Mutual Learning Programme
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Key policy messages from the Thematic Event on ‘Measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees’

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Thematic Event on ‘Measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees’, Brussels, 22 June 2016

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the Thematic Event

In light of the current refugee movements in Europe, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission hosted a Thematic Event on measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. In 2015, over 1.3 million people requested asylum in EU, representing more than double the number of applicants in 2014. The socio-economic integration of such large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees poses an important challenge to the EU and its Member States, as well as in other parts of Europe and beyond. The Event looked at different integration measures, in the context of promising practices across Europe, as well as the challenges that Member States face in developing and implementing integration policies.

The Thematic Event represents one part of wider efforts to support the inclusion and integration of refugees into employment, education and wider society. Prior to the Thematic Event, a Peer Review on the 'Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries' was hosted by Spain in May 2016, as part of the Mutual Learning Programme of the European Commission.

The Thematic Event was held in Brussels, brought together representatives from public administrations/agencies (regional and national), social partners and civil society organisations/NGOs from several European countries, as well as representatives from the European Commission, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Eurofound.

The Sections below provide a summary of the key policy developments and messages in the field of integration of asylum seekers and refugees across the EU.

1.2 European policy context

Whilst recognising that integration measures are a Member State responsibility, it was stressed that the European Union plays an important role in facilitating discussion and cooperation between Member States and support their actions through policy guidance and funding.

The European Union has a long tradition in developing integration policies. Indeed, a common approach to the integration of third country nationals dates back to 2004 (the Hague Programme). Moreover, within the European Semester, the challenge of integration of people with a migrant background has been reflected for many years. The pace and volume at which asylum seekers and refugees are arriving to Europe challenges the Member States' infrastructure, facilities and communities. In addition, the recent arrivals may reinforce existing integration challenges. Indeed, notwithstanding the efforts made, third-country nationals across the EU continue to fare worse than EU citizens in terms of employment, education, and social inclusion outcomes.

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1 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. In this paper, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status are grouped together under the umbrella heading 'refugee'.

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

3 It is recommended that readers also refer to the full report from this Peer Review, as it covers European and national approaches to integration in more depth, especially when it comes to labour market integration and skills recognition processes. Full report available here: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes

The socio-economic outcomes of refugees have been even worse. They represent one of the most vulnerable groups of migrants on the labour market. Refugees have on average lower employment rates than all other migrant groups except family migrants and once unemployed, refugees have more difficulties to return to employment. It takes up to 20 years for refugees to reach the same employment rate as EU citizens, which leads to a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. Nevertheless, education and knowledge of the host-country language help refugees significantly improve their labour market outcomes.5

The EU has a key role in supporting Member States in the integration of third country nationals through policies, measures and funding. The most recent policy developments with regard to the integration of third country nationals include in particular the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration6 in 2015 and the EU Integration Action Plan of Third-Country Nationals adopted on 7 June 20167 setting out a common framework to help with designing policies at national level. Integration is understood to be a multi-dimensional concept, capturing integration into housing, education, the labour market and wider society. Integration is further seen as a two-way process between third-country nationals and host societies.

Several EU level initiatives focus on specific aspects of integration:

- **Skills** are critical. The new Skills Agenda for Europe aims to bring the right training, skills and support to people across the European Union8. Specific measures of the Agenda can reach third-country nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees, for example:
  - A 'Skills Profile Tool Kit for Third Country Nationals' to support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications;
  - Online language assessment and learning for newly arrived third country nationals, especially refugees, through Erasmus+ online linguistic support9;
  - A revision of the 'Europass Framework', offering people better and easier-to-use tools to present their skills and get useful real-time information on skills needs and trends;
  - A proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a 'Skills Guarantee' promoting the upskilling of the low- and medium-skilled;
  - Greater transparency of qualifications through coordination with third countries, where possible, through the revision of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

- **Legal developments** are ongoing.

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9 100 000 licences for online language courses are available to refugees for a period of three years.
- On 13 July 2016 the European Commission issued a proposal to reform the Common European Asylum System. The Commission is proposing to:

  ◦ Replace the Asylum Procedures Directive with a Regulation that aims to simplify, clarify and shorten asylum procedures with decisions normally to be taken within six months or less. It further aims to ensure common guarantees for asylum seekers such as the right to a personal interview, but also to ensure stricter rules to combat abuse by making the current optional sanctions in case of abuse compulsory.

  ◦ Replace the existing Qualification Directive with a new Regulation that aims to ensure greater convergence of recognition rates and forms of protection by e.g. obliging Member States to take into account guidance from the European Agency for Asylum. The Regulation would enable Member States to make the access to certain types of social assistance conditional on participation in integration measures. The Regulation also proposes a compulsory status review on granted protection to take into account e.g. changes in the country of origin.

  ◦ Reform the Reception Conditions Directive ensuring that Member States apply the standards on reception conditions by the European Asylum Support Office. Access to the labour market should be granted at the latest six months after lodging an application for asylum (as opposed to the nine months currently in place). Asylum seekers with special needs and unaccompanied minors should be assigned a guardian at the latest days after an application has been made.

