



Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants

Synthesis report

This report stems from the Mutual Learning Conference on 'Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants' organised by the European Commission on 26 November 2020. The Conference -that took place online due to COVID-19 safety measures- brought together 116 participants consisting of Member States representatives as well as representatives from social and economic partners, academics, civil society and the European Commission. It offered an opportunity to exchange innovative practices on labour market and social inclusion of migrants and people with a migratory background. The event focussed on those facing specific obstacles such as women or the low-skilled, and tackled policy areas such as skills assessment, recognition and development, fast-tracking policies and innovative approaches. It also reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market integration and social inclusion of migrants in the European Union.

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Cover Image: © Integrating Refugees in Society and Labour Market through Social Innovation (SIforREF). SIforREF organised a workshop in Berlin for ten migrant entrepreneur women came together to reflect on their own experiences of establishing their businesses in Berlin.

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Introduction

1.1 European policy context and recent trends regarding integration and inclusion of migrants

The integration of migrants¹ is fundamental to building cohesive, resilient, and prosperous societies. To be fully achieved, the integration process requires long-term and consistent socio-economic investments from the EU Member States. For over 34 million people living² in Europe who were born outside the European Union – including 22 million non-EU-27 citizens – inclusion in the labour market and society is a key step towards self-reliance, well-being and a fulfilling life in Europe.

However, migrants still face many challenges to full integration into society and the labour market in the European Union. The employment rate of third-country migrants remains lower than that of native residents (a difference of 9.7 percentage points). Migrant women in particular face additional challenges as their employment rate is only 54.6%, 14.6 percentage points lower than EU-born women³. This difference in labour market outcomes is often the result of lower qualifications, lack of recognition of skills and foreign diplomas, language barriers, legal obstacles, cultural differences and discrimination.

Despite the existing hurdles the employment rate of non-EU migrants increased by more than seven percentage points between 2013 and 2019. During this time a number of Member States designed and implemented comprehensive integration programmes, with a focus on fast labour market integration, a reduction in processing times, and access to language training. The inclusion of migrants has also been an important priority for the European Union. For instance, between 2014 and 2018 the European Social Fund (ESF) contributed to the integration of around 3.9 million people with a migratory or minority background. More recently, the European Commission developed comprehensive strategies on migration such as the “[New Pact of Migration and Asylum](#)” (23 September 2020) as well as the “[Action plan on Integration and Inclusion \(2021-2027\)](#)” (24 November 2020).

The Action plan builds on the most recent innovations and lessons learned by Member States in the development of integration and inclusion policies. There is a growing consensus that achieving the inclusion of migrants is

more of a marathon than a sprint and requires early intervention as well as long-term investments. In his opening speech at the Mutual Learning Conference on “Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants”⁴, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, underlined that “integration of migrants is a long-term investment in a strong and more resilient society”. The plan covers migrants and EU citizens with a migratory background, who may face ‘direct or indirect discrimination as well as racism, [...] based solely on their migrant background, but may be exacerbated due to their ethnic or racial origin as well as their religion or belief’.

During the opening of the Conference, the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, noted that integration and inclusion initiatives are the EU’s best chance of ensuring migrants are no longer considered migrants and that “they live, not next to us but, with us and among us.”

In particular, recent integration policies and strategies have been designed to ensure that migrants’ potential and motivation are used to their full benefit. Integration programmes need to support migrants – and especially refugees – from day one through measures blending training and on-the-job learning. These programmes are often paired with new methodologies to recognise migrants’ existing skills and qualifications, such as the “[EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#)” and other similar tools at national level. These approaches are essential if migrants are to access the labour market as quickly as possible.

Moreover, Member States are increasingly implementing a blend of mainstream and targeted approaches to tackle the low employment rate of migrant women and overcome the barriers to their overall inclusion in societies. In the spirit of the sustainable development principles “inclusion for all” and “leaving no one behind”, some Member States have set up dedicated integration programmes also for migrants and people with a migratory background, often women, who have been in the country for several years but are not fully integrated yet.

Another effective policy approach is to enhance the participation of several relevant stakeholders. Reinforcing

1 This report uses the terminology derived from the [Glossary of the European Migration Network \(EMN\)](#):
Third-country national (TCN): any person who is not a citizen of the Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).
Migrant: a TCN who establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in a third country.
Person with a migratory background: a person who had a different nationality from their present country of residence and / or at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant.

