



Mutual Learning Programme

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Key policy messages from the Peer Review on 'Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries'

Madrid (Spain), 23-24 May 2016

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the Peer Review

The current refugee crisis is stressing the mechanisms in European countries to deal with asylum requests and general migration on economic grounds. In 2015, over 1.3 million people requested asylum in EU, representing more than double the number of applicants in 2014¹. The situation calls for ambitious and concerted efforts to support the inclusion and integration of refugees into employment, education and wider society. It raises questions about how and when to offer integration assistance, particularly the opportunities and practical/legal challenges of intervening early to support asylum seekers.

Even in countries with the highest employment rates of the foreign-born population, there are considerable differences between the labour market outcomes of the native-born and foreign-born residents. The Peer Review focused on the experiences of European countries regarding the labour market integration of applicants and beneficiaries of international humanitarian protection, i.e. asylum seekers and refugees². Amongst others, participants considered the role of social partners, charitable organisations and civil society in international protection; the recognition process for educational qualifications and previous work experience; fast track systems for asylum seekers and refugees to acquire basic language skills; social integration; and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes for social and labour market integration.

The event was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security in May 2016. It brought together Ministry officials and independent experts from Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, FYR Macedonia, Norway and Sweden, as well as representatives from the European Commission.

1.2 European policy context

The integration of non-EU nationals is a competence of Member States, although the European Union plays a role in facilitating transnational cooperation and exchange, as well as in providing policy guidance and support related to available funding.

The common EU asylum rules contain the obligation for Member States to provide rights relevant for the integration in the labour market of refugees and asylum seekers. There are significant differences, however, in the implementation of these rights across Member States. For this reason, the European Commission is actively promoting the exchange of perspectives and practices, through networks, peer learning events and online resources³, as well as providing policy guidance, including through the European Semester.

The European Commission also makes available funding opportunities that can support refugees and asylum seekers in Member States, such as the European Social Fund, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In June 2016, it also published an Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (including refugees) and launched a New Skills Agenda, with provisions related to the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers (see Section 3.3).

¹ Eurostat, 'Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex' [migr_asyappctza].

² The term refugee is used here to refer to all beneficiaries of international humanitarian protection, be they Geneva Convention refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The term asylum seeker applies to someone who has applied for humanitarian protection as a refugee and is awaiting the determination of his or her status. This distinction is important from a legal perspective.

³ For example, see: the webpages on "[Social and labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers](#)", the [European Web Site on Integration](#) and the [Mutual Learning Programme](#) of the European Commission.

2 The Spanish approach to including asylum seekers and refugees: 'Individualised integration itineraries'

As the starting point for discussion, the Peer Review presented the situation of the host, Spain, as regards the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The country has limited experience in this area, but the authorities give this issue high priority and have committed to receive more asylum seekers and refugees in 2016-2017. In addition, the country has greater experience when it comes to the integration of migrants in general. The integration of asylum seekers in Spain has recently become a pressing issue, given that the number of international applications more than doubled in 2015, placing significant strain on the current system and resulting in measures to improve it.

The Spanish system reflects a comprehensive concept of integration for asylum seekers and refugees, with labour market integration at its heart. The system is built around the idea of an individualised integration itinerary, which is divided in three phases – Phase 1: living in a reception centre; Phase 2: living independently; and Phase 3: looking for autonomy. The use of these phases emphasises the idea that becoming autonomous is a gradual process, and that the movement through these phases will not be the same for everyone. The duration and design of each phase thus depends on several factors affecting the individual, such as economic, labour, family and social factors. It is envisaged that individuals will normally spend 6-9 months in Phase 1 and 6-9 months in Phase 2. The itinerary includes employment integration measures (such as language/cultural immersion), access to training, assistance with the recognition of qualifications, and (if necessary) financial assistance to participate in courses around Spain⁴.

Collaboration between the regional governments, municipalities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is key to Spain's approach to international protection. The involvement of the NGOs is particularly noteworthy. In the three-phase integration process, NGOs are responsible for the development and delivery of the second phase (living independently). The Spanish system of international protection also involves partnerships with companies and the presence of active practitioner networks. The main tools and mechanisms for collaboration are discussed in depth below (section 3.2).

The Spanish government faces several challenges in its aim to further develop and harmonise the system and to grant minimum common integration itineraries for all asylum seekers and refugees across the country. Adapting existing integration measures to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees is seen as one way to improve the situation, taking into account issues such as the psychological wellbeing of individuals; their language skills; recognition of qualifications and previous work experience; access to training; and the level of engagement of employers. The success of such measures has not yet been evaluated.

Moving forward, the Spanish Government aims to increase the budget for international protection applicants by EUR 200 million. In 2016, the Government's employment policies also identify refugees as a priority group. Collaboration between different authorities responsible for international protection already in place will be strengthened. Although this is an exclusive competence of the central Government, the autonomous regions in Spain manage employment services, health, education and vocational training, meaning it will be important to engage them from the outset.

Further information on the Spanish example is available online⁵.

⁴ Spain is also in the early stages of developing special itineraries for victims of human trafficking and settlement itineraries for rural zones.

⁵ Markus Gonzalez Beilfuss (April 2016), *Host Country Discussion Paper – Spain*. Prepared for the Peer Review on 'Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries', Madrid (Spain), 23-24 May 2016

3 Labour market inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in practice

The Peer Review was an important step towards understanding better the situation 'on the ground' and the practical challenges that European countries face in supporting the labour market inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

European countries have introduced a number of measures to support the labour market inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees. Despite major differences at the national level when it comes to the scale of asylum applications, some common challenges include: trouble developing and delivering coherent training and education policies for asylum seekers and refugees, issues in the effective recognition of skills and previous work experience, barriers to the activation of those that have never been part of the labour market, and insufficient collaboration between the stakeholders involved (especially measures to activate employers).

Section 3 focuses on the key issues in designing effective policy interventions, as well as providing details of national policy approaches that seek to respond to these challenges. It is structured in this way:

- Section 3.1 considers the **rights and opportunities** of asylum seekers and refugees, exploring the ways in which the status of an asylum application affects legal access to different national labour markets;
- Section 3.2 considers approaches to **offering education and training services** to asylum seekers and refugees, especially the time at which such support is offered;
- Section 3.3 presents national processes and methods for **recognising previous skills, qualifications and work experience** of refugees and asylum seekers;
- Section 3.4 discusses methods of **organising and delivering labour market integration programmes**, particularly focusing on stakeholder cooperation and methods of assessing the needs of international protection applicants and beneficiaries;
- Section 3.5 briefly presents the state of play as regards the **monitoring and evaluation** of labour market integration policies targeted at asylum seekers and refugees.

3.1 Rights and opportunities within national labour markets

Conditions of access to the labour market

In all countries at the Peer Review, **recognised refugees** have the legal right to participate in the labour market on equal terms as native-born residents, as well as to access job support offered by Public Employment Services (PES)⁶. The barriers that refugees face in integrating into the labour market are thus more likely to be of a practical than a legal nature, including the experience of discrimination. Note that most EU Member States are also legally required to offer labour market access to **persons with subsidiary protection status** (⁷). In this report, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status are grouped together under the umbrella heading 'refugee'.

⁶ Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted.

⁷ However, Denmark is not party to the original Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC nor the recast Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU and is therefore exempt from the provisions of these directives. Ireland and the United Kingdom are party to Directive 2004/83/EC, but not to Directive 2011/95/EU, meaning that the provisions of the 2004 Directive still apply to the UK and Ireland.

