

NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

# POLICY BRIEFING ON HOUSING FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

'In this village we were living in an asylum pension. Far away from public places. I asked myself, what am I doing here?'

**ECRE**



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e p  
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programme

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In 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBPs) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication A Common Agenda for Integration, the European Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.<sup>1</sup> This policy briefing focuses on the implementation of CBP 6: 'Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration', and CBP 7: 'Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.'

The living environment and conditions in terms of housing is key to the integration of refugees and migrants. Only by making housing equally accessible to refugees, migrants and national citizens, as well as stimulating multicultural living environments will integration succeed.

In most Member States, many actors, governmental (national, regional and local authorities) and non-governmental, are involved in organising and managing housing facilities, as well as providing accommodation for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The cooperation of these different stakeholders in providing accommodation in combination with social counselling and integration programmes is essential for the realisation of the above two principles, and should be an integral part of any housing solution.

However, the reality in most Member States is that for many asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, the lack of adequate housing is an obstacle to integration into the receiving society. In addition, depending on their legal status, gender, civic status, and nationality, these particular groups face manifold barriers, especially financial and social disadvantages to acquire decent housing. For many, housing is scarce, rents are high, living conditions are poor, and often the only neighbourhoods available are deprived areas. Insufficient and inadequate social assistance often leads vulnerable groups amongst the immigrants, such as new arrivals, undocumented migrants and in some cases asylum seekers and refugees, to situations of homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

## Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

### DEPRIVED AREAS AND INTERACTION WITH THE HOST SOCIETY

Due to their socially disadvantaged position, many migrants and refugees end up living in deprived areas of cities where housing conditions are poor and unemployment is high. In many European cities so-called 'ghettos', where migrant communities live together separately from most of the native population, are on the increase. The poor living conditions, lack of opportunities and lack of contact between migrants and the native population in such neighbourhoods have a bad impact on migrants' and refugees' integration.

For positive and sustainable integration it is very important to promote the development of socially and ethnically mixed communities, as well positive dialogues between different migrant groups and the host society. Social housing, as well as reception centres, should be integrated into already existing residential areas, mainstreaming the availability and the delivery of social services (e.g. childcare, health centres, job centres, educational facilities, sport fields etc.) to asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and the local population.

### HOUSING DURING THE ASYLUM CLAIM

Adequate housing for asylum seekers is a condition for their future integration. Most asylum seekers are accommodated in reception centres, which are often not conveniently located and normally isolated from social and health services and facilities. In some Member States asylum seekers have access to independent housing.<sup>3</sup>

It is important that these housing arrangements and services take into account the needs of particular groups, such as unaccompanied minors, single women, single mothers, the disabled, and the elderly.

Accommodation in reception centres for asylum seekers should, where possible, be limited to a maximum of 6 months, after which access to independent housing should be facilitated. Any housing arrangements should provide legal, social and psychological services that take into account the individual needs of particular groups.

### **NEWLY RECOGNISED REFUGEES**

Most Member States do not offer enough support to prepare newly recognised refugees<sup>4</sup> for their life without material assistance. This makes the transition to independent accommodation, and ultimately integration, more difficult, and increasingly, puts refugees at risk of homelessness. Upon receiving permission to stay, people accommodated in reception centres should be given all necessary information to make an informed decision following full consideration of the type and location of housing that might be available to them.

It is important to prepare, guide and assist asylum seekers and refugees during and after their transition phase from direct provisions in reception centres to independent accommodation. This could include social guidance classes as part of their integration programme, looking at how to rent, how to apply for a loan and social benefits, how to pay for electricity, gas and other amenities.

### **THE PRIVATE HOUSING MARKET**

In many Member States there is a lack of assistance for newly recognised refugees to find independent accommodation in the private housing market or to provide them with access to social housing. Since newly recognised refugees were often not allowed to earn a living before recognition, it is difficult to save for the rent or the rent deposit necessary on the private housing market, or successfully apply for a bank loan.

Public administrations should take more measures to facilitate access to the private housing market and assist those individuals who cannot compete on the private housing market in finding social housing. Governments could provide housing allowances or subsidies, as well as help with deposits and (credit) references.

### **DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM IN THE PRIVATE HOUSING MARKET**

Aside from legal restrictions and financial barriers, many newly recognised refugees are often socially disadvantaged in terms of language, ethnicity, religion, size of their family, legal status etc. These hindrances could be more easily overcome if different stakeholders at all levels work together to face up to discrimination and racism that this particular group is facing in the private housing market.

It is important to involve all members of society in the struggle against discrimination and racism in the private housing market, especially practices that impede the access of refugees and migrants to housing opportunities. Stakeholders involved in the implementation of the right to housing for refugees and migrants, should include refugees and migrants, tenants/residents and housing associations, landlords, and public administrations.