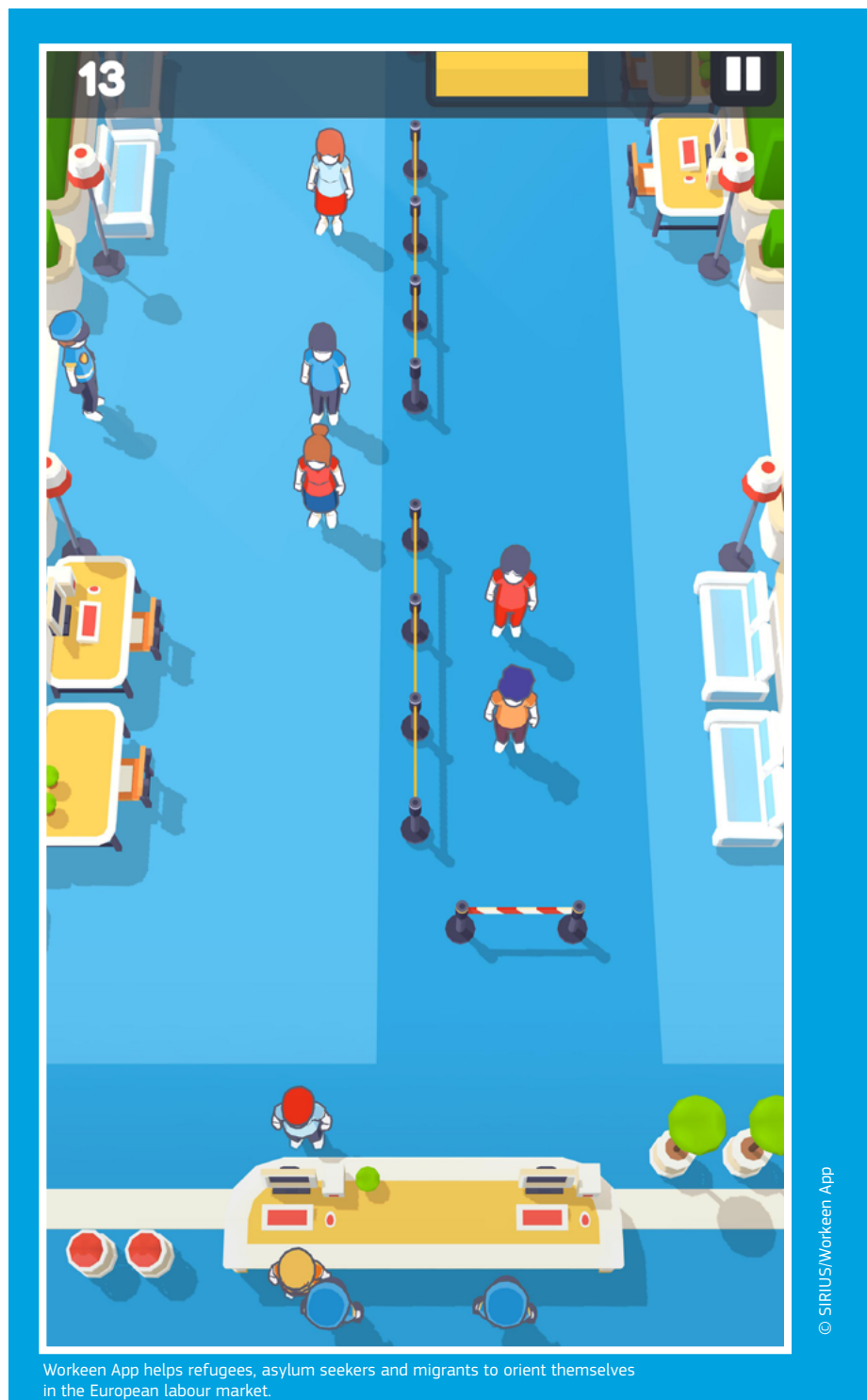
2 Eurostat, Population data, 2019.

3 Eurostat, Migrant integration statistics – labour market indicators, (Ifsa_ergacob), 2020.

4 The Mutual Learning Conference on “Innovative approaches to Integration and inclusion of migrants” took place online on 26 November 2020. For more information see <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9814&langId=en>.

horizontal and vertical cooperation at national and local levels is a crucial component in delivering effective integration measures, with local administrations at the forefront of implementing national inclusion policies and providing a variety of services. Moreover, new partnerships both at the national and European levels have been strengthened through the involvement of social and economic partners, the private sector as well as civil society in the design and implementation of integration measures. Similarly, migrant representatives and diaspora organisations are also increasingly involved in the co-production of new policies and measures at local and national levels.

Finally, also due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to services, a renewed effort is being made to improve the digitalisation of certain services and ensure that migrants are well-equipped to access them.



Workeen App helps refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to orient themselves in the European labour market.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on integration of migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the socio-economic situation of migrants and has put recent positive integration outcomes and efforts at risk. Temporary travel restrictions have reduced migration flows, specifically limiting asylum seekers' ability to seek international protection. Together with the economic consequences, the pandemic has made it harder for countries to predict migration flows and to plan and improve national integration measures. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis weakens migrants' participation in economic and social life.

As the situation on European labour markets worsens, migrants face several disadvantages. Available evidence suggests an impact of the EU-wide COVID-driven lockdowns and recession on the employment rate of non-EU migrants, resulting in a reduction between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020⁵ from 64.4% to 60.8%. This is connected to the fact that migrants are more likely to work in temporary jobs than the native population, have lower incomes (and hence fewer savings to rely on) and work in positions that are less likely to enable teleworking⁶. In addition, migrants tend to work in professions severely affected by the crisis. For example, in Vienna, more than two-thirds of the currently unemployed have a migratory background, of which many have worked in the hospitality sector. This was also observed in Sweden, where migrant women in particular are overrepresented in low-skilled jobs or rely on temporary contracts.

Moreover, 13% of key workers are migrants, performing essential tasks during the pandemic, for example, in the agriculture, health and social care, or transport sectors⁷. In particular, many migrants work in low-skilled professions which, in 2020, became crucial in providing basic services such as care, transport or cleaning. While this has resulted in increased public recognition of the important contribution of the migrant workforce, migrants have been faced with a higher risk of exposure to the virus as a result of their prevalence in public-facing jobs. This higher risk for migrants is also linked with often inadequate accommodation and barriers to access support services.

In order to mitigate the effects of the health crisis on migrants, some Member States have aimed to improve access to health and other support services through the establishment of regularisation schemes in sectors with a high number of irregularly staying migrant workers, for example, in sectors which became even more essential in the pandemic like the agriculture and care

sectors. This group is at particular risk of exploitation and have limited access to social protection, health services, sickness payment or unemployment benefits.

