

Towards an Effective Integration of Third Country Nationals

Eurodiaconia

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity**, **equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.



We bring members together to **share practices**, **impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a network of over 45 organisations in 32 countries, founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconia. Representing over 30.000 local organisations, Eurodiaconia members provide social and healthcare services and promote social justice. They are engaged in all facets of support to migrants, ranging from emergency aid to integration measures such as supporting access to the labour market and social participation.

The issue of migration has been particularly urgent and present in the public discourse since 2015, when unprecedented high numbers of asylum seekers entered the EU, adding up to the already existing flows of 'economic migrants'. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than 1 million migrants arrived in the EU through the sea-routes in 2015. The overwhelming majority were asylum seekers from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries fleeing armed conflicts.¹ In 2016 and 2017, numbers of migrant arrivals remained high, especially on the central Mediterranean route with a mix of persons fleeing poverty and conflicts.²

In an EU that has not yet fully recovered from the financial and economic crisis, these high numbers of migrant arrivals have created a feeling of insecurity and fuelled a sense of competition over social assistance between vulnerable groups. Rising populism and xenophobia are worrying consequences of these accumulated crises and generate additional barriers to an already challenging integration

process. Decisive action at political and societal level is urgently needed to foster social cohesion and to reduce the increased risk of poverty and social exclusion which many migrants continue to face.

Migration flows to Europe are, however, not new and Eurodiaconia members have a longstanding commitment and engagement in working with migrants, including refugees, as well as economic migrants and also undocumented migrants. Based on their experiences and activities this policy paper aims to provide targeted recommendations for a more effective EU strategy and national policies for the integration of third country nationals. Eurodiaconia believes that a definition of integration must be grounded in the important principles highlighted by the *2004 Council Conclusions on Common basic principles for immigration integration policy in the EU*, that have been reaffirmed in 2014. According to these principles, integration can be defined as a two-way process towards the active involvement of third-country nationals with local communities.³

Furthermore, Eurodiaconia welcomes the recently published EU Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals⁴ as an important step forward in promoting a holistic approach to integration; however, further steps need to be taken to ensure that integration measures can meaningfully complement each other and connect to the key needs observed by our members in their daily work. This policy paper is accompanied by an 'Integration Guide', which presents concrete project examples from Eurodiaconia members.

¹ UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>

² According to UNHCR there have been over 360.000 arrivals to Europe by sea in 2016 and 130.000 by September 2017. UNHCR, http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean#_ga=2.198513711.1290225614.1505725382-338970739.1491209689

³ http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles_en.pdf

⁴ European Commission, 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

I. Education - Building the foundations for successful integration

Throughout Europe the educational level of migrant children is significantly lower than of nationals. A quarter of third country national children leave school without graduating and a fifth of young non-EU-citizens is neither in employment, education or training (NEETs), putting these young migrants at significant risk of poverty and social exclusion.⁵ While young persons in compulsory school age have to enrol in public schools, young adults above this age limit (set at 16 in many countries) are often not accepted in mainstream schools anymore and are at risk of falling out of the system. Eurodiaconia members in many countries run projects to support young migrants above compulsory school age to receive further education or any other support facilitating their integration.⁶

In order to provide best possible chances to migrant children, they need to be integrated as early as possible into mainstream education to learn the language and interact with their peers, independently of their legal status. Early childhood education and care, as well as day-care for older children, are therefore very valuable for integration and should be accessible to all migrant children. In no case this should be done to the detriment of non-migrant children, but sufficient means should be deployed to make sure that high-quality education is delivered and

multicultural school environments are perceived as an opportunity for all. Considering that there is a joint responsibility of communities and families to support children, several Eurodiaconia members have set up afterschool clubs, which allow to create meeting places for migrant and non-migrant children and their families.⁷ Furthermore, schools and other care facilities are an ideal environment to combat racism on the one hand and teach what it means to be citizen of a European country on the other hand.