<sup>1</sup>See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

<sup>2</sup>See Caritas Europa, Migration, a Journey into Poverty? A Caritas Europa study on poverty and exclusion of immigrants in Europe, June 2006.

<sup>3</sup>ECRE recommends that independent housing and community developments should be the basis of any reception system for asylum applications. Any obligation to stay in state-sponsored reception centres should be kept to a minimum. See ECRE's report The EC Directive on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, November 2005, p.18.

<sup>4</sup>Most of whom have lived in reception centres for a long period of time waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

### ITALY

Throughout Italy there are initiatives such as the one in Bergamo, where the Casa Amica, a 'social housing' agency, has been involved in the creation of a network amongst the most important stakeholders in the field (e.g. local municipality, province, migrant associations and house-builders association), and promotes projects for housing, buying and renovating apartments in order to make them available for rent to disadvantaged persons, including refugees.

### THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR) has a presence both in reception centres (and all other asylum seekers centres), as well as local departments in the majority of the country's municipalities. In the reception centres, the DCR team informs refugees about existing housing possibilities, and often organise one or

two 'facilitation days' to ease the move from a centre to independent housing. In these 'facilitation days', a volunteer assists the refugee and/or family with signing the rental agreement, applying for a loan to furnish the house, applying for social benefits, gas and electricity, etc. In most municipalities, the local departments of the DCR will provide social guidance as part of the integration programme, which is organised by the municipality and which the refugee is obliged to follow.

### PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Refugee Council (PRC), with the help of EQUAL I funding, started with the construction of a new reception centre in Loures. It is integrated in a residential area and it will be, in part, a community centre. The services available (kindergarden, sports field, documentation centre) will both be delivered to asylum seekers and to the local society.

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This policy briefing has been produced by the NGO Network of Integration Focal Points, which brings together 28 non-governmental organisations in 19 European countries in the refugee and migration field with the aim of advocating for better integration policies and practices for refugees and migrants in Europe. The Network is coordinated by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) in liaison with Caritas Europa. The Network was established in June 2005 and received financial support from the European Commission (INTI preparatory Actions 2004) and the Network of European Foundations (European Programme for Integration and Migration) from September 2006 to February 2007.

This policy briefing is part of a series of six on the integration of refugees and migrants in Europe addressing the following topics: Housing; Introduction and language courses; Assessment of skills and recognition of qualifications; Vocational training and (higher) education; Employment and employment support; and Civic and political participation.

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FRONT COVER: This quote has been taken from ECRE's Refugee Stories project, which relates the experience of men and women who have sought sanctuary in one of 12 EU countries over the past ten years. More information: [www.ecre.org/refugeestories/](http://www.ecre.org/refugeestories/)

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NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

# POLICY BRIEFING ON INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES AND LANGUAGE COURSES FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

'The first priorities that a country has to care for have to be: language, work and accommodation. The obligation of any country is to help the refugee make a new start.'



**I**n 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBP) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication A Common Agenda for Integration, the Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.<sup>1</sup> This policy briefing focuses on the implementation of CBP 4:

‘Basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire the basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.’

In most Member States, this principle is pursued by the development and implementation of introduction programmes and/or integration or citizenship exams for refugees and migrants. In many Member States, these programmes are part of a national integration strategy or policy in which local authorities play an important role in their implementation. Other implementing actors are educational institutions, private sector organisations and NGOs.

Most courses contain a language component and information on the receiving countries’ society and culture, including an increasing emphasis on ‘Western norms and values’. In some countries, refugees and migrants (with some exceptions) are compelled to participate in such programmes and could be penalised (mainly through withdrawal of benefits) when they do not attend. In most countries, the courses are free of charge, but in some, refugees and migrants have to pay the costs themselves (for example in the Netherlands).

Introduction programmes are potentially an important tool for the integration of refugees and migrants. It is clearly in the interest of both receiving societies and refugees and migrants that such programmes are effective.

## Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

### NATIONAL INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES

In many Member States, there is a lack of a coherent national policy or strategy for the integration of refugees and migrants. Governments’ investment in introduction programmes vary widely, for example Italy spends only €42 million<sup>2</sup> a year on specific integration programmes in comparison to €493 million in Denmark. Local authorities, therefore, often do not have the resources to implement introduction programmes effectively and have a lack of qualified staff to respond to the various needs of refugees and migrants. In addition, there is an uneven provision of programmes within countries. In rural areas authorities particularly struggle to offer programmes that meet refugees and migrants’ needs.

