

# REFUGEES IN EUROPE

REVIEW OF INTEGRATION PRACTICES & POLICIES

AUSTRIA / BELGIUM / DENMARK / FRANCE / GERMANY / SWEDEN / THE NETHERLANDS

[Abridged version]

EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR  
DEMOCRACY



The European Foundation for Democracy would like to express its gratitude to all involved in this research project. In particular, we would like to thank the 131 refugees and asylum seekers who participated in the workshops and interview process. Their contribution has made this report unique and innovative.

The full version of this report is available on the website of the European Foundation for Democracy [www.europeandemocracy.eu](http://www.europeandemocracy.eu)

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# About the European Foundation for Democracy

The European Foundation for Democracy is a Brussels-based policy institute dedicated to upholding Europe's fundamental values of freedom and equality, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion. Today these principles are being challenged by a number of factors, among them rapid social change as a result of high levels of immigration from cultures with different customs, a rise in intolerance on all sides, increasing polarisation and the growing influence of radical, extremist ideologies worldwide.

We work with grassroots activists, media, policy experts and government officials throughout Europe to identify constructive approaches to addressing these challenges. Our goal is to ensure that the universal values of political pluralism, individual liberty, government by democracy and religious tolerance remain the core foundation of Europe's prosperity and welfare, and the basis on which diverse cultures and opinions can interact peacefully.

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# 2015: A TURNING POINT FOR EUROPE

In 2015, an unprecedented number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe, primarily fleeing the civil war in Syria. That year, some 1.3 million people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and a number of African countries applied for asylum in the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup> Today, Germany is hosting by far the largest number, having granted protection to a total of 593,410 asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016, including approximately 400,000 Syrians.<sup>2</sup>

Other countries—notably Sweden, Austria, and the Netherlands—also received large numbers of asylum seekers in 2015. Austria is emblematic of the magnitude of the refugee influx; it received more than 85,000 asylum requests in 2015 alone, which is equal to the number of requests it had received in the previous five years combined. That same year, Sweden—a country of just under 10 million people—recorded the highest per capita number of asylum applications of any OECD country, ever (162,877).

To understand better the 2015 refugee crisis and its evolution, the European Foundation for Democracy (EFD) decided to research how different European countries with high numbers of refugees (or those with experience integrating high numbers of refugees) are managing the integration process.

## WHY THIS SURVEY?

EFD's decision to undertake this survey was driven by the awareness that the policy decisions currently being developed across Europe will have a long-term impact both on European societies and on how successfully we remain true to the fundamental principles and values at Europe's core, as enshrined in

the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the national constitutional traditions. The enormous influx of asylum seekers into Europe since 2015 has created significant structural and organisational challenges for governments across the continent, as well as heated political debate. Xenophobic political parties have exploited the refugee crisis, which occurred at the same time as increasing numbers of terrorist attacks and threats all over Europe. These parties continue to use this to promote the divisive and dangerous narrative of "fortress Europe," under attack from people they describe as the "invaders." At the other end of the spectrum, radical groups seek to prevent refugees' integration in order to destabilise Western societies and in some cases to recruit them into terrorist and extremist activities.

Both refugees and host societies are victims of this polarising dynamic. The only way to avoid reaching a point of no return is to address the problem's root causes. To this end, this report takes a multifaceted approach to examining the challenges of integration, seeks to understand the extent of prejudice and racism to which those escaping the horrors of civil war have been subjected and assesses the risks of radicalisation to which such vulnerable individuals are exposed.

Failure or delay to implement changes at both the national and EU-wide levels will prove costly for the European Union. We can expect a bleaker future for the continent should things remain as they are. In sum, this report highlights the importance for Europe to find an equilibrium between security, humanitarian responsibilities and the protection and promotion of its liberal democratic values and principles.

<sup>1</sup>Eurostat, "Asylum in the EU Member States," 4 March 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf>, 1. See also Phillip Connor, "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015," Pew Research Center, 2 August 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>.

<sup>2</sup>In 2015 and 2016, a total of 1,164,100 first-time asylum seekers applied for international protection in Germany, including 424,850 Syrian nationals. In the same years, Germany granted protection to 398,700 Syrian nationals. In this regard, see Eurostat, "Asylum in the EU Member States," 4 March 2016. See also Eurostat, "Asylum in the EU Member States," 16 March 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7921609/3-16032017-BP-EN.pdf>; Eurostat, "Asylum Decisions in the EU," 20 April 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7233417/3-20042016-AP-EN.pdf>; and Eurostat, "Asylum Decisions in the EU," 26 April 2017, <http://www.europeanmigrationlaw.eu/documents/Eurostat-AsylumDecisions-2016.pdf>.

## PROJECT FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the survey was to identify good and bad practices in operation in the different countries surveyed. In identifying good practices, we sought to assess whether and to what extent it might be possible to replicate these in other EU member states. As regards the bad practices, we wanted to examine their vulnerabilities and potential for causing harm and address these accordingly. Based on the overall assessment, we propose a series of recommendations for consideration by policy makers at both national and EU levels.

Our research analysed the situation through the prism of three key tenets of integration policy—socioeconomic, sociocultural, and social inclusion. We focused on a number of

different categories, including the asylum process, national recognition procedures, economic and sociocultural integration following recognition, and issues for concern, among others.

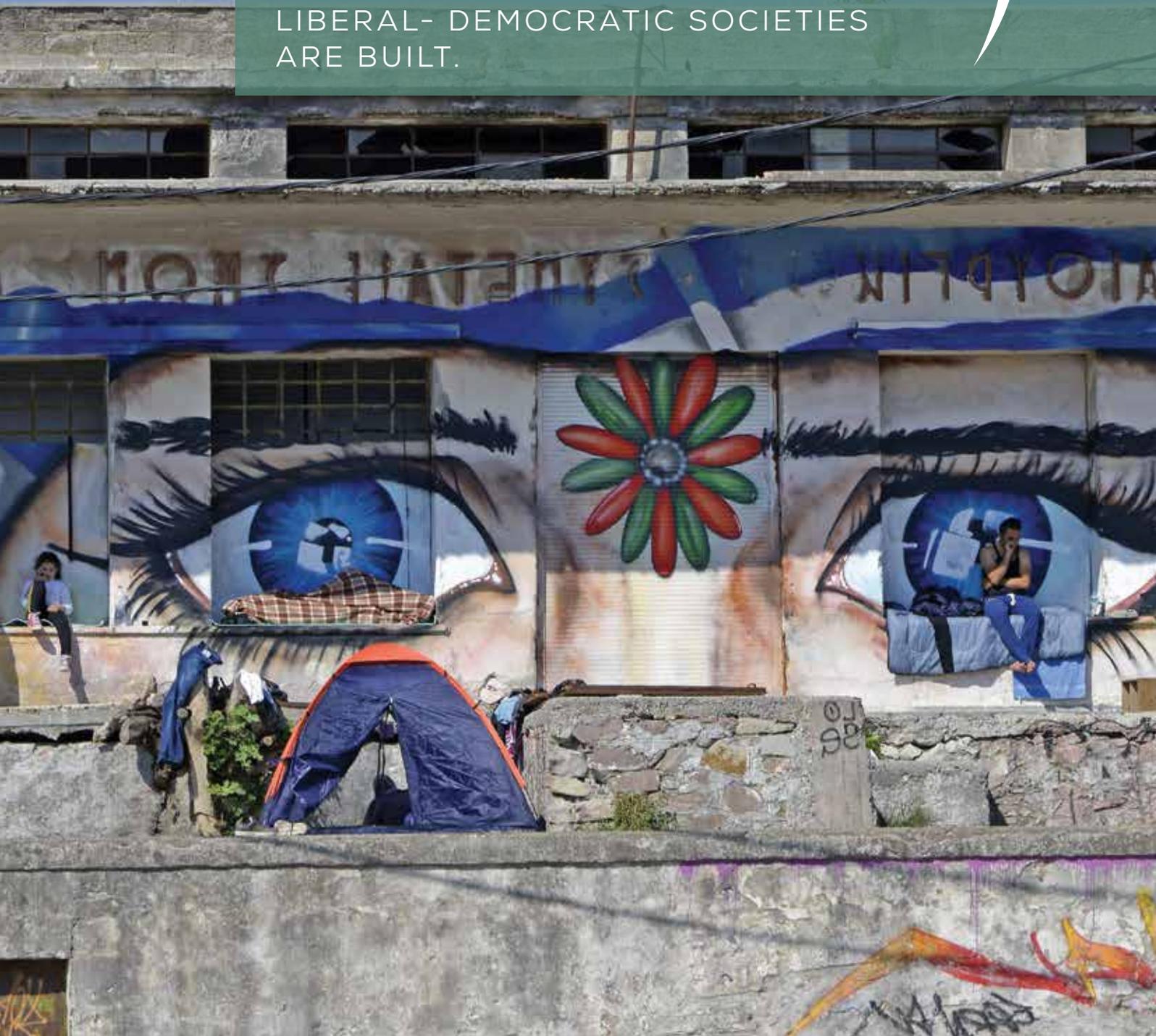
We surveyed Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands after deciding that these are the key countries whose experiences tell us the most. The focus was on Syrian refugees, although not exclusively so. Our report primarily looked at the years 2014-2016, when peak numbers of asylum seekers entered Europe.

## NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

	AUSTRIA	BELGIUM	DENMARK	FRANCE	GERMANY	SWEDEN	THE NETHERLANDS
<b>2016</b>	42,073	14,670	6,055	76,000	722,370	28,939	31,642
<b>2015</b>	85,500	39,064	20,825	70,570	441,899	162,877	58,880
<b>2014</b>	25,675	14,131	14,535	58,845	173,071	81,301	24,000



WE HAVE A DUTY OF CARE AND A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THEM FROM EXPLOITATION, PREDATION AND ATTACK WHILE PRESERVING THE VALUES UPON WHICH OUR LIBERAL- DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES ARE BUILT.





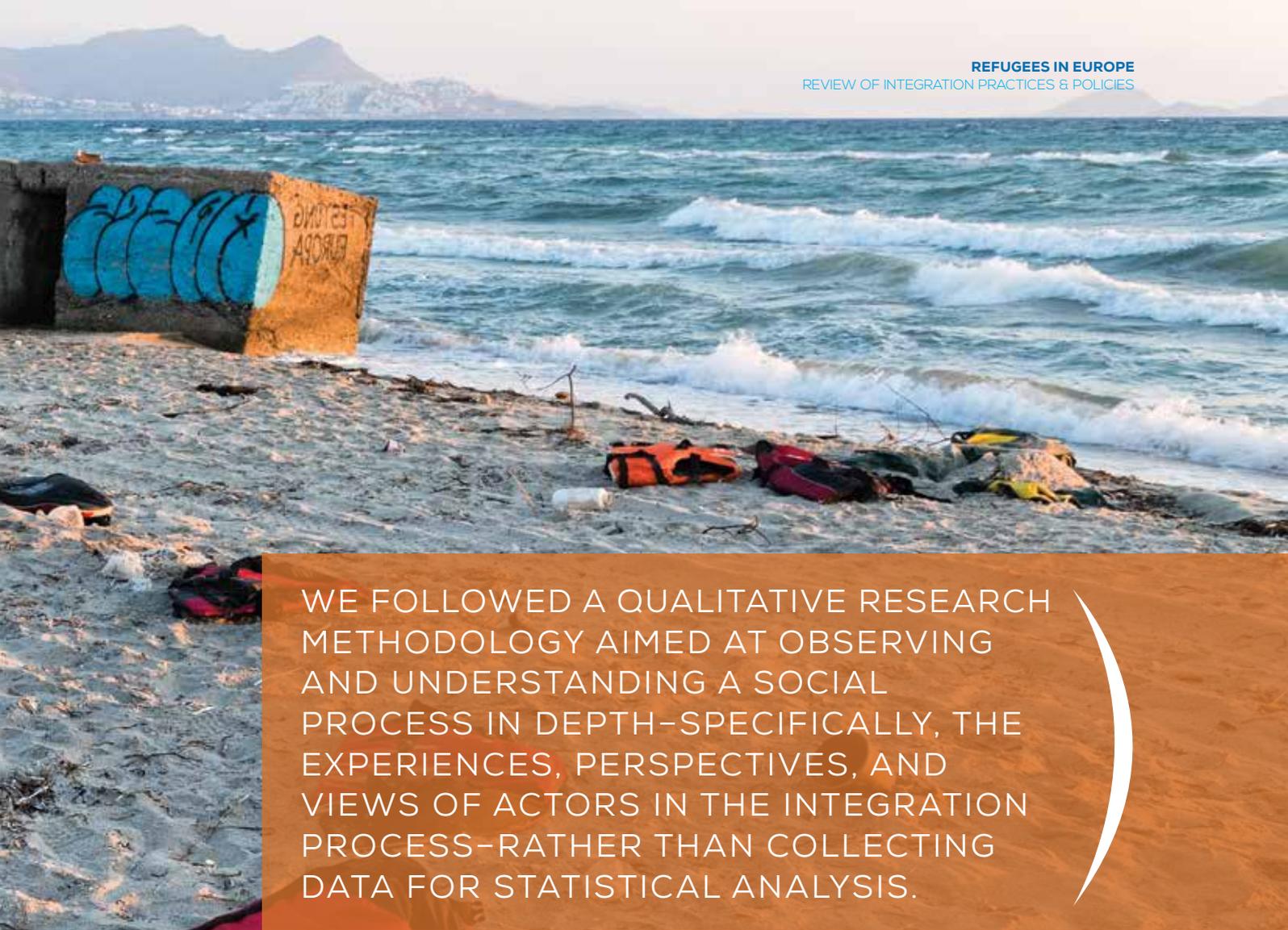
# METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

## THE RESEARCH

To undertake this work, we followed a qualitative research methodology aimed at observing and understanding a social process in depth—specifically, the experiences, perspectives and views of actors in the integration process—rather than collecting data for statistical analysis. The research was based on interviews with a selection of government officials, civil society organisations, integration experts, academics, community leaders, practitioners—including front-line professionals who engage with refugees—and notably, refugees themselves. The preliminary selection of individuals and groups was expanded thanks to the

additional contacts and input received from our interviewees. The quantitative analyses thus far carried out on the topic of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe have been used to integrate oral data collected during the interviews.

In 2017, we interviewed 245 individuals, of whom 131 were refugees and asylum seekers. Most of these had arrived in Europe from Syria in recent years. This represents a considerable value-added component compared to the majority of the previous studies on this topic, mostly based on secondary sources.



WE FOLLOWED A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AIMED AT OBSERVING AND UNDERSTANDING A SOCIAL PROCESS IN DEPTH—SPECIFICALLY, THE EXPERIENCES, PERSPECTIVES, AND VIEWS OF ACTORS IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS—RATHER THAN COLLECTING DATA FOR STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.

Government officials and civil society actors received a similar questionnaire that was adapted to the specific audience. These semi-structured interviews were divided into three parts:

- on asylum seekers awaiting status recognition, with a focus on recognition procedures;
- on what happens after asylum seekers obtain refugee status or temporary protection, with a focus on the aspects of economic and sociocultural integration; and
- on areas that respondents viewed as of concern.

For interviews with refugees, we adapted the questionnaire to include space for their specific reality and to capture more personal experiences. In addition to the interviews, we held a number of workshops and organised several group meetings for refugees and asylum seekers in the various countries we studied.



