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Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants

Media Q&A

Why was the research carried out?

Migrants and their descendants make valuable contributions to modern-day Europe. However, the EU faces challenges in ensuring that they are included and participate in society. Intolerance, xenophobia and racism, fuelling hate crime and discrimination against migrants or refugees and their descendants, are causes for concern across Member States whose action plans and strategies seek to promote integration.

This report [*Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants*](#) aims to encourage determined and effective action towards building a Europe that is inclusive, rights-based and fair. It highlights promising practices and shortcomings in Member State efforts to help EU and national policy makers foster integration and social inclusion.

What does the research cover?

The [research](#) examined national integration policies, action plans and strategies concerning 'active citizenship' and 'welcoming society', in the context of the societal and political participation of migrants and their descendants.

The analysis identifies patterns in national integration policy responses that promote participation. The responses follow the EU's Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU's core values.

The research did not address issues relating to security, radicalisation or rules on migrant admissions and stay.

How was the research carried out?

FRA's multidisciplinary research network, [FRANET, pulled together existing](#) data and material in 2015 through desk research and contact with authorities in all EU Member States. FRA combined this with information from its annual reports on fundamental rights and then analysed the information presented in the report, focusing on the national level.

How many immigrants live in the EU?

The number of non-EU citizens living in EU Member States on 1 January 2016 was 20.8 million people, according to Eurostat. This represents 4.1% of the EU population.

Immigrant integration policies and measures do not include non-EU citizens living in the EU irregularly.

How has the EU supported national integration policies and measures?

In 2004, the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council produced 11 [Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU](#) to guide Member States' efforts. The principles recognise the need for a two-way process of mutual accommodation by both migrants and natives.

Acts such as the Race Equality, Long-Term Residence and Employment Directives have sought to reduce discrimination. Following the Lisbon Treaty, the EU now has the legal basis to pass legislation aimed at promoting integration. The EU has also provided €765 million for the period 2014-2020 to support national integration measures under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund.

The European Commission's Action Plan on integration (2016) provides a common policy framework describing the policy, operational and financial support for Member States. Such a framework can further strengthen the coordination of integration policies across the EU. It also includes plans to upgrade the network of national integration contact points, with a stronger coordination role and a mutual learning mandate.

What is the picture across Member States?

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. However, while the report shows that there has been significant progress, greater efforts are needed to coordinate approaches among Member States, to reframe integration as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation and to assess the impact of measures. Member States should collect and share data on integration as well as best practices so as to learn what works in practice.

- Only 15 Member States carry out some form of periodic assessment or review of their integration strategies.
- Only 19 Member States have an active integration plan / strategy.
- Four Member States (Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Poland) have no specific integration strategy / action plan for non-EU nationals.

What is being done to tackle discrimination?

Discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as gender or ethnicity is prohibited under EU treaties. However, discrimination on the basis of nationality or migrant, refugee or foreigner status is not. Only 12 Member States have adopted legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of nationality or migrant, refugee or foreigner status. Other Member States should consider following the example of these Member States.

National equality bodies also receive few complaints about discrimination from non-EU nationals. However, FRA discrimination and victimisation surveys indicate higher levels of discrimination. While underreporting is a common issue across many population groups, the results suggest greater efforts are needed to step up rights awareness and information activities, particularly victim support.

How can education support integration?

The report points to some form of segregation of immigrant school children in about half of the Member States. This risks creating divided societies in which migrants and natives live apart instead of living together. Although separate schooling is not a policy in any Member State, it may be a real-life outcome of housing and residential patterns, or discrimination, as well as a result of unsuccessful policies to confront such phenomena. It is also often due to factors such as the tendency of parents to enrol their children in schools with children from their own ethnic background. This points to the need to actively avoid all forms of segregation and for more intercultural and citizenship education involving all parent and families in school and community life.

- The Netherlands has organised a 'Welcome to my neighbourhood' programme where school children of different backgrounds are encouraged to get to know each other, first via internet and then in real life, thus increasing mutual cultural appreciation.
- Italy has placed a 30% limit on foreign children in each class to redistribute pupils without Italian citizenship.
- Denmark provides additional funding to schools in disadvantaged areas of Copenhagen.
- 15 Member States regularly promote engagement with migrant parents to involve them in the education process. However, this is systematic in only four Member States.

What is being done to address gender in immigration?

Female immigrants often face additional difficulties, particularly when it comes to access to healthcare and employment. In light of the ongoing debates on gender equality that particularly affect Muslim migrant communities, it would be important to promote a human rights-based approach to gender issues in national migrant integration action plans and strategies. They should take into account important human rights aspects such as freedom of expression and religious freedom, to avoid reinforcing social exclusion and marginalisation.

Member States should ensure national migrant integration policies include specific actions targeting women to foster their equal participation in society, and should systematically monitor their implementation.

- The UK's Active Citizenship and English (ACE) project provides free english language learning programmes for women from non-EU countries.

How can trade unions and the public sector support migrant workers?

Membership of trade unions is a key element in social cohesion. It contributes to the shared sense of protected rights. However, a 2015 Eurofund study showed that although migrant workers form an increasing proportion of the workforce in certain sectors, few trade unions encourage migrants to become members.

This report shows that in 2015 trade union membership rates of immigrant workers were comparable with those of host-country nationals in Austria, Belgium, Estonia and The Netherlands; larger gaps were reported in Denmark, Ireland, Spain and the UK. In addition, 12 countries have trade unions with well-

established policies to reach out and support migrant workers. However, no such activities were identified in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia.

When it comes to the public sector - for example law enforcement, education and healthcare - 19 Member States provide equal access for non-EU nationals. Eight of these take concrete actions to increase diversity in the public sector and to encourage the recruitment of non-EU nationals or citizens with migrant backgrounds. Encouraging recruitment from those with migrant backgrounds can help better reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of society.

- In Austria, Vienna launched a police recruitment initiative called '[Vienna needs you](#)', to have at least one officer of migrant descent in every station.
- The native-born offspring of immigrants make up over one-third of public sector roles in France, The Netherlands and Sweden.

Can language learning help?

Most Member States acknowledge that language learning is necessary for finding work and for successful overall integration, and provide language support classes for immigrants and refugees. However, language learning programmes are rarely linked to employment, and job-specific or on-the-job language training courses are uncommon.

To improve the participation of migrants and their descendants in the labour market and their overall social integration, EU Member States should ensure that general and specific job-related language courses are also provided free of charge.

What voting rights do migrants have?

Participation in political life is a major driver of integration but voting rights are often restricted. Voting rights for national elections are provided for select categories of non-EU citizens in only Portugal and the UK. In Portugal, these rights are extended to citizens of Portuguese-speaking countries (e.g. Brazil) living in Portugal, provided they are registered to vote in Portugal. In the UK, citizens of Commonwealth countries can vote, and stand as candidates, in national elections.

Currently 12 EU Member States allow non-EU nationals take part in regional or local elections; three grant limited access and in the rest they have no access. Member States should consider granting voting rights to migrants based on such conditions as residence length and their status. They should also provide more favourable conditions for naturalising descendants born or educated in the EU, as more and more Member States are doing.

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