

Labour Market Integration of Refugees: European Networks and Platforms

KEY FINDINGS

- Apart from the Council of Refugees and Exiles (ecre) focusing on human rights, there
 exists a variety of European networks (and platforms) in the broader field of
 migration and integrating migrants, consisting of government representatives, NGOs
 and cities, focusing on migration in general or specific groups of migrants. The most
 comprehensive one is the European Migration Network, linking European level
 bodies with National Contact Points and stakeholders in the Member States. All such
 entities have produced deliverables on integration.
- Research on networks (e.g. ESF learning networks) has identified individual learning and continuing personal relationships as **strengths** and detected **weaknesses** in a wider use of knowledge and implementation.
- Impact and implementation: To enhance policy impact, a few networks have shifted from mutual learning to working methodologies for implementation (e.g. Eurocities, Public Employment Services network, European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network).
- Governance: The European Commission has recently created structures for coordination (Inter-Service Group under the lead of DG Home and a Task Force on labour market integration of refugees in DG Employment). These could have more positive impact on the effectiveness of soft coordination in a diverse but fragmented landscape of European networks if such structures were permanent.

To support the work of the Committee, Policy Department A has prepared three notes covering different dimensions of integration policies at European and at national level:

- 1. Labour market integration of refugees: EU-funding instruments
- 2. Labour market integration of refugees: European networks and platforms
- 3. Labour market integration of refugees: Lessons learnt and good practices.

This briefing note presents an overview of networks at European level, their members, objectives, main products and financing mechanisms as well as main challenges identified in research.

1. OVERVIEW OF EUROPEAN NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS

The compilation is based upon systematic online research within the remits of a briefing note. The list compiled might not be fully exhaustive as the information available is fragmented across different Commission, organisation and project websites.

To conclude from the research for this note, at European level a diverse landscape of structures exists covering different and partly overlapping aspects of the field of migration

in general or on integration of migrants. The only structure currently focusing on refugees is a network of NGOs - the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ecre) - whose objective is to enhance the respect of international human rights. Nevertheless, most of the other networks have produced knowledge which is equally relevant for the integration of refugees (being a special category of migrants). Despite several networks working on the same topic, strategic and operational results are not necessarily duplicated as network members have different institutional backgrounds and objectives. To detect the degree of overlap would require a more detailed case-to-case analysis.

Networks managed by the European Commission

Networks/ Platforms etc.	Members	Objectives	Products, e.g.
European Migration Network (DG HOME, Council Decision 2008/381/EC; AMIF Regulation)	Commission and National Contact Points (NCP) Council decision 2008	Collect and share information and statistics	Annual policy reports, country fact sheets, studies (e.g. regular updates on political and legislative developments in migration and international protection, Integration of Beneficiaries of International/Humanitarian Protection into the Labour Market), NCPs network meetings, Return experts' Working Group
European Migration Forum (DG Home / EESC)	Stakeholders including civil society	Physical platform for dialogue	Annual conferences, e.g. Safe routes, safe futures (2015).
European Website on Integration (DG HOME)		Virtual platform	e.g. Collection of good practices, Information on EU policies, country information, European Modules on Integration, Indicators of Immigrant Integration
ESF Thematic Network Migrants (DG EMPL, based upon ESF regulation)	Member State representatives (ESF)	Transnational network for mutual learning	Launch in February 2016, Priorities to be agreed with the members, grants for projects as part of national ESF allocations

The most comprehensive network at European level is the **European Migration Network** (EMN), a formal expert network established by a Council Decision of 2008. It is managed by the European Commission (DG Home) chairing the network's Steering Board and approving its annual work programme. The Board is composed of National Contact Points (NCPs) appointed by the national governments, mainly Ministries of Interior and Justice. These have a coordinating function developing a national stakeholder network. They are also responsible for country activities. The European Parliament is represented by an observer and the EMN annual status reports are disseminated to the European Parliament with the next one being the merged 2014-2015 report. EMN is funded under the Asylum and Migration with National Contact Points receiving grants accounting for EUR 12.375 000 m for the period 2015-2016¹.

