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The integration of migrants: Spotlight on skills intelligence and learning, housing, women and children

SYNTHESIS REPORT

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SYNTHESIS REPORT

This report stems from the Mutual Learning Conference on 'The integration of migrants: Spotlight on skills intelligence and learning, housing, women and children' hosted by the European Commission on 30 November 2021. The Conference was attended by more than 150 representatives from the national administrations of the EU Member States, civil society, academia, social partner organisations and the European Commission. The event provided an opportunity to discuss new trends, innovative practices and policy recommendations in the integration and inclusion of people with migrant backgrounds with a focus on skills intelligence and learning, housing, migrant women and children.

European Commission
Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
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1. Introduction

1.1. Changing the narrative on migration: Realising the benefits of migrant integration and inclusion through sharing good practices and innovative projects and policies

There are 37 million people residing in EU member states who were born outside of the EU, representing 8.3% of all EU inhabitants.[1] **Many of these migrants have made important contributions, including helping to fill gaps in the EU labour market as well as counteracting the challenges presented by an ageing population**. At the same time, the pandemic has had a disproportionately high negative impact on migrants, many of whom are frontline workers. They deliver food, work in hospitals, on farms and construction sites. But even after such contributions and sacrifices, migrants and migration in general remain a polarising issue. In his opening speech, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit highlighted how the Mutual Learning Conference provided an opportunity to contribute to *"changing the narrative on migration"* and to ***"bring the focus back to facts and figures and to concentrate on the real issues and challenges."*** In doing so, he reminded participants of the benefits of migration, but also the challenges that remain. He noted the comparatively lower employment rate of non-EU citizens compared to that of EU natives[1], the comparatively lower education levels, and a higher rate of in-work poverty. Such inequality, he continued, carries through to other areas, including the gender dimension of the labour market, where migrant women are less likely to be employed; childhood exposure to the risk of poverty, where the rate of early-school-leavers is higher; and housing, where migrants are more likely to be negatively affected by bad housing and increases in house prices and rent. There are, however, good examples of numerous projects and solutions available in the EU Member States, including on reskilling and upskilling, language courses, targeted education for children of migrant backgrounds, as well as available funding from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and other funds. The Commissioner also highlighted the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the three headline targets for 2030 that provide ambitious objectives welcomed by EU Leaders at the Porto Social Summit. The recently launched EU Platform on Combatting Homelessness also shows a strong commitment to address the homelessness challenges. And finally, he noted the actions within the European Skills Agenda as well as the European Social Fund support.

On the topic of gender, the Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson underlined the essential role played by migrant women, as *"**when migrant women do well, their children are more likely to do well too**"*. She highlighted that migrant women face more challenges than migrant men, including higher levels of unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable forms of employment. But she also noted their untapped potential, talents and skills, citing the Swedish example of the fast track projects with labour unions and employers that provide quicker ways to recognise or provide the qualifications necessary for migrants to enter the labour market. Underestimating the strength and capacity of migrants, women in particular, was a frequent mistake. She highlighted recent OECD research[2] showing that migrants' contributions in taxes outweigh what governments spend on their social protection, health and education. As the pandemic had made migrants' contributions to the EU society more obvious but also affected them disproportionally, it was important to include them in the recovery. The EU had to attract the skills needed for its recovery but was losing the global competition for talent against North America, Australia and New Zealand, due to regulations but also a negative narrative in many Member States. While the new Blue Card would help attract highly skilled migrants, the EU also faced shortages in other skill levels. The Commissioner noted the launch of the Talent partnerships in June 2021 to help people train, work or study in the EU and announced the launch in 2022 of a Skills and Talent Package to make it easier for people of all skill levels to come to the EU. She further underlined the necessity of changing the narrative on migration and called upon conference participants to make full use of the initiatives in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, including the Toolkit on the EU funds, to *"help make migration a success story."*

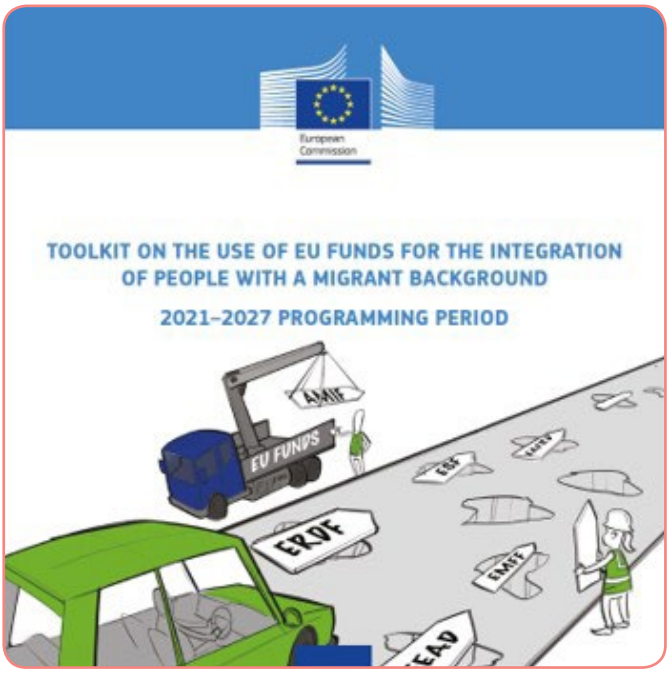
In the panel discussion that followed, facilitated by Emmanuelle Grange (Head of Unit, Disability and Inclusion, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission), panellists provided more in-depth analysis into the issues and available solutions. Thomas Liebig, Senior Migration Specialist at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), reinforced the need to move to a more whole-of-family and youth-oriented approach to integration, noting that migrant women and children continue to struggle. In terms of solutions, he stressed the benefits of better valuing the skills of migrants and addressing the training gap with upskilling and language learning.

Indeed, the Conference provided an opportunity not only to discuss challenges, but also to identify innovative solutions and strategies to

