

**9th meeting of the EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FORUM**  
**'Integration of migrant youth in the European society'**  
**Brussels, 4-5 June 2013**

**BACKGROUND PAPER**

**1. Introduction**

The increasing presence of migrant youth<sup>1</sup> in the EU represents both opportunities and challenges. Young migrants constitute a significant part of Europe's population and its future workforce. Their knowledge of different languages and cultures has a potential to enrich European societies, including through facilitating and creating business on an increasingly global market. Together, their presence offers a way to address the demographic challenges ahead.<sup>2</sup>

Successful integration is key to allowing these potential benefits to materialise and for this to be realised there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed. Some young migrants have been in the EU for a while, others arrived recently and are about to make their first experiences with the education system or the labour market. Recent data on the situation of migrant youth illustrate some worrying trends in this regard:

- In 2011, the share of early school leavers (persons aged 18-24) was 32% among third-country nationals compared to 14% among the total population<sup>3</sup>;
- In the majority of Member States, the percentages of young foreign-born people with the lowest level of performance in reading, mathematics and science are considerably higher than the percentages for the total population;<sup>4</sup>
- Young people with a migrant background are 70% more likely to become NEETS (not in employment, education or training) compared to nationals;<sup>5</sup>
- Young migrants and young people of immigrant origin continue to face disadvantages in education, on the labour market and in the transition from education to the labour market, despite the fact that a large portion of this group of people has been socialised or born in their country of residence.<sup>6</sup>

The economic and financial crisis with its rising youth unemployment, budgetary restraints and cuts in public spending on education and youth services has worsened the already challenging situation of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term 'migrant youth' will be used to describe young third-country nationals who are legally resident in the EU. Although having a focus on third-country nationals, where relevant, this paper also makes reference to the participation and inclusion of EU citizens with a mixed/migrant background (i.e. young people with one or two parents born abroad). The period when a person is considered to be 'young' differs across Europe according to national context, socio-economic development of a society and time. Common to all countries, however, is the fact that the period of youth is marked by important life transitions. For statistical purposes the target population is primarily the age category between 15 and 29 years of age.

<sup>2</sup> The EU's working age population has practically stopped growing and will start shrinking over the next couple of years. According to Eurostat projections, without migration the working-age population of the EU would fall to 385 million in 2050 instead of 443 million including migrants.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (LFS), 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat, '[Indicators of Immigrant Integration. A Pilot Study](#)'. (2011 Edition)

<sup>5</sup> Eurofund, '[NEETS – Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe](#)' Publications Office of the European Union. (2012)

<sup>6</sup> '[Migrants, minorities and employment. Exclusion and discrimination in the 27 Member States of the European Union](#)'. ([Update Report](#)) Publications Office of the European Union. (2011)

these young people. At the same time and in contrast to this negative picture, migrants continue to succeed and bring significant contributions and benefits to the society. Their success in areas such as music, film, sport, fashion and cuisine is evident, although not always sufficiently visible in mainstream media or in public discourse. The challenge of adapting our society so that we can make the most of these "hidden" talents remains.<sup>7</sup>

Successful integration of migrant youth is not only a question of ensuring economic growth and development, it is also a question of achieving greater social inclusion, a sound, sustainable and democratic functioning of the society and increasing its cultural richness. Addressing this issue in a more efficient way is thus not an option, it is a necessity.

Recent policy initiatives at EU level such as the 2010 [EU Youth Strategy](#) and the 2012 [Council conclusions on the participation and social inclusion of young people with an emphasis on those with a migrant background](#)<sup>8</sup> have put the situation of migrant youth in the spotlight and set out priorities for the years to come. The 2012 Council conclusions call for more synergies between relevant policies, promotion of good practices and further evidence on the topics of participation and social inclusion of young people with a migrant background (as well as young mobile EU citizens). They propose priorities to enhance participation and social inclusion of young people with migrant background, including engaging all young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of all policies which affect them, promoting intercultural dialogue and equality between young women and men, recognising the role of youth organisations and the importance of learning the official language(s) of the receiving country as well as other foreign languages.