- The proposed reform of the Common European Asylum System includes a proposal to create a Common EU Resettlement Framework. The common framework will be implemented through annual resettlement plans that set the geographical priorities as well as the number of persons to be resettled. The Commission will thereby provide €10,000 from the EU budget for each person resettled through AMIF. The Framework will take into account criteria such as the number of persons in need of international protection in third countries or the overall relations between the EU and third countries.

- The EU Blue Card Directive is the flagship EU instrument to attract and retain highly skilled workers, in order to enhance the competitiveness of its economy and cope with demographic challenges. In June 2016, the Commission adopted a proposal of revision of the EU Blue Card directive and – amongst other things – proposed to extend the scope of potential beneficiaries to highly skilled beneficiaries of international protection residing in Member States, with the right to work.\(^{10}\)

  \* Funding opportunities to support integration have been made available by the EU, through both dedicated instruments and more broadly through instruments addressing social and economic cohesion across Member States. The Commission has stepped up its effort to enhance the strategic and coordinated use of relevant EU Funds for quicker and more effective results on the ground, although the EU may need to do more to promote better take-up of available funding.\(^{11}\) Funding channels include:


\(^{11}\) In terms of EU funding, a desire for greater flexibility when it comes to core funds (ESF, AMIF, FEAD, etc.) and ability to target these to individual groups (not just ‘migrants’ in general) was expressed at the Thematic Event. The European Commission has prepared a guidance note for Member States, explaining how they can best make use of existing funding packages (FEAD, ESF, etc.) to support asylum seekers and refugees. This is available here: [http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=2336](http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=2336)
- The Asylum, migration and integration fund (AMIF) promotes the efficient management of migration flows and the implementation, strengthening and development of a common Union approach to asylum, migration and integration.

- The European Social Fund (ESF) can support, within its investment priorities, the integration of refugees and asylum seekers with a view to facilitate their social inclusion and integration into the labour market.

- The Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) can support the provision of basic material assistance and/or social inclusion measures to third-country nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees, if they are part of the target group defined at national level.

- Under the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), the European Commission aims to launch shortly a call to support projects promoting labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

- An Emergency Support Instrument for Greece was implemented in April 2016.

- Further plans of the European Commission include greater cooperation with the European Investment Bank, to fund temporary accommodation and health facilities for newly arrived third country nationals.

- Data collection and gathering is a challenge.

- The European Commission aims to improve data collection across the EU on the labour market and social position of asylum seekers and refugees and to monitor and assess integration policies and outcomes by building on and further developing the current tools and indicators, including by further strengthening cooperation with relevant actors.

- On World Refugee Day the new Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography was launched to support the work of relevant Commission services, EU Member States and their strategic partners through better and timelier policy-relevant knowledge and evidence-based analysis in this area.

- Research is ongoing.

- DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission has been mapping 'bottlenecks' to labour market integration and social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. Also, the Employment and Social Developments in Europe review (ESDE) is due later in 2016 with a specific chapter on the integration of refugees.

- Information exchange and mutual learning is crucial.

- The European Commission recently launched a database of 'promising practices' for the social and labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers.

- The Commission will also continue with Peer Reviews in the area of integration of asylum seekers and refugees, focusing on issues such as welcome classes, skills and language assessment, support for unaccompanied children, intercultural awareness, recognition of academic qualifications and integration into higher education.

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13 http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15894&langId=en
2 Integration: approaches and challenges

European countries have introduced a number of measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Despite major differences across European countries as to the scale of asylum applications, there are many common challenges including the development and implementation of coherent integration policies for asylum seekers and refugees, effective recognition of skills and previous work experience, the sustainability of funding (e.g. for scaling-up existing pilot projects), a lack of focus on alternative integration measures (such as fostering entrepreneurship) and insufficient collaboration between the public and private stakeholders involved.

In recent months, there has been a "sea-change in thinking" and integration is now a mainstream endeavour across a range of institutions, for example into schools, hospitals, employment services and others\(^\text{15}\).

The integration of asylum seekers and refugees raises a range of policy trade-offs:

- **When and how does a country invest in integration?** Normally earlier is better, but how can countries manage this trade-off in the case of asylum seekers? Countries face difficult choices: should they invest heavily in reception centres? Should they focus resources on those with a good chance to stay? Or should they wait until asylum seekers are granted international protection?

- **How can the needs of the people arriving be balanced with the needs of people already in the country?** For example, public housing and public service provision is generally an issue across Europe. Without adequate investment in public housing and services, this can create a sense of competition between ‘new arrivals’ and those waiting to access services.

- **How do core aspects of integration relate to one another?** For example, there is often not enough focus on the type of area where people are housed and how it may affect their ability to integrate if they live somewhere without labour market opportunities close by. Often, if a person manages to get a job their integration programme ends regardless whether its contents (e.g. language courses) are still needed.

- **Is it appropriate to make public benefits conditional for individuals in need of international protection?** Will this work and is this ethical for vulnerable groups? There is a need to balance the idea of making someone as productive as possible and meeting their complex needs (e.g. mental health support, childcare provision for parents, flexible hours for those in employment etc.).

