

DISCUSSION  
BRIEF

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# INTEGRATION

Sustaining mainstreaming  
of immigrant integration



**ReSOMA Discussion Briefs** aim to address key topics of the European migration and integration debate in a timely matter. They bring together the expertise of stakeholder organisations and academic research institutes in order to identify policy trends, along with unmet needs that merit higher priority. Representing the first phase of the annual ReSOMA dialogue cycle, nine Discussion Briefs were produced, covering the following topics:

- hardship of family reunion for beneficiaries of international protection
- responsibility sharing in EU asylum policy
- the role and limits of the Safe third country concept in EU Asylum policy
- the crackdown on NGOs assisting refugees and other migrants
- migration-related conditionality in EU external funding
- EU return policy
- the social inclusion of undocumented migrants
- sustaining mainstreaming of immigrant integration
- cities as providers of services to migrant populations

Under these nine topics, ReSOMA Discussion Briefs capture the main issues and controversies in the debate as well as the potential impacts of the policies adopted. They have been written under the supervision of Sergio Carrera (CEPS/EUI) and Thomas Huddleston (MPG). Based on the Discussion Briefs, other ReSOMA briefs will highlight the most effective policy responses (phase 2), challenge perceived policy dilemmas and offer alternatives (phase 3).

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## Discussion Brief

# Sustaining mainstreaming of immigrant integration\*

## 1 Introduction

Mainstreaming refers to the systematic implementation of policies and measures in all areas relevant for immigrant integration – be it housing, education, qualification, social services or health. All authorities and organisations providing public services, across all levels of government, become responsible for contributing to immigrant integration and for adapting their activities to the requirements of a diverse society. While services and measures may address specific needs of migrants in justified contexts, mainstreaming avoids group-oriented integration policies outside general public policies. It requires a common policy framework aimed at embedding immigrant integration as a general policy priority, cross-sectoral planning and implementation, efficient coordination and shared commitment. Comprehensive integration action plans or -strategies are typical instruments to achieve its objectives.

On European level, the Commission encourages mainstreaming by promoting it as a Common Basic Principle for Immigrant Integration, and through the inclusion of integration-related objectives in a range of EU policies and funding programmes. Under the impression of the 2015/16 arrivals, the 2016 Action Plan on

the integration of third country nationals of the European Commission and its ongoing implementation has marked a new high point of efforts at mainstreaming the response across EU policy fields. With the current preparations and negotiations on the 2021 to 2027 funding and programme framework, elections to the European Parliament and a new incoming Commission in 2019, key decisions about the priority of immigrant integration on the EU agenda are due in the near future.

## 2. Scoping the debate

**Patchy overall picture across Member States.** Responsibility for mainstreaming overwhelmingly rests with Member State governments. Ultimately, the national level of government disposes of the widest-ranging influence on relevant policies and of the means to coordinate across different policy fields. The commitment of central government is thus crucially important if immigrant integration is to be broad-based and become an integral part of policy-making and implementation, service delivery and organisational culture across a wide range of fields.

However, EU Member States differ widely in their policies and efforts at mainstreaming. This variegation reflects different

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migration histories and degrees of migration-related population change, but also political attitudes and different traditions of dealing with ethnicity- or citizenship-related issues. Evidence for a 2015 FRA report (FRA 2015, FRANET 2015) suggests that while 20 EU Member States (except BG, CY, FR, HU, IE, LT, PL, RO) have a national-level integration policy, most of these are time-limited strategy documents or action plans, not laws, and are revised in many cases only to comply with the requirements for EU AMIF funding. Nearly half of the EU Member States (both 'old' and 'new') only adopted an integration policy after 2004. A recent survey for the European Court of Auditors found that no fewer than 22 Member States revised their integration policies since 2014, and that 16 Member States had modified the focus of target groups as response to the increase in arrivals. Of 24 assessed EU countries, around 80% have developed integration measures in the areas of education and social inclusion, while less than 65% have measures in the fields of employment, health and housing. In the vocational training field, only 50% of the countries report activities to further integration (ECA 2018).

### **Multiple manifestations of mainstreaming.**

Generally, the notion of a whole-of-government response to migration challenges is most established in countries with a longer tradition of immigration, mainly in north-western Europe. Examples of countries with comprehensive integration policies, including specific commitments made by several ministries, are Germany (2007), Spain (2011), Finland (2012), Portugal (2007), and Sweden. Most explicitly, mainstreaming has been pursued in Scandinavia and the Nether-

lands, where integration ministries have pushed for supporting newcomers largely through generic policies. Ireland represents the example of a more recent destination country adopting a mainstreamed approach relatively early on (2008). In some countries, comprehensive national action plans emerged from deliberative, including multi-level, development processes, as in Austria (2010), Germany (2007) and Portugal (2007) (FRA 2015, FRANET 2015, Huddleston et al. 2015).