This network covers a broad range of topics and products in the field of migration and asylum, examining economic integration depending on the priorities as set by the annual work programme. EMN regularly provides country information on political and legislative developments, thus contributing to the Commission's Annual Migration and Asylum reports. Topics include, for example, migrant smuggling, reception facilities for asylum seekers or the resettlement of Syrian refugees².

A less formalised platform has been set up by the European Commission (DG Home) in 2015 in collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee: the **European Migration Forum** (EMF). It replaced the European Integration Forum (EIF, created in 2009) through extending the scope. EMF brings together stakeholders

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including civil society organisations on migration, asylum and migrant integration issues. The main activity is an annual meeting to enhance dialogue at European level. The first EMF was held in January 2015, on the topic *Safe routes, safe futures* including a workshop on the *Integration of beneficiaries of international protection*³.

The European Commission (DG Home) has also set up a dedicated website: the **European Web Site on Integration** (EWSI), complementing the two networks EMN and EMF. It presents a variety of sources and information, e.g. an overview of the EU's work on migrant integration and a collection of good practices uploaded by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, country information' information on EU, national and private funding opportunities. Regarding **good practices** uploaded to the EWSI, content specific to refugees is the exception rather than the rule but can be found with help of a specific search (currently 83 records). There exists a check of submitted practices on the basis of editorial and process criteria. However, these do not comprise **more rigorous criteria**, such as evidence of impact or qualitative expert assessment⁴.

A second network on migrants has a legal status, but is smaller and more project-oriented: In compliance with the ESF Regulation (1304/2013/EU), the European Commission (DG Employment) is currently establishing a number of **ESF thematic networks**, among which one is dedicated to **Migrants** with a view to labour market integration and social inclusion. Network activities will be launched in February 2016. According to the Regulation, each Member State may select a thematic group from a list proposed by the Commission or a theme proposed by Member States. Therefore, the fact alone that a network on migrants forms part of the list together with eight other topics mirrors its political importance. All thematic networks are guided by a Common Framework elaborated by the Commission as requested by the ESF regulation⁵.

While the Commission funds common activities of the thematic networks (meetings of the thematic networks, a dedicated webpage and a database of partners for transnational ESF projects), the definition of eligible activities (calls for proposals for concrete learning activities) falls under the responsibility of the Member States as part of the Operational Programmes. Such activities may include exchange of information, of people, joint development, review of transfer of experience from other Member States or joint action, e.g. twinning between institutions. These thematic networks shall continue the activities of the Learning Networks having supported mutual learning in the previous programme period 2007-2013: The project Impart - Increasing the Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the labour market (IMPART) had developed a Benchmarking Toolkit guiding peer reviews which was applied to a number of ESF projects⁶. A second ESF Learning Network granted was "SaviAV - Social inclusion and vocational integration of Asylum seekers and Victims of human trafficking". It has produced recommendations on how to include these specific target groups into ESF Operational Programmes⁷. Earlier, the EQUAL-programme had elaborated a relevant knowledge base on asylum seekers encompassing strategic lessons, good practices and a Vademecum for related ESF projects⁸.

Networks supported by the European Commission on the basis of grants or project-funding

The Commission (DG Employment) is also **co-funding** the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants** (PICUM). This platform receives a grant based upon a framework partnership agreement (2014-2017). For each year a specific grant agreement has to be signed on the basis of a work programme approved by the Commission. PICUM receives also funds from other sources, e.g. project grants from EPIM. The platform is active through monitoring and reporting, capacity building, advocacy and awareness-raising for a group of migrants which is most affected from social exclusion and poses specific challenges for integration. It aims at linking grassroots levels with European policymaking. Topics encompass a *women's strategy, protection of children in an irregular migration situation, fundamental rights of undocumented migrants and analyses* (e.g. *Guide to the EU Victim's Directive*)⁹.