Now is the time to ensure an effective implementation of these initiatives and to reflect on the way forward. Against this background and in view of the future funding programmes of the Commission<sup>9</sup> and the approaching end of the EU's [Stockholm Programme](#)<sup>10</sup>, the aim of the 9<sup>th</sup> European Integration Forum is to allow for dialogue and to feed the on-going policy reflection on integration of migrant youth. The Forum will have a specific focus on integration in the education system (roundtable A), access to the labour market (roundtable B) and diversity in the public space (roundtable C).

Input on these issues will help to frame the public debate on migrant youth not only to promote a more effective EU policy approach on integration, but also to contribute to reaching the headline targets of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#)<sup>11</sup>.

This Forum will also reflect the important role of local and regional authorities in providing services and activities and in shaping the interaction between migrants and the host society. In line with the spirit of the [European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals](#)<sup>12</sup>, which stresses the need to actively involve local authorities in the formulation and implementation of integration policies, 20 representatives of local and regional authorities have been selected to join the Forum to supply the discussions with their practical experience of the topic. The first day of the Forum will also see the launch of an interactive map on the [European Web Site on Integration](#) which will display good integration practices undertaken by local and regional authorities in a user-friendly way. Some of these practices were identified in a [study](#)<sup>13</sup> undertaken by the Committee of the Regions in 2012.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, the recent publication '[Hidden Talents, Wasted Talents?](#)' by the European Network against Racism (2013)

<sup>8</sup> 2012/C 393/05.

<sup>9</sup> Future Asylum and Migration Fund; on-going restructuration of the 'Lifelong Learning' programme and the 'Youth in Action' programme.

<sup>10</sup> OJ 2010/C 115/01.

<sup>11</sup> In the area of education, the headline targets are to reduce school drop-out rates below 10% and to ensure that at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds complete third level education. In the area of employment, the headline target is to ensure that 75% of the 20-64 year olds are employed.

<sup>12</sup> COM(2011) 455 final.

<sup>13</sup> 'Study on Practices of Integration of Third-Country Nationals at Local and Regional Level in the European Union'. (2013)

## Roundtable A: Integration in the education system

Teaching migrant youth is becoming an increasingly important reality in the education systems of the EU. According to a recent study on educational support for newly arrived migrant children, during the 2009/2010 academic year there were 17.6% of students with the first language other than German registered in Austrian schools.<sup>14</sup> In Flanders (Belgium), the number of newly arrived migrant children enrolled in primary education doubled in three academic years (from 2006/2007 to 2009/2010). It should though be noted that schools are not affected equally: schools in disadvantaged areas tend to have much higher proportions of migrant students.

While many students with a migrant background are successful in education and training, research demonstrates that in general they tend to have lower educational outcomes than their peers in most OECD countries. This can be explained by a number of barriers, including a lack of good diversity management in schools, language issues, lack of support from parents, low socio-economic background and financial barriers to remain in education.<sup>15</sup>

Young people with a migrant background are also at greater risk of exiting the education and training system without having obtained an upper secondary qualification.<sup>16</sup> The growing proportion of students with a migrant background in schools requires adaptation of the school systems to deliver high quality education for all and to capitalise on the potential of this diversity.

Stakeholders at different levels face severe challenges in accommodating the needs of young migrants effectively through education policies and practices.<sup>17</sup> The diversity of backgrounds and needs among these young people requires flexible and inclusive approaches. More needs to be done to adapt the educational systems to these challenges and this requires strong political commitment and going beyond compensatory measures.

The EU Member States have acknowledged the critical role played by education in facilitating integration<sup>18</sup> and the 2009 [Council Conclusions on the education of children with migrant background](#) invited the Member States to take measures “to ensure that all children are offered fair and equal opportunities as well as the necessary support to develop their full potential, irrespective of background.” Measures could include:

- developing an integrated policy approach for the achievement of these objectives; setting up, or strengthening, anti-discrimination mechanisms;
- increasing the permeability of education pathways and removing barriers within school systems; improving the quality of provision in schools and reducing differences between them;
- increasing access to high quality early childhood education and care;
- offering more personalised learning and individual support;
- providing specialised training in managing linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as in intercultural competences, for school leaders, teachers and administrative staff;
- developing adequate policies for teaching the host country language, as well as considering possibilities for pupils with a migrant background to maintain and develop their mother tongue;

