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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027

{COM(2020) 758 final}

ASSESSMENT OF THE 2016 COMMISSION ACTION PLAN ON THE INTEGRATION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS

1. General introduction

The European Commission (hereinafter the Commission) adopted in 2016 the [action plan on the Integration of third-country nationals](#) (hereinafter “the action plan”) to support actions by national governments, local authorities and civil society in line with the objectives of the [2015 European Agenda on Migration](#). The large number of people seeking asylum in the European Union (EU) in 2015 and 2016 mobilised all stakeholders, public and private, to welcome newcomers and put in place integration measures in most Member States. Even those Member States with limited experience in integration policies had to quickly design and implement integration measures, establishing strategies and action plans at national, regional or local levels. In this context, the action plan provided a common policy framework designed to help Member States develop and strengthen their national integration policies to the benefit of third-country nationals and the hosting society.

The objective of this Staff Working Document is to provide an overall assessment of the implementation of the actions included in the 2016 action plan and to draw lessons to inform the Commission action plan on integration and inclusion¹. It also takes stock of the impact of the 2016 action plan across EU Member States, including the follow-up to the recommendations addressed to them. When preparing this assessment, the Commission consulted Member States and other relevant stakeholders² so that their views could be taken into account in assessing the implementation and the impact of the actions (see sections 3 and 4 below).

2. Evaluation of the initiatives under the five priority areas

The scope of the 2016 action plan targeted third-country nationals legally residing in the EU, with specific measures responding to the integration needs of particular groups such as refugees. The Commission provided policy, operational and financial support to Member States in their efforts, and implemented **50 actions** at EU level³. In addition, **the Commission proposed 16 actions under the form of encouragements to Member States in the action plan. These 16 actions were** structured around the different policy areas contributing to integration: pre-departure measures, education, employment, access to basic services, participation and inclusion, with elements on funding and policy coordination.

¹ Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027, COM(2020) 758.

² The Commission organised targeted consultations to hear the views of key stakeholders on the new action plan and to hear their assessment of the 2016 action plan. The Commission consulted the European Integration Network, CSOs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), local and regional authorities, social and economic partners, members of the Business Refugee Action Network (BRAN) managed by the International Rescue Committee, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). More information on the consultations organized by the Commission is available at the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/summary/summary_of_consultations_in_view_of_the_action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion.pdf.

³ The full overview of the actions implemented can be found on the [European website on integration](#).

- **First priority area: pre-departure/pre-arrival measures**

Providing support to third-country nationals at the earliest possible moment in the migration process has proven to be an essential feature of successful integration. Pre-departure orientation and involvement of civil society are particularly important in the resettlement of vulnerable refugees. Therefore, the Commission has also undertaken actions at the stage of pre-departure and pre-arrival, mainly through the funding of projects.

In 2016, seven transnational projects for an amount of EUR 4.6 million were selected under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) call for proposals on “Pre-departure and post-arrival support for the integration of persons in need of international protection who are being relocated within the EU or resettled from a third country”. The boxes below contain two examples of successful projects financed under the 2016 AMIF call for proposals.

Title	LINK-IT Project
Link	https://eea.iom.int/LINK-IT
Short description	As part of the 2016 AMIF call for projects to increase integration outcomes through pre-departure measures, the Commission supported the LINK-IT project, coordinated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and implemented over 2018-19. The project was focused on Syrian refugees resettled from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to four EU Member States (the United Kingdom, Denmark, Romania, and Portugal). Four main actions have been delivered, among which the development of a skills profile tool template/method, which has been used to generate more than 1 000 profiles among Syrian refugees awaiting resettlement. Through the LINK-IT project, around 340 resettled Syrian refugees have benefited from post-arrival support and around 600 representatives from local authorities, public sectors, host community organisations or employers attended information sessions. In addition, mutual learning activities were facilitated and a policy brief about the “EU Integration practices for Resettled Refugees” was published. The initial targets could not be delivered due to delays and a lower number of refugees resettled than expected in the Portuguese and Romanian resettlement programs.

Title	SHARE Integration Project
Link	http://www.resettlement.eu/page/welcome-share-network
Short description	As part of the 2016 AMIF call for projects to increase integration outcomes through pre-departure measures, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Caritas and their partners implemented the SHARE project in 2018 and 2019. The general objective of the SHARE Integration project was to promote coordinated reception, early settlement and integration of third-country nationals resettled or relocated to European countries by means of strengthening the link between pre-departure and post-arrival support and preparing local communities. Through its trainings, conferences, and other activities, the project directly engaged more than 1,000 participants from 25 Member States, including national, regional and local authorities (including from small cities), civil society, and refugees themselves.

In 2017, four additional projects were selected under the AMIF call for proposals on “Pre-departure and post-arrival support for the integration of persons in need of international protection who are being resettled from a third country including through volunteering activities” for an amount of EUR 3.1 million, and are still being implemented (as of November 2020). In addition, the Commission has supported legal migration pilot projects from a number of African countries (through the Mobility Partnership Facility, AMIF Union Actions and the EU emergency Trust Fund). Currently there are six pilot projects ongoing with 1,725 intended beneficiaries and an overall budget of EUR 35 million, including non-EU funding⁴. The projects cover mobility as well as capacity-building and pre-departure training in origin countries.

For 2017, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) had foreseen in its work programme actions to facilitate exchanges of information and best practices to mainstream elements of integration at various stages of the asylum process and reception. Although not specifically referred to in the work programme for the following years, these mainstreaming activities continued after 2017, and included practical cooperation activities, exchange of information and development of guidance and practical tools. In addition, EASO organised several workshops with mostly experts from the Commission, Member States, international organisation and civil society on different topics related to integration and inclusion, for example on the role of reception agencies in the transition from reception towards integration, the role between reception and society and the impact of long stays in reception centres.

⁴ Constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic are negatively impacting the pilot projects and therefore the number of beneficiaries might be lower than initially envisaged.

