



Policy Brief #1

November 2024

Addressing Persistent challenges in Migrant and Refugee youth integration

Who is this aimed at

- **European policymakers and decision-makers (at EU, national and regional levels)** involved in shaping policies related to migrant and refugee youth integration in European countries

Key messages

This policy brief identifies several persistent challenges in migrant and refugee youth integration, despite existing policies and targeted initiatives:

- **Education Gaps:** Language barriers and inadequate support hinder access to quality education for migrant youth. This is compounded by recognition issues related to previous degrees, studies and qualifications
- **Healthcare Access:** Complex administrative processes limit equitable healthcare access for migrant youth and their families. Cultural barriers can be a barrier to appropriate care.
- **Labor Market Barriers:** Migrant youth encounter obstacles like complex work permit processes and discrimination in hiring.
- **Legal Rights and Social Barriers:** Enforcement gaps and social challenges, such as xenophobia or sex-based discrimination, impede migrant and refugee youth's ability to exercise their rights.

Policy options

- **Strengthen Educational Inclusion:** Improve foreign qualification recognition, expand targeted language support, and develop inclusive education policies for migrant and refugee youth.
- **Ensure Healthcare Access:** Simplify administrative healthcare processes, provide cultural competency training for providers, and conduct targeted outreach to migrant communities.
- **Promote Labor Market Integration:** Streamline work permit procedures, offer specialized vocational training, and address discriminatory recruitment practices.
- **Safeguard Legal Rights:** Enhance enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, develop positive communication strategies, and promote intercultural dialogue to challenge xenophobic narratives.
- **Strengthen Coordination:** Foster collaboration among authorities, engage youth organizations in policy development, and ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of integration initiatives.



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Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the challenges faced by migrant and refugee youth in Europe, highlighting persistent gaps and discrimination in four key areas: Education, healthcare, labour market access, and social inclusion. Despite existing policies, barriers such as language difficulties, inadequate support programs, and bureaucratic obstacles hinder their integration. The brief emphasizes the need for improved recognition of foreign qualifications, expanded language support, and enhanced cultural competency in healthcare. It also calls for streamlined work permit processes and targeted vocational training to facilitate labour market access. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of safeguarding legal rights and fostering positive narratives about migrant communities. Recommendations include strengthening educational support, ensuring equitable healthcare access, promoting labour market integration, enhancing legal protections, and improving coordination among authorities. By addressing these issues, policymakers can create more inclusive environments that empower migrant and refugee youth to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their societies.

Introduction

This policy brief is a specific contribution of the MyCOMM project, an EU funded Erasmus+ project that unites youth organizations and civil society stakeholders in five EU countries (Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, Romania, France), as well as EU umbrella level organizations for youth and migrant advocacy. A direct contribution to the capacity building of youth organizations in the EU, this policy brief aims to highlight common challenges, as observed by the partners, and propose targeted recommendations to foster the successful integration of migrant youth across Europe in diverse contexts

This policy brief specifically draws from the insights and contributions of the project partners, based on their work and experience.
It also integrates feedback from project events with other European youth organizations.

Project' Partners and their field of action with youth:

- The Rural Hub (Ireland): They specialise in creating innovative educational materials and digital resources for marginalised groups such as rural communities, NEETs, older people, migrants and creative sector entrepreneurs. They focus on e-learning tools to address training needs, skills gaps and alternative approaches to education, working with European partners to develop interactive online resources such as video lectures, escape rooms and WebQuest challenges.
- Group for European Integration GIE (Romania): NGO dedicated to supporting Romania's integration into the European Union through educational, cultural and socio-economic activities. Its objectives include promoting democratic values and conducting research on European integration. GIE also promotes cooperation with other organisations and creates media content to disseminate EU values and human rights.