# OVERALL CONTEXT

THE DEATH OF ALAN KURDI, A THREE-YEAR-OLD SYRIAN BOY WHOSE BODY WAS PHOTOGRAPHED WASHED UP ON A TURKISH BEACH, BECAME EMBLEMATIC OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS, WHICH WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST HUMANITARIAN DISASTERS IN EUROPE SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

In the autumn of 2015, thousands of asylum seekers crossed several borders from Turkey through the Balkans to Western Europe. Many were travelling through southern Europe to get to Germany, Sweden, or the Netherlands, where conditions for asylum seekers were considered more favourable than in other countries. Some individuals crowded into unseaworthy boats or were dependent on smugglers to cross the Mediterranean. Thousands of people lost their lives trying to reach the EU by sea in 2015–2016. The death of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy, whose body was photographed washed up on a Turkish beach, became emblematic of the refugee crisis, which was one of the largest humanitarian disasters in Europe since the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

It was not just Syrian asylum seekers who were arriving in Europe. Many others were fleeing other parts of the Middle East, south Asia, and continental Africa, most escaping local and regional conflicts. They were joined by economic migrants in search of better livelihood prospects. Tens of thousands of these asylum seekers walked through southern Europe, travelling north, until fences were erected to bar their route. The flow of people continued, however, and numbers increased.

By the second half of 2015, it became clear that Europe and its national security systems, administration procedures and asylum and immigration processing facilities were unprepared for such a dramatic, sustained and uncontrolled influx of people in their territories. Most were unable to house or process the huge numbers arriving. The lack of a common policy generated a certain level of chaos at numerous borders, and countries responded to the crisis in various ways. Hungary, for example, prevented asylum seekers from entering its territory and only accorded protection to very few individuals. Sweden decided to impose temporary border controls and did grant asylum, while the Danish government began an advertising campaign in the Lebanese press to discourage asylum seekers from coming to Denmark. After guaranteeing free access for Syrian asylum seekers, Germany later reestablished temporary border controls under Article 25 of the Schengen Borders Code. Meanwhile, in March 2016 the EU announced a deal with Turkey to reduce dramatically the influx of irregular migration inside its borders. Turkey was in charge of stopping people's exodus; in return, the EU had to provide, among other things, financial assistance to resettle refugees among its Member States with legal channels and to facilitate the visa-free travel of Turkish nationals to the Schengen passport-free zone. Although the deal was intended to curb the flow of Syrian refugees,

<sup>3</sup>Unicef, "Latest on the Refugee and Migrants Crisis," accessed 24 October 2017, [https://www.unicef.org/eca/resources\\_28329.html](https://www.unicef.org/eca/resources_28329.html).



## SOCIAL MEDIA AND TELEVISION NETWORKS WERE USED EXTENSIVELY TO SHARE MESSAGES AND LANGUAGE PERVADED BY INTOLERANCE, RESENTMENT AND VIOLENCE.

as of 2017 many Member States had not yet started resettling refugees within the EU-level schemes and thousands of people have continued to travel to Europe with the help of smugglers.

The fact that European governments found themselves surprised by and unprepared for this wave of asylum seekers and refugees was reflected in ad-hoc policy measures that did not benefit from careful planning or a longer-term strategy.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE “US” VERSUS “THEM” NARRATIVE**

The situation was becoming highly polarised, and rapidly so. Many Europeans said they felt that the social contract between the government and its citizens was breaking down as a result of the high numbers of refugees now residing in Europe.

In 2015, the media played an important role in disseminating a polarised debate. Social media and television networks were used extensively to share messages and language pervaded by intolerance, resentment and violence. The strong sentiments that animated the debate also contributed to the development of a polarised “us” versus “them,” “citizens” versus “refugees” narrative. This form of social fragmentation helped create fertile ground for the emergence of all forms of extremism, from right-/left-wing xenophobia to Jihadist radicalisation. Both phenomena represent two sides of the same coin—worldviews that reject the values and principles of liberal democracies.

Meanwhile, right-wing political parties across the continent exploited people’s fear of refugees by promoting the idea that “the other” was coming to “take over Europe’s Christian democratic heritage”. This narrative became increasingly common in many countries during 2015–2016. The spectre of right-wing nationalism reared its head in Germany, home to 1.5 million refugees. Cities across the country witnessed impassioned demonstrations and right-wing populist parties made gains in local elections, exploiting people’s fear of refugees among other anti-establishment concerns.

EU institutions and centrist European governments feared that right-wing populist leaders would be swept into office. This was a particular cause for concern during national elections in France, the Netherlands and Germany, where curbing immigration became a defining issue for many political parties running for office. Although these parties have not been elected to the highest offices, it has become clear that issues and platforms that were once fringe or socially unpalatable have become mainstream.

If the debate that has arisen across Europe has deepened social divisions, it has also raised awareness of the dramatic plight of those forced to flee their homes because of war and violence. On the other hand, the situation has been made worse by the absence of policies that address the need for values-based integration of refugees and migrants.

It is important to remember that the refugee emergency of 2015 exacerbated a tense situation, but is not in itself responsible for Europe's current crisis. Longstanding economic issues and the wave of terrorist attacks across Europe are not a direct consequence of the 2015 influx.

Indications that second and third generations from within communities of immigrant background have become increasingly disenfranchised and radicalised<sup>5</sup> confirm that integration is a long-term process that requires long-term policies and commitment. Governments can no longer ignore or dismiss the phenomenon; they must take positive action to prevent extremism, racism, and destructive divisions within society. Successful integration is the best antidote to fractured and polarised societies, and all actors bear responsibility: the EU, national governments, civil society organisations (CSOs)—and even individual citizens.

## THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSION OF ASYLUM AND INTEGRATION

Governments in most EU countries have similar asylum and immigration policies, although application processing can take significantly longer in certain jurisdictions; in March 2017, applications were taking as long as 13 months to process. The changing political climate toward refugees in Europe

has seen governments considerably tighten the rules on granting asylum and, significantly, those concerning family reunification for refugees.

Over the past year, EU Member States have handled the needs of more than 1 million refugees within their borders, providing not only basic services such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care, but also assistance via integration policies that facilitate access to work, language courses, education, well-being, cultural understanding and social inclusion. Such complex challenges require solid structural organisation.

In the seven EU Member States we surveyed, the national-level integration solutions are different; only three countries—France, Germany, and Denmark—deal with both immigration and integration through the same ministry. Although the majority of Member States distinguishes between immigration and integration, these policies are closely interlinked.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in all of the seven countries we surveyed, CSOs are playing a fundamental role in the integration process, which itself has pros and cons.

<sup>4</sup>France's experience is an example of this phenomenon. At least four relevant policy devices were simultaneously put in place during the 2015 influx: relocation, resettlement, the coordination of Iraqi nationals belonging to persecuted religious minorities and the need to find a solution to the Calais "jungle" refugee camps.

<sup>5</sup>On that note, see Gilles Kepel and Antoine Jardin, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Sean S. Costigan and David Gold, *Terroronomics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 60; Vicki Coppock and Mark McGovern, "'Dangerous Minds'? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the 'Psychological Vulnerability' of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain," *Children and Society* 28, no. 3 (2014), 242–56; Frazer Egerton, *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118; Peter Bergen, "Bergen: A Pattern in Terror—Second Generation, Homegrown," 24 May 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/24/opinions/homegrown-terrorism-opinion-bergen/index.html>; Valerio de Ditiis, "Considerations over Factors Empowering Radicalization in the European Union," *Perspectives on Immigration and Terrorism*, edited by Giovanni Maria Ruggiero, Sandra Sassaroli, Yael Latzer, and Sonia Suchday (Amsterdam, NL: IOS Press, 2011), 53; and Lindsey Holtgraves, "The Politics of Identity: The Roots of Radicalization and Home-Grown Terrorism Amongst Second and Third Generation Immigrants in Europe," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012, <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:65b0a5f0-3ba1-4a2e-ab4a-0f7ac37ecc41>.

<sup>6</sup>See Yves Pascoau, "Measures and Rules Developed in the EU Member States Regarding Integration of Third Country Nationals" (European Policy Centre, December 2014), 19, [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_6519\\_reportintegrationschemesfinalversionpdf-en.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_6519_reportintegrationschemesfinalversionpdf-en.pdf).