In response to the high levels of arrivals in 2015, many countries have set up so-called 'welcome', 'introduction' or 'submersion' classes for refugee children, with the aim of facilitating their integration in mainstream education. While following a good intention, this risks creating de facto segregation of up to two years, during which the children are not integrated into mainstream education and risk falling even further behind their peers. Eurodiaconia members have noticed that in some areas a de facto geographical segregation is taking place, with some schools composed of hardly any native-speaking pupils. Such de facto segregation should by all means be avoided and social as well as cultural diversity at schools should be promoted.

⁵ Rainer Münz, 'The Integration of Migrants and Refugees – a European Synopsis', In: Iván Martín et al. 2017, 'From Refugees to Workers – Mapping Labour-Market Integration Support Measures for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in EU Member States', Volume 1, Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), Gütersloh, p.13.

⁶ A good example for such projects are the two Finnish Projects "Vamos for young asylum seekers" and the "Trail for involvement for Immigrant Youth", described in the 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration, p.13

⁷ See for example the Hungarian project 'Kalunba', described in our Guide to Integration, p.11

II. Adult education, training and labour market integration

Being able to work is key to integration. Many third-country nationals, however, have difficulties accessing the labour market or have to accept jobs for which they are overqualified. Key obstacles are language barriers and lacking recognition of skills and qualifications. For some it might even seem easier to work in the informal working sector instead, especially for asylum seekers who can have their right to work denied while waiting for international protection.

Specific attention should be given to migrant women, who are particularly vulnerable and have the highest difficulty entering the labour market, often combining several barriers such as lower education, childcare obligations and traditional gender roles. Employers might also be reluctant to employ third country nationals, it is therefore crucial to reach out to them and encourage them to hire third country nationals.⁸ Furthermore, intercultural training and support could be beneficial for employers and improve integration efforts, as integration is always a two-way process. Cooperation or partnerships between public employment agencies, NGOs, the business sector and local employers to support labour market integration of third country nationals is essential and must be encouraged.

To facilitate integration, language (and literacy) training should start as early as possible, as learning the host-countries language is a necessary basis for integration and any further

training or work. There needs to be a broad offer of high quality and affordable language classes, adapted to different levels and needs. Attendance should be made mandatory up to a certain level that needs to be obtained by all third country nationals.

Furthermore, in order to allow migrants to fully use their skills, qualifications need to be recognized and skills to be adequately assessed, including skills gained through non-formal and informal learning. Providing individualised support at the earliest possible stage is best to help a third country national to find opportunities that fit experiences, skills and expectations - the [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#), part of the European Commission's New Skills Agenda for Europe, marks a welcome step in this direction.

Short internships can allow migrants to discover the working environment in their host country, which often facilitates integration later on, as the migrant understands better what to expect from a certain job.⁹ It also provides them with a first professional experience and helps them remain active. Longer internships should rather aim at training the migrant and should ideally be linked to employment perspectives afterwards. Finally, entrepreneurship should also be considered as a possibility for third country nationals and could be encouraged through relevant training and support.

⁸ See for example the German 'Welcome Center Sozialwirtschaft', described in the 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration, p.17

⁹ This is done in the Austrian 'Training Course for Asylum Seekers', described in the 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration, p.16

III. Integration based on universal access to basic services

Enabling social inclusion of third-country nationals' means ensuring that conditions are created for people to have a decent life, including adequate and affordable housing as well as access to social and healthcare services.

Housing

Providing affordable housing to migrants is extremely challenging for local administrations throughout Europe, as many cities face housing shortages. This lack of affordable housing fuels criminal organizations renting apartments in bad conditions for high prices, as well as a feeling of competition with other vulnerable groups. Disproportionally high numbers of third country nationals face bad housing conditions, compared to EU citizens. Racism or fear among landlords and administrative barriers are some of the main reasons for a lack of access to adequate housing.