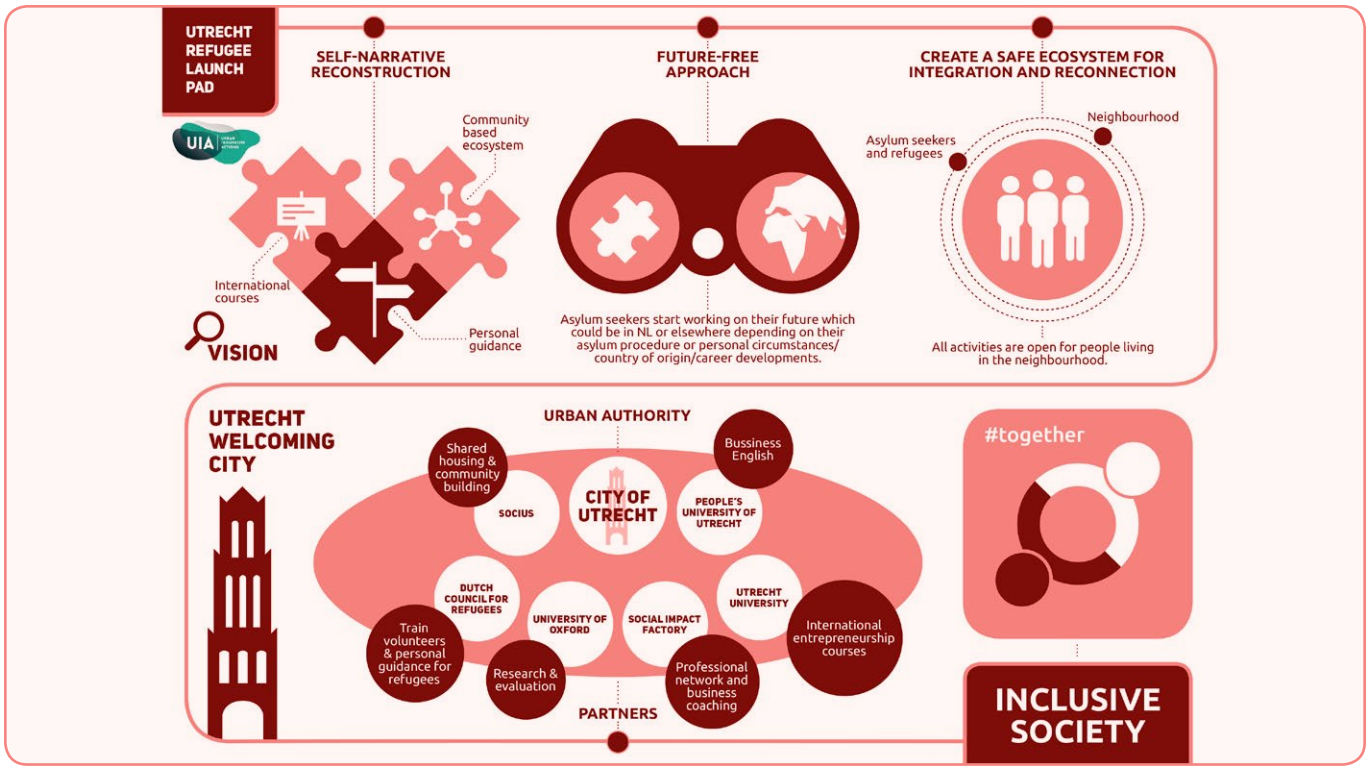
1 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en

2 https://www.oecd.org/migration/international-migration-outlook-1999124x.htm

improve the integration and inclusion of migrants and their families. In this respect, the EU has been proactive in funding projects and programmes, as outlined in the Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background for the 2021-2027 programming period, which has been updated in-line with the latest policy and legal frameworks.



In terms of best practices, Olga Stachova, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian NGO 'MOSAIC', presented an example of an innovative approach to labour market integration, foregrounding the importance of providing migrants with work experience. In her own words, *"the most significant barrier is our inability to provide immigrants with on-the-job work experience."* Working hand-in-hand with employers to provide work experience placements for migrants, **her programme has achieved *"85% success in the post-training placement of immigrants"***. Another innovative example of labour market integration was provided by Vania Nedelcheva, Head of Immigrants' Office at the Centre of Athens Labour Unions, with 'Project Labour-Int'. Labour unions, employers and migrants in cooperation with other stakeholders implemented the project (funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) that has been successfully launched in six EU countries and *"supported hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers with better labour market integration in Europe"*. Such a multi-stakeholder approach has also been successful on the city level, with the City of Utrecht's 'Plan Einstein' providing another good practice example. The project is based on seven principles, including **'inclusion from day 1', 'evidence-based' and a commitment to being a 'welcoming city'.**



In support of the EU's recent trend toward greater migrant participation in the design and implementation of integration policies and projects, Anila Noor, Managing Director of the Dutch NGO 'New Women Connectors' and member of the European Commission's expert group on the views of migrants, underlined the importance of migrant leadership. As a refugee from Pakistan who sought asylum in the Netherlands, she explained how **migrants are well positioned to co-design** and implement programmes for the migrant community because *"we are the community"*. Other innovative approaches were also highlighted by Armelle Ledan, Head of the social innovation action group at the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL), who stressed the importance of social innovation and how "we need to innovate" and "think out of the box and try new things". Presenting examples of this, she described five EaSI projects (FAB, FIER, forwork, RIAC and ALMIT)[3] that were funded under the 2016 call for fast track integration of migrants and asylum seekers. These small-scale experimentation projects have shown very promising results, reaching thousands of refugees in very different European contexts, speeding up, easing and improving their integration in the European labour market.

Such innovative approaches in the area of skills intelligence, skills assessment, access to housing, education and social inclusion, as stated by Katarina Ivanković-Knežević (Director for Social Affairs, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission), are *"moving us in the right direction."* In her closing remarks, she called for implementation of policies, programmes and projects that are beneficial for both migrants and the local communities and society as a whole. She stressed how migrant integration is a **multidimensional process, and that holistic and multi-stakeholder approaches** do bring results.

In order to explore the challenges - and solutions - in greater depth, participants joined five workshops divided into distinct themes: 1. skills intelligence addressing skills shortages and helping migrants to find employment; 2. finding sustainable housing solutions for migrants; 3. increasing the employment opportunities for migrant women; 4. new skills for migrants with the Europass portal and EU good practices; and 5. using education as a driver for the social inclusion of migrant children and their families. An overview of these workshops is now presented below.

2. Innovative approaches in the integration and inclusion of migrants and their families

2.1. Skills intelligence addressing skills shortages and helping migrants to find employment

Across the EU, over 14 million people are unemployed[4] with over half of Europe's unemployed being classified as 'low skilled'.[5] This lack of skills is reflected in the feedback from employers **with 40% of them struggling to find staff with the necessary skill set**.[6] Even in cases where migrant workers do have skills, many of them work in jobs that do not match their talents or level of skill, resulting in 'underemployment' or a skills mismatch. At the same time, this workshop highlighted a potential solution to these challenges in the form of 'skills intelligence'.

2.1.1. What is skills intelligence and what are its benefits?

Being aware of available labour market information and trends, and communicating this between different stakeholders, is referred to as 'skills intelligence'. According to Vladimir Kvetan, Senior Expert of Skills Analysis and Forecasts at the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), skills intelligence presents a number of solutions in terms of addressing skills shortages and helping migrants find employment. It can initiate **more effective distribution and matching of migrants on the labour market by identifying regions experiencing labour shortages**. Additionally, **the sharing of information with migrants supports their guidance and counselling, recruitment processes, provision of education and training, and career paths**.

