

Promoting Dynamic Integration in Europe

Findings and policy implications of research in Croatia



As FOCUS concludes its work, the project is issuing a series of short policy notes which summarise key findings and outputs. This note provides a general overview of the findings and policy implications of work conducted in Croatia.

FOCUS is an international consortium which has undertaken a deep look at key factors underpinning integration in Europe through both research and practice-focused activity. Using the EU's definition of dynamic integration, FOCUS has explored the dimensions of 'what matters?' and 'what works?'

The project's outputs range from detailed field surveys to a structured approach to promoting dynamic integration in this broad and diverse field. Research focused on post-2015 Syrian refugees and members of the communities where they now live. This included the first survey work to address, in a European context, both the socio-economic and socio-psychological dimensions of integration.

What do we mean by dynamic integration?

"In the EU context, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States."

Action 1, section 2 of Communication on a Common Agenda for Integration, COM(2005) 389 final

FOCUS RESEARCH IN CROATIA

One of the FOCUS partners is the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb (FFZG). The FFZG led important parts of the project's cross-country work and undertook detailed work within Croatia.

FOCUS included Croatia within its research as a country with relatively low levels of refugees and a status as more of a transit than a destination country. Major quantitative and qualitative surveys were completed in Croatia involving post-2015 Syrian Refugees and the Croatian communities where they now live. 178 refugees participated in the survey and 2 focus groups were held. 600 members of the Croatian communities where they now live participated in the survey and 3 focus groups were held. Detailed results are available [here](#) and publication of individual articles is ongoing and can be followed [here](#). In addition, experts from governmental and non-governmental organisations in Croatia participated in the practice-focused streams of the project's work.

Findings and Policy Implications

The research included over 100 questions and has many potential implications for developing effective integration policies in Croatia. In order to bring these together in an accessible way, there follows a table of key findings and implications which has been drawn up using an established framework for understanding key influencers on integration (for fuller explanation see: [here](#)). We base our findings on the multi-dimensional conceptualization of the integration presented in the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019).

In the following, the descriptor **Arriving Community (AC)** refers to post-2015 Syrian refugees in Croatia, and the descriptor **Receiving Community (RC)** refers to long-term residents of the Croatian communities where they now live



Markers and means (work, housing, education, health and social care, leisure)

Indicators of integration	Findings	Lessons and policy implications
Overall	The AC identified economic autonomy as the basis for feeling integrated . The RC showed appreciation of AC members who showed efforts to get into work as fast as possible.	Economic autonomy is the first step in integration for refugees and should be supported from the initial period after receiving asylum status.
Work	Slightly more than half of the AC was employed at the time of data collection. Most of them work full-time and at middle-skilled jobs corresponding to their level of education. However, a third of the AC are working in positions that are below their level of education .	Allow effective recognition of qualifications as a precondition for further training to access better jobs and to avoid a situation where the AC fills only low paid jobs.
Work	There are more male AC members who are employed and work full time compared to female AC members. Although most female and male AC members work middle-skilled jobs, a portion of males is employed at a high-skilled position. No female AC member is employed in a high-skilled position or on a position above their level of education .	Strengthen AC female position on the job market by extending support in childcare, and facilitate finding jobs that match their educational skill level. Empower refugees to engage in the labour market by offering vocational counselling, with interpretation if needed,
Work Housing Social care	RC members generally believe that most of the AC members are in a marginal or irregular type of employment. But most of the AC members in Croatia are in fact employed full time. There are fewer AC members receiving welfare assistance than the Croatian RC believes. More AC members live in overcrowded accommodation than the Croatian RC estimates. This shows an incompatibility between the beliefs of the RC of the AC's socioeconomic status and the AC's actual socioeconomic situation .	Provide correct information to the RC on the socio-economic status of the arriving community members, thus tackling their incorrect perceptions.
Education	Schools were seen as an important ground for fostering acceptance .	Develop programmes of intergroup contact and intercultural exchange for schools. Support scientific projects studying the dynamic of integration of children of refugees in schools.
Leisure	Food was seen as a connecting factor for the AC and the RC .	Organize public festivals offering traditional food and music, with support from institutions and NGOs. Foster communication and informal positive contact between RC and AC.
Overall	Some RC members demanded that financial security is guaranteed to them first before offering financial support to AC members and stated that the socio-economic support programmes should first be created and implemented on Croats, and then on refugees.	In order to ensure accurate understanding of resources supporting integration, provide transparent and up-to-date information to the general public on the allocation of resources supporting integration, and the economic contribution of refugees.

