Integration of refugees

10 lessons from OECD work

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Making Integration Work
A new OECD series

- **Objective**
  - A tailored tool for policy to support policy-making in integration areas

- **Approach**
  - Short booklets, each containing
    - 10 "lessons learned": WHAT and WHY? WHO? HOW?
    - Examples of good practice
    - Comparative tables on policy framework in OECD countries

- **Policy areas / migrant groups**
  - Refuges and Others in Need of Protection (Jan 2016)
  - Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (forthcoming)
  - Young People with a Migrant Background (forthcoming)
  - Family Migrants (forthcoming)
  - Language Training for Adult Migrants (forthcoming)
Overview: Not everyone is a refugee

Asylum channel (application in-country)

- Negative or closed
- Convention status (refugee)

Resettlement channel (via third countries or directly from origin)

- admitted new arrivals through UNHCR
- Other forms of protection

Refugees and others in need of international protection

+ individual country programmes not passing through the UNHCR
**Lesson 1:** Begin activation and integration services as soon as possible for humanitarian migrants and asylum seekers with high prospects to remain

- Early intervention is crucial for future integration outcomes
- Where asylum procedures are lengthy, groups with high probability to remain may benefit from up-front support – including language and job-preparation training, and skills assessment
- A growing number of OECD countries has opened integration measures for certain groups of asylum seekers, including Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, US

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Average duration of the asylum procedure until first instance decision, selected OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year

![Graph showing average duration of asylum procedure](image)

- Belgium, Mexico, Norway, Slovenia, Hungary, Italy, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Turkey, France, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, Luxembourg
- * For certain groups

*Sources: Processing times: OECD Questionnaire on the Integration of Humanitarian Migrants 2015; Swedish Migration Board*
Lesson 2: Facilitate labour market access for asylum seekers with high prospects to remain

- Early labour market entry is a key predictor for integration outcomes in the long-run
- Making labour market access subject to a waiting period and certain conditions helps preventing abuse of the asylum channel

Most favorable waiting periods for labour market access for asylum seekers in selected OECD countries, 2015 (in months)

* Under certain conditions

Source: OECD Questionnaire on the Integration of Humanitarian Migrants, 2015
**Lesson 3**: Factor employment prospects into dispersal policies

- Where humanitarian migrants cannot choose their place of residence, policies usually aim at an *equal ‘dispersal’ across the country* – often paying little attention to employment.

- But the costs for neglecting employment-related aspects are high.

- Evidence from Sweden suggests:
  - 25% lower earnings
  - 6-8 percentage points lower employment levels
  - 40% higher welfare dependency

  ... eight years after dispersal for refugees subject to a housing-led dispersal policy (Edin et al. 2004)

To be effective, dispersal policies ideally should consider:
- skills profile of refugees
- local job vacancies
- local labour market conditions
- specific shortages
- avoid segregation

Estonia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Portugal and Sweden are among the few countries explicitly considering employment opportunities.
Refugees’ qualifications and skills are often undervalued due to

- Different education and training contexts in origin countries
- Lack of documentation
- No access to / awareness about existing recognition mechanisms
- Vocational skills acquired through non-formal learning

Several countries assess refugees’ skills, but few do so for asylum seekers

Need for systematic assessment and adjusted recognition procedures

**Lesson 4:** Record and assess humanitarian migrants’ foreign qualifications, work experience and skills; provide for alternative assessment methods where documentation is missing

- Academic skills of refugees without verifiable documentation of their qualifications are assessed through expert committees.
- Municipalities use a three-level skills grid to assign refugees to language training.

**Norway**

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**The Netherlands**

- The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum seekers maps refugees’ skills as soon as they have obtained a residence permit. Alternative assessment for persons without documentation is done jointly with competent authorities, refugee organisations and business communities.