With this in mind, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain initiated regularisation schemes in sectors with a high share of irregularly staying migrants such as agriculture and care. In other Member States, restrictions were lifted to ensure the availability of workforce in specific sectors. For instance, Finland has temporarily removed the waiting period before asylum seekers can normally take up employment in the agriculture, forestry, horticulture and fishery sectors. Other countries, such as Germany, Ireland and Spain recruited and allowed foreign health workers to practice⁸. In addition, many countries have offered access to COVID-19 testing services and emergency health care irrespective of residency status.

Moreover, lockdown measures during the COVID-19 outbreak restricted access to wider integration measures. Language learning, civic integration programmes and vocational training were paused or had to rely on online communication. This situation encouraged investment in digitalised and simplified procedures. For instance, in Germany and Austria, online tutorials compensated for the temporary closure of immigrant integration courses, and in Greece job fairs for migrants have been offered online. However, many migrants, especially low-skilled, have had limited opportunity to access online support due to not having access to the relevant equipment or an internet connection. The digital gap became particularly evident for migrant children and their often-reduced access to online schooling. Moreover, the necessary social distancing and lockdown measures during the crisis meant reduced opportunities to be physically present at a workplace, in a classroom or a workshop, leading simultaneously to a reduction in valuable social contact, language learning, and opportunities to build social networks - all important for labour market and social integration.

Involving migrants in integration processes, meetings and exchange at community level were also stalled. In terms of housing, the deficit of current temporary accommodation schemes has become obvious during the pandemic. This became especially evident in countries of first arrival such as Greece, where many migrants live in overcrowded camps. Furthermore, an observed rise in discrimination and scapegoating has put integration into the society and social cohesion at further risk.

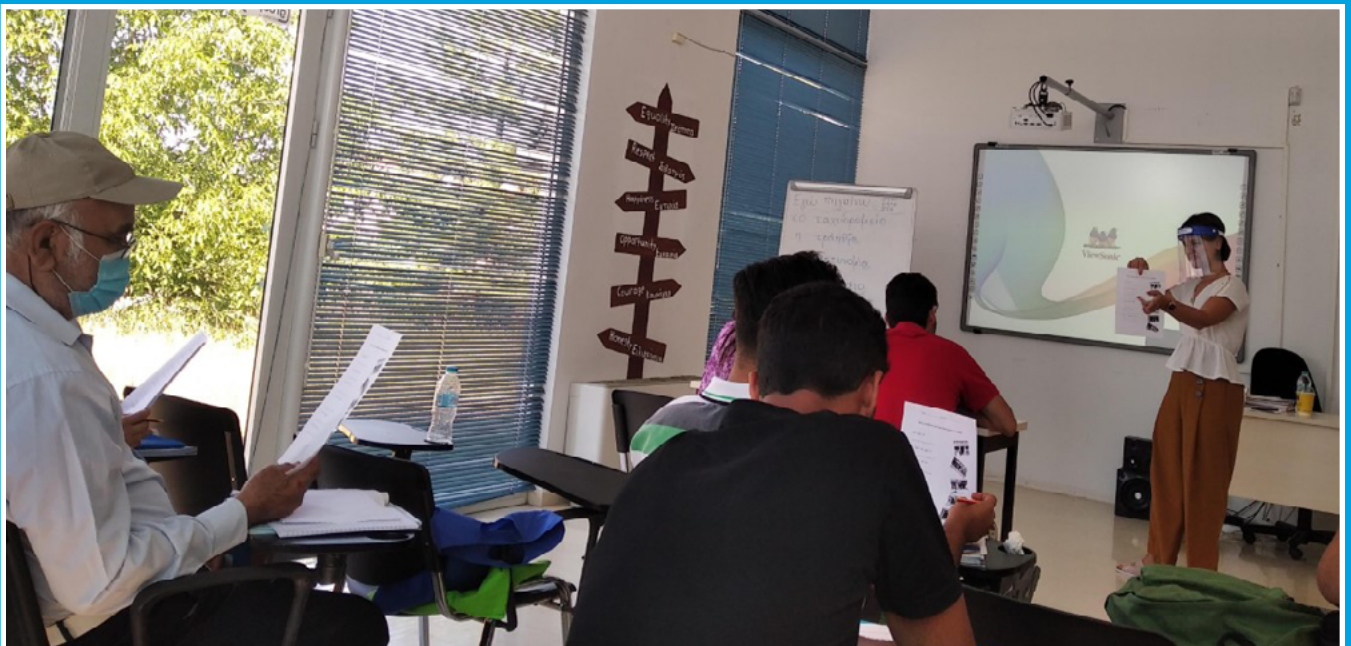
⁵ European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS, Eurostat), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/de/web/microdata/labour-force-survey>.

⁶ JRC, 2020, A Vulnerable Workforce: Migrant Workers in the COVID-19 Pandemic, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC120730/a_vulnerable_workforce_migrant_workers_in_the_covid19_pandemic_online.pdf.

⁷ Fasani F, Mazza J., Immigrant Key Workers, 2020, Their Contribution to Europe's COVID-19 Response, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/immigrant-key-workers-their-contribution-europes-covid-19-response_en.

⁸ See also: Overseas Development Institute, 2020, Migrants' contribution to the COVID-19 response, <https://www.odi.org/migrant-key-workers-COVID-19>.

Communication efforts directed towards migrants are critical to inform them about work opportunities and how to access services during the crisis. Information efforts targeted towards migrants are often based on multilingual websites and social media communication related to COVID-19.⁹ Local communities play a vital role - many cities and towns have set up measures to support the integration and inclusion process of migrants in the crisis, such as facilitating access to medical and support services, ensuring internet access and the provision of emergency support¹⁰.



