

BACKGROUND NOTE

Integration

Disclaimer

This Background Note was established to inform the intergovernmental consultations held in summer 2021. The consultations served the update of the Prague Process Action Plan and its six thematic areas. The fourth Ministerial Conference in October 2022 shall endorse a new Action Plan, which shall frame the Prague Process cooperation throughout 2023-2027.

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This publication was produced in the framework of the 'Prague Process: Dialogue, Analyses and Training in Action' initiative, a component of the Migration Partnership Facility, with the assistance of the European Union.

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Integration policies across the Prague Process region

The integration of immigrants and their children is vital for social cohesion and their ability to become self-reliant, productive citizens. It is also a prerequisite for the host population's acceptance of further immigration. Well-integrated migrants diminish the demographic pressure and help to address existing labour market needs. Oppositely, a lack of integration creates numerous challenges for hosting societies and the very migrants. While traditional countries of immigration have been paying due attention to migrants' integration for many years, states less affected by immigration have only recently started addressing this policy area. Even though integration policies differ between countries, they mostly face similar challenges.

The **MIPEX Integration Index** provides data on 38 Prague Process states. Most of them fall into the category characterised by 'halfway favourable integration policies', resulting in as many obstacles as opportunities for immigrants to participate and settle in. On average, immigrants enjoy most basic rights and long-term security, but still lack equal opportunities for full participation in all areas of life. Generally, immigrants face greater obstacles in emerging destination countries - **the Baltics, Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe** - with relatively small numbers of immigrants and high levels of anti-immigration sentiment. Meanwhile, **Sweden, Finland and Portugal** provide the most favourable conditions for integration across the Prague Process region. **Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland as well as Russia** pursue slightly unfavourable integration policies by either denying integration or providing it only 'on paper'. Russia's foreign-born population, one of the largest in raw numbers, faces many obstacles and slightly unfavourable prospects for long-term integration. More favourable conditions exist in **Moldova, Ukraine** and throughout the **EU**.

The vast majority of Prague Process states improved their integration policies over the past five years, with the most positive shifts implemented by **Ireland and Turkey**. Ireland's Integration Strategy for 2017-2020 created a slightly favourable approach focused on equal rights and opportunities. Meanwhile, Turkey - a major country of immigration - implemented the Harmonization Strategy Document and National Action Plan (2018-2023) to promote coordination among the relevant institutions, and ensure basic rights such as education, health, and labour market, as well as non-discrimination. **Denmark**, on the contrary, has significantly relapsed on its commitments to integration in 2015-2020, following the experienced spike in mixed migration flows.

Within the **EU**, national policies are stronger and convergent in the areas covered by EU law, such as basic security, rights and protection. Meanwhile, **education and political participation** remain a weak point for many Member States. Immigrant pupils receive little tailored support to catch up if they lag behind, or to quickly learn the local language. Teachers and other pupils remain poorly informed concerning diversity and immigrants. In terms of political participation, most immigrants have few opportunities to inform and improve the policies that shape their daily lives since the competent authorities are not accountable to them.

The **economic integration** of migrants remains equally challenging. Compared to the native-born, immigrants have higher unemployment rates virtually everywhere. Within the EU, the pay gap between migrant and national workers in **Cyprus, Slovenia, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg and Austria** has worsened since 2015. Overall, a migrant worker earns around 20% less as compared to a national worker for doing the same job. Female migrant workers face a 'double wage penalty', both as migrants and women, partly because they represent the large majority of domestic workers. The witnessed **skills mismatch**, whereby migrants often end up in jobs that do not reflect their skill level or education, also requires stronger policy consideration. Virtually everywhere, immigrants have difficulties in getting their qualifications valued, particularly those obtained abroad. The problem of transferring skills and experience across countries undermines successful integration.

The sudden surge in migrant arrivals as of 2015 affected the integration landscape negatively. The witnessed **media reporting** created a rather unfavourable public perception of migration and migrants, thus hindering their integration. For refugees, a timely economic and social integration is particularly hard to achieve. In **Germany**, for example, many refugees live in asylum shelters largely isolated from German society for too long, awaiting a vacant place in integration courses or being unable to work due to lengthy approval procedures.

Stepping up integration efforts: Key areas and recommendations

States should consider concrete actions at all stages of the integration process, ranging from pre-departure measures to long-term integration policies. These need to be implemented at national and local level, closely engaging civil society. The related challenges concern not only newcomers but often also second- or even third-generation nationals with a migrant background. Successful integration policies are not only a cornerstone of a well-functioning asylum and migration management system but can also support the dialogue with partner countries.