- **How can integration be 'mainstreamed' across sectors and organisations whilst avoiding duplication?**

To respond to these challenges, deep investment and tough policy choices are needed. In many countries, there is now an urgency to this endeavour that has not existed before, with innovative methods emerging of involving NGOs, employers and voluntary groups in the integration process. However, in others, programmes must be redesigned with an urgency so far lacking. In terms of integration, the main focus so far has been on the labour market, as a key catalyst for boosting individuals' social, financial and human capital. However, there is an unresolved issue of how to give someone access to a job that has prospects for the future. Furthermore, there are 'softer' social challenges to integration that are often equally critical to consider, such as limited social networks, lack of knowledge about how to access services and the labour market, discrimination, obligations to family, and others. Technological innovations can sometimes help with these issues.

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\(^{15}\) Elisabeth Collett, Migration Policy Institute, speaking at the Thematic Event.
The following sections focus on the key issues in designing effective policy measures for integrating asylum seekers and refugees, as well as providing details of national policy approaches that seek to respond to these challenges. They are structured in the following way:

Section 2.1 addresses labour market integration, discussing examples of labour market integration in Germany and Norway.

Section 2.2 considers the role of civil society in facilitating the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. It focuses on the examples of the protection of unaccompanied migrant children in Italy and the services for traumatised refugees in Denmark.

Section 2.3 presents the skills assessment, recognition and upskilling focusing mainly on the approaches in Finland and Austria. Finland and Austria have both piloted surveys with asylum seekers and refugees to assess their work experience, language skills, education and skills. The main outcomes focus on early skills assessment and training to enable early and effective integration.

Section 2.4 addresses the role of the private sector in integration approaches with examples from Sweden and the organisation UNITEE. The discussions focused on activating employers in the integration process and how entrepreneurship and exposure to a workplace can be beneficial for refugees in terms of integrating in the labour market and society.

## 2.1 Labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees

Responding to the surge in the number of asylum seekers arriving to Europe represents a humanitarian challenge first and foremost. However, the arrival of newcomers also represents an opportunity, as it may support European countries to address demographic ageing and fill gaps in their labour markets. From those arriving, joining the labour market is a critical part of integration in the long term.

Under European law, asylum seekers must have access to the labour market within nine months\(^{16}\) and, generally speaking, recognised refugees have the right to access the labour market on the same footing as nationals\(^{17}\). Despite this, as mentioned, it can take many years for refugees to reach an employment rate that is equivalent to that of EU nationals, even in countries with a long history of integration. There are many reasons for this situation, not least discrimination and exploitation, bureaucratic and legal obstacles, skills gaps and language barriers, limited opportunities, the long recovery process from psychological trauma experienced, and other societal/cultural challenges\(^{18}\).

During the Thematic Event, Norway and Germany both presented the measures that they have taken to support integration and to speed up access to employment for asylum seekers (with certain restrictions), as presented in the box below.

### Labour market integration in Norway and Germany

**Norway’s introduction programme** is for foreign nationals aged 18-55, led by the municipalities. The programme lasts for between one and three years and includes

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\(^{16}\) The Reception Conditions Directive, applicable from July 2015. Note that, as discussed earlier, a European Commission proposal (13 July 2016) for the Reception Conditions Directive foresees granting earlier access to the labour market, at the latest six months after an application for asylum is lodged.

\(^{17}\) 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.

\(^{18}\) For more information, see [http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15894&langId=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15894&langId=en)
language tuition, social studies in the newcomers' native language (where possible), and skills/education measures to support labour market entry. Participants are eligible for a benefit during the programme. The Public Employment Services (PES) partners with the municipality, taking a key role in approaching employers in the final phase of the programme and designing the labour market measures. The exact content of the programme is based on individually adapted plans, which consider as the background, work experience and qualifications/skills of foreign nationals (amongst other things).

Although only recognised refugees have access to the introduction programme, since May 2016, some asylum seekers have been able to benefit from new 'integration-reception centres'\textsuperscript{19}. Currently being piloted in seven Norwegian municipalities, these centres are reserved for asylum seekers with good employment potential. Activities include: self-registration of competence and skills, careers guidance, 50 hours of language and culture skills needed for the labour market, vocational training (in cooperation with local employers), and access to all PES measures. This contrasts with measures available in standard reception centres for asylum seekers.

In Germany, there are six core areas of action to support the integration of refugees:

- Early contact with those already in reception centres who have been granted asylum, facilitating a smooth transition from the asylum process to the integration process
- Compulsory and systematic language development
- Careers counselling, including digital services, especially for 15-30 year olds;
- Skills identification and profile building of refugees, given that many will lack documents to prove their existing qualifications. Here, early screening and profiles are used to identify technical and interdisciplinary skills. As part of this, an IT system is being piloted to make caseloads more manageable
- Partial qualifications delivered in modules and combined with further training. Here, the qualifications are related to a certain vocational curriculum (informed by the skills identification)
- Employer initiatives: a dual programme of language and job opportunities at a company

Germany also offers early integration initiatives for asylum seekers with a good chance of remaining\textsuperscript{20}.

More information on the approach in Norway and Germany can be found in the presentations delivered at the Thematic Event, available online\textsuperscript{21}.