Mandatory integration courses organised by the HELIOS project in Greece in 2020.

9 See also: OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19) What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-2019-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de>.

10 See also: Petra Bendel, 2020, Innovative or ad hoc? Practices of migrant integration in light of COVID-19, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9814&langId=en>.



Innovation, new approaches and good practices to foster integration and inclusion of migrants

3.1 Mapping, developing and matching skills of non-EU born migrants for the European labour market

Migrants bring with them talents, skills and professional experience acquired in their home countries. This represents an opportunity, in particular, for Member States where demographic changes and gaps between the supply of and demand for labour create skills mismatches, and in sectors experiencing labour shortages. However, mapping, developing and matching skills of non-EU born migrants in the labour market can present some challenges.

3.1.1 Mapping and developing migrants' skills

Mapping migrants' skills is the starting point of the integration process into the labour market. Moreover, socio-economic gains from migration can depend on the extent to which migrants can use their previously and newly acquired skills in the labour market. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the qualifications of migrants and refugees, even in cases where some of the relevant documentation is missing. Initiatives such as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees¹¹ and UNESCO initiative for a global Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants can contribute to providing an assessment of the higher education qualifications.

In 2017, to support Member States in profiling and identifying migrant skills, the European Commission developed the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals¹², as part of the Skills Agenda for Europe. In Norway, the new Integration Act, entering into force in January 2021, puts a particular emphasis on formal education and skills required to enter the Norwegian labour market, through early mapping of previous education and skills.

Across Europe, other initiatives aimed at ensuring that the employment of migrants reflects occupational qualifications acquired abroad have been established, such as, Network 'Integration through Qualification' in Germany (see box).

Network 'Integration through Qualification' (IQ) – Germany (2019-2022)

Network 'Integration through Qualification' (IQ) is the principal labour market integration programme in Germany. It was established in 2005 and funded by the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs

(BMAS) and the European Social Fund. Its main objective is to improve the labour market integration of migrants and people with a migratory background, by ensuring that occupational qualifications acquired outside Germany lead to employment appropriate to one's level of education. One of the key areas of activity is the one dealing with qualification measures in the context of the Recognition Act, which encompasses all education levels. Since January 2019, 3 260 job-training schemes have been running (of which 353 are course-based and 2 907 are individually tailored). Out of the 8 046 participants that have started job-training schemes, 3 569 completed them successfully as of November 2020.

As regards the mapping of informal skills, several tools and practices were put in place. For instance, in Germany, the Public Employment Agency's computer-based testing tool, 'MYSKILLS', helps to identify informal/non-formal skills and make them comparable against vocational educational references.

MYSKILLS – Germany (2017-2019)

MYSKILLS is a computer-supported test people can use to demonstrate the professional skills they possess. Their previous experience is checked by means of practical tests. Using the results, they can be helped to find the right job offer or obtain additional qualifications. The test is taken under controlled conditions to ensure the validity of the results and a connection to MYSKILLS's server is needed to implement the tool. It has been translated into 11 languages to overcome language barriers.

Skills mapping and skills development are long-term processes that require an increase of migrants' self-awareness about their own skills and potential and reflections on their career development possibilities, rather than activities offering short-term solutions for integration. The European Skills Portfolio for Refugees (ESPoR) provides an example of an innovative skills audit model.

11. European Qualifications Passport for Refugees: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>.
12. EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills>.

European Skills Portfolio for Refugees (ESPoR) – Italy (2018-2022)

The European Skills Portfolio for Refugees (ESPoR) project, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, implements an innovative skills audit model for refugees and asylum seekers, based on development and employability, in order to support their inclusion in the Italian labour market. ESPoR is piloting a career counselling path model that includes face-to-face interviews and group meetings. During this counselling path, migrants become aware of their skills and strengths, explore the training and working opportunities in the country and develop a professional portfolio that they can use as a starting point to find employment in line with their skills and expectations.

Moreover, migrants and refugees might have developed unique soft skills, through their journey and through their personal experiences, that can bring added value to the labour market. The European Commission is working on the classification of soft skills (notably in the context of ESCO¹³) in order to develop a common framework across Europe. While there is a section on soft skills in the EU Skills Profile Tool, the list of soft skills covered is not exhaustive and the relevance of specific soft skills can differ per country or setting.

The identification of these unique skills is at the centre of the 'DIMICOME' project (see box). Moreover, recognition and assessment of soft skills are particularly important when migrants have low qualifications. New approaches were also designed to help migrants acquire and develop necessary soft skills, such as the Workeen App (see box).

Diversity Management and Integration of Migrants' Competences in the labour market (DIMICOME) – Italy, Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary and Spain (2018-2021)

The project 'DIMICOME' aims to provide guidelines on how to identify and assess migrants' soft skills, hence contribute to migrants' economic integration by valuing their competences and by fostering their positive impact on the competitiveness of companies. The project also aims to identify which specific soft skills migrants acquire from their journey and specific experiences.

Workeen App / Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets (SIRIUS) – Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Switzerland and United Kingdom (2018-2021)

The Workeen app is a tool developed within the SIRIUS project, which builds on a multi-dimensional conceptual framework in which political-institutional, societal and individual-related conditions function either as enablers or as barriers to labour market integration for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Workeen App is presented in the form of a "serious game" that provides key information on how to access the labour market in a given country, how to prepare for a job interview, how to draft a motivation letter etc. The game also creates workplace scenarios where the player can train on behavioural aspects, work etiquette and other soft skills.

3.1.2 Tailored approaches

Migrants are not a homogenous group with similar skills and needs. Therefore, categories for skills mapping and development should be flexible and paired with a menu of different support services depending on the specific needs of migrants.