- **Second priority area: education**

The action plan recognised that education and training are among the most powerful tools for integration, provided migrants can access them as early as possible. In this field, the integration of migrant learners is primarily discussed in the context of inclusive education, taking into account the heterogeneity of the composition of the student population across Member States, and the complex interplay between multiple factors of potential disadvantage (such as socio-economic background, gender, and migration background). Considering these factors, the Commission has supported several initiatives that aim to ensure an inclusive education for all pupils, regardless of their migrant background.

The Commission established a policy network on migrant education to support the integration of children and young people with a migration background in education ([SIRIUS 2.0](#)) with participation of 17 Member States, Norway and the United Kingdom. In addition, the Commission organised seven peer-learning activities to support Member States through exchanges, mutual learning, evidence and data collection on topics such as language assessment, recognition of qualifications or intercultural dialogue⁵. These activities generated high interest among Member States, with 21 of them attending at least one event.

As learning the language of the country is crucial for integration, the Commission decided to extend the use of services offered by the [Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support](#) to support third-country nationals who settled in the EU in 2015-16. Out of the 100 000 licences earmarked, approximately 70 000 language assessments were allocated to the beneficiary institutions and organisations by participating Erasmus+ National Agencies in 21 countries. A total of 12 902 language assessments and 9 543 courses were used among refugees. Regarding supporting staff, 753 assessments were completed and 493 languages courses were activated.

Inclusive education. The Commission supported the development of high quality inclusive early childhood education and care services, as this can be an effective tool to achieve educational equity for migrant and refugee children in particular. Policy attention to learners with a migrant background increased in the work under the Education and Training Strategy 2020 (ET 2020). Within the ET 2020 framework, the Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education published a thematic fiche on the inclusion of young refugees and migrants through education. This included policy recommendations in several areas, such as combatting stereotypes, racism, and discrimination in learning content and professional development for teaching in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. In addition, concrete actions to support teachers in diverse classrooms involved the creation of platforms supporting teachers and schools in the exchange of good practices. An example is the [eTwinning platform](#), which facilitated mutual support, professional development opportunities, and the exchange of practices in relation to integration and inclusion amongst a growing community of teachers.

⁵ A [thematic fiche](#) on the inclusion of young refugees and migrants in education, prepared by the ET2020 Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education, summarises key messages from recent Peer Learning Activities and proposes further recommendations for policy-makers.

The EU has also co-funded transnational projects and partnerships. In the field of youth, since 2014 more than 2 000 projects promoting social inclusion of youth workers have specifically tackled integration of refugees and/or migrants' issues. In addition, between 2016 and 2020, a dedicated call for proposals on social inclusion under Erasmus+ in the field of education supported projects related to the inclusion of migrants and refugees. In 2020, a call for proposals under Erasmus + contained a specific objective to support the inclusion of newly arrived migrants in good quality education, including by assessing knowledge and validating prior learning.

Between 2016 and 2020, the Commission launched initiatives to improve processes, facilitate procedures, and ameliorate the exchange of information among different stakeholders in the area of recognition of **academic qualifications**. This included peer learning activities and exchanges between the European Network of Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC), the Council of Europe and UNESCO and civil society organisations (CSOs), and the co-funding of two toolkits for credential evaluators to support the recognition of academic qualifications of refugees (see box below).

Title	Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications
Link	Toolkit 1 “Refugees and Recognition” and toolkit 2 “REACT”
Short description	Co-financed by Erasmus+ and led by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, the projects developed tools to promote effective recognition procedures for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation (hereafter “refugees”). The target group included those who do not have complete official documentation, from ten countries (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Iran, Ethiopia, Somalia, Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo). Overall, the projects contribute to enhance mobility, employability and access to further studies for refugees by promoting transnational cooperation and mutual learning.

While efforts on education led to some improvements, specific shortcomings remain. These are mainly related to the fact that in the area of education, inclusion often covers a broader target group than third-country nationals. This represents an obstacle in assessing and measuring the impact of several measures, since it is necessary to take into account the complex interplay between multiple factors of potential disadvantage such as socio-economic background and gender. Given the remaining gaps in education outcomes, which do not favour pupils with a migrant background, education will remain a priority area in the future action plan on integration and inclusion. Additional efforts will focus on data collection to assess the impact of existing policies aiming to close the “achievement gap” between pupils with a migrant background (including native-born pupils with immigrant parents) and the rest of the student population.

- **Third priority area: labour market and vocational training**

The action plan clearly acknowledged that employment and timely and full labour market participation are core elements of the integration process. To support early integration, the Commission has funded five projects⁶ promoting "**fast track**" **insertion** into the labour market and vocational training (see an example in the box below).

Title	FIER – Fast track integration in European Regions
Link	https://fierprojecteu.com/about/
Description	Funded under the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), the FIER project aimed to develop instruments and strategies for fast-track labour market integration of disadvantaged groups among refugees and asylum seekers. The main objective of the project was to develop strategies on quality competence assessment, training curricula, self-empowerment initiatives, and a workplace language-learning concept to achieve a fast and successful integration process in different European areas. Initially targeting 1 000 refugees, the project eventually reached 3 000 refugees bringing them closer to self-sufficiency and a job. The project took into account and made visible how newcomers' challenges vary depending on their gender, ethnic origin, age, educational level, disabilities, religion or sexual orientation. Over 500 companies and stakeholders have been involved in the process and the 12 partners in the project have identified nearly 40 new methods and ways of working. About 25 partner projects have been set up and most of them will continue with new funding or will be incorporated in the partners' day-to-day activities, ensuring the sustainability of the new measures.

Improved outreach activities were also organised for vulnerable young people **not in Employment, Education or Training** (NEETs). In this field, the Commission proposed the Youth Guarantee, which aims to support disadvantaged groups and is a useful catalyst for supporting the integration of young migrants including refugees. Moreover, in the context of the European Skills Agenda launched in June 2016, the European Commission also proposed the revision of the Europass framework; the final revised recommendation adopted by the Council in 2018 pays specific attention to migrants' needs.