Social connections (bonds, bridges, links)

Indicators of integration	Findings	Lessons and policy implications
Bridges	The RC’s attitudes towards the AC are neutral and accepts that the AC does not pose a high socio-economic or societal threat. They are neither supportive nor against AC's rights and are unsure whether they would offer assistance to the members of the AC. RC does not have a lot of contact with the AC, but when they do, that contact is usually positive. The overall approach of the RC towards the AC is neutral.	Pay special attention within public campaigns to the issue of just distribution of resources send the message that exercising the AC rights does not threaten the rights of the RC
Bridges	Both the AC and the RC emphasized their common experience of war and refuge as a potential for empathy and understanding between the communities.	Use public communications to promote empathy and solidarity with people in distress, and clearly articulate various ways in which the AC can contribute to their new communities.
Links	The AC reported being discriminated against by landlords, service representatives and health care professionals who did not know the rights of refugees to health insurance , and denied them services.	Provide training and information on discrimination for all system stakeholders. Track patients in relevant databases. Provide interpreters in the health-care system, and cultural mediators where necessary.

Facilitators (language and communication, culture, digital skills, safety, stability)

Indicators of integration	Findings	Lessons and policy implications
Language	Half of the AC members have attended Croatian language and culture integration courses. They have assessed their proficiency in Croatian to be average. Female and male AC respondents are equally fluent in the Croatian language. While refugees who intend staying in Croatia have a high commitment to learning Croatian, provision of language courses is less generous in Croatia than in other countries.	Make the learning of Croatian language and culture more available. Allow for preparatory lessons in the Croatian language to be held in schools for children and provide additional lessons, suitable to the individual needs of the AC.
Language	Age is negatively related to Croatian and English language proficiency, such that older AC members are experiencing more difficulty in learning and using these languages.	Where possible, combine language courses with on-the-job training.
Culture	The AC perceived similarity between Croatian and Syrian lifestyles , which they saw as a factor facilitating integration. The RC, in contrast, emphasized differences between the cultures.	Articulate how greater diversity will not jeopardize Croatian culture. Experts should be engaged on this issue, and managing differences should not be left to chance or ignored.

Foundation (rights and responsibilities)

Indicators of integration	Findings	Lessons and policy implications
Rights	AC members are mostly aware of the rights they have as refugees in Croatia. They are most familiar with their rights to employment, education and raising of children under their culture and norms. They are less familiar with their rights to safety from prosecution, to free accommodation in case they cannot afford it, recognition of qualifications and legal aid.	Work on better informing the AC of their rights. Greater security in terms of rights directly aids integration by increasing the sense of safety and belonging in a society.
Rights	The RC members are neutral in their support for the rights of refugees , showing most support for the right to raise their children under their culture and norms, and for the right to assistance with integration. They are least supportive of the right to free accommodation.	Provide clear information on the rights and entitlements of the RC and document to the RC that this is not a threat to the rights of the receiving community. Address misperception of levels of economic dependence.
Responsibilities	Government: The RC couldn't describe the integration policies implemented in Croatia but were adamant in their belief that the process is not well regulated. They demand a fixed EU-administered policy, equal for all asylum applicants and beneficiaries.	Organize a transparent system with an online resource which informs the general public of the activities and processes stemming from the integration policies.
Responsibilities	NGOs were seen as important actors in supporting the AC with basic needs, bureaucracy and access to education and the labour market. The AC believed that the NGOs are not helping enough and do not provide adequate financial support.	Strengthen the network of NGOs working with refugees, undertaking joint work, projects and communication.
Responsibilities	The media was seen as main source of information and potential promoter of negative attitudes with specific ideological portals, called out for their negative portrayal of refugees.	Work with media companies to foster understanding and transmit transparent and up-to-date information on the integration process, refugees and policies.

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