- Association APEDV REGARDDDONS (France): Organisation dedicated to defending the rights and interests of families with disabled children. They provide support, advice and advocacy to parents, assist children in their development and education and promote their integration into society and the workplace. The organisation also supports young adults and works to ensure their social inclusion.
- Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology CARDET (Cyprus): An organisation focused on creating long-term impact through purposeful action in education, digital learning and skills development. They empower individuals and communities by partnering with diverse stakeholders such as public agencies, youth organisations and private companies, with a focus on youth rights and inclusion. It develops youth-led initiatives, skills development programmes and policy advocacy campaigns to amplify youth voices and promote inclusive societies where young people can thrive.
- OBREAL (Spain): International network focusing on improving cooperation in higher education between Latin America, Europe and the Caribbean. They work on projects that promote academic exchange, research collaboration and education policy development. It aims to strengthen partnerships between universities and institutions to address global challenges and improve educational outcomes through strategic partnerships and capacity building initiatives.
- Voices of Young Refugees in Europe (France): It is a refugee-led network created by, with and for refugees to strengthen the voices of individual refugees and refugee-serving organisations in Europe. Through training and advocacy, it promotes the rights and agency of young refugees and supports them in developing their skills to enhance their meaningful participation in society.
- Cyprus Youth Clubs Organization KOKEN (Cyprus): It is the largest NGO in Cyprus dedicated to the development and coordination of youth clubs. Founded in 2008, its mission is to promote volunteerism, participation, education and social interaction among young people. It aims to empower young people through active citizenship, social and environmental awareness and participation in group activities. It works with various stakeholders to design and implement initiatives that support youth development, guided by the principles of democracy, integrity and transparency.
- Jeunes Européens Fédéralistes JEF (Belgium): Political youth NGO working for a democratic European federation guaranteeing peace, the rule of law and human rights. Founded in 1972, it has more than 10,000 members in 37 countries and promotes European citizenship and further EU integration. JEF Europe supports a federal model based on subsidiarity and rejects a centralised superstate. It engages in political advocacy, campaigns, training and dialogue to raise public awareness of European issues and to encourage young people's participation in building a fairer, more sustainable and integrated Europe.



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Context of the Problem

The integration of migrant youth (defined as young people with a background of migration) and refugee youth (defined as young people fleeing armed conflict or persecution) in European countries is a critical challenge that demands urgent attention. Despite efforts by national governments and the European Union to promote inclusive policies, significant gaps and instances of discrimination persist, hindering the full integration of young people with migration backgrounds. These challenges span across crucial areas of life, including education, healthcare, labour market access, and social inclusion.

Addressing these issues is of paramount importance for several reasons:

- **Social cohesion:** Successful integration of migrant and refugee youth is essential for maintaining social harmony and fostering diverse, inclusive societies.
- **Economic potential:** Empowering migrant and refugee youth to access education and employment opportunities allows them to contribute fully to the economic growth of their host countries.
- **Human rights:** Ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, and employment for migrant and refugee youth is a matter of fundamental human rights and social justice.
- **Future prosperity:** As Europe faces demographic challenges, the successful integration of migrant and refugee youth is crucial for the continent's long-term social and economic well-being.
- **Cultural enrichment:** Migrant and refugee youth bring diverse perspectives and experiences that can enrich the cultural fabric of their host societies.

By addressing the policy gaps and discrimination faced by migrant youth, European countries can create more inclusive environments that not only benefit these young people but also contribute to the overall strength and resilience of their societies.

Access to Education

Access to quality education is a fundamental right and a crucial pathway for the integration of migrant and refugee youth. However, the findings reveal persistent policy gaps in this area across the countries examined.

In several EU countries, the education system faces challenges in integrating migrant and refugee students, particularly those from non-EU backgrounds. Barriers include language barriers, lack of targeted support programs, and difficulties in the recognition of foreign qualifications. MyCOMM partners highlight the need for more comprehensive language assistance, tailored integration programs, and streamlined processes for diploma recognition.

Specifically, The Rural Hub emphasizes the importance of inclusive education policies that accommodate the diverse needs of migrant students. While Ireland has made progress in this area, challenges remain in ensuring



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consistent implementation across all schools, providing adequate language support, and addressing instances of bullying and discrimination experienced by migrant youth in educational settings.

The European Integration Group's reflections highlight policy gaps in Romania, noting that although the Education Act guarantees the right to education for all children, including migrants and refugees, significant barriers remain. These include bureaucratic obstacles to the recognition of foreign qualifications, insufficient language support programmes and a lack of teacher training on cultural diversity. The paper calls for strengthening diploma recognition mechanisms, expanding language learning initiatives and improving intercultural teacher training.

