

## *Key findings*

### **Facts and figures**

OECD countries have seen record inflows of asylum seekers and refugees in recent years. From mid-2013 to mid-2017, the refugee population in OECD countries has tripled, from 2 million to 5.9 million. European countries received 4 million asylum applications between January 2014 and December 2017, three times as many as during the previous four-year period.

In relative terms, for European countries as a whole the impact of the recent refugee inflow is estimated to be small. By December 2020, refugees will have increased the working-age population by no more than 1/3 of one percent, according to projections.

Refugees have much poorer labour market outcomes than other migrants or the native-born. In the past, they've taken as much as two decades to catch up with the native-born in terms of employment. The average employment rate of refugees in the first five years after arrival, in Europe, is only one in four.

More than half of refugees arrive with low education levels. Skills tests also show a large share with low skill levels. In addition to refugees, other migrants are more likely than natives, in most countries, to have low skill levels, which make them vulnerable to being excluded. Moreover, those with tertiary education face considerable hurdles in having their skills rewarded in the labour market of the host country.

The cost of integrating refugees varies significantly across OECD countries, estimated between 0.1 and 1% of GDP, but should be seen as an investment in their success and in their future contribution to the economy of the host country. One element of these costs are the in-donor refugee costs counted by OECD DAC countries as overseas development aid (ODA), which increased sharply from 4.2 billion in 2013 to 16 billion in 2016.

### **Policies to improve co-ordination of initial and long-term response**

Most OECD countries were caught off guard by recent increases in demand for protection by displaced populations. The early warning systems in place were inadequate or poorly integrated into the policy making process, leaving signals unread. Better preparation of OECD countries for future crises requires improvement in early warning systems, but also their interaction with relevant authorities, in particular at the local level. Even in the absence of explicit warnings, scenario building can help guide policy choices when crises emerge.

At the international level, the crisis saw a remarkable effort to achieve co-ordination. However, co-ordination on managing movements and sharing information is still uneven between destination, transit countries and countries of first-asylum. The crisis also revealed the risk that failures in integration in one country could have spillover effects in other countries. Co-ordination on integration has taken on a new importance.

Migrants tend to be concentrated in urban areas and integration performance differs according to place of residence. Recent experience has shown the importance of involving local, sub-national and national governments. Within countries, multi-level governance is important to ensure that actors are in contact and collaborate with each other. The continuity and sustainability of integration measures has been less a product of funding than of collaboration with many actors and the assurance of public support.

The statistical infrastructure for monitoring flows and integration outcomes is still inadequate in many countries to capture essential information on the characteristics of migrants and their outcomes over time. Policy evaluation and development of responses requires more information than currently available. Steps should be taken to fill gaps.

## Employment

Delaying labour market access has in some countries prevented refugees from starting their integration process. Accelerated recognition of refugee status and labour market access, especially for asylum seekers who are likely to be granted protection, has helped speed up their integration. Legal, transparent, simple and rapid pathways to access the labour market should be in place for recognised refugees. This includes access to mainstream employment support services, and procedures to assess and recognise skills acquired abroad, as well as personalised counselling services. Skills assessment should produce profiles which can be used to inform both migrants and their potential employers.

Lack of language proficiency is a major barrier, and language support – especially occupation-specific support – should be one of the first integration measures. Language courses should be adapted to the profile of beneficiaries and employment prospects.

Employers have a key role to play in facilitating the integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants, but have been largely left out of policy response in many countries. Governments can increase employer interest in hiring refugees by providing legal certainty, and support after hiring.

Newcomers unfamiliar with the labour market – including refugees and other vulnerable migrants - face the risk of exploitation. Countries should enforce equal treatment with nationals and other migrants in terms of working conditions, wages, and access to redress for violations.

Entrepreneurship is one way for migrants to integrate in the labour market, but is especially challenging for refugees due to language barriers, lack of prior experience, and difficulty in accessing credit. Coaching and community-based finance can help entrepreneurship be a solution for some refugees.

## Education

School integration for refugee children is more complex than for other migrant children. Refugee children often need more time to adjust to the new education system, and may have additional vulnerabilities related to trauma experienced in their home country and during their journey, and from extended periods without schooling.

Vocational education needs to be adapted for refugees and other vulnerable migrants. Information and orientation are essential to help choose the right pathway, while bridging

education, including language education, may be necessary to prepare for mainstream programmes. Pathways to higher education should also be considered.

## Health

Health systems need to cope with and adapt to an increase in the number of refugee patients with multiple and complex physical and mental health needs. In addition to experience with violence in their home country, many refugees experienced trauma during flight and even reception, complicating their health situation.