Some countries are developing flexible patterns for skills development, such as modularised training, to complement the existing skills of individual migrants and their specific needs. In Norway, following the new Integration Act, standardised elements are being developed to increase the flexibility of the training offer for migrants and make it easier to individually tailor programmes to meet the needs for qualifications of migrants. Qualifications should be structured according to a toolbox of different learning modules that are coherent but can be taken individually on the basis of individual needs, following a flexible approach. In France, this people-centred approach has been used to design a learning programme (see box) where participants can develop individual career plans to activate their potential.

Springboard Programme – France (2015 - Present)

The Springboard programme (Tremplin) is a 12 week programme implemented by an NGO, eachOne, aimed at activating the potential of refugees. The objective of the programme is to remove the initial obstacles to integration for refugees/new arrivals to France which include for example, language and cultural barriers, lack of social connections, difficulties in building the right career in the country, lack of soft skills and credibility. The programme includes French courses, tutoring in English, workshops on 'living in France' and 'employability', as well as workshops with professional coaches, aimed at strengthening participants' professionalism and career plans. In addition to this main academic base, volunteer teams can lead extra bonus modules on themes chosen by the participants. Each participant is individually put in contact with three people who accompany him/her during the programme to define and realise their career plan in the long-term.

3.1.3 Multi-stakeholder and comprehensive approaches

The lack of coordination between services for migrants can create obstacles to integration. One-stop-shops and bundled services can contribute to making the integration process smoother. With the new [Europass Portal](#), the European Commission will bundle online services for migrants to map their skills and qualifications, provide information on how to get formal and informal learning recognised and validated as well as how to access education.

Comprehensive approaches aimed at covering different sets of activities related to skills mapping, skills development, career counselling and job matching (especially using online tools) are considered particularly effective. For instance, a comprehensive approach is adopted by the 'European Refugees Integration Action Scheme'- ERIAS, coordinated by EUROCHAMBRES (see boxes below).

¹³ European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO). For more information, see: https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/escopedia/Transversal_knowledge_44__skills_and_competences.

European Refugees Integration Action Scheme (ERIAS) – Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain (2019-2021)

The European Refugees Integration Action Scheme (ERIAS), funded by the EU's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, proposes a methodology for the integration of third-country nationals (TCNs) into the labour market based on the principles of comprehensiveness (from skills assessment to employment) and a multi-stakeholder approach. Partners from Spain, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria are testing the ERIAS approach on the ground, offering integration pathways to TCNs while considering the employment needs of enterprises.

Given the complexity of the integration process, a multi-stakeholder approach is also crucial in designing and implementing effective policies, linking the different dimensions of the integration process. For instance, the agreement among various stakeholders on a coherent strategy to validate skills and recognise qualifications is crucial to creating a smooth and effective process.

In order to ensure that migrants remain employed over time, employers should be actively involved in the integration process, helping in orientating skills assessment and skills development in a pragmatic way. However, employers might need support. For instance, in Germany, the *Willkommenslotsen* (Welcome tutors) programme within the local Chambers of Commerce facilitates the matching between refugees and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME). It also supports SMEs offering vocational training to migrants with personalised assistance. Similarly, in the Netherlands, three pilot projects were launched in 2019 to involve and support employers further. Their aim is to foster an inclusive and culturally diverse work environment, by tackling pre-entry discrimination during the recruitment process and addressing career disparities between employees with and without a migratory background.

3.2 Fast-tracking labour market integration and inclusion of migrants

Time is an important factor in ensuring successful integration of migrants into the labour market and society at large. If integration takes too long, migrants and refugees face the risk of losing motivation and which can lead to further impairment of their access to the labour market. However, migrants' employment is often hindered by linguistic barriers, the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications acquired in their countries of origin, and other individual factors. This multiplicity of barriers calls for an integrated, multi-layered and holistic approach to fast-tracking labour market integration and social inclusion for migrants. Such approaches combine different types of measures and provide individualised support when necessary, in order to ensure sustainable integration into the labour market. Here, cooperation with employers is crucial to match migrants with a job and a workplace that corresponds to their skills, qualifications and interests. In 2015, Sweden was one of the first countries to establish the so-called 'Fast-tracks' which aim to shorten the time between arrival in the country and employment, with a focus on matching newly arrived migrants in professions with workforce demand.

3.1.4 The importance of co-creation

As highlighted in the recently published Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion¹⁴, involving migrants in the design of strategies and measures is crucial to achieving a truly effective and comprehensive integration policy. Therefore, an Expert group on the views of migrants in the field of migration, asylum and integration, which includes migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers has been established by the European Commission to provide advice and expertise in the design and implementation of policies.

The 'expertise by experience' of migrants is also very relevant in the development of activities related to skills assessment and skills development activities (e.g. counsellors, intercultural mediators). The Refugee Start Force in the Netherlands is an example of an initiative launched by refugees for refugees to support the integration into society and into the labour market.

The involvement of migrants' organisations and/or the engagement of informal communities in the integration process can also facilitate dissemination of information and improve outreach, as some groups of migrants can be more difficult to reach and might not know about the services available.

Refugee Start Force – the Netherlands (2015 – Present)

The Refugee Start Force is a network created by refugees for refugees, with the objective of empowering refugees to integrate more quickly into the Dutch society and labour market. The initiative connects refugees to a social and professional network, making available information about various aspects of the labour market in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the network provides refugees with information on how to develop skills, organises networking events and company presentations, creates opportunities for volunteer work, and develops internships and learning programmes for refugees.

