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EESC fact-finding missions on the situation of refugees, as seen by civil society organisations

SYNTHESIS REPORT



European Economic and Social Committee

**EESC FACT-FINDING MISSIONS ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES,
AS SEEN BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
(December 2015 – January 2016)**

**Synthesis Report
16 March 2016**

KEY MESSAGES

The European Economic and Social Committee wholeheartedly appreciates the important role civil society is playing in the current refugee crisis. Without its response, the tragic humanitarian situation which has unfolded in many European countries could have been even more catastrophic.

Through its commitment to giving a voice to those involved, the EESC has undertaken 11 fact-finding missions - to Austria, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, Germany, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Malta, Poland and Bulgaria. On the basis of the results of these missions, and of the considerable experience of its members, the EESC, as a representative and supporter of organised civil society, presents its key messages to the Member States and EU institutions for addressing the refugee crisis¹:

- a. The European Union and the Member States must work together to achieve a genuine common European asylum system, as stipulated in Article 78 TFEU, as well as a fair distribution of refugees. Common EU criteria to determine whether a person is entitled to international protection should be reinforced and properly implemented.
- b. The Dublin regulation must be reviewed, taking account of the fact that countries of first arrival are often only transit countries for the refugees.
- c. The European Union and the Member States should allocate sufficient national resources (staff, funding and infrastructure) to the reception of and assistance to refugees. If civil society organisations fulfil the tasks of Member States, as happens in many places, governments should compensate them accordingly. Furthermore, CSOs need easier access to EU funding.
- d. Member States are responsible for implementing the mandatory requirements of the Geneva Convention. The European Council, European Commission and European Parliament should acknowledge responsibility for actively supporting Member States, in order to allow them to deal with the refugee crisis.

¹ A clear distinction must be made between refugees according to the Geneva Convention and third country nationals not entitled to a protected status. These key messages focus on refugees.

- e. The achievements of the Schengen System must be preserved. Effective external border controls are a precondition to maintaining it. Securing borders must not mean shutting out those who need protection for humanitarian reasons, in accordance with the Geneva Convention.
- f. Refugees need safe, regular routes to come to the EU, in order to avoid further deaths, human rights violations and exposure to smuggling and trafficking. A more coordinated approach from all of the European and international stakeholders involved is needed.
- g. The European Union and its Member States should support refugees in the countries neighbouring conflict zones.
- h. Information campaigns should dissuade economic migrants from risking their lives trying to reach the EU. Orders to return people whose asylum claims have been rejected, should be enforced. Stories by returnees should serve as a deterrent and to counter the biased information being spread by smugglers.
- i. Frontex's mandate and resources must be strengthened in order to improve search and rescue operations. Frontex should play a bigger role in the registration at the external borders.
- j. In order to make the relocation mechanism fully functional, registration at Europe's external borders must be obligatory, all planned hotspots need to become operational and active 24/7 and more hotspots need to be considered. Member States should live up to their promise to deploy staff to the hotspots and make additional resources available.
- k. Asylum seekers need to be given up-to-date information about their rights and obligations on their arrival and in a language they understand. Refugees, in particular the most vulnerable ones, and the volunteers who work with them need appropriate psychological assistance. Medical services should be provided at arrival points.
- l. Cooperation and coordination among civil society organisations (CSOs) and with their governments needs to be improved and professionalised to ensure they are sustainable. Members States must establish a clear line of responsibility for the often cross-cutting issue of reception of and assistance to refugees and ensure the coordination of public authorities at various levels.
- m. The EU should do more to coordinate humanitarian efforts and ensure a larger EU presence and visibility in the countries that are the main destinations for refugees, for instance through the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) or a similar body.

- n. Due account needs to be taken of the concerns of the local population. However, any hate speech, misinformation about refugees and xenophobic discourse must be firmly counteracted and the positive contributions of refugees must be highlighted in order to change the way they are portrayed in the media. Refugees should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for Europe's economic and social model.
- o. More than ever, it is important to implement strong economic policies in order to stimulate growth and job creation for all. Assistance for refugees and their integration is an economic stimulus in itself. Growth and jobs help counter hostility against refugees.
- p. Sustainable long-term integration policies, covering skills screening and recognition, education and training, including civic education and language courses, need to be applied as soon as possible if a positive outcome of the asylum procedure is to be expected. Labour market participation should be fostered in cooperation with the social partners. Investment in integration measures will pay off in the medium and long term, while the cost of no integration would be huge.

