



G-100

#NewVoices4Europe



DNA
DIASPORA NETWORK
ALLIANCE

Policy Brief 1, October 2019

G-100 Berlin

Newcomers Integration Challenges &
Recommendations



Policy Recommendations

For the Federal Office of Immigration and Refugees (BAMF), UN Agencies and German Civil Society

1. Integration is different than assimilation. Integration is a two-W street; it is not only on migrants and refugees to learn and adapt, but on society to actively include new members.
2. Newcomers generally lack representation in, and access to, political platforms and policy-making.
3. Newcomers welcome growing efforts by German civil society to work with them as equal partners.
4. Newcomers recognize the importance of psychosocial support to deal with past traumas, but that social stigma surrounding mental health issues discourages many from seeking help.
5. Newcomers view entrepreneurship as an opportunity to fulfill professional aspirations, but struggle with limited access to capital, networks and technology.
6. Newcomers value soft skills' trainings. This may be of greater importance to some female newcomers that lacked opportunities to develop such skills in their countries of birth.

For German Business Owners in the Job Market

7. The language barrier is one of the main challenges to accessing information and facilitate integration.
8. Employment opportunities
9. don't match newcomers' qualifications and skills, especially those with higher education.
10. There is a lack of tailored mentoring to help newcomers orient themselves on the job market.
11. Newcomers' face discrimination on the job market, especially veiled women.
12. The job market demands German skills, despite potential to capitalize on newcomers' diverse language skills.

For Higher Education Institutions

13. Newcomers struggle to have their education credentials recognized in Germany which delays integration.
14. Young newcomers are encouraged to pursue vocational training, despite interest in pursuing higher education.

15. Compulsory integration courses do not aptly prepare newcomers for future education and work or provide relevant language learning.
16. Newcomers often feel pressured to succeed in order not to perpetuate negative stereotypes and prejudice about refugees and migrants.

Policy Context

In 2014, UNHCR reported that the number of displaced globally reached unprecedented levels of a 59.5 million compared to 51.2 million just a year earlier. The number has since grown to new unprecedented levels. Although only a minority of the world's refugees and migrants have made it to Europe, the unforeseen influx have placed issues of security, immigration and integration on top of countries' agendas. Indeed, according to a 2018 Eurobarometer survey¹⁾, seven in ten Europeans viewed integration of newcomers to be a necessary investment in the long-run and believed that EU Member States should become better at exchanging best practices and establish common integration measures. Only in Germany, some 1.8 million people applied for asylum between 2015 and 2018, and at least 1 million of these have either been granted refugee status, or are recipients of subsidiary protection and suspended from deportation.

The G-100 is an initiative of the Diaspora Network Alliance (DNA), that brings together newcomers, including refugees and members of diaspora communities, with experts and decision-makers to discuss and find solutions to key challenges that face integration processes in Europe today. It does so by providing spaces for facilitated dialogue between relevant stakeholders, that culminate in policy recommendations and elevate newcomers' voices in the public debate and decision-making. The G100 has so far been implemented in Amsterdam, Brussels, and now in Berlin, with a view to be replicated across Europe.

This policy brief alludes to the key choke points that stemmed from a facilitated dialogue held on the 27th April. During this forum, some 50 newcomers discussed main integration challenges and recommendations as identified by them, and linked to issues of civic engagement, employment, education and personal growth and well-being. The brief further highlights where German policy-makers can intervene to reach policy goals of facilitating the integration of newcomers.

¹⁾ European Commission, 13 April 2018, Results of special Eurobarometer on integration of immigrants in the European Union, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/results-special-eurobarometer-integration-immigrants-european-union_en (accessed 6 October 2019).

CHALLENGE ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Having arrived, and wanting to “give back”

Having passed the initial stages of orientation in their new country, participants expressed a desire to become active members of society. Many are already heavily involved in civil society organizations, as entrepreneurs, in businesses and start-ups and in local politics.

