

EESC hosts the launch of a Commission toolkit advising Member States on EU funding for migrant integration

On 24 January, the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** and the **European Commission** jointly organised the launch of the Commission's new toolkit to help Member States to strengthen the integration of people with a migrant background by making more efficient and coordinated use of available EU funding instruments.

The Commission's [toolkit](#), or handbook, contains guidelines and practical recommendations for national and regional funding authorities, which should implement integration strategies and projects by tapping into various EU funds accessible under the current 2014-2020 budget period and combining them in a way that avoids overlaps and double financing and ensures synergies between multiple instruments.

In his opening remarks at the launch event, the **EESC President, Georges Dassis**, said: "A true democracy must allow civil society to express itself. The resources of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and of the European Social Fund (ESF) should be increased, especially in Member States where the number of refugees has exceeded the planned quota. This should be done to ensure better joint funding of integration measures intended for refugees."

The improved and enhanced use of funds should in turn foster the inclusion of over 20 million third-country nationals who legally reside in the European Union and account for 4.1% of the entire EU population, but who continue to face a plethora of challenges and discrimination when looking for a job or housing, or when trying to access education and basic services, such as healthcare or legal advice.

As many as 40% of third-country nationals are at risk of poverty, while 18% are unemployed and 19% leave school early, which is almost double the EU average, it was revealed at the launch event.

"The EU has to show humanism and solidarity. Citizens must be aware that the EU is working for their prosperity and liberty. Migrants aren't to be seen as a burden. If they are properly integrated, they will be a great boon, not only to our economies but to our society as a whole," said **Mr Dassis**.

The **Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Crețu**, said that Europe, which is facing unprecedented demographic challenges because of its rapidly ageing population, should recognise the potential of migrants and view their successful integration as an opportunity for its future.

"Migration is part of our history. Europe is built on migration and European societies will need migrants to address demographic decline and labour market

shortages,” warned **Ms Crețu**.

“Integration can only happen if it takes place on the ground, and local needs must be recognised. This is why the role of civil society is so important in this area,” she maintained.

In a video message shown at the launch, **Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility**, said the current situation must change urgently: “Optimal use of funds plays an important role in supporting the integration of people with a migrant background.”

The Commission’s toolkit suggests action in five priority areas – or scenarios – for the sake of efficient long-term integration strategies tailored to meet the individual needs of beneficiaries, in line with national strategic policy frameworks. These areas are reception, education, employment, housing and access to public services.

Each scenario describes typical challenges facing migrants, identifies the objective of EU funds, and proposes specific measures that may be taken, matching them with one or more suitable EU funds.

There is currently a wide range of EU funds which Member States and regions may use to finance projects relating to the integration of migrants; so far, however, this has only been done to a limited extent and with inadequate coordination.

These funds, among others, include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EASI), etc.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON EESC ACTIVITIES

The Committee, which has a Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration, has issued opinions and reports on the issue of migration.

In early 2016, the EESC was the first institution that launched fact-finding missions in 11 countries dealing with the refugee crisis.

On 6 and 7 March 2018 it will hold its fourth annual European [Migration Forum](#), jointly organized with the European Commission, which gathers over 200 non-governmental organisations and other groups working with migrants. The topic of this year’s forum is the inclusion of migrants into EU’s labour markets.