

EUROPEAN SUMMIT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS



European Coalition
A Key For Inclusion

POLICY OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS PAPER

May 2019

“A space to bring together refugee and migrant leaders from Europe to influence the European Agenda and European policies as new active citizens”

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

On 4 and 5 May 2019, refugee and migrant leaders living in Europe gathered for the European Summit for refugees and migrants in Brussels. The summit aimed at bringing together at least 60 refugee and migrant leaders from all of the European countries (28 including the United Kingdom) to plan and coordinate their efforts and influence the European agenda and European policies as new active EU citizens.

The European Summit was deliberately scheduled to take place before the elections of the European Parliament where issues such as migration and refugee inclusion dominated the political debates in many member states.

The objectives of the summit were threefold:

1. **To strengthen refugees'/migrants' agency and capacity to effectively influence** European decision-making processes, including by ensuring the voices of refugees and migrants are heard at the national and European levels.
2. **To build a European coalition** of refugee-led and migrant-led advocates capable of influencing the EU agenda and decision-making processes on refugee and migrant policies. This coalition will serve as the European chapter of the Global Refugee-led Network.
3. **To coordinate activities** for future refugee-led and migrant-led advocacy by identifying crosscutting EU policy priorities, develop joint recommendations to improve EU policies on refugees and migration and agree on a road map of future activities including a capacity development program of the advocates.

This paper outlines the main outcomes of the discussions and features key recommendations for improving European refugee and migration policies in four thematic areas, namely inclusion and participation, education, health and wellbeing and access to protection. This paper provides an overview of the main challenges and offers key recommendations to address those challenges.

Identified Challenges

- Inclusion and Participation
- Access to Labour Market
- Systemic Discrimination, Racism and Xenophobia
- Understanding Rights and Responsibilities
- Education
- Health and Wellbeing
- Protection

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

The inclusion of migrants and refugees into European societies presents an enormous opportunity. Inclusion and participation can be enhanced in several ways. In this paper, focus lies on three sub-themes that have been identified as key areas for meaningful inclusion of migrants and refugees. The first one is access to the labour market, as employment remains one of the most valuable ways to be integrated into the host society.

Employment is not only valuable for migrants and refugees themselves, but also for governments, employers and other stakeholders. The second factor that enhances inclusion and participation of migrants and refugees is the prevention and combating of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Unfortunately, racism and discrimination against migrants, particularly against Muslim migrants impedes successful inclusion and participation of migrants and refugees into the society of host communities. Third, an important factor for inclusion of migrants and refugees is to know and fully understand their rights and duties as newcomers.

ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKET

Being able to access the job market of a host country is crucial for participation and inclusion of migrants and refugees. Nevertheless, many people face hurdles and obstacles hindering them from accessing job markets in receiving societies, which are laid down below:

- a. **Language requirements** - limited language skills present a major obstacle to employment, especially for jobs for which qualifications are needed. Language courses are not always readily available to migrants due to waiting lists or high costs.
- b. **Legal barriers, i.e. lack of recognition of education and professional degrees** - migrants and refugees face difficulties in getting their previous education followed in their home country recognized in the receiving country. Official diplomas or other educational degrees are not recognized which hinders access to jobs for which those qualifications are required.
- c. **Difficulties in accessing education and professional training** - migrants and refugees face numerous difficulties in accessing formal education, especially those who are over 18 years old.
- d. **Lack of positive public attitudes - migrants often feels** that a positive attitude towards their potential is lacking. Diversity programs exist in some countries, but especially outside of the public sector diversifying the workforce remains a challenge. This lack of positive attitudes is also due to the lack of role models, who have succeeded in accessing the job market, representing and giving voice to other aspiring migrants and refugees.
- e. **Administrative struggles** - to access the labour market having a social security and a tax number is a prerequisite. For migrants

- without a physical address it is not always easy or possible to obtain such documents, excluding them from the labour market.
- f. **Lack of information for potential employers** - Potential employers do not always see an immediate business case for hiring refugees or migrants. This is not necessarily due to unwillingness to hire them, but mostly due to a lack of available information on the skills and potential of migrants and refugees.
 - g. **Uncertainty on legal status and duration of stay** - the temporality of the stay of migrants and uncertainties related to their administrative status brings many difficulties for getting into education programs and employment.
 - h. **Different rights corresponding to different status** - administrative distinctions between different types of permits (temporary, permanent) is reflected in the political distinction between students, migrants, highly skilled migrants, refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, etc. This leads to confusion and uncertainty for both migrants and employers and impedes access to economic opportunities.
 - i. **Pressure** - migrants experience a lot of pressure, for example during an asylum procedure in which they have to submit evidence to substantiate their claims, but also after obtaining their legal status in order to become self-reliant. At the same time, migrants often still have traumas that have not been dealt with or they suffer from psychological stress.