EVIDENCE: „A 2017 survey from IAB-BAMF-SOEP 2019 (Forschungszentrum Migration, Integration und Asyl des Bundesamtes für Migration und Flüchtlinge) showed that a growing number of refugees made progress in learning the German language and completing integration courses in comparison to the years before. This growing interest clearly shows that refugees want to accelerate the process and learn German in order to pursue their own civic engagement in society. The survey also shows that more people without children accomplished their language learning and course visiting process“.

Redefining integration

Overall, the notion of integration was widely challenged and critiqued; many participants felt that the concept of “integration” suggested a homogeneity on the part of the receiving society which does not correspond to reality, while creating an expectation on refugees and migrants to abandon their identities. Participants broadly agreed that there should be a move away from assimilationist interpretations of “integration” and towards an approach which allows for the inclusion of people and their diversity. In the process of integration, the onus is not only on migrants and refugees to learn and adapt. Instead, the receiving society is also responsible for actively including those who wish to join and participate in society.

EVIDENCE: „a study by Gesemann, Roth and Aumüller (2012) on local integration policies revealed that 64.2 percent of municipalities have an institutionalized form of migrant representation, which are either elected by non-Germans or selected by the municipal Council. Often, integration councils tend to have an advisory function, and therefore can only advocate for the interests of the immigrant populations but do not make binding decisions. The low turnout for many council elections, which is on average around 10 per cent, poses another challenge to the legitimacy of migrant representative bodies (Vicente 2011)“.

Political participation & representation

Politically, participants felt that migrants and refugees

were lacking representation and access to platforms and fora that would allow them to engage with the political system or influence policymaking. Notwithstanding, participants agreed that a great deal of information exists about ways to engage in civil society and politics, but barriers persist to accessing that information, including language barriers.

EVIDENCE: „the motivating factors for joining a German political party for refugees and migrants were diverse, being politically engaged as well as previous involvement in politics of their country of origin, but also the opportunity to gain experience in democratic practices²⁾“.

Participants acknowledged the vibrancy of civil society activism in Germany and appreciated that organizations increasingly work not just for, but with refugees and migrants as equal partners – a trend that participants agreed should be continued.

EVIDENCE: „Migrant and refugee organizations can serve as bridge-builders between the migrant population and local communities and provide alternative avenues for political participation (Leinberger 2006). Although targeted support for migrant organizations is provided by BAMF, the relationship between the state and migrant organizations has also been critically discussed. Weiss (2013) points out that state-led funding schemes tend to favour bigger umbrella organizations and preference is also given to similar projects led by organizations already established in the host society³⁾“.

Combating racism & Discrimination

While many participants recounted direct or indirect experiences of racism and discrimination, they also viewed the issue of racism not to be predominant in society.

EVIDENCE: „In the past two decades, mainstream media in European countries have had the tendency to produce a narrative that associates immigration with negative threats, such as illegality, crisis, crime, etc. (Fitzgerald, Curtis & Corliss 2012). In recent years, a greater coverage of Islamic terrorism and an association between European of Muslims origin and terrorism can be observe. For this reason, media are often believed to be “an additional factor” in shaping hostile public attitudes and in producing negative narratives that construct immigrants as ‘threats’ to receiving societies (van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, Vliegthart & de Vreese, 2015, p. 269⁴⁾“.

²⁾Ragab, N. and L. Antara, Political participation of refugees: The case of Afghan and Syrian refugees in Germany. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2018.

³⁾Ibid

⁴⁾Caponio, T. and T. Cappiali, Exploring the current migration/integration ‚crisis‘. What bottom-up solutions? Vision Europe Summit, no date

CHALLENGE TWO: ACCESS TO THE JOB MARKET

From Job Centers to the Job market

Many participants confirmed a mixed record of Job Centers in matching people to jobs. The services provided do not generally suit individuals from other countries with different type of formal and informal work expertise and training, especially those with a high degree of professional qualifications and aspirations, which leads to employment that does not fit their skills, abilities or aspirations.