Where efforts at mainstreaming are made, they tend to be labelled according to country-specific discourse. Thus, 'mainstreaming of integration' may also come along in the guise of e.g. 'diversity' or 'equality' policies, 'diversity management', 'interculturalism', 'intercultural opening of services', or simply as comprehensive integration policy. Where policies aim to avoid migrant-related objectives altogether, 'proxy' policies defined in territorial or social cohesion terms may pursue the same substantive objectives as such more explicit policies – that is, the adaptation of general policies and public services to the needs of a diversifying society (Scholten & van Breugel 2018, Kasli & Scholten 2018a,b).

### **Volatile developments and lack of knowledge on impact.**

However, recent research in five Member States (Benton et al. 2015, Collett & Petrovic 2014) has highlighted the fragility and contestation of the mainstreaming agenda. While austerity measures have led to the decentralization of integration policy responsibilities in the UK and France, in the Netherlands the government retracted to a considerable extent from the notion of



integration as being a public responsibility. In addition, politicization of migration through the rise of populist and anti-immigrant sentiments has contributed to a renunciation of group-specific approaches. The 2015/16 peak of arrivals provided a new impetus in the most affected countries, with Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden all reinforcing the mainstreaming of generic services, especially in the labour market and education fields. While some of these changes were primarily aimed at increasing the short-term ability of the systems to absorb the sudden increase of numbers, policy attention clearly has shifted now to the fine-tuning of integration strategies (OECD 2017, 2018, Kasli & Scholten 2018a,b).

Overall, the prevalence of mainstreaming across EU Member States can only be assessed from the 'input' side, that is, the existence of national integration policy frameworks and the reality of mainstreaming efforts seen in various policy domains. No systematic and comparable impact assessments exist, however, that would evaluate the results and effectiveness of mainstreaming in terms of better integration and social cohesion outcomes across countries.

**Mainstreaming on local and regional level.** Notwithstanding the pivotal role of national government action, mainstreaming on the local and regional level is essential for comprehensive implementation. In all Member States municipalities have responsibilities for delivering basic services to the population. Depending on the specific constitutional context, local and regional levels of government play major roles in providing key housing, ed-

ucational, health and other social services. Indeed, in a number of countries a major impetus for the mainstreaming agenda has come from below, when cities or regions adopted such policies early on and inspired the development of comprehensive integration policy frameworks on national level. A main reason for this is that local authorities tend to have a specific, 'urban' approach to migrant integration, marked by pragmatism in the day-to-day provision of e.g. housing, access to care, income and education, and managing the relationships between receiving and newly arriving communities (EUROCITIES 2014, 2016, 2017a,b, Penninx et al. 2014a,b, ReSOMA Discussion Brief on cities as providers of services to migrant populations).

**Transnational agenda.** International actors, such as the European Union, OECD and the Council of Europe, but also policy networks involving cities and regions, have increasingly promoted and supported mainstreaming of migrant integration. EUROCITIES continues to play a proactive role in endorsing the approach through a series of (EU-funded) peer-learning and policy development projects, culminating in the Integrating Cities Charter that has been signed by 37 cities since its launch in 2010. Solidarity Cities, the initiative on the management of refugee reception at local level includes 14 European cities.

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme, emerging from a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in 2008, is promoting its Intercultural Integration Model with a strong emphasis on interculturally adapted public services. Until 2017, a total of 85





municipalities have signed up to the model by undergoing the assessment associated with the ICC Index tool, providing another indicator how widespread local level efforts at mainstreaming integration are across Europe.

**Cornerstone of EU approach to immigrant integration.** The EU Commission embraced mainstreaming early on and made its advancement a cornerstone of the EU policy framework on the integration of third-country nationals, as it emerged from 2004 onwards. The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU (CBPs), proposed by the Commission and adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council, form the foundations of EU initiatives in the field of integration. Devised as a steering instrument to foster a common understanding of integration across all Member States, CBP 10 states that “mainstreaming integration policies and measures in all relevant policy portfolios and levels of government and public services is an important consideration in public policy formation and implementation” (CEU 2004).

The EU Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners highlighted mainstreaming in its 2007 edition, resulting from a Europe-wide stakeholder dialogue and development process (EC 2007). In 2011, the EU Integration Agenda put an emphasis on the management of integration as a shared responsibility (EC 2011). Actual influence of the EU principles and policy guidance instruments on integration policy-making seems strongest in Member States that are more recent destination countries and where the EU approach helped to instigate first

efforts at mainstreaming (Pawlak 2015, Jozwiak 2018 et al.).