All Member States should have an integration strategy with a coherent and consistent national introduction programme. A substantial increase in funding is necessary in most Member States to increase the availability and quality of introduction programmes. The resources should be allocated effectively and strategically to facilitate the provision of the introduction programmes and language courses in both urban and rural areas.

### INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES FOR ALL

In most countries, asylum seekers are excluded or have limited access to introduction programmes. This has a negative impact on their integration process and that of their children. Also, those with subsidiary forms of protection are sometimes excluded from introduction programmes despite the fact that they have exactly the same needs as recognised refugees. In addition, there is a need to address the integration needs of migrants who are long-term residents.

Member States should offer introduction programmes to all refugees and migrants, including asylum seekers<sup>3</sup> and those with subsidiary forms of protection, and ideally not only to newcomers, but also to people who have already been in the country for some time.

### **INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES AND THE LABOUR MARKET**

Introduction programmes generally do not sufficiently connect with vocational training or the labour market and often lack proper follow up. After completion refugees and migrants are often unable to access further training or education and/or need more individual support to find suitable employment.

Introduction programmes should be rooted in the local community and include good contacts with employers. Depending on their needs and aspirations, participants should receive individual assistance from a trained professional to facilitate progress towards further language or vocational training, voluntary work, work placements, (higher) education or suitable employment.

### **QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF LANGUAGE COURSES**

The availability, quality and length of language courses vary across Europe. The number of hours is often insufficient to achieve a language level necessary to progress towards further training, education or suitable employment. Teaching methods used are sometimes not suitable and teachers are not always suitably qualified and/or sufficiently trained in methods for teaching a second language.

In all Member States, the quality of the teaching should be commensurate to the mainstream education service. The receiving country should ensure that the teaching of the language courses is delivered by professionals adequately trained in the instruction of the language as a second language.

### **INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

Obviously, refugees and migrants are a very diverse group with different educational levels, professional backgrounds, family commitments, and aspirations. However, introduction programmes tend to be packages, where highly educated and illiterate persons sometimes follow the same language classes. Introduction programmes are more effective when they are tailored to the individual needs of refugees and migrants.

Introduction programmes should take into account individual circumstances (for example childcare needs or other commitments), language needs, educational level, and social needs of the participants. Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups, such as single parents and people who are illiterate.

### **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES**

In recent years there has been a growing tendency to connect integration policies to admission policies. Integration requirements such as language skills or knowledge of the host country are increasingly becoming a precondition not only for obtaining citizenship, but also for entry and residence permit. In addition, to ensure participation in the introduction/language programmes, the emphasis is mostly on sanctions (such as reductions in benefits).

Introduction programmes should be free of charge and participation should be stimulated by positive incentives rather than sanctions. Integration requirements such as language skills or knowledge of the host countries' history, culture and values should not be a precondition for obtaining entry or residence permits.

<sup>1</sup>See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

<sup>2</sup>See European Commission, Communication on immigration, integration and employment, 3 June 2003, COM (2003) 336 final.

<sup>3</sup>The European Parliament calls upon Member States “to make provisions for integration-related measures for refugees during the reception phase, such as language courses and voluntary work activities, taking in consideration the fact that the integration process for refugees starts during the reception phase.” Report on strategies and means for the integration of immigrants in the European Union, 6 July 2006, (2006/2056(INI)).

## EXAMPLES OF INTRODUCTION PROGRAMMES

### DENMARK

A three-year introduction programme offers good opportunities to learn the language and takes into account different levels of ability. Attention is also paid to the professional and educational background of refugees and migrants and support is tailored (to a certain extent) to the individuals' needs, and includes employment-promoting activities. However, the approach has negative elements, with a focus on sanctions rather than incentives, and little attention to barriers in society such as (indirect) discrimination.

### FINLAND

In the last few years, there have been advancements both in the quality and availability of integration programmes and language courses. A positive step has been the possibility to extend the period for completing the integration plan from the normal three years to five years for maternity or sickness cases. However, asylum seekers and people with temporary residence permits are excluded from the programmes.

### ITALY

There are many local projects that are tailored to the needs of the local area. NGOs can apply to local authorities for projects, for example programmes that offer work placements for refugees and sensitise employers to the benefits of employing refugees and migrants. However, there is no overall integration strategy; integration programmes are in general 'one package for all' and there is a lack of funding.

### THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands introduction programmes are accessible for migrants who are long-term residents but still have integration needs. Programmes are obligatory, candidates need to pay for their own programme and there is a strong emphasis on sanctions when people fail to participate.