Fast-tracks and the intensive year programme – Sweden (2015 - Present)

The Fast-tracks combine different measures in parallel, such as guidance, skills' assessment, validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications, work placements, training and language training, in order to speed up the integration into the labour market in sectors with a labour shortage. Fast tracks cover 40 professions including, for example, social workers, nurses, teachers, chefs and electricians. The measures are implemented by the Public Employment Service and developed in tripartite cooperation between the government, trade unions and employer organisations. In addition, there is also the Introduction Programme which supports refugees to learn Swedish and start working as quickly as possible. The programme, which lasts in most cases for two years, consists of language training, civic integration courses and guidance on employment consisting of traineeships or skills assessment. As of April 2020 the Swedish Public Employment Service will run the Intensive Year programme, supporting participants to find their first job within a year.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf.

The delivery of fast-tracking integration services has progressively been digitalised to improve efficacy, efficiency and outreach. For example, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Greece has set up the HELIOS project that aims to support refugees with integration, housing and employment. In the recent pandemic, they set up an online portal to assist migrants with skills assessments and housing. In addition, job fairs where refugees and employers can meet are now organised online. Skills assessment tools are also being digitalised. For instance, as part of the 'Integration Pact', the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Munich in Germany developed an online application called 'Check.work' to determine migrants' competences and to support their integration into the labour market that can be used by all chambers of commerce throughout Germany (See box).

Check.work – Germany (2017 - Present)

Check.work is an online application, funded by the Bavarian State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy, that determines migrants' competences in order to support their targeted labour market integration. The application includes an image-based tool to map professional experience gained in the migrant's home country, as well as a tool for capturing job-relevant skills and personality traits. This latter is particularly relevant for professional orientation. The application identifies existing competences and releases 'a passport' of competences and a technical document, based on which chambers of commerce can allocate the user to the appropriate vocational/educational training. The application is being scaled up by Germany's Federal Employment Agency (BA) to include more professions.

Finding a job is not the only way available for migrants to stand on their own feet financially. Entrepreneurship is

also a way in which migrants can make a living without needing to find employment. In fact, often migrants become entrepreneurs out of necessity, even though they might lack relevant information necessary to start a business successfully or establish a robust network of customers and local businesses. Counselling and networking can both play a key role in allowing migrants to access eco-systems that support the creation and growth of new businesses. 'Startup Preschool' is a project that aims at connecting talented migrants with the business and start-up world, in order to improve their chances at succeeding in business (see box below).

Startup Preschool – Germany and Norway (2019 - Present)

Startup Preschool is a programme which aims to find business-talented migrants and connect them with the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The goal is to discover Europe's future entrepreneurs and business leaders. During an intensive 3-day programme, participants learn how diversity drives job creation, they also learn about idea testing and pitching, sales and networking, local and national business culture, as well as the laws governing business. There is a strong emphasis on networking, so every speaker represents the local business ecosystem and commits to meeting and following up with the participants. Having completed the programme, each participant is provided with a diploma and access to an active alumni-group online.

In a similar way, the German 'Competence Centre on Migrant Entrepreneurship' offers support in terms of legal requirements, self-employment and recruitment as well as individual support with setting up businesses.

3.3 Overcoming barriers to employment and social inclusion of migrant women

Integrating migrant women into the local labour markets and communities continues to present specific challenges to Member States. Migrant women usually have higher unemployment rates than both migrant men and native women. Migrant women are also overrepresented in the long-term migration population - 40% of all permanent migration is composed of families, of which 60% are women.¹⁵ Migrant women are usually underemployed, resulting in a diversity of competences and skills that go unrecognised.¹⁶ Therefore, integrating migrant women is a priority as well as a requirement to close socio-economic gaps between men and women in general. To tackle this disparity, policy approaches need to be integrated and comprehensive because the obstacles hindering migrant women's participation in the labour market are not only labour-related and thus cannot only be addressed by increasing the women's skillset. Policy approaches require gender mainstreaming and intersectionality to ensure that women should not only

have the same opportunities as men, but that they are also able to access them. Moreover, it seems that the COVID-19 pandemic is further restricting the integration of migrant women. Migrant women who are domestic workers - who were often precariously employed prior to the pandemic - are at particular risk of losing their jobs in this context, as they are more likely than men to be informally employed and consequently unregistered and excluded from labour protection.¹⁷

Several projects taking into account gender-specific requirements were implemented across Europe to integrate migrant women. For example, a number of projects were based around the need to bridge the gap between the skills brought by migrant women, recognised or unrecognised, and the industries that were in need of them.¹⁸ These projects aimed to provide specific training on the labour market, language classes and workshops on cultural integration.

15 OECD, Migrant Policy Debates, "How to strengthen the integration of migrant women?", n°25, November 2020. Available here: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/migration-policy-debates-25.pdf>.

16 Ibid.

17 Wolffhardt A., Long O., 2020. Gender perspectives in integration policy approaches.

18 For example, the Mirjam Project in Sweden: <https://www.esf.se/sidhuvud/the-swedish-esf-council/articles-about-our-projects/mirjam--facilitating-entry-into-the-labour-market-for-newly-arrived-refugee-women-within-the-labour-introduction-assignment>.

Concept of integration, support and guidance (CIAO!) – Luxembourg (2020-2022)

CIAO! is a project co-financed by the European Social Fund aiming to facilitate the inclusion of migrant women in Luxembourg through training and workshops. Although their topics are fixed in advance, workshops within the project remain flexible and are permanently adapted to the needs of participants. Workshops and training have a participative approach, valuing the experience and culture of the participants. Besides language workshops, subjects such as the culture and history of the country, the local school system, childhood, adolescence and the school system, and the labour market are encompassed. Moreover, some workshops cover more personal subjects, such as self-esteem and personal well-being.