**Germany**

- Case workers systematically assess skills of asylum seekers in reception facilities under the ‘Early Intervention’ programme.
- Skills of humanitarian migrants with no or insufficient documentation of qualifications are assessed through ‘qualification analysis’ on the basis of work samples.
Lesson 5: Account for growing skills diversity of humanitarian migrants and develop tailor-made approaches

- The scarce available evidence suggests a large and growing diversity of refugees’ qualifications and skills

Education level of new immigrants aged 16-74 in Sweden by latest country of residence, 2015

- Tailor-made integration programmes ideally include:
  - Flexible durations of integration programmes - as in Scandinavian countries
  - Modular language training - as pioneered by Denmark
  - Targeted courses for specific groups like illiterate, high educated and mothers
  - On-the-job training – as in Australia, Canada and in Scandinavian countries

Source: Statistics Sweden, 2016
Lesson 6: Identify mental and physical health issues early and provide adequate support

WHO estimates of mental health issues in adult populations affected by emergencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before emergency: 12-month prevalence (median across countries)</th>
<th>After emergency: 12-month prevalence (median across countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severe disorder</td>
<td>2% to 3%</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild or moderate mental disorder</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15% to 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal distress / other psychological reactions</td>
<td>No estimate</td>
<td>Large percentage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WHO, 2012

- Physical and mental health issues are widespread and affect refugees’ integration
- Tackling the issue requires that refugees have legal and effective access to targeted care services, including translation

Good practice examples:
- Sweden systematically screens asylum seekers for physical and mental health problems and refers patients to specialised centres throughout the country. In some cases, trained “health” mentors from refugee populations are used.
- Austria, Canada, Denmark and Finland operate centres for the treatment of severely traumatised refugees and their families!
Lesson 7: Develop support programs specific to unaccompanied minors who arrive past the age of compulsory schooling

- Vulnerable group requiring specific (and often expensive) support
- Many arrive with little prior tuition at the end of obligatory schooling but are eager to enter the labour market immediately
- Schools should offer targeted catch-up programmes and language support preparing UAMs for further education or labour market entry; ideally complemented by case workers (e.g. SchlauSchule in Munich)

Evolution of the number of unaccompanied minors in Austria, EU and Sweden

Sources: Statistics Sweden; Austrian Ministry of the Interior; Eurostat
Lesson 8: Build on civil society to integrate humanitarian migrants

- Civil society creates the conditions conducive to the social and labour market integration of refugees
- It steps in where public policy does not tread or cannot be upscaled sufficiently or quickly enough.

- In Austria and Germany, the Social Partners actively engage in refugee integration; in Denmark and Sweden in the skills assessment
- In the United States, the AmeriCorps programme builds integration capacity in local communities
- Australia and Canada have large scale community sponsorship programmes
- Australia, Canada and Denmark run successful, large-scale mentorship programmes
- In the United States, reception and placement services, including for unaccompanied minors, are provided by volunteer organisations
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Lesson 9: Promote equal access to integration services to humanitarian migrants across the country

- Integration primarily takes place at the local level
- Where standards are uneven, integration prospects depend not only on the refugee’s characteristics but also on the area of settlement rather than
- To limit differences, countries should
  - *build* and *exchange* expertise in municipalities
  - *provide* adequate financial support and set incentives right
  - *pool* resources
  - *allow* for some specialisation
  - *implement* minimum standards
  - *monitor* how municipalities live up to these

- Denmark developed a benchmarking system to monitor the effectiveness municipal integration measures; Switzerland has a binding federal framework with cantonal adaptations
Lesson 10: Acknowledge that integration of very low educated humanitarian migrants requires long-term training and support

- Reaching the minimum standards of what is needed to be employable may take several years - but this investment will pay off in the long run
  - Australia, Denmark and Norway have longer introduction programmes for very low-educated refugees
- Support needs to extend beyond training to help refugees enter employment
  - Sweden and Denmark offer stepwise labour market introduction
For further information on the OECD’s work on the integration of refugees and other migrant groups:

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