**Mainstreaming in EU funding and policy coordination.** Over the years growing EU funding opportunities to support the integration of third country nationals (INTI, EIF, AMIF) have given ample room to initiatives and projects that fostered mainstreaming. EU Structural Funds, in particular ERDF-sourced programmes in urban contexts and the ESF, have increasingly contributed to immigrant integration. In the 2014 to 2020 programme period, at least 20% of ESF spending in Member States has been earmarked for social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination, making it a potential source for integration-related funding. Across its other funding priorities as well, focusing mainly on employment and qualification measures, the ESF has provided ample opportunities to support immigrant integration.

From 2011 on, the European Semester emerged as an annual policy coordination instrument where the Commission assesses Member States progress towards the EU's overall objectives on growth, employment and social inclusion, as set out in the Europe 2020 strategy. Targets on the employment rate, early-school leaving, risk of poverty and social exclusion represent the policy hooks around which integration issues can be raised by the Commission. While country reports mention relevant challenges and analyse outcomes, Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) relating to integration are rarely made to governments until now (e.g. in 2017 to Austria, Belgium and France). Also, because recommendations are not binding and are negotiated



between Commission and Member States, the mechanism has had limited impact on the design of national integration policies (Benton et al. 2015, ESN 2016).

**'Soft' European governance in integration field.** Overall, EU efforts to support the integration of third-country nationals, based on Art. 79.4 TFEU which confirms integration as national competence, never went beyond 'soft steering', such as promotion of the common principles, funding programmes and tools for benchmarking, comparison and know-how transfer. Up to now, availability of EU financial means for integration in various policy fields has never been linked to the explicit existence of mainstreaming agendas in the Member States, or even made dependant on implementation through a mainstreamed policy framework. Nevertheless, with their programming and partnership principles, cross-cutting impact on various policy fields and multiannual spending perspectives, EU programmes remain a significant potential lever for introducing, or strengthening, mainstreaming objectives in Member States.

### 3. EU policy agenda

#### 3.1. The EU crisis response: 2016 Action Plan and related efforts

With the 2015/16 arrivals and the related efforts at migration management at European level, mainstreaming of integration found new prominence on the EU policy agenda. Building on the 2015 European Agenda on Migration which had set out the goals of the current Commission, the 2016 Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals was pre-

sented as a common policy framework helping Member States to further develop their integration policies. As such it was strongly couched in language calling for the mainstreaming of migrant integration, as "an integral part of inclusive social, education, labour market, health and equality policies", pointing out that "integration policies work best when they are designed to ensure coherent systems that facilitate participation and empowerment to everyone in society" (EC 2016a).

In this way considered an impetus for mainstreamed and more comprehensive national policies, the policy priorities of the EU Action Plan included (among others) education, vocational training, employment, access to accommodation and health, participation and social inclusion. As a manifestation of Commission policy-making, the more than 50 concrete measures to be implemented from 2016 on represented a new level of attention given to migrant integration across EU policy fields, and of related coordination across Commission services. Resulting from this concentrated effort at mobilising the existing instruments, funding programmes (such as Erasmus+, COSME, EaSI, REC, Creative Europe, Horizon 2020) have been used to underline this ambition with a number of dedicated calls for projects over the last two years.

In addition, the Commission has pushed for stronger multi-level and cross-stakeholder coordination, including the establishment of the European Integration Network (EIN, replacing with a stronger mutual learning mandate the previous Commission network with National Contact Points representing Member States governments). Inclusion of



migrants and refugees was made an early priority of the Urban Agenda for the EU, a new multi-level format to render EU policies more responsive to the needs of the local level, and for strengthened participation of cities in EU policy-making based on topical partnerships and action plans (EC 2017c). Intensified efforts at horizontal coordination with social partner organisations culminated in the signing and launch of the 2017 tripartite European Partnership for Integration, as well as the evolution of the annual European Integration Forum (a stakeholder dialogue event co-organised with the EESC) into a broader European Migration Forum.

### **3.2. The post-2021 agenda: MFF proposals**

The response to the 2015/16 arrivals and the experiences gathered in this period directly fed into the Commission's policy planning process for the upcoming Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), i.e. the 2021 and 2027 programme and funding period. A comprehensive spending review to underpin the future shape and priorities of the EU long-term budget assessed, among others, the coherence of all instruments with the main political objectives and values of the EU, as well as potentials for streamlining and synergies in cross-cutting issues. While it concluded that horizontal mainstreaming as formal EU budgeting tool (that uses quantitative targets) also in future should be limited to climate and environmental goals, the review suggests continuing to pursue other cross-cutting themes through programme design with specific objectives, targets, eligibility criteria or appropriate conditionalities. It further finds that "more than mainstreaming or

earmarking of funds, the coherence of policies has emerged as the most important element to support efficiently the policy objectives." With more streamlined, less overlapping and better integrated programmes the Commission aims for stronger performance and greater economics of scale when delivering EU policy goals (EC 2017a, 2018b).