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<sup>14</sup> ['Study on on educational support for newly arrived migrant children'. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg \(2013\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Froy, F. and L. Pyne \(2011\), 'Ensuring Labour Market Success for Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Youth', OECD Local Economic and Employment Development \(LEED\) Working Papers, 2011/09, OECD Publishing.](#)

<sup>16</sup> The EU Labour Force Survey shows that migrants are significantly under-represented at the medium educational level and over-represented to a much greater extent at the lowest educational level.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the [MIPEX assessment of education policies](#)

<sup>18</sup> See the [Common Basic Principles on immigrant Integration](#)

- ensuring that curricula are of high quality and relevant to all pupils, irrespective of their origins, and taking into account the needs of children with a migrant background in teaching methods and materials;
- developing partnerships with migrant communities and stepping up efforts aimed at improving communication with parents with a migrant background;
- providing targeted support for pupils with a migrant background who also have special needs.

In 2011, the Council adopted a [Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving](#) which emphasized the need to ensure that policies include appropriate measures for groups at increased risk of early school leaving such as children with a socio-economically disadvantaged, migrant or Roma background, or with special educational needs.

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. In the area of education, the headline targets of the EU 2020 Strategy state that the school drop-out rates should be reduced to less than 10% and that at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds should complete third level education. Among the recommendations set out in the 2009 Council conclusions on education of children with a migrant background, which are the (three) most important ones to reach these targets? Which of the above mentioned measures require most political initiative?
2. How can civil society organisations work with authorities at different governance levels to implement these actions and to achieve the aims outlined above?
3. Do you have examples of good practices that are transferrable? What are the lessons to be learned from such experiences?

### **Roundtable B: Improving access to the labour market**

Migrant youth are more likely to experience unemployment than their peers. This is worrying in the current context of high youth unemployment, with some 5.5 million young people in the EU labour markets (more than 1 in 5) that cannot find a job and 7.5 million aged 15-24 that are NEETS (not in employment, education or training).<sup>19</sup> A more efficient integration of migrants into the labour market could have a strong effect in reaching the [EU 2020 targets](#)<sup>20</sup>, not least as the demographic forecasts predict that the relative importance of migrants in our society will increase and thus their integration outcomes will become more and more relevant for the general prosperity of the society.

There are a number of factors that affect the chances of migrant youth to enter the labour market successfully, including discrimination, recognition of degrees obtained abroad, poor language skills and a lack of network outside of specific ethnic sectors/groups.

In fact, the structure of the society shapes integration. Immigrants tend to have better labour market outcomes, perform better in schools and participate more in countries where the general population has higher outcomes. Immigrants from the same country of origin and with a similar social background perform differently in different countries. Some welfare systems protect immigrants from poverty better than others and some education systems are more favourable for low-performing immigrants. Migrants are far more exposed to the risk of relative income poverty than the native population, which makes them more exposed to the risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

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<sup>19</sup> [Eurofound \(2012\): Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.](#)

<sup>20</sup> In the area of employment, the headline target is to ensure that 75% of the 20-64 year olds are employed.

Also, social mobility remains modest for immigrants. Employment and education outcomes still largely depend on the parents' socio-economic status. Immigrants are more likely to be concentrated in low-performing schools with a low average socio-economic status. Children of immigrants with low socio-economic status face much greater difficulties advancing into higher education and consequently in accessing high skilled jobs.

In addition, migrants who do participate in the labour market often have more precarious, temporary jobs or atypical contracts; especially highly qualified newcomers end up performing jobs for which they are overqualified.

Employment prospects for all young people in Europe are bleak. Still, integration of migrant youth into the labour market is an issue which national governments may find particularly difficult to address, in the current economic context.<sup>21</sup> Improving access to the labour market for immigrants involves working with different cultures, traditions and customs, meaning that a number of actors and stakeholders need to be involved to ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach. Indeed, to be successful, such approaches need to be co-ordinated, adapted to local needs and shaped by both business and the civil society.