Current EU legislation states that **asylum seekers** (applicants for international protection) should have access to the labour market no later than 9 months after filing their application for international protection, although Member States have the flexibility to decide the precise conditions for granting access to the labour market for the applicant. Member States also have the power to give priority to EU citizens and legally resident non-EU nationals "for reasons of labour market policies"⁸. As a result, for asylum seekers, the timing and conditions of access to the labour market, together with the length of the asylum procedure, vary widely.

Table 1. Typology of national restrictions on the time period before asylum seekers can access the labour market⁹

Time period from lodging the application to when applicant can access the labour market (¹⁰)	Countries in which this applies
No time restriction applies/from the moment of lodging the application	Greece ¹¹ , Norway, Portugal, Sweden ¹²
2 months	Italy ¹³
3 months	Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania
4 months	Belgium
6 months	Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Luxembourg ¹⁴ , Netherlands, Poland, Finland ¹⁵
9 months	France, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Malta ¹⁶ , Slovenia, Slovakia
12 months	United Kingdom
Asylum seekers have no access to labour market	Ireland ¹⁷ , Lithuania ¹⁸

⁸ The Reception Conditions Directive, applicable from July 2015.

⁹ EEPO (June 2016), Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, p. 7.

¹⁰ Before obtaining a decision on their application and only if they are not considered responsible for the delay in the decision.

¹¹ Presidential Decree 220/2007 "on the transposition into the Greek legislation of Council Directive 2003/9/EC from January 27, 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers" Gov. Gazette 251/A/13-11-2007

¹² Law on Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others 1994:137

¹³ Legislative Decree 142/2015 "Implementation of Directive 2013/33/EU on minimum standards for the reception of asylum applicants and the Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for the recognition and revocation of the status of international protection."

¹⁴ Loi du 18 décembre 2015 1 relative à la protection internationale et à la protection temporaire

¹⁵ In Finland, asylum seekers who have a travel document entitling them to international travel can work after three months.

¹⁶ Reception of Asylum-seekers (Minimum Standards) Regulations, Legal Notice 320 of 2005

¹⁷ The Irish Working Group on the Protection Process recommended in 2015 that 'provision for access to the labour market for protection applicants who are awaiting a first instance decision for nine months or more, and who have cooperated with the protection process (under the relevant statutory provisions), should be included in the forthcoming International Protection Bill and should be commenced when the single procedure is operating efficiently.'

¹⁸ The situation is unclear in Lithuania. National legislation states that asylum seekers are not entitled to work or leave the country during the period of examination of their applications for

In many countries, asylum seekers occupy an ambiguous legal status if their applications are rejected. Germany's legal framework is unusual in that it makes specific provisions for these people, as the country legally recognises "tolerated persons". This covers mostly unsuccessful asylum seekers who do not voluntarily return and whose deportation is suspended for factual, legal or political reasons. Toleration may last for years and be repeated several times until the person succeeds in legalizing their residence and shifting to a humanitarian or regular (family, labour) residence permit¹⁹. There are several channels to move people out of tolerated status. For example, after a few years, some tolerated persons who cannot move will gain residence permits.

Actions to 'fast-track' labour market access for asylum seekers

Countries have taken a number of steps to enable asylum seekers to join the labour market more quickly. These include:

- **Lower waiting times** for accessing work (Italy, Germany, Hungary, Belgium). For example, in Belgium, asylum seekers who do not receive a first instance decision on their asylum application within **four months** can access a temporary work permit card (C) (prior to October 2015, this period was six months). The card enables asylum seekers to work for any employer so long as they fulfil certain skills requirements. It lasts for 12 months and is renewable. It automatically expires if the asylum procedure finishes with a negative final decision²⁰.
- **Removing restrictions to the employment** of asylum seekers. For example, the German Federal Government also announced in April 2016 that it plans to suspend for three years the labour market test for asylum seekers and tolerated persons²¹, meaning that they would be able to compete more easily in the labour market for subcontracted employment²². The country is also opening up options such as internships and 'mini-jobs'.
- **Fast-track options for skills in demand** (Sweden). Sweden has been working closely with employers to introduce fast-track labour market access for skilled refugees. Although statistical evidence is not yet available on the outcomes, this received a highly positive response from employers and social partners.

As one of the biggest destination countries for the recent wave of asylum seekers and refugees, Sweden has been particularly active in this respect and is presented as a detailed example below.

asylum. Applications for asylum should, by the same national law, be examined within three months, and in exceptional cases the period can be extended to six months. However, there is no information on what happens if the examination period takes longer than six months.

¹⁹ In this paper it mostly cover these unsuccessful asylum seekers. However, the coverage is technically broader; tolerated foreigners are persons who are obliged to leave due to the absence of a legal title to remain or the rejection of their asylum applications or simply due to illegal entry or residence on other grounds (falsified visa, expulsion).

²⁰ I. Marx (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Belgium*, prepared for the Peer Review and available here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

²¹ This labour market test takes the form of a 'priority examination', which "requires the Employment Agency to examine whether the vacant job may be taken by a person enjoying preferential access to the labour market. Preference is given to German nationals, equally entitled Union citizens and resident migrants who are entitled under the Residence Act to take up employment without restrictions. "

²² K. Hailbronner (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Germany*, prepared for the Peer Review and available here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

Sweden's introduction programme²³

For many decades Sweden has been considered as being at the forefront of integration, as reflected in its high standing in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)²⁴. Integrating asylum seekers and refugees is currently at the top of the agenda of the Swedish Government²⁵.

Swedish integration policy centres on a two-year introduction programme for newly arrived refugees and their families. The programme provides a multi-faceted comprehensive package, including Swedish language training, civic orientation and activities to promote labour market integration. At the start of the programme an individualised introduction plan is created for each refugee. During the programme the participants receive a benefit, conditional on their participation in agreed activities²⁶.

The most recent developments in the integration policy in Sweden focus on speeding up the integration of refugees with skills and developing the skills of those refugees with little or no previously acquired skills. Amongst others, measures to strengthen the introduction of new arrivals in Sweden include the following:

- Early action in the asylum-seeking process, including a compulsory civic orientation programme and Swedish language courses to encourage active participation and to strengthen the ability of individuals to establish themselves
- All municipalities have shared responsibility for the reception of newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees (supported by new legislation in force from 1 March 2016).
- The Swedish Migration Agency will be developing an action plan for the asylum examination process, in order to reduce processing times²⁷.
- Better and more rapid introduction into society, focussing on those with low levels of education to obtain vocational training to be able to enter the labour market. The government aims at trialling vocational training schools. The possible introduction of obligatory education for adults arriving in Sweden without compulsory schooling is being explored.

Other actions tested to improve asylum seekers' entry into the labour market include greater **training, coaching and assessment** of skills (Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal); **greater information for employers** regarding employment of asylum seekers (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany) and **lower social benefits** for asylum seekers (seen as a way to motivate work) (UK)²⁸. Many of these are discussed in depth later in this report.

