

THE ACTION PLAN ON INTEGRATION & INCLUSION 2021-27



Relevant Research and Practice from the FOCUS project

During the progress of the FOCUS project the core integration policy documents of the European Commission and various programme mechanisms were revised. Of these, the most important document is the Action Plan on Integration & Inclusion 2021-27. During engagement with practitioners and policy makers it was suggested that it would be helpful to them if FOCUS produced a short document which linked, where relevant, its work to the Action Plan.

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.

With a primary focus on post-2015 refugees from Syria and the communities where they now live, the research involved:

- ◆ The first broad surveys which have explored, in a European context, both the socio-economic and socio-psychological dimensions of integration. Over 5,000 people participated in extensive qualitative and quantitative survey work undertaken in Germany, Sweden, Croatia and Jordan.
- ◆ A study of the views of senior policy and programme makers concerning current practices and knowledge gaps.
- ◆ A study of current integration practices and practice case studies to validate the FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration. Based on this work, the [Living Well Together online Resource](#) and [Implementation Guide](#) are accessible resources for practitioners and policymakers.

The FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration is a practical framework to strengthen existing promising integration practices and support the development of new ones.

At its core is the idea of fostering social bonds, connections, and bridges among arriving and receiving communities. The FOCUS Approach highlights key elements to promote trust and reciprocity, social connectedness, wellbeing, resilience and a sense of belonging of all community members.

Read more and find further resources on the different dimensions of the FOCUS Approach in the [Living Well Together Resource](#).



EU ACTION PLAN ON INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION 2021-27

In FOCUS's [interviews with senior policy and programme leaders](#) a consistent finding was that integration policy and practice in Europe is very heavily influenced by the policies of EU institutions and funding programmes. Therefore, the publication of a new strategic direction for integration is a very significant development and it has been central to debates and drafting of funding instruments (in particular the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, AMIF, and European Social Fund Plus, ESF+).

The **Action Plan on Integration & Inclusion** was published in **November 2020**. It replaces a 2016 plan and, for the first time, covers EU citizens with a migrant background. It is intended to be complementary to other policies, especially the New Pact on Migration & Asylum and the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan.

The Action Plan sets out a series of **key principles and values** which it says should inform integration practice and then sets out priority actions for 2021-27. A review of the Action Plan from the perspective of the largest NGO network in the field can be found [here](#).

The measures set out in the *Action Plan* do not always fully address the key principles and values and the operation of the *New Pact on Migration & Asylum* clearly contrasts with integration objectives in important ways. However, the *Action Plan* does mark a substantial step forward in aligning the overall framework for integration with research on best practice.

FOCUS's research is relevant to nearly all elements of the *Action Plan* in terms of providing supporting evidence, guidance for implementation or noting important gaps. Especially as an aid for organisations preparing proposals for programmes during new programming periods, what follows here are ten areas where FOCUS's output is particularly relevant. The referenced publications provide detailed references and guidance on the topics:

Action Plan Point: Encourage 2-way integration

Over 80% of members of both receiving and arriving communities who participated in FOCUS's surveys chose a preferred mode of acculturation which involved retaining multiple identities and cultures. However, the research also showed that levels of contact are low, with the receiving community not accepting a personal role in promoting integration – instead putting responsibility on institutions. In a related finding, the research showed that there are significant factual misperceptions of the current status of refugees (e.g. underestimating education levels and overestimating dependence). Lack of a 2-way dimension in current work is acknowledged as the biggest current gap in integration practice.

See: [Field Study Reports](#), [Triangulation Report](#), [Qualitative Study of the Views of Senior Professionals](#).

Action Plan Point: Encourage 'encounters and exchanges', empowering both communities

The profound importance of increasing direct social contact between communities emerged as a theme in all elements of FOCUS's research. The *FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration* addresses this as a core pillar. Following reviews of practice and practical opportunities to encourage these encounters volunteerism was identified as a significant vehicle to address this gap in current practice. Co-creation and participation in the development and implementation of programmes were also identified as core to empowerment.

See: [Living Well Together Online Resource](#), [Practice Case Studies](#), [Implementation Guide](#).

Action Plan Point: Support should be targeted and tailored to the needs of a diverse population

Ensuring that programmes respond to the practical needs of people is critical to not just achieving the immediate goals of a programme but also encouraging a sense of agency and belonging to society – something without which integration is not possible. In FOCUS’s research the diversity of needs was strongly present and *participatory and co-creative* approaches to developing and implementing programmes helped to ensure that practices more directly met the needs of individuals. This is the case in practices from the earliest stage of the process.

