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## **Recent developments in migrant integration policy**

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This chapter provides an overview of the changes in the integration policies in OECD countries during the period 2020-21. Digitalisation of integration systems has been a notable change as countries have worked to respond to substantial restrictions on gatherings imposed due to COVID-19. The chapter also examines how countries have recognised and responded to the need to improve diversity measures, specifically concerning the migrant community.

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# In Brief

## Key findings

- Integration measures were, in most respects, significantly impacted by COVID-19 throughout 2020. In many countries, obligations for integration were relaxed or timelines extended. In some countries, notably the Netherlands, obligatory examinations were paused during the crisis.
- Most countries increased their use of digital tools to conduct outreach to migrant populations about COVID-19-related measures. Some countries have also implemented platforms and applications to inform and prepare migrants for integration measures.
- COVID-19 increased the pace of an ongoing trend of using digital tools for host-country language learning and other trainings.
- In recognition of the fact that not all migrants have the same level of access to or literacy in digital tools, several countries offered exceptions to online integration and language courses during COVID-19. Some, including Australia and Finland, have taken action to help migrants build digital literacy to transition to distance learning as needed.
- Supports for vulnerable migrants, including workers and international students, were in place in most OECD countries. Particular focus was placed on encouraging migrants to access health care systems. In some cases, these supports extended into 2021.
- Many OECD countries (and the European Union) have implemented action plans to combat discrimination in light of heightened public awareness of the issue and the specific impact of discrimination on those perceived to have a migrant background. On the local level, online anti-discrimination campaigns have been a popular tool.
- Given the pandemic, broad integration overhauls have been rare, though Australia, Luxembourg, and Norway made significant changes to their integration measures. Luxembourg and Norway reorganised their co-ordination mechanisms. Australia and Norway both extended their target language levels while shifting away from hours-based models for language courses.
- Some countries moved to streamline naturalisation processes while others added requirements.
- Integration of immigrant women remains high on the policy agenda. Germany, Sweden, and Austria have taken specific actions toward gender mainstreaming in project design.
- The trend of decentralisation of integration measures has continued, although COVID-19 highlighted the limitations of that approach and the importance of a clear co-ordination mechanism.

## Introduction

Throughout 2020 and into 2021, two major trends, born from largely external factors, have left a profound imprint on integration policy in OECD countries. The first is a shift toward digitalisation of integration programmes and services, which, while underway prior to 2020, accelerated significantly in response to periodic confinement or lockdown periods tied to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The second, which responds to societal reactions to acts of racial or ethnic violence, is a focus on policy measures regarding antidiscrimination, antiracism, and diversity. Other important policy changes to integration policies in OECD countries are considered in the last section of this chapter.

## Digitalisation may be the most durable change wrought by COVID-19

While the world is in the midst of a digital transformation, countries have been slow to replace in-person and in-country services with online systems in their contacts with migrants. Digitalisation of integration service provision has been ongoing, but COVID-19-related restrictions on gatherings have accelerated the pace. The disruption of services in 2020 required many countries to adapt their integration offerings – across OECD countries, digital tools have been used for information sharing, for language learning, and even for naturalisation ceremonies. This section will consider the increasing use of digital tools for dissemination of information, language courses, and skills development in addition to examining emerging challenges associated with the increasing use of technology in integration policies.

### ***OECD countries increased their use of digital tools to disseminate information***

Many OECD countries used online tools to communicate with migrants in 2020, both about public health measures tied to COVID-19 and about integration resources. The majority of OECD countries provided translated content related to COVID-19 on their official websites. Several countries, including Denmark, Germany, and New Zealand, provided information in more than 20 languages. The German Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration also developed the online platform “Handbook Germany” to present information and videos on a Facebook page, enabling the government to respond to questions and correct misinformation. Finland followed a similar approach with the platform, infoFinland.fi, providing translations of official information on COVID-19 in 12 different languages on its social media channels. The Finnish Government also launched a nation-wide campaign to tackle misconceptions about COVID-19 using social media influencers. France made information on COVID-19 available to migrants in nine languages on the Ministry of Interior’s website. In Portugal, the High Commission for Migration (ACM) created a dedicated page on its website providing information to migrants in Portuguese and English. Additionally, it provided translations of official documents from different public and non-governmental entities in nine different languages, giving migrants access to information on legislative measures, public services, social support measures, lockdown measures, and sanitary rules. The Romanian Government used a variety of targeted social media campaigns, and the Romanian Digitisation Authority developed several new IT systems to provide information and allow for upload of registration documents.

