

Refugee Integration: Capacity and Evaluation

Project Overview in Central Europe

Background

There are approximately 1.6 million persons with a protection status in Europe. For most of them, integration is the most relevant durable solution. Although there is no unified understanding of what integration means, it is widely accepted to include a socio-economic, a legal, and a cultural aspect. Despite this lack of a common definition of integration, the matter is in many countries part of mainstream debate.

UNHCR considers the integration of refugees to be a dynamic, complex, and multifaceted process comprising three distinct but interlinked dimensions: legal, economic, and socio-cultural. It necessitates actions from numerous ministries, different levels state administration all the way down to municipalities and from a large variety of non-governmental stakeholders such as NGOs, employers, trade unions, schools, education providers of language and vocational skills, health care providers, the banking system, landlords and many others. Therefore, it has been very difficult to evaluate the impact and the cost effectiveness of integration measures thus far.

To address this gap, UNHCR Regional Representation in Central Europe is implementing an 18 month project in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia co-financed by the European Refugee Fund. The project will pilot an online Integration Evaluation Tool (IET) developed by the Migration Policy Group (MPG) for UNHCR, which will gather information, identify gaps and measure progress in relation to refugee integration. The project will support, through expert advice, training and practical cooperation arrangements, the building of effective and sustainable data collection and internal review mechanisms. It will also foster partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders to maintain and develop effective support for refugee integration.

Project objective

The overall objective of the project is to improve the quality and effectiveness of refugee integration by building the capacity and expertise of the authorities responsible for integration in each of the four participating countries. To this end, the project will pilot the IET with a focus on access to education, employment, housing, and family reunification. Specifically, the IET, comprising of over 200 indicators, will ensure comprehensive data collection and the accessibility of governments and other stakeholders to reliable information on integration matters. Based on the data collected, the project will provide expertise, awareness, training and support to the various ministries and service providers responsible for refugee integration. This part of the project will enable the evaluation and development of effective integration programs for refugees and persons with complementary protection in Central Europe. Regional roundtables and reports on thematic will review the gaps and good practices identified through the information collected throughout the region on the various areas of integration.

The Integration Evaluation Tool (IET)

The tool, developed in partnership by MPG and UNHCR, will help create a data base with over 200 indicators requiring inputs from governmental and non-governmental stakeholders alike. The indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, are grouped under four headings:

- 17 indicators on general considerations (impact of reception conditions on integration, mainstreaming of refugees into general policies, etc.)
- 76 indicators on legal integration (residency rights, family reunification, access to nationality)
- 90 Socio-economic indicators (housing, employment, health, lifelong learning, public relief and social security)



- 45 socio-cultural indicators (access to education, language learning and cultural orientation, community participation)

The tool covers every aspect of refugee life, from the use of skills and qualification in their current employment or school enrolment of children to more administrative issues such as government budgets for cultural orientation.

Project outcomes and benefits of the IET

Overall, the project will:

- pilot the IET, and in this respect improve the data on refugee integration;
- expand the knowledge base of government counterparts in relation to key integration areas such as access to housing, education, employment and family reunification;
- build the capacity of stakeholders on good practice integration support for beneficiaries of international protection.

The European Commission in its Common Agenda on Integration stated that in order to implement Common Basic Principle 11, Member States need to develop clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective. The indicators in this tool have been chosen in accordance with policy goals needed to achieve a Common European Asylum System. Therefore, the tool will help governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and UNHCR to establish both what data are needed and whether policies achieve these goals.

Project Partners

The project is managed by UNHCR Regional Representation for Central Europe, with funding by the European Refugee Fund and co-funding by UNHCR.

The project is implemented in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia in partnership with the following organizations:

Migration Policy Group (MPG), Belgium
Immigration Office, Department of Asylum and Integration (Romania)
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Poland)
State Agency for Refugees (SAR) / the Integration Centre for Refugees (Bulgaria)
Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (Slovakia)