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Networks / Platforms etc.	Members	Objectives	Products, e.g.
Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM - Grant DG EMPL)	Organisations and individuals	Monitoring, research, advocacy with a view to fundamental rights	Projects, e.g. Women's Strategy, Children's Strategy, Fundamental Rights, Reports, policy briefs, position papers, conferences; e.g.: Guide to the EU Victim's Directive; Position Paper Undocumented Migrants and the EU2020 Strategy
European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	90 NGOs	Advocacy with a view to international human rights, fair and humane European asylum policies	Asylum Information Database (AIDA), European Database on Asylum Law (EDAL), Comparative study on the best practices for the integration of resettled refugees in the EU Member States (for the European Parliament, 2013)
European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM - Initiative by Network for European Foundations)	11 NGOs	Grant-making: support for vulnerable migrants, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants from a Universal Human Rights perspective	Granting projects, capacity development and networking, workshops for grantees; e.g. EPIM toolkit on drafting successful applications for EU funding, EU Return Directive, supporting projects on Immigration Detention, inclusion of unaccompanied minors
European Network of Migrant Women	Umbrella organisation of migrant-led women NGOs in the EU	Advocacy for migrant women (e.g. integration, employment, health, violence)	Position papers, e.g. Gender-based Dangers Facing Migrant And Refugee Women, projects, e.g. Promoting the Empowerment of Migrant Women in the European Union
Working group Migration and Integration (Eurocities)	Major European cities	Integrating cities concept Migration and integration (Part of the work programme)	Integrating Cities Charter and implementation reports, programmes such as "Implementoring" on implementation of standards / good practices"
Intercultural cities (Council of Europe)	Cities EU and beyond	Diversity concepts and implementation	Expert and peer support, thematic papers and policy briefs, collection of good practices, e.g.; welcoming and social inclusion, business; faith in intercultural cities; intercultural toolbox

The **European Council on Refugees and Exiles** (ECRE) is the only network with a specific focus on refugees. It is an **umbrella body of refugee assisting organisations** across Europe consisting of 90 member organisations in 38 countries. It is financed by a mix of private and public resources including project-funding by the Commission. Since the regulation establishing AMIF entered into force, an application for co-funding was no longer possible according to information from ECRE. In its mission and work programme the organisation puts its focus on the respect of human rights of asylum seekers and refugees. ECRE coordinates relevant databases, such as the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) and the European Database on Asylum Law (EDAL). Furthermore, it is responsible for the European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA), a network of legal practitioners. The network monitors the implementation of the Common European Asylum Framework, national legislation and European practice. In addition to ECRE's advocacy and research, they share their expertise via policy papers, consultation submissions and studies. ¹⁰

A specific structure represents the **European Programme for Integration and Migration** (EPIM) which is an initiative by the Network of European Foundations (presently 11)

granting projects to civil society organisations supporting undocumented migrants, unaccompanied children and in general to promote equality, integration and social inclusion of the most vulnerable migrants (10 projects accounting for EUR 3 m 2012-2015). In 2016-2018 sub-funds will focus on immigration detention, reforms of the Common European Asylum System, long-term reception and inclusion of unaccompanied minors. Further, EPIM aims at capacity-building through organising collective thematic workshops and joint learning initiatives for its grantees and enhancing networking between national and European NGOs¹¹.

The **European Network of Migrant Women** (ENoMW) is an umbrella organisation of migrant-led women's non-governmental organisations in 20 EU Member States, working to promote migrant women's rights, the concerns, needs and interests of migrant women in the EU. It publishes position papers on different topics, such as on gender-based violence against refugee and migrant women. It is currently running a project on *Promoting the Empowerment of Migrant Women in the European Union* in partnership with EPIM¹².

From a local perspective, the **EUROCITIES network** shows considerable continuity and experience. In 2010, the network adopted the *EUROCITIES Charter on Integrating Cities* setting out the commitment to implement the European Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy (2004)¹³. The network has created an Integrating Cities website. It is running a working group consisting of practitioners from 30 cities organising mutual exchange and attempting also to influence European policies. Projects have been funded under the European Integration Fund and partially by DG Employment. It's more recent work goes beyond identifying good practices. Building upon previous projects, the focus of the project **Implementoring** (2012-2014) has been shifted from mutual learning towards implementation guided by standards (benchmarks) and evaluation, applying a mentoring scheme where cities support others, monitoring progress on an implementation roadmap. This methodology has been adapted more recently by the SHARE network in the frame of the *Sharing for mentoring - programme* and *volunteering programmes* (see below)¹⁴.