There is an emerging consensus that there must be \textbf{early access} to the labour market for asylum seekers (not just recognised refugees), and that they should be supported with services by the Public Employment Services (PES). Sweden, for example, is now operating 'fast-track' services to shorten the time before refugees can get a job that is matched to their education and experience, covering several roles, including chefs, butchers and others\textsuperscript{22}. The more time that asylum seekers spend in the process the more disadvantage they face in relation to the labour market at later stage. Both Germany and Norway have additional lessons from their experiences:

\textsuperscript{19} This is in line with Norway's White Paper on Integration (May 2016).
\textsuperscript{20} http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeid=41
\textsuperscript{21} http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1072&newsId=2555&furtherNews=yes
\textsuperscript{22} Sweden has developed a 'fast-track' services to help get asylum seekers and refugees into sectors experiencing labour shortages. For more information, see http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeid=3
• Language training is important but, after a certain point, the returns can diminish. In Norway, it was found that more than 600 hours of language training does not provide a positive transition to work. Language training should be tailored to the personal situation of the individual and combined with work practice and/or labour market orientation. The combined option of language courses and additional language training in a work environment was regarded as especially effective. Finland is currently running a relevant ‘Workplace Finnish’ language project.

• There must be close inter-institutional cooperation between the PES and educational/vocational system as well as public authorities for asylum seekers. In this regard, some countries are also considering/designing integrated data systems.

• Assessing and validating non-formal and informal acquired skills and competences is important for informing a long-term labour market placement.

• Employers should be engaged, including through advice on the legal framework and right to work of newcomers, the support available from the PES and individual job placements. Small and medium enterprises especially need support from the PES and state authorities.

• Trade unions can take a role in integration and proposing job placements.

• When considering waiting times to access services, countries with a high number of arriving asylum seekers may need to count from the point from which an individual arrived to the country, rather than the point at which he/she files a formal asylum application, in order to reflect the reality of the waiting times before individuals can start work, and the potentially negative effects of skills ‘blunting’.

• In general, the role of Public Employment Services (PES) in integration is expanding. Investing in PES is thus crucial, so that they can function efficiently and the staff has a manageable caseload.

• Bridging programmes can allow individuals to fill gaps in knowledge.

• It is important to challenge the poor working conditions often experienced by refugees, such as receiving lower pay than the minimum wage.

In Norway and Germany, there has been a move away from sequential approaches to integration towards more part-time and combination options (for example, combining different training modules and/or combining job placement/training). Not only can this be more effective but also it supports the participation of those with other responsibilities (for example, those with childcare responsibilities).

For detailed information on national and European approaches to labour market integration, it is strongly recommended that readers also refer to the full report of the Peer Review on the ‘Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries’, hosted by Spain in May 2016, as part of the Mutual Learning Programme of the European Commission.

2.2 Building on civil society to integrate asylum seekers and refugees into society

During the Thematic Event participants discussed the role of civil society in facilitating the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The focus was on two examples: the protection of unaccompanied minors (UAM) in Italy and the services for

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23 http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=2585
traumatised refugees in Denmark. It is vital to consider services for the most vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, for example unaccompanied minors and victims of torture. This must be considered before focusing at all costs on labour market integration.

The system of protection of unaccompanied migrant children (presented by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies) and the programme for providing health and rehabilitation services for traumatised refugees by DIGNITY (Danish Institute Against Torture) are both interesting examples, as shown in the boxes below.

**System of protection of unaccompanied migrant children: The Italian experience**

In 2015 around 11,000 UAMs arrived in Italy and almost 4,000 of these applied for asylum. The majority are boys who are between 15 and 17 years old, mainly from Egypt and Albania. In September 2015 Italy has implemented the EU Directives concerning international protection and has introduced a comprehensive reception system for UAMs. This includes a first level reception system for 60 days including accommodation, identification and age assessment, and a second level reception system – SPRAR – with a focus on UAMs social integration whereby measures are conducted by NGOs. The integration of UAMs is promoted by the National Migratory Fund with the aim to facilitate the integration of UAMs through the promotion of 1,000 individual grants in order to enable children to attend vocational and educational training defined on the basis of their skills and needs.

Between 2012 and 2015 the ESF-funded “DOWRIES Project” involved UAMs who were either transitioning to adulthood or UAMs who had recently reached adulthood in active labour market policies. The support was divided in two stages:

- **Stage 1:** profiling and tutoring dedicated to each beneficiary
- **Stage 2:** Definition of a Personalised Intervention Plan (PIP) by accredited services, including active labour market policies aimed at developing an individual and personalised “life project” on the basis of needs and skills emerged

The project was successful and funded 1,226 PIPS by delivering 910 “work dowries” to accredited services and 310 “qualifications dowries” to minors attending traineeships and professional trainings aimed at facilitating the development of their qualifications.

Following the DOWRIES Project, a follow up project was initiated (‘Educational and Labour Integration Paths for UAMs’). The programme aims to facilitate the educational and labour integration of USAMs through the promotion of 1,000 individual grants to enable UAMs and other young migrants to attend vocational and educational training defined on the basis of their skills and needs. The programme aims to promote access to the labour market once minors come of age and includes a set of integration services (e.g. tutoring, coaching, job guidance, traineeships).

The integration of UAMs in Italy is based upon multi-level governance whereby a cooperation between the federal authorities as well as the different regions and municipalities in Italy is crucial.

**Providing health and rehabilitation services for traumatised refugees in Denmark**

25 For further information and other examples see also the European Commission’s homepage on Social and labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en
The Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY) has been providing health and rehabilitation services for traumatised refugees in Denmark since 1982. The organisation has come across several issues in their work. Their experience shows that at least 30-50% of asylum seekers and refugees have been exposed to torture. However, there is a lack of knowledge about torture and a lack of assessment and treatment that needs to be addressed. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other issues inhibit the possibility to adjust to the new system. This leads to multilevel negative consequences with extreme impairment of functioning – physical, mental and social. It has a negative impact on integration – including the labour market and education.