Following the fact-finding missions, the EESC is now better prepared to contribute to the resolution of the refugee crisis and to policies for the integration of refugees. As a representative of organised civil society, the EESC, will be channelling its needs, observations and recommendations towards the EU institutions, European citizens and their organisations. By adding our expertise, as well as European and global perspectives, the EESC will further contribute to the development of EU policies in the area of asylum and migration.

Introduction

Persecution, conflict and poverty have driven more than one million people to seek safety in Europe in 2015, after death-defying journeys across sea and land. 57% of them were Syrians escaping the war in their country. Afghans accounted for 24% and Iraqis for 9%. Others came from countries such as Pakistan, Eritrea and Somalia². The overwhelming majority of people reached Europe having made their way across the Mediterranean, arriving mainly in Greece and Italy. Of these, 3 735 went missing and are believed to have drowned³. Unfortunately, for those who survived, arrival in Europe has rarely meant the end of suffering and harsh conditions. Poor reception conditions, smugglers, robbers, incidents of corruption and police and border guard violence, severe weather conditions, closed borders, passport controls and increasingly hostile European citizens are but some of the difficulties encountered by the men, women and children seeking refuge in Europe.

The public authorities responsible at the national and regional levels have often found it challenging to provide an adequate response to the arrival of large amounts of migrants in 2014 and 2015.

² UNHCR, Regional refugee and migrant response for Europe 2016, published on 26 January 2016.

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>.

Volunteers, donors, civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities have often played a major role in the various phases of the asylum process. In some cases, local mayors have gone beyond their responsibilities to fill the gap left by national and regional authorities and the role of civil society has been notable and continues to be essential. In some countries, local authorities in border regions have accumulated substantial debts to finance their efforts.

In December 2015 and January 2016, EESC delegations have visited eleven EU Member States (and a visit to Turkey is planned in March) to meet civil society organisations working with refugees and migrants in order to identify the problems, needs, failures, success stories and best practices of the various actors in the current refugee crisis with the final aim of providing input to EU policy making. Each delegation was composed of three members and supported by the EESC secretariat. The delegations visited Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden and met 183 stakeholders in total, mainly from civil society organisations.

This synthesis report provides an overview of the delegations' main findings with particular emphasis on policy recommendations to address the challenges of the current refugee crisis and the long-term integration of beneficiaries of international protection. The synthesis report will be supplemented with detailed summary reports on the eleven country visits.

1. Reducing the number of (irregular) arrivals

The factors that make the arrival of large amounts of refugees and other migrants particularly challenging are the sheer number of people arriving in a short period of time and the fact that most of them make their way to Europe via irregular channels. The Dublin system is not fit to respond to the massive flow of refugees. Assistance to countries that are neighbouring conflicts and hosting refugees is not sufficient. Countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have taken the biggest share of the refugees, including almost 4.3 million Syrians. Life there is difficult and expensive for refugees, with practically no employment possibilities and a chronic aid shortage. Migration to Europe is expected to continue, most likely in large numbers.

1.1 Addressing the root causes

- The root causes of forced displacement need to be addressed, including by ending conflict and finding political solutions to crises. Peace-building efforts should be accompanied by efforts to reconstruct countries and societies after years of war.
- The core objectives in the countries of origin should be rights-based human security and human and social development offering real prospects for local populations, especially for young people.
- More investment in relief and development initiatives, including those undertaken by civil society organisations, which improve the situation of displaced populations in countries in the regions neighbouring conflict, such as Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan should be undertaken.

1.2 Ensuring safe routes

- **Refugees need safe, regular routes to come to the EU. Deaths, human rights violations and exposure to smuggling and trafficking** must be prevented. This should include humanitarian admission programmes (resettlement), humanitarian visas issued in embassies, private sponsorship programmes and the introduction of temporary protection mechanisms. The EU Visa Code should be amended to allow for more protection. One potential solution is to register asylum requests outside the EU, e.g. in Turkey.
- In the absence of safe routes, free services, such as transportation, accommodation and internet connection, should be provided on transit routes to avoid smuggling and exploitation.
- Frontex's mandate and resources should be strengthened, allowing it to play a more prominent role in the registration and border control processes.