Successful integration measures require early action and long-term investment. Integration can start even prior to arrival. Setting up and expanding **pre-departure measures** (e.g. training, orientation courses), and effectively linking them to post-arrival measures can significantly facilitate and speed up the integration process, including in the context of resettlement and community sponsorship. Online services can be particularly effective in the pre-departure phase to help migrants learn the language and acquire skills. Skills assessments already conducted in the pre-departure phase can equally help migrants to integrate more quickly into the labour market.

Migrant women and girls face additional obstacles to integration. They are more likely to enter the country to join a family member, bringing with them domestic responsibilities that can prevent them from fully participating in the labour market or in education. When employed, migrant women are more likely to be over-qualified for their jobs than native women. Accounting for **gender aspects** is also pivotal for the promotion of intergenerational upward mobility. The better migrant parents and especially mothers are integrated, the more positive are the outcomes for their children. Nevertheless, migrant women often are not adequately reached by mainstream integration offers.

Integration begins right from the migrants' arrival to their host communities. It happens in every village, city and region where migrants live, work and go to school. Where migrants settle can thus affect their integration prospects. This is why addressing integration policies at the **local level** is key. Establishing a network of metropolitan cities could support the exchange of best practices. Meanwhile, the proportion of migrants settling in rural areas is relatively low. Nevertheless, they tend to fare worse on most integration indicators, both due to the general shortage of basic services in many rural areas and the lack of specific support services that migrants need. Local authorities should establish shared spaces such as cultural and sports facilities in order to prevent segregation. In addition, they should engage with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, educational institutions, employers and socio-economic partners, churches, diaspora organisations and the very migrants. Ultimately, integration requires a holistic **whole-of-society approach**.

The **recognition of skills and qualifications** acquired abroad needs to occur faster and more easily. National authorities need to ensure that procedures for recognising foreign qualifications are quick, fair, transparent and affordable. Migrants should be provided

1 See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM%3A2020%3A609%3AFIN>

with all the relevant information on recognition practices. Increasing the comparability of qualifications is also essential. In this regard, fostering the cooperation between national centres for recognition (e.g. through the ENIC-NARIC network) and exchanging more actively on the provision of **complementary or bridging courses** for migrants could be beneficial.

Learning the **local language** is crucial in order to successfully integrate. However, this should not stop a few months after arrival but also be supported for intermediate and advanced courses and tailored to the needs of different groups. Combining language training with the development of other skills or work experience and with accompanying measures like childcare has proven to be particularly effective in improving access to and the outcome of language training. While e-learning tools for language mastery exist in many Prague Process states, new technology could be deployed much stronger in this area, without fully replacing face-to-face learning. Given the limited knowledge and room for innovation with regards to new technologies, facilitating research and knowledge exchange is particularly important. Moreover, offering bridging courses to complement the education acquired abroad can help migrants to complete their education or to pursue their studies in the host country. Finally, gaining an understanding of the laws, culture and values of the receiving society earliest possible, for example through civic orientation courses, is equally recommended. The courses shall begin upon arrival and accompany migrants along their integration journeys.

Upskilling and reskilling should be continuously supported, including through validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning. Authorities need to ensure that more migrants participate in high-quality **vocational education and training**. A strong work-based learning dimension in line with local and national labour market needs can be particularly helpful. States should actively support employers in assessing and recognising the skill level of their employees. The rollout of a **fast-track assessment** of candidates' vocational education for a specific job can be helpful in this regard. Countries such as Germany and Austria have developed computer-based skills identification tests supporting early profiling of refugees and migrants. Their experience could be valuable for other countries. If designed in a tailor-made way, online platforms also have great potential to facilitate **labour matching** as well as immigrants' access to vocational training, where they still remain underrepresented, in spite of substantial needs. Better guidance and counselling on learning opportunities along with better outreach programmes may also constitute a prerequisite for success.

Migrants and nationals with a migrant background play a key role for the economy and the labour market. This has also been exemplified during the COVID-19 crises, which made their contribution in essential services all the more evident. A successful **labour market integration** is not only a moral duty but also an economic imperative as it could generate large economic gains, including fiscal profits, contributions to national pension schemes and national welfare in general. It requires the active collaboration of a large variety of actors, including the public and private sector. Moreover, there is a need to raise awareness of discrimination in the recruitment process and in the workplace and reinforce anti-discrimination measures.

