

NADINE - digital iNtegrAted system for the social support of migraNts and refugEes

POLICYBRIEF

for EC internal use

Collaboration between private and public entities supporting migrant integration and access to digital services

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the EU officially launched its Horizon 2020 programme, dedicating nearly EUR 80 billion of funding to research and innovation. The project NADINE (digital iNtegrAted system for the social support of migraNts and refugEes) receives funding from this programme to harness the potential of big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support migrant integration across Europe.

The project brings together a consortium of 13 organisations from France, Italy, the UK, Greece, Belgium and Spain. In line with the idea that employment is essential for the successful integration of migrants into their new country, NADINE aims at providing a tool that will cater to both migrants and employers' needs and enable better skills matching. The output of the project will be an online tool that can be used by both parties with the potential of alleviating current and future skills shortages

The project is close to completing its second pilot during which the online system is being tested in real-time by more than 100 migrants in different locations across Spain and Greece. These pilots provide us with invaluable information on how NADINE provides online skills assessments through games, the training offers provided and the recommendations provided to migrants arriving to Europe from various backgrounds. The objective is to support the employability of migrants by identifying their educational backgrounds, practical skills and providing them with adequate employment information and opportunities based on those.

NADINE has recently participated in a three-day joint migration policy roundtable discussion, which brought together six other EU-funded projects in the field of migration. The roundtable sessions were focused on providing solutions to ongoing challenges related to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), integration efforts and relevant policy measures. The NADINE project team has chaired session three of the roundtable discussions focusing on improving collaborations between policy makers and public authorities in support of migrant integration and the delivery of digital public services to migrants. The outputs of session three, including the proposed policy solutions, are reflected in this policy brief.

II. SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOCRATIC IMPACTS

Context

During the last 25 years, digital products and services have altered the lives of people and fundamentally changed communication and business. Digital industries are rapidly evolving and identifying areas of development that previously may have been overlooked. In addition to creating new products and services they have also transformed jobs and skills. According to a recent OECD report¹, AI holds the potential to alleviate labour shortages in the wider economy.²

One unique feature of this industrial revolution is its truly global context. Digital technologies appeared almost simultaneously across the world, and owing partly to low consumer prices, a significant share of household digital items can now be found in all countries regardless of their development status. Access to and use of digital products and services are important and relevant for migrants and asylum seekers as well. Global connectivity provided by digital technologies can help migrants identify and access basic services such as health care, education or public administration as well as communicate and seek assistance or support in case of crisis³.

However, as identified by a report from the UNHCR⁴ (2020), the benefits delivered by digital tools may not be equally and readily available for all migrants and refugees. In some cases, marginalised groups of refugees such as women, children, elderly, gender and sexually diverse persons, and those with disabilities may face further restrictions. These include mobility restrictions which can in-turn “limit their access to coverage or signal strength and all the resources and benefits that come with internet connectivity, contributing to larger power asymmetries in the community”⁵.

Digital technologies, employment, and skills development

Digital technologies are also beneficial when seeking information on the jobs, the skills market and employment opportunities. To participate in an informed and productive way in a society characterised by rapid changes in ICT, social inclusion is facilitated through access to and the use of

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/sti/Megatrends%20affecting%20science,%20technology%20and%20innovation.pdf>

² <https://www.bankmycell.com/blog/how-many-phones-are-in-the-world>

³ <https://www.oecd.org/sti/Megatrends%20affecting%20science,%20technology%20and%20innovation.pdf>

⁴ [https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Space-and-imagination-rethinking-refugees%E2%80%99-digital-access WEB042020.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Space-and-imagination-rethinking-refugees%E2%80%99-digital-access_WEB042020.pdf)

⁵ [page 1]

digital technology. A lack of access or skills to participate online therefore bring disadvantages in terms of being socially included in society and addressing social needs. Considering this, it is of the utmost importance to address the potential digital gap which refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants (RAVs)⁶ may face in their integration process and the effect it might have on their social inclusion. As a newly arrived RAV, a lack of information and inability to use technology due to insufficient access, skills, and proficiency in the language of the country of residence may lead to limited interaction with the new community and consequently to social exclusion. For RAVs to be able to adopt an adequate level of ICT and have enhanced access to information for essentials to daily life, such as healthcare, education, and employment, the ICT needs and capabilities of RAVs must be identified⁷. The adoption of digital technologies is a focal point of the NADINE project and one of the indirect findings of the first piloting phase showed the different level of competence migrants have with digital tools, and highlight specificities for each use case. These differences, which translated to their varying engagement with the NADINE platform and opinion on the components, also exist between people of different educational backgrounds, ages and genders.