Given the clear benefits of online platforms for widespread information sharing, digital tools will likely outlast the COVID-19 pandemic in their use as communication channels for migrants. In addition to information on the coronavirus, the Swedish information website, Information Sverige, publishes information and preparation materials for the civic integration course. Norway’s Directorate of Integration and Diversity’s website served as an information hub for COVID-19 in different languages, but it is also a repository for collected information on language training, the introduction programme, and other practical information from Norwegian public offices. In the United States, the Office of Refugee Resettlement provided funding for the International Rescue Committee to develop an online portal of services called Switchboard. OECD countries are also pursuing application-based platforms for communication, reflecting awareness of the most common devices used by migrants. Austria and Germany both have smartphone apps (“Meine Integration Österreich” and “Ankommen”, respectively) used to communicate information about available integration services.

### ***Countries have increasingly used digital tools for education and language learning***

In the context of education and language learning, digital tools represent an opportunity for governments, and their use has been increasing, even prior to the pandemic. The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools has potential to expand both the reach and the cost-effectiveness of language learning for newcomers. Digital platforms offer flexibility to migrants with competing schedules, and digital tools may increase capacity for differentiation in the classroom. Video- and audio-based

resources can help improve the skills of illiterate or early learners. Digitalisation also offers opportunities for governments with decentralised systems for integration service provision, as digital offerings may reduce inequality and provide greater access. ICT tools are also used as a supplement for in-person classes.

Norway has invested in bilingual and online resources for schools and newly arrived children, with materials available in Norwegian and six other languages. They are designed to aid in learning not only Norwegian language, but also math, science, and English. In some countries, such as Australia and Finland, digital classrooms allow countries to reach migrants living in diffuse or remote geographies. In 2020, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology began developing and providing Japanese language learning materials using ICT for foreign nationals living in areas where it is difficult to set up language classes. Canada's LearnIT2teach project has supported blended learning since 2010 through hosting of courseware and training teachers on adapting the tools for their learners. In 2020, IRCC launched an enhanced site for language training providers, Avenue.ca, an internet-based system for the planning, delivery, and management of settlement language training. The new platform allows attendance tracking, a virtual space to store resources, and electronic learner portfolios.

The recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the need for reliable distance learning in situations where in-person learning is impossible. Countries that had not developed distance courses found themselves faced with the need to identify partners and ramp up such programmes rapidly. The alternative was to halt language-learning opportunities and postpone proficiency examinations, a policy that could have negative impacts on migrants' learning trajectory. In response, several OECD countries have taken steps to extend and improve upon their use of digital tools in language learning, including by enacting policies to make digital offerings more accessible.

With in-person meetings impossible, Germany brought its Network IQ support services online, offering email, phone, and video calls for job counselling and training. Qualification and introduction courses were also offered online. Skills Norway has been developing open educational resources for enhanced digital skills since 2017, when it launched the Digidel programme. In 2020, Norway offered funding in some localities to expand the programme for digital training to compensate for temporary unemployment.

To ensure continuity of integration offerings in 2020, France provided 15-24 hours of distance learning per week to those migrants who had already begun French courses under their integration contract. Distance training was targeted to 100-hour courses (for migrants closest to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1 level during initial placement) with groups of 6-10 participants, and 200-hour courses with groups of 3-5 participants. Based on lessons learned, France plans to integrate e-learning modalities into their general course offerings in the future.

Germany, which offered online language options through its Volkshochschul-Verband (Adult Education Association centres) prior to the pandemic, invested EUR 20 million and approved nearly 9 300 online classes to avoid disruption of courses due to suspension of government services during spring 2020 and winter 2020-21. Approximately 66 000 migrants (plus about 8 600 course repeaters) transitioned to the online classes, which were offered free of charge during this period. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees determined that online courses taken during the confinement period would be a "bonus" that would not count against the migrant's language learning entitlement. At the same time, Germany also increased efforts to support regular courses in their online transition, providing additional funding since 1 July 2020 to education centres to purchase devices needed for online teaching.