EVIDENCE: Labor force participation significantly increased; 21 percent of refugees arrived in Germany since 2013 were gainfully employed in the second half of 2017. While, at the time of the study, the estimates based on the BA's process data imply further increase in this share up to 35 percent by October 2018, a report by Bundesagentur für Arbeit (April 2019) indicated a growth of employment by 40% more than in 2018. This trend is accelerating with the completion of integration measures, such as participation in integration courses.
Redefining integration

Orienting the job market

Participants pointed out the lack of targeted consultation, coaching, guidance and mentoring to allow migrants and refugees to orient themselves in the labor market and learn about country-specific requirements, especially that language courses do not take the heterogeneousness of their professional background into consideration. In addition, participants noted lack of formal and informal networks that are essential in accessing employment opportunities. Participants also highlighted that

discrimination against migrants and refugees in the job market was a common experience, as well as stereotyping, hiring biases and low esteem on existing qualifications. Women wearing the headscarf are particularly affected.

EVIDENCE: „A main result of a study analysis of labor market performance of refugees in the EU concluded as a main result that “refugees need better qualifications, but suffer a low return on existing ones”, explaining that around 30 percent of the refugees are working jobs for which they are formally overqualified, a quarter also work in occupations whose demands go beyond their formal qualification level. The average earnings of refugee working full-time are around 55 percent of the average earnings of full-time employees in Germany⁵⁾“.

Language requirements remain a key obstacle in accessing employment and while participants recognized the need to master the German language, many jobs could also be carried out despite lower levels of language proficiency or in English. By contrast, the language skills that refugees and migrants do bring to the labor market – many, after all, speak several languages, including English – are rarely recognized or used.

EVIDENCE: „A third-country origin lowers employment prospects significantly. This problem has already been highlighted in the 2015 Employment and Social Developments in Europe Review. It implies that non-observable factors such as legal obstacles, a low recognition of skills and education or discrimination damage the employment prospects of refugees to an extent that they reduce the value to refugees of acquiring better skills and education⁶⁾“.

⁵⁾Peschner, J., Labour market performance of refugees in the EU. Working Paper 1/2017: Analytical support to the employment and social developments in Europe 2016 review (ESDE 2016) Chapter 3: The labour market and social integration of refugees in the EU, European Commission, 2017.

⁶⁾Ibid

CHALLENGE THREE: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

From “integration courses” to educational courses

From “integration courses” to educational courses

The educational system was generally perceived as fairly inflexible, putting greater emphasis on preserving German standards than on making use of talents and qualifications which refugees and migrants may have to offer. For instance, many participants shared the struggle to get their foreign educational credentials recognized in Germany in order to continue their education or enter the job market. Similarly, practical competences and work experience are not sufficiently valued leading to demotivation of fresh professionals. In addition, participants perceived a bias towards counselling young migrants and refugees to pursue vocational training rather than higher education.

EVIDENCE: „It should be noted that it is difficult to compare education systems in the countries of origin to the education system in Germany, and that degrees cannot always be classified easily (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2017b, c). For example, the Technical Institutes in Syria are located at the tertiary level, but at the same time, they impart vocational qualifications that fall within the scope of dual training in Germany. In addition, the qualitative demands for

learning and practicing professions within the countries of origin, and as compared to the standards customary in Germany, vary considerably (ibid.)⁷⁾“

Participants gave a mixed assessment of the compulsory integration courses. On average, completing the courses have been linked to higher language proficiency and employment chance. However, the design of those courses has been criticized for being time- and resource-intensive and for rarely delivering adequate outcomes in terms of language learning, cultural understanding of their new country or preparation for further education or work. The focus should be on the quality of outcome, not on the number of students taking integration courses. The German language component of integration courses needs to give greater priority to actual and practical communication. Some participants would have preferred subject-specific language training that could have facilitated a quicker entry to further education or work.

EVIDENCE: „A report by BAMF 2019 of employment and education on refugees showed that participation in integration programs is closely related to gainful employment; 31 percent of people who have completed an integration course are employed, compared to 16 percent of those who have not yet participated or are currently attending⁸⁾“.