The Council of Europe supports another network targeting the local level: **Intercultural cities**. Its mission is to minimise threats and **maximise the potential of diversity with a view to public space and services**. Given the broader profile of the Council of Europe its members are cities from Europe and beyond. Currently, 30 cities belong to this network including a city from Israel, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine, respectively. A number of countries have founded national Intercultural cities networks, e.g. Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain. The Intercultural cities network provides expertise, peer support and practical help to cities. It has produced an *Intercultural city toolbox*, thematic papers and policy briefs on a number of topics, e.g. *Intercultural centres, Faith in intercultural cities, business partnerships with migrants' countries of origin, Good practices on welcoming and social integration ¹⁵.*

Another network deals with services for integration, the **European network of Public Employment Services** (PES). It has been established on the basis of a Decision by the European Parliament and the Council in 2014, replacing the previous informal Commission expert group of Heads of Public Employment Services (HoPES). Its activities are financed by DG Employment. The 4th meeting of the Board decided in November 2015 to include the **situation of the refugees and their sustainable integration** in the national labour markets into the **Work Programme 2016**. One option discussed was to establish a working group. A European Web-tool for Evaluated Employment Services Practices (**WEESP** - 2012-2014) containing a number of practices on integration of migrants is currently under reconstruction¹⁶.

Selected networks previously funded by the Commission

A number of networks in the area of integration of migrants and refugees have produced relevant deliverables for refugees, covered by resettlement arrangements. The **European Resettlement Network** (2012 - 2014), a platform to exchange information and expertise,

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for member organisations and individuals, dealt with processes and practices to support the development of resettlement and integration policy in EU Member States. Within the more specific **SHARE Network** (2012 - 2015) bringing together local authorities and NGOs, mutual learning and cooperation was organised in relation to refugee resettlement, protection and integration. The SHARE network was led by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and co-funded by the European Commission. Adapting the methodology for implementation developed by EUROCITIES (see above), it developed webinars and web-based toolkits including one on **Volunteering** for refugee integration¹⁷.

2. FROM MUTUAL LEARNING TO IMPLEMENTATION

Numerous networks have produced a large volume of knowledge over time. For the most formalised network, the European Migration Network, the use of a part of that knowledge is clearly defined: the countries (National Contact Points) receive a grant in return for delivering country information as part of their responsibilities.

As regards results from mutual learning, an **evaluation of the ESF Learning Networks** (2007-2013) detects **strengths and weaknesses** which might be applicable to a number of other learning activities in European networks:

- **individual learning and personal relationships** emerged as clearest and most positive outcome including continuation after the end of the project,
- **mixed results for dissemination of knowledge**, as dissemination strategies were partly under-developed or inappropriately targeted,
- **limited evidence of policy learning** apart from a visible impact on the immediate organisational context of ESF, this might have to do with the fact that the **production of recommendations** appeared to be demanding,
- lack of adequate support given that network management requires **considerable expertise**, **assistance and leadership** to achieve good outcomes¹⁸.

The evaluation study also identified a practice on how to **improve dissemination**: using "**ambassadors**" to share learning within Member States and systematically building links with key players in the Member States (and the EU) appeared to be important.