III. USE CASES

EU position

The European Commission has currently launched a public consultation to gather views on new potential actions at EU level on integration and social inclusion. The aim is to improve access to employment, education, and healthcare and shows a commitment to make European societies more inclusive, as well as one of the main enablers of migrants' inclusion being their ability to work⁸. When the new Pact on Migration and Asylum was announced in September 2020, the European Commission, together with its European Social and Economic Partners, emphasised the potential of migrant workers contributing to digital transitions by providing the European labour market with much needed skills⁹. The European Commission announced in May 2020 that a Next Generation EU recovery package should address the issue of improving digital skills. The Commission will put forth its Skills Agenda for Europe with a dedicated part on migrants and an updated Digital Education Action Plan¹⁰. The importance of such integrated efforts is underlined by recent data showing that even though the percentage of the European populations with at least basic digital skills increased to 58% in 2019 (up from 55% in 2015), a large part of society still lacks basic digital skills, even though most jobs require such skills. This became particularly relevant when looking at the measures taken throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby individuals' use of online tools soared due to the imposed restrictions on movement and measures on social distancing¹¹. Similar to the general population, it is primarily elder or less educated migrants who have a low level of digital literacy. Since ICT provides easily accessible information (e.g. on administrative procedures, rights and duties,

⁶ RAVs are also the NADINE use cases, with whom the platform is being tested.

⁷ Alam, Korshed 2015: "The Digital Divide and Social Inclusion among Refugee Migrants: A Case in Regional Australia"

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/the-european-commission-launches-a-public-consultation-on-integration-and-a-call-for-an-expert-migrant-group>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/1_en_act_part1_v7_1.pdf

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-europe-moment-repair-prepare-next-generation.pdf>

¹¹ European Commission: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020

opportunities for education, and access to health services), it increases the opportunities for developing social networks, gaining employment and consequently, being integrated in society. In this regard improvement of digital literacy could be combined with language courses as knowledge of the host country language is a key driver for social, economic and digital integration¹² Within the NADINE project, one of main objectives is to provide a digital companion that will suggest and assist the end-users through administrative tasks, but also provide them with training options based on their skills and career goals. NADINE offers more than 20 free online training courses for languages, hard and soft skills. This is part of NADINE's approach to facilitate smooth access to employment at EU level, as a key ingredient to successful integration. For instance, for certain target groups facing literacy or language difficulties, the inclusive approach means that the use of ICT-based skills assessment tools is considered to be more appropriate for these groups and they will thereby achieve a proper skills assessment despite the inherent difficulties of their situation¹³.

Member State practices

Member State public authorities have varying practices on digital skill development as well as migrant integration. The key determining factors are generally a country's exposure to migration, knowledge and experience of competent authorities, availability of resources and availability of relevant services online. In addition to the efforts of public authorities, NGOs, education institutes and private enterprises also are regularly engaged in migrant integration campaigns. Member States often provide online language learning tools and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) as well as general information on access to public services as way to support migrant integration and at the same time make use of digital tools. There are also innovative practices that go beyond basic information provision. One such practice comes from Sweden, where with funding from the ESF, an entrepreneurial project has developed a digital tool that provides comprehensive government information directly on the mobile phone in the app, Mobilearn. The app displays information in the native language of the migrant while searches can be carried out in any language and results are translated into the user's mother tongue. If the person is illiterate, they can have the information read to them by the audio option. The aim is to help migrants get acquainted to the new society and learn about their basic rights and relevant regulations¹⁴. The Mobilearn app also assists new migrants to build their CVs by mapping both their soft and hard skills. It supplies information on what skills and competences are needed on the Swedish labour market and sends users vacancies¹⁵.

