



# Mutual Learning Conference on Integration of migrants: Spotlight on skills intelligence and learning, housing, women and children



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

ONLINE EVENT

30 NOVEMBER 2021

## Executive summary

This Conference provided an opportunity to discuss the new trends and innovative practices in the integration of people with migrant backgrounds with a focus on skills intelligence and learning, housing, migrant women and children.

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.

Starting with a plenary session, participants were reminded of the challenges migrants and their families face and which can negatively impact upon their levels of employment, poverty and social exclusion, homelessness, education and health. Many reasons, including education and language issues, discrimination and the lack of recognition of migrants' qualifications, contribute to the challenges, and the situation is often even worse for migrant women. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, widening the existing gap instead of closing it. But the session also offered reasons to be optimistic about the future, providing examples of innovative, multi-stakeholder and migrant-led policies and programmes as well as funding to support them.

The new trends and approaches to integration and inclusion were subsequently explored in greater depth in 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.

## Changing the narrative on migration: Realising the benefits of migrant integration and inclusion through sharing good practice and innovative projects and policies

In his opening speech, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit stressed that *“migration is still high on the political agenda”*. The Conference was very important as it offers an opportunity to contribute to *“changing the narrative on migration...by bringing the focus back to facts and figures and to concentrate on the real issues and challenges, like the demographic changes in Europe, the contribution of migrants to our economy, the labour market transformations and the shortages we are facing.”* In doing so, he noted that there are around 8.6 million non-EU citizens in the EU labour market, representing 4.6% of the total labour force.

He recalled the invaluable contribution of people with a migrant background in fighting the pandemic or in recovering from it. Many frontline workers have a migrant background. They deliver food, work in hospitals, on farms and construction sites. At the same time, the pandemic has had a disproportionately high negative impact on migrants. He noted the comparatively lower employment rate of non-EU citizens compared to that of EU natives<sup>1</sup>, 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.

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1 In 2020, the employment rate in the EU in the working-age population was higher for EU citizens (73.3%), than for non-EU citizens (57.6%).

## MUTUAL LEARNING CONFERENCE ON INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS: SPOTLIGHT ON SKILLS INTELLIGENCE AND LEARNING, HOUSING, WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In her remarks, Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson focussed on 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 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 disproportionately, 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 skills 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. With regard to the latter, he called for more vocational-specific language training, which demands employers’ involvement and which research has shown to be *“the single most important and effective type of language training”*.

Olga Stachova, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian NGO ‘MOSAIC’, provided 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”.

Vania Nedelcheva, Head of Immigrants’ Office at the Centre of Athens Labour Unions (UKA), provided another innovative example of labour market integration with ‘Project Labour-Int’. As a multi-stakeholder approach, working collaboratively with labour unions, employers and migrants, the project which was funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), successfully operated in six EU countries and *“supported hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers with better labour market integration in Europe”*.

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, stressed the importance for integration policies and projects to be migrant-led. 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”*. Continuing the theme of innovative projects, Armelle Ledan, Head of the social innovation action group at the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL), provided an overview of the outcomes from the five innovative projects that were funded by the EaSI programme to test the new methods and tools in the fast track labour market integration of refugees, asylum seekers and their families.

Jan Braat, Senior Policy Advisor for Migration, Diversity and Integration at the City of Utrecht, then gave participants an insight into migrant integration on a city level with the innovative ‘Plan Einstein’ project that has been implemented initially in Utrecht and more recently other cities in the Netherlands. Underlying the project are seven principles, including ‘inclusion from day 1’, ‘evidence-based’ and a commitment to being a ‘welcoming city’.

In terms of supporting and funding projects and programmes, Otilia Ciobanu (Policy Officer, Inclusive Growth, Urban and Territorial Development Unit, DG for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission), presented 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 and will be published soon.

In her closing remarks, Katarina Ivanković-Knežević (Director for Social Affairs, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission), paid tribute to the speakers for sharing their knowledge and good practices in the area of skills intelligence, skills assessment, access to housing and using schools as hubs of social inclusion of migrant children and their families. In wrapping up the Conference, she called for implementation of policies, programs and projects that are beneficial for both migrants and the local communities and society as a whole. She stressed the migrant integration is a multidimensional process, and that the holistic and multi-stakeholders approaches do bring results. She concluded that the tools we have presented and the good practices we have shared today are moving us in the right direction. This sharing of experience and cooperation will hopefully provide inspirations in our future work and help us identify workable solutions.

The key policy messages stemming from the Conference, organised according to the five workshop themes, are as follows:

### **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 [Europass Digital Credentials 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 heterogeneous 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, speakers' presentations and recordings](#)