



SOC/641
Migrant integration and target language levels

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Integration of women, mothers and families with a migrant background in the EU Member States and target language levels for integration

(Exploratory opinion at the request of the German presidency)

This opinion was prepared by **Indrė Vareikytė**, EESC member from October 2015 to September 2020, as rapporteur, and presented during the first session of the EESC's 2020-2025 term in October 2020 by **Ákos Topolánszky**, as rapporteur general.

Request by the German Presidency of the Council	Letter of 18/2/2020
Legal basis	Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship
Adopted in section	09/09/2020
Adopted at plenary	29/10/2020
Plenary session No	555
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	234/4/14

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC notes, that:

- national migrant integration action plans and strategies differ widely across the EU in terms of their guiding principles, measures and their level of monitoring and evaluation;
- there is little evidence across all Member States of action plans and strategies with a particular focus on women or gender issues, while ethnic minority women with migrant backgrounds, as well as women of different age groups, face multiple or intersectional discrimination in many areas of life;
- fewer than half of EU Member States have action plans or strategies that explicitly address descendants of migrants, even when statistical evidence from Eurostat and international organisations highlights their disadvantaged position;
- effective integration has a number of potential economic, social and fiscal benefits for the countries where migrants settle, yet the sum of adequate actions both at the EU and national level is low compared with the complexity of the challenges.

1.2 The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, especially ethnic minority migrants and migrant women in particular. The EESC therefore strongly encourages the Commission, in developing its new Initiative on Integration and Inclusion, to take into account the lessons learnt from this crisis and showcase the best approaches taken within the Member States.

1.3 The EESC believes in a holistic approach in tackling the migration challenges. The Initiative should therefore encompass policies on fundamental rights, social and labour inclusion, education, culture, justice and health.

1.4 The EESC calls for the Commission to develop better and more efficient communication and coordination with the Member States, their national, regional and local authorities and civil society organisations in shaping holistic integration policies.

1.5 The EESC once again condemns all forms of violence against women and encourages Member States that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to reconsider their position and calls for all Member States to ensure female migrant victims of violence have equal access with indigenous women to appropriate services, support and facilities.

1.6 The EESC once again encourages the establishment of better systems for assessing educational credentials and providing gender-specific support programmes that can facilitate migrant women's entry into the labour market.

1.7 The EESC calls for urgent actions to ensure an integrated approach that aims at harmonising the multilevel governance of social and employment policies affecting domestic work across the EU.

- 1.8 It is necessary to develop more systematic outreach and awareness-raising activities to make sure migrant people and refugees are aware of their rights and duties, and to build their trust in – and increase the capacity of – administrations and public authorities to protect them.
- 1.9 The EESC calls for common EU guidelines for language training to ensure a unified and holistic approach, by not only reflecting the differing needs and levels of learners, but also qualification requirements for teachers.
- 1.10 The EESC believes that **language training should include guiding, informing and explaining** the objectives and benefits of language training for their life, thereby encouraging migrants themselves to be more active in the process.
- 1.11 The EESC believes that it would be beneficial to further investigate whether the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages could be used to streamline the migrant language training process and ensure a more tailor-made approach.
- 1.12 The EESC stresses the necessity to improve the collection of adequate and comparable sex-disaggregated migration and integration data at EU, national and, especially, local level.

2. **Subject of the exploratory opinion**

- 2.1 The German presidency of the Council of the European Union has requested the EESC to discuss in an exploratory opinion the specific measures provided for in the Member States for the integration of women, mothers and families with a migrant background, and the language course models used in Member States at the beginning of the integration process for refugees and other migrants and the target language levels set by these courses.

3. **Situation analysis¹**

- 3.1 National migrant integration action plans and strategies differ widely across the EU in terms of their guiding principles, measures and monitoring and evaluation. These variations reflect national specificities, administrative traditions and migration histories. These diverse approaches are discussed in the European Integration Network. However, national differences remain in implementing the Council of the European Union's Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU and other relevant policy documents. It is important to note that in some Member States integration policies are implemented by the regional and/or local authorities, thus increasing even more the differences in implementing this guidance.
- 3.2 Across all Member States there is little evidence of action plans and strategies with a particular focus on women or gender issues and there are indications that women with migrant backgrounds, including minority ethnic and black women in particular, face multiple or

¹ More at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/what-measures-are-in-place-to-ensure-the-long-term-integration-of-migrants-and-refugees-in-europe>.

intersectional discrimination in many areas of social life, including employment and education, and particularly face barriers in accessing healthcare services².