# MAIN FINDINGS

THE INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN THE COUNTRIES WE ANALYSED DO NOT PRESENT, TO DATE, PERFECT MODELS THAT HAVE AVOIDED KEY PROBLEMS: ALL SHOW A STRONG NEED FOR TARGETED SUPPORT POLICIES.



As we undertook this research, we hypothesised that countries with a long tradition of receiving asylum seekers and refugees would have good experience handling such complex situations. Their maturity in this field could produce lessons and good practices to share with countries with less experience. However, this initial assumption was partially upended during our research. The integration processes in the countries we analysed do not present, to date, perfect models that have avoided key problems: all show a strong need for targeted support policies.

The 2015 crisis showed that many countries were unprepared to handle the influx of migrants—even those with a long tradition of doing so. The system was largely not ready, trained or equipped to deal with this significant flow of people, thereby creating chaotic situations and problems of a different nature.

In spite of this, our research has also highlighted a significant number of good practices at work. These include examples, programmes and initiatives implemented to address specific problems related to receiving asylum seekers and integrating refugees.

In the following sections, we provide an overview of good practices and vulnerabilities, while a summary of country-specific findings is present in the “Country Contexts” section.

## GOOD PRACTICES

Currently, no clear agreement exists on how to measure and evaluate practices that facilitate integration. After conducting preliminary research into integration policies and practices in the different countries, we made an assessment based on a number of criteria aimed at evaluating the holistic integration of refugees into European societies. We examined approaches to integrating refugees socially, economically and culturally into their new host societies. Considering that most of the good practices identified are ongoing while others are at an initial stage, respondents’ satisfaction was taken as a midpoint evaluation, rather than a definitive judgment, of the practices’ success. Overall, our assessment was based on the relationship between need and response: if the practices targeted solutions to central problems that affect the integration process in the outlined pillars, they were mentioned for their potential contribution.

The following list of good practices is an overview of positive examples we encountered during our research that could be promoted and replicated where needed. It should not be understood as an exhaustive mapping, nor as a way to compare heterogeneous national and local realities.



## LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC VALUES

For the sake of peaceful and harmonious coexistence, it is necessary that all citizens, including newcomers, abide by the principles of liberal-democratic societies. Most governments we surveyed require asylum seekers to sign a declaration of intent to abide by the values of the host country. These include fundamental liberal-democratic values such as gender equality, respect for different sexual orientations, freedom of religious and non-religious beliefs and respect for the individual. Such declarations are a compulsory part of the integration process.

However, similar documents also exist at the local level and are signed on a voluntary basis. For instance, the city of Vienna adopted a charter that was drafted with input from refugees and asylum seekers and contains the basic principles for good neighbourly relations in the city, including respect for the abovementioned values. These are

good practices that need to go beyond mere formalistic requirements.

Some integration courses, such as those offered in Belgium by the Flemish authorities or by different CSOs throughout the country, include modules dedicated to intercultural exchanges and civic education on the laws and values of the host country.

Some projects specifically designed by refugees for newly arrived asylum seekers intend to breach the barrier between two different cultures. For example, in Belgium, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers supports a pilot project run by Afghan volunteers from the NGO Human Welfare Association, which aims to educate Afghans in refugee centres on gender equality.





## SOCIAL INCLUSION

We identified a number of initiatives in the different countries aimed at supporting social inclusion between refugees and the host community. For example, since 2012, the *Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)*, which provides language and other services to help integrate asylum seekers and migrants into Austrian society, has managed an initiative called *TOGETHER: AUSTRIA*. This programme asks successful migrants—so-called Integration Ambassadors—to visit schools, clubs, and associations to help young people with a migrant/refugee background recognise education as an opportunity and avail themselves of the many career options Austria has to offer them.

Another example is *Peer Youth*, a subproject of an EU-funded project run by the city of Vienna that aims to prepare groups of refugee and/or immigrant youth to engage with peers from their neighbourhood, particularly on issues related to integration. Another association, *Zebra*, provides help with the labour market and connects refugees with the local community in Graz through close cooperation with municipalities and other stakeholders.

In Denmark, some municipalities recruit older or former refugees to serve as mentors who train new refugees to act as intercultural bridges among newcomers, the authorities and the general public. Furthermore, to avoid the formation of ghettos, the Danish government requires refugees to remain in the municipality where they have been assigned for three years in order to receive state integration benefits. This seems effective in prompting refugees to integrate into Danish society. A recent survey by the Justice Ministry<sup>7</sup> has demonstrated that following initial misgivings, most refugees settle in quickly, enjoy living in the area where they have been assigned, and manage to integrate successfully.

In March 2016, Sweden approved a law requiring all municipalities to settle asylum seekers to free up capacity within the reception system. Prior to this, it was optional for municipalities to settle asylum seekers. This resulted in several municipalities taking in a minimal number of refugees, which led to problems associated with high concentration.

IN DENMARK, SOME MUNICIPALITIES RECRUIT OLDER OR FORMER REFUGEES TO SERVE AS MENTORS WHO TRAIN NEW REFUGEES TO ACT AS INTERCULTURAL BRIDGES AMONG NEWCOMERS, THE AUTHORITIES AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

<sup>7</sup>Information provided by Justice Ministry officials, 29 March 2017.



*HEJ FRÄMLING!* (HELLO STRANGER!) IN JÄMTLAND COUNTY (SWEDEN), WHICH ORGANISES OUTDOOR EXCURSIONS AND PHYSICAL EXERCISE ACTIVITIES FOR REFUGEES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

At the civil society level, Swedish NGOs undertake a number of local initiatives that aim to integrate refugees into local societies through volunteering. One example is *Hej Främling!* (Hello Stranger!) in Jämtland county, which organises outdoor excursions and physical exercise activities for refugees and their families. These initiatives generally have a high level of participation.

In Belgium, *Duo for a Job* and *Refugees Got Talent* are worth mentioning for the integration they promote between refugees and the host society. Furthermore, *Convivial* organises workshops for Belgian schools and other groups in which the historical and humanitarian dimensions of refugeeism are presented from different angles. We found a similar initiative in the Netherlands undertaken by *Humanity House* under the auspices of the *Dutch Red Cross*. In Germany and France we also met representatives of the organisation *Singa*, which undertakes very important work for bringing together refugees and local communities. These kinds of activities are crucial for dispelling myths, fear and ignorance regarding the refugee phenomenon.

In Germany, a number of municipalities have created structures to teach the local population about refugee-related issues. One example comes from the city of Lübeck, in Schleswig-Holstein, which has pioneered the so-called “*Lübeck method*.” This is a public relations and information campaign that aims to include the public in planning and decision-making related to accommodating refugees in their communities. Another initiative comes from the city of Worms, in Rhineland-Palatinate, where regular roundtable discussions bring together both supporters and opponents of Germany’s refugee policy with a view toward engaging the community in productive debate on the issue.

At the civil society level, several initiatives and programmes address intercultural interaction between refugees and local communities via cultural, musical, and similar activities. One example of an NGO active in this area is “*Start with a Friend*.” Founded in Berlin in 2014, the initiative is currently active in 15 cities. It links refugees to locals, offering newcomers access to mainstream society.



## KEY SUPPORT SERVICES

It is crucial that each newcomer receives information about asylum seeker procedures, how to find essential goods, how to overcome common challenges, options for obtaining social aid and how to find a job. We identified a number of official and volunteer-based organisations offering these services, although often with a lack of holistic coordination. The *Start Vienna* programme and the *weanswer.eu* website, designed in Paris, are two examples of potential good practices that provide basic information regarding how to start life in those cities. In Germany, a partnership between public actors has created the *Ankommen* phone app to help refugees navigate the labyrinth of German asylum and integration rules and regulations, as well as understand the basics of adapting to daily life in Germany. In Belgium, asylum seekers enjoy the right to individual guidance from a social worker. This is meant to inform asylum seekers of their social rights, the rules of the reception centres and the asylum procedure as well as provide assistance with any critical individual circumstances.