During coronavirus-related lockdown, Austria's Österreichischer Integrationsfonds (OIF) provided free online language courses for CEFR levels A1-B1, and 75 000 eligible migrants participated. Additionally, in December 2020 – during lockdown of the hospitality industry – the OIF and the Viennese Economic Chamber provided tailored online language courses for employees of the hospitality and catering industry.

Korea and Switzerland were among OECD countries that moved their language and integration programmes onto digital platforms due to COVID-19. Estonia launched the Volunteer Language Friends project, advertised through social media, which linked volunteer mentors to language learners through e-channels. Estonian Language House teachers from the Integration Foundation provided short trainings to volunteers. Such online programmes provided a way for migrants to continue their learning with minimal disruption while also maintaining important social contacts in their host country.

### ***Countries must recognise the challenges and limitations associated with increased digitalisation***

In spite of the high potential of digitisation, countries must also face the potential risks and design their digitalisation policy accordingly. Steps to improve digital offerings in integration may have significant benefits in terms of flexibility and cost, but if not carefully considered, digitalisation increases the risk of leaving behind a significant portion of the migrant population. Transition towards such tools was relatively smooth for higher-educated migrants with at least basic levels of language proficiency. However, many countries experienced challenges reaching low-educated migrants, especially those with low levels of host-country language proficiency. In the context of pandemic information dissemination, some countries addressed this through neighbourhood-based information initiatives, for example, in some parts of Germany and in Scandinavian OECD countries. Recognising that digitalisation of integration measures may present a particular challenge for entry-level language learners, Switzerland made an exception to the “COVID-19 Special Situation Ordinance” that prohibited face-to-face courses. Those learners unable to participate in online education due to very low language level or lack of digital literacy or connectivity could attend in-person courses up to CEFR level A2. Group sizes were limited to 15 people.

Countries pursuing the use of ICT for integration measures should consider the simplicity of the tools. Instructions should assume low prior technical knowledge, and the interface should avoid distracting material. For migrants who are building digital skills, Australia initially provides books and CDs, encouraging a transition to online tools as students progress. Finland allows distance learners to return homework and other materials by mail. Helping migrants gain digital literacy within the context of integration programmes may have a dual advantage, as this can play the role of upskilling to reflect the digital transformation of the workplace. Quebec (Canada) now considers migrants with low digital literacy as a group of migrants in need of additional support (alongside those in need of alphabetisation) in its governmental programme of French language education.

Related to the challenge of digital literacy is the challenge of digital access. While schools are better equipped with digital tools today than ever before, access to digital learning opportunities remains unequal outside the classroom. In most OECD countries with significant shares of children of immigrants, students with immigrant parents are less likely than students with native-born parents at the age of 15 to have access to a computer and an internet connection at home (OECD, 2020<sub>[1]</sub>). To mitigate the adverse impact on such children, many OECD countries distributed computers to students in need during COVID-19 school closures. In Belgium, adult migrants who did not have access to the necessary equipment to follow online integration courses received devices from the responsible agencies. Switzerland adapted its rules to allow cantons to use federal funding to acquire computer equipment to lend to learners studying remotely. Canada developed a Citizenship Modernization Plan aimed to improve service delivery and leverage digital processes wherever possible. To avoid going forward on an *ad hoc* basis, countries that have not been active in increasing digital uptake will need to consider how to develop a coordinated approach to digitalisation that meets the needs of both their governments and their migrant populations.

Programme and software design are also key considerations. The effectiveness of digital tools lies in their ease of use, so it is important to develop programmes that are relatively simple in interface. Countries must also consider hesitancy of migrants to use digital tools and include measures to educate migrants of their benefits. Data security is an additional issue that will become increasingly salient as digitalisation of

integration services increases. Additionally, countries must determine whether fully digitalising integration services would meet their integration goals, considering, for example, the potential loss of social aspect of integration measures when programmes transition to an online setting. Countries should consider each of these elements carefully when formalising their digital policy.

### **While digitalisation was important, most policy responses to COVID-19 were not driven by technology**

In addition to information and training, digital solutions were also used for other aspects of integration programmes in response to COVID-19 pandemic. Australia, Canada, and Norway, for example, conducted naturalisation ceremonies online throughout 2020, and Lithuania introduced a service wizard for submission of e-applications for 32 citizenship-related application forms. Canada also provided settlement and integration services online or by telephone whenever possible.