1.3 Dissuasion from irregular travel

- The EU and its Member States should dissuade potential irregular economic migrants from travelling to the EU, by means of information campaigns in their countries of origin. In addition, voluntary returnees may act as messengers in their countries of origin and correct the often biased information created by smugglers and others involved.

2. Receiving and assisting refugees in a humane way

In addition to looking for ways of addressing the causes of the large flows in the long-term, the EU needs to be prepared for migratory flows to continue and must come up with strong tools to manage them effectively. Migratory routes and profiles of migrants are always changing, requiring countries to be flexible and adapt to these changing realities.

Civil society deplores the absence of a common EU approach to managing the large influx of refugees and the lack of a properly-functioning common asylum system. The relevant EU and international laws are not always properly implemented in Member States. The agreed numbers for relocation do not match the reality of arriving migrants. Additionally, the EU relocation system does not function as it should and only very few migrants have been relocated to date. Some countries have unilaterally closed their borders, threatening the Schengen system.

2.1 Common European asylum system

The EESC recommends:

- The completion of a **genuine common European asylum system** based on the protection of human rights, solidarity and shared responsibility. It **should include uniform asylum status and mutual recognition of asylum decisions**, in order to guarantee that asylum seekers can benefit

from the same rights and reception conditions and undergo the same procedure in all Member States. This could help end "asylum shopping".

- The registration upon arrival of all asylum seekers entering the EU, thereby avoiding duplications in registration. Member States should also better share information on the refugee inflow. Frontex should play a bigger role in that process.
- The revision of the Dublin Regulation in order to establish a better, permanent responsibility sharing mechanism, to support the Member States at the external borders of the EU. They should not be the only ones obliged to receive all asylum seekers that enter the EU, consider their asylum applications and integrate them afterwards.
- That all planned hotspots need to become operational and active 24/7, more hotspots need to be considered and Member States should deploy staff to the hotspots and make additional resources available.
- Compliance with relocation quota within deadlines to be established and a quicker administrative response. Whenever possible, language skills, family or diaspora ties should be taken into account.
- That Member States need to increase their processing capacity, both to reduce costs and to improve the situation of applicants.
- That migrants who have received a return order are swiftly readmitted to the country of origin, in dignity and equipped with tools for reintegration, in cooperation with the authorities of the countries of origin.

2.2 Reception of asylum-seekers and refugees

Member State authorities struggle to provide an adequate response to the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers. Many of them do not have the capacity and/or the political will to ensure adequate reception conditions, medical assistance, information on legal procedures and asylum seekers' and refugees' rights. There is a shortage of funding, trained staff and interpreters. Sometimes an unclear distribution of responsibilities and funding between the central and decentralised levels generates confusion in aid activities, while local authorities and CSOs make efforts to cope with the crisis. After lodging an application for asylum, refugees should normally be entitled to basic services such as accommodation, but there are a chronic lacks of adequate housing and many refugees remain in temporary accommodation. A failing government response leaves room for unscrupulous people to take advantage of the vulnerable position of refugees left to fend for themselves, e.g. by providing goods, housing, jobs or services in the irregular circuit.

The EESC therefore recommends

- **That the European Commission monitor the proper transposition and compliance by all Member States with EU asylum legislation, in particular the Reception Conditions Directive⁴.**

⁴

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN>.

- Continuous monitoring of the legal conformity of registration and asylum procedures (language of procedure, provision of necessary and reliable information, legal representation, adequate living conditions during procedure etc.), especially in countries with a conspicuously low rate of positive asylum decisions.
- That Member States demonstrate political commitment to the reception of and assistance to refugees. They should dedicate sufficient national resources (staff, funding and infrastructure) to the crisis and implement strategic plans. Reception of refugees is the responsibility of the entire Member State and local authorities need to be supported by the national level.
- That Member States establish a clear line of responsibility for the often cross-cutting issue of reception of and assistance to refugees and ensure coordination of public authorities on various levels.
- That the EU and its Member States prepare for similar crises to occur in the future and set up migration-specific monitoring systems.
- That Member States maintain family unity and offer an individualised approach.
- That Member States provide reception and transit centres with adequate resources and these should offer 24/7 assistance when needed, especially to vulnerable people.
- That Member States make the necessary resources available to reduce the time spent in emergency accommodation – especially for families – and to improve living conditions. Housing should be provided within local communities rather than outside of them. There is an urgent need for affordable housing for refugees, who should be supported in finding accommodation.