Businesses

Businesses and non-for-profit organisations are also often involved with migrant integration and digital skills initiatives. Their involvement can be manifold including app developers or trainers as well as employers who provide jobs and skill development options to migrants. Several NGOs work with innovative solutions to mitigate the digital gap for migrants. These initiatives are aimed at varying levels of digital proficiency. The "Good Things Foundation" is a British NGO which provides digital inclusion programmes with community-based learning. The NGO has identified that a lack of digital skills and access to digital technologies can lead to poor health, social isolation, and less access

¹² <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC93966/jrc93966.pdf>

¹³ NADINE project description

¹⁴ <http://se.mobilearn.com/>

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/sweden-using-digital-app-speed-migrant-integration>

to the labour market which, consequently, will place the individual in a financially strained situation and risk of poverty. These people are often already in a disadvantaged situation of social exclusion and being digitally excluded creates a lack of a visibility in society, as government services increasingly move online¹⁶.

Techfugees is a global organisation which develop tech innovation for and by displaced people in order to support their inclusion into society. One of the organisation's initiatives is the TF4Women implemented in France, which is a free programme for refugee women. The main objective is the professional inclusion of women in the technology industry by providing educational and practical knowledge on new technologies. To grow the women's professional network, the programme includes trainings and networking events, as well as a mentor to support their job search in the tech industry¹⁷.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendations presented below are a result of the Joint Policy Roundtable Session held on 16 October 2020.

EU level:

To aid the integration and skills development of the migrant communities, it is essential to provide digital services in a one stop shop environment where services are connected both on the EU and the Member State levels, packing all relevant information and contacts into one place. The design process of the platform should be based on the collaboration of multiple stakeholder groups including migrants and asylum seekers. The result should be a flexible platform with flexible outputs that can be easily adapted to various socio-economic environments. Often, there is a challenge in reaching the end-users of such digital tools and therefore, communication of the existence and accessibility of such online tools and services must be improved. For instance, the future Europass Portal launching in 2021 will use big data analysis to assess where the migrants' skills can bring added value. Similarly, it would be useful for NGOs to have an EU-wide platform supporting their work on creating a mutually supportive local environment, by way of sharing good practices on multi-stakeholder involvement, as well as on working together with non-migrant local communities. Workshops and training on how to access financing, specifically EU financing is also very much needed and could be used to strengthen NGO competences.

Additionally, the recommendations of the annual report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) should be more widely disseminated. This report outlines the main trends in the fields of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism, and intolerance throughout Europe. The objective is to display the context in which ECRI will continue its efforts. The identified trends of 2019 included different kinds of hate speech from political parties. One element was to feed into a belief that migrants constitute an unwanted competition in what is already considered a highly competitive society by people with shrinking resources. Despite there being no evidence that the arrival and integration of migrants into domestic labour markets result in a reduction of socio-

¹⁶ <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/areas-of-work/digital-inclusion>

¹⁷ <https://techfugees.com/fellowship-tf4women/>

economic rights and opportunities, xenophobic nationalists continue to argue the opposite. ECRI argues that socially excluded groups cannot be integrated in a society by playing one group against another¹⁸ and brings forward their General Policy Recommendation number 10 of combating racism and discrimination through compulsory, free, and quality education for all¹⁹. Member States can actively use the annual trends of ECRI to identify domestic issues and target their national anti-discrimination activities where needed. For instance, last year in Finland, ECRI identified an escalation in the public discourse of expressions of racism and xenophobia containing anti-immigrant rhetoric targeting asylum-seekers, persons of African descent, and Muslims. ECRI recommended the Finnish authorities to substantially increase the resources of the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal to enable it to fully carry out its mandate of dealing with complaints of discrimination and granting compensation to victims of discrimination²⁰. Similarly, in Romania, ECRI noted an abject tendency amongst certain politicians at local level in engaging in anti-Roma rhetoric and nationalistic discourse. The aim was to use hate speech to gain political power in local elections. ECRI urged the Romanian authorities to act immediately to ensure that anyone who engaged in hate speech as covered in the Romanian legislation on the matter was duly prosecuted according to the law²¹. Regarding ECRI's findings and recommendations, it is crucial to follow up on pledges and practices. This can be done by implementing an EU-wide monitoring and evaluation scheme that tracks Member State public authority practices, compare and contrast NGO good practices and communication strategies, and highlight good examples of local communities where migrant integration has already been successful.