3 Further information about these projects can be found in Armelle Ledan's presentation here: https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24866&langId=en

4 Eurostat (2021). Euro area unemployment at 7.4%. Euroindicators: 125/21. Eurostat Press Office. Accessed via: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11563355/3-03112021-AP-EN.pdf/8841353c-11f6-7fab-efef-0e768ab13bfd?t=1635931825200

5 Eurostat (2016). Statistical approaches to the measurement of skills — The state of play in Europe within the European Statistical System. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed via: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3888793/7753369/KS-TC-16-023-EN-N.pdf/438b69b5-2fcb-4923-b9e2-fa7b59906438?t=1480688572000

6 Eurofound (2017). European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed via: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1733en.pdf

2.1.2. What are the challenges in addressing skills shortages and what solutions are there?

According to Robert Plummer, Senior Advisor at Business Europe, labour market shortages were a key issue prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and migration to the EU, as well as intra-EU mobility, was playing an important role in reducing labour shortages. Consequently, the restriction of mobility resulting from the pandemic has somewhat curtailed the supply of skilled labour available to employers. Moreover, looking past the pandemic, other challenges remain. Plummer underlines the EU's need to be more 'appealing' to attract and retain more workers, particularly those who are highly skilled, but also those who are not: migrant workers of all skill levels are needed. In an effort to meet these needs, the EU updated its **'Blue Card' initiative**, helping to facilitate the matching process between employers and third country nationals, as well as skills assessment tools like CEDEFOP's European Skills Index, Skills Forecast and the SkillsOVATE tool.

CEDEFOP has developed a number of innovative 'big data' tools in the area of skills intelligence:

- The **European Skills Index** measures 'the performance of EU skills systems'. The index ranks EU member states on a scale with a maximum score of 100. The index is already live and is available through the CEDEFOP website.
- The **EU Skills Forecast** is in development but will provide 'quantitative projections of the future trends in employment by sector of economic activity and occupational group.'[7]
- The **SkillsOVATE** tool: Cedefop's 'big-data' powered SkillsOVATE (Online Vacancy Analysis Tool for Europe) tool offers detailed, granular information on trends in occupations, sectors and skills in real-time. It enables a better understanding of the skills most demanded by employers and gives insight into national and regional skill trends. It offers the ability to identify gaps in the labour market that could be filled by migrants in the EU and address skills mismatches in the EU workforce, ultimately increasing economic growth and social inclusion across the EU.

In terms of migrants and refugees already in the EU, there is a need to look at 'activating' and upskilling or reskilling these individuals into the labour market in sustainable ways, taking into account the skills needs of companies and existing labour shortages and skills mismatches. In doing so, the multiple stakeholders involved in the process face a number of challenges. Yet, as will be shown below, there are also a number of innovative solutions and projects which are showing great promise.

2.1.3. Tackling the low attendance rate of refugees at language courses.

Learning the native language of the host country is essential to integrating into the labour market and local society in general. Despite this, refugee attendance rates at language courses are often relatively low. There are several reasons for this. First, due to limited resources and a desire to become productive and self-supporting as soon as possible, refugee arrivals often opt to take up low-skilled or temporary employment immediately, rather than spending time to learn the language or develop their skills. Second, language and professional employment go hand-in-hand and newly arrived individuals are often not told the importance of this, so it takes several years to realise that they cannot progress from low-skilled employment without a good understanding of the language and further training. Finally, employers often do not recognise their employees' need to further develop their language skills and, as result of this, do not provide support or allowances for this.

In terms of solutions, a good practice has been identified in Denmark, whereby workplace training and language learning are offered in parallel so that people of migrant backgrounds can increase their professional and social integration at the same time. Moreover, support from employers is key: They can play a role in facilitating workplace language training and/or supporting employees to attend external language courses.

2.1.4. Workplace discrimination and unequal opportunities for migrants and refugees.

Although it is banned across the EU, discrimination in the hiring process - for example against gender or 'foreign-sounding' names - remains a barrier to the labour market integration of migrants and refugees. There are a number of underlying reasons, including a lack of awareness among employers in terms of the different skills that refugees can offer, as well as a lack of available tools and information for employers to understand and support employees with migrant backgrounds.

7 CEDEFOP (2021). Accessed via: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-forecast

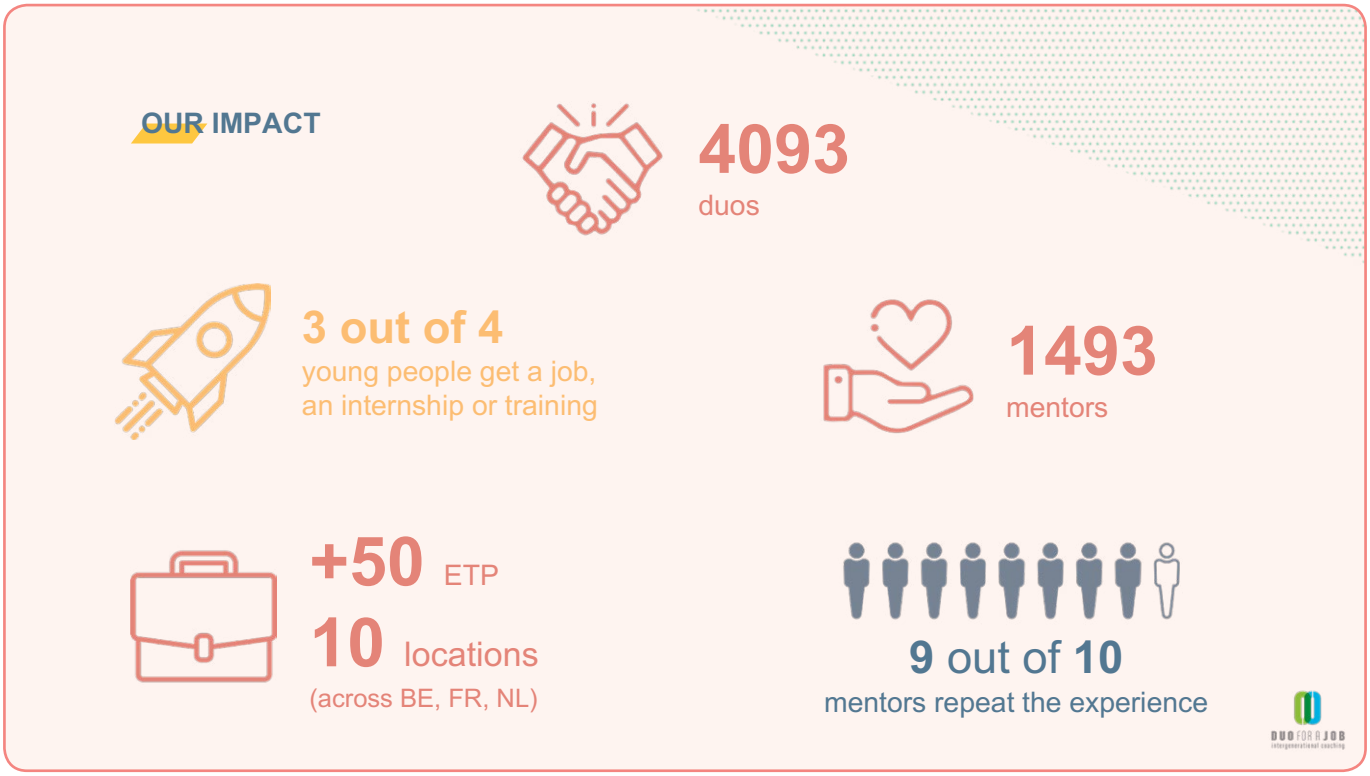
Solutions here include the provision of more education for employers on discrimination, inclusion and diversity, as well as changing the practices themselves, for example requiring CVs to not reveal names nor genders in order to avoid feeding into subconscious stereotypes. Additionally, another solution is the facilitation and promotion of dialogue, for example through the creation of new platforms that can connect people beyond the usual formal interview process and traditional networking methods.

