

# What does integration mean?

As more individuals around the world find themselves away from their homes whether by choice or through force, the need for a unitary notion of individual rights and integration becomes essential. Even though in this age of globalization the labour markets are opening up, many people still are socially and economically excluded. Globalization has also led many people to try new and ever-dangerous ways to escape dictatorship, oppression and misery. This is the case for Europe's "new" migrants such as Algerians, Africans, Central Asians, Roma and many more. "New" migrants, as compared to "old" migrants who have become members of the European Union and benefit from social, legal and economic citizenship within Europe, usually begin their journey into Europe under illegality creating an unstable situation for all individuals. In this way, integration through an accessible and legal labour market as well as through cultural respect on behalf of everyone is necessary to create a sense of belonging and stability for all peoples within the European Union.

The promotion of an effective and welcoming integration policy is essential in keeping our societies peaceful. Although asylum seekers and refugees with or without temporary legal status might not receive full legal citizenship right away, they must still have a chance to attain social and economic citizen rights while awaiting an answer to their future legal status. Through language education and employment opportunities, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants should be given a chance to integrate and adjust to their host country with ease regardless of their duration of stay. This, in turn, will promote a safe environment not only for refugees and asylum seekers, but for the original citizen in the host country. The main hindrance, however, to successful integration are the disparate laws practiced by every individual European member state. Similar integration and immigration laws must be implemented in all European Union countries.

**Integration means protecting the rights of all individuals without compromising the rights of citizens and/or non-citizens.**

Integration within the European Union entails the following:

- ▶ Compulsory language courses; proficiency in the host country's language is pertinent to successful social and economic mobility. It lessens the stigma of being an 'immigrant' and makes room for a more peaceful social and work environment.
- ▶ It must be mandatory for illegal immigrants, especially children, to attend school and receive an education for the duration of their stay. This includes language classes to help prevent segregation and isolation of different ethnic and national groups.



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- ▶ Reception of asylum seekers and refugees should not only be confined to shelter and food but should also extend to legal and social support while awaiting their legal status.
- ▶ Providing work permits for those arriving in the European Union who are able and eligible to work even if it is for a short duration of time. Migrant workers should pay taxes and insurance while being justly compensated for their work. Employment will promote self-sufficiency, benefitting the host country. If refugees and asylum seekers find it difficult to attain work permits then it will foster more illegal, blackmarket employment that could lead to exploitation, including enslavement through human trafficking which affects all Member States.
- ▶ Identical laws concerning asylum procedures and rights of immigrants in all European Union countries should be promoted. In this way, exploitation in the form of human trafficking will diminish and will be easier to stop.
- ▶ Similar laws in all European Union countries on social support (ie. food and education for children).

According to the United States Committee for Refugees (USCR), at the end of 2002, Belgium hosted about 30,300 refugees and asylum seekers in need of protection, including 23,100 persons awaiting a decision on the merits of their claims, around 5,500 awaiting a determination of admissibility, and 1,700 persons granted asylum during the year. The rest either return to their homes, enter another country and/or remain under an illegal status where they continue to be socially and economically excluded.



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While most immigrants are denied admissibility (about 90 % in Belgium in 2002 according to the USCR), many end up under an illegal status. In this way, individuals, especially women and children, become more vulnerable to human trafficking where they are trapped and enslaved within an illegal, criminal status. Refugees may enter the trafficking process as the only avenue of escape from persecution. We must protect refugees, asylum seekers and all migrants from the reasons they have left or were forced out of their homes in the first place. Once we start implementing sound integrational measures in all European Union countries, the less exploitation through enslavement and trafficking will occur. As trafficking and other forms of exploitation become transnational problems, we plead for similar laws regarding immigration in all European countries.





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UN-Secretary general Kofi Annan described the situation in a speech

to the European Parliament on the occasion of receiving the Sakharov Prize: "Sometimes the breadth of the (migration) agenda has been lost amidst shrill debate about clamping down on illegal immigration, as though that were the major purpose of migration policy. The public has been fed images of floods of unwelcome entrants and of threats to their societies and identities. In the process, immigrants have sometimes been stigmatized, vilified, even dehumanized. In the process, an essential truth has been lost. The vast majority of immigrants are industrious, courageous and determined. They don't want a free ride."

The fact is, immigration, whether legal or illegal, at will or forced, will not stop. Conflicts and natural catastrophes come up and die off again only to restart in another place somewhere on this globe and while we witness this on our TVs from a secure distance, the protagonists now are beginning to come to us faster and from further away than we ever expected. There will always be situations terrible enough to push people to leave their homes and we have to be prepared to receive them. All individuals who find themselves in another country and environment whether by choice or by force must receive their basic rights as human beings.

Access to citizenship is central to creating a sound immigration policy and to lessen possible conflict between original citizens and newcomers. Citizenship entails not only rights but also duties and gives immigrants a chance to prove their good will and solidarity with the host society. Europeans must help migrants adapt and integrate as best as they can; one way to create this sense of acceptance is through the creation of government legislation. The only way Europe will realize its economic potential is if immigrants are integrated socially and economically. We must stop perceiving immigration as a threat, but rather as something that will let us grow economically, socially and peacefully.

- ▶ We ask that the EU policy makers endorse and support a sound, ultimately European, integration policy.
- ▶ We call for a rapid ratification of the European convention in order to create a common basis of law so that citizens coming from abroad will have a chance to a safe residence in Europe.

In addition to policy changes regarding refugees and migrants, we encourage migrants to form legal networks of social and economic support to aid each other in better integrating themselves. Such policies and attitudes will end the legal loopholes in which trafficking and racism thrive and create a socially balanced society.

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- you can create a link to our website [www.ifias.net](http://www.ifias.net)
- you can support our work with migrants in Brussels and displaced people in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union at our meetings and conferences (Please send us your email address for receiving our invitations)
- you can make a donation to the following bank account:  
**IFIAS, Kredietbank Brussels**  
**Rue Wiertz 60, European Parliament**  
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# Towards a European integration policy



Lay out: kipponcept, Bonn



We believe that the rights of the individual always have priority over historical or cultural rights of a group. In this way, integration is a two-way street. Our societies must not only adapt to a greater variety of historical and cultural backgrounds but also augment our civic duties through volunteering and taking an active part in the lives of new residents. On the other hand, newcomers do not have to relinquish all their cultural ties and forget their past but must be willing to give certain things up for the sake of establishing a successful life in a new environment.