The [EU Skills Profile Tool for third-country nationals](#), launched in 2017, has been supporting early profiling of the skills and qualifications of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. As such, it aims to facilitate the integration of third-country nationals in the labour market and to promote their skills and potential (see box below for further information).

Title	Skills Profile Tool for third-country nationals
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⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=18831&langId=en>.

Link	https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/
Short description	The 'Skills Profile Tool for third-country nationals' is a practical tool for early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications of refugees and other third-country nationals (available in all EU languages as well as in the main languages of the sending countries). The tool is free to use and available for national authorities responsible for reception and integration of refugees, as well as public and private employment services. Despite initial hesitance from some organisations, a diverse set of stakeholders in many different EU Member States (including CSOs, national authorities, public employment services) are now increasingly using the Tool. It has enabled identification and mapping of skills and qualifications of third-country nationals, facilitating their pathway towards employment or further training and education. In addition, it played a useful role in addressing some skills shortages and is an opportunity to understand the value of refugees' skills, as well as the barriers that they face in having their skills and competences recognised.

The Commission has also promoted the **sharing of promising and best practices on labour market integration** through the organisation of different initiatives, including exchanges within mutual learning programmes for Member States, conferences and workshops. The Commission also developed an [online repository](#) of promising practices on labour market integration and the social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees.

The action plan has contributed to a greater acknowledgement of the importance and potential of migrant entrepreneurship. Actions were carried out especially under the COSME programme, under which a [second call](#) on capacity building for young migrant entrepreneurs was launched in 2018. Funding in this area has also **financed actions to improve** the integration of third-country nationals in the labour market. For example, the Commission has provided funding to strengthen the **capacity of municipalities and local authorities** on reception and integration practices for refugees, with a focus on labour market integration, through the preparatory Action “[Supporting Active Inclusion of Disadvantaged Migrants in Europe](#)” (ADMin4ALL).

Overall, in the policy area of employment, the Commission went **beyond the actions included in the action plan**. For example, the Commission launched the initiative *Employers together for integration* to mobilise private and public employers to promote the labour market inclusion of migrants and refugees, through trainings, mentoring, and apprenticeships. The Commission has also strengthened cooperation with social and economic partners, with whom it signed the [European Partnership for Integration](#) to foster the integration of refugees in the labour market at the end of 2017 (see box below).

Title	European Partnership for Integration
Link	https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_5352
Short description	Launched in 2017, the Partnership brought the European Commission and European social and economic partners together to establish key principles and create new opportunities for the labour market integration of refugees. Social and economic partners have put in place a wide range of actions and initiatives in 20 EU countries. The EU has co-funded several innovative projects bringing together employers, chambers of commerce and industry, chambers of skilled crafts and trade unions to help refugees integrate into the labour market. <u>Renewed</u> in September 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Partnership recalls the need for a comprehensive approach to integration that empowers all relevant stakeholders at local, national and European levels, and the essential role played by public authorities. In addition, it highlights that migrants including refugees make up a significant part of the EU's workforce. It also acknowledges their contribution to European economies, particularly during the recent health crisis when many made critical contributions.

Since 2016, EU Member States and institutions have promoted a number of new actions to support labour market integration of migrants. While these efforts translated into increasing employment rates, especially among recently arrived, large gaps remain, in particular in terms of access to (stable) employment for third-country nationals. In light of this situation, **employment will remain a key priority area** in the future action plan.

- **Fourth priority area: access to basic services**

The action plan recognised that access to basic services, such as healthcare and housing, is a pre-condition to successful integration. Third-country nationals still face major challenges in accessing basic services. The Commission proactively supported Member States in addressing such challenges by providing funding and guidance.

The **European Investment Bank (EIB)** substantially increased financial support for private and public investments in the reception and integration of asylum seekers and other migrants. In particular, the EIB granted EUR 1 billion in loans and guarantees to ensure reception capacities and build or refurbish social or affordable housing for migrants.

Access to healthcare. The competence of the EU action on healthcare limits its possibilities to act in this area, with support mainly focused on funding⁷ and exchange of best practices in care provision to vulnerable migrants and provision of training to health professionals, law

⁷ More information on the projects funded on migrants' health is available on the [Health Programme page](#).

enforcement officials and other professionals in contact with migrants and refugees⁸. These activities have led to a stronger understanding of the needs of vulnerable groups and had a strong impact. The trainings offered to law enforcement officials also proved to be more successful than expected. The box below contains an example of a successful EU-funded project in the area of healthcare.

Title	Mig-HealthCare - strengthening community based care to minimise health inequalities and improve the integration of vulnerable migrants and refugees into local communities
Link	https://mighealthcare.eu/
Short description	Launched in May 2017, this three-year project was implemented by a consortium of partners from ten countries across Europe. The overall objective of Mig-HealthCare was to improve healthcare access for vulnerable migrants and refugees, support their inclusion and participation in European communities and reduce health inequalities. Mig-HealthCare produced effective community-based care models, pilot tested in different contexts and countries, which focused on health promotion and prevention. It developed guidelines and tools to reorient healthcare services to a community level and provided a comprehensive mapping of the existing practices. The Mig-HealthCare project emphasises that universal access to health and social care services must be ensured for all migrants and refugees (including irregular or undocumented migrants and rejected asylum-seekers).

Access to **housing** is another key basic service for integration. Migrants need decent and adequate accommodation in order to pursue employment, education and stay healthy both physically and mentally. Statistics prove that there is a significant gap between third-country nationals and EU citizens in terms of quality of accommodation and homelessness. This is why housing was a priority in the action plan. As housing is a national competence for Member States, the Commission supported housing initiatives mainly through funding. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded the development of social housing and renovation projects, while integration strategies and actions that include housing were funded through the AMIF (e.g. the [Helios project](#) in Greece, see below). The Commission also encouraged national authorities to include housing in their integration programmes and financed innovative projects through the [Urban Agenda](#).

⁸ All the training materials for health (and other) professional can be found at the [health policy platform](#) and the [European Virtual Academy](#) of the ECDC.