The insights of the Association Parents d'Enfants Déficiants Visuels APEDV provide a comprehensive overview of the country's education policies for young migrants and refugees. Although France has a strong regulatory framework, including the right to inclusive education and language support provisions, the implementation of these policies often falls short. Youth migrants and refugees, especially those with disabilities, continue to face difficulties in accessing education due to a lack of resources, specialised staff and effective communication between schools and immigrant families.

To address challenges such as language barriers, teacher training and the need for specific support for refugee students, a working strategy to improve access to education for young refugees and improve the quality of the educational experience in the early stages of education can help integrate refugee children into the education system. The success of the 'InScool'¹ EU project on inclusive schools in several European countries demonstrates the importance of such strategies. In Germany, the impact of the "SchlaU²" initiative is based on a mix of training for refugees, psychosocial support, school certificates and support in the transition to the labour market. Both initiatives demonstrate that success does not come from isolated action but from a combination of holistic interventions focused on the needs of migrants and refugees.

Access to Healthcare

Ensuring equitable access to health services is crucial for the well-being and integration of young migrants and refugees. The findings highlight both progress and persistent challenges in this area.

In France, the regulatory framework guarantees the right to healthcare for all individuals, including irregular migrants, through mechanisms such as the AME (State Medical Assistance) and CMU (Universal Complementary Health Coverage) schemes. However, the implementation of these policies is often complicated, with migrant families, especially those with children with disabilities, facing difficulties in navigating the complex administrative procedures and accessing the assistance to which they are entitled.

In Romania, similar concerns are echoed, noting that while the legal framework provides for the right to healthcare, migrant youth, particularly those with disabilities, continue to encounter barriers in accessing the

¹ Inclusive educational context <https://www.inclusiveschools2.net/>

² Social education: from literay to the world of work: <https://www.schlau-schule.de/>



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services they need. Factors such as a lack of information, complex administrative processes, and inadequate support for families contribute to these gaps.

The Irish approach to health care for young migrants appears to be more comprehensive, highlighting the country's efforts to ensure access to primary care, mental health services and specialised support for vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees. However, it also recognises the need for continued improvement in areas such as cultural competency training for health care providers and outreach to migrant and refugee communities.

In Spain, despite the recent adoption of a law on universal health coverage³ that includes migrants (including undocumented migrants), social inequalities have been identified as a major contributor to health inequalities⁴. It is therefore necessary to address not only health inequalities, but also social determinants such as education, living and working conditions, employment and income. Difficulties have also been identified in accessing public health care and in understanding and using the health care system. This calls for the development of culturally competent health literacy intervention programmes to support strategic health planning.

Access to the Labour Market

Access to the labour market is a crucial step in the integration of young migrants. The interventions reveal different levels of progress and persistent challenges in this area. In several EU countries, young immigrants, especially those of non-EU origin, face difficulties in accessing the labour market. Obstacles include complex administrative procedures, language barriers and, in some cases, discrimination by employers. The experience of youth organisations working with migrants and refugees calls for streamlining work permit procedures, providing specific vocational training programmes and addressing discriminatory recruitment practices.

The Rural Hub emphasizes the importance of promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment among migrants as a means of fostering labour market integration. It also highlights the need for targeted employment support services, such as mentoring programmes and job placement initiatives, to help migrant youth overcome the barriers they face in accessing the labour market.

The European Integration Group highlights the dichotomy between the Romanian legal framework, which provides for equal treatment of EU and non-EU migrants in the labour market, and the practical challenges faced by young non-EU migrants. These include difficulties in obtaining work permits, language barriers and, in some cases, the reluctance of employers to hire migrants due to a lack of knowledge of legal procedures.

The conclusions of the Association Parents d'Enfants Déficiants Visuels A.P.E.D.V. address the employment-related challenges faced by migrant youth, particularly those of African descent. These challenges are often due to a combination of factors, such as lower socio-economic backgrounds, more difficult educational

³ <https://www.sanidad.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa.do?id=6421>

⁴ https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB154/B154_21-sp.pdf



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pathways and, in some cases, discrimination in employment. The paper highlights the important role of associations and community-based organisations in supporting the professional integration of migrant youth.