However, shutdowns due to the pandemic also led to the temporary reworking or pause of integration measures in many OECD countries and to the provision of specific supports for those impacted by the pandemic. Most adjustments during the pandemic consisted of relaxing some rules and obligations for recently arrived immigrants. Several countries, such as Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway, for example, postponed obligatory examinations or extended timelines for eligibility for integration programmes while such programmes were paused.

Many OECD countries also implemented measures to provide support for vulnerable migrants and extended COVID-19-related mainstream financial supports to foreign nationals throughout 2020. In New Zealand, foreigners had access to the same wage subsidy schemes available to New Zealanders. Additionally, Immigration New Zealand provided loans to people who required financial assistance to repatriate from New Zealand.

Canada made income support available to individuals residing in Canada who were not entitled to Employment Insurance. The government did not consider the benefit to be social assistance when assessing eligibility to sponsor family members (from which social assistance recipients are generally barred). New benefits schemes, including a benefit for caregivers and for individuals with children, were available from 27 September 2020 to 25 September 2021. The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) gave income support to employed and self-employed individuals who were unable to work due to COVID-19 or who had an underlying health condition putting them at greater risk of getting COVID-19. Between 27 September 2020 and 25 September 2021, migrants could apply for up to two weeks of support (CAD 500 before tax per week). In Belgium, third-country nationals authorised to stay on force majeure grounds were not entitled to unemployment benefits but provisions were made to allow receipt of social aid.

In the Netherlands, where some residence permits do not allow recourse to public funds, exceptions were made to allow for access during the COVID-19 crisis. Latvia temporarily suspended rules regarding minimum income requirements or maintenance of economic activity in 2020 when examining registration of permit applications or withdrawal cases. However, this derogation did not apply to first-time permit applications submitted after 10 June 2020. In Slovenia, the minister for the Interior instructed administrative units to apply flexibility in relation to the usual rules for assessing sufficient means of subsistence for granting a residence permit. The period of time during which the third-country national was waiting for employment or ordered to quarantine was not considered.

Special considerations were also made regarding access to health care. In Austria, tolerated migrants, who are not eligible for health insurance, were covered for COVID-19 care. In Estonia, regulations were amended on 26 June 2020 so that COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment could be provided free of charge to uninsured persons. In Lithuania, a decision was made not to terminate the validity of the compulsory health

insurance during the quarantine period for those individuals unable to continue to pay. Israel allowed Palestinian day labourers who remained in Israel overnight to access the employer-based health insurance programme beginning in May 2020.

Some OECD countries created arrangements around working conditions for migrants during 2020. Germany mandated arrangements that facilitated separation between teams of workers, including for their living areas. Employers were obligated to inform local health authorities about new arrivals and keep contact details for tracing in case of infection. In August 2020, Spain introduced extensive guidelines on the prevention and control of COVID-19 on farms that employ seasonal workers, requiring each employer to conduct a risk assessment and to adapt the workplace and accommodations to meet the guideline provisions. In Poland, seasonal workers were subject to a mandatory 10-day home quarantine.

Several OECD countries enacted additional measures to support international students whose financial situation was impacted by COVID-19. France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal introduced some state-funded support and scholarships. In Germany, international students received access to interest-free study loans and were eligible for a special aid grant. Preliminary data suggest that they accounted for about a third of the recipients of the grant scheme. International students who had been working in Australia longer than 12 months were able to access their Australian superannuation fund. Canada doubled its need-based Student Grant (up to CAD 6 000) for full-time students, including international students, for 2020 and 2021. In Hungary and Portugal, international students were entitled to accommodation. Latvia and the Czech Republic both provided accommodation support.

### **Addressing discrimination has become a high priority for integration**

Negative sentiment toward minority populations, including certain groups of migrants, is not a new phenomenon. However, as societies have become more diverse, many countries have implemented diversity measures to reduce or remove obstacles for perceived disadvantaged groups, particularly along racial or ethnic lines. Attitudes to diversity throughout the OECD have largely improved over the past decade, but the same cannot be said of attitudes toward migrants, where negative attitudes have remained high in a number of countries and increased elsewhere (OECD, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>).