Other projects work in cooperation with recruiters or representatives of specific industries to offer training and job opportunities to migrant women. Some projects work towards targeting specific spaces on social media where migrant women can have access to information about navigating the labour market or job opportunities. Again, involving women in projects from the same background and also speaking the same languages is essential to reach out to newly arrived women. Additionally, women need to be put in the condition of accessing these opportunities. For instance, migrant women's access to integration opportunities could be boosted by providing convenient opening hours for women, providing them with childcare services or challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging migrant men to take on more responsibility at the domestic level.

Relying on communities and networks was found to be crucial to sustainable integration. Several projects promoting community integration were implemented across the EU. They relied on mentoring or "buddy" systems,¹⁹ linking local women, migrants or with a migratory background, with newly arrived women to help them navigate these new spaces.

One notable example was implemented in Sweden and Germany, where women from the migrant community carried out outreach activities to engage with newly arrived women.

Neighbourhood Mothers in Stockholm – Germany, Sweden (2018-2020)

The Neighbourhood Mothers initiative is part of the EaSI funded project "Fast Track Action Boost" (FAB) that supports fast-track inclusion of refugees into the labour market in Milan, Berlin, Vienna, Stockholm, Madrid and cities in Serbia. The City of Stockholm piloted the Neighbourhood Mothers approach initially designed in Berlin. Women with a migratory background are employed by the city, receive training and carry out outreach work in their local neighbourhood. The focus is to support migrant women to know their rights, familiarise with their new communities and access useful information.

The project results show that the neighbourhood mothers can effectively reach out to women that previously have been out-of-reach. This allows them to communicate and gain trust, which increases their access to the right support. By participating in the project, migrant women gain work experience, access training and become active member of the society.

A buddy system was also introduced in some French schools to help newly arrived parents navigate the French school system and build networks within the community.²⁰ In the same vein, but more informally, an initiative in Sweden sought to create meeting opportunities for all individuals on parental leave, including newly-arrived parents, to create an informal space where they could build relationships and access information.²¹ Ensuring that women have access to information is paramount and this requires specific and ongoing outreach activities, in a language they understood, and through the support of outreach partners which will allow for continuous communication. Additionally, outreach programmes targeting difficult to reach women are necessary.²²

Overall, service provision needs to include a gender perspective, as well as language capacities and be flexible enough to adapt the services to women's needs. Therefore, providing more funds to migrant women-led organisations could help to boost integration through gender mainstreaming, and play an important role in the integration of migrant women (See box). Establishing more networks focusing on the inclusion of migrant women would also improve the sustainability of their integration.

This would contribute to boosting communication and information sharing among migrant women and their families.

Expat Spouses Initiatives – the Netherlands (2015 – Present)

Expat Spouses Initiative (ESI) connects migrants, especially spouses of international knowledge workers, to local professional opportunities and accelerates their transition into the Dutch labour market in a community-driven way. For the local business community, ESI is a driver of change specialised in bridging the gap between businesses that need talented and skilled employees and highly skilled international talent ready to enter the labour market. ESI is currently a thriving community of more than 2 000 international professionals in the Brainport region of the Netherlands. The ESI innovative community-driven approach simultaneously creates awareness as well as puts the focus on talent.

¹⁹ For example, Female Fellows, in Germany: <https://femalefellows.com/mitmachen>.

²⁰ "Ouvrir l'école aux parents pour la réussite des enfants" : See <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/Accueil-et-accompagnement/Le-parcours-personnalise-d-integration-republicaine2/Au-dela-du-contrat-d-integration-republicaine-CIR/Ouvrir-l-ecole-aux-parents-pour-la-reussite-des-enfants-OEPRE-est-un-dispositif-complementaire-au-CIR-au-croisement-des-formations-civique-et-linguistique>.

²¹ Project "Swedish with Baby": <https://svenskamedbaby.se>.

²² An example of a successful partnership between national authorities and civil society is the Fem.Os project in Germany, where qualified counsellors have been reaching out to newly arrived women through social media to offer counselling services: <https://minor-kontor.de/fem-os-en>.

Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Lessons learnt & conclusions

Successful, long-term integration and inclusion requires comprehensive strategies and long-term investments from Member States as well as support from the European Commission. Overall, between 2013 and 2019, a growing number of Member States put in place holistic integration strategies and measures that contributed to increasing the employment rate of migrants as well as fostering their social inclusion. However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic is threatening to slow or halt the inclusion journey of many migrants. To limit disruptions, Member States devised new and ad hoc measures, including the digital provision of services. While effective in the short term, this effort needs to be closely monitored as there is a risk of leaving behind people who might not have the relevant digital equipment or digital skills.

At the same time, the pandemic has shown the important role that migrants have in our society as many of them are working in essential services. Their front-line work exposes them to a higher risk of contagion also due to a range of other vulnerabilities they might face such as overcrowded housing conditions, access to healthcare or higher incidence of poverty.²³

As stated by the European Commission in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), “integration is both a right and a duty for all”. During the past years, several Member States recognised the importance of supporting migrants in entering the labour market quickly and introduced various innovative measures. Fast-track programmes have been designed

to prioritise on-the-job training in parallel with other services such as language courses and counselling.

In this approach, skills’ assessment, validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications play an essential role in ensuring that migrants are employed at the appropriate level and in line with their interests. Member States are investing in methodologies to identify migrant skills and design personalised learning pathways to complement them in order to speed up the integration into the labour market in sectors with labour shortage. Upskilling and reskilling measures are thus crucial to ensure migrants are prepared for the current and future labour market.