Good practice: 'Career pathways: invisible minority newcomer women', Ottawa, Canada

This initiative, coordinated by the World Skills Employment Centre in Ottawa, primarily supports minority women and aims to bridge them to the labour market within six months of arrival. Through early introductions to employers, the project has yielded positive initial results with 50 % of women finding jobs within three months; 33 % within 4-6 months; 15 % within 7-12 months; and just 2 % over 12 months.

Good practice: 'Duo for a job', Belgium, France and the Netherlands

This intergenerational coaching initiative pairs older, experienced professionals (50+) with younger people (18-33) of non-European backgrounds as mentees. Mentors are trained to give weekly mentoring sessions, advice and help with finding a job. There are three goals: 1. Reduce inequality in accessing the job market; 2. Value and maximise the potential experiences and skills of those aged 50+; and 3. Strengthen social cohesion and promote intercultural and intergenerational relations. The initiative has shown promising outcomes with 3 in 4 young people securing a job, internship or professional training after 6 months in the programme and 9 in 10 mentors choosing to continue coaching after their first experience.



2.1.5. Recognising and valuing the individual talents of refugees and migrants.

Despite the greater clarity offered by EU skills tools, individuals' skills are not always immediately clear and refugees cannot always provide proof of their skills and qualifications. Moreover, even when non-EU courses and institutions are listed, employers may be unfamiliar with them and therefore give them little weight. Solutions here centre around projects and programmes that bridge the gap between employers and jobseekers with migrant backgrounds.

Good practice: Caritas Europe

Caritas Europe runs several activities with the aim of promoting labour market integration through improving the communication and understanding between employers and migrants/refugees.

- 'Lunch and learn' sessions to promote workplace interaction and debunk stereotypes, such as the representation of 'refugees' in the media.
- 'Meetups' between companies that receive many CVs from refugees but struggle to understand them due to the unusual formatting, presentation or language used. The companies offer advice and support on how to create a strong CV and answer questions from potential applicants to help them understand how to better showcase their skills and present themselves.
- Encourage employers to consider different or additional hiring processes, e.g. by setting tasks or observing competences in the field, in order to mitigate the risk of a refugee individual being overlooked due to a CV that does not conform to professional norms.
- Implement strategies to build the self-confidence of long-term migrant jobseekers, including adequate practice and preparation to improve confidence in interviews.
- Support employers to better understand the skills, qualifications and work experience that refugees and migrants already have.

2.2. Finding sustainable housing solutions for migrants

A recent report by FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation shows that foreign nationals are overrepresented among the homeless. This was underlined by Simona Barbu, Policy Officer at the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), who stated that, according to a survey conducted in 2019, a quarter of single people and homeless families in Finland were immigrants, while in Sweden 43 % of the homeless population from 2017 were foreign nationals, rising to 52.3 % in Barcelona, Spain.

This greater prevalence of homelessness among migrant populations stems from a variety of factors, including a critical lack of affordable housing in the EU, the precarious legal situations of many migrants and their families, discrimination and gender-specific issues (migrant women in the EU are more likely to be pushed into homelessness due to lack of legislative support to access housing, gender-based violence combined with a dependent migration status linked to an abusive partner and several forms of economic and social marginalisation).[8] Moreover, the situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only carried economic consequences such as unemployment and rising costs, but also introduced confinement measures leading to a feeling among migrant populations of being 'trapped' in cramped and unsanitary housing.[9]

8 v FEANTSA. (2020). Homelessness among Migrant Women in the EU. https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/Homelessness_Among_Migrant_Women_in_the_EU_(final).pdf

9 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2017). Second European Union minorities and discrimination survey: Main results. [EU MIDIS II]. Vienna: Author.

2.2.1. Defining homelessness among people with migrant backgrounds

According to the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[10] satisfactory housing consists of legal security of tenure; availability of accessible services, facilities and infrastructure; habitability; physical accessibility for persons with reduced mobility/disabilities (e.g. access to employment, health services, schools, etc.); cultural adequacy; and affordability. This complexity in the definition of what constitutes 'homelessness' is mirrored by FEANTSA, which in 2009 developed a typology with 13 different operational categories, including 'rooflessness', 'houselessness', 'secure housing', 'adequate housing', among others. In developing more specific categories, organisations and governments are better able to develop, monitor and evaluate policies.

FEANTSA's typology also differentiates between homelessness among migrants and homelessness among the native population. The purpose of this differentiation is not to prioritise one group above the other but, rather, to acknowledge the specificity of each situation. People with migrant backgrounds have particular housing needs which differ from their native counterparts. First, they are more likely to have accommodation tied to their work contracts or legal residency, so they require housing options which do not threaten their sense of security that they will not be reported and deported. Second, cultural differences and discrimination can lead to conflicts in their new communities. Third, they require housing that is not isolated far away from urban centres, as they need to be able to access training opportunities and jobs.

2.2.2. Homelessness among undocumented migrants

For undocumented migrants, finding safe and adequate housing can be very challenging, as the provision of accommodation is often tied to migrants' residency status. According to Laetitia Van der Vennet, Advocacy Officer at the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), the latest EU-wide review[11] shows that renting to undocumented people is criminalised in 15 EU Member states, leading to a reluctance among landlords to do so. As a result, migrants are often pushed out of good housing and into the hands of exploitative landlords.

Even in the EU Member states where renting to undocumented people is not criminalised, migrants still face challenges. Landlords may still fear renting to people with insecure residency status – an issue with stems from the requirement in certain Member states (e.g. Germany) for tenants to report their residency status. Additionally, smaller budgets (as a result of lower income) and discrimination can also contribute to the host of barriers facing undocumented migrants.

2.2.3. Safety risks for homeless migrants

In lieu of finding suitable housing, migrants are often forced to accept inadequate and unsafe accommodation. It is not uncommon for such accommodation to have lead paint, mould or other hazardous factors. Danger can also come in the form of other people, for example negative attitudes in their new communities, or dependency situations. With regard to the latter, migrants living in accommodation provided by their employer, and the subsequent 'double dependence', are vulnerable to being exploited. Additionally, women who are dependent on their partner are also at risk of exploitation and abuse.