Undocumented migrants face even higher barriers accessing housing, despite the fact that housing is recognised as a fundamental human right.¹⁰ Often, their status doesn't give them access to emergency accommodation or shelter and landlords are very reluctant to offer accommodation to undocumented migrants, fearing legal consequences. Hence, undocumented migrants are pushed to the margins of the private housing sector or end up being homeless.¹¹

Social and health care services

Third country nationals also face barriers accessing social and health care services, despite the fact that EU law entitles them to access most social and health services on an equal basis as nationals.¹² Partly, this is related to the fact that most administrative systems are complex and difficult to navigate, especially for migrants who do not speak the national language.¹³ There is an urgent need to reduce these barriers and provide a non-discriminatory universal access to social and health services. Additionally, some migrants such as asylum seekers and refugees may have experienced traumatic events and therefore might have special needs in terms of access to specialized services, such as psychosocial care.¹⁴

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, ratified by all EU Member States, guarantees the right to healthcare for everyone, independently of legal status¹⁵. However, in many European countries, this right is not enforced and most undocumented migrants have to fear being reported to the police when going to the doctor. Therefore, most of them receive none or only incomplete care through humanitarian projects which are often the only ones to provide healthcare in a fully anonymous way. These projects work mostly with volunteers, lack coordination and can't secure generalized healthcare access for undocumented migrants.

¹⁰ Art. 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

<http://ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf>

¹¹PICUM 2014, 'Housing and Homelessness of Undocumented Migrants in Europe: Developing Strategies and Good Practices to Ensure Access to Housing and Shelter', Brussels, p.8-15,

http://picum.org/picum.org/uploads/publication/Annual%20Conference%202013%20%20report%20HOUSING_EN_FINAL.pdf

¹² Article 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union affirms recognition and respect of the right, *inter alia*, to housing assistance to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources.

¹³ A good example is the Italian Project 'Servizio Migranti Piedmont' who include in their support activities intercultural mediation with social services and public administration.

The project is described in the 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration, p. 9

¹⁴ A Eurodiaconia member in Sweden has set up a specialized clinic for migrants with psychosocial needs. You can read more about it in our 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration, p. 7

¹⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 12 "(...) the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health",

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

This is detrimental to the affected person, but also to the society as a whole, as many preventable health situations are treated only at a late stage in emergency care, which is much

more expensive than early intervention and conventional care.

IV. Integration through active participation in the host society

Education and employment are important aspects of the integration of third country nationals. However, in addition, integration needs also to be promoted in other fields and through other ways, such as sport, culture or arts. Eurodiaconia believes churches, religious communities and faith-based organisations play a decisive role in facilitating social inclusion and that this role needs to be recognised and capitalised on.

Language, orientation and culture classes or activities should be accessible as early as possible for all migrants in order to allow for the quickest possible integration. Motivation and willingness to learn and integrate is highest at the very beginning of their stay and should not be lost by long waiting periods. Cultural classes should deal with elements of democratic education and discussions around society's values, but also very practical everyday knowledge about grocery shopping, opening a bank account and other issues.

Bringing people together through community building

Integration in a society means also creating social bonds between migrants and locals. This

can be achieved in many different ways. Eurodiaconia members have a wide range of successful projects encouraging exchanges between locals and migrants, offering cultural events, sport or artistic activities of any kind that bring people – migrants and locals - together.¹⁶ Another opportunity can be through volunteering, which can be a chance to increase self-esteem, give responsibility and a role in society. It can also be a way to gain useful skills and knowledge that can help finding employment.

Churches, religious communities and other faith-based organisations play a crucial role in the integration of migrants. Many migrants perceive faith-based organisations as particularly secure and familiar environments. Their community structure and traditional attention to vulnerable individuals give them a natural role in facilitating integration. Furthermore, they can be part of a network, sometimes englobing the local, national as well as international level, which can offer financial support or cooperation possibilities in cases of resettlement or return activities. Many are already offering a broad range of community based activities and can integrate and welcome migrants within their existing structures and network.¹⁷

¹⁶ Several Eurodiaconia projects organise this kind of activities. In the 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration you can find projects that favour cultural exchanges in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the UK.