2.3 Providing adequate and reliable information to asylum-seekers and refugees

On their way to and through Europe, refugees rely on information – often false – obtained through informal channels and smugglers. Stories in the media may be biased and censored. In addition, refugees rarely speak the language of the host society or any other European language. However, in many EU Member States there is a lack of interpreters mastering languages such as Arabic, Farsi or Pashto. Currently, CSOs play an important role in finding and training interpreters.

Therefore The EESC recommends that

- The European Commission ensure Member States comply with Article 5 of the Reception Conditions Directive on the provision of information on asylum seekers' rights and obligations and on organisations, groups or persons providing assistance and information.
- The European Commission ensure Member States comply with all language-related provisions in the Asylum Procedures Directive.
- Member States provide clear practical and legal information to refugees, both orally and in written form, in a language they understand; it is vital to have a sufficient number of well-prepared interpreters and translators to help with registration and dissipate fears and misinformation and Member States need to make the necessary resources available for their recruitment. Non-professional interpreters (e.g. refugees/migrants from past immigration waves)

can be useful for basic conversations, but the right balance needs to be found between risks and benefits.

- **The EU should make centralised information for refugees available on arrival. Leaflets and an official EU website** (similar to the EU Immigration Portal) would offer up-to-date information about their rights, the procedures in place and the asylum possibilities available to them around the EU, and not only in a few countries such as Germany, Austria or Sweden.
- The EU should coordinate the production of information brochures for refugees that are to be relocated, with basic information in their mother tongue about the destination country, distributed before travel. Adapted information should also be given to children.

2.4 Protection of the most vulnerable

Many refugees arrive after long and traumatic journeys, often experiencing robbery, rape or other types of violence. They have escaped from war, left family members behind or lost them on their way to Europe. This particular trauma is not always sufficiently taken into account in the reception and asylum procedure phase. The number of unaccompanied minors arriving in the EU is increasing. Unaccompanied minors have been reported to go missing in alarmingly high numbers. Although it is often unclear what has happened, many of them seem to have fallen in the hands of criminal groups, traffickers and other people with ill intentions.

Therefore the EESC recommends that

- **Member States should make the necessary resources available so that refugees, but also volunteers who work with them, can be provided with adequate psychological assistance.**
- Unaccompanied minors should be given accommodation in small centres or in host families. The European Commission should ensure that Member States do not detain (unaccompanied) minors and the EU should strengthen the mechanisms for monitoring the respect of the rights of the child, in coordination with UNICEF.
- Gender should also be taken into account: whenever they so request, female applicants should be interviewed by a female official with the assistance of a female interpreter.

3. Better supporting civil society organisations

CSOs carry out invaluable work assisting or even replacing governments in their duties to provide humanitarian assistance and protection of refugees. CSOs, very committed local initiatives and volunteers carry out a wide range of activities in all phases of the reception process, including meeting refugees' primary needs, providing accommodation, social and psychological assistance, as well as information, reuniting separated family members, finding solutions for unaccompanied children and hiring interpreters. They monitor respect for human rights and carry out advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

3.1 Acknowledging and coordinating civil society organisations

Some CSOs are officially mandated by the government to deal with the situation and ensure coordination of assistance activities, but some states do not coordinate humanitarian aid efforts, or leave this to UNHCR and IOM. In some countries, governments do not seem to have enough confidence in CSOs, which are regarded as being too 'generous' or part of the "goodwill industry". This does not create the right atmosphere for effective cooperation. In other countries, cooperation with the government is good, and civil society organisations' suggestions are taken on board by public authorities. Regular coordination meetings among all relevant stakeholders are organised and the personal involvement of politicians (ministers) demonstrates governments' commitment and produces good results.

Cooperation among CSOs generally seems to be efficient, avoiding confusion and the duplication of efforts, and is sometimes even cross-border in nature. However, CSOs sometimes compete with each other for resources and media attention. This highlights the need for a long-term sustainable strategy, taking into account the well-being and job-satisfaction of the – often very limited – CSO staff and volunteers.