The year 2020 marked a shift in polarisation around the question of belonging and the need for more policy action to address the issue of discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing economic and social inequalities in OECD countries. High-profile events occurring in early 2020, which quickly emerged as symbols of enduring discrimination, touched off both global protests and debate, which have in turn led policy makers to enact a variety of new laws or enhance existing measures. An attack in Hanau, Germany on 19 February 2020 that left nine people with a migrant background dead was acknowledged by the state as a racist attack. In the United States, the murder of George Floyd, an African-American man, on 25 March 2020 led to an expansion of the *Black Lives Matter* movement that came into existence in 2013. Mr. Floyd's death sparked global protest demanding more be done to combat racial discrimination and violence, even in countries without large black populations. In the United Kingdom and Belgium, authorities removed statues of individuals with controversial colonial legacies in response to local protests.

Increasing or ignored violence toward migrants and their descendants is a concern, but many antidiscrimination measures have a broader focus, seeking also to address persistent economic discrimination. For example, in most, but not all, OECD countries, migrants have lower employment rates than the native-born population and wage gaps are common. At the same time, clearly not all observed persistent disadvantages faced by migrants and their children are due to discrimination. While skills differences account for only a part of observed disadvantage, other structural obstacles include lack of networks and knowledge of the functioning of the labour market. Many countries have thus concluded that broader equal employment or “diversity” policies (with diversity encompassing a range of disadvantaged

minority groups) can provide more equal opportunities. Understanding this policy space is complicated by the need to define who is a minority, particularly where countries create policies that are broadly tailored to cover multiple groups. In some countries, inclusion of long-standing ethnic minorities may be perceived as in competition or tension with the interests of more recent migrants. Defining migrant status as distinct from ethnic minority status raises complicated questions around the degree of implied belonging or “otherness.”

The minority population that receives primary focus under antidiscrimination measures differs across OECD countries. In most English-speaking OECD countries, the focus is on race or skin colour, although migration background is also relevant, especially for specific groups like Asians or Hispanics, where the majority are immigrants and their native-born children. Statistics Canada reported an increase in racial or ethnic harassment of Canadians with Asian background in 2020 that has been interpreted as rising from the emergence of the coronavirus in China. In the United States, 2021 protests highlighted anti-Asian-American violence. In Central and Eastern European countries, the Roma people are considered the most visible minority. There is also intersectionality with religion, especially in European OECD countries with large immigrant groups from predominately Muslim countries.

### ***Heightened awareness of the issue of discrimination is the impetus for policy change***

Many OECD countries have monitored attitudes of the native population toward migrants, but an increased focus on migrants’ perception of discrimination has also added weight to the momentum for policy change. Survey research among immigrants, their children, and ethnic minorities in the EU show that nearly one in four respondents felt discriminated against in the 12 months prior to the survey due to their ethnic or immigrant background (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017[3]). Across the OECD countries with available data, nearly one in five immigrants and native-born children of immigrants report to have been subjected to discrimination (OECD/European Union, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). At the same time, while all OECD countries have legislation to protect from discrimination (OECD, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>), only one-quarter of immigrants are aware there is a legal framework to protect them from discrimination (Eurobarometer, 2015<sup>[5]</sup>).

Native-born children of immigrants are more likely to be aware of and unwilling to accept discrimination. This advocacy and willingness to call out injustice, which may be seen as a sign of successful integration into the host country, has heightened awareness amongst policy makers of the issue of discrimination against migrants.

### ***OECD countries have enhanced their actions to address discrimination, often through dedicated action plans***

Throughout 2020 and into 2021, many OECD countries, as well as the European Union, have taken a variety of actions to address discrimination and develop plans to reduce unequal treatment.

Australia has launched several budget initiatives to enhance the existing Multicultural Access and Equity Policy. Funds include AUD 17.7 million to enhance engagement with multicultural communities and AUD 7.9 million to establish a research programme to inform inclusion initiatives. Additional allocations include AUD 3 million over four years from 2020-21 to the Islamic Museum of Australia to develop educational resources and online learning platforms to support social cohesion. Further, AUD 37.3 million is allocated over four years to promote Australian values, identity, and social cohesion and to counter online misinformation.

Austria continues to monitor indicators on public opinion toward migrants through its National Action Plan for Integration. In 2020, perception of integration by Austrians was almost evenly divided between positive evaluations (54.7% felt integration worked very well or well) and negative opinions (45.3% not so good or not at all). In December 2020, the Constitutional Court lifted a legislative reform that forbade girls in primary



school to wear a headscarf in school. The government programme for 2020-24 explicitly states that freedom from discrimination is an important concern for Austria; however, unequal treatment based on nationality is not prohibited where not used as a pretext for ethnic or racial discrimination.