The spending review prominently informed the eventual Commission proposals for the 2021 to 2027 MFF, also taking into account numerous stakeholder consultations, audit findings, and assessments of conditionalities applied in Structural Funds (EC 2016b, 2017b, ECA 2018b, HLG 2017). The European Parliament actively contributed to the debate on the future MFF, with a March 2018 resolution emphasizing spending levels appropriate to the Union's increased tasks including a comprehensive asylum, migration and integration policy. The EP position included a dedicated AMIF instrument, complemented by contributions to the integration of refugees and migrants under other policies, especially the Structural Funds, but also cultural, educational, youth and sports programmes (EP 2018a).

Released in May and June 2018, key changes put forward in the Commission proposals for the 2021 to 2027 MFF include, with a view on immigrant integration and mainstreaming (EC 2018c-f):

- Structural Funds will continue to be spent and programmed across all, including higher developed, EU regions, ensuring that all Member States are covered by a more integrated governance of EU programme spending





and overall EU social and economic policy coordination;

- The merging of the ESF, YEI (Youth Employment Initiative), FEAD, EaSI and Health Programme into one fund, the ESF+, aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights. At least 25% of national ESF+ funds will have to be earmarked for social inclusion and fighting poverty; with at least 2% dedicated to measures targeting the most deprived.
- The European Social Fund is to become, as ESF+, the major EU funding source for medium and long-term integration, with a newly established programme priority ('specific objective') that includes the promotion of the socio-economic integration of third country nationals. Member States will have to address the objective as part of the overall 25% allocation of national ESF+ funds to the social inclusion policy area.
- Simultaneously, the restructuring of AMIF to an Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF), to fund early integration measures for newly arrived third-country nationals; with a reinforced partnership principle and a financial scope of national programmes of euro 6.25 bn more than doubled compared to the 2014-2020 period.
- A stronger alignment of the ESF+ (and ERDF) with the European Semester to support reforms and increase the funds' leverage, and to better coordinate the programme framework with newly emerging EU level policy initiatives. Policy challenges of Member States identified in the European Semester process are to inform programming of the funds at the start

and mid-term of the 2021 to 2027 period.

- The abolition of the option for Member States to programme and implement the ESF on regional level, which will affect 8 Member States (including the 5 largest post-Brexit) which made use of the provision in the 2014 to 2020 period. The intended stronger use of ESF+ as an instrument to support EU-inspired national reform policies may be a major reasoning behind this change.
- Synergies between integration funding under ESF+ and the EU Social Open Method of Coordination as well as the EU Education and Training strategic framework, to which the European Social Fund contributes;
- Increased use of conditionalities in the Structural Funds ('enabling conditions' replacing previous 'ex-ante conditionalities'), i.e. the existence of adequate regulatory and policy frameworks in Member States before funding is released, to ensure that performance of all co-financed operations is in line with EU policy objectives;
- A general focus on labour market integration, and related to that, issues of qualification, training and skill recognition that has already underpinned the 2016 Action Plan; visible e.g. in the proposed advancement of the mainly employment-oriented European Social Fund to the main funding instrument for medium- and long-term integration; as well as specific AMIF support to assessment of skills and qualifications acquired in a third country.



## 4. Key issues and controversies

### 4.1. Sticking points in the European dimension

**Varying commitment and denial of mainstreaming as policy priority among Member States.** In essence, mainstreaming is the notion of integration as a two-way process – involving both the receiving society and migrants – translated into the domains of general policies and policy-making, public institutions and public services. As such it needs to be built on political leadership which acknowledges migration as a major factor shaping society, and the resulting needs for adaptation and reform.

In the political reality of Member States, however, this very notion is widely contested, and mainstreaming may not make it to government policy agendas due to constraining public attitudes, dominance of a denying political discourse or electoral considerations. What is still at stake in many of EU Member States, is whether broad-scale integration efforts and mainstreaming are necessary at all – or even, whether they are desirable in view of perceived pull effects attracting people to the country. And it remains a fact that where sustained mainstreaming is seen, it tends to correlate with wide-ranging and decade-long population changes and the resulting pressure on policies and institutions to come up with adequate responses. Mainstreaming as a policy solution may come rather easy under conditions of 'superdiversity', but is destined to prove difficult and a long-term challenge in newer countries of immigration (e.g. Crul 2016, Kasli & Scholten 2018b).