Local Level:

Local authorities play a vital role in migrant integration. Another example of a one stop shop platform is the European Platform of Integrating Cities which was initiated in the beginning of this year and is currently running in eight cities. The aim is for local authorities and local NGOs to work together to understand the main needs and challenges at local level for migrant integration. It is a comprehensive approach, and the process tailoring takes around one year. As the development of the one stop shop platform at EU level, the development process needs to have a consistent multi stakeholder approach to ensure co-ownership and co-creation. Local authorities must work closely together with the local NGOs in order to adjust policies to reflect local environments. Eventually, each city will learn from one-another by sharing their good practices.

Successful collaborations of any kind are ones where NGOs and local authorities have a common goal, a specific strategy and a clear division of responsibilities. When targeting politicians for potential collaborations, there is a need to tailor communication materials to their policy programme to identify these common goals. One of the bottlenecks identified is the absence of migrants participating in the design of relevant policy measures at local level. The involvement of migrants as co-creators of policies could bring them to expose their own vulnerabilities, among the other the lack of knowledge related to access to services and poor understanding of concepts, processes and regulations. This is specifically important in gateway countries in the Balkan, in the case of Bulgaria

¹⁸ ECRI 2019: Annual Report ECRI's activities

¹⁹ ECRI General Policy Recommendation no. 10

²⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-finland/1680972fa7>

²¹ <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-romania/168094c9e5>

for example there is a lack of even acknowledging the presence of migrants and asylum seekers. Therefore, in the case of Bulgaria it would be essential to create an integration coordination body made up of public authority and NGO representatives along with migrants and refugees to create more transparency around the actual state of migration in the country. More specifically this could include the creation of a central referral point either an agency or an online information surface.

Another important bottleneck is the lack of evaluation of previous results. In the case of Spain, which is another gateway country, a recommendation is to introduce measures for the collection and analysis of results from previous missions and initiatives, as a way to inform future integration policies. Based on the experiences of local stakeholders such measures could be helpful for maintaining public opinion in support of migration and cultural diversity.

Furthermore, there is a strong need for using a communication platform in a way to present the stories of migrant communities from a personal angle. It is vital to share the voice of the migrant community through personal stories, during education and dissemination campaigns. To deliver a combination of statistically founded tendencies with real narratives on the personal aspects to put a face on the research and data is crucial when communicating on the benefits of migrant integration. It should be noted that the character of the data should move on from generalised descriptions of migrants as victims or perpetrators and rather aim at presenting the migrant communities in their true variety. Furthermore, often, NGOs have easier access to communicating with the migrant communities and identifying relevant local stories if the NGO has operational activities. However, in some Member States there is a need for more data on local level which makes it difficult to back the personal stories with quantitative statistics.

Local media can play an important role in providing the general public with an insight into the complexity of reasons behind the migratory journeys, however, in addition to the stories themselves there is a need to educate the storytellers including journalists, photographers, and editors on the complexity of people's journeys. It is important to broaden the context from a specific incident which is either war or poverty and instead look at it from a wider perspective and present migration as a natural phenomenon that has accompanied human evolution.

Finally, there is also a gap in targeted outreach campaigns specifically involving the millennial generation. The younger generations need to be included in the storytelling process and educated in the history and importance of migrant integration for countries across the world.

V. SUSTANABILITY TOOLKIT

The NADINE project is considering three generic business models to deliver the innovations generated by the project:

- National level service (the client is a public authority on national/regional level)
- NGO/commercial cross-border service
- Pan-European Service

These business models consider also to include the local NGOs on national level as distribution channels. As of today the partners in the consortium are considering how each of these business models can be delivered through commercialisation by one or several project partners, licensing out the solution to a third party or even creating a start-up that can commercialise and operate the final

platform. Based on these efforts a detailed business plan will be created during the last year of the project, taking into account the IP ownership structure of the solution.