To respond to the general deteriorating youth situation, the European Commission is proposing a [Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) in partnership with all Member States. Its purpose is to help unemployed young people who left school or training before finishing upper-secondary level to get back to school or into a vocational training course that can give them the skills they need to get a job. It also aims to give a first work experience to young people who have a diploma, but cannot find work.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

1. Do you think that migrant youth are likely to benefit from actions such as the Youth Opportunities Initiative, and/or is there a need for further (targeted) policy initiatives to tackle unemployment among migrant youth? Which level of governance is the most appropriate in order to tackle this issue? What kind of targeted initiatives would be most relevant?
2. To what extent is there a problem regarding lack of (access to) information among these young people about available support to access the labour market? To what extent is there a problem regarding lack of knowledge about the challenges faced by migrant youth among relevant stakeholders?
3. What can be done to overcome indirect discrimination based on origin and social conditions?
4. How can civil society organisations, social partners and different governance levels work together to improve the access to the labour market for migrant youth? Do you have examples of successful cooperation between civil society organisations and local, regional and national authorities that are transferrable? Please share any lessons learned from these experiences.

#### **Roundtable C: Diversity in the public space**

This roundtable will address the integration of migrant youth in spheres that are different from that of education and the labour market. It will explore how young migrants organize themselves during their free time, including in sports, culture and the digital space and how such activities are linked to integration. In this regard, the opportunities offered by information and communication technology (ICT) and new media to interact with the world and have a say in the society merit particular

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<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, [Froy, F. and L. Pyne \(2011\), "Ensuring Labour Market Success for Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Youth", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development \(LEED\) Working Papers, 2011/09, OECD Publishing.](#)

attention. In fact, today virtual spaces available through the internet are considered as a new type of public space that fosters new types of interaction and social mixing.

Migrant youth can find new ways of mass communication, civic mobilisation and political participation, through the use of new IT tools, notably social media such as Twitter and blogs. These technological means contribute to their maintaining and further forging of transnational links between their countries of origin and the country of settlement. Such links may relate to culture such as music, but they may also be of a civic, political or religious character.

The ways in which migrant youth have mobilised in favour of democratic transformation in North Africa and the Middle East post-2011 are one expression of this trend and of the growing political and policy relevance of what have been called "liberation technologies". The ways in which migrant youth, among others, has protested and mobilised through online platforms and IT tools across Europe in relation to the current economic crisis and related austerity policies is another fact pointing to the potential of such forms of engagement to enhance democratic participation. This roundtable will consider the potential of such forms of engagement for strengthening democratic and active citizenship.

Migrants, and especially migrant youth, also engage in innovative ways with the urban environment creating their own spaces where they "work and play" but also by choosing places to socialize with the other groups and practice certain activities. This engagement changes both the migrant youth and the city environment. Migrants are very diverse across Member States and even regions and cities and it is important to explore this diversity, how it is expressed and enacted in the interaction between different migrants, different migrant communities and other citizens.

The EU has recognized the importance of engaging migrant youth in these different spheres to enhance integration and the key role played by youth organisations, including migrant youth organisations and other parts of civic society, including through the 2012 [Council conclusions on the participation and social inclusion of young people with emphasis on those with a migrant background](#).<sup>22</sup> Amongst other, the Council conclusions invite the Member States and the European Commission to increase accessibility to cultural, sport and leisure-time activities and to promote social inclusion in the information society by e.g. enhancing media literacy among young people with a migrant background.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

1. How can new urban spaces be created that can be "appropriated" by migrant and "native" youth together in ways that help them forge links with one another as young people with common interests or talents rather than emphasising ethnic or cultural differences?
2. What can be done to foster the use of ICT to increase civic participation among migrant youth and fighting youth disenchantment with the political system? What is the role of the different governance levels and NGOs in this field?
3. How should appropriate national and local cultural policies be devised to provide opportunities for migrant youth to exploit their potential and develop their diverse talents? What are the necessary infrastructures to be put in place and what is the role for cultural associations and other NGOs?

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<sup>22</sup> 2012/C 393/05