Title	HELIOS PROJECT
Link	https://greece.iom.int/en/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios
Short description	Launched in July 2019, HELIOS is an integration project implemented by IOM and its partners, with the support of the Greek Government and funding of the European Commission. The HELIOS project aims to integrate beneficiaries of international protection into Greek society through the promotion of independent living, and specifically through: a) support for autonomous housing; b) integration courses; c) employability-related activities to support access to the labour market. The project serves as a rotation mechanism for the overstretched temporary accommodation system in Greece. By reducing the likelihood of overpopulation and constant expansion of the reception system, in the long run the project should contribute to the decongestion of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme (ESTIA) accommodation scheme and of the Open Accommodation Centres. By 2 October 2020, 18 141 beneficiaries had enrolled in the programme and have been receiving support for independent living, while 5 743 beneficiaries have received subsidies upon finding independent housing. So far, the programme covers 17 municipalities, while 19 Integration Learning Centres are operating across the country.

- **Fifth priority area: active participation and social inclusion**

Several actions prompted by the action plan have proved that developing and sustaining real people-to-people contacts through social, cultural and sports activities and political engagement are key elements for integration.

The Commission supported the establishment of several working groups composed of Member States that have contributed to the development of handbooks and toolboxes for practitioners. This material covered topics such as [cultural awareness and expression](#), intercultural dialogue, and active participation of third-country nationals.

Several projects were also launched to support the social inclusion of third-country nationals under programmes such as [Creative Europe](#), [Europe for Citizens](#), AMIF and the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme. The projects have promoted intercultural dialogue and European values through culture, films and arts, and helped combat stigmatisation of immigrants by building narratives to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue and a better understanding between communities. Additional actions, such as the “Voices of Culture” Structured Dialogue (see box below), were taken to support integration through culture.

Title	Voices of Culture Structured Dialogue – The Role of Culture in Promoting Inclusion in the Context of Migration
Link	https://www.voicesofculture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/5.Brainstorming_Report_Migration.pdf
Short description	A “Voices of Culture” Structured Dialogue was held on 14-15 June 2016 in Brussels. It provided a space for exchange and discussion between 33 participants representing the cultural sectors from the EU Member States. During the discussion, civil society presented strong arguments on why and how to make the best use of culture for the integration of migrants and refugees based on experience from the field.

The Erasmus+ programme has also contributed to the social inclusion of third-country nationals. Local **sport projects** have provided many opportunities for the integration of refugees in their new societies (see example in the box below). In total 66 grassroots projects were supported since 2016 through the Erasmus+ sport actions and the [preparatory actions and pilot projects](#) fostering social inclusion and the integration of refugees through sport. The Commission launched the [#Beinclusive EU sport awards](#) to reward the best projects supporting social inclusion through sport.

Title	We Welcome Young Refugees - Royal Europe 90' Kraainem Football Club - Kraainem FC - (BE)
Link	https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-119016
Description	Funded under the 2016-2019 Preparatory Action on the Sport as a tool for integration and social inclusion of refugees , the Kraainem Football club is an example of proactive social integration adapting its everyday activities to involve young refugees in the life of the club. Each week since 2016, the club has welcomed around 30 unaccompanied refugees aged between 10 and 18 under a partnership agreement between Kraainem FC and FEDASIL (the Belgian governmental organisation in charge of welcoming asylum seekers). Three times a week, young refugees share in the normal life of the club, train with a qualified coach and attend teaching sessions such as French and Dutch language classes. They also receive free equipment and lunch in the club cafeteria. Kraainem FC has been running this project for four years. At the end of the 2018/19 season, the club had welcomed more than 2 000 refugees and asylum seekers.

Volunteering can also facilitate the integration of third-country nationals. Since October 2018, the European Solidarity Corps has supported 126 volunteering, traineeships, jobs and solidarity projects addressing the reception and integration of third-country nationals, offering opportunities for 700 participants to get involved. Under the AMIF, 20 projects were financed to promote active participation of migrants in political, social and cultural life, as well as projects for the integration of victims of trafficking. Additional actions included the development of expert group on youth work for integration of young migrants and refugees (see below).

Title	Expert group on youth work for integration of young migrants and refugees
Link	https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1bcaf566-6a29-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1
Short description	The Commission set-up a dedicated expert group on youth work for the integration of young migrants and refugees under the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018. The group developed policy recommendations and a practical toolbox for youth workers containing 47 good practice projects from all over Europe, and providing tips, advice and guidance to youth workers and youth organisations to support them in their work in different national contexts.

As part of the actions on social inclusion, the Commission has addressed issues such as **xenophobia** in the new [EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance](#) (HLG). The High Level Group has provided guidance, tools and support on combating racism, both in the enforcement of legislation and on the ground (e.g. the [guidance note on the practical application of Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating racism and xenophobia](#), published in 2018). The High Level Group gathers twice a year, and since 2019, several subgroups have focused on specific areas of work such as support to victims, hate speech online, training of police and data collection on hate crime. In addition, in 2016 the Commission agreed on a voluntary [code of conduct](#) with major social media platforms to counter [illegal hate speech online](#). Finally, the Commission has created a [one-stop-shop dedicated website](#) to provide information on relevant EU funding for projects that promote tolerance and combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination⁹.

On the integration of **migrant women**, the Mutual Learning Programme on gender equality focused on issues relating directly or indirectly to the integration of third-country nationals. In addition, in the EU Fundamental Rights Colloquium of 2017 on ‘women’s rights in turbulent times’, a workshop was organised on ‘Trafficking of women for labour and sexual exploitation’ in the context of the migration crisis.

- **Sixth priority area: tools for coordination, funding and monitoring**

Policy coordination and cooperation with national authorities was reinforced following the adoption of the action plan with the transformation of the existing Network of the National Contact Points on Integration (NCPI) into a **European Integration Network** (EIN), with a stronger coordination role and mutual learning mandate. The EIN has proven to be a highly relevant platform of mutual information between Member States and with the Commission (see below).