DIGNITY provides multi- and interdisciplinary assessment and treatment with the goal of re-establishing a higher level of function of traumatised asylum seekers and refugees. There are several projects managed by DIGNITY, focussing on issues such as:

- Early intervention and prevention can counteract issues: in some cases it takes time (even several years after the arrival) for third-country nationals to acknowledge the traumas and to approach appropriate services.
- Treatment for radicalised youth in refugee families with primary or secondary trauma-related issues since radicalised youth come out of families where parents are traumatised.
- Trauma-related family violence since it often leads to second generation problems, because family issues have not been tackled.

The impacts of DIGNITY’s services are seen in the raised level of functioning for the majority of clients (ca. 120 pr. year) and also in the reduction of negative impact on families of traumatised refugees. The organisation also does research and dissemination of knowledge at different levels – incl. strengthening of social services and linking to civil society.

Remaining challenges include ensuring an initial screening at an early stage, as well as securing adequate health and social services in assisting refugees and their families, and finding ways to include civil society more consistently in assisting traumatised refugees and their families.

The discussion uncovered the challenges of integration of UAMs and traumatised refugees, but also the opportunity stemming from effective integration measures:

- Early and systematic assessment of social and health needs of asylum seekers and refugees is necessary to develop measures to enable a sustainable integration.
- Resources should be focused especially on children as they are often more inclined to quickly learning the host country language and integrating into the education system and society.
- The majority of UAMs in Europe is in Sweden (40% of around 80,000 in total) and currently also the smallest municipalities in the country have to provide integration measures for these. There are shortages of legal guardians in Sweden and further involvement of the civil society could ease such shortages.
- The engagement of the civil society, including small NGOs and individuals functions very well, if local authorities are the coordinating bodies. An example is the city of Vienna where the municipality helped coordinating activities and reaching out small NGOs to provide services for asylum seekers and refugees. This has been very successful during the large inflow of asylum seekers and refugees to Austria in 2015.
The example of the Red Cross National Societies showed the activities of civil society organisations regarding the integration of third country nationals. They are active throughout the EU addressing the needs of migrants and involving local populations in volunteering actions. Red Cross is also an employer of migrants and refugees.

Civil society organisations support also access to housing of asylum seekers and refugees. During the discussions having a decent accommodation was identified as an important first step towards a successful integration. In Belgium the NGO Convivial supports asylum seekers and refugees through a ‘housing service’. The NGO offers an array of services, including: support in the housing search; information on housing including rights and obligations, and general information about maintenance. Convivial provides also transitional housing for the most vulnerable refugees for a short period and it acts as a mediator between the refugee tenant and the owners providing both with transparent information. The NGO has built up a list of owners who rent their properties to refugees on a regular basis and has recently launched a campaign aiming at encouraging other owners to collaborate with Convivial.

There was a strong consensus that the integration activities should not be at the detriment of the local population and that it is important to support local projects through EU funding. In terms of funding the Commission acknowledged that in some cases more needs to be done to encourage civil society to apply for funding.

Examples from Canada and the United States show the importance of a community based approach in integration where the role of NGOs is key in the success of the integration process. It was however emphasised that the institutional environment in these countries and in European countries differs. Cooperation with civil society is crucial but it is important not to rely too much on voluntary organisations, especially given issues over the sustainability of their funding. The need for highly qualified professionals in the field was emphasised.

In terms of civil society engagement, asylum seekers and refugees should be seen as part of this society. It is important not to consider asylum seekers and refugees only as assisted people but also people with know-how, who should be involved in the integration efforts, and not victimised.

### 2.3 Skills assessment and recognition processes

For many countries at the Thematic Event, arriving asylum seekers are generally young (under 34) and could make important long-term contributions to the labour market, if supported correctly. However, the most recent cohort of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe presents a broad diversity of skills (from those who are tertiary educated to the illiterates). Many may lack skills that employers are looking for, most obviously knowledge of the host country language. The assumption that refugees can fill gaps and help countries to overcome the shortage of highly skilled workers is not wrong, but it can require an investment in the medium to long term (3-5 years).

For countries to plan how best to make use of new arrivals' skills, it is highly important to introduce systems of skills assessment and ‘upskilling’. Finland and Austria have both piloted surveys with asylum seekers and refugees to assess their work experience, language skills, education and skills, as given in the box below.

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26 For further information see: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeId=43
Skills assessment in Finland and Austria

In 2015, 32,476 asylum seekers arrived to Finland, primarily from Iraq and Afghanistan. Of these, 84% were under 34.

Between January 2016 and March 2016, Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture conducted a skills assessment survey of asylum seekers in Finnish reception centres. It included questions on: work experience (fields, amount of time); educational background (fields, degrees, amount of time); language skills (mother tongue, school language, English); knowledge of the Latin alphabet (reading, writing) and experience of entrepreneurship.