⁷⁾ Stoewe, K., Education levels of refugees: Training and education in the main countries of origin. IW-Report 37/2017, Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, Cologne, 2017.

⁸⁾ Brückner, H. et al., Language skills and employment rate of refugees improving with time. Issue 01/2019 of the Brief Analysis by the Migration, Integration and Asylum Research Centre at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2019.

CHALLENGE FOUR: PERSONAL GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

Self-sufficiency is no luxury

Attaining independence and self-sufficiency, developing social networks and maintaining personal and psychological well-being is critical for refugees and migrants after often difficult, sometimes desperate, departures from their home countries and the challenges of arriving in a new country. Participants recognized that Germany – in theory – offers many opportunities to realize personal aspirations, but that barriers remain, as detailed above in relation to the labor market, education, and civic or political engagement.

In addition, the emphasis on integration in the public discourse and an implicit obligation on refugees and migrants to “make it” seems to neglect that many have only been in Germany for a few years. Refugees and migrants are under additional pressure to succeed; individuals feel responsible for the public image of all refugees and migrants and as such, cannot afford to fail for fear of perpetuating negative stereotypes.

Mental health in face of social stigma

Many migrants and refugees struggle with psychosocial issues and participants emphasized the central role of psychosocial support in improving personal well-being but acknowledged that the social stigma attached to mental health, psychological and emotional problems can prevent migrants and refugees from seeking help. Although participants acknowledged that information about counselling, services and opportunities does exist, they also noted that it may be in fact a case of “information overload”, as individuals cannot identify the information most relevant to them and thus, they lie in a paralysis in decision making.

EVIDENCE: „A brief report by BAMF in 2019 reported that refugees are at a higher risk of developing mental illnesses than the average population; their self-reported psychological well-being is lower in all age groups and female refugees are characterized by having poorer psychological well-being than men. They also reported similar patterns in depression-related symptoms and the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Health risks depend on country of origin and experiences during forced migration; refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, as well as people who have experienced one or more negative events that may cause trauma or psychological distress while coming to Germany, have the highest risk of developing PTSD and symptoms of depression“.

Entrepreneurship enabling self-fulfillment

Refugees and migrants are also affected by the global entrepreneurial trend which carries means, in which self-reliance, sustainable personal development and self-actualization can be achieved. Many participants noted that entrepreneurship and starting one’s own business doesn’t only come from wanting to stand out, but also because sometimes it came out of a necessity to create tailor-made opportunities for themselves that weren’t accessible in the conventional job market. However, additional challenges are expected for refugees when compared to their native peers due to the legal strategy of work and employment of migrants and refugees, entrepreneurial education and their access to finance, networks and technology.

EVIDENCE: „Within the present context of globalization, entrepreneurship is perceived as one of the economic growth engines at European level in the 2020 perspective, as a key factor of economic growth, social progress and employment. Promoting entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as an effective approach to overcoming some of the challenges of economic and social inclusion for migrants and refugees. In host countries, migrant and refugee entrepreneurship can assist in promoting safe, regular and orderly migration by changing societal perceptions of migrants and refugees and promoting social cohesion. For countries of origin, migrant and refugee entrepreneurship can create opportunities through its potential to stimulate both investment and private sector development, in particular in families and communities back home¹⁰⁾“.

Supporting softer skills

Female refugees and migrants who may have not had many opportunities available to them in their countries of origin may need extra time to develop goals and skills that allows them to take advantage of new opportunities. Therefore, beside barriers to providing subject-specific skills, participants stressed the significance of soft skills - both in the professional and the social sphere - early on in the journey of building their future, as they may sometimes differ from their prior experiences.

¹⁰⁾ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Policy guide on entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees. UNCTAD/DIAE/2018/2, 2018

POLICY IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The choke points described above have significant policy implications for Germany. The large number of newcomers that have settled in the country, and Germany's leading role in Europe, means that it holds the power to set positive integration examples which are, and will be much needed in Europe for years to come.

ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Facilitate political representation on the local level

From an early stage upon arrival, guarantee information outreach about existing institutions and bodies that propose a nontraditional form of participation on the local level such as migrant advisory councils and federal anti-discrimination agencies. In that sense, it is not enough to make sure this information is included in integration courses, but also, for a meaningful application of these approaches, the following is to guarantee:

- universal access to those bodies in all cities of Germany
- the legitimacy of migrant and refugee representation in those boards
- active role of those bodies in making policies on refugees and immigration.

Improve the provision of information

Improve the provision of information for refugees and migrants by the authorities, specifically:

- the use of different languages – the offline and online use of language should not be limited to German, but rather be extended to a range of languages being understood by at least the majority of refugees and migrants, especially when it comes to rights and duties.
- the style of language – easily understandable language should be preferred over bureaucratic and complex styles of language.
- the accessibility of information – the utilization of social media channels by the authorities to disseminate information useful for refugees and migrants should be increased. The user-friendliness and completeness of existing information platforms should be reassessed in order to ensure that refugees and migrants can find the information they are seeking.
- better cooperation between the authorities and volunteer networks to guide refugees and migrants through bureaucratic procedures and paperwork.

Boost the presence of Advisory offices

Improve the accessibility of advisory offices, for instance by establishing an advisory office in every initial reception center and by increasing the available funds for mobile

migration counselling offices, such as the one run by the German Red Cross society.

Combat racism and discrimination

Allow and enable migrants and refugees to be ambassadors of their culture rather than expecting them to minimize or abandon their background and heritage. Engage the media in its responsibility and role in shaping perceptions about refugees and migrants in society and shifting away from the depiction of refugees and migrants as one homogenous (and problematic) unit, specifically by:

- reducing biases in the framing of issues related to refugees and migrants and emphasizing common humanity.
- reflecting the diversity within German society in the media, for example among news reporters and other key figures.
- raising public awareness to differences among the pre-defined cultural and ethnic groups on one hand, as well as the outnumbering similarities across those groups in combatting stereotyping in the media.
- sensitizing public servants about institutional prejudices and biases, which may create challenges in their interactions with migrants and refugees.

Encourage participating in political parties

Encourage refugees and migrants to join political parties while encouraging political parties to reach out to refugee and migrant communities. In order to mobilize eligible refugee and migrant voters, it is also important for those parties to address refugees' issues and be -in their practice- as inclusive as the policies they stand for.

Promote Self-Organization

Promote the self-organization of migrants and refugees to empower groups to define and represent their concerns and interests and create platforms that engage more refugees and immigrants in issues that concern their communities and empower them to work together with the state and civil society organizations.

Support locals' involvement in integration processes

Foster initiatives in which locals support migrants and refugees in learning the language, understanding local norms and values, and taking bureaucratic hurdles.

Promote peer-to-peer support networks

Promote “peer-to-peer” support networks connecting newcomers to migrants and refugees who have been living in Germany for longer periods of time; and integrate this informal help network with the formal governmental institutions.

ON ACCESS TO THE JOB MARKET

Facilitate navigation on the job market

Provide support for refugee and immigrant professionals regarding skills assessment, including their prior work experience and guide them in transitioning those skills to the new opportunities of the job market.

Provide alternative access to employment

Foster creative ways of accessing the labor market, which may include volunteering or internships as stepping stones into the job market, but take care that unpaid or low-paid work does not become permanent, which may lead to “brain waste” or bar individuals from accessing more qualified jobs.

Facilitate the entry into the market

Include employers, municipalities and refugee professionals in implementing scalable and sustainable approaches towards facilitating entry to the job market such as a credit institute which subsidizes internships for refugees and migrants and thus facilitates their entry into the labor market.

Boost mentorship programs

Complement services currently offered at Job Centers with individualized guidance programs such as mentorship, buddy-schemes and career coaching.

