More than 260 participants coming from all Member States, participated in the DG HOME Info day an event bringing together national managing and responsible authorities, regional and local level actors and stakeholders as well as different Commission’s services, EU institutions, bodies and partners in the integration area.

**Opening address by Matthias Ruete, Director-General of DG Migration and Home Affairs**

Mr Ruete started the day by stating that migration is one of the most challenging issues facing our societies. Integration of the migrant is a complex two-way process which requires efforts from both the migrant and the host society. There is no single solution that fits into all cases. The Commission presented an Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals last year with concrete measures for integration. To support the implementation, several EU funds are available to support integration activities. He recalled that the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund has some €920M for integration actions in the period 2014-2020. Other EU funds (such as the European Regional and Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development or the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived or Erasmus+, …) can also contribute even though there is no specific allocation for integration. He insisted on the importance of taking advantage of the synergies between the different funds and possibly also with International Financial Institutions (IFIs). Additionally, he highlighted that the European Commission is already working to strengthen the dialogue with local and regional authorities in the context of the European Integration Network (EIN) and underscored the Partnership launched under the EU Urban Agenda. It might also be worthwhile considering a pilot project for easier access to EU funds for local level actors. Mr Ruete concluded by saying that this info day is just a start of the process and DG HOME is also planning workshops with Member States.

**Scene setting opening panel**

Moderator: Ms Elizabeth Collett, Migration Policy Institute

Mr Matthias Ruete, Director-General of DG Migration and Home Affairs
Mr Alex Tortell, Integration Advisor Ministry of Social Dialogue, Malta
The moderator, Ms Collett opened the panel by asking the panellists a question: "If you were in charge of all this money, what is the one thing you would change in order to improve the policies for the integration of migrants?"

There were short introductions from all the panel members followed by a lively discussion concentrating on the following key issues:

- A lot of EU funding instruments can be used for several aspects of integration.
- More emphasis should be put on the quality of the integration actions, maximising the impact on the ground.
- Integration of third country nationals should be part of a larger social integration plan with a cross-sectorial approach and the support of main actors in the community (e.g. labour market, education, health care...). This will avoid competition between locals and third country nationals. Therefore EU funds should have a broader perspective.
- Integration should be seen from a social inclusion perspective, with a clear need to involve everyone in the integration process. Volunteers and role models are important pillars in this process.
- Three basic issues are needed to a successful integration: affiliation, having power to make decisions and achievement. Also family reunification is a very important contributor to integration.
- There is a request for a single holistic fund pilot project for communities with a general integration plan, to simplify and increase efficiency.
- Panel members expressed a need for cities and communities to have a more direct access to the EU funds rather than channelling EU funding through central government. Cities are closer to the migrants and to the actors creating opportunities for integration (e.g. businesses creating jobs).
- The EU funds should have minimal reporting standards.
- There is a need to include irregular migrants in the scope of the (re-)integration plan.
- DG REGIO stressed the role of the Urban agenda, the Amsterdam pact and the urban development network. A place based approach and sharing knowledge are important in this respect.

In conclusion it was recalled that different EU funds have different objectives and methods of implementation. It is important to ensure that local and regional actors have access to EU funds in the short- and long-term. It is however clear that under the current legal framework, only national authorities and the Commission can manage funding directly while regional and local authorities have to work with the Commission and the national authorities under the partnership principle to implement measures on the ground. The Commission can, and is, making available funding to regional and local authorities through ESIF as well as under AMIF union actions.
Panel 1. How local actors can access EU funds for integration

Chair: Mr Georg Fischer, Director in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Ms Stephanie Carillon, Head of Unit of 'Union Actions' in DG Migration and Home Affairs
Mr Ricardo Carrilho, AMIF responsible authority Portugal
Mr Carlos Mascarell Vilar, Council of European Municipalities and Regions
Mr Nils Lagerroth, Swedish Rural Network

The objectives of the panel were to present the management of the funds from different perspectives – the Commission, national authority responsible for the management of the funds and potential beneficiaries/applicants – and to develop an exchange of views especially on the difficulties of access and various options to overcome them.

Mr Fischer introduced the topic recalling the challenges faced by governments as well as regional and local actors in achieving the integration of migrants. Also, from the DG EMPL perspective, he stated that labour market integration along with language knowledge and recognition of skills and qualifications are vital aspects towards a complete and successful integration.