In this vein, it is not a surprise that the establishment of immigrant integration as an EU policy goal worth of a spending priority that would deduct available EU funds from other objectives is contested as well. As proposed by the Commission, in the 2021 to 2027 MFF Member States will be asked to allocate part of ESF+ funding to the integration of third country-nationals, while the ESF+ budget with euro 88.7 bn (at 2018 prices) would roughly stay the same as the combined ESF and FEAD budget with euro 87.7 bn in the 2014 to 2020 period (at current prices; CPMR 2018, EC 2018d, ECRE 2018, EUROCITIES 2018b, EP 2018b, EPRS 2018). As opposed to this de-facto stagnation of available ESF means, AMF funds are planned to sharply increase, but it remains to be seen what the spending shares dedicated to early integration in national AMF programmes will be.

#### *Focal points of current European debate:*

- *Provisions in the future ESF+ Regulation on thematic concentration of means that ask Member States to allocate part of the 25% earmarked for social inclusion in national programmes to socio-economic integration of third-country nationals (EC 2018d, Art. 7.3).*
- *Lack of earmarking of national AMF allocations to the specific objective supporting integration of third-country nationals in the EC proposal; and reliance on mutually agreed needs assessment between the Commission (possibly supported by the Asylum Agency) and the Member State to ensure that AMF means are actually spent on early integration under national AMF programmes (EC 2018f, Art. 3.2.b, Art. 8.2.a, Annexes I. and II.).*



➤ *Support from AMF for mainstreaming-related actions promoting equality in the access and provision of public and private services to third-country nationals, including adapting them to the needs of the target group, and actual meaning of such support in the context of 'early integration' (EC 2018f, Annex III.3.h).*

### **Contested necessity of more binding European governance in integration field.**

At this juncture – where EU policy-makers draw lessons from the 2015/16 period, try to move from crisis management to long-term integration and prepare for the 2021 to 2027 EU programme cycle – one question is at the core of debate: Whether EU policies can, or should, go beyond the existing 'soft' governance aimed at inspiring, enabling and facilitating mainstreaming in Member States, and move towards a more binding framework.

As proposed by the Commission, mainstreaming of integration in the 2021 to 2027 MFF would become more strongly entwined with overall EU economic and social governance, i.e. the European Semester and national reform programme process. More flexible and cyclical governance of the ESF+, oriented at newly emerging needs, would be part of this shift, providing a new EU lever to influence Member State policy priorities. Annual Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in the European Semester cycle, (increasingly also referring to migrant integration), will be taken into account in programming at least at the beginning of the period and at the mid-term review (assessing progress after five years; EC 2018d).

The main rationale for such a more binding frame, from an EU-wide perspective, is to level out the existing differences among Member States in terms of their capacity and commitment to integrate migrants and refugees, and to respond with efficient policies. With stronger incentives, migration- and integration related conditionalities in EU funding programmes, and under peer pressure, the hope is that also more reluctant governments would develop and implement comprehensive, broad-based integration policies. Not the least, the increased urgency stems from the fact that effective integration across the entire EU is intrinsically linked to the issue of responsibility-sharing in the asylum field: More opportunities for beneficiaries of international protection to successfully integrate, resulting from efforts at mainstreaming, will reduce incentives for secondary movements between Member States with weak integration frameworks and those with well-established policies.

However, given the political attitudes among some Member State governments (but also the legal constraints of the EU mandate in the integration policy field), any plans for a more binding EU governance framework for integration are set to be contested. For example, a clear two thirds-majority among the national representatives in the European Integration Network (EIN) recently considered that the current Commission competences in the integration field should not expand (ECA 2018a).



#### *Focal points of current European debate:*

- *Provisions of the future Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) asking for the consideration of CSRs in Fund-specific programming (EC 2018c, Art.9 on Partnership Agreement & Art. 14 on mid-term review); provisions of the future ESF+ Regulation requiring concentration of means at challenges identified in the European Semester and CSRs (EC 2018d, Art.7).*
- *Need seen by stakeholders for more explicit integration-related 'thematic enabling conditions' including migrant target groups in new CPR governing the programming of ESF+ and ERDF in Member States (EC 2018c, Art. 11, Annex IV); thus amending the Commission proposal of 29 May 2018 (which speaks of migrants and disadvantaged backgrounds only in the contexts of social inclusion and education/training).*
- *Higher number of integration-related Country-Specific Recommendations and use of re-programming requests by the Commission to steer Member States reactions to economic and social challenges (in future based on Art. 15 CPR); and applicability of such requests in cases that go beyond 'sound economic governance' and relate to broader social inclusion issues like integration (EC 2014).*

**ESF+ as main EU integration fund: incentive for mainstreaming in Member States or empty claim?** On the face of it, the intention to render the European Social Fund the major EU funding source for medium- and long-term integration makes much sense. With its cross-cutting objectives, including access to employ-

ment and self-employment, training, education, lifelong learning, equal access to services, social inclusion and poverty relief, the ESF represents a significant tool to potentially support mainstreaming integration across Member State policy portfolios.