The experience in Spain of job placement programs with individualized integrated itineraries⁵ has achieved good employability rates by linking the skills and knowledge of migrants and refugees seeking employment with the business community, which needs people with a professional profile to meet its labor needs. These initiatives are complemented by training to adapt skills to the needs of the labor market⁶ and specific initiatives to promote the inclusion of migrants and refugees with disabilities in the labor market⁷. However, a major challenge remains to raise awareness in the business community and to disseminate these programs to interested parties.

Legal Rights and Social Barriers

Migrant and refugee youth also face obstacles in exercising their legal rights and navigating the social landscape in their host countries. Experienced organizations commenting on this issue underline the need to address these challenges.

In Romania, while the country has made efforts to align its legal framework with EU directives on migrants' rights, significant gaps remain in the implementation of these rights. Young migrants, especially those of non-EU origin, often face difficulties in obtaining residence permits, which are necessary for access to education, the labor market and other essential services.

In France, there are wider challenges to the social inclusion of migrant youth, including xenophobia, discrimination and the perception of migrants as a 'political stake' by populist movements. It is important to develop positive and creative communication strategies to change the narrative and promote a more inclusive understanding of migrant communities.

In Ireland, there is a need to address social barriers through community-based initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and the active participation of migrant youth in civic life. It is important to highlight the role of youth organizations and community groups in creating spaces for cultural exchange and breaking down social divides.

In Spain, as in France and other European countries, the rise of xenophobia and sexual orientation discrimination is increasing the social and legal barriers faced by young refugees and immigrants. Campaigns have been launched to break down these barriers, highlighting the importance of role models for children and young people and the need for Spanish society to embrace its diversity. To this end, it 'empowers and gives

⁵ <https://www.accem.es/programa-insercion-laboral-personas-inmigrantes-empleain/>

⁶ <https://www.cepaim.org/areas-actuacion/empleo-y-formacion/servicio-de-empleo-en-sistema-de-acogida-y-proteccion-internacional-2023/>

⁷ <https://www.accem.es/accem-fundacion-once-se-unen-fomentar-la-inclusion-laboral-las-personas-migrantes-refugiadas-discapacidad/>



visibility’ to personalities from culture, sport, science, technology and other professional fields who defend and exemplify the ‘intrinsic diversity’ of society and serve as role models for young people.

Recommendations & Practical Framework for its Implementation

Based on the ideas contained in the views and experiences of the country organisations involved in developing the content of this paper, the following recommendations are proposed to address the policy gaps and discrimination faced by young migrants and refugees, with examples of activities to facilitate the practical implementation of the recommendations:

1. Strengthen Educational Inclusion and Support	
RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONABLE BY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve mechanisms for the recognition of foreign qualifications and diplomas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote projects and initiatives to specifically recognise the qualifications of migrants and refugees who lack key documents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand language support programs, including native language maintenance, to facilitate educational access and success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote existing or introduce intensive language courses for newly arrived migrants and refugees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide targeted training and professional development for teachers on cultural diversity and the specific needs of migrant students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise/replicate cultural competency workshops for teachers and school staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance collaboration between schools, families, and community organizations to support the integration of migrant youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create mentorship programs pairing migrant and refugee students with local peers

2. Ensure Equitable Access to Healthcare:	
RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONABLE BY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify administrative processes and improve communication to make healthcare services more accessible for migrant youth and their families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing multilingual information materials about health services. Establishing mobile health clinics in areas with large migrant and refugee populations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide cultural competency training for healthcare professionals to better serve diverse migrant communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide regular cultural sensitivity training for health care providers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the presence and support of community organizations that assist migrant families in navigating the healthcare system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a network of migrant community health workers.