²³ Based largely on OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris

²⁴ European Commission - European Website on Integration (2015), Sweden: According to MIPEX, Sweden still has the world's best integration policy, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/sweden-according-to-mipex-sweden-still-has-the-worlds-best-integration-policy?pdf=1>

²⁵ The Government Offices of Sweden (2015), Measures to tackle the refugee crisis, <http://www.government.se/contentassets/f8effa03946941c5987f7ae76b356a02/agreement-measures-to-tackle-the-refugee-crisis.pdf>, p.1

²⁶ OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris

²⁷ The Government Offices of Sweden (2015), Measures to tackle the refugee crisis, <http://www.government.se/contentassets/f8effa03946941c5987f7ae76b356a02/agreement-measures-to-tackle-the-refugee-crisis.pdf>, p.1

²⁸ Presentation by Robert Anderson, Eurofound, 'Evidence on approaches to labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers', delivered at the Peer Review and available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

Although asylum seekers may need to wait until they can formally access the labour market, some countries are taking steps to facilitate their access to education and training services before they receive a decision on their application for protection. This is discussed in depth in section 3.2 of this report ("Offering education and training services to asylum seekers and refugees").

The move towards short-term international protection and potential risks

Faced with growing numbers of asylum claims, some countries have taken steps to introduce short-term forms of international protection. For instance, since the passage of the Asylum Act in Austria (January 2016), residence permits for recognised refugees are only granted for a three year-period, after which time they can be renewed. Finland is also using permits to introduce the idea of temporary protection, and Spain previously operated a programme of voluntary return. However, as discussed at the Peer Review, the notion that recognised refugees will eventually return to their country of origin can pose ethical challenges, and conflict with wider efforts to support their integration into the labour market (and wider society), resulting in a trade-off with positive integration outcomes. Furthermore, such a move may increase the administration associated with processing asylum applications and leave employers uncertain or unwilling to employ refugees with only a temporary ability to work.

3.2 Offering education and training services to asylum seekers and refugees

On arriving to a new country, asylum seekers – and those later recognised as refugees – are likely to be in need of education and training of some kind, either to support their orientation into the social and cultural norms of the country, to encourage their knowledge of the host country language, and/or to prepare them for entry into a specific sector or occupation.

As discussed above (Section 3.1), refugees have access to the services available through the Public Employment Services (PES), including job training and placement measures. The access of asylum seekers to training varies across Europe; in some cases, this training is available after a certain period of time from making the asylum application (before the outcome is known), whereas in others this training is only available for those who have gained recognised refugee status and/or a work permit. In cases where training is on offer to asylum seekers, the content also differs widely from country to country, and asylum seekers may have to wait up to 12 months before they can access it (assuming their application is not declared invalid).

Given the high numbers of asylum applications in some countries and the long processing times that may result, there are some moves towards facilitating earlier access for asylum seekers to particular training measures, rather than waiting until they gain refugee status (by which time they may have spent months, if not over a year, waiting for the outcome of their application). For example:

- In **Germany**, recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are legally entitled to benefits and employment-related support, as they have a secure residence right. Since November 2015, new groups (tolerated persons and asylum seekers) have gained access to an integration course and advanced job-related language training. The information and job placement services of job centres are also available to these groups, once they have resided in Germany for three months. Given the high numbers of applications in the country and the delays that some newcomers face before they can formally lodge an asylum application, the country is also considering counting the access from the time of newcomers' 'certificates of arrival' being issued, as opposed to their formal application.
- In **Norway**, currently asylum seekers do not gain access to training until they are granted asylum (i.e. refugee status) and resettled in one of the country's

local municipalities. However, the government is beginning some projects to offer training in the asylum centres, in order to provide support at an earlier stage.

- The City of Vienna in **Austria** will soon be introducing obligatory information events for asylum seekers on a range of topics such as: 'Living together', 'Education', 'Healthcare', 'Housing', 'Social affairs'. In addition, they will need to attend language courses, counselling and education programmes, organized by the 'education hub' (Bildungsdrehscheibe).

From the perspective of labour market and social integration of refugees, the benefits of offering early inclusion activities to asylum seekers are increasingly recognised. Recent research by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) highlighted that language knowledge is essential, and that courses need to be offered at an early stage (potentially at reception centres)²⁹. Furthermore, offering these services at an early stage prevents the 'blunting' of individuals' existing professional skills and helps to safeguard against their entry into poverty and/or undeclared employment.

In practice, there can be significant challenges for countries in providing training to asylum seekers before a decision on their application is taken, particularly when it comes to resourcing. For example, in Germany, given the high numbers seeking asylum, there remain many pending issues as to whether the country has the administrative and financial resources to supply the infrastructure and teachers needed for the language training of asylum seekers (including childcare services). The resource needs are especially high given newcomers' differing cultural backgrounds and educational levels when they arrive. The challenges are even more acute if one considers the additional resources needed to provide more job-orientated training, such as professional training and advanced vocational training. Coaching and training measures can be expensive, especially preparatory measures to prepare people for vocational education and training (VET).

Whilst Peer Review participants agreed with the notion of early inclusion activities, they emphasised the need for countries to consider carefully **the degree of integration support offered at different stages of the asylum procedure**. There also need to be **clear and efficient rules on access within each country**, laying down the precise legal right of asylum seekers to training.

Language and civic orientation training

At the Peer Review, Member State representatives emphasised the importance of asylum seekers and refugees speaking the language of their host country, in order to integrate into the labour market and wider society. Focusing on **early access to language training in particular** is also recommended in existing research by the OECD and Eurofound (see Section 4).

In reality, it can be highly challenging to encourage language learning amongst asylum seekers and refugees, especially for those who arrive with medium or low skills levels. For example³⁰:

- In Latvia, asylum seekers are able to access 120 hours of free language classes. However, most jobs require non-native speakers to pass a language proficiency test, and in practice these classes may not bring asylum seekers to a sufficient level of ability to pass the test.

²⁹ Presentation by Robert Anderson, Eurofound, 'Evidence on approaches to labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers', delivered at the Peer Review and available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

³⁰ These examples are from the Peer Review discussions and the Peer Country Papers, available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

- In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Bureau for the Development of Education recently prepared a curriculum of 150 hours of language and social integration training for asylum seekers and refugees. However, few nationals in the country speak the main languages of asylum seekers, meaning English acts as a 'bridge' language in teaching Macedonian to newcomers.
- In Estonia, there are voluntary Estonian language classes twice a week in the accommodation centres of asylum seekers. However, some have warned that these can be repetitive and do not easily support progression. Furthermore, they do not cater for individuals who may be illiterate.
- In Spain, the authorities have aimed to improve the quality of language teachers for asylum seekers, but there are difficulties in encouraging a minimum level of competence.

In order to support greater language proficiency amongst refugees and asylum seekers, teachers and trainers may need specific support on how to work with, and meet needs of, these groups. The Peer Review participants emphasised that it might be beneficial to explore alternative learning methodologies and tools for reaching adults with limited skills and formal education. For example:

- Exploring **dual training (connecting workplace training and language training)** can be beneficial. Both Norway and Sweden have experience of combining language training with work experience for refugees, rather than sequential activities³¹;
- In Germany, German language training is offered as early as possible, irrespective of an individual's asylum status. Furthermore, since November 2015, new groups (tolerated persons and asylum seekers) have gained access to an integration course and **advanced job-related language training**³². The country also encourages a **language coaching system** amongst asylum seekers and refugees.

In addition to language training, most countries at the Peer Review offer some integration training on the 'civic and societal values' of the host country (although the situation varies as to whether this is available to asylum seekers or only recognised refugees).

Tailoring training

For those eligible to receive labour market training, it is important to tailor it by considering not only the needs of the participants but also the wider job opportunities available. Countries use different methods for assessing newcomers' needs and existing skills and needs, as discussed in Sections 3.3 and 3.4. The Peer Review highlighted an interesting example of tailoring training from Finland, as presented in the box below.

