



3rd meeting of the Permanent group on Immigration and Integration:

"Including newcomers: from European to the local context"

19 October 2023, JDE 62, EESC Brussels

Event report

Event summary

This was an event full of excellent panellists and topical debate. Some of the key take-aways of the event were:

- Comprehensive tools to compare integration policies are useful for analysis and for understanding and evaluating current policies and trends.
- It is useful to measure integration comparatively across Europe.
- Action plans can facilitate integration.
- We should see integration as a two-sided approach: not only does the newcomer have to integrate into the community, but local citizens should welcome newcomers. It is difficult to integrate yourself into society if the host is not participating in this process.
- It is essential to identify the needs of refugees and immigrants.
- We should not only focus on how to integrate immigrants into the labour market but also on how to integrate them (culturally) into society.
- Barriers that refugees and immigrants face are:
 - Lack of information;
 - Lack of social networks;
 - Lack of recognition of qualifications;
 - Lack of available job opportunities;
 - Language barrier/lack of access to language courses;
 - No access to childcare services;
 - Unaffordable or indecent housing.
- What can be done?
 - Supporting Member States with different housing funds;
 - Providing access to learning materials;
 - Help migrants access jobs, trainings and adult learning;
 - Facilitate the recognition of academic and professional qualifications;
 - Encourage flexible jobs, part-time or short-term work to facilitate a first access to the labour market;
 - There should be free language classes without waiting times.



- Refugees from the Ukraine face similar problems and barriers like refugees from other countries. However, they integrate quite well into the labour market of host countries.

Objectives of the event:

How is the EU measuring up when it comes to integrating newcomers into our societies? This event, organised by the EESC's permanent group on immigration and integration (IMI), aimed to examine the success and lessons learned of integration and inclusion as an EU policy as well as a reality facing many cities and regions in the EU.

Each panel comprised of distinguished experts from the EU institutions, EU agencies, international organisations, social partners, civil society organisations and think tanks.

Panel I - The policy and the data: what is the current general landscape on integration?

- **Başak YAVÇAN**, Head of Research, Migrant Integration Policy Index, Migration Policy Group
- **Giuliana BENEDETTO**, Policy Officer, Legal pathways and Integration, DG Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
- **Klára FÓTI**, Senior Research Manager, Employment Unit, Eurofound

- **The context of the Ukraine was discussed**

Regarding labour market integration of Ukrainians, we see that the labour market integration of Ukrainians is a success in general. Their employment rates in Poland, Latvia, Sweden, Netherlands, Lithuania and Estonia are very high. However, 23% said they can only find irregular jobs. There is a risk of getting jobs of poor quality.

Mental health issues are prevalent and have to be addressed. The problem is that there is not much information available among refugees about mental health services. Also, long-term housing solutions are needed. Moreover, the problem of care responsibilities and childcare capacity problems were mentioned because most Ukrainian refugees are women.

When it comes to employment, the European Commission has put forward the EU Talent Pool Pilot in order to match Ukrainian job seekers to European employers. The Ukrainian language has been added to the EU Skills Profile Tool for third country nationals in order to help Ukrainian job seekers and those who wish to continue their studies. A recommendation and a comparison report have been put forward on how to facilitate the recognition of academic and professional qualifications obtained in the Ukraine. Also, support for the public employment services in Member States has been put in place through various EU funds with measures such as work placements, language courses, vocational education and training.

Also regarding the topic of education, many actions have been taken by the Commission. First, there has been financial support for schools, vocational education and training as well as for early childhood education and care through EU Cohesion Funds, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity



Corps. Secondly, coordination of an EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine in order to identify the needs of Ukrainian children and how to support Member States who host them, including peer learning and policy guidance. Thirdly, provision of access to learning materials in Ukrainian and offering online resources and courses for teachers through the School Education Gateway. Moreover, support for teachers among the refugees through access to EU programmes.

Regarding health, a EUR 20 million support fund from the European Commission has been put in place. Also, the International Federation of the Red Cross Societies (IFRC) provides direct trauma support on the ground in all Member States as well as in Ukraine.

When it comes to housing, the 'Safe Homes' initiative supports those private individuals across the EU who have opened their homes to host displaced people. The IFRC is currently implementing a EUR 5.5. million project to put into practice the Safe Homes guidance to support hosts and hosted families.

- **Additional highlights of the panel**

Migrant populations have become more educated in most countries and students with migrant parents perform better than a decade ago in most countries. Migrant women are on average more educated than their male peers. Labour market outcomes for migrants improve over time, meaning that the employment rates of migrants increase by duration of stay (despite starting at lower levels, migrant women progress more quickly). Highly qualified migrants find it harder to get a job when educated abroad. Migrants are much more likely to live in overcrowded housing conditions than the native-born population.

It is important to measure integration comparatively across Europe and to continue working on possible linkages between policies and outcomes. As an example of good practice, Portugal, Spain and Ireland were mentioned for having a leading position in migrant integration policies in the EU. Sweden and Finland are also traditionally good in these fields.

- **Useful tools and policies**

MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) is a comprehensive tool to compare integration policies in different places and periods of time (across 6 continents). The tool ranges from 2007 to 2019 and will be updated next year. It covers 8 policy areas (labour market mobility, family reunion, education, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality, anti-discrimination and health) and countries get overall scores. It was found in the research that there is a strong correlation of MIPEX scores and public acceptance of migrants.