- 3.3 Fewer than half of EU Member States have action plans or strategies that explicitly address descendants of migrants, even when statistical evidence highlights their disadvantaged position. Lack of social inclusion risks the potential alienation of young people of migrant descent, with consequences for social cohesion, intolerance, discrimination and the rise of crime, as well as increasing the vulnerability of young migrants to disinformation and extremist movements.
- 3.4 Outreach to migrant parents is an established and systematic policy only in a handful of Member States. Such policies range from involving and engaging migrant and refugee parents and families in the life of schools and informing and raising awareness about the education of their children to supporting them in learning the Member State's national language and enabling them to assist and support their children in the education process.
- 3.5 Evidence provided by national-level research and studies within the Member States indicates segregation of migrant children at school. Moreover, even when the residential concentration is not high, some schools, particularly primary schools, tend to be more segregated than the neighbourhoods they serve.
- 3.6 The number of migrant children under the age of 18 with no legal guardian is continuously increasing – Europe receives 74% of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors. After a traumatic migration journey, often marked by violence, these children and adolescents continue to be exposed to multiple dangers and are particularly vulnerable to criminal networks: under-age recruitment, child trafficking for prostitution, sexual exploitation and child labour³.
- 3.7 Data collection by the Equality Bodies in the Member States is usually limited to cases of discrimination on grounds of racial/ethnic origin. Little or no data exist in most EU Member States on discrimination-related complaints submitted by third-country nationals on grounds other than ethnic or racial origin⁴. The actual number of complaints submitted by third-country nationals to Equality Bodies is very small compared with the experiences and incidents of perceived discrimination and victimisation as recorded by surveys. Underreporting⁵ is a serious concern and can be linked to a lack of rights awareness and to mistrust of the authorities, especially among migrant women and children.

² [Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017.](#)

³ Opinion SOC/634 – The protection of unaccompanied migrant minors in Europe, EESC (scheduled for the plenary session on 16-17-18 September 2020).

⁴ Links between migration and discrimination – A legal analysis of the situation in EU Member States, European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, European Commission DG for Justice and Consumers, 2016.

⁵ Being Black in the EU – Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018.

4. Improving integration

- 4.1 The EESC underlines the fact that **integration is a dynamic, long-term, and continuous two-way process** involving both migrants and the receiving society. It is a challenge that the Union has committed itself to tackling, and effective integration has a number of potential economic, social and fiscal benefits for the countries where migrants settle, yet the sum of adequate actions both at EU and national level is low compared with the complexity of the challenge.
- 4.2 The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, especially migrants and migrant women in particular⁶. The impact includes physical and mental health, as well as economic consequences, possible increase in discrimination and racism, and the impact of physical school closures on migrant children and their parents. The EESC therefore strongly encourages the Commission, in developing its new Initiative on Integration and Inclusion, to **take into account the lessons learnt from this crisis and showcase the best approaches** taken within the Member States. In light of this crisis, the EESC also urges the Member States to provide free training on the use of digital devices, document management, looking for work and remote working and provide access to crisis support and legal advice for people with economic difficulties and/or at risk of social exclusion⁷.
- 4.3 The EESC believes in a holistic approach in tackling the migration challenges. The future Initiative should therefore encompass policies on fundamental rights, social and labour inclusion, education, culture, justice, health and housing.
- 4.4 The EESC once again condemns all forms of violence against women and encourages Member States that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to reconsider their position⁸ and calls for all Member States to **ensure migrant female victims of violence equal access with native-born women to appropriate services, support and facilities**. Immigrant victims of domestic violence should be able to confidentially apply for legal immigration status independently of the perpetrator⁹.
- 4.5 Migrant women are often overqualified for available jobs, are unemployed and face deskilling¹⁰. The EESC once again encourages the **establishment of better systems for assessing educational credentials** and **providing gender-specific support programmes** that can facilitate women's entry into the labour market (such as early childhood education and care) to begin addressing these issues¹¹.