Several CSOs in all the countries examined provide administrative guidance to asylum seekers and inform them of their rights and duties. For instance, a Berlin-based CSO founded by social workers, lawyers, and students called *Angehört* explains the process of applying for asylum and helps applicants prepare for their interview at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. In Belgium, organisations such as *Caritas*, *Ciré*, and *Convivial* help asylum seekers and refugees with legislative and administrative hurdles and provide assistance with daily life necessities, both during the asylum process and afterward. France has similar efforts led by *Singa-France* and *SyriansFriendsParis*.

One of the most vulnerable categories of people in need of specific services are unaccompanied minors. In Sweden, local authorities are recruiting retired individuals to work with unaccompanied refugee minors to address the shortage of mentoring and teaching staff there. This is significant because in 2015, more than 35,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in Sweden—half of the total number of children who came to the country.

*Stichting Nidos* is a Dutch organisation providing guidance and support to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers—the first European organisation to do so. One does not need refugee status to have a Nidos guardian. The organisation is also responsible for the *Reception and Living in Families (RLF)* project, in which children under 15 years old are placed with reception families. Nidos recruits families of the same ethnicity and culture as the asylum seekers who have been in the Netherlands for at least two years. Children who have been granted refugee status will be integrated into the community in which they live and Nidos is responsible for them until they turn 18. Having professional guardians educated in child protection and caring for children in family-based surroundings can be considered good practices that should be replicated in all European countries.



## HOUSING

Finding available and affordable housing is described by many refugees as the greatest challenge they have to face, due to housing shortages, high rents and landlords' lack of willingness to rent to them.

In the Netherlands, the State provides refugees with social housing, and each municipality is required to house a certain number of refugees. In Belgium, where the State supports refugees economically

but does not offer them accommodation, *Caritas* and *Convivial* have built a network of *propriétaires solidaires* ("sympathetic landlords") willing to rent to refugees and act as intermediaries between the two groups. In France, we encountered *QuickBed*, a management tool that helps asylum seekers and refugees find accommodation. It also is useful for dispersing newcomers throughout the country without placing too much pressure on any one region.

FINDING AVAILABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS DESCRIBED BY MANY REFUGEES AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE THEY HAVE TO FACE, DUE TO HOUSING SHORTAGES, HIGH RENTS AND LANDLORDS' LACK OF WILLINGNESS TO RENT TO THEM.





## LANGUAGE AT WORK

Developing language skills and finding skill-relevant and skill-appropriate work are among the most critical challenges refugees face. In all countries surveyed, language is, to varying degrees, part of the integration package. All countries also have programmes, courses, web platforms and opportunities for professional inclusion on the initiative of both central governments and CSOs.

Many governments surveyed for this research support interesting initiatives to facilitate refugees' access to the labour market. Asylum seekers are usually allowed to apply for a work permit within a number of months (between four and nine) of submitting a claim. Some governments have conducted skill- and education-mapping exercises to determine if asylum seekers and refugees live in areas where their skills are needed.

In Austria, the Public Employment Service launched *Competency Check*, a programme which assesses refugees' qualifications and prior work experience to determine their suitability for specific jobs and match them with prospective employers who have specific needs.

In Sweden, the government has undertaken a number of measures to provide support to non-Swedish labour market entrants. These include subsidised jobs and internships, where a company receives an 80 percent subsidy for the newly arrived individual's salary, the so-called *Step in Job* programme, as well as complementary education and work placement programmes administered by the Public Employment Service. The government works with social partners and other agencies to fast-track newly arrived individuals into the labour market. This involves education, training and internships in areas that have a high demand for labour. The first fast-track scheme took place in September 2015 and focused on chefs; since then, it has been adopted for a number of other professions,

including doctors, nurses, painters, decorators and entrepreneurs, among others. The Swedish government also created the *100 Club/Sweden Together* in 2015, which allows the Public Employment Service to offer support to large companies that wish to help integrate newly arrived individuals while strengthening their own workforce. The objective is for each company to employ or offer an internship to at least 100 new arrivals within three years.

We also identified a number of NGOs that help refugees search for a job. *Zebra*, in the Austrian city of Graz, undertakes significant efforts to provide refugees with immediate information and assistance to accelerate their integration in the labour market. This includes an accelerated qualifications recognition process and cooperation with the Association for the Promotion of Labour and Employment (FAB) to identify the qualifications, work experience, and training refugees need to access certain jobs.

In Denmark, we encountered a volunteer-based organisation called *Venligboerne* (Kind Neighbours) that has more than 90 Facebook groups based in different districts, towns and cities in Denmark and abroad. Its 150,000 or so members and many refugees widely praise it as being one of the country's most accessible support networks for newcomers. For many, it offers the first tangible opportunity to participate in the labour market and receive practical information on different domains.

A similar initiative is the French group *Action Emploi Réfugiés*, an NGO that has launched a project aiming to connect refugees looking for work with employers prepared to recruit refugees.

In Belgium, an interesting model can be found at *Duo for a Job*, an NGO that has developed a mentoring system between experienced locals and newcomers looking for a job.



MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS HAVE EXPERIENCED PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AS A RESULT OF FLEEING CIVIL WAR AND CONFLICT IN THEIR HOME COUNTRIES. MOST GOVERNMENTS DO NOT OFFER PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA THERAPY AS STANDARD, ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE IF REQUESTED.

In addition to helping refugees navigate the labour market, the initiative has the added benefit of bringing them together with the host population.

We should also report on initiatives that exist in specific sectors. For instance, the *Danish Society of Engineers* (IDA) has undertaken its own training courses for Syrian refugees who were engineers at home. This course, which includes language and on-the-job professional training, is remunerated. Similar courses exist for doctors who train on the job and learn the language. In Belgium, the NGO *Refugees Got Talent* offers refugee artists the chance to practice their art, meet other artists and disseminate their work.

Furthermore, providing volunteer opportunities to asylum seekers and refugees as a form of aid is a widely-implemented good practice in all of the countries we analysed, even if it presents a number of challenges. In particular, it should be emphasised that if governments encourage CSOs to intervene in the asylum process, they must carry out constant checks and evaluations on the quality of benefits provided.

### **VULNERABILITIES AND AREAS OF CONCERN**

Many asylum seekers have experienced psychological trauma as a result of fleeing civil war and conflict in their home countries. Most governments do not offer psychological trauma therapy as standard, although it can be made available if requested. In some of the countries surveyed, government funding is being reduced for this service.

Another source of frustration is the loss of social status, which is regularly cited as profoundly stressful and demotivating. Many refugees we interviewed said they accept un- or semiskilled work even if they had been skilled workers/professionals before seeking asylum in Europe. This happens for many reasons: a number of refugees surveyed said they had accepted lower-skilled work than they had previously performed in order to facilitate family reunification; almost all refugees said their diplomas were not recognised as on par with similar European degrees. On the other hand, European labour markets are highly skilled and automated, providing few opportunities for un- or semiskilled asylum seekers and refugees.

Finding affordable accommodation is also an obvious priority for refugees, but this is not an easy task. In Sweden, a number of cities, including Malmö, are experiencing a housing shortage for refugees. Similarly, France suffers from a chronic housing shortage. In Belgium, refugees and CSOs complained about housing shortages, combined with some landlords' reluctance to rent to refugees.

The situation is complicated by the fact that certain countries do not undertake policies of redistribution. This leads to high concentrations of newcomers in poor neighbourhoods, which strains local social services. It also discourages integration with the host community, while also heralding the oppression of certain refugees/immigrants by others.