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**FRONT COVER:** This quote has been taken from ECRE's *Refugee Stories* project, which relates the experience of men and women who have sought sanctuary in one of 12 EU countries over the past ten years. More information: [www.ecre.org/refugeestories/](http://www.ecre.org/refugeestories/)

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NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

# POLICY BRIEFING ON THE ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

'I am a graduate from the university and I am sweeping the floor. I know that I am not alone in that situation.'



In 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBP) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication A Common Agenda for Integration, the Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.<sup>1</sup> This policy briefing relates to the implementation of CBP 3: 'Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible', and CBP 5: 'Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society'

and in particular the action points:

- 'Exploring additional ways of recognising newcomers' qualifications, training and/or professional experience, building upon existing laws and
- Facilitating transparent recognition of qualifications, notably through proposals for a European Qualifications Framework.'

Due to problems with recognition of their qualifications, skills and work experience, many refugees and migrants end up unemployed or underemployed. Many highly-skilled refugees and migrants are working in low-skilled, temporary and badly paid jobs. A loss not only for the affected persons, but also the receiving societies and their economies.

Problems relating to the assessment of skills and recognition of qualifications apply to both refugees and migrants, although refugees are confronted with even more obstacles. Migrants can prepare for the recognition process in the country they choose to live and work. Refugees often leave in a hurry without knowledge of their final destination. They are not always able to bring all their diplomas and certificates with them and/or cannot access the institutions in their host countries that issued their documents. Refugees are more often confronted with these problems because, compared to other immigrants, a larger proportion tend to have higher educational and professional backgrounds.

Experience in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK shows that when migrants' and refugees' qualifications are recognised and/or if they have the opportunity to update their skills and knowledge by undertaking additional training or education, they are more likely to find suitable and long-term employment – matching their skills and qualifications.

## Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

### THE EU DIRECTIVE ON THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

The EU Directive on the recognition of qualifications<sup>2</sup> makes it possible for EU nationals who obtained their professional qualifications in one or more Member States to pursue their profession in other Member States. This Directive is beneficial for those professionals who are EU nationals wishing to relocate within the EU, but it is perceived as discriminatory by professionals from non EU Member States. The latter will have to go through usually lengthy, bureaucratic and expensive recognition procedures, even when they obtained their qualification in another EU country.

The EU Directive on the recognition of qualifications should be extended to third country nationals who have long-term residency.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Long Term Residence Directive<sup>4</sup> should be amended to include refugees and persons with a subsidiary form of protection.

### RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS PROCEDURES

Not all EU Member States have a sufficient legal framework in place to deal with the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals. In all EU Member States the recognition procedures for regulated professions<sup>5</sup> are generally lengthy, bureaucratic and expensive. Diplomas for non-regulated professions tend to be evaluated at different levels by different universities and National Recognition Information Centres (NARICs). However, they tend to be generally assessed (much) less than EU diplomas. Across Europe, refugees have additional problems because they are not always able to bring all their diplomas with them.

All Member States should have a legal framework in place for the recognition of third country qualifications. Within this framework recognition procedures must be fast, transparent, simple, easily accessible, and free of charge. Alternative assessment methods such as exams to prove prior knowledge and working experience, inclusion of alternative documents and interviews to clarify previous education, should be (further) developed.

### **ADAPTING SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS TO THE RECEIVING SOCIETY**

Refugees and migrants generally agree that it is necessary to adapt or upgrade their knowledge and skills to the working standards and culture in the receiving society.<sup>6</sup> This is even more pertinent for refugees who often have been unable to work for years due to their situation of exile and lengthy asylum procedures. In most Member States, there is a lack of suitable training courses that meet the learning needs of these professionals. They often need to go back to university and follow similar courses again to get the same degree in the receiving country. This takes years and is often impossible because of financial difficulties. In addition, there is a lack of information and professional assistance to advise migrants and refugees on suitable progression routes.

Member States should promote and facilitate better cooperation between professional bodies, training providers and universities in order to provide training courses to upgrade qualifications tailored to the needs of third country nationals. The relevant service providers should ensure adequate information and assistance for diploma equivalence and progression routes to training and education that takes into account their skills level. For refugees, financial support is essential to enable them to follow additional training.

### **ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS, QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK EXPERIENCES**

Many migrants and refugees feel that employers undervalue their qualifications, skills and work experiences. Various EU Member States are developing systems (e.g. Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning – AP(E)L) to make the value of people's skills and experience more visible to employers. At European level, there are initiatives such as Europass and the development of a European Qualifications Framework that should make qualifications and competences more comparable and compatible throughout the EU. So far such initiatives have not yet (fully) included third country nationals as a target group.<sup>7</sup>

Qualifications of third country nationals should be included in the development of a European Qualifications Framework. All Member States should have skills audits in place to assess the competences of third country nationals and portfolio building should be further developed as a tool to assess skills, experience and qualifications as soon as possible after arrival in the host country. Skills audits should lead to formal certificates, which can be used for the purposes of further education, vocational training or searching for a job.