In order to reduce such risks – and in addition to the housing solutions which are outlined further below – migrants require a support system and the means to communicate with the community, allowing for a more holistic approach which enables them to be included in their new communities. Moreover, they should be educated about their rights and how to protect those rights.

> *"Since I am undocumented, I am entitled to nothing. Only the shelters of Red Cross and SamuSocial accept undocumented people, but just for one night. Every day you have to call them to know if they will have a bed for you, but you have to call them 200 times because lines are always collapsed... There is not a long-term accommodation option for me at all. How can I plan anything if I don't know whether I will be sleeping on the streets tonight? How will I take care of my daughter? That's why I am living with this man. Despite he is sometimes violent, at least my daughter and I sleep with a roof above our heads."*
>
> *– Woman attended by La Source asbl (Belgium)*

2.2.4. Solutions to homelessness among people with migrant backgrounds

Without any support, migrants facing homelessness are forced to rely upon their own strategies, including living with families and friends (i.e. 'couchsurfing'), homeless shelters, accessing the private housing market (but often with poor quality and overcrowding), squats or temporary shelters, or via employers.

10 https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/pages/internationalstandards.aspx

11 Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). (2011). Fundamental rights of migrants in an irregular situation in the European Union (europa.eu)

External support can provide other solutions that not only benefit migrants, but also their new communities. Here, options include social housing, self-restoration of dilapidated housing, or the innovative approach of using vacant private housing. Regarding the latter, Maria Jose Anitua Trevijano, President of the Arteale Foundation in Spain, stated that **there are 22 million empty homes in the EU** - twice the number that she and her colleagues expected. Her project, 'The Empty Homes Collaborative', is outlined as a good practice how to use them for the benefit of those in need, see below.

Good practice: The Empty Houses for the Homeless Project, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

Working as a bridge between landlords and refugees, the project aims to establish trust between the two parties, leading to many of the landlords agreeing to rent their properties to refugee tenants. Not only does the initiative help refugees to find accommodation, but the project also benefits landlords, for whom it is more profitable to re-use their empty homes, and also the environment, as reusing homes is more environmentally friendly than building new homes. In terms of results, six empty homes were included in the project and 20 people have found accommodation within a 15-month period. The project is set to expand and, in the next few years, over 200 homes are expected to provide accommodation for 800 tenants from vulnerable groups.

Funding for initiatives and programmes is available from a range of sources. At the EU level, Member states can make use of EU grants and loans such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and InvestEU. Funding is also available to varying extents at the national level within EU Member states. For smaller civil society organisations, however, the bureaucracy involved in applying for funding can be a significant barrier.

The funding and implementation of projects and programmes should retain a long-term perspective and be integrated with public policy to provide everyone with equal access to adequate accommodation. This integrated approach is reflected in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 of migrants and Beneficiaries of International Protection (BIP). At the same time, despite the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective, the immediate housing needs of migrants and refugees should not be neglected.

2.3. Increasing the employment opportunities for migrant women

According to UN data,[12] migrant women are equally likely to be highly educated as non-migrant women and more likely to be highly educated than migrant men, yet migrant women in the EU have a higher unemployment rate than both groups.[13] Moreover, employed migrant women are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than non-migrant women. This workshop considered the underlying reasons for this, while also highlighting some good practices and solutions.

2.3.1. Recognising the needs of migrant women

Salome Mbugua, Co-chair of the European Network of Migrant Women, stressed the importance of recognising the challenges that migrant women face, even prior to their arrival in Europe. Many of them have had long and difficult journeys, living in refugee camps for many years in challenging circumstances and may have even lost loved ones along the way. Subsequently, one of the most important things that can be done to support these women is to help them overcome trauma. Trauma support services and counselling are crucial and should be offered prior to providing them with employment opportunities. In the provision of counselling, it should be taken into account that group counselling might make women more comfortable to talk about their problems, such as the 'Let's Talk' group counselling initiative in Dublin, Ireland.

Kristin Marklund, Senior Advisor at the Nordic Welfare Centre, echoed the importance of targeted programmes for migrant women - a principle that is embodied in the Nordic welfare model. There, all Nordic countries have integration programs for the first two years and counselling is also a part of this program, albeit with the primary focus on employment.

12 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020): International Migrant Stock 2020.

13 OECD (2020): How to strengthen the integration of migrant women? Migration Policy Debate No. 25, p. 4.

Good practice: "Let's talk" group counselling initiative by AkiDwA in Dublin, Ireland

Since March 2018, AkiDwA has been providing informal group talk therapy using a psychosocial approach, known as Let's Talk, to support migrant women. The aim of this project was to explore the mental health experiences of a sample of migrant women in Ireland, with a view to piloting a series of informal psychosocial support sessions in a culturally sensitive manner. The researcher conducted focus group discussions and individual interviews with 40 participants from five locations.[14]

Good practice: Neighbourhood Mothers initiative in Denmark

Starting in 2008, the initiative aimed to enable migrant women to acquire knowledge about Danish society, improve their proficiency in Danish, gain easier access to social services and become empowered. The goal, in short, was to give them 'help to help themselves'. In terms of results, a qualitative assessment (2015) showed that the participants are better acquainted with Danish society, feel more included in the neighbourhood, feel that their relationship with public bodies is improving and find it easier to enter the labour market. Moreover, a cost-effectiveness study (2016) showed that, for every Danish krone invested in the project, society regains three times that amount in one year and ten times more in ten years. Denmark now has more than 600 active project participants and around 40 groups.

2.3.2. The role of childcare

Childcare comes up as an important topic when we talk about women's employment. According to Fatima Yassir, Researcher at the Socio-economic Council of Flanders, stereotypes of 'the migrant woman' - who is not allowed to work because of her husband or does not want to send her children to childcare - are over-simplified, as migrant women are not a homogenous group. According to her, it is simply not true that most of them are reluctant to send their children to childcare because of cultural differences. However, for many of them, it is such a struggle to combine their family and work in the new system that they can give up and decide to focus their time on raising their children.

The heterogeneity of migrant women, including the variation in their legal status, socio-economic situation and level of education plays a key role in determining their access to the labour market. This is why the specific situations of migrant women should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This approach helps to understand what each of them need, whether it be counselling, educational support, childcare support, skill development or self-esteem development.

When we think of 'childcare', we usually think of professional facilities such as daycares. However, an often neglected form of childcare is the potential role of the father. In Sweden, it is a growing trend for fathers to stay at home with their children. Many men have started to realise that there is another way of living. In Ireland there are initiatives helping to combine work and family and bringing in fathers and bridging the gender care gap. People are becoming more conscious of sharing the responsibility. In a migrant context, there are many absent fathers who are not together with their families but work in other countries and this puts additional pressure and responsibility onto women.