In Belgium, there is no plan for how to distribute asylum seekers and refugees, who tend to concentrate in Brussels and Flanders. Similarly, distribution in France is unequal, with concentration in the Paris/Île-de-France region. Until very recently, Sweden's lack of distribution policies encouraged concentration and ghettoisation in certain neighbourhoods, particularly in Malmö and Stockholm. In these neighbourhoods, tension, criminality and clashes with police have been reported. In the Netherlands, despite a quota system in each municipality, refugees complained about the concentration of migrants and refugees in cities like Amsterdam or Utrecht. This closed, highly concentrated environment reportedly makes it more difficult for refugees to pass language and integration exams.

Life in reception centres and communal housing is reported as yet another hardship asylum seekers and refugees must endure. Through the course of this research, it became clear that overcrowded reception centres, a lack of pre-integration activities for asylum seekers (such as language classes and civic orientation courses to relieve boredom) and forced cohabitation of people from different backgrounds have led to regular incidents of violence in most of the countries we surveyed. These issues were often due to sectarian tensions (for religious and political reasons) exacerbated by forced cohabitation. Some refugees reported finding high levels of conservatism in the centres, including pressure to adopt certain mores and clothing styles, as well as harassment of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

(LGBT) people and those who consumed alcohol. Refugees complained about how the authorities half-heartedly enforce security and mutual respect in communal housing.

For their part, authorities have had to manage complex and sensitive situations. On the one hand, they have had to deal with pressure from right-wing political parties to crack down on the number of refugees accepted into the country. On the other, they are confronted with attempts by various Islamist groups to call any government intervention against radicalisation as being anti-Muslim or infringing on religious freedom.

In fact, a number of refugees reported that they had encountered Islamist organisations seeking to act as intermediaries between them and various government agencies, or had even appointed themselves to represent certain refugee communities. The refugees said they had rejected these groups because of their overly conservative narratives and non-inclusive approach to integration. They also resented the fact that government institutions had abrogated their responsibilities toward refugees, delegating these to politico-religious groups interested in taking over certain tasks from the State. Many interviewees felt that those groups did not represent their interests or needs, did not appear to have the same respect for liberal-democratic values, or seemed corrupt and ineffective.

All countries we examined experienced problems with conservative religious organisations and individuals.



For instance, in the Netherlands, some refugees expressed concern that in some Arabic and Quranic schools, women had been verbally abused for not wearing the veil. They also asked that authorities refrain from assuming that religious organisations were automatically entitled to address the spiritual needs of Muslims in the Netherlands. In Sweden, a number of civil society respondents criticised the government for allowing conservative religious organisations to take over tasks related to refugees' material needs or education, including preschool education for refugee children; these were funded by the government but lacked oversight. In France, respondents reported obscure money-raising schemes in halal butcher shops that were allegedly for relief purposes but outside any state control.

In addition, we heard from a number of refugees that Islamist actors in Germany and Belgium have been proselytising among newly arrived refugees, particularly aiming their efforts at young people and unaccompanied minors who represent those categories most at risk for radicalisation and recruitment by terrorists. In Austria, France and Germany, we heard examples of high levels of intolerance and conservatism evident in some mosques. We also heard that some female refugees feared their own

menfolk in Europe in the event they did not wear the veil and behaved more like Western women—in fact, they feared repercussions from their own community far more than they did acts of racism or anti-Muslim sentiments. In all countries, respondents reported some attempts to indoctrinate refugees into radical ideologies and mores and to discourage them from integrating or learning the local language. Harassment of those who do not want to conform is also a recurring phenomenon, especially in neighbourhoods that have high concentrations of immigrants.

Furthermore, interviews with experts in international crime and terrorism reveal that some actors involved in supporting the refugee integration process do not always report to the authorities signs of radicalisation emerging from some of the individuals met. This happens for various reasons, including lack of intercultural awareness and relevant training in spotting signs of radicalisation, fear that their reports may have serious negative repercussions for those individuals, and/or a lack of feedback from the authorities regarding their reports.

IN ALL COUNTRIES, RESPONDENTS REPORTED SOME ATTEMPTS TO INDOCTRINATE REFUGEES INTO RADICAL IDEOLOGIES AND MORES AND TO DISCOURAGE THEM FROM INTEGRATING OR LEARNING THE LOCAL LANGUAGE.

On the other hand, even in those cases where asylum seekers are clearly proven to be radical and a threat to the country, they cannot be expelled if their identity remains unknown or if they would be sent back to a country where their life is at risk (based on the principle of “non-refoulement”). Indeed, a problem common to all the EU Member States is that of the so-called “undesirable and unreturnable migrants.” in such cases, the rejected asylum seeker enters into a kind of limbo of uncertainty and diminished rights and can, on occasion, pose a risk to national security. Recent attacks in Ansbach (24 July 2016), Berlin (19 December 2016), and Hamburg (28 July 2017) in Germany may ring alarm bells regarding this issue; indeed, in each case, the attackers were asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected.

Government respondents from many countries downplayed the risk posed by “fake refugees” because of what is considered to be good cooperation between the security services and asylum agencies and systems in place to detect inconsistencies in asylum seekers’ applications. However, it is possible for individuals to present a plausible case and be considered genuine. European authorities interviewed for this research admitted that in many cases, they did not know who was who among the refugee flows arriving in 2015. The numbers were so vast that many countries’

security services were overwhelmed and unable to vet properly those arriving. National authorities also were not inclined to share information about individuals who had passed through the entry ports in Europe with their law enforcement colleagues in neighbouring countries.

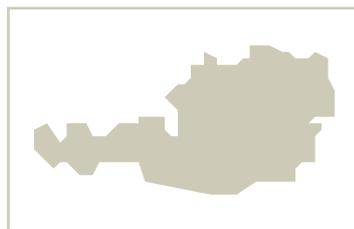
Given the various vulnerabilities and numerous areas of concern, it is critical to find a balance between security and humanitarian responsibilities.





# COUNTRY CONTEXTS

EACH COUNTRY WE ASSESSED HAD ITS OWN PARTICULAR CONTEXT, CHALLENGES, AREAS OF CONCERN AND SUBSEQUENTLY, A UNIQUE SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS. A SUMMARY OF THESE FINDINGS IS PRESENTED HERE.



## AUSTRIA

In 2015, Austria received more than 85,000 applications for asylum, which was more than three times the number received the previous year. While numerous civil society and other actors are involved in integrating refugees in Austria, our research was unable to identify many examples of outreach to refugees outside of Vienna. We also found that CSOs and NGOs have a capacity issue. Refugees interviewed said they found the process of integration in Austria to be challenging and highlighted specific problems, such as accessing the appropriate level of language classes and integration courses and experiencing less than qualified integration service providers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Austria could benefit from various administrative, integration and educational programmes to improve social cohesion and access to the labour and housing markets. The country could establish national and provincial

information offices to guide refugees through complex administrative procedures; offer orientation courses that feature values-based content; organise language and other courses according to participants' educational, age, and cultural differences; implement mechanisms to monitor the quality and providers of integration activities; inform and raise the public's awareness of refugees; deploy experienced and well-educated refugee youth to schools to implement integration activities among other refugees; engage with organisations and support activities that have been initiated by refugees and immigrant communities; make the *Competence Check* initiative permanent; give more attention and support to vocational and professional training; support refugees' initiatives for self-employment; and encourage landlords and real estate agencies to consider refugees who need accommodation as a legitimate demographic that is subject to standard, non-discriminatory renting procedures.

### IN NUMBERS

A total of 34 interviews were carried out in Austria, 13 of which were conducted with refugees in a workshop. Participant breakdown was as follows:



20

Refugees and asylum seekers



7

Government officials



7

Civil society representatives



# BELGIUM

To reflect Belgium's complex political and administrative structures, we carried out a proportionally higher number of interviews in relation to the country's size and its refugee population. Among the country's main challenges is the lack of structured integration programmes for asylum seekers. Many applicants are beset by overly bureaucratic regulations and lack information regarding how to navigate the process. Issues pertaining to housing also exist, as do tensions in refugee centres, mainly due to cultural, political and religious issues. Interviewees report difficulty finding accommodation, which affects their ability to integrate. Refugees tend to be concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where housing is less expensive and easier to find. This creates two problems: ghettoization and over-stretched local services. Regarding culture and values, all first-line practitioners acknowledge the existence of certain cultural barriers between Western law and morals and the mind-set of many refugees. Invariably, homosexuality is highlighted as the most problematic issue, along with religion, women's rights, and freedom of expression.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Belgium could benefit from making multiple services and programmes more structured and coordinated. Integration courses should be tailored to different groups in a language they can master. Civic training courses should take into account refugees' educational and cultural backgrounds.

