



Key points for the European Commission public consultation on the future of EU legal migration

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Cities are key stakeholders in integrating migrants. As the context at the local level is shaped by policies at the EU and national level, cities should be involved in the design and implementation of regular migration channels to best meet long-term socio-economic needs and ensure sustainable integration outcomes at the local level. This document gives a brief summary of cities' main priorities and needs and includes best practice city examples for thematic focal points suggested for the Commission's consultation on the future of EU legal migration.

Cities as main integration stakeholders

European societies are ageing fast and are in need of immigration to uphold socio-economic standards, counteract the pressure put on welfare and social systems and maintain the essential infrastructure of our economies. In addition, there are growing needs in key sectors in national labour markets, including in industries that require skilled third country nationals (TCNs) coming from outside the EU. It is therefore important to create new avenues for regular labour migration at the EU level and to improve the EU's fragmented legal migration framework.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on cross-border migration and highlighted the essential role of migration in today's economies and societies. It has shone a new light on the **indispensable contributions of migrants as key workers in society**, in upholding crucial supply chains and as care professionals in a crisis situation.² In developing new avenues for regular labour migration, it is therefore crucial to go beyond migration channels for highly qualified TCNs. Indeed, regular migration channels should also be open to those with vocational training and education or key skills needed in medium or low wage sectors of the economy.

In this context, cities are looking into new ways to attract international talent and provide incentives for migrants to settle and work in their territories. They are key stakeholders in the integration process of migrants, something that the European Commission most recently acknowledged in the Action Plan

¹ European Commission (2019), Legal Migration Fitness Check, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/fitness-check_en

And

Migrant Integration Policy Index (2019), available at: <https://www.mipex.eu/play/#/filter-countries>

² European Parliament (2020), Draft report on impacts of EU rules on the free movements of workers and services: intra-EU labour mobility as a tool to match labour market needs and skills (2020/2007(INI)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/EMPL-PR-660195_EN.pdf

on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.³ Given the link between regular migration channels and facilitated integration, cities have an interest in migration through safe, dignified and regulated channels. In order to make regular migration channels a win-win situation for both migrants and the host society, it is important to **involve cities' integration expertise from the start** when developing regular pathways.

From an economic point of view, cities are best placed to have a coherent overview of the current and more structural shortages and opportunities in the local labour market. Local administrations should therefore be included in multi-level governance of attracting and retaining international talent to respond to the needs of the local labour market. To this end, spaces for **multi-level dialogue across the local, national and EU level governance structure** need to be expanded. More city-EU Commission dialogues on legal migration and integration are needed to allow cities to provide real time feedback about local challenges, bottlenecks and solutions.

Migrants have been one of the groups hit the hardest by the pandemic and its socio-economic impact, and have been among the first to lose their employment. New legislation should therefore **have social protection for migrants at its core** and improve their access to healthcare, housing and decent working conditions. The inconsistencies in the EU's current legal framework with respect to work and residence permits, the recognition of skills and qualifications, and intra-EU mobility create uncertainty for migrants, employers and local administrations.

The link between talent attraction, retention, and integration

Integration is a complex process that happens at the local level and involves both migrants and local communities. Cities' involvement is crucial in providing migrants with different services, ranging from access to adequate and affordable housing to education of their children or providing information and matching for job opportunities. Moreover, cities take on a coordinating function and bring together other local stakeholders that shape the integration process in a sustainable way, including employers, schools, civil society organisations etc.

This local ecosystem needs to be taken into account when designing and implementing regular labour migration channels to attract highly skilled third country nationals. TCNs that are described as "international talent" can be characterised by a high degree of mobility due to their specialised skill set that facilitates many employment possibilities. Cities therefore need to be involved from the beginning to **foster sustainable integration opportunities at the local level**. In this way, they contribute to making the EU a more attractive destination to work, live and study in the international comparison.

Moreover, long-term integration and participation in the local labour market is more beneficial for welfare systems and the economy at large. This is also relevant for the retention of international students after the conclusion of the (university) programmes – the relative "cost" of training third country nationals should be offset by measures to retain young professionals, invigorate local industries and invest in European economies.