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION, RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

1. **Discrimination on the job and the housing market** - Migrants are often discriminated as landlords reject them as tenants and their job applications get disregarded because of a family name or photo in a CV. In addition, landlords often expect deposits, which migrants are not able to afford due to their weak economic situation.
2. **Racial profiling** - while racial profiling is forbidden by law, migrants and refugees feel discriminated as they are coming under increasing suspicion when travelling, during security checks or anti-terrorism operations of security forces. This fuels the feeling of being excluded.
3. **Lack of political representation** - Migrants and refugees are not always visible as political actors; as politicians on a local or national level, or in leading roles at companies. This increases the ‘fear of the unknown’ and leads to discrimination and xenophobia.
4. **Lack of soft skills** - in order to create mutual understanding between migrants and members of the host society soft skills are crucial. Civil servants or government officials often lack intercultural communication skills, while migrants’ often still distrust public authorities due to previous negative experiences. The lack of soft skills on both sides leads to misunderstandings, ‘fear of the other’ and discrimination.

UNDERSTANDING RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **Lack of information about and access to rights** - migrants are often not well informed about their (labour or other) rights, exposing them to risks such as exploitation. Especially in rural areas migrants and refugees are not aware of their rights, as there is less civil society engagement.
2. **Available information on rights and duties is not accessible for everyone** - even when the relevant information is there, migrants and refugees face several barriers in accessing or processing these information. Information is often provided in the local language, or translations are not always accurate. At the same time, not being aware of crucial duties such as the obligation to pay certain taxes can lead to issues. Administrative terminology is often hard to understand, even for those who speak the local language. Information are at time only available online, but migrants that do not have access to a device or lack digital skills cannot make use of this channel.
3. **Awareness on local customs and traditions** - communication with authorities varies widely amongst states, (levels of) authorities and cultures. Migrants are not always aware of how to communicate with authorities (e-mail, in person, etc.) or how to ask them for the relevant information.

EDUCATION

Access to education, both to schools and further higher education institutions is crucial for the inclusion and integration of migrant and refugee communities. Nevertheless, they often face numerous obstacles in accessing education opportunities, which are listed down below:

1. **Migrants and refugees face difficulties in getting existing qualifications recognized** the **lack of information** about educational opportunities, and financial difficulties (to access language courses and to invest in higher education rather than immediate job prospects etc.). Additionally, women and mothers face extra difficulties in accessing education due to **lack of flexible schedules**.
2. **The existing education systems often lack flexibility.** Legal status determines access to education, keeping many children and young people without a definite status from educational opportunities.
3. **The lack of harmonisation of education laws across the EU** makes it difficult for migrants and refugees to pursue their education in a different EU country than their country of arrival.
4. **Language** remains a key barrier to access quality education. Language segregation in schools does not encourage inclusion and rapid progress in learning the new language. Countries with more than one official language bring an additional layer of challenge. But most importantly, the same barriers as to general education apply to accessing language training.

5. General lack of cultural knowledge and awareness across educational institutions and professionals hinders efforts towards inclusion in the education system.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Health and the wellbeing of migrants and refugees is crucial for their inclusion, participation and flourishing in society. However, there are many challenges that remain for migrants and refugees to achieve this. These are laid down below.