<sup>1</sup>See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

<sup>2</sup>See the EU Council Directive 2005/36/EC of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications.

<sup>3</sup>This proposal is in line with the Commission's Communication on immigration, integration and employment, COM(2003) 336 final, and the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee, ECOSOC Opinion (SOC/113), of 18 September 2002 on the Proposal of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications, (COM(2002)119 final).

<sup>4</sup>See the EU Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country national who are long-term residents.

<sup>5</sup>Professions regulated by a professional body, for example medicine, dentistry, law. Some professions are regulated in one country but not in another.

<sup>6</sup>See Education Action International's Report Resource Project – Refugees' Contribution to Europe, February 2004.

<sup>7</sup>The European Thematic Group for Asylum Seekers (ETG5) of the EQUAL programme gathered expertise from different countries including the UK, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark, showing the benefits that skills audits can bring for asylum seekers. See: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/activities/etg5\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/etg5_en.cfm)

## Examples of good practice

### BELGIUM

A pilot project by the Flemish Refugee Council showed the need for adequate information and assistance with diploma equivalence. Such assistance clearly had a positive influence on the chances of the applicants for obtaining a positive decision on their recognition. Analyses showed that people who had an equivalence of their foreign diploma were more often employed according to their level of education. For more information: <http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be>

### THE NETHERLANDS

The University Assistance Fund (UAF) supports about 2500 refugee students each year. Over 70% of the refugee students who graduate find a suitable job within a year. For more information: [www.uaf.nl](http://www.uaf.nl)

### SWITZERLAND

The integration project Cocomo (Coaching, Coordination, Mobilisation) offers skills assessment, practical training/mentoring at the workplace, and unlimited engagement of refugees in Zürich. The project BIRD develops activities to assess skills and professional qualification, and when necessary tries to get them recognised. For more information: [www.cocomo.ch](http://www.cocomo.ch); [www.bird-ge.ch](http://www.bird-ge.ch)

### UNITED KINGDOM

The Refugee Education Training and Advisory Service from Education Action International gives expert advice and guidance on professional re-qualification for refugees and has a successful programme to support refugee medical doctors with the re-qualification process and procedures. For more information: [www.education-action.org](http://www.education-action.org)

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NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

# POLICY BRIEFING ON ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND (HIGHER) EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE.

'I'm excited for when I finish my training. I'll be relieved. Even if I won't know if I will be allowed to work. My training is something that no one can take away from me.'

**ECRE**



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- 'Improving the participation of young migrants in higher education' (CBP 5);
- 'Informing employers and educational institutions about certificates for introduction courses to promote access to the labour market or training opportunities' (CBP3);
- 'Supporting training capacities of small companies, business organisations and trade unions in sectors of the economy employing many migrants' (CBP3);

Employment is acknowledged to be one of the most crucial areas for integration. While the CBPs pay particular respect to enhancing the opportunities of migrant entrepreneurship, there is not enough emphasis on education and training that leads to qualified employment. Here, the CBPs need to be seen in conjunction with each other: education, recognition of skills and qualifications, service provision by private and public bodies, language training and vocational training all need to be cross referenced to ensure that they do not form an end in themselves, but work together to enable labour market participation of refugees and migrants according to their skills and qualifications.

Vocational training, education and language tuition should be seen as facilitators in the process of achieving suitable employment. But they also have a role to play in terms of refugee and migrant empowerment more generally. Developing new skills, especially the language skills to communicate well in the host society, enables refugees and migrants to be active in their own integration.

There are many barriers to successful schooling, and subsequent vocational training or higher education, including institutional restrictions preventing access, a lack of or inadequate financial support and a lack of information about the education system and training courses. Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants face similar problems in terms of access to vocational training and (higher) education, but restrictions in place often have the greatest impact on asylum seekers. Being barred from participating in education and training courses while their claim for asylum is being decided means in many cases lost years in terms of finding work and making a living once a decision has been reached.

## Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

### ACCESS TO TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Access to vocational training and the education system is crucial for refugees and migrants to enable them to adapt their skills and qualifications to the labour market requirements of receiving countries. In most countries, refugees do not have access to vocational training or the education system while their asylum claim is being decided<sup>2</sup> and also, for people who have subsidiary forms of international protection, access to vocational training can be restricted.<sup>3</sup>

*Asylum seekers and persons with subsidiary forms of international protection should be given unrestricted access to vocational training and the education system.*

### A WAY OUT OF THE POVERTY TRAP

In most EU countries, government policies focus on trying to get refugees and migrants into any kind of employment as soon as possible, aiming to make people self-sufficient and independent of state support. In practice this often leads to a situation where skilled migrants and refugees end up working in low skilled, temporary and badly paid jobs. The need to make a living and lack of financial support prevent them from participating in vocational training and (higher) education, which would help them to escape this poverty trap and eventually find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

*In their integration strategies, Member States should develop mechanisms that facilitate refugees' and migrants' access to suitable training and education, for example by granting them permission to study (for a reasonable period of time) without losing social benefits, scholarship programmes or facilitating the possibility to work and study part-time.*

### PREPARATION FOR STUDY

Adequate language skills are essential for refugees and migrants to be able to access mainstream education or vocational training programmes. However, the existing language provision is often insufficient to enable them to reach the necessary entry levels. In countries such as the UK and the Netherlands, refugees and migrants can follow a so-called transition year (also called a preparatory, pre-university, or language and transition course). This year consists of extra language classes (including sometimes language courses adapted to specific academic or professional language) and other necessary subjects and gives them the opportunity to get used to the

host countries' education system. Following a preparatory year significantly reduces the dropout rate.

Member States should ensure that language courses are sufficiently available, adequate and affordable to enable refugees and migrants to reach the level necessary to access further training or education. Educational institutions should cooperate in organising preparatory courses in order to achieve a successful intake of refugee and migrant students and prevent dropout during studies. Furthermore, affordable intensive language courses adapted to specific academic or professional language may also be needed to enable refugees and migrants to enter courses in their field of profession.

#### **ADVICE AND GUIDANCE**

Information and individual advice and guidance services are essential to assist refugees and migrants in finding their way in the education system. Advice is necessary to support them with choosing the right course and exploring options for financial support, childcare etc. In addition, staff of service providers (in particular employment offices) should take more account of refugees' and migrants' previous educational and professional backgrounds and consider their specific training needs, the available courses and support services, and refer them accordingly.

Member States should ensure that refugees and migrants have access to adequate information and individual advice and guidance (for example through a system of case workers) on vocational training and educational opportunities. Staff of the relevant service providers (in particular employment services) should receive training on the specific needs of refugees and migrants and ensure that they are referred to progression routes to training and education that take into account their skills level.

#### **RE-TRAINING OPTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS**

Migrants and in particular refugees with professional backgrounds often face major difficulties in accessing the same profession because their diplomas are not, or only partially, recognised. Recognition procedures for regulated professions are often bureaucratic, expensive and time-consuming and, in most cases, the outcome is that additional training is necessary to re-qualify. Unfortunately, in most Member States, possibilities to follow the necessary training courses that meet the learning needs of these professionals are limited.

Member States and training providers should create opportunities for refugees and migrants to follow suitable training in a learned profession or sector in order to allow them to re-qualify and adapt their skills and experience to the receiving country's labour market requirements.

#### **INVOLVE EMPLOYERS**

Many employers are not sufficiently aware of the skills and economic potential of refugees and migrants. Vocational training should be well coordinated with labour market needs and at the same time be in accordance with the refugees' and migrants' educational and professional levels. In order to lead to employment, vocational training should be especially targeted in fields where there is a labour market shortage. Representatives of employers should be included in vocational training initiatives.

Employers, especially the private sector should be included in vocational training initiatives. Programmes can only be successful if upon completion jobs are available. This requires the awareness and cooperation of the private sector.

<sup>1</sup>See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

<sup>2</sup>Article 11 of the Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers stipulates that Member States must grant conditional access to vocational training and the labour market after a maximum of 12 months of waiting for a first instance decision. This is a minimum standard and Member States are free to establish more favourable provisions. From February 2005 all Member States were bound to have implemented this rule.

<sup>3</sup>Article 26 of the Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on the minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of protection granted allows Member States to restrict access to employment-related education opportunities for adults, vocational training and workplace experience for beneficiaries who have subsidiary forms of international protection.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

### THE NETHERLANDS

The University Assistance Fund (UAF) supports about 2500 refugee students each year. Apart from guidance and (financial) assistance, transition years to prepare foreign speaking students for their studies in the Netherlands are also offered, which reduces dropout rates. For more information: [www.uaf.nl](http://www.uaf.nl)

### BELGIUM

A pilot project by the Flemish Refugee Council provides special guidance and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers who want to start or continue higher education studies in Flanders. For more information: [www.vluchtelingenwerk.be](http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be)

### ITALY

A study by Marco Lombardi entitled 'Percorsi di integrazione degli immigrati e politiche attive del lavoro' shows that it is important to organise programmes involving a network of different actors to address all the different needs of students (like transportation and housing). For more information: [www.ismu.org](http://www.ismu.org).

### PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Refugee Council together with the vocational centre "Centro de Formação Profissional para o Sector Alimentar" (CFPSA) started a pilot project under EQUAL II to integrate asylum seekers in vocational training courses in the restaurant and hotel sector, as these are areas with a shortage of workers in Portugal. For more information: <http://viaas.refugiados.net/a1.html>

### SPAIN

Public institutions, sometimes in collaboration with NGOs, provide skill-training courses to third country nationals (including refugees) that already have some knowledge of the Spanish language. Moreover, there are agreements between NGOs and private companies to provide vocational training for immigrants followed by a job contract in that company.

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FRONT COVER: This quote has been taken from ECRE's Refugee Stories project, which relates the experience of men and women who have sought sanctuary in one of 12 EU countries over the past ten years. More information: [www.ecre.org/refugeestories/](http://www.ecre.org/refugeestories/)

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NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

# POLICY BRIEFING ON EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

'The fact that we can't work is really bad because we can't build our own future. We are dependents. For a human being this situation is the worst.'

**ECRE**



**I**n 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBP) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication A Common Agenda for Integration, the Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.<sup>1</sup> This policy briefing relates to the implementation of CPB 3: 'Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigration, to the contributions immigrants make to the receiving society, and to making such contributions visible'

On June 3rd 2003, the European Commission issued a Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment.<sup>2</sup> This stressed that while immigration should be recognised as a source of cultural and social enrichment, particularly by contributing to entrepreneurship, diversity and innovation, its economic impact on employment and growth is also significant, as it increases labour supply and helps cope with short-term skills shortages. In addition, immigration tends to have an overall positive effect on product demand and therefore on labour demand.

Furthermore, the 'Handbook of Integration for policy makers and practitioners' 2005 says: "The Commission's first Annual report on Migration and Integration (2004) demonstrates that in all Member States the access to the labour market as well as the language skills and a sufficient level of education constitute the most important goals for securing successful integration. At the European level, labour market integration is the area with the most concretely defined policy objectives, as the 2003 Employment Strategy Guidelines propose to achieve a significant reduction in the unemployment gap between non-EU and EU-nationals by 2010".<sup>3</sup> In addition, the EU Directives on 'employment equality' and 'race' form the legislative framework in the fight against racism and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

Refugees and migrants are a very diverse group with different skills levels, language abilities, qualifications, work experiences and ambitions. However, what they do have in common is the fact they suffer higher levels of unemployment than the native population and are often found working in low-skilled, badly paid and temporary jobs. Due to the forced nature of their migration and their experiences, compared with other migrant groups, refugees often face additional difficulties in accessing the labour market.

## Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

### ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Policies and practices across Europe vary considerably regarding granting legal access to the labour market for different groups of migrants. Recognised refugees have unrestricted access to the labour market, but many Member States impose various restrictions for people with subsidiary forms of international protection. The legal right to work for asylum seekers varies across Europe. Some Member States grant access to the labour market early, after three months, while others do not respect the spirit of the EU Reception Directive<sup>5</sup> and use various derogations to prevent asylum seekers from accessing the labour market.<sup>6</sup>

Imposed unemployment causes dependency on state benefits, social exclusion, poverty and de-motivation. Member States should ensure that refugees, people with subsidiary protection and other migrants with a residence permit have unrestricted access to the labour market. Moreover, asylum seekers should be allowed access to paid employment at the earliest possible stage in their asylum application process and not later than six months after arrival.

### LANGUAGE SKILLS

Lack of linguistic proficiency is one of the primary causes of refugees' and migrants' disadvantaged position in the labour market. The quality, availability and length of the programmes vary across Europe. The number of hours is often insufficient to achieve a language level necessary to progress towards further training, education or suitable employment. Some Member States provide language courses for asylum seekers, arguing that this is important to enable their participation and integration in society regardless of the outcome of their asylum procedure. Unfortunately, most Member States exclude asylum seekers from professional language courses.

Member States should facilitate refugees' and migrants' access to suitable language training as soon as possible after arrival. Such courses should be tailored, as far as possible, to the needs of refugees and migrants and provide the level of language necessary for them to access further training or find suitable employment. It is particularly important to make language training accessible to all asylum seekers.

### **PATHWAYS TO SUITABLE EMPLOYMENT**

Sustainable employment is key in the integration process of refugees and migrants. At present, across Europe, refugees and migrants experience much higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than nationals. Many are unable to make use of their previous skills and experience and are often working in low skilled, temporary and badly paid jobs. They are also over-represented in the informal labour market due to lack of access to legal employment and the need to survive (in particular in countries with less developed social benefits systems). It is important to tackle this waste of human resources and better facilitate successful pathways to suitable employment (reflecting their skills and experience), instead of any kind of employment as soon as possible.