³ Eurocities (2020), Key points for the Public Consultation on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background, available at: <http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Eurocities-KeyPoints-Inclusion and Integration.pdf>

And

European Commission (2020), Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf

An effective and responsive EU Talent Pool for a range of skills

The upcoming EU Talent Pool is a welcome proposal to match skilled TCNs and EU employers. To be an effective tool, however, the Talent Pool should also **reflect the labour market needs of the local level. Cities should be included and consulted in its development to ensure the Pool's relevance for individual local labour market needs.**

More specifically, cities should also have access to the Talent Pool itself: first as potential employers of third country nationals in their own administrations, which would also contribute to making city administrations more diverse and inclusive; and second, to act as a bridging point for local businesses and to coordinate the needs of local stakeholders. Cities' involvement in the Talent Pool would contribute significantly to making it a more effective and responsive instrument to find and match skilled third country nationals.

In addition, the EU Talent Pool's function as database for job matching can also be expanded to make the EU's competitiveness for skilled third country nationals more visible. Cities, being the preferred places to settle and work for highly skilled third country nationals, can contribute significantly in advertising their opportunities and attracting "international talent".

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly brought to the fore an existing reliance on TCNs in the care sector, food supply chains and agriculture, as well as infrastructural services in cities. EU countries are in need of TCNs working in industries or sectors that are characterised as being "medium or low wage" and where vacancies may not be easy to fill. The EU framework on legal migration should take this into account and provide opportunities for **increasing regular migration channels for so-called "low or medium skilled" migrant workers** in key industries with labour shortages, as well as job matching in the local labour market.

The recognition of skills and qualifications

Training and skills development are key to ensure long-term integration in the labour market. The European Commission should support initiatives that help migrants reskill and upskill, learn the local language and have their qualifications and skills recognised in their host countries. Skills programmes have the potential of significantly increasing migrants' contributions to the local labour market, as well as for their personal and professional development. In case of return to a migrant's country of origin, for instance through a circular migration scheme, an improved skill set may also be of benefit in the context of (economic) reintegration.

In addition to developing them, the recognition of third country nationals' existing skills and qualifications needs to be a focus area at EU level. Very often, national systems to recognise qualifications are very complex with respect to the documents that are required, deadlines or immediate financial support. It is often **cities that support migrants with additional services to get their qualifications recognised in a timely manner and facilitate their labour market integration.**

In Munich, for instance, the city provides advice to migrants and supports them throughout the process of the recognition of their qualifications. The city also initiates specific upskilling programmes, provides coaching and financial support or connects migrants with business leaders in their respective industries. In Tampere, the International Skills Centre helps residents of migrant background enter the labour market through a comprehensive two-week skills assessment, including soft skills and language command. Tampere also offers subsidised work experiences for migrants, whereby they can obtain official recognition of their skills and enter the regular job market afterwards.

Cooperation between cities and employers and business associations should be strengthened, for a better matching of migrants' skills to labour market needs. Solna is a good example of how continuous dialogue with migrants and employers leads to careful and thorough matching of labour market needs and increases the chances of long-term employment. Stockholm has recently launched a network of

business, non-profit and public sector organisations to coordinate efforts to train newly arrived migrants and help them find employment.

In this way, cities create outcomes that are of benefit for all: they ensure that migrants are working in professions that correspond to their level of qualification and contribute to an increased personal and professional level of satisfaction; they create returns on investment for the local labour market and economy, as migrants do not rely on social support anymore; and they contribute to meeting the need for skilled workers.

Cities need more support to implement such programmes, as they often depend on the continuity of EU funding through programmes such as ESF+ or ERDF. Moreover, the European Commission should ensure the recognition of skills and qualifications in a similar way across EU countries and guide cities on this as well. Capacity building on the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, as well as its further adaptation to local level needs, could be a practical step towards direct EU-local cooperation on this topic. In addition, third country nationals should have easy access to information on how their qualifications may be recognised in their country of destination. Such information could be collected in a common multi-lingual EU database on the recognition of skills and qualifications.