⁶ The [European web site for integration](#) continuously tracks the impact of COVID-19 on migrant communities in a number of key integration areas across the EU.

⁷ [Manifesto on Digital Inclusion, European Network of Migrant Women, 16 June 2020.](#)

⁸ [OJ C 240, 16.7.2019, p. 3.](#)

⁹ Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women, DEW/DESA, United Nations, 2009.

¹⁰ Harnessing Knowledge on the Migration of Highly Skilled Women, International Organization for Migration, 2014.

¹¹ [OJ C 242, 23.7.2015, p. 9.](#)

- 4.6 The Committee stresses that migrant women are not a homogeneous group, especially in terms of skills and qualifications¹²; they are more likely to be under and/or over-qualified for their job and less likely to be in employment¹³. Therefore, integration measures, active labour market policies and programmes and social economy projects should include language courses, skills assessment and vocational training¹⁴.
- 4.7 Migrant domestic workers have become a major pillar of welfare systems, especially in the field of long-term care for the elderly, and migrant women in the domestic work sector are most often negatively affected¹⁵. This sector still has total or partial irregularity of employment, and low wage levels; domestic workers have a lower level of labour and/or legal protection against unemployment, professional injuries or disability, as well as in cases of maternity, and often suffer from social isolation and exclusion, especially in the case of live-in employment¹⁶. The EESC calls for urgent action to ensure an integrated approach that aims at **harmonising the multilevel governance of social and employment policies affecting domestic work** across the EU while considering the intersections of care, employment and migration policies, and how they affect the labour market integration and living conditions of migrant domestic workers.
- 4.8 The EESC draws attention to the fact that migrant women are often forced to live in isolation and become vulnerable victims of loneliness and violence. At the same time, if they work, they are often overworked and additionally have to bear all caring tasks in the household. As such issues are addressed by gender equality policies, measures and tools, it is crucial to **guarantee migrant women's equal access** to such tools and to ensure that they are being empowered no less than native-born women. It is also necessary to develop more systematic outreach and awareness-raising activities to make sure migrant people and refugees are aware of their rights and duties, and to build their trust in – and increase the capacities of – administrations and public authorities to protect them.
- 4.9 The EESC believes that in the context of migration and integration, gender equality plays an equally important role as for the rest of European society, as it encompasses a set of fundamental rights (i.e. tolerance, equality, freedoms of expression, views and religion, etc.) which can be culturally unfamiliar to refugees and other migrants coming from completely different cultures and backgrounds. It should therefore become one of the key pillars for integration through holistically tailored policies, integration models and actions.
- 4.10 The EESC notes that the involvement of migrant families and parents in local and school communities should begin during the early stages of reception, to avoid marginalisation and

¹² [The New EU Migration Pact in Progress: Recalling Legal Obligations, European Network of Migrant Women, 2020.](#)

¹³ European website on Integration, Integration of migrant women, 12/11/2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/integration-of-migrant-women>.

¹⁴ Point 4.16 of the opinion [OJ C 283, 10.8.2018, p. 1](#).

¹⁵ Out of sight: migrant women exploited in domestic work, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018.

¹⁶ International migration paper No. 115, International Labour Organization, 2013.

consequent alienation of children and young people of migrant background. Such support can benefit early native language acquisition.

- 4.11 The EESC therefore calls for the Commission to **develop better and more efficient communication and coordination** with the Member States, their national, regional and local authorities and civil society organisations in shaping holistic integration policies, as well as in publishing comparative reports on their implementation and in actively promoting the sharing of good practices¹⁷. At the same time, it is up to the EU institutions to uphold European values and enforce the applicable legislation in cases when Member States do not comply with human rights laws, apply inhumane treatment to migrants and/or discriminate against them.
- 4.12 The EESC calls on the Commission to set up a range of measures and tools to support Member States and their national and local authorities, as well as social partners, NGOs and individual initiatives in tackling hostility against migrants and migration in general and disinformation campaigns against migration, by showcasing the benefits and potential migrants bring to our societies.
- 4.13 The EESC stresses the necessity to ensure the collection of adequate and comparable migration data at EU, national and, especially, local level, including, but not limited to, data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity and migration status, duration of employment, salary scale and progress in career, in order to ensure adequate evidence-based policy-making.