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-funding-tackle-racism-and-xenophobia_en.

The European Integration Network

In 2016, the Commission reinforced the role of the National Contact Points on Integration and transformed it into the European Integration Network (EIN) with an extension of its mandate to mutual learning activities. Since 2016, five study visits have been organised by the Commission in Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Norway and Denmark, gathering more than 100 participants in order to learn integration practices and exchange on measures and tools developed in each country. Likewise, the Commission financed several mutual assistance projects to allow bilateral exchanges between Member States on a given topic. In the context of the EIN, several topics of interest for Member States have been discussed during meetings of the network, such as the integration of migrant women, cooperation between different levels of government, indicators and evaluation, and integration in the labour market. Activities of the EIN have been evaluated on a yearly basis and the new activities and topics discussed have been assessed very positively by Member States.

At the local and regional level, the Commission has initiated many actions. For example, two calls of the [Urban Innovative Actions](#) have included “integration of migrants and refugees” as a topic that resulted in seven projects running across the Member States. In addition, another tool of coordination was launched in 2016 under the name of the [Urban Agenda](#). This tool represents a new multi-level working method promoting cooperation between Member States, cities, the Commission and other stakeholders. Under this framework, coordinated by the Commission, the [Partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees](#) has proven an innovative tool to strengthen multilevel governance in the field of integration. In the Partnership, national authorities, cities and the European Commission have worked together to put in place actions to improve funding, coordination and knowledge in the field of integration. Among the main outcomes of the Partnership are the **creation of the [Urban Academy on Integration](#)** (see box below) and the launch of a [Migrant Advisory Board](#), composed by migrants and refugees to advise the Partnership, the Commission and European cities on integration matters.

The Urban Academy

Launched in 2018 by the Urban Agenda Partnership on the inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, the Urban Academy on integration is a training programme for practitioners and policymakers from the national, regional and local level on different aspects of integration. It combines experts’ input and peer-to-peer exchanges on specific challenges faced by the participants in their city, region or country in the field of integration. It gives participants the opportunity to build a network of peers across the EU to exchange and provide mutual support beyond the Academy itself. Since its creation, the European Commission organised two academies in Brussels (2018) on education and working with civil society and Antwerpen (2019) on labour market integration and housing.

The EU has also enhanced the coordination and strategic alignment of all relevant EU funding instruments. A key step was the development of the [toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background](#) (see box below), which facilitates better coordination of EU Funds supporting the integration of migrants. In addition, in June 2019, the [conference for managing authorities on ensuring an effective coordination and use of](#)

EU Funds gathered more than 200 participants including the managing authorities in the Member States of the European Social Fund (ESF), ERDF, AMIF, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and Erasmus+. The aim was to bring the relevant managing authorities of each Member State closer and increase the impact of EU support on the overall integration of third-country nationals, especially in view of the next programming period.

Title	Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background
Link	https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2018/toolkit-on-the-use-of-eu-funds-for-the-integration-of-people-with-a-migrant-background
Short description	Launched in January 2018, the Toolkit helps enhance coordination and strategic alignment of all relevant EU funding instruments to increase the impact of EU support on the overall integration of third-country nationals. It aims to support national and regional funding authorities in reinforcing synergies between EU funds under shared management, namely to raise awareness about the possibilities under each of the funds and possible complementarities when implementing integration policies via interventions that centre on the needs of the recipients. Widely used by managing and local authorities, as well as several stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations, the toolkit helped identify areas where people with a migrant background are considered to face the most pressing and acute challenges, including housing, reception and access to basic mainstream services.

In addition, under the AMIF, Member States allocated more than EUR 1 billion to integration-related projects supporting language courses, exchanges with the host society, civic orientation and capacity building. Under the 2014-2020 European Social Fund, EUR 21.4 billion was available to all Member States for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination. This funding benefited migrants among other groups. Under the current period, at the end of 2018 around 3.8 million people belonging to the group of ‘migrants, participants with a foreign background, minorities’ had received ESF support. At the end of 2017, the share of migrants, people with a foreign background and minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma) in ESF measures was 16%. Funding opportunities have also contributed to **integration in rural areas**. For example, the managing authorities of some Member States decided to dedicate specific actions on integration under the EAFRD. The [European Network for Rural Development](#) (ENRD) has undertaken

additional initiatives to improve the image of third-country nationals in rural areas¹⁰, and a dedicated task force composed of several national rural networks was created to exchange good and bad practices on the topic of integration.

Research from different Commission services contributed to **further developing evidence on integration at EU level**. The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) developed a number of specific reports through the European Migration Network on integration, in particular on the labour market. It also co-funded the joint Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-European Commission publication “[Settling in 2018: Indicators of immigrant integration](#)” that remains the main tool for comparing integration outcomes across EU (and non-EU OECD countries). Eurostat further populated the [database on integration indicators](#), including with new topics such as health and data at intra-national level, and is publishing quarterly statistics from the labour force survey. In addition, different Commission services developed specific analysis on refugee integration. Examples are the [Employment and Social Developments in Europe \(ESDE\) reports](#) and other reports analysing the education outcomes of migrant pupils and the specificities of refugee pupils. Moreover, EU agencies such as Eurofound and CEDEFOP invested in specific analyses related to labour market integration and best practices, for instance in the role of social partners and local authorities as well as the potential of using vocational education and training (VET) for refugee integration.

The new European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD) was established on 20 June 2016 to provide scientific evidence for EU policymaking tailored to the needs of Commission services and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Among others, the KCMD analyses have been shared with local authorities in the context of the Urban Agenda and have contributed to the creation of bilateral projects with municipalities.