Belgian authorities renewed their focus on anti-racism after a xenophobic arson at a planned asylum centre in Bilzen in November 2019. In February 2020, the Inter-Ministerial Conference Against Racism was established, providing federal and federated entities a forum for co-ordinating racial discrimination, antisemitism, faith-based discrimination, and intersectional discrimination measures. Following this Conference, in September 2020, the federal government committed to co-ordinate the inter-federal development of a national action plan against racism and related intolerance and discrimination. One of the goals of this action plan will be improvement of data collection to better inform decisions on hate speech and hate crimes policy. Belgium also created a special parliamentary commission in July 2020 to examine Belgium's colonial past and its consequences in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda. The police also launched pilot projects to develop a policy to prevent ethnic profiling. In September 2020, Belgium's Federal Human Rights Institute held its inaugural meeting.

In late 2020, Canada's Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat launched the 50-30 challenge, a joint initiative with civil society and the private sector that aims to attain 30% representation of under-represented groups on boards and senior management positions in Canada. Additionally, the two-year budget announced by the government in April 2021 allocates an additional CAD 11 million to expand the activities of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, a non-profit Crown corporation tasked with combating racial discrimination.

The French Government launched several initiatives in early 2021, including an online antidiscrimination platform and a two-month citizen consultation to encourage dialogue and proposals for concrete solutions to combat discrimination. Additionally, in March 2021, a report listing the findings of a parliamentary mission on the emergence and evolution of racism (created in December 2019) was published, listing 57 concrete proposals to address racism and antisemitism in France.

In 2020, the German Federal Government established the "Committee to combat right-wing extremism and racism" to counter anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism, anti-black racism, hostility towards Muslims, and other forms of group-related enmity. Germany expanded its support for those affected by racial discrimination and invested in effective victim protection as well as in improvement of sustainable structures for combating racism. Germany further announced an intention to invest EUR 1 billion from 2021-24 (with the option to add a further EUR 150 million in 2022). With the "Our Work: Our Diversity" initiative, launched in spring 2021, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will fund 30 projects to develop and test innovative forms of combatting racism and right-wing extremism in the world of work. Several German states also increased their anti-discrimination budgets.

Ireland's Minister for Justice and Equality, together with the Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, established an Anti-Racism Committee in June 2020 to draw up a New Action Plan Against Racism. Public consultation on the plan opened on 21 April 2021.

Latvia's Diversity Promotion project (2016-22) allocated EUR 6.8 million to the "Openness is a Value" campaign to sponsor educational activities on social inclusion and discrimination prevention, with 2019 dedicated to people of different ethnic origin. In 2020, the Society Integration Foundation invited employers to conduct a self-assessment to receive recommendations and a package of support measures.

In Norway, a new Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination on the Grounds of Ethnicity and Religion for 2020-23 entered into force in January 2020. In response to an August 2019 terrorist attack against an Islamic centre, Norway launched an Action Plan against Discrimination of and Hate Against Muslims in September 2020. The plan contains 18 measures focusing on research and education, dialogue across religious communities, and police initiatives such as registration of hate crimes towards Muslims as a separate category in the crime statistics.

The EU announced its Action Plan Against Racism 2020-25 on 18 September 2020 calling for fair policing and protection, disaggregation of equality data by race, better enforcement of the Decision on combatting racism and xenophobia, and closer co-ordination. In this context, the European Commission organised a Summit Against Racism on 19 March 2021 to address implementation, involving EU Institutions, Member States, civil society, and grassroots organisations. This plan, which was not initially foreseen by the Commission's work plan, responds to the events of 2020 and represents the highest level of institutional recognition of structural racism and its impact in the EU. Also in line with this plan, the Commission appointed its first co-ordinator for anti-racism, whose role is to liaise with members of minority racial and ethnic communities and relay their concerns to the Commission. The co-ordinator will also work with Member States, the EU Parliament, and institutions of higher education to develop anti-racism policies.

In a number of countries, the focus has extended beyond anti-discrimination measures toward broader measures on diversity and equal opportunities for migrants. This is the case, for example, in the Netherlands, which made several changes in 2020 within the scope of its Action Plan against Labour Market Discrimination 2018-21, including establishment of a programme to improve the labour-market position of Dutch residents with a migration background. As of July 2020, individual employers could access a barometer by which to benchmark their inclusion of migrants against employers in the same sector. The government also announced an amendment to the Health and Safety law extending competence to monitor employer recruitment and selection procedures to the Inspectorate SZW (for fair, healthy and safe working conditions).