1. Due to a lack of information on available (medical) services access to medical care and services is often impeded. Many migrants and refugees are not aware of their right to access quality care, many are also not familiar with medical practices in their host countries, making them suspicious of available services. In particular, there is a very strong lack of accessible information on **sexual health and mental health** – both issues that can be difficult to express within migrant communities.
2. Cultural and language barriers further limit access to and effective practices of medical services. This translates into communication difficulties between doctors and patients, which may lead to inadequate diagnosis or treatment. Hospitals or medical institutions often lack professional interpreters, which further increases the language and cultural barriers.
3. The lack of cultural awareness among doctors of the host community leads to discrimination against migrants/refugees coming from regions with specific diseases. These barriers further lead to misunderstandings between practitioners and patients and an environment of mistrust.
4. National government invest only limited resources into providing healthcare for migrants and refugees. In practice, this translates into long waiting lists and priorities given to situations of 'emergencies', with no preventive care. This further leads to limited access to specialist care for migrants and refugees, with no early diagnosis of serious medical conditions. In particular, there is a **lack of investment in mental health care for migrants and refugees**.
5. Mental health represents a challenge in itself, both in terms of access and knowledge. Within migrant communities, there is a strong stigma against mental health issues, but also in host countries. In practice, this means that these issues are not discussed and therefore not treated. This translates into a lack of access to information on available services.
6. For undocumented migrants who are in a period of transition, **access to healthcare is significantly impeded**, making them even more vulnerable.

PROTECTION

For migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, access to protection is the prerequisite for further inclusion and participation in the host societies. While the Common European Asylum System has harmonized EU standards, there are still large differences between EU countries with regards to asylum procedures and access to protection. Migrants and refugees thus face numerous challenges, which are explained below.

1. Migrants face **barriers in accessing legal information** in some EU countries. This leads to a lack of knowledge on their procedural rights and is especially problematic for vulnerable groups, including women and LGBTI. This includes limited or no access to a legal counsel. This is highly problematic for asylum seekers who are not aware of the complex application procedure.
2. Lack of training for public servants, which increase language and communication barriers, but may also lead to discrimination. While adequate laws are in place, lack of awareness amongst public servants leads to gaps in implementation, prolonged procedures, harassment in centers or at the EU borders. Lack of training and checks often lead to unsafe situations for refugees and migrants.
3. **Fragmented implementation of asylum policies in EU states** lead to different implementation. An example of this is the family reunification procedure under the Dublin regulation.
4. **Suspicion and criminalization of solidarity** leads to lack of support of the general public for providing and guaranteeing protection for those in need. Support for protective policies is highly dependent on the political context and therefore an enabling and supportive environment is crucial.

Recommendations

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KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

The following are recommendations on how to enhance inclusion and participation of migrants and refugees arising from the discussion at the European Summit on Migrants and Refugees:

Access to the labour market

1. Open up national labour markets for refugees who are recognized in other EU member states
2. Speed up access to a permanent status to take away uncertainties for migrants and refugees
3. Facilitate on-the-job language learning so that initial limited language skills are not used as reasons not to hire migrants and refugees
4. National authorities, civil society organisations and private actors to provide seed funding to stimulate migrant entrepreneurs and their start-ups
5. Support 'buddy' programs and mentorships between locals and migrants to facilitate exchange of best-practices, for example utilizing co-working spaces open for migrants and locals
6. Support paid internships in the local job market to facilitate initial professional experiences
7. Provide counselling and support the provision of information to migrants on the labour market needs and how they could fill the existing gaps in the workforce
8. Support building networks through the regular organization of meet-ups between (local) companies and job-seeking migrants
9. Provide accessible language courses and easier access to formal education for migrants and refugees
10. Stimulate companies to hire migrants and refugees by creating incentives to hire them, such as benefits, funding, publicity, etc.
11. Create stricter diversity laws to stimulate both public and private sector organizations to diversify the workforce and enhancing the employment rate of migrants and refugees
12. Open up trade unions for migrants workers and facilitate the involvement of migrants in workers' representative bodies

Combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia

1. Raising awareness in receiving communities through positive images and success stories of migrants as great potential for local societies
2. Increase cultural trainings in companies to facilitate intercultural understanding of each other
3. Create meeting places for locals and migrants to meet and discuss to create mutual understanding
4. Support migrant children through out-of-school activities with local children to enhance mutual understanding at a young age

Understanding duties and rights

1. Supporting the creation of accessible bodies, organisations and individuals that migrants and refugees can address for help, support and information
2. Diversify communication channels, for example using social media and information providing videos on relevant information, so that migrants and refugees who do not speak the local language are adequately informed

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

All of the below should include the involvement of migrants and refugees in decision-making and implementation:

1. To enhance coordination and harmonization between EU member states on education systems and access to education for migrants and refugees through:

- i) Devising a unified process for recognizing foreign diplomas at EU level - with an independent institution or EU body equipped with the necessary mechanisms and trained staff for assessing qualifications.
- ii) Simplifying and regulating access to the education system for all children and young people, including undocumented migrants - for example by expanding the possibilities to obtain a study visa, work visa or a visa for highly skilled migrants.
- iii) Creating a European information platform on education for refugees and migrants providing information on their rights, existing support mechanisms, possible paths towards education and diploma recognition. This platform could exist online as well as in local support centres and could be available in multiple languages.