3. Promote Labor Market Integration:	
RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONABLE BY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline work permit procedures and provide targeted vocational training programs for migrant youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the creation of one-stop shops for work permit applications and job search assistance.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with employers to address discrimination and raise awareness of the benefits of a diverse workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the organisation of job fairs specifically targeted at young migrants and refugees. Develop internship programmes in local enterprises for young migrants and refugees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support migrant entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide entrepreneurship training and start-up support for businesses run by migrants and refugees.

4. Safeguard Legal Rights and Address Social Barriers:	
RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONABLE BY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and enhance legal protections for migrant youth, particularly in rural areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launching public awareness campaigns highlighting the contribution of migrants and refugees to society.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop comprehensive communication strategies to challenge negative perceptions and promote a more inclusive narrative around migrant communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing local forums for intercultural dialogue. Setting up a hotline for reporting incidents of discrimination.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase funding and support for community-based organizations that facilitate intercultural dialogue and foster the active participation of migrant youth in civic life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising cultural exchange events in schools and community centres.

5. Strengthen Coordination and Collaboration:	
RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONABLE BY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance cooperation between national, regional, and local authorities to ensure consistent implementation of migrant integration policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the creation (or strengthening of existing) of inter-ministerial working groups on the integration of young migrants and refugees. Encourage the establishment of regular meetings between national and local authorities on integration policies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the sharing of best practices and the coordination of efforts among EU member states to address common challenges faced by migrant youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and promote the use of an online platform for the exchange of best practices between EU Member States.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the involvement of migrant youth and their representative organizations in the design and implementation of integration policies and programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise annual conferences bringing together policy makers, NGOs and representatives of migrant and refugee youth.

This practical framework for implementing the recommendations set out in the policy brief also provides the following implementation guidance:

1. Conduct a needs assessment in each area to identify specific local challenges
2. Set clear, measurable goals and timelines for each initiative



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3. Allocate adequate funding and resources for program implementation
4. Involve migrant youth in the planning and execution of activities
5. Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented programs
6. Adjust strategies based on feedback and measured outcomes
7. Ensure continuous communication and coordination among all stakeholders

Conclusion

The integration of migrant and refugee youth remain a pressing challenge for many European countries. By addressing the policy gaps and discriminatory practices highlighted in this brief, policymakers can create more inclusive and supportive environments that empower migrant and refugee youth to thrive and contribute to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of their host societies. Sustained efforts in the areas of education, healthcare, labour market access, legal rights, and social inclusion, underpinned by a commitment to European values and principles of citizenship, are crucial for fostering the successful integration of migrant youth.

Youth organisations play a crucial role in advocating for and supporting the integration of migrant and refugee youth in the four key policy areas discussed in this brief. These organisations serve as important bridges between migrant communities and policymakers, providing grassroots insights and facilitating direct engagement with the young people concerned. In the area of education, youth organisations often provide additional language classes and cultural orientation programmes. In the health sector, they conduct outreach initiatives to inform migrant youth about available services and their rights. In terms of access to the labour market, many youth organisations run mentoring programmes and provide vocational training tailored to the needs of migrants. In the area of legal rights and social inclusion, these organisations are at the forefront of combating discrimination, organising intercultural events and empowering migrant youth to participate in civic life. By amplifying the voices of migrant youth and making use of their experiences on the ground, youth organisations contribute significantly to shaping more inclusive and effective integration policies.

Annexes: Existing Policies on Migration



United Nations
Network on Migration
Working Better Together

<https://migrationnetwork.un.org/policy-documents>



<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/migration.html>



https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Migration-Policy_EN.pdf



<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/policy-briefs>



<https://www.enar-eu.org/>

General Policy Paper No. 6 : Migration and Diversity: A Rights-Based Approach to Migration



<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>

Eurydice Reports

Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures:

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/integrating-students-migrant-backgrounds-schools-europe-national-policies-and-measures>



[https://school-](https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/resources/etuce-report-integration-migrants-and-refugees?prefLang=es)

[education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/resources/etuce-report-integration-migrants-and-refugees?prefLang=es](https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/resources/etuce-report-integration-migrants-and-refugees?prefLang=es)

Report: Promoting the effective integration of migrants and refugees in education



Migrant and Refugee
Youth Communication
and advocacy for equity
and inclusion



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