
Position for the successful integration of refugees

Adopted by the Presidium of CESI

Preliminary remarks

In the wake of the crisis that has engulfed the European Union surrounding the handling of asylum seekers and the further integration of refugees across Europe, CESI has taken it upon itself to address the issues.

In its main motions adopted at its 2016 Congress, CESI emphasised the need to invest in people through the means of fast integration of migrants, including access to education and vocational training. The main motions dedicated a section to managing migration while safeguarding inclusive societies namely by pointing out the need to allocate sufficient funding to central and local administrations, as well as enhancing the role and responsibilities of trade unions with regards to labour market integration of refugees. CESI has also duly taken into account the results of the Eurofound report “Approaches to the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers” published in December 2016.¹

As can still be seen, the EU stands split on the issue of refugee reception and integration. Certain Member States have been faced with unprecedented numbers of persons seeking asylum, whilst others have paid less attention to integration questions as they stand largely unaffected by migration flows. The recent phenomenon only highlights the old issues of the Common European Asylum System and reignites debates surrounding the efficiency and fairness of the Dublin mechanisms.

EU legislation requires the Member States to provide for integration support to refugees. However the extent and rate, at which Member States provide this varies greatly from country to country. Not only does integration processes differ, but several administrative challenges affect refugees and asylum seekers. The waiting time to process asylum applications signifies that a person has to wait for an extended period until he or she is allowed on the employment market. This time period will also vary from country to country, and will often lead to inactivity that further impacts negatively on employability.

¹ See <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2016/labour-market-social-policies/approaches-to-the-labour-market-integration-of-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

However one point remains crucial for all Member States: the need for speedy and comprehensive integration. The crucial component of integration must start with labour market integration and this is where the valuable insight and significance of trade unions must be fully exploited. The legal/administrative obstacles to legal work and the already negative attitudes of some employers potentially drive refugees and asylum seekers into the shadow economy, where they can be at risk of exploitation and abuse.

Overview of the situation and the various tools for integration

1. Framework for integration

1. As set out in Article 79 (4) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, whilst the competence on integration lies primarily with the Member States, the EU may establish measures to provide incentives and support for Member States in promoting integration of third country nationals residing legally in their territories and has an important role in supporting, stimulating and coordinating Member States' actions and policies in this area.
2. EU secondary legislation on the subject of asylum is primarily covered by the recast Qualification Directive² and the recast Reception Directive³. The legislation provides for all beneficiaries of international protection, which is the status of refugee, to have full access to the labour market. It also stipulates for asylum seekers to have access to public services albeit limited.
3. The Commission's Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals⁴ adopted in 2016 provides the common policy framework to assist and strengthen the efforts of Member States and describes the policy, operational and financial support which the Commission will deliver to support them in their efforts.

2. Other factors to take into consideration for integration purposes

1. The administrations that are in charge of refugee recognition procedures are strained to the maximum in certain Member States where the number of arrivals has been high. As already mentioned above, longer periods of time waiting for recognition of refugee status also means restrictions on the integration procedure during that same period.
2. Local and regional authorities are arguably the main actors with regards to integration as their work touches upon housing, education, vocational training, language training, health services, social security etc. Budget and staff cuts of recent years have significantly hampered their work. This

² (2011/95/EU); see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:337:0009:0026:en:PDF>

³ (2013/33/EU); see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN>

⁴ See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf

negatively impacts integration efforts alongside other noteworthy factors such as housing crisis and high unemployment that have gripped European countries. In the 2016 Action Plan tools are included to facilitate its implementation and they, amongst others, include improving coordination and cooperation between central, regional and local authorities.

3. While public administrations may not only be understaffed, public service employees need also to be up to speed with regards to legislative reforms and current developments. This requires continuous learning which is not always provided to them and leads to undermining the efforts to provide accurate quality services for refugees and asylum seekers. The lack of knowledge of a fast evolving system is also the reality for refugees who need information on the required paperwork and the administrative procedures.
4. CESI also stresses the fundamental role of trade unions. CESI calls upon them to invest more in helping migrants set foot in labour markets. The expansion of trade unions' roles and responsibilities may also allow them to play a decisive card in the mitigation of the potentially negative consequences such as social dumping or diverting funds from other necessary actions targeting unemployment. Additionally having new and active members with a migrant background is synonymous with adapting to changes in society – and being fit and prepared to face the future.
5. Strained finances over the past years have also led to the increased outsourcing and dependence of some administrations on charities and volunteers to deal with the various tasks. Even if these individuals' work is extremely laudable, it cannot be a sustainable solution to gradually outsource what is traditionally public service work.
6. Failure to release the potential of third-country nationals in the EU would represent a massive waste of resources, both for the individuals concerned themselves and more generally for our economy and society. This point is clearly highlighted in the Action Plan 2016 and supported by studies carried out on the economic cost of non-integration. There are clear studies showing that investing into integration policies will cost less than not doing so in the long-term. A study of the OECD equally highlights the need, although not at the expense of support for other disadvantaged groups but through scaling up the provisions of services provided.⁵

3. As a consequence, CESI's demands are as follows

1. The responsibilities, competences and experiences of social partners, employers and trade union are extremely valuable and should be fully benefitted from. The integration of third country nationals is nothing new within the EU, however, mistakes of the past, namely lastingly leaving people behind, are to be avoided at all costs. More intensive interaction and cooperation between employers, trade

⁵ OECD "Making Integration Work"; see http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/social-issues-migration-health/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants_9789264251236-en#.WIdrw9LhC70#page1

unions and refugees could facilitate the transition into the labour market as trade unions and employers have precious experience and insight.

2. Greater emphasis has to be put on mentoring schemes as additional means to assist persons on an individualised basis to integrate the labour market. CESI sees this as an answer to many problems occurring during the integration processes. While numerous countries have enacted fast track vocational insertion programmes, a joint call at EU level strives for fast and efficient labour market integration of refugees – mentorship programmes may partly be the answer.
3. Multinational enterprises and other public sector actors that receive government subsidies should be encouraged to set up trainee programs for the benefit of refugees. Using subsidies may well even be the incentive to use as a tool for more integration programs outside the remit of state administrations.
4. Specific measures to address the real needs of language training and vocational training are to be established. A crucial part of integration lies in education and language training, yet also adapted to the needs of refugees. Investments in the sectors of education are to be considered as social investments and need to be given special consideration in the frame of the EU's economic governance and budgetary surveillance rules.
5. More efforts should be made to set up harmonised mechanisms for recognition of qualifications and skills across the EU. The setting up of a more performant, mutually recognised, skills certification system (e.g. exam) should be envisaged. Skilled third country nationals should not have to go through unnecessarily lengthy processes of skills recognition. Furthermore, universities should envisage opening up more doors for refugees and asylum seekers to be able to study and seek diplomas.
6. Networks and/or platforms where useful best practices can be shared, monitored and evaluated should be established. Integration indicators could be defined and monitored on a regular basis, using for instance the European semester and other policy tools. Joint platforms with as many relevant actors as possible should be established so to provide a job and training exchange market for refugees.
7. Generally speaking, integration efforts must always be sustainable and aim at long-term integration. Urgent situations do not justify looking for short-term solutions only. Investments should be regarded as investments, not only as costs, following which economic and societal returns will be very quickly tangible.