The survey was conducted with newly arrived 1,004 asylum seekers, through individual interviews. The sex breakdown of participants was 90% male and 10% female (close to the overall breakdown in Finland). Amongst other things, it found that:

- The educational levels of asylum seekers are highly diverse: 27% of participants have some kind of Higher Education background (based on self-certification), but another 27% have less than six years of primary education experience;
- 90% have some kind of work experience, although the sectors of their work experience do not necessarily match the areas of shortage in Finland;
- 50% speak some English, although not all of this group would be immediately able to study in English.
- To varying degrees, most would need practice in learning to read or write in Latin alphabet.

The results from the pilot have been used to pre-empt asylum seekers' educational needs, including the offers of basic education and language courses, as well as the design of the project, 'Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland' (SIMHE).

In Austria, the Public Employment Services (PES) work with recognised refugees (not asylum seekers). Around two-thirds of recognised refugees are living in Vienna, reflecting the uneven distribution of new arrivals around the country.

In August 2015, the PES in Vienna started a pilot 'check of competences' programme, designed to gauge the skills levels and needs of refugees. There were six projects, each with approximately 150 refugees, conducted mostly in the native language of participants. For each participating refugee, the programme involved 5-6 hours of one-on-one biographical interviews and 50 hours of workshops with each participant. This was followed by a practical competence assessment, in which participants had the chance to demonstrate their capabilities.

In April 2016, PES Vienna started the roll out of the "check of competences" all over Vienna for about 6,000 participants up to May 2017. There are later plans to roll it out across Austria.

More information on the Finnish survey and Austrian project can be found in the presentations delivered at the Thematic Event. There is also further information on the Finnish example available on the Ministry's website.

The experiences of Austria and Finland proved to be highly instructive. Both highlighted key considerations for skills assessment programmes, including the following:

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27 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1072&langId=en&newsId=2555&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news
• Bear in mind that there may be differences in individuals' perception of his/her own skills and the reality of the labour market of the host society. This is not necessarily because individuals are intentionally misleading survey authors. It can also relate to key contextual differences when it comes to what particular skills 'mean'. For example, even if someone genuinely has a background in mechanics and engineering, they may still have trouble in working with modern cars, due to having worked previously with older style cars.

• To roll out and resource such surveys for asylum seekers on a wide scale, consider whether they can be universal or whether it is necessary to target them to certain groups (for example, those with good prospects of remaining).

• A variety of organisations work on the issue of integration – consider the feasibility of an integrated data system

• Gauge whether women may benefit from additional support. For example, the pilot check in Austria was extended to 7 weeks for women. This is because 'additional empowerment' was necessary for women, given that the majority who did not work in their country of origin were women (even sometimes if they were well-educated).

• Invest in understanding the educational systems of the countries where individuals are coming from.

• If individuals are highly educated, begin with the processes to recognise their qualifications.

• If individuals have a practical background, focus on getting them to work and letting them demonstrate their abilities.

To ensure asylum seekers and refugees are able to put their existing qualifications to use, countries are encouraged to think carefully about systems of recognition that can be put in place. For instance, in Germany, chambers of industry, commerce, crafts and others are working together to share tools and experiences on practical ways in which they can recognise the competences of asylum seekers and refugees who lack certifying documents from their countries of origin\(^{29}\). In the Netherlands, EP-Nuffic (independent organisation) has taken a range of steps to facilitate the evaluation of refugees' qualifications, including recruiting and training evaluators who have Arabic language skills, developing resources on the educational systems of common countries of origin (including Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Syria) and creating training resources for higher education bodies on how to expand access for refugees\(^{30}\).

For asylum seekers and refugees who do not have formally acquired skills/qualifications, investing in education and upskilling is very important, especially for those who face the most difficulties in integrating. In doing so, countries should aim to challenge problematic gender assumptions. For example, 'upskilling' can also be considered in relation to arriving family members in a few years' time (more likely to be women), so that there is not a clear mismatch between skills levels of women and men.

For more information on national and European approaches to skills assessment and recognition, readers are advised to refer to the full report of the Peer Review on the 'Labour market inclusion of international protection applicants and beneficiaries', hosted by Spain in May 2016, as part of the Mutual Learning Programme of the European Commission\(^{31}\).

\(^{29}\) http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeId=21
\(^{30}\) http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeId=44
\(^{31}\) Available here: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=2475&furtherNews=yes
2.4 The role of the private sector in developing new integration approaches

Participants at the Thematic Event emphasised the importance of including the private sector, i.e. employers in the development of new integration approaches. Two examples of a possible inclusion of employers were presented – the 100 Club in Sweden and the example of the New European Business Confederation (UNITEE). The discussions focussed on activating employers in the integration process and how entrepreneurship and exposure to a workplace can prove to be beneficial for refugees in terms of integrating in the labour market and society.

**UNITEE initiatives and activities on refugee integration**

Several initiatives by the UNITEE member associations have been introduced. They try to address some of the many obstacles for the integration of refugees that they have encountered, including psychological barriers due to trauma (see also the example of DIGNITY above), lack of self-confidence or orientation barriers in terms of adapting to the context in the new country. It is important to understand the ‘rules of the game’ in the new society. Barriers are also the low value of one’s skills on the labour market (see also Section 2.3). Cultural barriers might make integration into the labour market harder, for example the approach to work in the home country might not correspond with the approaches in Europe. Gender and reputational barriers, often coupled with stereotypes play a role. At last legal and bureaucratic barriers are a challenge for any integration measure, hence a legalisation of asylum seekers and refugees as soon as possible is necessary.