After short introductions by each panellist, the discussions concentrated on the following points:

- Member States should work in partnership with regional and local authorities and other key stakeholders. Good information sharing is a key factor for success.
- Investments in integration projects have to cover several different areas – for example housing, education, employment, social and cultural activities.
- Again calls were made for 'one stop shop' for all funding instruments and direct access to funding for cities and communities. Simplification was also raised.
- It is crucial to ensure access to funds to local actors since integration takes place at local level. Simplification is therefore essential.
- The rural dimension is also an important element to be taken into account in the integration work.

Panel 2. Expectations on the future of EU funding for integration

Chair: Mr Matthias Oel, Director in DG Migration and Home Affairs

Mr Loris Di Pietrantonio, Head of Unit of 'ESF and FEAD: policy and legislation' DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Mr Alfonso Montero, Policy Director, European Social Network
Ms Sabine Kekic, Assistant for Migration for the Mayor of Amsterdam
Mr Thomas Jézéquel, Eurocities

Mr Oel introduced the topic by emphasizing that the objective of the panel was to draw lessons from the current practical experience for the future and exchange views on the importance of the funding integration activities and the possible modalities of the financial support. He mentioned briefly as background the migration crisis that is the main cause for
making integration a political priority. Next, the panellists were also invited to reflect on: how to facilitate access to EU Funds, what the real needs are and, hence, what should be funded.

The main points discussed between panellists and the audience were the following:

- Integration is a long-term process. It involves housing issues, employment, health care, education etc. and all these aspects should be addressed by funding. The target groups should be as wide as possible while vulnerable migrants like unaccompanied children need special attention.
- Legal constraints of the funding instruments prevent sometimes flexibility and innovative solutions for integration.
- The possibility for cities to receive directly EU funding for integration activities was raised again and there were also calls for a network of cities to be created in this sense.
- A single-audit principle was proposed in pursuit of increasing simplification of the funding process.
- The partnership principle was considered to become a compulsory issue in the future.

In conclusion, while recognizing the multiple offers for funding provided by EU Funds, possibilities for IFIs to be also involved were mentioned. It was underlined that it was not realistic that apart from Union Actions EU-funding could be directly provided to the local level in the foreseen short term future. It is therefore necessary that Member States work closer with their regional and local actors and vice versa. In this context is called for and simplification and synergies are important issues on which our work needs to be focused in the future.

Panel 3. How to maximize the impact on the ground? How to enhance EU funding synergies for the support of integration?

Chair: Mr Mario Milouchev, Director in DG Agriculture and Rural Development

Ms Liina Carr, European Trade Union Confederation
Ms Elizabeth Collett, Migration Policy Institute
Mr Antoine Savary, Deputy Head of Unit of 'Legal Migration and Integration' in DG Migration and Home Affairs
Mr Moray Gilland, Head of Unit of 'Policy Development and Economic Analysis' in DG Regional and Urban Policy
Mr Dimitrios Karampelas, Swedish Migration Agency
Mr Adam Kullman, Metropolitan Research Institute

The panel discussions focused on two questions: what interventions are the most effective regarding the integration/social inclusion of third-country nationals? And as many EU Funds can contribute to integration, how should they be used to make them as effective as possible?
Mr Milouchev introduced the topic by giving an overview of the different EU Funds and specifically the areas of intervention of the rural development programmes, in particular Leader which provides for a local approach. He stated that AMIF is the only fund for which the target group is exclusively third country nationals. The other funds (ESF, ERDF, FEAD) in their respective areas can be used for the integration of third-country nationals but of course they also target other categories of people, in particular EU citizens. ERASMUS+ is also an important source of funding for the integration of third country nationals in the education system. As the different funds target different areas of integration it is important to use them in a coordinated way.

The panellists made short introductions followed by discussions with the audience which focused on the following:

- An integrated approach to integration, covering all aspects (i.e. housing health care, education, employment) is important. EU Funds can support integration in their areas of intervention; the Commission is actively assisting Member States in establishing synergies at national level.
- Interventions have proven most effective if they are designed and implemented based on cooperation between national, regional and local levels of governance. The needs at the local level need to fit into national policy and "partnership principle" is very important in this regard.
- Concerning EU Funding, efforts have been made at EU level. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement. At national level, more discussions between different managing authorities are needed. At beneficiary level, exchanges of information are needed too. Peer review mechanisms are important in this respect.
- It is challenging to reach long-term sustainability of EU funded activities.
- Multi-stakeholder projects can maximise the impact on the ground but are challenging in avoiding losses and accountability. Monitoring and evaluation of integration multi-stakeholder projects should be revised.

