



INTEGRATION OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Observations and Recommendations to the European Commission in its consultation on the upcoming Second European Union Agenda for Integration

1. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereinafter “UNHCR”) welcomes the efforts of the European Union and Member States to strengthen the EU framework for supporting the integration of third-country nationals, including refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection. **UNHCR also welcomes the opportunity to provide general observations and specific recommendations for the European Union’s Second Agenda for Integration.**

2. UNHCR’s interest in integration of refugees stems mainly from its mandate in relation to Article 34 of the 1951 Convention and the search for durable solutions for refugees. Article 34 states that States shall as far as possible facilitate the “assimilation and naturalisation” of refugees, and in particular, States shall make every effort to expedite naturalisation proceedings. UNHCR also has an interest in ensuring that measures are taken to strengthen non-discrimination and anti-racism efforts, as well as to combat xenophobia. Integration can contribute to reinforcing positive attitudes in the host community vis-à-vis refugees, along with attitudes towards asylum seekers and other third-country-nationals, which are important for social cohesion.

3. UNHCR notes that the Common Agenda for Integration focused on integration of third country nationals legally residing in the territories of an EU Member State. Refugees and other beneficiaries of protection were not expressly included in this focus and were excluded from direct support from the main funding instrument accompanying integration in the European Union *i.e.* the European Fund for Integration. UNHCR has nevertheless noted and welcomed that beneficiaries of international protection were not *excluded* in practice, when part of a larger group of third-country-nationals, from benefiting from integration activities carried out with support from this Fund. **UNHCR also notes and welcomes the inclusion of refugees** (and, in certain appropriate cases, those seeking international protection and their family members) in the **definition of third-country-nationals set out in the scope of the consultation for the Second Agenda for Integration.**

UNHCR recommends that the Second Agenda for Integration and accompanying funding will include refugees and other beneficiaries of protection within the European Union, as well as their families. In particular, UNHCR recommends that the specific needs of this group are recognised and that dedicated, initial integration support is provided, with separate funding if necessary. This group should also be included in mainstream efforts, including funding, to integrate third-country-nationals.

4. The Common Agenda for Integration focused *inter alia* on the Common Basic Principles. **UNHCR welcomed the over-arching principle that integration is a two-way process.** UNHCR further considers that integration is a legal and socio-economic process and a social and cultural process of acclimatization by the refugees and accommodation by the local communities. It should enable refugees to live alongside the host population, without discrimination or exploitation and prepare them to contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum. Integration therefore is

a process involving not only protection beneficiaries and nationals of the host State, but all stakeholders in society and different societal institutions. UNHCR considers that much has been achieved in the Common Agenda for Integration in terms of establishing a common framework for integration and tools to share information and practice among Member States. UNHCR's experience in integration of refugees shows that the integration processes require support, not only at the national level, but at the local level as well as for specific individuals. Integration embodies a meeting of cultures, which when well mediated, can be a driver for development and growth. Cultural mediation is a skill, which should be cultivated within both refugee and hosting communities to the benefit of the integration process.

UNHCR recommends that the focus in the Second Agenda for Integration will be on supporting host communities and local authorities in reception and integration of third-country-nationals, including beneficiaries of protection. To this end, UNHCR recommends a focus on building cultural competencies and mediation skills within receiving and hosting communities.

5. UNHCR has highlighted that integration, in addition to being an economic process aimed at refugee self-reliance, is a legal process. **UNHCR stresses the importance of the legal dimension of integration**, which entails the host State granting refugees a secure legal status and a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements that are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by its citizens. Over time such rights should include the possibility of naturalizing. In this respect UNHCR and States have noted the relevance of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and relevant human rights instruments as providing a widely-accepted legal framework for guiding the local integration process.

UNHCR recalls that persons fleeing persecution, armed conflict or wide-spread human rights violations, or persons who are stateless, have in many cases lost the bond between state and individual, which is the natural foundation of citizenship. Furthermore they may have experienced loss of property, and in many instances loss of close relatives, in difficult circumstances. Many have left behind family members in order to find safety and some have been forced to separate from their children, their spouses and their social and emotional networks of support. They often find themselves in unfamiliar circumstances without the opportunities of migrants to return home. **To be successful, integration efforts in the receiving country must recognize these particularities of persons benefiting from protection.** This includes recognition that persons, who were forced to leave their home country, may not have essential documents in their possession and may not be able to obtain them; that loss and trauma can influence the ability to learn new skills and knowledge and therefore, despite efforts and good-will, they may not be able to meet difficult integration requirements and standards in tests. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that after flight, the need to feel re-rooted in society is important; and that having experienced human rights violations at the hands of state agents or the lack of required protection from the state against harm from others, persons benefiting from protection often need to acquire or re-acquire a trust in state institutions.

UNHCR recommends that refugees and other beneficiaries of protection receive long-term residence rights at an early stage. Naturalisation should be available and facilitated within a reasonable timeframe. Similarly, their status should not be subject to frequent review and family reunification should be facilitated without delay. Test and documentary requirements should be adapted to take into account the specific situation of persons benefiting from protection. UNHCR therefore recommends that the Second Agenda for Integration acknowledges the specific needs of this group of third-country-nationals and supports activities aimed at facilitating the legal aspect of the integration process.

6. In addition to the shared experience of loss, many people benefiting from protection in the EU have experienced particular hardship while seeking protection. Some are recovering from perilous journeys in search of safety, through territories where additional human rights violations may have occurred. Within Member States, many beneficiaries of protection have had their first experiences of their host country in reception centers, in detention or in some instances without support, homeless on

the streets. The impact and vulnerabilities stemming from States' practices during the asylum procedure which may influence integration for beneficiaries of protection is still not fully analyzed and taken into account in asylum and integration policies.

UNHCR recommends that the Second Agenda for Integration includes a focus on the need for more research and analysis of the impact of procedures and treatment of beneficiaries of international protection prior to recognition.

7. UNHCR's recommendations in relation to integration reflect many aspects of the Common Basic Principles including the economic, social and cultural aspects of integration. In order to ensure that integration measures and efforts have the desired impact, integration policies must be based on evidence of measurable impact and independent evaluations. Such integration evaluation and research should in UNHCR's view include quantitative as well as qualitative data from the target groups in both the host society and among new-comers. Data should be age and gender disaggregated, to show the differentiated impact integration policies may have on different groups in society.

UNHCR recommends that the Second Agenda for Integration includes a focus on integration data collection and promotion of evidence-based integration policies. UNHCR further recommends that the agenda supports research and evaluations which are rooted in the integration experience of persons concerned. Research should also be broad in its scope, encompassing different age groups, gender and diversity elements.

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