¹⁷ For example the project 'DOMA' in the Czech Republic uses its existing communities to facilitate integration and community building with migrants. See p.12 in our 2017 Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration

Conclusion

The significant increase of Third Country Nationals arriving in Europe represents a clear challenge, but also an important opportunity. On the one hand, Eurodiaconia's members are witnessing that the arrival of large numbers of migrants with complex needs is enhancing the pressure on social protection systems, which have already been weakened in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis. Furthermore, increased migratory flows are fuelling nationalist rhetoric, which portray migrants as a threat to European welfare and European identity. Migrants face higher risks of experiencing discrimination, as well as poverty and social exclusion. They are particularly vulnerable to risks when they are in irregular situations.

On the other hand, times as such are an opportunity for Europe to renew its commitment to human rights and the protection of the vulnerable, by providing opportunities for migrants desiring to come and settle in Europe to integrate and start a new life away from conflicts

and poverty. An effective response, grounded in European governments' commitments to respect Human Rights and European solidarity, must be found for a balanced European response to the changing trends of migration.

Moreover, the majority of migrants arriving in Europe are young and looking for employment, and therefore provide an important source for the development of relevant skills and a foundation for rejuvenating Europe's greying workforce. Migrants can help address staff shortages in specific sections of the labour market and provide a welcome stimulus to national economies. Facilitating successful integration at the earliest possible stage and on a holistic basis, reaching beyond the facilitation of labour market access, is key to capitalising on migrants' potential and to countering negative rhetoric. This policy paper has outlined what Eurodiaconia and its members consider to be the essential ingredients for such an approach.

Policy recommendations to the EU and National Governments

To ensure the effective integration of Third Country Nationals, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to:

- Mainstream the integration of third country nationals throughout all EU policies and address the social inclusion of migrants in areas beyond employment policy;
- Carefully monitor how Member States implement the Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals and ensure adequate support through EU Funds, such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived (FEAD) and the European Social Fund (ESF);
- Extend the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund to include migrants irrespective of their status;
- Increase space for civil society involvement in the European Integration Network and ensure meaningful stakeholder dialogue in the context of the Urban Agenda Partnerships.

To ensure equal access to education, Eurodiaconia calls on National Governments to:

- Provide access to early childhood education and care as early as possible and remove any administrative and financial barriers that could prevent attendance, in order to facilitate integration of children into mainstream education independently of their legal status;
- Increase enrolment in school or other types of education (e.g. apprenticeships) of newly arrived young Third Country Nationals beyond compulsory school age, for instance through the development of action plans setting out concrete targets at national or regional level;
- Ensure teachers are adequately trained to manage diversity and integration and schools have sufficient means to adequately address migrant children's needs;
- Ensure that the school is a safe place and that schools are not obliged to transmit information about undocumented children to the authorities, unless it is in the child's best interest to do so.

To ensure effective labour market integration, Eurodiaconia calls on National Governments to:

- Call on public employment services to provide tailor-made support pathways for vulnerable persons, including for Third Country Nationals, into the labour market, which fit Third Country Nationals' experiences, skills and expectations;
- Facilitate easy access to the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals for NGOs and churches, which are often at the forefront of supporting migrants in their new environment;
- Encourage cooperation of public employment services, NGOs and the business sector to facilitate labour market integration of migrants.

To ensure universal access to basic services, Eurodiaconia calls on National Governments to:

- Provide affordable and adequate housing for all, in line with the housing principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights and in cooperation with local actors;
- Facilitate access to social and healthcare services by reducing administrative barriers and by providing special guidance for third country nationals;
- Recognize the right of undocumented migrants to housing as well as basic social and healthcare services and refrain from criminalising service providers which provide services for undocumented migrants.

To ensure equal opportunities for social participation, Eurodiaconia calls on National Governments to:

- Recognize the importance of churches and religious communities for the integration of third-country nationals by involving them in the development and implementation of integration initiatives and ensuring adequate access to funding;
- Offer a broad range of high quality and free language classes that are adapted to different levels and needs, and available quickly after arrival;
- Enable reception centres and social services facilitating the integration of Third Country Nationals to engage users as volunteers, to empower them and strengthen their sense of co-ownership.

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