In July 2020, the United Kingdom established the independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The Commission released its report on 28 April 2021, laying out 24 recommendations intended to promote greater fairness and build trust between communities and the government while also highlighting progress made toward inclusion and integration.

In the United States, President Joseph Biden signed two executive orders in January 2021 on advancement of racial equity and support for underserved communities, directing the Domestic Policy Council to include racial equity as part of its mission and setting up the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. A main identified priority is the collection of racial data, which states do not consistently collect at present. Further, in March 2021, the Department of Justice announced a cross-agency initiative to combat anti-Asian violence and the National Science Foundation announced USD 33 million in grants for anti-racism research.

Finally, several OECD countries, notably Germany, Italy, and Spain, launched online initiatives to combat anti-migrant sentiment related to COVID-19. On the local level, the city of Barcelona launched the "StopRacism" campaign in March 2020 and Prague launched an anti-prejudice campaign in February 2021. In New York, the city government instituted a "COVID-19 and Human Rights" campaign to provide information for services to support victims of harassment and discrimination. International organisations assisted with campaign development in some cases. The International Organisation for Migration collaborated with the Mexican authorities on a campaign entitled "COVID-19 does not discriminate, why do you?" The United Nations delivered information to combat xenophobic stereotypes against migrants through the "Verified" campaign, and the UNHCR implemented targeted campaigns through its country offices.

## **Other recent changes to integration policies in OECD countries**

While large-scale reform was rare in 2020, with most countries reacting to circumstances caused by the pandemic, some countries did push forward on major overhauls of integration policy in 2020 and early 2021. Others have announced more targeted interventions. Even those countries that planned large-scale modifications acknowledged the challenges created by COVID-19. The Netherlands, for example, postponed implementation of its new Civic Integration Act (that was to take effect on 1 July 2021) to 1 January 2022. It will, among other things, introduce three separate civic integration routes and an increased target Dutch language level.

### ***Broad integration programme overhauls have been rare***

Norway and Luxembourg worked toward fundamental reform of their integration measures in 2020. Norway implemented a new Integration Act in January 2021. One of the main goals of the new act is that more migrants will gain access to formal education. To prepare participants for employment or further education, Norway shifted its language requirement from an hours-based model to a target level model, having determined that reaching CEFR level B1 was important for full participation but recognising that not all migrants will reach this level at the same rate. Norway also raised the threshold age for the target group for the integration programme from 16 to 18 years of age to avoid confusion for minors who are still in school. Migrants will now be eligible for career counselling within three months of entry in addition to the previously existing skills assessment. Norway also made modifications to facilitate co-ordination of integration programmes, implicating county-level actors that have responsibility over upper secondary education in organisation of integration measures. Counties and municipalities will share responsibility for integration.

In Luxembourg, changes took the form of a rearrangement of competencies intended to delineate between reception and integration. With the Law of 4 December 2019, Luxembourg created a new National Reception Office (ONA) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Beginning in January 2020, the ONA took charge of organising reception and managing accommodation for refugees and asylum-seekers. The law created a Department of Integration within the Ministry of Family Affairs, Integration and the Greater Region (MFAMIGR), which has signed an agreement with 18 municipalities to develop local plans for integration with the support of national integration counsellors. The MFAMIGR was charged with developing a new law on integration for 2021. In this context, the main national and local stakeholders participated in a large consultation. An overhaul of the reception programme for newcomer pupils in the education system is planned for 2021. On the co-ordination side, Luxembourg changed the format of its Interministerial Committee on Integration, which now includes civil society organisations.

Australia announced significant reforms to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), removing the previous cap on the number of free English tuition hours and extending target English levels from functional to vocational level. For migrants in Australia on or before 1 October 2020, the reform also removed time limits for beginning and completing English classes. These reforms entered into effect on 19 April 2021.

