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European Commission Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027

Briefing for Members

What is the Integration and Inclusion Action Plan?

The Integration and Inclusion Action Plan (2021-2027)¹ was presented by the European Commission on November 24th, 2020 and builds on the previous action plan from 2016. It seeks to promote the inclusion of migrants in the EU and address the complex barriers that hinder their active participation and inclusion in society. Foundational to the action plan is the principle that integration is a two-way street and requires the contribution of both the migrant and the host community. While the 2016 Commission action plan only covered third country nationals, the new action plan covers both migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background².

The integration and inclusion of migrants is highly relevant, as around 8% of the EU population were born outside the EU, and 10% of young people aged 15-34 years born in the EU have at least one foreign-born parent. Migrants play an important role in the European economy, and above a quarter of migrants are highly educated, with almost 40% being overqualified for the job they do. This reveals a major need to establish pathways to quality employment for migrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the strong role migrants play in delivering essential services in the EU as care workers, doctors, and other services. However, it also revealed the poor protection and job quality many migrants face, as many also faced economic precarity, sub-par and unsafe working conditions, and compensation not commensurate to the role they played in helping Europe weather the pandemic. It is therefore important that the integration of migrants into the labour market is matched with strong social policies that protect the rights and needs of workers in all sectors, but particularly sectors that provide social and health services.

The evaluation of the 2016 action plan revealed that there is a need for further and increased action in several areas, for example, the integration of migrant women and better involving host societies in integration and inclusion policies. Additionally, the monitoring and evaluation of policies is needed to better determine what works and what doesn't.

Although integration and support to migrants are a competency of national governments, the EU plays a role in supporting Member States through funding, establishing partnerships, and providing guidance. The action plan is complemented by the mobilisation of EU funding and plans to create partnerships between migrants, host communities, social and economic partners, civil society, local and regional authorities, and the private sector.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf

² The expression "EU citizens with migrant background" covers nationals of EU Member States who had a third-country nationality and became EU citizens through naturalisation in one of the EU Member States as well as EU citizens who have a third country migrant background through their foreign-born parents.

The EU sees effective integration and inclusion as an important part of a unified and effective asylum system. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum³ proposes several changes to the current system and is currently in negotiations by the European Parliament and Council of the European Union.

Main actions

The action plan covers all stages of the integration process, from pre-departure measures, reception and early integration, long-term integration, and the building of inclusive societies. There are several principles underpinning the action plan, including inclusion for all, mainstreaming gender and anti-discrimination priorities, targeted support where needed, maximising EU added value through multi-stakeholder partnerships, and support at all stages of the integration process.

The Action Plan foresees action in several areas to step up the work of inclusion and integration and bring together actors from all levels. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, health is at the top of the agenda currently. The four key topics were chosen based on the major difficulties facing newly arrived and EU citizens with a migration background.

1. **Education and training:** More migrant children participating in high quality and inclusive early childhood education and care, teachers better equipped with the necessary skills and given the support to manage multicultural and multilingual classrooms, multi-stakeholder learning communities created with the involvement of schools, health and social services and parents. More migrants participating in comprehensive language training and civic orientation programmes, qualifications from non-EU countries are recognised faster.
2. **Employment and skills:** Stronger cooperation between key labour market actors and migrants, more support for migrant entrepreneurs. More migrant women participating in the labour market, assessment of migrants' skills is more effective and faster.
3. **Health:** Migrants are informed about their rights and have equal access to regular health care services, including mental health services. Specific challenges faced by migrant women, including prenatal and post-natal healthcare, are prioritised.
4. **Housing:** Migrants have access to adequate and affordable housing. Member States have access to a wide range of tools and good practices to fight discrimination on the housing market. Innovative housing solutions that foster inclusion and fight segregation are implemented.

The plan also proposes cross-cutting actions supporting effective integration and inclusion in all sectoral areas.

1. **Building strong partnerships for a more effective integration process:** Reinforce and develop partnerships with national authorities, local and regional authorities, host communities, civil society, and social and economic partners.
2. **Increased opportunities for EU funding under the 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework:** Supporting the use of EU funding for integration through fostering exchange and coordination between managing authorities (AMF, ERDF, ESF+, ERASMUS+), providing information to beneficiaries, investing in education and training and social infrastructure, and developing public-private partnerships.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

3. **Fostering participation and encounters with the host society:** Involving migrants and migrant organisations in the policy-making process, community sponsorship programmes, integration awards, and projects to raise awareness.
4. **Enhance the use of new technologies and digital tools for integration and inclusion:** Supporting Member States in assessing digital integration services, improving digital skills for migrants, new EU e-government action plan on human-centric digital public services and engagement of migrants in the creation and delivery of digital public services.
5. **Monitoring progress: towards an evidence-based integration and inclusion policy:** Launching a Eurobarometer on integration, analysis of progress and common challenges based on a set of indicators and exploring the idea with Member States of creating a joint 'scoreboard' of integration policies.

These priorities and actions will be implemented in close cooperation with other European Commission departments and Member States, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, social and economic partners, the private sector, host communities, diaspora organisations and migrants. The Commission has communicated that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has shifted the priorities of the action plan to prioritise urgent action to meet the needs of migrants and away from monitoring. It is anticipated that data will be gathered on the effects of the crisis on migrants' integration before monitoring progress can be started.

What is the role of Eurodiaconia members?

Eurodiaconia has been engaged in the consultation process for the creation of the action plan and were pleased to see that several topics, including the gender dimension of the integration process, were taken up and included as priorities in the action plan. We will continue to monitor the implementation of the action plan and would appreciate feedback from members on the progress of the implementation of the action plan in Member States in the coming years. The Commission foresees a mid-term review of the action plan in 2024.

Eurodiaconia members are encouraged to engage with the implementation of the integration and inclusion action plan by establishing themselves as key civil society partners and to participate in the Commission's plans to establish strong partnerships between migrants, host communities, civil society, social and economic partners, local and regional authorities, and the private sector.

Civil society actors are encouraged to participate in regular consultation and dialogue, including through the annual European Migration Forum⁴.

Given its cross-cutting nature, different EU funds are available to Member States' programmes through shared management and by the Commission. Eurodiaconia members can access more information on this funding at the European website for integration⁵ and by signing up for Eurodiaconia's funding newsletter.

Members are invited to participate in Eurodiaconia's annual migration network meeting to provide feedback about the situation of migrants in Europe, network, share best practices, and learn about current EU initiatives. Additionally, members can sign up for our migration newsletter⁶ to keep up to date with relevant events, funding, publication, and news related to migration in Europe.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/european-migration-forum_en_en

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/>

⁶ <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/newsletter/>