The **Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)** also contributed to the production of evidence on integration, and monitored social inclusion and the participation of third-country nationals in society from a fundamental rights perspective. FRA produced a series of major reports drawing on data collected through the [second EU minorities and discrimination survey \(EU-MIDIS II\)](#)¹¹. In addition, FRA publishes papers on integration-related topics on a regular basis, from the 2018 first [database on anti-Muslim hatred](#), to the [bulletins on the fundamental rights situation of asylum seekers and immigrants](#), published regularly since 2015. The data

¹⁰ For example, the following brochure was created to explore how people in rural areas have used EAFRD support to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the arrival of migrants and refugees into the EU: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/publi-eafrd-brochure-03-en_2016.pdf.

¹¹ Conducted in 2016, the EU-MIDIS II collected information from over 16 149 immigrants and descendants of immigrants in 19 EU Member. The survey includes questions on experiences of perceived discrimination in different settings, such as (access to) employment, education, housing, health, and when using public or private services; on experiences of police stops, criminal victimisation (including hate crime); on awareness of rights and redress mechanisms; and on societal participation and integration, including trust in public institutions and level of attachment to the country of residence. Respondents also provided information about basic socio-demographic characteristics for all household members, including themselves. The collected data are accessible through a [data explorer tool](#).

and reports produced by the FRA, and the resulting evidence, are regularly quoted and used at EU and Member State level.

3. Stakeholders' views on the action plan

During the second half of 2020, the Commission organised meetings with different stakeholders¹². The Commission consulted the European Integration Network, representatives of local and regional authorities, representatives of civil society organisations, the UNHCR, social and economic partners, the Business Refugee Action Network (BRAN), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Council of Europe and the recently created Commission Expert group on the views of migrants. The views of all those stakeholders on the impact of the 2016 action plan are summarised below.

Overall, the 2016 action plan was positively evaluated by CSOs, international organisations and social and economic partners. CSOs in particular highlighted the fact that many of the individual actions taken by the Commission may be regarded as a success. The action plan was considered in general a useful tool for both vertical and horizontal coordination. The focus of integration at different levels, the involvement of several actors (including non-governmental), as well as the 'mainstreaming' of integration and inclusion across all relevant policy areas, particularly education and employment, was considered positive. It was also appreciated that the action plan improved horizontal coordination within the various Commission departments.

CSOs nevertheless underlined some important challenges, as in the overall EU context gaps in integration outcomes persist and have even worsened in the last decade. The social and economic partners underlined that the action plan helped put integration in the spotlight and that the identified priority areas were and remain relevant. They noted that the current context was very different from the one in which 2016 action plan was conceived, in particular in terms of labour market needs.

According to the CSOs, the main weaknesses of the action plan and of its implementation were in its format and methodology. The action plan was perceived as insufficiently strategic and too much of a patchwork of actions. Overall migrants were insufficiently involved in its design and implementation. The mechanisms to review priorities and monitor implementation were too weak. The social and economic partners also regretted the rather loose follow-up of the action plan by national authorities, and underlined the difficulty of clearly attributing measures taken on the ground to either the action plan or to other (national, regional or local) policy frameworks.

Regarding its approach, CSOs considered the action plan unbalanced in some areas. In particular, the gender dimension was not sufficiently developed and attention for some migrant profiles (such as domestic workers) was seen as insufficient. The action plan was also

¹² A full overview of the organisations that took part in the consultation is available at the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/summary/summary_of_consultations_in_view_of_the_action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion.pdf.

perceived as focusing too much on the status of migrants as well as on integration through employment, which was detrimental to those not able to access the labour market. Similarly, efforts in terms of pre-departure were considered limited. More importantly, the action plan was considered to focus more on the integration efforts to be made by migrants rather than those by the host society, even if it underlines that integration is a two-way process.

All stakeholders shared the view that funding was a key tool for the action plan, but funding programmes remained difficult to access or too complex to manage. According to CSOs, this was true especially for smaller and migrant-led organisations, and that there was an issue with the sustainability of the projects financed under AMIF due to the short duration of the projects financed. Stakeholders also called for further improving coordination between the different parts of the Commission working on migrant integration or on issues that would affect migrants, especially in terms of the management of funding programmes.

Finally, most Member States believed that the action plan contributed positively to the development, design and implementation of national integration strategies. In those Member States with longstanding integration policies, the action plan provided the framework for comprehensive policies, cooperation between Member States, exchange of practices and learning opportunities. The action plan has given visibility to integration issues in the policy agenda, has provided a common framework for national policies, and has identified relevant areas for actions. The focus on integration as a two-way process and the multi-stakeholder approach strengthened migrants' integration. The strategic use of the AMIF provided the possibility to implement national strategies on the ground. As such, the 2016 action plan acts as a shared base and common standards fostering an effective and positive migrant integration approach in all Member States. The **establishment of the European Integration Network (EIN)** and its peer learning activities is considered as one of the main achievements of the action plan. Additional work should focus on the monitoring of migrants' integration in Member States, which could have increased the commitment of Member States in this area.

4. Assessment of the recommendations to Member States

The action plan also included 16 recommendations to the Member States. As the consultations with the EIN members confirmed, the recommendations were all considered to be relevant for the development of national integration strategies. In some Member States, the recommendations have informed the design and implementation of funding in the area of integration. In some others, the actions included in the recommendations were already part of the national policy. In addition, many Member States have undertaken **concrete initiatives** in line with the recommendations across the various policy areas. Some examples are given below.

Under the **first priority area (pre-departure and pre-arrival measures)**, the Commission had put forward three recommendations to Member States on the resettlement of refugees, and on the provision of pre-departure information. The Commission welcomes a series of initiatives undertaken by Member States under this priority area. An example is the new successful private sponsorship programme developed by **Spain** in cooperation with UNHCR and the Basque Country public administration. In addition, **Lithuania** is currently at the early

stage of developing an alternative integration system that could complement the national system and be implemented by CSOs or local communities. In line with recommendation no. 3 and partly supported by AMIF, **Latvia** prepared paper and video informative materials for asylum seekers about Latvia in English, Arabic, and French. Additional efforts were also made to harmonise and ensure a smooth relocation, and Latvia appointed two State Border Guard liaison officers in Italy and Greece tasked with conducting interviews with asylum seekers, as well as preparing them prior to their entry into Latvia.