UNITEE members conducted three different pilot projects to address the barriers:

- Germany: Labour market orientation and vocational education for refugees from Syria
- Netherlands: Entrepreneurship orientation, training, coaching and microfunding for 45 refugees from Syria
- Belgium: Mentor programme for youth and integration of graduated professionals in networks

The projects aim to address integration challenges through embedding asylum seekers and refugees in social networks of experienced peers, to provide coaching and to effectively prepare them of the labour market. As an example for fostering entrepreneurship retired entrepreneurs could serve as mentors and role models for new arrivals. The initiatives have increased the sense of belonging to the host country, have contributed to a better management of what realistic expectations are when entering the labour market and have maximised the autonomy of the participants.

**Public-private cooperation regarding newly arrived migrants in Sweden**

As part of the integration process, the Swedish government has initiated a public-private partnership through the 100 Club with the 100 largest Swedish companies and the Swedish Public Employment Service (PES). The PES is responsible for the implementation of the Swedish Introduction Act since 2010.

The PES aims to intensify the interaction and cooperation with employers (large or small) and employers’ organisations. Recent initiatives include ‘Sweden together – the 100 club’ and the ‘Welcome Talent’ Roadshow.

**The 100 Club**

In October 2016 the Swedish Government issued an appeal to companies that can take on 100 people over a three-year period for internships, professional skills evaluation or employment. Around 20 companies are part of the initiative. To recruit
the companies, the Swedish Public Employment Service organised a national kick-off via telephone. Further, functions in 11 organisational units of the PES are responsible for the coordination. Once the contact with employers is established, the PES explains the project to employers and the intentions to start on a small scale and increase the number later on. Generally the PES’ experience shows that it takes time to establish an understanding on each organisational level when getting employers on board. One of the success factors is certainly the joint recruitment events with PES and the companies, where employers and candidates meet face-to-face to begin a relationship. The Swedish Public Employment Service then steps in and funds the internship through its own means, i.e., payment to the candidate and insurance. The PES has an additional programme whereby they provide financial support to the employer to conduct a structural evaluation of the candidate based on a number of questions over a three week period. This then forms the basis for continued planning and any necessary contributions. The 100 Club will be further developed and 200 so called ‘company advisors’ will be employed by the PES to give guidance and support for companies (especially small and medium sized) to participate in the initiated measures.

**Welcome Talent**

The Stockholm Chamber of Commerce and Swedbank launched the initiative to recruit more companies – especially small and medium-sized – to offer internship placements for newly arrived refugees. The Stockholm Chamber of Commerce arranged a roadshow together with Swedish Public Employment Service, the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, LinkedIn and Swedbank. A significant element of this initiative was that it was entirely led by the business sector. The PES provided support and collaboration. During the roadshow, the PES brought local business representatives together, which resulted in around 800 internships that the PES continues to work with. Swedbank will monitor the projects from their local offices. The chambers of commerce contribute by reaching out to companies that are already involved in the matter and hold meetings. LinkedIn has already launched a digital support tool for matching companies with migrants looking for corporate internships. That is a good example of how companies might take initiative for themselves and not depend on the government. Many companies want to be involved in integration matters and to inspire interest. The Welcome Talent project will be launched in several locations during 2016.

The Swedish experience of the 100 Club and the work of UNITEE highlighted the need to enhance cooperation between the public and private sector when developing integration measures. The participants stressed key considerations, such as the following:

- Employers should be seen as facilitators of integration and the cooperation between PES and employers is fundamental.
- Actions to support employers’ engagement include: guidance on the legal framework and supporting measures from the PES.
- The case for employing refugees should be presented as 'Win-Win'. This is not just a question of corporate social responsibility but also a "hard-headed economic issue": refugees (and potentially asylum seekers) can cancel gaps in all types of skills.
- Many asylum seekers are potential entrepreneurs. Migrants are slightly more likely to start businesses than their native-born peers. The experience of

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32 For further information see: [http://www.welcometalent.se/](http://www.welcometalent.se/).

UNITEE shows that those potential entrepreneurs do not always need funding, as this can come from the refugees' network for the microenterprises they start. What they need is guidance and coaching, which can come, for example, from retired local entrepreneurs.

Successful integration into the labour market of asylum seekers and refugees is only possible if the skills of these people are identified as soon as possible (see also section 2.3) and also if employers are involved in the recruitment process and offer their perspective on the competences they need for future growth. As for the asylum seekers and refugees it is important to activate them early for example through internships. Any kind of activation can contribute to faster integration.

The challenges ahead include the scaling-up and sustainability of implemented ‘pilot’ projects and the further activation of employers in the implementation of these projects. Finally, it is important to change the mind-set of employers – asylum seekers and refugees should be seen as people with assets who can be an active part of the society.
3 Conclusions and recommendations

In the last part of the Thematic Event, European Commissioner Ms Marianne Thyssen addressed the audience particularly stressing that facilitating the economic and social integration of asylum seekers and refugees in our society is both a moral and economic imperative. In the long run, the cost of non-integration will be much higher than the cost of successful integration. Investing in the modernisation of our integration systems will ultimately benefit all.

The key policy messages from the Thematic Event can be summarised as follows.