Another obvious advantage is the fund's broad definition of target groups (based on Art. 162 TFEU), where everyone with legal access to the labour market includes third-country nationals (in a number of states even asylum seekers) in the same way as nationals with a migration background or migrants from other EU countries. Locating the topic under the remit of social affairs and inclusion policies also allows for a more comprehensive approach than closely linking integration to admission and migration management policies under home affairs portfolios (cf. ECRE 2018). Most important, the ESF is already widely used to support migrant integration, and on the ground often represents the most obvious and for many actors most accessible EU funding source. Abundant evidence exists that especially in the main destination countries of the 2015/16 arrivals ESF programmes have been tapped with good results for e.g. labour market insertion, skill validation and training measures for migrants and refugees (EC 2015, 2017d, Rietig 2016).

However, to what extent precisely the ESF is used for migrant integration in the implementation practice of Member States, is unknown (ECA 2018a). Only in the upcoming programme period output indicators on 'third country nationals' and 'participants with a foreign background' (disentangled from other target groups)





will be introduced according to the proposed ESF+ Regulation.

Crucially, it is not clear at all from the Commission proposal how it will be ensured that ESF+ will actually support medium- and long-term integration on a broad basis across all Member States: The fund's general objective expressly does not refer to migrant integration, only to equal opportunities, access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion and health protection (EC 2018d, Art. 3). Socio-economic integration of third-country nationals is being introduced as part of the specific objective that also includes marginalised communities such as the Roma (Art. 4.1.viii), and the tabled proposal further suggests that Member States do have to programme this objective by taking into account third-country nationals (Art. 7 on thematic concentration). However, no ring-fencing of means is foreseen for this specific objective, which is only part of the sub-set of social inclusion objectives (Art. 4.1.vii to xi) for which at least 25% of national allocations will have to be dedicated.

Evidence from the current period shows that Member States have the tendency to spend, among these social inclusion objectives, the biggest shares (with more than 80%) on the 'active inclusion' and 'access to services' goals (AEIDL 2018, EAPN 2016). At any case, it can be assumed that Member States willing to tap the ESF+ for integration purposes would do so across all specific objectives anyway, in line with current practice. Member States not wishing to use ESF+ means for migrant target groups, on the other hand, would get away with dedicating

only token amounts within the social inclusion objectives, according to the proposed provisions on objectives and thematic concentration. In this light, the proposed mechanism to take into account Country-Specific Recommendations emerging from the European Semester in the initial and mid-term programming phase may not have much effect on unwilling governments either, as long as these recommendations have to be agreed by the Member States.

Overall then, the claim that ESF+ will become the EU's foremost funding source for medium- and long-term integration stands on shaky grounds. If AMF national programmes in practice turn out to concentrate on early integration in a strict sense, the threat is of a major future funding gap for medium/long-term integration in such Member States which at the same time chose not to concentrate ESF+ resources on migrant target groups.

*Focal points of current European debate:*

- *Provisions in the proposed future ESF+ Regulation on general and specific objectives (EC 2018d, Art. 3 & 4) and thematic concentration of means that ask Member States to allocate part of the 25% earmarked for social inclusion in national programmes to socio-economic integration of third-country nationals (Art. 7.3).*
- *Future mandates and complementarity of the ESF+ and the AMF in the integration field, with the authorities responsible for AMF implementation required to cooperate and establish coordination mechanisms with the authorities managing the ESF+ and of the ERDF (EC 2018f, Rec.14).*





**Sustained mainstreaming across EU policy areas.** The ability of the Union to influence Member State policies also hinges on its own capacity to mainstream migrant integration across EU policy domains. In the 2016 Action Plan, the Commission pledged to “continue to mainstream the priority of immigrant integration, non-discrimination and inclusion into all relevant policy actions and areas” (EC 2016a). An open question is whether the momentum achieved in the wake of the 2015/16 arrivals can be maintained under the upcoming Commission taking office in 2019. Beyond the envisaged strengthening of integration responsibilities under the remit of EU employment and social policy as well as the structural funds, it remains to be seen whether integration-related priorities continue to be reflected in policies, actions and funding in the e.g. entrepreneurship, education, health and culture domains. As a possible harbinger of a future trend, of the 52 measures included in the Action Plan 23 had not been completed as of December 2017 (ECA 2018a).