5. **Language training**

- 5.1 The EESC believes, that language training should not be a goal on its own – combining language training with cultural exploration and community and societal involvement would ensure a more successful integration process.
- 5.2 Unfortunately, only a few Member States follow a needs-based approach to language learning by opening courses to all residents with limited language proficiency. Several Member States provide access to such courses only for beneficiaries of humanitarian protection. Language-learning programmes are rarely linked to employment, and job-specific, on-the-job and higher level language training courses are rare. In others, migrants need to pay for the courses in advance and are only reimbursed if they pass the final exams. Moreover, great disparities exist not only in the approach and the quality of language teaching, but also in the commitment of migrants themselves¹⁸.
- 5.3 The EESC therefore believes that it is important to have common EU guidelines for language training to ensure a unified and holistic approach, by not only reflecting the differing needs and levels of learners, but also qualification requirements for teachers.

¹⁷ See the appendix to this document for examples of migrant women integration and language training within Member States.

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/201915_early_language_support_wider_dissemination.pdf.

- 5.4 In addition, women with care responsibilities find it especially difficult to access language courses because of their schedule and conditions (costs/location)¹⁹. It is crucial to note that women migrants in particular should receive additional attention due to particularly wide gaps in language education because of limitations for women to access general education in some countries of origin. For instance, migrant women should be offered childcare while they are attending the language classes, and their young children could attend language and play classes, which have proven very effective both for language learning and integration purposes.
- 5.5 The EESC believes that it is also up to migrants to decide for themselves and for their families and children which of the language learning strategies are best suited to their goals in life. The fact that migrants may wish to choose among the various types of adaptation implies that arrangements need to be made for listening to migrants' views and for designing and managing tailor-made courses. It is crucial that **language training should include guiding, informing and explaining** the objectives and benefits of language training for their life, thereby encouraging migrants themselves to be more active and engaged in the process.
- 5.6 The EESC believes that it would be beneficial to further investigate whether the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages could be used to streamline the migrant language training process and ensure a more tailor-made approach, as it might not only alleviate the organising process, but also set clear expectations for learners.
- 5.7 The EESC highlights the fact that interpreters have a major impact on an individual's migration and integration services and outcomes. However, the qualification of interpreters does not necessarily correspond to the migrants' needs, often placing women in a disadvantaged position. Interpreter training should therefore be streamlined and lead to a European level certification. Collaboration with universities across the EU that offer study programmes in Public Service Interpreting should be established.
- 5.8 The EESC believes that language skills, employment and the quality of that employment are interrelated and that therefore the better the language skills, the more likely it is that a newcomer will have access to good jobs and education opportunities and better integrate into society in general. The benefits from learning the language of the receiving community are many: from more and better access to the labour market, to recognition of belonging from the rest of the community and a feeling of belonging for the migrants themselves. The most important aspects to language learning are thus: using high quality instruction to deliver, making it accessible and making it convenient and tailor-made. Learning from the experiences during the COVID-19 crisis, there should be more investment in digital tools in order to allow migrants to attend classes online.

¹⁹ Opinion [OJ C 242, 23.7.2015, p. 9](#).

Brussels, 29 October 2020

Christa Schweng
The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX

Examples of migrant women integration and language training within Member States

European Web Site on Integration summary of measures that are in place to ensure the long-term integration of migrants and refugees in Europe, including a list of good practices:

<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/what-measures-are-in-place-to-ensure-the-long-term-integration-of-migrants-and-refugees-in-europe>

The **Kalejdo** project in Sweden is an activity for foreign-born women who have mainly been housewives or have limited experience of working outside the home. The Labour Market Unit and the associations OliviA and Energikällan carry out 10-week programmes with the women and work on five themes: gender equality, health, economy, labour market and participation and influence. Discussions, study visits, lectures, excursions and try-on activities together become educational, exciting, fun and a nice and safe community is created in the group. Together, they dare to try to do things they would never have thought they could do. All groups then visit the Riksdag in Stockholm, where Laila Naraghi (MP) receives the women and shows and guides them around with enormous enthusiasm.