Under the **second priority area (education)**, the Commission made recommendations regarding the skills of teachers and promotion of a more diverse background of teaching staff, as well as stronger support for migrant children in early childhood education and care. In line with these recommendations, the Commission appreciates that **Croatia** provides school staff with tools to foster knowledge and skills needed to manage diversity (also supported by the use of EU assessment tools), and that the **Latvian Language Agency** organises courses for teachers from institutions attended by underage asylum seekers and for the parents of pre-school children. In addition, the Commission has identified **additional practices** in line with the recommendations on education. **Ireland** launched the ‘Turn to teaching’ programme which aims to support over 100 students from marginalised backgrounds in becoming teachers, including those from the Traveller community, migrants, mature students, lone parents and other disadvantaged backgrounds. In **Slovenia**, the ‘Only (with) others are we’ project aims to train 10 000 expert workers and leaders at all levels in social and civic intercultural competencies in order to boost the integration of migrants and the acceptance of diversity, to support faster identification of potential conflict situations and to develop intercultural relations and conflict resolution. In **Poland**, and specifically in Warsaw where there are over 4 500 foreign students, some teachers were appointed to prepare a diverse range of training opportunities for other teachers who work with migrant children. For 2020, workshops are planned on intercultural competences, preparation of texts for foreign children, and multicultural education lessons. At the beginning of the 2019/2020 school year, Warsaw prepared special welcome packages for foreign students. The guidebook contains information for example on the education system, school year schedule, assessment system, additional classes, as well as leisure time suggestions. Finally, **Sweden** launched the “Fast Track for Teachers Initiative” in 2016 to help newcomers with previous professional qualifications integrate into the labour market in sectors where there is a shortage of workers, including the teaching profession. In addition, a new curriculum was adopted in 2018 to strengthen the focus on Swedish language learning, digital skills, and integration and equality.

Under the **third priority area (labour market and vocational training)**, the Commission appreciates that Member States have taken further steps in line with the recommendations. In **Lithuania**, the national employment agency and the Ministry of education, sports and science started a dialogue to address the issues of skills identification and insertion into the labour market. **Italy** is promoting national programmes to support fast-track insertion into the labour market of vulnerable groups of migrants. Finally, **France** considered that recommendations in this area have allowed specific work to be started on this topic. In addition, it recognised that the mutual exchange programmes with Austria and the Netherlands supported the access of third-country nationals to skills recognition systems. On entrepreneurship, **Lithuania** is

developing a call for proposals to address the challenges for third-country nationals who want to start their own business, and in 2019 **Italy** launched a project to encourage entrepreneurship in urban areas in partnership with *Unioncamere*, the national chambers of commerce association.

In addition, the Commission identified **additional practices** in line with the recommendations on labour market integration. For example, fast-track integration projects supported by the European Social Fund can be found in Sweden, Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, France and Finland, and other Member States are investing possibilities for more effective access to vocational training and to the labour market for refugees. On the latter, targeted measures to facilitate the independence and access to the labour market of vulnerable migrants such as victims of trafficking and unaccompanied minors reaching the age of majority have also been implemented in **Italy**. In addition, the Commission is providing technical support to the **Greek Manpower Agency** (project started in 2019) with the design of a pilot project aimed at the inclusion of refugees in the labour market. This includes different elements in line with one or more recommendations. One example is the development of a methodology for providing counselling services, identifying training courses in consultation with employers and a review of existing tools for assessing skills assessment and job readiness. Similarly, the Commission is providing the **Italian Ministry of Interior** with technical support to create a national database to collect the skills of international protection holders and improve their matching with current vacancies, and the development of mentorship programme between selected companies and international protection holders.

As regards **assessing, validating and recognising skills and qualifications** as soon as possible, municipalities in **the Netherlands** are involved in improving the recognition of migrants' skills. In cooperation with NUFFIC, a non-profit Dutch organisation, the level of education previously obtained in the country of origin is matched with the Dutch requirements, and the amount of additional courses needed to obtain an equivalent professional degree is also identified. Other initiatives include the Amsterdam Approach, where refugees who hold a master's degree have the opportunity of completing or validating their higher education. Under this scheme, students are provided with a scholarship and coaching, with the target that 75% of them complete their diploma. For refugees with secondary education, the main objective of the Amsterdam Approach is to help them acquire a basic qualification. Refugees between the ages 18 and 28 are guided towards an education path, including bridging classes that allow refugees to start their bachelor's degree. For refugees with a lower education level, the focus is on basic language training and civic participation.

As part of the recommendations on the **fourth priority area (access to basic services)**, the Commission encouraged Member States to ensure an integrated approach. This involves coordinating policies on housing with equitable access to employment, healthcare and social services and inter-sectoral collaboration including by strengthening communication between local, regional and national levels. Taking into account the action plan and its recommendations, the Commission welcomes **Greece's** initiative to carry out two projects in this direction. The first involved the establishment of Migrant Integration Centres; the second is the HELIOS programme which is described above (for further details, please see table at p.

9). At the start of 2020, **Lithuania** started a pilot project which evaluates the needs and strengths of third-country nationals at a local level, as well as the preparedness of local authorities to implement integration programmes, work with their competences and through inter-sectoral collaboration, and develop a local integration strategy. Since 2015, in **Latvia** social work and mentoring services include practical assistance to clients in searching for housing and in communication with various state and municipality institutions, such as health care providers and banks. This new approach was prompted by the Latvian action plan on Relocation, Resettlement and Reception in Latvia of Persons in Need of International Protection (2015), in line with the recommendations issued by the Commission in 2016. The Society Integration Fund, responsible for the social work and mentoring services for asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status, also implemented a housing support pilot project, which covers housing expenses and promotes employment, language training, access to child education, health and social services, and integration into the society. In addition, within the project “Information Centre for Newcomers” a new dialogue platform was established to foster practical cooperation and exchange of information between various representatives from national, local, private, and non-governmental institutions.