Member States should arrange for refugees and migrants to have access to schemes that provide job search training, followed by one-to-one employment support. Although individual employment support is labour-intensive it delivers results by making clients independent and able to compete in the labour market. Staff in employment agencies should be trained to address the specific needs of refugees and migrants, taking into account their skills, qualifications and professional backgrounds. Employment services should enable them to follow appropriate training (for a reasonable time period) without losing unemployment benefits. In addition, mentoring programmes for a wide range of professions should be available.

### **LABOUR MARKET SHORTAGES**

As a result of demographic changes Europe will be increasingly in need of foreign labour to sustain economic growth. Across Europe, employers are experiencing difficulties recruiting

staff at both skilled and unskilled levels. Newly arriving and settled refugees and migrants can make a major contribution towards easing current and future labour market shortages.

Member States should promote the benefits of hiring refugees and migrants to employers and develop systems that provide incentives for employers to hire them. Employers' motivation and commitment in contributing to the integration of refugees and migrants in the labour market can be sustained by offering them information, advice and financial incentives. Employers need to be made aware of the potential and diversity of the workforce as a competitive factor. Moreover, Member States need to promote the potential of this workforce in order to combat the view that it is a 'threat' to the national workforce.

### **DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE**

Many refugees and migrants experience discrimination and prejudice in the job seeking process. Employers often do not trust foreign qualifications or do not value work experiences gained from abroad. Well-qualified job seekers are sometimes not invited to interviews because of their foreign names and perceived lack of language skills is often used as a reason for not hiring refugees and migrants. Discrimination is often fuelled by the negative portrayal of migrants, refugees and in particular asylum seekers by elements of the media and politicians from various political parties.

Governments, politicians and their parties, the media and educational institutions all have a role to play in fostering understanding and solidarity, and ensuring accurate and balanced public information on migration and refugee issues.

<sup>1</sup>See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

<sup>2</sup>COM(2003) 336 final

<sup>3</sup>European Commission, European handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners, 2005, page 10.

<sup>4</sup>Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation and Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

<sup>5</sup>Article 11 of the Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers requires that "Member States shall decide the conditions for granting access to the labour market, if a decision at first instance has not been taken within one year of the presentation of an application and this delay cannot be attributed to the applicant".

<sup>6</sup>See ECRE's report The EC Directive on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, November 2005, p.14-16

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

### THE NETHERLANDS

Emplooi and Job Support are two organisations that operate at the national level and help refugees find suitable employment. Emplooi operates in close cooperation with the Dutch Council for Refugees, as well as with Job Support, which is part of the University Assistance Fund (UAF) Foundation for Refugee Students. Together, these organisations have so far helped approximately 11,000 refugees find employment over a period of 12 years. For more information: [www.emplooi.net](http://www.emplooi.net) and [www.uaf.nl](http://www.uaf.nl)

### SPAIN

Under the EU-initiative ENEAS-EQUAL, actors including the Dirección General de Integración de los Immigrantes, ACCEM, CEAR and the Spanish Red Cross are involved in a programme, which promotes access to the labour market for asylum seekers and persons under humanitarian protection. For more information: [www.eneas-equal.mtas.es/ingles/index.htm](http://www.eneas-equal.mtas.es/ingles/index.htm)

### SWITZERLAND

The association Cocomo (Coaching Coordination Mobilisation, see [www.cocomo.ch](http://www.cocomo.ch)) is setting up a network between local businesses, social services and refugees. It offers different models of practical skills assessment, traineeships and coaching.

### ITALY

The IntegRARsi project funded by the EQUAL initiative, involves 8 local municipalities, the Association of Italian Municipalities (Anci), the 4 major protection organisations (CIR, ICS, ARCI and Caritas), IOM, CENSIS (Italian Centre for Social Studies and Policies) and Formautonomie. Its objectives include the availability of information and orientation services for asylum seekers, the development of regional models in order to transfer good practice and raising awareness of refugee and asylum seekers' rights. For more information: [www.integrarsi.anci.it](http://www.integrarsi.anci.it)

### PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Refugee Council, together with the vocational centre Centro de Formação Profissional para o Sector Alimentar (CFPSA), set up a pilot project aimed at integrating asylum seekers in vocational training courses in areas such as the catering sector where there is a shortage of workers, in order to give them direct access to the labour market. For more information: <http://viaas.refugiados.net/a1.html>

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