Belgium also needs to improve the clarity and quality of information at every level. Public services should make administrative procedures more accessible and clear from an early stage. A coordination office should be set up to track all public and private activities, organisations, and services that serve refugees. Finally, the State should focus on avoiding ghettos and dispersing refugees and asylum seekers according to established objective criteria, including available housing social and other state services, potential job availability and so on. Public offices should use new technologies to match demand and supply in the labour market and to coordinating existing, less well-developed private endeavours.

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## IN NUMBERS

A total of 40 interviews were carried out in Belgium. Participant breakdown was as follows:



17

Refugees and asylum seekers



10

Government officials



13

Civil society representatives



# DENMARK

The Danish government has taken significant steps to curb the flow of refugees by making Denmark appear a less attractive destination. Meanwhile, many Danish citizens and the CSO community have worked to find ways to make refugees feel welcome.

Among Denmark's main challenges is the fact that refugees need a high degree of proficiency in Danish to access the labour market. They also rarely find opportunities that match their work experience and education. Remaining in reception centres for extended periods without gainful employment or regular activities can negatively impact asylum seekers. One of the biggest challenges for refugees raised by CSOs/integration experts is being housed in centres in isolated, rural places. Regular incidents of conflict and clashes are reported in asylum centres on religious, political, and ethnic issues, particularly among Syrians. Danish law has changed making it impossible for refugees to apply for family reunification for three years. This was highlighted as causing distress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Denmark could increase support for NGOs' and CSOs' existing initiatives that bring refugees and Danish people together. It might also create an accessible system whereby refugees can be assessed on their knowledge of a particular profession or trade. Additional programmes could be added to integration courses that more effectively involve refugees in the workplace. Denmark could also review family reunification policies in light of the reported negative effects on refugees' efforts to integrate. Meanwhile, interpreters should receive special training, and coordination for all official bodies that engage with asylum seekers and refugees should be improved. Finally, Denmark could improve relations with migrant/refugee associations to enhance trust and communication and address and counter conservative narratives that encourage separation from mainstream society.

## IN NUMBERS

A total of 17 interviews were conducted in Denmark. Participant breakdown was as follows:



5

Refugees and asylum seekers



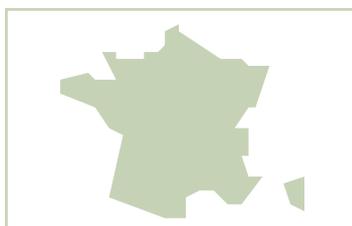
6

Government officials/actors



6

Civil society representatives



# FRANCE

In 2015, France received more than 70,000 first-time asylum applications, 11,725 more than the previous year. France was unprepared for this unprecedented influx, not least because of inadequate accommodation capacity at reception centres that was typified by the situation near Calais, a squalid, makeshift camp called “the Jungle” that was eventually closed down.

The most significant challenge asylum seekers face in France is the critical lack of suitable housing due to insufficient government resources to deal with the number of applications for public accommodation, which is exacerbated by a chronic housing shortage. Given this, many asylum seekers are sent to hotels, which is expensive. Even when they receive refugee status or subsidiary protection, finding work remains beyond the reach of most, mainly due to insufficient knowledge of the language. Asylum seekers may apply for a work permit within nine months of filing their application. However, it remains difficult to find a job because they generally lack language proficiency. During the waiting period for status recognition, asylum seekers may attend language or

university courses as “outsiders” but are not permitted to work, which puts economic pressure on them. Refugees also testify that it is difficult to find employment opportunities in line with their educational qualifications, as diplomas/degrees from their home countries are often not accepted.<sup>8</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, asylum seekers need more clarity on how to navigate France’s complex asylum application process and how to access government support. A greater focus is needed on French language courses beyond the A1 level and there should be more opportunities to learn about France’s laws, culture, heritage, and values. Finally, asylum seekers and refugees need to be more fairly dispersed across France and more effective policies are needed to help them access the labour market.

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## IN NUMBERS

A total of 26 interviews were carried out in France. Participant breakdown was as follows:



15

Refugees and asylum seekers



6

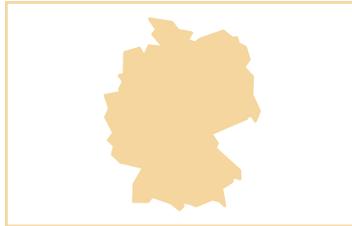
Government officials



5

Civil society representatives

<sup>8</sup>For more, see France Terre d’Asile, “Questions-Réponses ‘Infos Réfugiés’—Diplôme/Permis de Conduire,” accessed 24 October 2017, <http://www.france-terre-asile.org/refugies-col-280/infos-migrants/refugies>.



# GERMANY

In 2015-2016, Germany received nearly 1.2 million applications for asylum. The large number of refugees, along with the perception that Angela Merkel is a leading voice in the EU advocating for the humane treatment of refugees, has added to Germany's challenging situation. The country has experienced a wave of right-wing nationalism as it has suffered from several terrorist attacks. This has exacerbated negative feelings toward refugees in general and Muslim refugees in particular and amplified the voice of right-wing nationalism.

One of the main integration challenges asylum seekers and refugees cite is the lack of direct interaction with the German population, due to the fact that refugees often stay for long periods of time in communal accommodation. Refugees note that the local population lacks information about the cultural diversity and heterogeneity of those seeking protection and this results in what they perceive as guardedness on behalf of the locals. Refugees also said that too many regulations govern integration policies and accompanying services. Most indicated that there was not enough guidance in terms of administration

and integration activities and requirements and that information provided by the German government (regarding preparing to enter the labour market, the local branches of the federal employment agency, and so on) is overly formal and complex.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Germany would benefit from supporting additional efforts by NGOs and CSOs, including ones to map and profile all actors involved in efforts that support refugees. The government should also do more to educate the public about refugee-related issues.

Regarding the asylum procedure, better and more comprehensive intercultural training is needed regarding the latest administrative developments and changes in the law, and the BAMF application procedure should be simplified. Finally, the government should be wary of allowing political-religious organisations to appoint themselves as intermediaries between refugees and government ministries and agencies.

## IN NUMBERS

A total of 54 interviews were conducted in Germany, including a workshop in which 18 refugee interviews were conducted. Participant breakdown was as follows:



38

Refugees and asylum seekers



7

Government officials



9

Civil society representatives



# THE NETHERLANDS

The large number of asylum claims in 2015 generated a crisis in terms of lack of reception capacity in the Netherlands, especially since the majority of arrivals occurred during the last six months of the year.<sup>9</sup> To manage the influx, the government called on the municipalities and provinces to set up several emergency reception centres for asylum seekers and to provide more housing for refugees.<sup>10</sup> This sparked a major and heated debate and set off a number of protests around the country.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The government, NGOs and CSOs should organise more events aimed at improving awareness of immigration/refugee issues among local populations. This would go a long way towards decreasing the isolation refugees often feel and reduce opposition from local communities. All actors involved in supporting the refugee effort should be mapped and profiled as well. Greater attention must be paid to evaluating the quality and abilities of refugees to help them enter the labour market more easily. Meanwhile, the government should introduce rigorous monitoring and qualitative evaluation criteria of private sector organisations participating in teaching civic orientation/integration

courses and ensure that they are open and transparent in their activities.