The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 sets out the way for integration measures from 2021 to 2027 and puts forward 60 actions for Member States. It is structured around 4 main sectoral priorities, namely education, employment, health and housing. And its horizontal priorities are the following: building strong partnerships, increased EU funding for integration, fostering participation in host societies, enhance the use of digital tools for integration/inclusion, monitoring progress.



A mid-term review of the action plan will be conducted at the end of 2024. It will focus on each of the priority areas identified and will report on the actions undertaken by the European Commission since 2021 as well the Member States' actions and good practices in these areas. It will also be an opportunity to highlight actions carried out for displaced people from the Ukraine and to reflect on the impact of these actions on integration policies.

Panel II - On the ground: what's happening in Member States?

- **Diana BOTESCU**, Head of Unit for migration and refugee policies, City of Berlin, Germany
- **Kristel DANEL**, Policy Officer on 'Asylum & Refugees', City of Ghent, Belgium
- **Andrea PETTRACHIN**, Whole-COMM project, Collegio Carlo Alberto, Italy

This panel looked at good practices of including newcomers at the city and rural level.

- **Berlin**

40 % of the inhabitants of Berlin have a migratory background and 23% do not hold a German passport. Migrants in Berlin face the same challenges as migrants in other places - especially newcomers. In 2010, Berlin issued a participation and integration law called the Participation Act and in 2020 it revised that law. In the wake of the refugee crisis from Syria, Berlin set up a comprehensive programme for integration and participation of refugees. It has also been successful in the wake of the influx of displaced people from the Ukraine. However, the approach was adjusted and they put in place a so-called Action Plan Ukraine. They also have an Action Plan for the inclusion of migrant Roma.

- **Ghent**

For newcomers and asylum seekers, the city of Ghent tries to start integration from day 1. The newcomer is central in their approach. They look at different aspects of life in order to see which talents and needs a person has. They try to encourage them to take part in language classes or see whether they want to do certain hobbies or sports. Also, they try to make existing services available to them. If the migrants have specific needs, they try to look for solutions. They help them to set up their CV to get access to the labour market. Buddy programmes are being run through which they make a match of local citizens with newcomers to expand the newcomer's social network. They also run small initiatives. For example they open up reception centres so people can get to know asylum seekers and have conversations with them – this helps to counter prejudices.

- **The WHOLE-COMM project**

It explored the integration of post-2014 migrants in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas (in 45 small localities across 7 EU countries and Turkey and Canada). The first finding was that there is a general housing crisis also in small European localities and a sort of trade-off between access to housing and access to employment across local contexts. The second finding was that recent migrants tend to have few meaningful social interactions with long-term residents. The third



finding was that their survey results challenge the idea that public attitudes to immigrant integration are more negative in small localities. Also, two key challenges were found: first, the isolation of local governments of small localities from multi-level governance structures and venues, and their rare access to any kind of EU funds. Secondly, the increasing politicisation of integration policymaking: political factors are affecting integration policies and policymaking relations.

Panel III - Critical view from social partners and civil society

- **Marta MACHADO**, Deputy Director General, HOTREC

- **Frohar POYA**, Research and Outreach, European Network of Migrant Women

- **Öndercan MUTI**, Project Coordinator, Population Europe, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

One of the topics discussed was the obstacles migrant women face to integration. Language is the main problem. Migrant women lack access to language courses and the classes are not mandatory. Often these women are forced to stay at home to look after their children whereas men go and work and thereby learn the language of the host country. Migrant women are often financially dependent on men and do not have the means to pay for language classes. They also have no childcare available so they drop out of language classes or cannot take up a job. They face a sort of double discrimination on the labour market because they are women, mothers and migrants at the same time. The conclusion drawn was that there should be free language classes without waiting times. Men need to be made aware of the fact that it is necessary for women to attend. Attendance should be mandatory.

Another topic discussed was the inclusion of newcomers. Newcomers will make the need for improvements to services and infrastructure visible. Inclusion and integration policies should not create a split between locals and newcomers. It is important for migrants to have in person communication possibilities with municipalities and migrant organisations. Regarding the access to culture and local ties, municipalities are seen as more trusting than other actors. Bottom up initiatives can unite the community around shared development visions when more people are involved in designing and implementing them. The local identity and heritage are open to adjust, and newcomers and younger people are allowed to be part of local identity and cultural heritage.

The introduction of the EU Talent Pool has been welcomed. Also, the EU and Member States should work together to update the shortage of occupation lists.

Key resources and references

- Presentations by the panellists
- [Migrant Integration Policy Index | MIPEX 2020](#)
- [Including newcomers: from European to the local context | European Economic and Social Committee \(europa.eu\)](#)

- [EU Talent Pool Pilot \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [Action plan on the integration and inclusion \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [Home • Whole-Comm Project - Whole of Community Perspective](#)
- [Act to regulate Participation and Integration in Berlin | European Website on Integration \(europa.eu\)](#)

Background of the IMI group

The Immigration and Integration (IMI) group is made up of 15 member of the EESC, the group comprises of 5 members from Group I (employers); Group II (workers) and Group III (civil society organisations). The group aims to support the EESC's work on migration and asylum by: promoting the development of a common European immigration and integration policy based on the principles of fundamental rights and solidarity, with strong involvement of the civil society; preparing the EESC's contribution to the European Migration Forum (EMF); and to make more concretely the EESC's role as a facilitator between organised civil society and the EU institutions in the area of migration policy and migrant integration. The group tends to organise three meetings a year.