2. The establishment of targeted support mechanisms to guarantee and facilitate access to education, by:

- i) Targeted and unified language support across EU with the guarantee that asylum seekers can access language course from day 1 regardless of their status. This language support should be tailored to their age and educational aspirations. Develop hybrid and flexible courses (language courses but also general and higher education skills courses) for mothers to be able to attend classes: flexible schedules, evening classes, and online courses with regular contacts with teachers.
- ii) Mentorship programmes in educational institutions: with support from other refugees, local students (for example, an older 'buddy' in schools), as well as training for parents to help their children, and tutoring and orientation support.

3. Ensuring inclusive education in schools and universities, through:

1. The expansion of the number of scholarships for refugees at universities, and implement quotas or other forms of mechanisms to support further inclusion.
2. Educating staff through awareness campaigns and cultural training in educational institutions for teachers.
3. Preventing discrimination by exposing and documenting discrimination in an initial stage, and following up through implementing penalties if necessary.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

All of the below should include the involvement of migrants and refugees in the implementation of the recommendations, in particular migrant doctors and medical professionals with a migration background.

1. Social workers and medical services should **make better use of technology and implement digital solutions** to guarantee access to information on available services, such as:
 - (a) An app or online platform with simple information on the right to healthcare, relevant procedures and information on the health care system in the host country, and a mapping of available free services. The platform could also provide audio or video tutorials on how to navigate the system and should be available in multiple languages.
 - (b) The creation of a public hotline available in multiple languages.
 - (c) One-to-one Skype meetings between social workers and migrants to answer relevant questions and give information.
 - (d) A virtual network for refugees and migrants to share experiences and support each other.
2. **The establishment of informal support mechanisms** to bridge the cultural gap between the system and migrants, such as:
 - (a) Including cultural mediators to provide information and accompany migrants in navigating procedures to access health care.
 - (b) Building partnerships between skilled doctors from migrant communities and doctors in host countries, to ensure better communication and trust amongst them.
 - (c) Providing cultural trainings to doctors of the host country and information training on regional diseases to avoid discrimination.
 - (d) Ensuring NGOs work with high-level actors to make sure existing practices translate into better policy-making.

3. Invest in raising awareness on mental health issues and provide better support by:

- (a) Providing trainings on mental health to social workers so they can identify early signs of mental health issues and direct migrants and refugees towards adequate services to address them.
- (b) Providing training on the specificities of refugees and migrants experiences to mental health specialists.
- (c) Building partnerships between migrant psychologists and local psychologists.
- (d) Implementing awareness campaigns targeted at migrants and refugees.
- (e) Organizing workshops on mental health issues for and with migrant communities to increase knowledge and break the stigma around mental health issues.

4. Strengthening existing health care system and facilitate their accessibility for migrant communities by:

- (i) Instating prevention programmes for migrants, both adults and children.
- (ii) Guaranteeing equal access to health care for both documented and undocumented migrants.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PROTECTION

Central to all recommendations is the centrality of a human rights based approach in all asylum policies.

- 1. Invest in the provision of free legal information on asylum procedures**, for example through the creation of materials (tutorials, individual legal counsel sessions, leaflets, online tools)
- 2. Invest in sensitization campaigns for local citizens and local government employees**, to enhance intercultural understanding and to change the negative narrative, for example by focusing on positive and personal success stories.
- 3. Invest in compulsory intercultural training modules for civil servants involved in protection procedures**, such as asylum officers, translators, border guards and police officers.
- 4. Better coordination and cooperation** with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and national and local asylum authorities to enhance harmonisation and decrease difference in recognition rates.
- 5. Simplify and harmonise the family reunification** procedures amongst EU member states.
- 6. Revise the current Dublin system**, especially the first entry criteria requiring asylum seekers to apply for asylum in the first country of arrival.

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