Finland's employment-orientated modular integration training³³

In 2016, Finland introduced a more flexible form of integration training to different groups of asylum seekers. It uses modularised integration training with three different pathways – adapted to whether the individual is a fast or slow learner.

There is now also an orientation module for asylum seekers who have residence permits but are awaiting resettlement in a municipality or the start of integration training. This takes between two and five weeks, and can involve activities to validate their existing qualifications and experience.

³¹ E. Wadensjö (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Sweden* and A. Britt Djuve (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Norway*, prepared for the Peer Review.

³² K. Hailbronner (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Germany*, prepared for the Peer Review.

³³ S. Pitkänen (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Finland*, prepared for the Peer Review.

The new training allows for modules to be taught in a more flexible and tailored way by combining them to suit the participant's objectives (for example, entering self-employment, voluntary work, distance learning, etc.). Between the modules, there are also measures such as support in finding jobs or placements. There are plans to offer vocational training, and to support learning of the 'occupational language'.

The new training also seeks to offer support to the Finnish Public Employment Service offices in validating the qualifications of asylum seekers, and to make integration training more job-orientated.

Although it is important to consider how to 'upskill' newcomers, it is also worth remembering that underemployment is also an issue, whereby refugees are employed in roles that do not make full use of their existing skills and qualifications. Methods of skills recognition are discussed in more depth in Section 3.3. However, European governments appear to have made limited efforts thus far to reach out to these individuals already in work.

Encouraging participation in training and linking it to labour market outcomes

Peer Review attendants emphasised the need to motivate people to take up training. In some cases, this might be challenging, especially with regard to vocational training, as individuals with the right to work may see greater value in entering low-skilled employment at an earlier stage.

Sanctions and testing have been used to ensure that individuals participate in training. In some countries, non-attendance can lead to benefits cuts; in others, individuals who fail a test at the end of training are unable to gain citizenship. However, there may be ethical issues in using such measures. Some countries consider that the uneven balance of power between authorities and asylum seekers/refugees means that it is unethical to require them to sign an agreement in advance (as they lack a genuine choice about whether to do so).

Disciplinary measures should be used with care, taking into account the starting point of the participants and the level of commitment they have demonstrated (for example, training attendance), rather than their exact test results. This is highly important so as not to disadvantage particular groups (for example, illiterate persons, amongst whom women may be overrepresented). In addition, when assessing the participation and commitment of participants, the specific needs of those applicants with disabilities or those suffering from specific traumas resulting from torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence should be taken into account.

More generally, demonstrating the labour market relevance of training (including through dual vocational training) can be an important way of incentivising refugees to stay in training and to favour it over low-skilled employment. Offering 'bridging courses' and placing individuals in sectors that relate to their qualifications and interests can also be beneficial.

Supporting the participation of women and children in integration programmes

The Peer Review shed light on the specific barriers to involving women asylum seekers and refugees in integration programmes, including disproportionate childcare responsibilities, lower levels of literacy and/or language proficiency on arrival, and gendered expectations as to women's role and capacities. In general, charities from Spain emphasised the challenges in encouraging the labour market integration of women who are 'very far from the job market', especially if their families do not support their employment. Perhaps for these reasons, the OECD (see section 4) has emphasised the importance of continuing support for women's integration over the long term. Providing a clear pathway for the low-skilled was also seen as an important way of

supporting women's participation in the labour market, given that women may be more likely to arrive without formally recognised skills³⁴.

Countries appear to have fairly limited experience in designing measures to increase women's inclusion³⁵. However, there are some exceptions, as presented in the box below.

Measures to increase women's integration and inclusion

In **Norway**, as part of the Introductory Programme (NIP) for refugees, there is an 'introductory benefit' of around EUR 20,000 annually. Part of the rationale for introducing an individual benefit rather than a household benefit was to support women's participation, by creating an economic incentives for both individuals in a partnership to take part in the programme. This programme aimed to address the issue faced by previous integration programmes, whereby the involvement of women in some refugee groups was very low³⁶.

In **Finland**, there is now the option to undertake integration training part-time, which may support those with additional responsibilities, such as those caring for young children (more likely to be women) or people with health problems³⁷.

Considering how to integrate children in the educational system as early as possible is important for encouraging social integration and avoiding future disadvantage in the labour market. In Austria, there are plans to introduce compulsory education and training for those under 18. In Germany, new programmes have been started in cooperation with employers to engage young asylum seekers, offering preparatory training, language courses and scout programmes.

Focusing on integrating children is especially important in light of the numbers of asylum seekers in Europe who are unaccompanied minors (almost 90,000 in the EU in 2015³⁸), who are especially at risk of falling out of standard education programmes and becoming social excluded.

3.3 Recognising qualifications and work experience of refugees and asylum seekers

Recognising and validating the qualifications and work experience of asylum seekers and refugees represents one of the biggest challenges for the countries at the Peer Review. The discussions during the Peer Review focussed mainly on the assessment of skills and the recognition of qualifications, including informal qualifications. The importance of the topic was emphasised at the end of the peer review, when it was proposed to hold a separate peer review on the topic of qualification recognitions.

The recognition of foreign professional qualifications, especially university studies, is regulated in the participating countries as shown in the table below. These regulations affect all migrants and are not tailored to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

³⁴ OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris

³⁵ This is potentially due to the greater number of men within the arriving population of asylum seekers and refugees in the European Union. See European Parliament (2016), *Reception of female refugees and asylum seekers in the EU: Case study Germany*. Commissioned by the Policy Department for Citizens' rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee.

³⁶ A. Britt Djuve (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Norway*

³⁷ S. Pitkänen (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Finland*, prepared for the Peer Review.

³⁸ Eurostat, Press Release: 'Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors: Almost 90 000 unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers registered in the EU in 2015', 87/2016, 2 May 2016.

Table 2. Regulations for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications

Country	Regulation and process
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four types of recognition: (1) professional recognition (professional accreditation) of regulated professions for the purposes of the EU Recognition Directive, (2) notification of college and school-leaving certificates, (3) validation of academic degrees and diplomas for the purposes of exercising a profession and (4) accreditation of apprenticeship certificates. • Documents necessary • Complex process (new law to enter into force in 2016)
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NARIC "National Academic (and professional) Recognition and Information Centre" is responsible for recognising the equivalence of foreign study certificates • Documents necessary • Complex process • Fee is charged in regular cases, but waived for asylum seekers, refugees and persons under subsidiary protection • For informal skills, it is possible to pass certain tests organised through PES, but it is not very well-known
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act no. 18/2004 Coll. On the recognition of professional qualifications • Documents necessary, if no documents available documents, person signs declaration of honour about the particular qualification/training. • Strict procedures by the Ministry of Health for medical doctors/nurses, including spending at least 6 months in a hospital as a secondary level doctor/nurse and passing an exam afterwards
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Recognition Information Centre • Original documents necessary • No alternative assessment methods
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Board of Education (as part of the Ministry of Education and Culture), is responsible for matters relating to immigrant education and training and for the recognition of formal qualifications of foreign nationals. • Public Employment Service is responsible for the recognition of other qualifications and work experience • Recognition of qualifications and previous work experience complemented by targeted integration training
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2012 Law on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications • Documents necessary • Examination of equivalence and possibility to close gaps through training courses or tests
Latvia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the recognition of qualifications • Documents necessary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complicated procedure for regulated professions, due to bureaucratic requirements which are not easy to meet
FYR Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The diploma recognition process is executed by the Ministry of Education and Science through the Commission for diploma recognition for primary and secondary education and for tertiary education• For the recognition of a tertiary education degree, the applicant must also submit a document from the Ministry of Education and Science in the relevant country in which the diploma is issued confirming that the university is registered and works according to the country rules.• Long lasting process• The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy supports the international protection applicants to ease the communication with the ministry of education, help applicants to collect the necessary documents etc.• Persons registered as non-qualified were referred to the vocational training or in programs to gain literacy skills or to complete some education level as per the programs for adult education accredited by the Centre for Adult Education.
Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education), can grant a general recognition of university and university college degrees, and also assist the other actors in their work.• Universities and University Colleges are responsible for specific recognition within their respective fields and there are 180 different institutions that recognise regulated vocational education• No formal system for recognition of vocational training has been established• County Governors are authorised to establish local institutions of recognition of vocational training. Some County Governors have established systems for practical testing of vocational skills.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Certificates for professional skills by ministry of education and capacity documents by ministry of employment• Increase in human and budgetary resources to speed up the process of recognising university qualifications• Complex process, excessive administrative requirements and calls for a reform of the whole system• For work experience and professional qualifications, there are problems with a lack of recognition mechanisms and in some cases of legal or administrative requirements to obtain some professional qualifications.• Accrediting non-official experience in vocational training is a cumbersome method nationally and very slow for public administration. 17 autonomous communities implement central policies in any way they see fit, so very varied.• The Spanish first reception and integration system includes some financial aid to obtain and recognise documents

Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public employment service validate people's skills and experience• Documents required for the recognition of qualifications• Capacity issues• Fast track for some categories, such as teachers, butchers and chefs
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Countries are facing challenges in adapting current systems to the growing number of asylum seekers and refugees whose qualifications and work experience need to be assessed. In particular, regulations on the recognition of work experience and informal qualifications are limited. These challenges are discussed below.

Challenges in the recognition processes

- The recognition of skills and qualifications can be challenging, due to a lack of documentation on the part of asylum seekers and refugees, lengthy and bureaucratic processes in the host country, and a lack of government resources to engage in processes to recognise non-formal and informal learning. In this regard, the low and medium skilled (especially those with informal education and experience) may be in the most precarious situation. For this group, it is especially important to consider alternative ways of assessing non-formal and informal learning experience.
- Several countries experienced challenges in skills assessment. The main challenges include a general lack of skills, lack of documents, lack of knowledge of host country language on the part of newcomers, as well as capacity issues and a lack of assessment methods in the host countries.
- The most common issue relates to documentation: asylum seekers and refugees lack documents to prove their previous education and cannot gain access to these papers from their home countries.
- Another important challenge is the capacity issue when dealing with the number of requests at the ministries of education responsible for the recognition of qualifications
- Other challenges include a lack of uniform rules on the formal recognition of qualifications obtained outside of the EU, as well as a lack of clear strategies on streamlining and regulating the recognition processes.

Approaches for the recognition of qualifications and work experience

Some countries have implemented measures to address the challenges in the recognition process as seen in the box below.

Actions to improve the recognition process: contact points and networks

As of 2013, third country nationals in **Austria** can receive free, multilingual personal counselling about whether it is possible to recognise formally their qualifications formal qualification recognition is possible, as part of the '*Contact Points for Persons with Qualifications from Foreign Countries*' initiative. These counsellors can also offer support during the process.

The *IQ-Network (Integration by Qualification)* in **Germany** was expanded in 2015 to cover recognition issues. The main activities of the network, coordinated by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, include establishing an information network on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications and developing special adjustment programmes (such as internships and practical training) in order to achieve formal recognition. The network cooperates with employment agencies and job centres. It is

implemented across Germany through regional networks and coordinated by local offices. Besides the assistance in the recognition process, the network offers support measures for a faster integration into the labour market as well as intercultural training.

Although the countries have established criteria for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications, as shown in Table 2 above, the recognition of work experience and informal qualifications is challenging. Several countries have recently developed or are in the phase of developing and implementing processes for this purpose:

- In **Germany**, it has recently been suggested to admit refugees to certain professional activities, on the basis of an internship or proven practical experience. There is already some experience of this, with respect to Syrian doctors working under the supervision of authorized medical doctors.
- A fast track for validation of skills has been introduced in **Sweden** for specific groups, such as butchers and chefs. There are also measures for teachers, such as deploying university teachers who speak the necessary language to offer courses for other teachers. The goal is to shorten the time for skills validation (if no documents are available) by half compared to the regular system.
- A new formal recognition law to summarise the regulations on the recognition of qualifications and work experience should be introduced in 2016 in **Austria**. The law foresees a skills assessment for those persons who have no documents proving their skills. Targeted procedures for refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection without any certificates shall be introduced.
- In **Norway** the Government published a recent White Paper on adult learning, outlining the goal to establish national systems for the recognition of vocational training. The systems will be administered by NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) and are supposed to be operative by 2017.
- In **Finland**, a practice change from integration training to a more job-oriented approach has been introduced: '*Employment-oriented modular integration training for immigrants*'. The aim is (among others) to train PES offices to carry out validation and recognition of qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees (amongst other things). This is described in more detail in Section 3.4.2.
- One of the tools being considered in **Spain** are 'professional qualification certificates' that accredit existing experience.
- In **Latvia** a new procedure for recognising professional qualifications of persons without the possibility to obtain documents is being developed.

The role of employers

The participants in the peer review emphasised the importance of including employers in the process of assessing qualifications of asylum seekers or refugees.

- Employers can play an active role in assessing skills in a workplace situation. Currently employers are only involved in skills recognition to a limited extent. For example in **Belgium** employers are part of the skills recognition for specific bottleneck occupations such as pipefitters. A recent study³⁹ conducted by the

³⁹ The study refers to the initiative IdA (Integration durch Ausbildung und Arbeit/ Integration through Education and Work) developed in October 2015 by the vbw, which includes tailored education and qualification projects for asylum seekers, refugees and tolerated persons. For more information, see (in German) vbw – Vereinigung der Bayerischen Wirtschaft e. V. (Eds.) (2016), *Integration durch Bildung. Migranten und Flüchtlinge in Deutschland (Integration through education. Migrants and refugees in Germany)*: https://www.vbw-bayern.de/Redaktion/Frei-zugaengliche-Medien/Abteilungen-GS/Bildung/2016/Downloads/Gutachten_2016_Integration-durch-Bildung.pdf

Bavarian Business Association (Vereinigung der Bayerischen Wirtschaft – vbw) in **Germany** showed that skills assessment conducted by employers is connected with immediate access to training and thus might contribute to the creation of skills necessary to take up the formal professional occupation. The process identified in the study is threefold: first the employers conduct a language assessment, then a skills assessment to find out which training the persons would fit into, and lastly the persons are offered the necessary training.

The role of the European Union

The Peer Review emphasised that the recognition of qualifications and work experience of asylum seekers and refugees is fragmented across the EU and that there is a need for creative ways of recognising particular qualifications and work experience. However, many sources of support already exist at EU level, for example the European Qualifications Framework (a point of reference for better understanding and comparing qualifications across the EU), and the EURES job portal for mobile EU citizens. The passage of the New Skills Agenda and the existence of mutual learning resources on the validation of non-formal and informal learning are also important, as presented in the box below.

