



European Committee
of the Regions

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COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

INTEGRATION OF YOUNG MIGRANTS: PREVENTING A "LOST GENERATION" BY FOSTERING LOCAL SOLUTIONS

4 DECEMBER 2020

Since 2009, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and European Agency for Fundamental rights (FRA) have held an Annual Dialogue to discuss fundamental rights themes of relevance at regional and local level, sharing knowledge on existing fundamental rights good practices.

In 2020, the Annual Dialogue aims to discuss challenges and good practices of integration support for young migrants and refugees, and explore how success factors can be further expanded and supported by the European Union.

Protecting Fundamental Rights within diverse, inclusive and cohesive societies has always been at the heart of European Union development. EU Member States have recognised in the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union that rights and values serve as a compass for migrant integration. They have also recognised that immigration is a permanent feature of European society and that "it is clearly in the common interest of all Member States [...] that each individual Member State pursues effective integration strategies". In its 2016 Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals, the European Commission pointed out that failure to integrate the newly arrived people can result in "a massive waste of resources, both for the individuals concerned themselves and more generally for our economy and society".

The CoR in its own work has strongly acknowledged the importance of integrating migrants, in particular young migrants. As stressed in the Opinion on the protection of children, the committee highlighted "that a good reception and integration process is therefore a long-term investment in welfare, democracy and human rights"¹.

To facilitate an exchange of information and practices among European mayors and other local and regional politicians (CoR members and non-members) in particular of small and medium-sized

¹ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on [The protection of children in migration](#).

municipalities, the European Committee of the Regions initiated the *Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants*² platform.

The overarching aim of this CoR initiative implemented in cooperation with the European Commission and a number of European associations (Eurocities, CEMR, CPMR and AER), is to step up efforts to improve the integration of migrants and to present a positive narrative of solidarity, showcasing the potential benefits of the integration of migrants in EU cities, towns and rural areas, and the political, social and economic costs of failed integration.

Medium and small cities and rural areas in Europe have increasingly found themselves addressing the needs of migrants and refugees and developing and implementing integration programmes for their newly-arrived residents.

In this context, the CoR, as part of its Cities and Regions for Integration Initiative commissioned, a report on the "Integration of migrants in middle and small cities and in rural areas in Europe"³.

The report, drafted by the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, explores the context in which, and the structures through which, integration measures are implemented and the nature of the actions being undertaken by medium and small cities across Europe.

The research showed a relatively positive attitude by many of the cities examined to actively engage with migration generally and integration in particular. Migration is seen as a way to address some of the existing demographic and other challenges of the city and integration provides a way towards ensuring that migrants and refugees are actively contributing to their new homes.

The integration of young migrants and refugees is particularly important. From 2015 to 2018, almost 2 million people received international protection in the EU; 80% of them were below the age of 34. Young refugees, in particular those beyond the compulsory education age, face difficulties in accessing education and vocational training. They also face mental health problems, difficulties with family reunification, discrimination and more. At the same time, young people have particular potential to quickly and fully integrate and participate in all aspects of life as they develop, contributing to the overall well-being of society.

Local authorities and actors have played a crucial role in integrating young migrants and refugees. They can create spaces for exchanges with local communities, foster participation, support the matching between newcomers and the local labour market and promote integration through inclusive education and housing policies. Providing access to healthcare, social support, education and housing possibilities are responsibilities that usually fall to local actors. Gaps in support thus often become evident earlier at local than at central level, and solutions need to be found quickly.

Strong coordination of all levels of governance, including national, regional and local actors, is needed as successful integration involves multiple factors. Extended legal uncertainty, being separated from

² <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/cities-and-regions-for-integration.aspx>

³ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Integration%20of%20Migrants.pdf>

family members, unstable housing conditions, language difficulties, interrupted social support, mental health issues, limited educational and training opportunities and the threat of criminality – all these in and of themselves present hurdles to integration, and can also exacerbate each other as measures taken in one field affect the degree to which individuals are able to enjoy their rights in other fields.

FRA explored the challenges of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who fled armed conflict or persecution and arrived in the European Union (EU) in 2015 and 2016. Based on interviews with over 160 refugees and 400 frontline workers at local level, FRA's "Integration of young refugees in the EU" report identifies obstacles as well as many good local policy initiatives that have helped young refugees' integration. Challenges relate to specific turning points that risk undermining integration progress achieved so far, such as the transitions from

- childhood to adulthood on turning 18
- being an asylum applicant to a person granted international protection.

Concerning migrant integration in general, FRA also found positive indications. The majority of immigrants and descendants responding to FRA's 2016 EU-MIDIS II survey⁴ feel strongly attached to the country they live in; immigrants often indicate higher levels of trust than the general population does in national and European institutions, including the legal system and the police; and survey results show a very high level of acceptance of other religious or ethnic groups. At the same time, the proportion of migrants experiencing discrimination, as well as physical violence and harassment motivated by hatred, remains at a level raising serious concern. It also constitutes a major barrier to integration.

All existing challenges have been exacerbated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures – as they directly affected administrative procedures, including asylum processes, schooling, and accommodation arrangements, as well as services providing language courses.

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⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/dataset/ds00141_en

Appendix:

Examples of good local policy initiatives to support integration of young migrants and refugees identified by European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA):

- Special [programmes](#) for integrating migrants aged 15 to 25 in educational and professional systems, e.g. Youth college (*Jugendkolleg*) in Vienna, Austria;
- Sponsorship and "buddy" programmes smoothing the transition from youth welfare to adult support systems, e.g. the "[Schlüsselbund](#)" initiative in Bremen, Germany, connecting housing sponsors with young refugees with the support of the youth welfare authority.
- Local education authorities allowing for enrolment of newly arrived foreign children during the school year, e.g. in Marseille, France;
- Municipal housing companies making available a percentage of vacant flats for refugees, prioritising young persons, e.g. in Luleå, Sweden.
- NGOs or local social services subleasing to young refugees, e.g. in Marseille (sliding lease system), France or Norbotten, Sweden;
- Youth meet-ups and counselling [cafes](#), e.g. Bremen, Germany;
- Municipal and regional authorities facilitating referral to specialised mental health care, e.g. Milan Vulnerabilities Network, Milan, Italy;
- Integration programmes launched by municipalities, e.g. "Curing the Limbo" offered by the municipality of Athens, Greece;
- Community-building programmes, such as [BENN](#) in Berlin, Germany;
- Transitional accommodation and integration support offered by the [Arsis Home](#) to 17 year olds hosted in the safe zones in the centres of Shisto, Ritsona and Thiva, Greece.