Migrant entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, create jobs and can support the post-pandemic recovery. However, they often lack the necessary networks and knowledge of the regulatory and financial framework or face difficulties in accessing credit. They thus require more support through easier access to financing, training and advice. Digital finance can help in making financial services more accessible. Migrant entrepreneurship can be further facilitated through tailored training and mentoring programmes and by including entrepreneurship in integration programmes.

More migrant children should participate in high quality and inclusive early childhood **education**. Teachers need to be better equipped with the necessary skills and to be given the resources and support needed to manage multicultural and multilingual classrooms. This

would benefit both the migrant and native children. Teaching curricula could be improved to better value and mobilise the pupils' individual linguistic backgrounds as key skills. A stronger involvement of health and social services as well as parents can also improve education outcomes of migrant children. Ensuring the accessibility and affordability of after-school leisure activities and sports is equally important in this regard. Children generally require additional protective support, always ensuring the best interest of the child. Unaccompanied minors who arrive past the age of compulsory schooling may require tailor-made support programmes.

Promoting inclusion and providing opportunities for young people at risk through education, culture, youth and sports can further contribute to the prevention of **radicalisation**. Working closely with practitioners and local actors can be particularly effective in preventing radicalisation. States should support first line practitioners to develop best practices to address violent extremism, support resilience building and disengagement, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration in society.

National authorities should ensure equal access to regular **health care** services, including for mental health, and proactively inform migrants about their related rights, while also addressing any form of discrimination. The provided services should be adapted to the particular needs of specific migrant groups such those suffering from trauma, victims of human trafficking or gender based violence, unaccompanied minors, elderly or disabled people, and particularly pregnant women (pre- and post-natal phase). Migrants often face additional challenges such as limited access or a health insurance linked to their residence status, language barriers and limited knowledge on how to access services, scarce financial resources, or living in disadvantaged areas with lower quality health services. National systems thus need to adapt to these challenges and migrants' specific needs. Providing training to health care workers concerning diversity management and the particular vulnerabilities described would represent a valuable first step. In this regard, the Prague Process states could make use of the different projects and training materials developed within health programmes.

States and local municipalities should facilitate migrants' and refugees' **access to adequate and affordable housing**, and actively fight discrimination and segregation on the housing market. The competent authorities need to ensure an integrated approach between housing policies and policies on access to employment, education, healthcare and social services. Adequate, affordable and autonomous housing for refugees and asylum seekers who are likely to be granted international protection should be provided as early as possible.

As public perception matters, future integration policies should feature a strong communication dimension, promoting a **balanced and fact-based media coverage** while acknowledging and addressing challenges and opportunities that migration brings. Working with media representatives, education institutions as well as civil society organisations is key to better inform about the realities of migration and integration. These efforts should involve traditional and new media outlets including social media and blogger communities, which could reach an audience of different ages and backgrounds. Inclusive policies create a 'virtuous circle' of integration that promotes openness and interaction. Migrants and natives are more likely to interact in countries where inclusive policies treat immigrants as equals. Inclusive policies increase positive attitudes and create an overall sense of belonging, well-being and trust.

Modern technologies open up new opportunities to modernise and improve access to integration and other services. **Digital public services** need to be deployed in an inclusive way and be accessible to migrants, as they could otherwise widen inequalities instead of narrowing them. The COVID-19 crisis has shown the potential of digitalising services such

as education, language and integration courses. However, this shift also made clear that migrants often face obstacles in accessing digital courses and services because of lacking the needed devices or the required language and digital skills to make use of them. Establishing digital literacy courses for migrants and ensuring that digital public services are inclusive by design, easily accessible and adapted to a diverse population is essential. Engaging migrants themselves in their creation and further development can be particularly helpful.

Efficient integration policies should be built upon reliable evidence on the specific outcomes of integration policies. To **monitor and evaluate** the effectiveness of policies in the long-term, accurate and comparable data on the scale and nature of discrimination suffered by migrants is important. Developing and updating monitoring systems to identify key challenges and track progress over time is just as important as the availability of data on integration outcomes at national and local levels.

Most Prague Process countries still lack experience in the integration sphere and only now start to shape their related policies. Across the region, third-country nationals continue to fare worse than native-born in employment, education and social inclusion outcomes. This means that all countries need to step up the development of effective integration strategies. Acknowledging that integration concerns the whole of society, their related efforts may constitute a marathon rather than a sprint.

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