New Skills Agenda

As part of the Commission Work Programme 2016, the European Commission is adopting a new Skills Agenda for Europe in June 2016. The aim of the agenda is to ensure that people in Europe develop skills early on that are necessary for the jobs of today and the future. For the first time the Skills Agenda focuses also on asylum seekers and refugees. In late 2016 and 2017 a 'Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals' will be launched, aiming to support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. It will further include a guide on best practices to support labour market integration in Member States as well as online language training⁴⁰.

European Inventory and Database on Validation of non-formal and informal learning to include asylum seekers and refugees

Based on the 2012 Council Recommendation, EU Member States are encouraged to put in place national arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. The European database serves as platform for information exchange about national arrangements for validating non-formal and informal learning. The Inventory supports countries to further monitor/develop validation nationally and is regularly updated. The next update will also include reforms also about the situation of the validation of non-formal and informal learning concerning asylum seekers and refugees⁴¹. This update can assist EU Member States in their assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal skills of asylums seekers and refugees.

Despite these advances, it is necessary to consider the practical implementation of existing tools for the recognition of qualifications and work experience of asylum seekers and refugees. Better information exchange between the different EU countries and the EU is necessary to compare how countries are dealing with similar issues and to learn from experiences, with the aim to streamline the assessment and recognition process in the different EU Member States.

⁴⁰For more information, see European Commission (2016), *Press release. Ten actions to help equip people in Europe with better skills*: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2039_en.htm

⁴¹ For more information, see European Commission (2016), *Validation of non-formal and informal learning*: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/fr/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

There is also a need for better coordination between different stakeholders involved in the process of assessment and recognition of qualifications and work experience (whether formal or informal) and in the integration process more generally. This is considered in more depth in the next section.

3.4 Organising and delivering labour market integration programmes

3.4.1 Collaboration and coordination between multiple stakeholders

The Peer Review highlighted key differences across Europe when it comes to stakeholder collaboration.

Although central government generally has exclusive authority over the system of asylum, the development and delivery of integration policies can be split across multiple Ministries. For example, in Sweden, this responsibility lies not only with the Ministry of Employment, but also the Ministries of Education and Research, Justice and Health and Social Affairs, in addition to the Swedish Migration Agency⁴². Furthermore, the stakeholders involved in integration vary widely, as do the nature and magnitude of their role. In some cases, the Public Employment Service (PES) may act as the leading stakeholder, in others municipalities, and in others even non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (in partnership with central government). Coordination and cooperation between different types of ministries and organisations is thus highly important, not only for covering the complex needs of asylum seekers and refugees, but also for maximising the efficiency of resource use and avoiding duplication.

Spain's tools and mechanisms for collaboration and consistency of services⁴³

The Ariadna network brings together all individuals responsible for labour inclusion within the Spanish reception centres, enabling them to undertake common training and activities. The Ariadna network allows members to share their experiences, as well as tools and methods for supporting integration. Another tool used for collaboration is the computer programme, SIRIA⁴⁴, which supports the centralized management of the reception system.

More generally, NGOs at the Peer Review – such as the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR), the Spanish Red Cross and ACCEM – confirmed the importance of their networking activities at local, regional and national levels, which serve to harmonise methodologies and ensure that the majority of work is carried out based on the same principles and criteria.

Regional and local authorities often have power in areas critical to integration, such as language training, education, civic orientation and housing. In practice, there can be substantial variety when it comes to the quality of integration services on offer at local/regional level. For instance, in Norway, the Introductory Programmes (NIP) for refugees is supposed to include an element of labour market training, but local authorities and case workers have significant discretion over the programme content. Although this was originally intended to allow for greater tailoring of the programme to individual needs, in practice it has meant that some municipalities lack specialised training, and the main services consistently on offer are the general Norwegian language training and social studies modules agreed by central government⁴⁵. Participants agreed

⁴² OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris

⁴³ Markus Gonzalez Beilfuss (April 2016), *Host Country Discussion Paper – Spain*. Prepared for the Peer Review on 'Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries', Madrid (Spain), 23-24 May 2016

⁴⁴ Information system of programmes for refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers.

⁴⁵ A. Britt Djuve (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Norway*, prepared for the Peer Review.

that it is important to have a clear distribution of powers between central government and municipalities, and to set minimum standards to ensure consistency of integration services across the country.

The participants highlighted that the involvement of NGOs can be very important for offering more understanding of the needs of particular groups, as they are often the ones working directly with asylum seekers and refugees. Moreover, they have the ability to offer more mobile services. However, the level of professionalization in NGOs varies by country. In some cases, they may require additional capacity-building support. Furthermore, participants highlighted that it is important that the state does not give up its responsibilities within international protection. NGOs should not serve as a total substitute for government integration services; the government should retain a role in coordinating the overall levels and consistency of NGO services (as with municipalities). In cases when multiple stakeholders are involved in integration, it is important for countries to consider ways of guiding asylum seekers and refugees through the system, as reflected in Estonia's support person service.

The role of NGOs in integration

In some countries, NGOs play a large role in providing services to asylum seekers and refugees, such as material support and counselling services.

As mentioned, in **Spain's** three-phase integration process, NGOs are a key actor in the development and delivery of the second phase (living independently). Specifically, they have a large role in the Spanish reception system, as they manage a number of reception centres for asylum seekers (in addition to the public reception centres that exist).

Estonia's NGOs are relatively unusual in having set up a support person service for beneficiaries of international protection. This aims to support refugees in their communication with various state organisations, such as local authorities, central government, schools, etc. The service also aims to offer vital psychological support (or to direct people towards other services) and to provide practical guidance on living in Estonia. One of the responsible NGOs has also begun to use a new case management software, in order to track the progress of particular refugees⁴⁶.

In the **Czech Republic**, NGOs are also important in supporting the labour market integration of asylum seekers. There are 38 diverse organizations working on this topic, including better-known bodies such as as Člověk v tísni (People in Need), or Multikulturní centrum Praha (Multicultural centre Prague). They have made use of European funding in particular to support their projects⁴⁷.

In other countries (Norway, Finland), NGOs play less of a prominent role in supporting the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

Across the countries at the Peer Review, **recognised refugees** also have access to support services of the Public Employment Services (PES), on offer for all citizens. Some Member State representatives warned that while this can support their integration, it may be problematic if the PES is unable to cover all the needs of refugees through its mainstream services (for example, need for psychological support). Refugees may also face practical barriers to using these if the services apply an insurance-based model and require previous contributions over a set period of time. The access of asylum seekers to PES services is normally more limited, and can be dependent on them gaining a work permit, even if other education and training services are available (see Section 3.1).

⁴⁶ E. Janson (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Estonia*, prepared for the Peer Review.

⁴⁷ W. Strielkowski (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Czech Republic*, prepared for the Peer Review.

The involvement of employers is also essential, not only to facilitate the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees, but also to support the process of skills recognition (see Section 3.3) and to educate employers themselves – on, for example, the legal status and access of asylum seekers and refugees to employment. Some countries have taken interesting steps to engage employers. For example, in **Sweden**, as part of the '100 club', the prime minister asked employers to receive at least 100 refugees for employment or a work placement. Sweden also established a special support service and hotline for employers.

Trade unions can also play an important role in supporting the labour market integration of refugees, mainly when it comes to defending the same working rights and conditions for native-born and foreign-born employees. In addition, trade unions can play a role in validating and recognising the existing skills / qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers.