2.3.3. The importance of confidence and self-esteem

During the discussion, Yassir raised the issue of a general lack of self-esteem among migrant women. This, she explained, can to some extent be attributed to 'the feeling of non-belonging' and the impact this has on your self-confidence. Subsequently, she called for the importance of psychosocial factors to be better highlighted in policies.

This feeling of exclusion can demotivate women from entering the formal labour market. They are, however, very active in voluntary work. It is worth considering why their skills are appreciated in informal settings and not in the formal labour market. This gap between employers and migrant women can not only be attributed to one side of the equation: It is important for employers to also play a more proactive role in inclusion.

14 "Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women" available at https://akidwa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LetsTalk2.pdf

2.3.4. Overcoming discrimination against migrant women

According to Marklund, a report by the Swedish Public Employment Service shows that less women than men, among the new arrivals, are given the opportunity to participate in job-oriented initiatives such as labour market training, work placements and subsidized jobs. In contrast, women are channelled into preparatory training and ancillary services to a greater extent. With this background the national Equal Entry programme is now being implemented.

At the same time, barriers are not only on the side of the employer. Sometimes, even when invited, joining meetings and trainings is a challenge for migrant women because they do not have money to travel or do not have access to childcare. Subsequently, in offering such trainings, it is important to customise them based on the specific needs of the migrant women.

Good practice: Upskilling and reskilling for migrant women, Norway

"There is a job opportunity program in Norway. It is a permanent qualification program for women who have not had permanent employment for several years. The programme prioritises stay-at-home women. The key is to develop knowledge and support these women to be financially self-sufficient. 70 percent of the women started jobs or education in this program. This program focuses on work, language training and social orientation."

— Kristin Marklund, Senior advisor, Nordic Welfare Centre

2.3.5. Supporting migrant women with language and vocational training

Some women face challanges in the labour market integration, also due low level of education and skills, including language skills. So it is important to do the assessment of each woman and support them according to their needs. In Nordic countries, refugees have language trainings for the first two years and receive payments for doing so. But they also need opportunities to practice their language skills with native speakers.

The panellist Salome Mbugua underlined the importance of learning the native language, stating that *"language is everything"*. With language, migrant women can navigate themselves through the system and present themselves to the society. She - as well as the other panellists - also echoed the need for trainings to be provided in a customised manner with flexible courses online that can be done while working or with a provision for childcare.

2.4. New skills for migrants with the Europass portal and EU good practices

It has been found that refugees take on average 20 years to reach an employment rate similar to that of the native-born population.[15] It is understandable, therefore, that there is a keen interest in tools or initiatives that can expedite this process. Digital tools in particular have been highlighted as having huge potential in the area of labour market integration. This workshop examined the different functionalities offered by such tools, in particular the renewed Europass system, and considered the early successes as well as opportunities for improvements.

2.4.1. Early successes of the Europass portal

Europass, the European career platform, launched in July 2020 and allows users to create a free profile (in up to 29 European languages) in a secure, online location, listing all their skills, qualifications and experiences. Users can also store diplomas, reference letters or other documents relating to their achievements in their personal Europass library, and make use of online employment, job seeking and education support. With regard to the latter, it helps to bridge migrants to employment opportunities through upskilling and reskilling. The tool can quickly and easily pinpoint skills needed in any given sector or region, helping migrants to establish with ease the ways in which they need to re- or up-skill. So far in 2021, the Europass platform has attracted approximately 500,000 visitors per week.

As part of the EU Skills Agenda, the tool has recently been renewed, expanding its learning opportunities, increasing the number of countries sharing their learning data, and integrating related national initiatives, such as the Global Study Choice Platform which promotes 'study portals' for higher education. Additionally, the European Digital Credentials for Learning Infrastructure (EDCI) has recently been integrated into the Europass platform: It is a tool to support efficiency and security in how credentials, such as qualifications and other learning achievements, can be recognised across Europe.

15 OECD & EU (2016). *How are refugees faring on the labour market in Europe?*. Working paper 1/2016. Accessed via: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/87a8f92d-9aa8-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1

Looking to the future, Ildiko Mazar, Expert at the European Digital Credentials for Learning Infrastructure (EDCI), explained how more opportunities, vacancies and courses will be added to the portal. Moreover, digital attestations for skills and qualifications are currently in development.

In addition to Europass, progress has also been made in the development of other tools that likewise contribute to labour market integration. Cesar Herrero, a researcher at the Joint Research Centre, cited three in particular: 1. EURES, which is an EU portal for jobs and is already live, promoting job opportunities in all 27 EU member states; 2. The EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals which helps with skills mapping, skills matching and offering personalised advice to users; and 3. MOOCs4Inclusion which aims to create a catalogue of free digital learning resources and MOOCs.

Good practice: EURES

EURES is a cooperation network formed by employment services. It is set up to facilitate employment mobility among the member states and it maintains a database of jobs as a useful means to search and apply for jobs in the EU, EEA and Switzerland.

Good practice: EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals

The tool is intended for use by organisations offering assistance to Third Country Nationals. It helps to map the skills, qualifications and work experiences of the third country nationals and to give them personalised advice on further steps, e.g. a referral to recognition of diplomas, skills validation, further training or employment support services.

Good practice: MOOCs4Inclusion

This project focuses on creating a catalogue of free digital learning resources and MOOCs for the inclusion of migrants and refugees. At present, there are 74 free initiatives collected and revised and the final version of the catalgoue is expected to be available at the end of 2022.[16]

2.4.2. Future opportunities in labour market integration

Improving outreach to all people with migrant backgrounds

The outreach of tools, such as the Europass portal, should be expanded to better include and facilitate labour market access for all migrants, not just the highly skilled. Potential solutions here include:

- The development of online information pages in key migrant community languages.
- The use of social media platforms to share employment and training opportunities (targeted / tailored to specific online communities).
- Outreach to companies, community, social organisations that communicate with migrants and refugees already and who can spread the message and tailor it to target group needs (two-fold expertise).

Developing universal professional vocabulary

Migrants risk missing out on job opportunities because they are unfamiliar with the specific terms and concepts included in some job adverts. In order to make job opportunities more accessible to jobseekers with migrant backgrounds, there are a number of potential strategies:

- Improve the accessibility of employment information by better explaining specific terms and concepts in job adverts in order to render them easier to understand for migrants who speak the language but are not trained in sector-specific vocabulary.
- Improve the accessibility of employment information by using standard frameworks (e.g. DigComp) and multilingual controlled vocabularies, such as the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) to describe vacancies in job adverts.
- Facilitate a better understanding of common migrant credentials on the part of employers to support them in being able to recognise migrants' skills when they are presented in an unfamiliar format or when their qualifications are issued by an unfamiliar institution.

16 https://moocs4inclusion.org/

- Wider recognition and acceptance of foreign diplomas and qualifications.
- Make available better support for the accurate translation of job adverts and job applications in order to mitigate the risk of mismatching as a result of vocabulary or concept-related misunderstandings.