Better coordination between healthcare providers is needed to improve the efficiency in service delivery. Triage should be improved to ensure that those with specific health needs are directed to places where appropriate care is provided.

## Housing

Finding adequate reception facilities and longer-term housing solutions for refugees has been difficult in a context of shrinking access to low-cost housing and constraints on supply, in particular in urban areas.

Dispersal, one of the main policy responses to inflows of large numbers of refugees, is meant to limit segregation and congestion of services in areas where demand is concentrated. However, dispersal may also prevent the creation of a critical mass of users for support services and keep refugees far from areas rich in job opportunities. Coordination with local governments is necessary to improve buy-in – including by rural areas and those with declining populations – and identify the profiles best suited for integration in each context. Poorly matched placements, and unprepared, underfunded or unengaged local partners, can lead to excessive secondary movements and undo the benefits of dispersal policy.

## Specific factors of vulnerability

Among refugee and vulnerable migrants, a number of factors contribute to additional vulnerability and require specific responses. Unaccompanied minors in particular face additional risk of mental health problems, exploitation by criminal networks and difficulty in integrating in school. Policies to address their needs are resource-intensive, requiring trained support. Rapid provision of a guardian and school enrolment are important, as is guidance in managing the transition to adulthood and the end of special support.

Another target group where employment outcomes have been poor and slow to improve is refugee women, who are at higher risk of trauma during flight. There is a high return of language proficiency and education for refugee women on the labour market and on the education and employment prospects of their children, especially their daughters. Yet enrolment of women with children into standard language courses has been difficult, due to cumulating factors, including conflict with childcare commitments. More flexible arrangements can increase participation in training.

Low-skill and low-educated migrants fare poorly, and low-educated refugees even worse. Very low language skills can potentially be addressed through workplace training, especially as low-educated migrants have employment levels which are at least as high as those of low-educated natives.

Resettled refugees are selected from among the most vulnerable of all refugees in countries of first asylum. Resettlement, however, opens the possibility for pre-arrival preparation and training and intensive post-arrival case management and support. This is important because resettled refugees often have serious health problems, low education, and other vulnerability factors, and are more likely than other refugees to comprise families and women.

Private sponsorship is one way through which refugees can benefit from personalised integration services, beyond what governments can provide on an individual basis.

## Solutions in countries of first asylum and origin countries

Integrating forcibly displaced people into host communities in developing countries is fraught with challenges, some of which could be overcome with greater coherence between humanitarian, development and peace actors. Achieving coherence requires several key elements: a common risk-informed content analysis to define a collective outcome; the mobilisation of aid instruments according to their comparative advantage to meet the objective; and political leadership to overcome institutional barriers and strategically review partnerships. Regional plans can also improve coherence.

In terms of reducing pressure in developing host countries, resettlement is an important contribution. For less vulnerable refugees –generally excluded from resettlement channels – complementary pathways for study or work can provide an attractive alternative to remaining in the developing host country.

Return to origin countries, always challenging, is becoming more important. The recent increase in people seeking protection meant an increase in the number of rejected asylum seekers, requiring return. Their sustainable return and reintegration is facilitated by work at the community level in countries of origin. Voluntary return, of migrants who wish to go back when the situation in their home country improves, also implies co-operation with the country of origin. Policies should engage migrants in the process, plan return at the community level and provide post-return support. Efforts to ensure transfer of skills and the ability to use acquired skills can bring benefits to the origin country as well as the person returning.

## Improving preparedness

Countries should develop a crisis response plan in advance, identifying partners, channels of communication and responsibilities in the face of large inflows of people seeking protection.

Early warning systems can contribute to prepare public authorities for imminent likely spikes in demand for protection or other inflows of vulnerable migrants. Such systems were in place in many countries but were insufficiently connected with response mechanisms. New data sources offer unprecedented opportunities for monitoring risk, and should be explored. Such systems require a high degree of collaboration and take time to develop.

Following major shocks and crises, a “post-mortem” exercise should be conducted by authorities to improve data and channels of communication, and ensure that signals are transmitted and acted upon.

Since no country can address the challenges alone, international co-operation should start with developing a response plan and extend to implementation. Channels need to be in place for concertation and distributing responsibility and roles, as well as sharing effective practices. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration offers a framework for strengthening co-operation.

Regarding preparedness in developing host countries, donors and partners should work together for crisis prevention.

Authorities have struggled in recent years to communicate basic facts about refugees and about policy response. The response plan should include a framework for working with the media and providing the public with clear information about the strategy and initiatives planned and undertaken and about the results achieved. This can reduce the risk that shocks, even when successfully managed, lead to political crises.



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