Integration: approaches and challenges

- Recognise that integration is multi-faceted and encompasses housing, education, the labour market, healthcare, public life and wider society (amongst others);
- Undertake more mutual learning and work specifically on the integration of young asylum seekers and refugees into education systems (with less of a direct labour market focus). Many asylum seekers and refugees are minors and a focus on their early integration in the education system is crucial to avoid any potential negative repercussions – in terms of labour market integration, but also integration in the society – for these generations in future. The wish for another mutual learning Event specifically on this was expressed;
- Adjust policies for different groups for asylum seekers and refugees. In some cases, integration measures have been tailored to women’s needs, to support their empowerment.

Labour market integration

- Work towards early access to the labour market and fast provision of public employment services for asylum seekers, rather than just recognised refugees. Early activation is crucial to minimise the issue of skills deterioration;
- Consider a move away from sequential approaches to integration towards part-time and combination options (for example, combining different training modules and/or combining job placement/training). Not only can this be more effective but also it supports the participation of those with, for example, family responsibilities. Bridging programmes can also allow individuals to fill gaps in their knowledge;
- Invest in the education of those who face the most difficulties in integrating, such as the low-skilled;
- Tailor language training to the personal situation of the individual and combine it with work practice and/or labour market orientation;
- Ensure close inter-institutional cooperation between the Public Employment Services (PES) and educational/vocational system, as well as the public authorities;
- Invest sufficiently in the Public Employment Services (PES) to enable them to fulfil their expanding role in integration;
- Challenge the deterioration of working conditions for refugees;
- Where possible, consider integrated data systems to support cooperation between agencies.

Building on civil society to integrate asylum seekers and refugees into society
• Consider services for the most vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees e.g. unaccompanied minors and victims of torture, before focusing at all costs on labour market integration;

• Tackle traumas and family violence to avoid second generation problems;

• Provide family support when unified (e.g. encourage female participation in the labour market and/or community activities) and avoid uncertainties and delays regarding family reunification, which can impede integration – also important to provide family support when reunified;

• Provide systematic and early screening of needs and subsequent mental health services to support these groups;

• Involve local authorities in managing the input of civil society organisations;

• Focus on encouraging civil society organisations to use available EU funding instruments;

• Involve asylum seekers and refugees actively in the integration efforts.

**Skills recognition processes**

• Establish systems for assessing skills early and validating non-formal and informal acquired skills and competences;

• Consider modular partial qualifications, accompanied by further training. Here, the curriculum should be based on an individual's identified skills;

• Recognise that it takes a long time to test and use someone's skills. 'Upskilling' and flexible guidance are both needed for specific competences;

• There is a potential need to use skills screening to orientate residential settlement – for example, placing individuals in areas with appropriate and accessible job opportunities.

**The role of the private sector in developing new integration approaches**

• Enhance cooperation with employers: employers should be seen as facilitators of integration. Cooperation between PES and employers is fundamental;

• Enable asylum seekers and refugees to live autonomously, the focus of measures should be on mentoring and coaching, as well as enabling access to necessary professional and social networks to enter the labour market;

• Present the case for employing refugees as 'win-win'. This is not just a question of corporate social responsibility but also a "hard-headed economic issue": refugees (and potentially asylum seekers) can fill several different types of skills gaps;

• Support employer engagement through e.g.: guidance on the legal framework, supporting measures from the PES (e.g. facilitating meeting between the employer and the candidate) and involving them to offer individual job placements.

**Further information**

Full report, presentations and background papers will be available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1072&newsId=2555&furtherNews=yes
Annex 1  Event contributors

• **Keynote address**
  - Ms Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility

• **Opening session**
  - Mr Michel Servoz, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.
  - Ms Elizabeth Collett, Migration Policy Institute
  - Ms Manuela Geleng, Head of the refugees Task Force, Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

• **Working group A: Labour market integration**
  - Mr Max Uebe, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
  - Mr Haakon Hertzberg, Chair of PES Network WG on refugees, Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
  - Mr Dirk Buchwald, Coordination Division for Migration of the Federal Employment Agency, Germany
  - Dr Cristobal Bohorquez-Zayas, Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Spain.

• **Working group B: Building on civil society to integrate asylum seekers and refugees into society**
  - Laura Corrado, Director General for Migration and Home Affairs
  - Ms Cassandra Koch Dandolo, Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Italy
  - Mr David Oehlenschläger, DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture
  - Mrs Linda Pauga, Ministry of Welfare, Latvia

• **Working group C: Facilitating skills assessment, recognition and upskilling**
  - Mr William O’ Keeffe, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
  - Ms Kaisu-Maria Piirainen, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland
  - Ms Petra Draxl, Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), Austria

• **Working group D: The role of the private sector in developing new integration approaches**
  - Mr Jeroen Jutte, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
  - Dr Adem Kumcu, UNITEE – New European Business Confederation
  - Mr Goran Sehovac, Swedish Public Employment Service, Sweden

• **Closing Panel**
  - Ms Belinda Pyke, Director for Migration and Mobility, Directorate General of Migration and Home Affairs
- Mr Brando Benifei, European Parliament, MEP rapporteur of report on "Refugees: social inclusion and integration into the labour market".
- Ms Christiane Kuptsch, ILO.
- Mr Martin Lauterbach, Head of the integration policy unit, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Germany
- Ms Anaïs Faure Atger, Head of unit migration, Red Cross