Target the employers

Facilitate employment, especially in small- and medium-sized enterprises, by providing accessible and reliable information on options and procedures for hiring refugees and migrants such as equivalence of prior training and education, liability risk for employers in case refugee employees lack documentation of employment history or credentials as well as sensitizing them about conscious and unconscious biases and stereotyping.

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Improve vocational language training

Consider the possibility of an on-the-job language training which may be sensible to the employee’s required professional background and communication needs. This applies especially in occupations for which full German proficiency is not required.

Ensure fair opportunities

- Address discrimination in the labor market comprehensively, including by revising and reinforcing Germany’s anti-discrimination law and by creating a media campaign about the impact of discrimination.
- Increase diversity and inclusion through training HR departments and talent acquisition managers to address hidden biases or stereotypes about migrants and refugees among recruiters.
- Raise awareness about the potential and talents that migrants and refugees can bring among the existing workforce in companies.
- Promote the use of anonymous job applications to reduce incidences of hiring discrimination.

ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Shift from “integration courses” to integration practices

Review, evaluate and reform integration courses by means of gathering and using the feedback of migrant and refugee students who are undergoing or who have completed courses, as well as including refugee professionals of pedagogy, social work and other related subjects who bring their perspective on the educational needs and styles of their community.

Improve quality of German courses

Ensure a high and more consistent level of quality of German language courses including through better qualified teaching staff, by providing more opportunities for interaction with native speakers, and by including the following components in the courses:

- Practical: for example, expand tandem or host family schemes between refugees and locals to facilitate language learning and contact to the host population.
- Flexible: facilitate access to language courses by offering different course schedules or providing childcare options for individuals with children.
- Inclusive: expand the availability of childcare facilities to ensure that refugee and migrant children have access to early childhood education in order to learn the language and become acquainted with German society

Facilitate orientation to the right training

Make information about the educational system in Germany available and transparent, in particular the difference between higher education and vocational training and options to combine the two; provide unbiased information to migrants and refugees regarding which pathway to pursue. In addition, inform parents about the educational system in Germany, the options available to their children and the consequences for future educational opportunities, in particular concerning the choice of secondary school.

Provide more lanes to higher education

When it comes to student refugees coming from various educational backgrounds, focus on value-based education rather than educational certification. More lanes on the highway to education should be added, allowing students to customize their pace and fulfill their goals. Similar measures would involve:

- opening up pathways to universities by supporting students in obtaining credits for education completed in their home countries and introducing entry-exams for students who have prior education, but no documentation.
- promoting and improving scholarship and financing opportunities that enable refugees and migrants to access higher education, especially the availability of funding under the BAföG scheme.
- enabling combined educational schemes in which vocational training and language learning are offered together in order to limit the time spent exclusively on reaching the C1 language level.
- introducing a standardized skills test for refugees and migrants whose educational credentials cannot be recognized in order to assess their competences and subsequently match individuals to suitable job positions, study programs, or dual-track apprenticeships.

ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

Enhance prospects for a stable future

- Recognize that psychological safety and stability is fundamental to personal well-being; by contrast an uncertain legal status, short-term residence permits, or family separation are not conducive to personal growth and well-being.
- Recognize that refugees and migrants need time to understand and learn some cultural codes, social norms and soft skills that may be unfamiliar to them; facilitate this learning through more opportunities to interact with the local population, through “buddy systems”, and as part of revised integration courses.

Increase the access to psychosocial support

- Increase the availability and accessibility of psychosocial support services, including those offered in languages other than German.

- Sensitize authorities, employers and service providers who are likely to be in contact with refugees and migrants about psychosocial issues which they may be facing.
- Destigmatize psychosocial issues and create more openness about seeking support, for instance by addressing issues as part of revised integration courses and improving referrals to psychosocial services by other institutions that migrants and refugees come into contact with.

Facilitate access to information on personal development

Develop a new comprehensive online platform in order to increase newcomers’ awareness and access to information regarding psychosocial health, self-development and navigating bureaucracy which connects different existing initiatives, mapping a network and connecting those searching with existing available help.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME

G100 – New Voices for Europe

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