Therefore the EESC recommends that

- As successful cooperation, instead of competition, is essential for addressing the refugee crisis, organisations should build a shared vision of refugee protection and a common understanding of each other's mandates, roles and responsibilities. **Member States should support CSOs in working together, conducting research, coordinating activities and sharing experiences, knowledge and resources.** Their internationalisation, cross-border cooperation and exchange of information could be supported through specific funds or a formal network.
- The EU arrange for CSOs' good practices to be promoted, shared and, where possible, replicated. CSOs' practical experience needs to be used in the policy-making process.
- Cooperation and coordination should be improved between Member States and CSOs, including by appointing contact persons in the relevant ministries to provide information to organisations. There should also be a clear division of responsibilities for the reception of migrants, with the necessary coordination between different public authorities and organisations.
- The various organisations involved in support networks should hold regular coordination meetings and would be well advised to document their joint initiatives for future reference, as well as create checklists, procedures, etc.
- Cooperation forums should be set up in Member States where they do not exist, bringing together public authorities (State and local level) and CSOs. At the EU level, the EESC and the European Commission could play a role in ensuring that these cooperation forums are sufficiently operational and inclusive.
- The issue of refugees has to be de-politicised and Member States must ensure that there is no discrimination between organisations based on political loyalty or political preferences.

- Taking the mandates of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) and Frontex into account, the EU should do more to coordinate humanitarian efforts and ensure a larger presence on the ground. Through ECHO or a new body, the EU should provide experts in coordination, reception and protection of refugees and implement strategic plans at the local level in agreement with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that refugees' basic needs such as food, medical care, accommodation and legal aid are met.
- The EU should make sure that the new EU Aid Volunteers initiative, coordinated by ECHO, can also be used also within the EU, ensuring that volunteers are channelled to the places where they are most needed and that their skills and expertise are not redundant or wasted.

3.2 Funding and support for civil society organisations

CSOs face a number of difficulties in accessing funding and training their staff. They are usually expected to co-finance their activities with their own resources, even when carrying out tasks on behalf of public authorities. In addition, CSOs often rely on short-term EU grants, which does not allow them to plan activities with a sustainable, long-term perspective. There is also competition between CSOs due to the requirement to demonstrate a sufficient number of clients, which can be detrimental to the efficiency of the services they provide. Short projects also have an impact on the job security of staff, making it more difficult to attract and retain skilled personnel. In some areas, a sort of "charity tourism" has emerged.

- **Where CSOs are carrying out tasks on behalf of public authorities, it is the responsibility of Member States to compensate them adequately.** Moreover, Member States should make the necessary resources available to professionalise assistance to refugees in the long term, as the number of volunteers declines, and to make jobs in this sector sufficiently attractive to address the shortage of skilled staff.
- **It should become easier and faster to obtain EU funding,** including for small-scale initiatives, without jeopardising the impartiality and transparency of the process. The co-financing requirement should be facilitated or covered by Member States.
- There is a strong need for the long-term programming of allocation of AMIF (European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) grants, based on clear rules. The Commission should avoid delays in the allocation of AMIF grants.
- The Commission should adapt the funding rules to make it possible to claim certain indirect costs (beyond coordination costs), which used to be the case in ERF and EIF.
- The Commission should initiate legislation making it possible to fund institutional capacity building of CSOs, i.e. in order to guarantee stable employment conditions, and for training (such as in camp management).

4. Changing the narrative

Public support for welcoming refugees is a prerequisite for an effective common EU approach to the arrival of refugees. However, negative sentiments towards refugees are growing in the EU. The public

needs to receive fact-based information on refugees and in this respect, the media and CSOs play an important role. Fear of the unknown is reinforced by some media outlets, which spread inaccurate information and repeat stereotypes. However, some media outlets were found to use civil society input to create a balanced perception of the refugees.

4.1 **Highlighting the benefits of migration**

- The EU institutions and Member States should publicise positive examples of migrants' achievements and contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Europe in order to improve their perception in the public debate (e.g. highlighting the numbers of teachers or army/police officers of foreign origin in Germany or France instead of focussing on troublesome youths). Successful refugees must be visible as role models and the EU should support the exchange of good practice in this field.
- Public support for migration can be increased if societies understand the benefits of migration. The EU institutions should **highlight the positive aspects of migration**, such as the fact that many villages in remote areas in Europe suffering from demographic decline are now benefiting from the extra workforce, consumption, students in schools, and so on provided by the arrival of refugees.

4.2 **Migration in the media**

- The Member States' authorities should consider providing key facts and data to journalists as well as the opportunity for study visits, e.g. to refugee centres or border control points, to counter negative stereotypes.
- Member States need to strengthen multicultural and anti-discrimination education in their schools' curricula, as well as outside the school system, as diversity will inevitably increase. Such education should be based on the experiences of local governments, relevant CSOs and migrant-led organisations. They should help their citizens become aware of the global trends.
- Member States should not tolerate the use of offensive, xenophobic language and hate speech in the media and should sanction these according to the law.