Finally, the government should do more to combat the problem of migrant children who go missing. There should be greater cooperation among the authorities, NGOs and the refugee community to support emerging initiatives aimed at countering extremism and the influence of ultra conservative religious teachings that encourage separation for mainstream society. In addition, refugees should be supported in their efforts to establish “moderate” Arabic language schools by increasing authorities’ awareness of the importance of engaging former refugees in the process.

## IN NUMBERS

A total of 32 interviews were carried out in the Netherlands. Participant breakdown was as follows:



17

Refugees and asylum seekers



4

Government officials

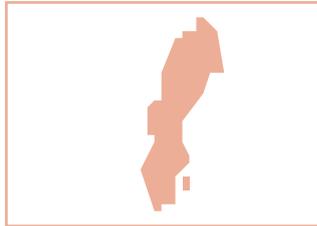


11

Civil society representatives

<sup>9</sup>Jeanine Klaver, “Local Responses to the Refugee Crisis in the Netherlands—Reception and Integration” (National Integration Evaluation Mechanism Analyses, 2016), 4, [http://www.forintegration.eu/uploads/drive/publikacje/pdf/holandia\\_1.pdf](http://www.forintegration.eu/uploads/drive/publikacje/pdf/holandia_1.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



# SWEDEN

In 2015, Sweden, a country of just under 10 million people, recorded the highest per capita number of asylum applications of any OECD country, ever: 162,877. Of these, more than 70,000 were children, of which more than 50 percent were unaccompanied minors. The huge influx of refugees placed significant pressure on Sweden's health care, social welfare, housing, and other sectors. Many civil society respondents said they felt the social contract between the government and its citizens was breaking down as a result of the many refugees entering the country.

As in other countries, a number of refugees and CSOs criticised the government for allowing political-religious organisations to take over certain tasks, such as providing refugee housing, offering Swedish language courses and facilitating other services to refugees that should properly be undertaken by the government. Refugees also expressed concern at the prevalence of conservative Islamic organisations providing education services at kindergarten and special schools for children. They reported a significant erosion of trust and a polarisation within society that is being exploited by far-right political groups and organisations. Many in this category of respondents believe that the media does not realistically report how difficult it is for the country to integrate such large numbers of refugees; government respondents, on the other hand, indicated

that the media focuses unduly on the negative aspects of refugee integration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should institute more targeted protective measures for women and unaccompanied minors in SMA reception centres. The State should provide access to language classes for asylum seekers to more effectively motivate them, relieve boredom, facilitate integration, and help them prepare to access the labour market. Many individuals indicated a lack of trust in non-Swedish Arabic interpreters - the government should increase the numbers and training of ethnic Swedish Arabic interpreters employed at the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA). The SMA should encourage refugees to remain in one place after they are granted residency, rather than congregating in cities or ghettos where housing is scarcer and integrating into Swedish society is more difficult or even impossible. The government should encourage a nationwide public debate on the refugee issue and deny far-right political groups and parties the opportunity to make significant gains in the next national elections, as they continue to exploit the Swedish population's concerns about refugees. A robust system by which to vet and assess the CSOs that provide integration services to refugees should be established.

## IN NUMBERS

A total of 40 interviews were conducted in Sweden. Participant breakdown was as follows:



19

Refugees and asylum seekers



8

Government officials



13

Civil society representatives

PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR BUSINESS INTERESTS TO INVEST IN MENTORING PROGRAMMES, SKILLS MAPPING, LANGUAGE CLASSES, AND/OR TRAINEESHIPS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES.



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## THE FOLLOWING ARE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU AND NATIONAL POLICYMAKERS AS A WHOLE.

- Be cognisant of the psychological trauma experienced by refugees, who have been forced to flee their homes because of civil war and local and regional conflict; just because the evidence is not visible, it does not mean it is non-existent. Consider providing specialised psychological support including trauma therapy, particularly for children, who are the most vulnerable and risk becoming a “lost generation.”
- Protect asylum seekers and refugees from violence, harassment, and exploitation from extremists of all hues and colours.
- Organise compulsory values-based training for refugees. Ensure that trainers are properly vetted and qualified to understand the cultural background of those whom they instruct.
- Engage directly with refugees and assess their needs and requirements to facilitate their successful integration into European societies.
- Be wary of accepting the credentials of any organisation that claims to represent particular groups or religious faiths. Be particularly careful of encouraging certain groups to approach and interact with refugees if those groups promote a politico-religious ideology.
- Ensure that any pastoral care for refugees is provided by vetted religious instructors who are trained in the principles of liberal democracy.
- Ensure that rigorous qualitative assessment, evaluation monitoring and inspection systems are in place for any organisations that provide religious-based education services for refugee children and unaccompanied minors. Establish transparency and compulsory disclosure rules for such organisations’ funding sources and make any public funding contingent on a binding commitment to support liberal-democratic values.
- Evaluate the risks of encouraging sectarian and other actions that can lead to violence in reception centres. Be more sensitive on cultural, religious, ethno-national, and political specificities and on how they might clash.
- Governments should redistribute newcomers so as to avoid the creation of ghettos and educate refugees about the benefits of remaining in their assigned catchment areas while undergoing the integration process. Refugees themselves report that they do not appreciate living in ghettos, and avoiding such environments helps them integrate much more quickly. Public authorities could consider linking social benefits to the refugees’ remaining in the assigned area.
- Begin the process of mapping asylum seekers’ previous education and skills as early as possible. Consider providing state-funded language classes at the earliest possible stage to generate a sense of investment in integrating into the host country, should their application be successful.
- Prepare measures that facilitate less-complicated labour market access for both asylum seekers and refugees. As a 2017 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/International Labour Organization (ILO)/World Food Programme (WFP) report outlined, jobs make the difference.<sup>11</sup>
- Provide incentives for business interests to invest in mentoring programmes, skills mapping, language classes, and/or traineeships for asylum seekers and refugees.
- Invest in vocational training initiatives for refugees. Establish rigorous qualitative assessment and evaluation of the activities, service provision and funding sources of private contractors that governments hire to provide services to refugees.

<sup>11</sup>United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organization, and World Food Programme, “Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities,” 5 April 2017, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/compressed\\_12312313123UNDP\\_JOR\\_FINAL\\_Low%2520Res.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/compressed_12312313123UNDP_JOR_FINAL_Low%2520Res.pdf).



# CONCLUSIONS

In conducting this research, it became clear that significant problems relating to the 2015 migration crisis persist at both local and international levels.

Failure to integrate refugees into the socio-economic and socio-cultural fabric of our liberal-democratic societies is bringing about political and social polarisation, creating spaces that are being filled by extremist forces of different shades that, in a vicious circle, increase societal fragmentation. These problems are deeply rooted within European societies and cannot be fixed merely with ad-hoc policies or 'quick-fix' solutions.

Indeed, our key findings, both in terms of good and bad practices, reveal that the consequences of the crisis will continue to be felt until they are properly addressed through long-term policies aimed at socio-economic and cultural integration. Investing in policies that facilitate access to the labour market, housing and values-based training will lay the groundwork for a more equal, diverse and safer Europe. An increased commitment by states to key support services and NGOs will further aid the integration process. At the same time, in order to protect refugees from exposure to radical ideologies and mores, states must also adopt more robust vetting procedures for organisations that provide delegated services.

There is but a small window of opportunity to devise and implement sound and effective integration policies relevant in particular to Syrian refugees, whether they remain in Europe temporarily—which is increasingly unlikely, as there is no end in sight to the Syrian civil war—or indefinitely. This will require political courage, foresight and intellectual honesty from all political actors and civil society players. There must be greater awareness that failing to integrate fully refugees and migrants into European society, regardless of whether they stay 6 months or 10 years, will have greater long-term economic and social costs than that of the investment into comprehensive integration programmes.

The international community has failed to protect the Syrian people from their own government and other forces over the past seven years; now that millions of refugees are in need of the protection of many EU Member States, we have a duty of care and a responsibility to protect them from exploitation, predation and attack while preserving the values upon which our liberal-democratic societies are built.



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