The management and delivery of integration programmes depends on the level of inflow of asylum seekers and refugees in a country. In some countries with large inflows, integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the existing institutional system can be important to avoid duplication, to ensure consistency of support, and to ease the pressure on overstrained resources. This approach builds upon pre-existing processes, structures and/or expertise to provide tailored support to the specific groups. The economic situation in the host country also affects the opportunities available to asylum seekers and refugees and the design of the integration process.

3.4.2 Assessing the needs of asylum seekers and refugees

According to evidence from existing research (see section 4), successful labour market integration rests upon developing an **individualised integration plan** for each asylum seeker and for each individual later recognised as a refugee. Assessing the **personal needs** of asylum seekers and refugees is thus highly important. This needs assessment should include assessment of their psychological needs, as well as their need for other forms of support to improve their employability, such as training in the host country language, and assistance in getting their existing qualifications recognised. As part of the integration plan, it is also important to consider the sequencing of the support on offer, as individuals move through their asylum application process and (potentially) become refugees.

Methods of assessing needs and tailoring support

In **Austria**, due to limited data on the qualification levels of refugees, the regional Public Employment Service (PES) in Vienna began a pilot project called the 'competence check for vocational integration'. Occurring from autumn 2015 (lasting five weeks for each participant), this project collected detailed information about refugees' qualifications and abilities through interviews. The sessions were carried out by individuals who spoke the native language of participants and covered topics such as formal qualifications, competences, work experience, employability, and language skills. In all, 898 people were interviewed for the project⁴⁸.

In **Sweden**, the introduction programme begins with the development of an individualised introduction plan for every refugee. This takes into account their experience, education and objectives. Both the refugee and a member of staff from the PES are involved in writing the plan. It also sets out the planned activities for the refugee as regards Swedish language-learning and civic orientation, as well as employment preparation (for example, support in getting their education and work experience recognised).

⁴⁸ Persons receiving subsidiary protection were also included.

In assessing people's needs, it is important to bear in mind many asylum seekers and refugees will have had traumatic experiences during their transit to a new country. This is particularly the case for women and unaccompanied girls, who may have experienced gender-based violence during their journeys⁴⁹. Assuring people's psychological wellbeing is thus integral to supporting them into work.

Providing psychological support

Existing research suggests that professional counselling services are on offer for refugees in 18 out of 28 Member States⁵⁰. In six Member States⁵¹, NGOs also offer special counselling for refugees to overcome trauma.

3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

There is limited country-level data available specifically on the labour market situation, poverty and social exclusion of asylum seekers and refugees, meaning it is not possible to measure countries' success in fulfilling the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy – which encourages greater inclusivity within the labour market and lower levels of poverty and social exclusion by 2020.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of existing measures, countries face challenges in identifying successful policies and measures that might contribute to a better integration of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in labour markets, due partly to the pressure created through large inflows of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. This may make scaling-up of pilot or small-scale measures highly challenging.

Although the evidence base is now improving when it comes to the **design** of more effective integration policies and programmes, it is too early to assess good practices, as labour market support measures are too recent to draw robust conclusions about their implementation. Even for countries with a long track record of supporting refugees, such as Sweden, integrating the most recent wave of refugees can be challenging. The Swedish National Audit Office is in the process of carrying out a study on the reasons behind the successful labour market integration of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sweden, in order to gauge what can be learned for the present situation⁵². In the long term, more research is needed to monitor and evaluate the sustainability of the **impacts** of integration measures, as well as to understand the factors that lead to successful **implementation** – for example, collaboration tools, effective teaching methods for asylum seekers and refugees, training methods for staff in public employment services and NGOs, etc.

4 The 'success factors' of effective integration programmes: evidence from existing research

In general, asylum seekers and refugees face particular challenges in finding work and exhibit lower **employment** rates compared to other migrants, but – until recently – there were knowledge gaps in relation to these groups. Several recent studies consider the success factors of integration programmes, including those relating to labour market integration:

⁴⁹ European Parliament (2016), *Reception of female refugees and asylum seekers in the EU: Case study Germany*. Commissioned by the Policy Department for Citizens' rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee.

⁵⁰ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, IE, FI, FR, LV, MT, NL, SI, SK, ES, SE, UK. See European Migration Network (2016), *Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices* (forthcoming).

⁵¹ BE, IE, NL, SE, SI, UK

⁵² E. Wadensjö (2016), *Peer Country Comments Paper – Sweden*, prepared for the Peer Review.

- In a recent study⁵³, the **OECD** identified several success factors that contribute to the effectiveness of integration programmes in Sweden, which has a long tradition of integration of refugees and a relatively good labour market situation in general. In the current inflow of asylum seekers and refugees, Sweden was one of the main destination countries.
- **Eurofound**⁵⁴ recently analysed national approaches across the EU to the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers.
- The **European Parliament**⁵⁵ focussed on identifying 'best practices' among Member States.
- **European Migration Network** (2016), *Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices* (forthcoming).
- **OECD** (Jan 2016), *Making integration work: refugees and others in need of protection*.
- **European Employment Policy Observatory** (EEPO, DG EMPL) (June 2016) *Synthesis Report on the Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees* and 30 country articles.
- Finally, a study by the **Migration Policy Centre**⁵⁶ mapped policies and practices of Member States regarding the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

These studies identify several success factors for the integration measures in EU Member States, as summarised in the box below. It is worth bearing in mind that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, and these factors should serve only as guidance, to be reviewed and tailored to match the situation within a particular country (or region).

Emerging success factors from research: labour market integration programmes for refugees and asylum seekers

- Providing **early integration activities** for refugees and asylum seekers with high prospects of being allowed to stay, such as fast-track employment options for those with skills in high-demand sectors or language training for those in reception centres⁵⁷.

⁵³ OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/working-together-skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-sweden_9789264257382-en

⁵⁴ Presentation by Robert Anderson, Eurofound, 'Evidence on approaches to labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers', delivered at the Peer Review and available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

⁵⁵ European Parliament (2015), *Work and social welfare for asylum-seekers and refugees: Selected EU Member States*: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_IDA%282015%29572784

⁵⁶ Migration Policy Centre (2016), *Mapping labour market integration for asylum seekers and refugees: policies and practices*. See the Executive Summary (full report not yet available): http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/refmismes/Executive_Summary_Draft.pdf

⁵⁷ OECD (2016), *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/working-together-skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-sweden_9789264257382-en

- **Minimising the administrative obstacles** that prevent refugees from entering the labour market, even when they are legally permitted to do so⁵⁸
- Allocating **additional financial and human resources** promoting the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers⁵⁹.
- Developing **integration plans that are individualised and tailor-made**, taking into account the diversity of the population that they target. These plans should be developed jointly with the participants and focus on several key issues centring around cultural orientation, socio-professional orientation and/or training:
 - Early skills recording, assessment and further development according to the needs, to avoid over-qualification
 - Offering of early language courses
 - Incorporating targeted entry subsidies and quality mentoring as well as help in addressing advantages due to the flight experience (personal, social or economic)⁶⁰
 - Providing a coherent pathway for the low skilled⁶¹. Many applicants and beneficiaries have rather limited skills / education, and need intensive education for basic skills to be employable. Thereby, an emphasis on adult education is necessary.
 - Attention to acquiring new skills in employment, not only in vocational education
 - Reaching late-arriving youth by allowing more time to qualify for upper-secondary education and ensuring that the youth labour market programmes in place reach late arriving migrant youth. These should also include language courses for youth⁶².
 - Engage with women who have often traumatic experiences associated with abuse affecting their overall chances of adapting to society and the labour market. They face additional challenges to labour market integration, such as childcare responsibilities and, for single women, limited access to social networks relative to other women⁶³.
 - Support for self-employment
- Adapting the process of recognition of skills and qualifications to **incorporate informal learning and work experience**.
- **Coordination and cooperation of the stakeholders** involved is central to the effectiveness and efficiency of integration measures. The OECD study recommends to systematically involve municipalities in the design of introduction programmes, to track and exchange information throughout