Another question arising in this context is the possible future role of the EU-level stakeholder consultation mechanisms – foremost the European Migration Forum (EMF), the newly created European Migrants Advisory Board (Urban Agenda 2017), the tripartite European Partnership for Integration and the European Integration Network (EIN) – in contributing to mainstreaming efforts across EU policy domains. The partnership-based approach to multi-level governance as embodied in the Urban Agenda for the EU could also have a role in future

strengthening of integration as a priority across EU policies and programmes.

Ultimately, an EU-level partnership principle still needs to materialise and become formalised: In the same way as required by the Commission when Member States implement EU programmes and are to involve civil society, social partners and other equality stakeholders in a structured way.

*Focal points of current European debate:*

- *Completion of the 2016 Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals and possible future update(s).*
- *Designation of the European Social Fund plus to become the major EU funding source for medium- and long-term integration (EC 2018d).*
- *In the 2021 to 2027 Erasmus programme, based on a duplication of funds: stronger outreach to people from all social backgrounds including migrants, through increased and more flexible formats for school pupils, vocational and adult learners, apprentices and youth; and a small scale partnership action for grassroots organisations (EC 2018h).*
- *Ensuring that under the new Single Market Programme (replacing i.a. COSME) provisions are made for inclusive entrepreneurship support policies to encourage and strengthen migrant entrepreneurship (EC 2018i).*
- *Definition of a role for EU stakeholder participation formats in future efforts at mainstreaming integration across EU policies and programmes, including the EMF, EIN, Urban Agenda, European Partnership for Integration and European Migrants Advisory Board.*



## 4.2. Sticking points concerning all levels of government

### **Comprehensive governance frameworks.**

In terms of governance arrangements, mainstreaming of immigrant integration is highly demanding. By definition, it is a cross-cutting goal asking for horizontal coordination, development of skills in diversity management across government portfolios and public services, and vertical multi-level cooperation with regions and municipalities. A particular challenge is maintaining strong cross-governmental coordination mechanisms, while concrete policies are developed across various policy fields. Coordination must be efficient to guarantee even implementation and sustained high levels of attention in different domains.

In addition, if mainstreaming is to be sustainable in the long term, evaluation, ongoing monitoring and informed renewal of policy frameworks are essential. Beyond the realm of public policy-making and administrative action, the involvement of civil society (including migrants themselves) and social partner organisations takes mainstreaming to another level, and can significantly increase the reach, impact and effectiveness of policies. Such an involvement, however, requires transparent and open, inclusive and empowering development frameworks – something that has shown to be difficult to achieve where tested, and not even seriously tried in many Member States (Benton et al. 2015, Collett & Petrovic 2014).

**Leadership for agenda-setting and organising change.** Building an agenda for integration mainstreaming, driving this agenda forward and mustering the polit-

ical will necessary for implementation, even in the face of competing priorities or resistance, is a key issue in many countries. It relates to the capacity of committed actors to organise and facilitate processes of change and to coordinate the drivers across institutions and levels of government. Fora for networking and exchange, formal or informal policy platforms and structured dialogue processes have proven their value for reaching 'beyond the converted', engaging the public and building durable alliances.

A key challenge is to capitalise from the fact that local and regional authorities often are early adapters and can fertilise agenda-building, while governments have the means to potentially steer and initiate country-wide change and support sub-national levels in implementing mainstreaming. Social partners, welfare organisations and civil society platforms in general can play a crucial agenda-setting role, as they often combine sufficient resources and country-wide organisation with freedom from electoral considerations (that may hamper the commitment of politicians). Achieving and sustaining a dynamic for change, however, is notoriously difficult in the absence of a positive narrative of migration and where the political undercurrent is not supportive of immigration and international protection.

### **Financial and other capability gaps.**

Seriously shifting to a mainstreaming approach means to invest – in change and reform of policies, provision of public services, organisational cultures and the overall functioning of public institutions in a diverse society. It requires investments e.g. for building new capacities in administrations, change management, devel-



opment of intercultural competencies of staff, new recruitment strategies reflecting the altered population, and new efforts at monitoring and assessing the impact of policies. What is necessary is a public sector able to reform and take on new responsibilities, and related incentives for change.

In practice, however, these requirements of a policy approach that does not come for free contrasts with sustained pressures on public services for cost-cutting, efficiency and shrinking of the public sector. The actual decrease of the ability of public administrations and services to embark on broad-based integration has been exacerbated by austerity policies, related to the EU response to the financial and sovereign debt crisis, in exactly such Member States where needs for more mainstreamed policies are especially urgent.

