



INTEGRATION OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

*Recommendations to the European Ministerial Conference on Integration, Zaragoza
15 and 16 April 2010*

1. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereinafter “UNHCR”) values 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 notes that the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty provided for the first time an explicit legal basis for adoption of measures to support Member States’ integration policies and encourages States to develop this area further. UNHCR has a particular interest in ensuring that the protection of refugees leads to sustainable and durable solutions, including their integration in host countries. **UNHCR calls on States to consider the specific needs of refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection in their discussions and reflect these in the conference conclusions.**
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 enforce 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 asylum seekers and other third country nationals, which are important for social cohesion.
3. UNHCR notes that integration is not only a legal and socio-economic process, but also 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 contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum. It is, in this sense, an interactive, two-way process involving both protection beneficiaries and nationals of the host State, as well as its institutions. The result should be a society that is both diverse and open, where people can form a community, regardless of differences.

4. UNHCR highlights the following key issues for consideration by EU institutions and Member States in relation to the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

Mainstreaming integration of beneficiaries of international protection

5. Refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection face similar challenges to those of other third country nationals staying legally in the European Union when it comes to access to the labour market, education and other integration challenges. **Integration policies for refugees should therefore be mainstreamed in general integration plans, strategies and policies for third country nationals. The European Integration Fund should be extended to support actions for protection beneficiaries.**

Recognizing individual needs

6. The specific situation of protection beneficiaries distinguishes them in many ways from other third country nationals. Refugees move from one country to another for non-economic reasons. They also suffer the loss of protection from their own State and likely separation from family and community support. Many have experienced traumatic events in their country of origin that can impair learning and self-esteem, which are necessary to embrace new challenges and opportunities. Many may therefore be in need of specialised care and counselling as well as specific health services. Such support may not be available through mainstream services. Refugees may also need special consideration in assessing their performance against general integration targets. **UNHCR recommends policies and services that recognise that protected individuals may need targeted forms of integration support in addition to mainstream services, depending on personal circumstances.**

Promoting social cohesion

7. UNHCR considers that integration should not require refugees to forgo their own culture. The logic of the 1951 Convention framework is that, with time, refugees should be able to enjoy a wider range of rights as their association and ties with the hosting State grow stronger. As such, *Executive Conclusion No. 104* calls on States to facilitate, as appropriate, the integration of refugees, including, as far as possible, through facilitating their naturalisation. As such, integration in the refugee context is the end product of a multifaceted and on-going process, of which economic independence is but one part. Integration requires preparedness on the part of the refugees to adapt to the host society. From the host society, it requires communities that are welcoming and responsive to refugees, and public institutions that are able to meet the needs of a diverse population. **UNHCR recommends that integration of protection beneficiaries is part of social cohesion strategies. Measures should be taken and developed to foster an inclusive society without discrimination and xenophobia. Services should cater for a diverse society.**

Ensuring secure legal residence and family reunification

6. Integration involves firstly a legal process, whereby refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host State that are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by its citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and the labor market, access to public relief and assistance, including health facilities, the possibility of acquiring and disposing of property, and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents.

Realization of family unity is another important aspect of integration. Over time, the process should lead to permanent residence rights and in some cases the acquisition, in due course, of citizenship in the country of asylum. Considering that short-term residence permits can have a negative impact on the person's sense of belonging and motivation to integrate, **UNHCR recommends that refugees and other beneficiaries of international 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.**

Promoting Self-reliance

8. Economic independence through participation in the labour market is an important aspect of integration. Protection beneficiaries should be assisted to become progressively less reliant on state assistance, acquiring the skills and abilities to pursue sustainable and independent livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life of the host country. Protection beneficiaries may face particular barriers to employment, including language qualifications and recognition of qualifications, but also in some cases limited awareness of employers of their entitlements to work, or lack of incentives to employ protection beneficiaries. Anti-discrimination efforts may be required with innovative ways of ensuring employment, including mentoring arrangements and measures to address challenges faced by women.

The integration of those recognised to be in need of international protection can be enhanced if, during the reception phase, asylum-seekers' language training is adapted to various learning capacities, and if key information about the host society is communicated. Negative impact on integration of accommodation in reception centres in some cases can also be mitigated by the involvement of asylum seekers in local society, and personal development such as through sports, art and cultural activities.

9. UNHCR welcomes the special attention given by the European Union to employment and education and the increasing awareness of the need to improve efforts for female third country nationals. **UNHCR recommends that States' asylum and refugee policies support the aim of self-reliance. In this regard, UNHCR recommends that reception policies should minimize isolation and separation from host communities, that effective language and vocational skills development should be provided and that the pursuit of employment should be assisted. Access to employment should be granted progressively, taking into account the duration of asylum procedures. Detention of asylum seekers, even for short periods, can have lasting consequences on their ability to integrate. Rights given to beneficiaries of international protection other than refugee status should be approximated to the rights of refugees.**

Incorporating the use of integration evaluation and indicators

10. UNHCR welcomes the focus in the European Union integration framework (Common Basic Principle 11) on evaluation of integration policies and inclusion of integration indicators. UNHCR has worked with the Migration Policy Group to develop a refugee integration evaluation tool that it plans to pilot in 2011.¹ The tool identifies relevant indicators generally, in relation to legal integration, concerning

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/4b797b3e9.html>

socio-economic integration and for socio-cultural integration. It looks at policy indicators as well as administrative and financial inputs and the actual outcomes. UNHCR considers it important to involve refugees and beneficiaries of international protection in the design, implementation and evaluation of integration programmes. **UNHCR recommends further efforts at the EU level to ensure that integration policies are well informed and evidence-based. In this regard, UNHCR also recommends broad participation and consultation with refugees, as well as involvement and cooperation, among governmental and non-governmental actors involved in planning and implementation of integration programmes for this group.**

Summary of Recommendations

- ✓ UNHCR calls on EU Member States to consider the specific needs and service requirements of beneficiaries of international protection in their discussions and conclusions.
- ✓ Integration policies for refugees should be mainstreamed in general integration policies and strategies drawn up for third country nationals. The European Integration Fund should be extended to address protection beneficiaries.
- ✓ UNHCR supports policies and services that recognise that refugees may need targeted forms of integration support depending on personal circumstances.
- ✓ UNHCR recommends that integration of beneficiaries of international protection is part of social cohesion strategies aiming at an inclusive society without discrimination and xenophobia, with services which can cater for a diverse membership.
- ✓ UNHCR recommends that refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection receive long-term residence rights at an early stage. Similarly, their status should not be subject to frequently review and family reunification should be facilitated without delay.
- ✓ UNHCR recommends that States' asylum and refugee policies support self-reliance as a means to ensuring refugee social inclusion. Reception policies should minimize isolation and separation from host communities. Effective language and vocational skills development should be provided and that the pursuit of employment should be assisted. Access to employment should be granted progressively to asylum seekers, taking into account the duration of asylum procedures. Detention of asylum seekers, even for short periods, can have lasting consequences on their ability to integrate. Rights given to beneficiaries of international protection other than refugee status should be approximated to rights of refugees.
- ✓ UNHCR recommends further efforts at the EU level to ensure that integration policies are well informed, evidence-based and take into account the specific needs of refugees. In this regard, UNHCR also recommends participation and consultation with refugees, as well as involvement and cooperation, among the governmental and non-governmental actors involved in planning and implementation of integration programmes for this group.