<https://www.facebook.com/oskarshamnskommun/posts/1423048514442804/>

Yalla Trappan in Sweden is a social enterprise, based in a neighbourhood of Malmö, whose staff mainly consists of migrant women. Many of them arrived at Yalla Trappan with very little education, little to no work experience, at a mature(r) age, and with limited Swedish language skills. Yalla Trappan aims to integrate migrant women into the labour market by capitalising on their skills, which for most of them are cooking, sewing and cleaning. Starting as a lunch restaurant/café, it later expanded its business to cleaning and sewing. It operates mainly on the basis of business to business contracts and now employs 40 women (a mix of permanent staff and interns).

The enterprise bears its own costs and is run as a non-profit organisation. Besides employing migrant women who had difficulties entering the labour market, the organisation also runs internships and employment training programmes. Yalla Trappan is also exploring new activities or projects, such as its all-female staff – who are often mothers – training unaccompanied minors (often male) in household tasks and managing their budget. Yalla Trappan is organised as a cooperative enterprise, which means that its workers are also members of the association and thus play an important role in the decision-making of the organisation.

The word "trappan" means "steps" and the name refers to the fact that the women are encouraged, step by step, to take more and more responsibility in the company depending on their own recovery or growing ability. The women who are trained or employed by Yalla Trappan do indeed feel more empowered, experience a sense of usefulness, enjoy the social contact, and develop their Swedish language skills, but also other skills they were sometimes not even aware they had.

<https://www.yallatrappan.com/om/>

Multi Kulti Collective (MKC) is a Bulgarian NGO which works on community development and the integration of migrants and refugees. Since 2013, MKC has been running many projects, but is also a social enterprise that empowers migrants through offering and promoting their culinary services (such as culinary team building, catering services and cooking courses) to individuals, cultural institutes and companies. It also has vast experience in campaigning, awareness-raising, training, research, monitoring, policy analysis and advocacy. MKC has a strong media strategy and strives to give migrants a voice in the public space. Media campaigns such as "Diversity is tasty" celebrate diversity by putting the (culinary) skills and richness of foreigners in the spotlight, thereby aiming at fighting discrimination, xenophobia and hate speech. The project has enabled the sharing of personal stories of migrants, while creating connections on the basis of a topic of common interest: food. The organisation is based in Sofia, but has grown into a social franchise in the Bulgaria's eight biggest cities. It collaborates across borders with other NGOs, international organisations, universities and foundations.

<https://multikulti.bg/>

Funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication, **Arsenal Double Club Languages** is an innovative award-winning educational programme combining football and language learning in the UK. Aiming to inspire and motivate pupils at primary and secondary level, the programme uses Arsenal and football to show pupils that language learning can be achievable, rewarding and, above all, fun!

<https://www.arsenaldoubleclub.co.uk/>

HELIOS is an integration project implemented by the International Organization for Migration and its partners, with the support of the Greek Government and funding of the European Commission. The HELIOS project aims to integrate beneficiaries of international protection into Greek society through the promotion of independent living, and specifically through: a) support for autonomous housing; b) integration and language courses; c) employability-related activities to support access to the labour market.

<https://greece.iom.int/en/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios>

The **Skills2Work** project, funded by the European Commission's DG Home and implemented with 11 regional partners, aims to facilitate the labour market integration and participation of Beneficiaries of International Protection (BIPs) by promoting the early validation of formal and informal skills and competences. This is achieved by supporting the reception framework and capacities of relevant authorities, service providers and employers, and by enhancing access to information and services regarding the recognition of skills and qualifications of refugees.

<https://www.iom.int/news/skills2work-promotes-labour-market-integration-beneficiaries-international-protection-eu>

Temporary study group on immigration and integration (IMI) – the EESC has set up a temporary study group on immigration and integration (IMI), made up of members from various of its sections covering different policy areas and representing employers, workers and various interests. Since 2009, the group has drawn up opinions and held hearings and conferences on various integration-related

topics (e.g. the contribution of migrant entrepreneurs to the economy, social innovation for refugee inclusion and civil society support to migrants and refugees). To this end, it has worked with external partners from civil society, academia and national and EU authorities. IMI members participate actively in the European Migration Forum (EMF) and the IMI also organises consultation meetings on the format or topics of upcoming EMF meetings.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/other/temporary-study-group-immigration-and-integration-imi>