A pattern repeatedly seen – and representing a real pitfall for credible efforts at mainstreaming – is to misuse the concept as an excuse for decreased investment in targeted measures, while generic policies remain largely unreformed, leaving migrants with less support rather than more. Misconceived this way, mainstreaming can turn out to cover up assimilationist strategies (Kasli & Scholten 2018a,b). In addition, without further non-material investments in terms of conceptual leadership, expertise and long-term commitment, administrative inertia can prove a serious stumbling block for the implementation of a mainstreaming agenda.

**Ambiguities of mainstreaming.** In itself, the concept of mainstreaming is not void of controversies and different interpretations. As coherent the general principle is

of designing public policies and services that accommodate diversity, as difficult it is often to find the appropriate balance on the ground. In particular, migrant-specific targeting within mainstreamed services needs careful policy design: On the one hand, the shift to mainstreaming is generally associated with the goal to avoid stigmatisation and the 'reduction' of a socially diverse population with immigrant background to one 'target group' with pre-assumed deficiencies; and to facilitate the emergence of a new sense of belonging in diverse societies. On the other hand, keeping a clear eye for the specific needs related to migration experiences calls for the continued existence of measures designed to support migrants as part of generic policies, especially for newcomers and groups in a vulnerable position.

Sometimes, such questions of interpreting the mainstreaming principle become linked to an urge to avoid targeting migrants altogether, be it due to political discourse that stresses universal values (as can be seen in France), be it because policy-makers prefer to present measures as addressing socio-economic disadvantages in general, using such 'proxy policies' to avoid political backlash (Kasli & Scholten 2018a, Scholten et al. 2017).

Another example for the fluidity of the mainstreaming concept are diverging approaches to how to achieve a more diverse public sector. While in some countries explicit recruitment strategies to employ and promote more staff with immigrant background are in place (including targets and legal underpinnings), in many places more indirect means are considered appropriate, like outreach to



migrant communities, encouragement, highlighting of role models and mentoring, collaboration with educational institutions and a stress on intercultural/language skills. Overall, mainstreaming is not a one-size-fits all approach, and under different demographic, discursive, administrative and political frame conditions necessarily takes various shapes across different countries and levels of government (Kasli & Scholten 2018b).

## 5. Potential impacts of policies adopted



### Inclusiveness of European societies

- Mainstreaming is the core strategy of adaptation in diversifying societies and the only sustainable way of enabling countries to deal with constant immigration, maintain social cohesion and strengthen the absorption capacities of education, health, housing, etc. systems.



### Institutional, operational and political implications

- Generally and across all levels, mainstreaming entails the empowerment of actors inside and outside governments to deal with challenges of integration. Potentially it stabilises integration policy agendas and provides a modernisation impetus for public administrations with regard to new governance arrangements. New (power)

balances among responsible government portfolios and coordinating authorities are frequent consequences.

- Strengthening integration as an overall EU policy goal implies stronger recognition on behalf of Member States of an active EU role in this policy domain. In particular, a more binding governance framework linked to the European Semester would imply a stronger role for the European Commission.
- The levelling out of discrepancies among Member States with regard to integration capacities (eventually, through mainstreaming) is a precondition for the mid- and long-term success of any EU-wide asylum policy based on notions of distribution, relocation and responsibility sharing.



### Economic and fiscal consequences

- Short-term investments in the development and implementation of mainstreamed policies can be offset by long-term gains concerning higher efficiency of public services and increased social cohesion; especially mainstreaming in the labour market, qualification and education fields and resulting employment outcomes can improve the overall migration balance sheet.



## **Migratory consequences**

- More even capacities of Member States to accomplish integration resulting from broad-based policies and mainstreaming efforts will reduce incentives for secondary movements from Member States with less developed integration policies to those with sophisticated policies.
- Better integration outcomes resulting from mainstreaming means improved conditions for EU Member States to globally attract human capital, as public policies and services competently dealing with needs of immigrants are relevant criteria for mobility decisions of e.g. highly-skilled and specialised labour migrants and students.



## **The EU as an international actor**

- A visible and credible EU-wide mainstreaming approach would be an opportunity for the Union and its Member States to position themselves as leaders in questions of long-term integration, especially among OECD countries and with a view to the Global Compact on Migration.





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# ReSOMA

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## ReSOMA - Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum

is a project funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme that aims at creating a platform for regular collaboration and exchange between Europe's well-developed networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policymaking. Being a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), ReSOMA is meant to communicate directly with policy makers by providing ready-to-use evidence on policy, policy perceptions and policy options on migration, asylum and integration gathered among researchers, stakeholders and practitioners.

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