⁵⁸ Migration Policy Centre (2016), *Mapping labour market integration for asylum seekers and refugees: policies and practices*. See the Executive Summary (full report not yet available): http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/refmismes/Executive_Summary_Draft.pdf

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ European Parliament (2016), *Labour market integration of refugees: Strategies and good practices*:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2016\)578956](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2016)578956)

⁶¹ OECD (2016), *Making integration work: refugees and others in need of protection*: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants-9789264251236-en.htm>

⁶² OECD (2016), *Making integration work: refugees and others in need of protection*: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants-9789264251236-en.htm>

⁶³ EIGE (forthcoming), *Study on area A of the Beijing Platform for Action – Women and Poverty*.

the integration process and to monitor local performance. Finally, including civil society as well as social partners is crucial for success⁶⁴.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The Peer Review was a testament to the magnitude of the challenges facing European countries when it comes to the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees: challenges of an economic, legal, social and moral nature. The scale of the difficulties is especially great for those countries with the highest number of asylum applications in recent years.

Legally, recognised refugees have the right to participate in the labour market on equal terms as native-born residents, and to access the mainstream services offered through the Public Employment Services (PES), including education and training. EU legislation also states that asylum-seekers should have access to the labour market no later than 9 months after filing their application for international protection. However, Member States have some flexibility in deciding the conditions for granting access to the labour market for asylum seekers. Therefore, across Europe, the timing and conditions of access to the labour market, together with the length of the asylum procedure, vary widely.

The benefits of offering early inclusion activities to asylum seekers are increasingly recognised, from the perspective of the long-term labour market and social integration of refugees. The Peer Review highlighted the real steps being taken to facilitate earlier access of asylum seekers to education, training and employment, on the one hand, and to overcome the practical challenges facing refugees in integrating into the labour market, on the other.

When designing labour market integration policies for asylum seekers and refugees, it is recommended that European countries taking the following steps.

Access to the labour market and integration measures

- **Continue efforts to facilitate early access to integration activities for asylum seekers:**
 - Methods of doing so include lower waiting times for accessing work, actions to streamline/speed up the asylum procedure, the removal of restrictions on employment, fast-track entry options for those with 'in-demand' skills, and offering education and training services in reception centres. At times, a legal change may be necessary to support these steps.
- **Integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the existing institutional system can be important** for avoiding duplication, ensuring consistency of support, and easing pressure on overstrained resources.
- **Bear in mind that mainstream employment services are unlikely to be enough on their own to cover all the needs of asylum seekers and refugees** – for example, the need for psychological support to recover from traumas experienced. Furthermore, personnel in employment services are likely to need specific training to support them to work with these groups.

Education and training services

- **To support all forms of integration, offer language courses as early as possible** (potentially at reception centres). This can help to prevent the 'blunting' of individuals' existing professional skills.

⁶⁴ OECD (2016), *Making integration work: refugees and others in need of protection*: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants-9789264251236-en.htm>

- To alleviate potential resourcing challenges, **consider carefully the degree of integration support offered at different stages of the asylum procedure and establish clear and efficient rules on access within each country**, laying down the precise legal right of asylum seekers to training.
- **Consider methods of motivating people to take up training**, for example demonstrating the labour market relevance of training (including through dual vocational training). Sanctions and testing should be used very carefully, so as not to disadvantage particular groups (for example, illiterate persons).
- **Provide specific support to teachers and trainers working with asylum seekers and refugees**, in order to help them better understand their needs.
- **Explore alternative learning methodologies and tools for reaching adults with limited skills and formal education**, for example, connecting workplace training and language training.
- **Consider how to integrate children in the educational system as early as possible is important for encouraging social integration** and avoiding future disadvantage in the labour market.
- As recommended by the OECD, **develop support programmes for unaccompanied minors who arrive past the age of compulsory schooling**, including through allowing more time to qualify for upper-secondary education and ensuring that the youth labour market programmes in place reach late arriving migrant youth⁶⁵.

Organising and delivering labour market integration programmes

- **Develop an individualised integration pathway** for each asylum seeker and for each individual later recognised as a refugee.
- **Assess the personal needs and skills of asylum seekers and refugees early**, looking at the psychological needs of individual applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as other forms of support that they need to improve their employability.
- In view of the specific challenges that they may face, **pay special attention to engaging women in integration measures on a long-term basis**, through measures such as offering better childcare options, making it possible to undertake training on a part-time basis, and opting for individual rather than household benefits.
- **Encourage coordination and cooperation between the different organisations involved in the integration process**, through tools and mechanisms such as regular meetings and communications, practitioner networks and case management software.
- **Recognise the role that Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) can play in offering more understanding of the needs of particular groups**, as the ones working directly with asylum seekers and refugees. At the same time, **offer capacity-building support to NGOs in countries where they are less professionalised**.
- **Make concerted efforts to involve employers in labour market integration programmes**, given that they can support processes of skills recognition. This

⁶⁵ OECD (2016), *Making integration work: refugees and others in need of protection*: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants-9789264251236-en.htm>

is also important for educating employers themselves on the legal status and labour market access of asylum seekers and refugees.

- **Engage trade union organisations in labour market integration programmes as well**, as they have a role to play in protecting the same working conditions and rights for the foreign-born and native-born population.

Recognition of existing qualifications and work experience

- **Focus on alternative and creative methods for the recognition of qualifications that do not require paperwork**, given that asylum seekers and refugees are likely either to lack the documents to confirm their formal qualifications or to have non-formal or informal qualifications. For the low and medium skilled, such steps are especially important.
 - For example: skills validation through short-term work placements (with employers playing a role in skills assessment); job-orientated modular training in which skills are tested over the course of the programme; targeted procedures specifically for refugees and asylum seekers; self-certification methods accompanied by training and testing.
- **Make use of new European tools to support the recognition of qualifications and skills assessment**, such as the European Inventory and Database on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (soon to include asylum seekers and refugees) and the (upcoming) Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals.
- **Learn from existing national examples**, such as the contact point system in Austria and the IQ-Network in Germany.
- To support the labour market integration of foreign nationals more generally, **develop and harmonise systems to recognise tertiary qualifications acquired at foreign universities** (although be aware that many asylum seekers and refugees will not have university education)
- **Consider methods of reaching out to those who are already in work and 'underemployed'**, i.e. in jobs that are not commensurate with their existing skills and abilities.
- **Involve employers in skills recognition processes, partly to validate skills, but also so that they define their requirements as to the qualifications and language skills of potential employees** and facilitate the work of the Public Employment Services (PES) and other matching services.

Monitoring and evaluation

- **Work with national and European statistical offices (Eurostat) to consider methods of improving data collection on the labour market situation and levels of poverty and social exclusion amongst asylum seekers and refugees**, to enable better monitoring of their position, as well as to support future evaluation activities.

Further information

Full report, presentations and background papers will be available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1047&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes>