Under the fifth priority area (**active participation and social inclusion**), the Commission issued six recommendations, and stressed the importance of the engagement of the host society for a successful integration process. In line with its recommendations, the Commission welcomes several initiatives under this priority area. For example, **Czechia** invested in projects and measures aimed at combating prejudices and stereotypes, and provided increased support to the topic through calls for proposals and closer cooperation with civil society. In **Croatia**, the Croatian coordinating body for integration of persons granted international protection initiated two AMIF-funded projects, which included activities such as awareness-raising campaigns, educative activities, knowledge and information sharing on integration policies and the human rights protection system, data collection and documentation of human rights violations, human rights advocacy and social participation. Similar actions have been proposed by **Lithuania**, where a call for proposals is being developed for innovative communication actions to combat prejudice and stereotypes, and **Latvia**, where the project “Diversity promotion” aimed to increase the level of information and understanding in society as a whole on the issues of prevention of discrimination and fostering an inclusive society. There is already full-fledged legislation to combat racism and xenophobia, which the Commission recommended to implement. In line with this recommendation, **Ireland** is working to update Ireland’s criminal law on both hate speech and hate crime as a priority.

Finally, the Commission recommended Member States to **organise civic orientation programmes** for all third-country nationals as a way to foster integration into the host society and promote understanding and respect of EU values. On this point, the Commission was pleased to see that Member States have been very active. Civic orientation programmes have been organised in **Wallonia (Belgium)**, and in **Portugal** migrants’ civic participation is being fostered through the improvement of support to migrants associations, the enlargement of the migrant mentorship programme network, and the development of leadership training for migrant associations. In addition, **Czechia** made it mandatory for selected groups of third-

country nationals to participate in these programmes. Finally, **Latvia** adopted a conceptual report that proposed to amend the Law on Immigration to define various groups of migrants for whom integration activities (including language and integration courses) would be mandatory.

In addition, the Commission identified **additional practices** in line with the recommendations on active participation and social inclusion. These regard particularly the projects under a specific call of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme on combating racism and xenophobia. The call, reserved for national local public authorities, supports projects in the fields of fighting intolerance, racism and hate crime/hate speech, and saw interest from several Member States' authorities, which applied to promote projects on narratives on inclusion and tolerance.

Finally, other practices have been highlighted, which go beyond the recommendations issued by the Commission. For example, with the 2017 Integration Act **Austria** launched the monitoring of integration outcomes. Romania implemented a regional integration process through the Regional Integration Centres, created within a grant project financed by AMIF, with the aim of fostering greater involvement of local authorities in this process.

5. Conclusion and lessons learned

As confirmed by all stakeholders throughout the broad consultation process undertaken during the last months, the 2016 action plan positively contributed to improving the integration of third-country nationals across the EU Member States. It increased awareness of the situation of third-country nationals, and contributed to a better overall understanding of specific challenges that they may face. It also helped mainstream integration throughout different policy areas and was generally considered as a useful tool for both vertical and horizontal coordination.

The action plan also contributed positively to the development, design and implementation of national integration strategies in those Member States with limited experience in the field. In those Member States with longstanding integration policies, it provided a framework for developing more comprehensive policies, as well as for cooperation, exchanges of practices and learning opportunities with other Member States.

Moreover, in certain areas, such as access to employment, the Commission developed actions that went even beyond the measures included in the action plan, by launching the initiative "Employers together for integration" and by strengthening cooperation with social and economic partners through the European Partnership for Integration.

At the same time, some **shortcomings and areas for improvement** have emerged in the course of the implementation of the action plan. First, the **lack of data and structured monitoring systems** and the **difficulty in accessing specific segments of the population** have been identified as obstacles to developing targeted policy actions. These shortcomings represent a primary obstacle to conducting research and developing initiatives benefiting third-country nationals: on the one hand, this lack of data limited the possibility to measure improvements of integration outcomes; on the other hand, it made it more difficult to address

specific policy challenges encountered by the target group. Reinforcing the monitoring of the integration outcomes in Member States should also be improved, as it allows measuring progress and making the necessary adjustments to policies and measures in order to increase their effectiveness. It can also allow transferring and replicating quickly in other Member States those measures that have already proven successful at national or regional level.

On a similar note, the **use of EU funds**, which benefit third-country nationals, migrant youth and children as well as the most disadvantaged migrants, has proved to be one of the main levers to support Member States' integration efforts. Nevertheless, EU funds should be more easily accessible, in particular by local and regional authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who have reported difficulties in getting access to EU funding to finance their activities in an overall context of fiscal tightening at national level. In addition, EU funding for integration should be subject to a better tracking and reporting system. For the time being, the share of large thematic EU funds used for integration is difficult to assess (in particular ESF+ and ERDF), and this makes it difficult to grasp the overall EU financial contribution to integration.

Another shortcoming concerned the **scope of the action plan**, which was limited to the integration of third-country nationals. While this target group is likely to experience considerable obstacles in the integration process, the Commission recognises that other groups, such as second-generation migrants or people with migrant background more generally, often face similar challenges. It should therefore be possible to design integration and inclusion measures covering all these groups. Additionally, the action plan only **recognised to a limited extent the specific needs of certain categories** and the possible intersections between the migrant status and other segments of discrimination (e.g. gender, sexual orientation, age, and disabilities).

Finally, on the operational side, the Commission identified two main shortcomings. Firstly, while integration is defined as a two-way process of mutual accommodation, the 2016 action plan has **not sufficiently stressed the need to involve the host society** and, more specifically, the local communities. In addition, the implementation of the action plan showed that **more synergies between integration and other policies** directly or indirectly relevant to the integration of migrants should be ensured.

As regards the **priority areas** covered in the action plan, stakeholders confirmed their relevance for the integration process. It is however clear that drawing lessons from the implementation of the various measures, and in the light of recent developments, aspects such as access to housing as well as to health services will become even more topical in the future. The impact on the integration process of digitalisation and new technologies will also have to be further explored and taken into account in defining future priorities.