Increasing the effectiveness of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offer a way for people with migrant backgrounds to upskill without the need to travel and often without the need to pay (many of them are freely available). Despite this, there is room for improvement in terms of the number of migrants who are signing up to - and completing - these courses. One contributing factor that has been identified is a lack of personal support. Subsequently, potential strategies for mediating this challenge are as follows:

- Facilitation of 'social learning': more opportunities for co-learning and (group) learning with peers.
- More tutoring and mentoring could be offered in conjunction with the courses themselves in order to support people to finish the tasks and ensure they are able to make the most of the learning opportunities offered by their chosen course.

Other opportunities for improvement

During the workshop, panellists outlined several other opportunities for improvement:

- Despite progress having been made in this area, there is still a need for a fully developed, timely, comprehensive system for skills recognition. Virtual recognition procedures can be very slow, and there is still a need to establish good contacts between the developers of these tools, employers and qualification/skills recognition authorities.
- Smaller-scale pilot projects need to be more widely scalable and better recognised at all levels, and their learnings and tools better distributed among all target groups across Europe.
- More support should be made available to companies in the provision of language assistance for migrants in the workplace and to better understand and value the contributions and potential of their migrant and refugee employees.

2.5. Using education as a driver for the social inclusion of migrant children and their families

According to PISA 2018 results,[i] pupils with a migrant background lag behind their peers with a non-migrant background in many EU Member states. This trend has likely been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent switch to online classrooms, as children of immigrants tend to have fewer access to a computer and a home environment suitable for distance learning (OECD 2020).[17]

In response, inclusiveness and social cohesion are among the key EU policy priorities outlined in the European cooperation in education and training 2020 strategic framework.[18] Moreover, the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) underlines that education is one of the most powerful tools for building more inclusive societies and that schools can become hubs of integration and inclusion for migrant children and their families. Additionally, in 2021, the Council adopted the **European Child Guarantee** which provides guidance and tools for Member States to prevent and combat social exclusion among the EU's children, including those with a migrant background. As the first European Union instrument devoted to combating social exclusion in childhood, it aims to guarantee effective access to a number of services, which are key for child development.

17 https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/

18 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48584/st06289-re01-en21.pdf

2.5.1. Barriers to the inclusion of migrant children and their families

While language issues are important and are often cited as the biggest barrier to inclusion, the panellists of this workshop stressed the understated role of cultural differences. Janice Darmanin, a Research Analyst at the Institute for Education in Malta, recounted her own memories of transitioning to a new culture: *"Coming to Malta was quite traumatic because the culture shift was quite big for me as a 9 year old child. The education system was completely different."* Indeed, such cultural differences can often lead to confusion and misinterpretations. Children that appear to lack social skills may simply be remaining quiet out of cultural norms, while, similarly, a perceived lack of engagement of parents might not be a result of indifference but, rather, the fact that in some countries of origin questioning the teacher is considered to be impolite and inappropriate. Here, according to Michalis Kakos, Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Childhood Education and Society (CIRCES), empowering students and parents to communicate their views and understandings is key.

Policy implementation was another challenge highlighted in the workshop. Even when policies are in place, the implementation of these policies 'on the ground' can be difficult. Shamla Tsargand, Founder of the NGO 'PARTicipate' and Member of the EU Expert group on the views of migrants, explained that *"in the Netherlands school tends to be diverse but unfortunately when it comes to practise it is not always the case because inclusion and respect to diversity is difficult to achieve."* Specifically, while social inclusion is very beneficial to every child in the classroom and this is reflected in policy, in practice when it comes to implementation there are many concerns to be addressed.

Additionally, migrant children and their families may be carrying trauma from their home countries or journeys to Europe, plus even upon arrival the transition to a new school and culture may in itself be traumatising, especially when also facing forms of discrimination.

Good practice: Institute for Education, Malta

In a school in Malta, **a focus group** with different parents of different nationalities including Maltese, helps to empower parents and give them a venue in which they can voice their thoughts, feelings and questions. Here, parents discuss a range of topics, including those related to the school's decision making process and what they would do to improve the community within the school, resulting in the generation of several good ideas. The parents are united by their desire to create the best learning environment for their children and the focus group has generated cross-cultural understanding between migrant and non-migrant parents.

Good practice: NGO PARTicipate, the Netherlands

Shamla Tsargand, Founder of PARTicipate, explains the commitment in the Netherlands toward communication between parents of migrant children and their native Dutch counterparts: "We try to have conversation groups about the school system in the Netherlands, what elements of education can you question and how do you question it, how to communicate effectively with school etc. Parents are not happy with the marks of their kids but they are hesitating to communicate it. We bring together Dutch parents and non-Dutch parents so that they could also discuss out of school activities because this is also very crucial. We tried to create this environment for safe communication."

2.5.2. The need for an individualised approach to child education and inclusion

Migrant children and their parents are not a homogeneous group. They come from a variety of different cultures, have had different experiences and have different personalities and styles of learning. It is essential, therefore, that programmes aiming to inclusively educate migrant children should be customised to the specific needs of children and their families. Here, panellists stressed the need for teachers, at the beginning of the school year, not to rush into the curriculum but instead to take the time to learn about their students, their nationalities and their cultures. In order to complement this approach, children may benefit from classes or sessions promoting personal and social development. Such an approach is supported in Malta, whereby the educational system requires differentiated learning whereby the teacher needs to provide an individual programme for the child if the child needs differentiated material.

In schools where individualised and supportive environments have been provided, migrant children have 'flourished' and even outperformed their non-migrant counterparts. Such variation in outcomes once again underlines the heterogeneity among all children, including migrant children, and why an **individualised approach** is recommended. While migrant children are still more likely to lag behind in terms of school grades, this is not predetermined and a more individualised approach to learning may help to narrow the gap. Additionally, Darmanin also underlined the key role played by parents, as children with engaged and supportive parents are more likely to flourish, regardless of the children's nationality. Subsequently, involving the parents is also very important.

2.5.3. Recognising the valuable input of migrant leaders in policy development and implementation

Panellists stressed how, for many decades, the decisions and strategies on how migrants should be integrated have been made without the input or voices of migrants themselves. More recently, the European Commission has made efforts to incorporate the feedback of migrant organisations and these efforts are to be commended. However, according to one panellist, there remains room for improvement in terms of the extent to which this feedback is listened to and implemented. In addition to including more migrant voices in policy creation, the recruitment of more teachers from migrant backgrounds also represents an opportunity for improvement.

3. Conclusions and key policy messages

3.1. Lessons learnt and conclusions

The Conference brought the opportunity to share objective data, positive narratives and numerous good practice projects – with a focus on skills intelligence, skills learning, housing and inclusion of migrant women and children.