Looking at the list presented above, a few networks have developed strategies to cope with the **implementation gap** through **shifting activities from mutual learning to implementation** on the basis of a process-oriented methodology. Even if this might be easier for organisations and concrete Active Labour Market Programmes than for politically more sensitive dimensions, such as wage levels, the way of thinking and the working methodology can be applied to other networks:

- At local level, the **EUROCITIES network** in its project *Implementoring* has progressed in several steps. In a first phase, goals and standards have been set by a benchmark based upon European experience. Second, cities undertaking actions to implement these standards can ask for support including evaluation and mentoring by a partner city (mentor). On this basis toolkits have been elaborated for the field of action concerned, e.g. on promoting equality in administration and service provision¹⁹. This methodology has been applied by other networks, e.g. the SHARE network described above.
- The **European network of Public Employment Services** has developed a **benchlearning methodology**. In a first step, a framework for qualitative performance assessment has been developed by a working group defining key elements and indicators describing variety of practice. On this basis small teams assess a public employment service in a country and priorities for action are agreed in dialogue with the PES management²⁰.
- The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) has produced a Resource Kit including a section on career management skills to better manage transitions from school to education or work or from unemployment to employment.

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The kit broadly defined policy issues, questions that policies need to address, policy steps and implications for sectors such as schools, vocational education and training or employment. In a second step mutual exchange continued on implementation to detect success factors and obstacles, to conclude after further exchange on ongoing changes with a more operational tool for implementation²¹.

3. GOVERNANCE: ENHANCING COORDINATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

An analysis by the Migration Policy Institute similarly argues that a stronger orientation towards implementation is needed while pointing to a second, higher-level precondition: the role of governance and coordination. It underlines that after a phase of intensifying legislation (i.e. Directives adopted in the field of asylum), "the next phase will be far more focused on soft diplomacy, practical cooperation, and ensuring that policies agreed at EU level, are implemented effectively [...] at national level." For this purpose, "a coordinated, coherent, and comprehensive approach to migration" should emerge in European institutions and national capitals²². The analysis finds that despite some efforts during the last decade, migration policies were in 2015 still fragmented across the European Commission. As regards integration, the Directorate General for Employment had deemphasised for a while immigration issues within its own portfolio, focusing on youth unemployment and poverty.

The policy brief recommends strengthening coordination and leadership. It suggests establishing a special representative on migration at the EU level to act as envoy and a Migration Working Group of Commissioners chaired by the Vice-President for Better Regulation and Inter-Institutional Relations. This should be backed by **more cross-cutting policy development**.

Given the urgency of the situation coupled with the Commission Work Programme 2016, since autumn 2015, the European Commission has undertaken concrete steps to improve coordination and also to enhance labour market integration strategies for refugees within DG Employment. In November 2015, an Inter-Service Group "Integration of thirdcountry nationals" has been set up under the lead of DG Home. This group brings together desk officers from several DGs such as DG Employment, DG Education and Culture, DG Regio, DG Research, DG Growth, DG Justice. According to information from the Commission, this group will not only provide input to the preparation of the Legal Migration Package (including a Communication or an Action Plan on Integration) in the first half of 2016. Recently, a sub- group on Funding has been established, and with further ones envisageable. One possibility could be a sub-group on Indicators and data in order to foster comparative analysis and monitoring of results. Within the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, a Task Force on Refugee Labour Market **Integration** has been established to propose a set of possible actions to promote refugee's integration in the labour market and society. It focuses on the medium to long-term perspective and is looking into ongoing and future initiatives at EU level. Aspects include access to labour market and working conditions, skills and qualification recognition, quidance through the European Semester, good practices and peer learning of member states.

With a more **permanent** nature, a **coordinating structure** could also contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the diverse, but hitherto fragmented landscape of networks in the field of integration of migrants and refugees. Such a structure could also shape a consistent process for mutual learning and implementation. For this purpose, it could mainstream rigorous criteria for collecting good practices, use databases of good practices for targeted analysis to define strategic core elements or benchmarks (e.g. good practices on language courses, skills assessment or anti-discrimination activities in public services), and support the development of working methodologies to enhance implementation in the Member States.

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 - $\underline{\text{http://www.resettlement.eu/page/volunteering-refugee-integration-share-network-toolkit-publication.}}$
- ¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/esf/BlobServlet?docId=454&langId=en.
- ¹⁹ http://www.integratingcities.eu/integrating-cities/projects/Implementoring.
- ²⁰ http://www.pesboard.eu/EN/pesboard/Benchlearning/benchlearning_node.html.
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Manuscript completed in February 2016

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