In order for the fast-track approaches to be successful, it is important to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships where service providers at the local level are fully involved in the preparation and implementation of the integration strategies. Social partners and the private sector also need to contribute actively as they play an important role in the training and employment of migrants. Furthermore, the involvement and contribution of migrants in the design and implementation of integration policies is important, taking advantage of their unique expertise and aspirations.

Finally, fast integration in the labour market and society at large should also be as inclusive as possible. It is crucial to mainstream gender to target the specific obstacles that migrant women experience during their integration. These measures should not leave anyone behind and should also be addressed to migrant women who have lived in the European country for several years, but are not yet fully integrated.

4.2 Key policy messages

Cross-cutting principles to be taken into consideration while developing policies and services for migrants

- When designing innovative measures and policies, a holistic approach focussing on migrants as individuals and adequately addressing their needs is crucial. Empowerment, participation, two-way communication and mainstreaming are equally important.
 - Co-creation with migrants in developing, implementing and evaluating innovative integration measures is important to ensure that their needs are thoroughly addressed from the outset.
 - An integrated, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach is crucial in designing and implementing
- effective integration policies that link the different dimensions of the integration process. In particular, employers’ and social partners’ engagement is crucial to design and implement integration measures, such as skills assessment and skills development activities as well as fast-track procedures for the integration of migrants into the labour market and society.
 - A ‘joined-up’ approach to integration service provision (i.e one-stop-shops) can facilitate the provision of the holistic support required to address their often complex and specific needs. A coordinated approach between the different services will facilitate a more efficient and effective support and thus increase their opportunities for integration.

²³ See OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-2019-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de>

- Innovative actions designed and implemented to tackle the hardships of the COVID-19 crisis for migrants at local level should be supported through funding and disseminating information across layers of government and Member States. Initiatives that meet the good practice standards such as sustainability, empowerment and participation, two-way communication, mainstreaming, and easy access should be supported further, scaled up and promoted to others.

How best to develop migrants' skills assessment and skills development with a focus on medium and highly skilled migrants:

- Skills mapping and skills development are long-term processes that require an increase of migrants' self-awareness of their own skills and potential, and reflections on their career development possibilities. Examples have shown that the early involvement of migrants in designing skills mapping and skills development approaches has paid off.
- Non-formal and soft skills are relevant and should be appropriately taken into consideration in (formal) migrants' skills assessments. In particular, migrants might have developed unique soft skills, through their journey to Europe and through their personal experiences, that can bring added value to the labour market.
- Migrants should not be considered as a homogenous group with similar skills and needs. Therefore, categories for skills mapping and skills development should allow for some individualised interventions in order to offer a menu of different support services to be selected on the basis of specific migrant needs.
- Recently arrived migrants should have better access to language learning, including online courses, and the necessary digital equipment. Innovative digital tools that do not require the proficient use of the European country's language can provide an effective solution for the identification of migrants' skills.

How to overcome barriers to employment and social inclusion of migrant women²⁴:

- Migrant women face additional barriers to labour market integration and long-term social inclusion which require comprehensive support. Thus, the provision of integration services for migrants should be designed to include a gender perspective (e.g. opening hours in parts of the day where women tend to be available) and specific measures for women with care responsibilities (e.g. programmes offering childcare).
- Initiatives to challenge gender stereotypes and encouraging migrant men to take more responsibilities in the domestic context can contribute to the participation of women in the community, hence, would improve integration into society and the labour market.
- Adequate outreach activities can contribute to the engagement of all migrants, including women, which are particularly difficult to reach. Innovative outreach activities targeting migrant women, such as

buddy, mentor or mediator collaborations, can build networks and communities that encourage more effective inclusion in the labour market and society.

How to develop innovative approaches to ensure fast-track labour market integration and social inclusion of migrants:

- Migrants should be integrated into the labour market as soon as possible in order to prevent a loss of motivation and skills. This disengagement might result in further difficulties for migrants to join the labour market.
- A holistic approach combining different measures (e.g. language learning, workplace learning) and individualised support yield the best possible results. Language and culture courses can be delivered in innovative ways, for instance, between other courses (e.g. vocational training courses) or during extra-curricular activities.
- In order to facilitate the integration of migrants into the society, counselling activities should focus on giving migrants the knowledge to access and navigate the specific labour market, including through offering advice and information on existing regulations and opportunities. Targeted measures and training might be developed to support other skills such as entrepreneurship.
- Digitalised skills assessment tools used at the regional or national level need to be standardised to speed up the integration process and increase the effectiveness of the recognition process.

How to match low-skilled migrants with work opportunities in the post-COVID-19 situation²⁵:

- Vocational training can be an effective way to improve the employability of low-skilled migrants and facilitate their access to the labour market in the post-COVID-19 situation.
- Mentoring services can steer the migrants towards labour market needs in order to sustain their integration in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery phase.
- In the light of COVID-19 pandemic restriction, digital technologies and innovative tools for sharing information on labour market opportunities can play an important role to overcome information gaps for migrant communities, in particular regarding access to the labour market for low skilled migrants, access to housing and basic needs.
- Measures need to be taken to close the digital gap that often affects migrants, making sure that they are equipped and have the necessary skills to access online and digital services, which have become particularly relevant since the outbreak of COVID-19, in order to overcome the barriers resulting from restrictions to movement.

²⁴ See also the thematic report: Wolffhardt A., Long O., 2020. Gender perspectives in integration policy approaches <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9814&langId=en>.

²⁵ See also the thematic report: Petra Bendel, 2020. Innovative or ad hoc? Practices of migrant integration in light of COVID-19, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9814&langId=en>.

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