The host society needs to be also targeted to create a welcoming atmosphere to the migrants. Awareness raising actions towards the host society need to be conducted regarding the benefits of migration, emphasising the 'two-way principle'; integration efforts need to be made by both host society and migrant.

In conclusion, it was agreed that it is important to learn lessons from actions already carried out, success stories and failures. Partnerships and sharing knowledge should be more supported.

**Good practices and innovative approaches in the use of EU funds for integration by regional and local level actors**

Chair: Mr Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz, Head of Unit in DG Migration and Home Affairs

The objective of the afternoon session was to gather insights from actual projects on integration of thirds country nationals financed by the different EU Funds and to activate the lessons learning process.
'Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad' (Utrecht) - Ms Imara Antonius

The aim of the project is to successfully integrate migrants into the City of Utrecht. It tries to avoid creating new tension in the city between local inhabitants and the new arrivals by creating shared space i.e. sharing housing areas. The project also includes language learning, professional networking and coaching.

'A school with company rules' (Toulouse) - Mr Gilles Vandecaveye

The objective of the project is to give new opportunities to young people between 15 and 20 years of age with poor academic/professional perspectives including professional qualifications. So far the experience has been very successful in changing the young persons' life for the better with new purposes and opportunities.

'Campus Model, from a refugee to a busy Bavarian' (Wittislingen) - Mr Ulrich Otto Müller

The project aims to integrate migrants arriving in Wittlislingen from day one onwards through assessing their needs at individual level – language needs, personal skills, labour market possibilities. The first generation, once arrived and fully integrated, becomes an essential actor (along with local people) to integrate newcomers. Special attention is given to women and children. The project is considered to be a success - easy to manage, cost efficient, highly effective in address the integration issues.

'Egalitarian Citizen' (Helsinki) - Ms Tiina Kevätpuro

The objective of the project is to promote multi-administrative knowledge about services and participation possibilities for third country nationals. It is initiated through a dialogue and aims to improve communication between citizens; locals and third country nationals.

FEDASIL (Brussels) - Mr Michael Kegels

FEDASIL manages reception facilities and works on integration through local communities and civil society organisations. Integration should start in the earliest phase possible, eg in resettlement or relocation cases integration starts in pre-departure phase in the origin or transfer country. In other cases integration starts in the reception phase and should be continued post-reception, together with the local communities. FEDASIL launched an open call for projects to ‘civil society’ (sports, youth clubs, volunteers, cultural associations, etc) to open up their networks for newcomers.

‘Immigrants; a resource in Åre’ (Åre) - Ms Lena Öqvist and Ms Helena Burholm

The project aims to make newcomers want to stay and to help migrants become self-efficient. The integration is done through education, employment and social integration with the objective that all migrants are employed within two years from arrival. The migrant is welcomed upon arrival in Åre and given individual follow-up throughout the integration process.
Next steps and closing remarks by Director Matthias Oel

The high number of participants of different stakeholders in the Info day, the multi-facetted discussions throughout the day and the presentations of good practice discussions in the afternoon have impressively demonstrated that the better access to and the use of EU-funding for the integration of Third Country Nationals is a topic of central political and practical interest in the context of the high migratory influx to Europe.

Cities do have access to the EU funds already, either through shared management or directly from the Commission through the so-called Union Actions. No changes are needed in the DG HOME Regulations in this respect.

Furthermore, there was broad common understanding that Member States need to pay more attention, increase and improve the dialogue with regional and local authorities as well as ensuring the efficient spending of the resources available.

Mr Oel emphasised the potential offered by the migrants, the partnership between relevant actors and the performance of the funding. Investments on migration should be understood as an investment in our future and in the social cohesion of our societies.

It is important to ensure free and equal access to information and to make public the results of the EU funding projects in order to allow others to benefit from good experiences.

Mr Oel also indicated that this Info day should be followed up by workshops, round tables for deeper discussion in Member States and in Brussels as appropriate.

Mr Oel closed the info day thanking all for their active participation.