Through the presentation and discussion of the issues and their solutions, several key lessons emerged. First, the role of language learning - an issue which surfaced in all five of the workshops -seems key. At the same time, it was also stressed that it is not the only factor, as cultural differences can often play a less obvious but equally important role. Second, the EU's funding and proactive approach to integration and inclusion was commended by panellists and speakers. Nevertheless, some called for the funding and interventions to be better targeted. Here, although there has been a trend toward greater inclusion of migrant leaders in the planning and implementation of initiatives, this could be expanded upon and would lead to more informed, targeted initiatives. Additionally, more programmes are needed to specifically target women migrants. Their role here seems pivotal, as they are a disadvantaged group within a disadvantaged group - with lower employment rates than migrant men - and, as pointed out by the Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, *"when migrant women do well, their children are more likely to do well too"*. Perhaps one of the greatest opportunities, therefore, is to offer more targeted initiatives that empower migrant women to be included in the labour market and society in general. Finally, another recurring theme at the conference was that integration and inclusion is a two-way process. Migrants and their families are just one side of the equation: It is important for initiatives to also target the receiving society, helping to provide a more inclusive environment and leading to outcomes that benefit all members of society.

3.2. Key policy messages

Skills intelligence: addressing skills shortages and helping migrants to find employment.

- Labour shortages will remain a key issue in Europe. Particularly in the hospitality and transport sectors, intra EU mobility and third-country migration can help to address skills mismatches. Because of demographic factors, all skill levels will be needed in the longer term.
- Big data tools, like the Skills-OVATE tool offered by CEDEFOP, provide the chance to foresee skills shortages. The amount of data that can be collected at the EU level is immense and could be used to develop successful, sustainable training programmes to help fill skills gaps.
- Good relationships - and particularly trust - between jobseekers and employers are essential. They can be improved via increased opportunities to bring them together, such as mentoring, networking, training, job fairs, structured collaboration through social partners, and workshops on diversity and anti-discrimination. Also, it is important to provide the different services at one location where migrants can be brought together.
- Matching experienced professionals with migrant and refugee jobseekers for mentoring and support can be an incredibly successful tool in the integration of migrants into the labour market.
- Improving the self-confidence of migrant job seekers is a necessity. Increased opportunity for recognition of their qualifications and skills would facilitate this, as well as better and more accessible, sustainable training, personalised support and mentoring programmes, and a greater variety of opportunities for social and professional fulfilment of their potential. An example of an online tool which combines these different elements is the EU Skills Profile Tool.

Finding sustainable housing solutions for migrants.

- Migrants in the EU are more likely to be homeless than their native counterparts. This situation is a result of a number of factors, including discrimination, migrants' residency status, low-income levels as well as a critical lack of affordable housing in the EU. Policies and programmes, therefore, should be tailored to the specific needs of homeless people with a migrant background.
- There are estimated to be as many as 22 million empty homes in the EU. Sustainable housing initiatives that make use of these homes not only help to reduce homelessness among people with migrant backgrounds, but also provide landlords with additional income that they would not otherwise receive.
- When considering housing options for migrants, it should be taken into account that they cannot be housed in isolated regions, as access to training and employment opportunities is essential to their labour market integration and inclusion.
- Policies and programmes need to target not only people with migrant backgrounds, but also landlords and local neighbourhoods. By facilitating relations, including providing intercultural education and training to the local community, a support system can be provided around migrants and their families.
- Migrants should be made aware of their rights and how they can protect these rights.
- Accommodation projects and programmes should be connected with other support programmes, as those requiring housing would often benefit from other programmes and vice versa.

Increasing the employment opportunities for migrant women.

- Migrant women are not a homogeneous group. Some women, for example, are highly educated, while others have no formal education. For this reason, it is important to assess the situation of each woman upon arrival and to customise labour market integration programmes to their specific needs.
- Many women refugees and asylum seekers have experienced trauma in their countries of origin and/or on their migration journey to Europe. For those affected in this way, counselling should be provided, even before the provision of employment opportunities.
- Discrimination and prejudice on the side of employers, even unintentional and unconscious, can act as a barrier to migrant women entering the labour market. Projects and policies in this area, therefore, should not only target migrant women, but also the employer side of the equation. Employers should be provided with training and equipped with tools to facilitate their ability to be more inclusive.

- In order to increase the number of migrant women in entrepreneurship, assistance should be provided to grow their social networks, as social capital has been shown to be a key prerequisite to running a successful business.
- With a high number of migrant women staying at home, early intervention is key. Outreach programmes to reach them at home offer a potential solution. NGOs and civil society organisations can play a key role here.
- Language and vocational training are essential, but need to be offered in a flexible manner that can be combined with childcare responsibilities.

New skills for migrants with the Europass portal and EU good practices.

- Many different tools for migrant skills development are already available, and many others are in development. In terms of dissemination and uptake of these tools, however, there is still room for improvement.
- The European Digital Credentials for Learning Infrastructure (EDCI) is currently being further developed as a tool to support efficiency and security in how credentials - such as qualifications and other learning achievements - can be recognised. It aims to support the process of recognition.
- However, recognising certification and degrees remains an ongoing challenge, particularly when an individual cannot provide proof and the qualification was issued by an institution that is unknown or no longer accessible.
- Access to obtaining relevant information is reported to be a challenge for migrants. For this purpose, a dedicated page for third country nationals has been launched within the updated Europass portal, providing all kinds of information relevant for third country nationals, including about recognition.
- Language as a barrier in job seeking and integration is a key issue. Offering language courses in combination with job search advice offers a potential solution here. Translation of job adverts into migrant languages can help to overcome issues with specific professional vocabulary and concepts.

Using education as a driver for the social inclusion of migrant children and their families.

- Migrant children statistically underperform in schools when compared to their native peers, which is more likely to stem from factors such as segregated schools, a lack of guidance and assistance from teachers in the classroom and adverse socio-economic climates at home rather than being a direct result of migrant children's backgrounds. For this reason, targeted programmes and policies are required in order to address these inequalities and untapped potential.
- Efforts should be made at the school level to get to know migrant children and their families that will be part of the school community and provide them with a sense of belonging that they will need to feel empowered to actively participate.
- Migrant children and their families are a heterogenous group with a variety of backgrounds. Prior to starting to teach the curriculum, teachers should be given the opportunity to first get to know their students, their origins and cultures, so that lessons can subsequently be designed to accommodate their specific needs.
- Teachers should be provided with training in intercultural communication and more efforts need to be made to remove cultural bias in education with a greater focus not on teaching 'nationals', but instead 'global-citizens'.
- Every child should be given the opportunity to flourish in their education journey by providing the children with all that they need to learn and develop, not only in terms of their academic development, but also their psycho-social needs and well-being.
- As successful policies and programmes depend on intercultural sensitivity and understanding, it is important for migrants to be involved in the design and implementation of such policies and programmes. The recent efforts of the European Commission to involve greater migrant participation and leadership are to be commended, however, they need to be continued and to go further.

Additional information

- Link to the Conference agenda, background papers and speakers' presentations

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