

EMN National Conference 2016

On Tuesday 29 November 2016, the Netherlands National Contact Point for the European Migration Network organized the ninth edition of its annual conference. The topic of this year's conference was the integration of asylum seekers. The conference addressed integration measures concerning persons who are in the asylum procedure and those who have already received an asylum status. It also focused on the moment when the integration measure has been implemented: before, during or after the increased influx in 2015. The conference venue was Europe House, The Hague. Over 70 persons from government, NGOs and academia participated in the conference.

Welcome

The participants were welcomed by **Ms. Lieke Schuitemaker** (Europe House) and the conference chair, **Mr. Paulus Bouma** (Head Research & Analysis, Immigration and Naturalisation Service).

Opening address

The opening address was delivered by **Mr. Kees Riezebos** (Director Migration Policy & Deputy DG Immigration Affairs, Ministry of Security and Justice), who noted that EMN research products contribute to policy making. He also mentioned that, as concerns integration, speeding up the procedures and providing housing for the newcomers are the main challenges.

Keynote speech

Mr. Harry Boschloo (Member Management Team, Directorate Society and Integration, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) gave a keynote speech. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is responsible for the integration of asylum seekers. Boschloo mentioned that his Ministry is sensitive to the concerns of receiving communities. In order to ease the existing tensions within these communities, the integration focus should be on housing, education and labor market participation. In order to cope with the integration of permit holders, some new initiatives have been launched.

Panel I

In the first panel, three Dutch stakeholders in the field of integration gave a short presentation on the Dutch situation. **Mr. Harry Somers** (Project Leader 'Pilot Jozefzorg', Municipality of Tilburg) explained that in their program, 'Pilot Jozefzorg', they focus on the active participation and incorporation of refugees in the municipality. They try to achieve this via intensifying voluntary work, early childcare and education and language courses. **Ms. Roswitha Weiler** (Senior Policy Officer, Dutch Council for Refugees) explained that a lot has changed after 2015. Before 2015, integration was the responsibility of the refugee him or herself, but a study from the Dutch Refugee Council in 2014 concluded that this policy aim could be counterproductive. In 2015, we've gradually seen a shift from the focus on reception to integration, and Ms. Weiler calls for a persisting focus on integration in 2017. Finally, **Mr. Roel Jennissen** (Researcher, Scientific Council for Government Policy) gave insights in a recent study on the integration of a cohort of refugees in the '90s. His main conclusions were that asylum migrants over all perform quite well in education, although there are significant differences between nationalities, but fall behind in labor market participation. Mr Jennissen also mentioned that asylum migrants are not registered as offenders of crimes more often than the Dutch, when taking into account individual characteristics such as age and sex.

Intermezzo I

During the intermezzo, **Ms. Lonneke Kapoen** (Head Analysis & Support, Repatriation and Departure Service) and **Mr. Hans Lemmens** (Coordinator EMN NCP NL, Immigration and Naturalisation Service) organized a quiz with facts and figures about asylum and migration in EU and The Netherlands. Ms. Kapoen also gave a short introduction to the work of the EMN's Return Expert Group, as she is the co-chair of this group.

Panel II

During the second panel, representatives from Sweden, Austria and Germany discussed integration policies in their respective countries. **Ms. Marie Bengtsson** (Coordinator EMN NCP SE, Swedish Migration Agency) highlighted some similarities between the Dutch and Swedish situation in 2015, but also pointed out that the scope of the challenge is different: around 163.000 people came to Sweden in 2015 and applied for asylum. At the moment, Sweden is still trying to cope with the large number of people, arrange housing and try to stop the large influx of people. Although the ambition is to facilitate and promote integration, this can only start after applicants have received a permit and are settled in municipalities. **Mr. Johnny van Hove** (Project Officer 'Network IQ', Entwicklungsgesellschaft für berufliche Bildung) explained that ten years ago the first integration courses have been developed in Germany. The Integration through Qualification project aims to recognize professional qualifications obtained outside Germany in order to match those competences to the German labor market and find suitable jobs. **Ms. Natalie Herold** (Head Unit Research, Knowledge Management and Integration Monitoring, Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs) finally provided insights into the Austrian integration system, which has been developed by the Federal authorities only since 2010. Ms. Herold emphasized that the 2015 crisis has created a window of opportunity and changed the Austrian attitude towards the topic. For example, extra funding has been made available and the federal government has developed a strategy for language training. She emphasized that recognition of skills and diplomas is very important and that Austria recently set up procedures to get skills recognized and assessed, also for asylum seekers who do not have their documents yet.

Intermezzo II

Ms. Verena Schulze Palstring (Researcher, Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies, University of Osnabrück) gave a short intermezzo on a German scientific research project on a digital tool to map German scientific research on refugees and integration. This mapping tool is meant for networking and the inventory of knowledge and research, and seeks to bridge the gap between policy and academia. The tool shows research projects, research institutions and financing for research projects on the map of Germany.

Closing remarks

Mr. Paulus Bouma summarized the main findings and conclusions of the afternoon. He emphasized that although the influx of asylum seekers has provided the Netherlands and other Member States with several challenges, it has also provided a boost for integration measures. Mr Bouma emphasized that we should hold on to an important finding: integration is not something that can be dealt with in a split second, but takes years. Labor market integration appears to be key to integration, but it is a multi-faceted phenomenon and needs careful attention.