### ***While some countries streamline naturalisation, others add requirements***

Citizenship legislation and accompanying measures continue to be an area of high policy action across the OECD. Canada's Citizenship Modernization Plan of 2019-20 called for digitalisation where possible, and the government began offering online citizenship testing and e-applications. For 2021-22, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced the intended elimination of citizenship fees, along with an amendment of the Oath of Citizenship to reflect Indigenous treaty rights, and the revision of the citizenship guide to reflect Canada's diverse society. Norway amended the Nationality Act to allow dual citizenship from January 2020. Norway also raised the naturalisation requirement for skills in oral Norwegian from CEFR level A2 to level B1. An amendment to Austria's Citizenship Act allows direct descendants of individuals persecuted under Austrofascism and National Socialism to acquire citizenship more easily. Italy, which in 2018 had increased the processing time for citizenship to 48 months, reduced it again in December 2020 to 24 months, with a possible extension to a maximum of 36 months. Portugal and Latvia introduced extensions of their principle of *jus soli*. Latvia now automatically confers citizenship on children born in Latvia unless the parents have agreed proactively on another citizenship. In Portugal, children born in Portugal acquire nationality at birth if one parent was residing legally in the country at the time of birth or if one of the parents (regardless of residence status) has been residing in Portugal for at least a year at the time of birth.

In recognition of their role in the response to the pandemic, France created a fast-track naturalisation programme for health care workers in 2020, allowing them to apply after two years in France, rather than five.

In Denmark, the spread of COVID-19 led to the temporary lifting of a rule requiring all future citizens to shake hands with a representative of the public authorities to become Danish citizens. Denmark did introduce, however, some limitations to automatic granting of Danish nationality to children in January 2020. In Greece, March 2020 amendments to the Citizenship Code now require migrants to demonstrate sufficient integration through language and knowledge of Greek political life through a written test. The amended legislation increases the period after which refugees may seek citizenship from three to seven years, in line with other categories of migrants residing in Greece. Refugees must also pay a fee of EUR 100.

### ***Integration increasingly includes a gender perspective***

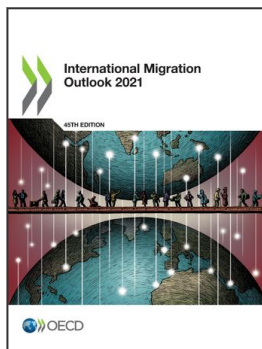
Integration of immigrant women is another issue that continues to be high on the integration policy agenda. High migrant-gender gaps in employment are persistent, and empowerment of migrant women also affects the integration of their children. Recognising this, countries have increasingly developed policies and programmes to facilitate better integration of migrant women, particularly into the labour market. In Germany, since May 2020, the project “Fem.OS”, funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, has offered legally certified counselling and proactive information through social media in ten languages. There are also various other ongoing programmes, including “Stark im Beruf” (Strong at Work) by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Women, Senior Citizens, and Youth, to support migrant women in their job-search. Sweden extended a 2019 directive on inclusion of a gender perspective in all measures of the integration programme to remain valid for Public Employment Service appropriations in 2020. This includes new funding for Swedish language training for foreign-born parents who are away from the labour market taking care of children. On 29 January 2020, the Austrian Federal Chancellery assumed responsibility for Austria’s integration agenda, appointing a Federal Minister of Women and Integration in the Federal Chancellery. Other countries have acknowledged the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on migrant women and are beginning to view integration policy with a gender lens. However, this policy trend is still nascent, as is gender mainstreaming in project design and funding.

### ***Decentralisation continues, but the pandemic further exposed its limitations***

For countries that have increasingly decentralised their services, the challenges of COVID-19 revealed the limitations of the approach. Systems that manage the organisation of introduction activities on the local level have faced more difficulties in adapting to rapid shifts, such as the need for physical distancing and online learning. For example, a report by the Norwegian Research Institute FAFO on how municipalities adapted their introduction activities – chief among which is language learning – during the pandemic showed that one in two municipalities faced difficulties managing the situation (Kavli and Lillevik, 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). In particular, digitalisation of services often proves challenging in a decentralised setting due to lack of economies of scale. Strengthening integration at the local level has often been a first step for countries that do not yet have a national policy on integration. Some longer-standing immigration countries, including Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, in addition to Japan have also largely devolved integration to the local level. It may be too early to say whether countries with localised strategies will continue to operate in a decentralised manner. However, it is clear that policy makers, having seen how these systems respond to periods of great stress, will need to consider whether the approach is sustainable without a clear co-ordination mechanism. Stronger oversight with guidelines and appropriate incentives can facilitate consistent implementation and mainstreaming of good practices, two policy challenges that decentralised systems will need to rise to meet.

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