See: [Implementation Guide](#), [Practice Case Studies](#), [Field Study Reports](#).

Action Plan Point: Ensure access to health services and in particular mental health services

FOCUS’s field studies supported the idea that equal access to health services is essential – with issues of information about rights and the availability of language support being raised. The *Action Plan* acknowledges mental health as critical to integration, but does so in the narrow context of trauma-related services. A core principle arises from FOCUS’s work is that mental health and psycho-social support need to be seen in a much broader context and incorporated in to all elements of integration work in addition to the essential provision of trauma-related services.

See: [Summary of Socio-Psychological Factors and Integration](#), [Living Well Together Online Resource](#).

Action Plan Point: Access to Quality & Affordable Housing

Secure and appropriate housing is essential to integration and has both socio-economic and socio-psychological dimensions. In addition, segregation undermines the opportunity for positive social connections. In the qualitative research, housing emerged as the field where both perceptions of racism and discrimination as well as racist and discriminatory opinions were most prevalence.

See: [Summary of Socio-Economic Factors and Integration](#), [Field Study Reports](#), [Triangulation Report](#).

Action Plan Point: Need to improve and make accessible the evidence base

FOCUS’s practice-related work demonstrated a very high level of commitment to using the evidence base in developing programmes but a frustration about its accessibility – something which is only partly linked to the lack of in-house research specialists. There is support for the idea of investing in practice networks and online resources which identify and disseminate best practice at different levels of complexity. FOCUS’s *Living Well Together Online Resource*, and *Focus Approach Implementation Guide* are direct responses to this.

See: [Qualitative Study of the Views of Senior Professionals](#), [Living Well Together Online Resource](#), [Implementation Guide](#).

Action Plan Point: Mainstream gender and anti-discrimination practices

This is a relatively undeveloped area in the *Action Plan* but FOCUS’s research suggests that it is an area for priority action. The structural nature of barriers faced by refugees in, for example, obtaining employment appropriate to their level of skills or secure and appropriate housing, suggest that racism and gender discrimination should be a concern of all integration practice, and recognised as a barrier to integration. Work in FOCUS’s practice stream suggests that this is achievable if given adequate prioritisation.

See: [Triangulation Report](#), [Practice Case Studies](#), [Implementation Guide](#).

Action Plan Point: Provide support at different stages of process

Frustration at the withdrawal of many integration programmes after the short reception phase is widely felt. The continuance of practical networking, advisory and language programmes for a longer period would potentially have a very positive impact. The logic and benefits from this are accepted by members of receiving communities.

See: [Field Study Reports](#), [Practice Case Studies](#).

Action Plan Point: Support Evaluation

FOCUS’s research found widespread acceptance of evaluation, but this was accompanied with frustration about unreasonable evaluation expectations. The scale of integration programmes is generally limited in both time and resources, so it is not credible to seek to evaluate the ‘achievement’ of integration. Evaluation needs to be more focused on actions which the research show to be important. The *FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration* is a means for assisting in the structure development, implementation and evaluation of integration programmes.

See: [Living Well Together Online Resource](#), [Implementation Guide](#), [Qualitative Study of the Views of Senior Professionals](#).

Action Plan Point: Maximise EU added value through multi-stakeholder partnerships

FOCUS’s work suggests that this is a wider point which goes beyond just maximising the impact of EU-funding and policies. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can, in fact, be central to developing effective programmes in all contexts. The needs and opportunities in arriving and receiving communities are diverse and always stretch beyond programmes offered by individual agencies or organisations. Adopting a multi-stakeholder approach helps address diverse and changing needs. As such, this area is a core pillar of the *FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration*.

See: [Practice Case Studies](#), [Implementation Guide](#).

OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT FOCUS OUTPUTS



Implementation Guide



Field Study Reports



Living Well Together Online Resource



Practice Case Studies



Socio-Economic Factors and Integration



Socio-Psychological Factors and Integration



Triangulation Report



Qualitative Study of the Views of Senior Professionals

THE FOCUS PROJECT (2019-2022)

Coordinator

Sabina Dziadecka Gråbæk / IFRC Psychosocial Centre

contact@focus-refugees.eu

www.focus-refugees.eu