4.3 **Efforts in the community**

- The EU and its Member States should provide local communities (e.g. parents at local schools) with appropriate, fact-based information and encourage the creation of opportunities for contacts with foreigners – e.g. via activities for children and adults organised by local culture centres or CSOs.
- Member States should fund preparation and training for public service officials who are in contact with refugees – including local and national government, employment offices, police, schools etc. – to provide them with tools to help them accommodate cultural diversity as well as with information and useful contacts (CSOs offering assistance).

5. Ensuring the integration of refugees

5.1 Designing integration policies

EU Member States' experience with integration policies varies as well as their approach to them. Integration is a two-way process and it entails both rights and obligations. CSOs all over Europe fill gaps and offer many services contributing to integration, such as language courses, legal assistance, information services, and cultural activities.

- All over Europe, **there is a need for sustainable long-term integration policies**. The EU should further support stakeholders' involvement and exchange of good practices among Member States.
- Member States should apply a comprehensive and consistent approach, cutting across different policy areas, and should acknowledge the asylum procedure as an essential part of the integration process.
- Experts and practitioners need to be involved in designing integration policies at the Member State level, to avoid a populist approach. The involvement of local stakeholders is very important, as this is where integration really takes place.
- Member States should involve CSOs and in particular employers and trade unions, as well as regional authorities, in the design of integration policies, not least to ensure that refugees develop the skills needed to fill specific labour market gaps.
- Member States should consider that an individualised approach is needed in integration policy. Indeed, refugees are in a worse position than other migrants. Their documentation may be lost, their networks are more limited, and their health may have declined due to violence and trauma.
- Member States should involve well-integrated people with migrant/refugee background as mentors in providing support to asylum seekers. They serve as role models and help get a better understanding of the host society.
- Refugees should abide by the laws of their host country and also need to accept its culture. This includes respecting gender equality and female staff in positions of authority, such as teachers, doctors, social workers, etc. To that end, Member States should provide funding for guidance and mentoring.
- Member States should bear in mind that the very intensive support given to unaccompanied minors in some countries is a good practice and a model, albeit a costly one, for the integration of all migrants.

5.2 The key role of language training and education

- Member States should make the necessary resources available to **provide language training for those whose protected status is likely to be granted as soon as possible after arrival**, and it is a good practice to combine it with work as it helps with language learning.
- Member States should provide quick access to childcare facilities and schools, which is of key importance for families' integration and for women's integration into the labour market.

5.3 The importance of labour market integration

The social partners recognise the positive contribution that refugees could make in the context of demographic ageing and specific skills needs in some sectors. For most adult refugees, finding suitable employment is a major challenge. They face many obstacles, such as insufficient language skills, loss of personal documents and certificates, the non-recognition of diplomas and qualifications, and a lack of job opportunities, especially in countries with high unemployment. Many highly-skilled refugees end up working in an unskilled sector, if they manage to find work at all.

- Notwithstanding article 15 of the Reception Conditions Directive, which requires "Member States [to] ensure that applicants [for international protection] have access to the labour market no later than 9 months from the date when the application [...] was lodged", Member States should make an effort to get asylum seekers into work as quickly as possible, to avoid skills obsolescence and to allow them to become economically productive. As this leads to self-reliance, dignity and social interaction, it is beneficial both to individuals and the receiving society. They must ensure equal conditions with nationals.
- In its legal migration and integration policy, the EU should dedicate sufficient attention to labour market assessments and skills screening and provide for better identification and development of skills of refugees. Effective recognition of diplomas and qualifications needs to be developed, possibly on the basis of the European Qualifications Framework.
- Refugees, educational institutions and employers need legal certainty. Member States should give migrants in education and training reasonable time to finish their education and training even if their request for asylum is rejected. As regards refugees' apprenticeships, a good practice adopted in some Member States is to encourage employers to invest in training apprentices and ensure security for both the refugee and his/her employer, by allowing the asylum applicant to remain in the workplace for a couple of years, even if the asylum procedure was unsuccessful.
- The EU and Member States should specifically target employers and trade unions with an educational and information campaign concerning the rights, obligations and procedures related to the employment of migrants.



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