Working conditions and safeguards from exploitation

Adequate working conditions, and particularly sufficient and stable income, have a direct impact on workers' living standards, for example on the ability to afford housing and cover basic needs. This is essential to ensure their integration into their host society, both economically and socially, and it is a precondition to make labour migration durable and mutually beneficial. This is especially relevant for the local level, as it is primarily in cities that migrants work and integrate. Moreover, when working conditions are suboptimal, cities become an essential provider of support for migrant workers, be that in housing, financial aid, or the provision of food and essential items. EU legislation currently in place grants third country nationals with regular residence and work permits the same rights as EU nationals enjoy. However, as highlighted by a recent report of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights⁴, migrant workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation with regards to pay, regulation of working hours, health and safety and medical assistance. Cities are crucial actors for the identification of those at risk of poverty, or with undignified living conditions, even when in employment. The EU should recognise and support cities as fundamental allies in **monitoring working conditions** to create a welcoming framework that incentivises TCNs to work in the European Union.

Actions to ensure that migrant workers are duly protected from exploitation in the labour market also include adequate **awareness-raising and the provision of information**. The EU should provide migrant workers with information on their rights as workers and residents of the European Union, as well as of the avenues to report violations of their rights and discriminatory practices they might experience. Cities are the closest level of government to citizens, they have a clear, up-to-date, overview of the composition of the migrant populations, and the effective structures to reach them. They play an essential role in the dissemination of information in languages and formats that their inhabitants with a migrant background can understand, and they work closely with NGOs and diaspora organisations that support them in the process. Therefore, the EU should actively involve cities as partners in awareness raising and communication strategies.

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019), Protecting Migrant Workers from Exploitation in the EU: Workers' Perspectives, available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/protecting-migrant-workers-exploitation-eu-workers-perspectives>

Focus on particular groups of migrant workers

Amongst TCNs that contribute to the EU labour market, there are specific groups that legislation should pay attention to, as they become increasingly relevant in essential sectors in European labour markets.

Covid-19 has demonstrated the need for an increased workforce in the **health and care** sectors, especially in cities, which have been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic by increasing, for example, support to childcare and care for the elderly. Acknowledging that migrant workers have substantially contributed to the effective delivery of key services and will be even more so in the recovery process should be the starting point for legislative initiatives to come that aim to reinforce the health and care sectors, such as the EU Child Guarantee, or the upcoming Green Paper on Ageing.

Migrant **women** are one of the main target groups in city strategies for labour-market integration, as they recognise that migrant women play an important role in the workforce, not the least in sectors in growing need of workers, such as health and care services. The EU should follow the example of cities and mainstream a gender perspective into all aspects of regular migration and regulations of the job market at EU level. Here, facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life is essential, because preventing women from disproportionately taking unpaid care responsibilities is central to promoting their inclusion in the regular job market.

Toulouse, for example, provides tailored support, individual coaching, training, and language courses, but also childcare assistance and empowerment activities to promote migrant women's labour market integration. Helsinki recognises the low employment rate of women with a migrant background as key challenges and implements specific projects to find them jobs. Since 2018, Leipzig organises an annual expert meeting called 'Women at work', which aims to exchange information, and experiences among migrant women and key stakeholders. The EU should recognise cities' contributions in this area and should provide stronger support for the implementation of such measures.

A sector gaining relevance in the EU labour market is **platform work**, or the gig economy, in which people of migrant origin are overrepresented. This has seen an increase during lockdown periods, where much of the population relied on online platforms for the delivery of goods. Platform work provides an opportunity for cities because it creates new jobs, it contributes to a more effective and innovative delivery of services such as food, transport, cultural content and even health and care services, and it supports the digital transition of the local economy.

Cities have recognised this and, even in lack of a robust regulatory context, they have taken steps to ensure they remain inclusive and respectful of workers' rights. Bologna's 2018 Charter of Fundamental Rights of Digital Labour in the Urban Context is an innovative way whereby the city gathers commitment by online platforms to ensure workers' right to be informed, to be protected, and to disconnect. It also provides for strengthened coordination between businesses engaged in such non-standard forms of employment, to increase support given by the public administration. As the EU sets to develop legislation on platform work, it is essential that it works in partnership with cities to identify challenges arising from the platform economy and to support innovative ways of making new forms of work inclusive, especially given that a considerable proportion of platform workers are non-EU nationals.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, **seasonal workers** proved to be fundamental for the maintenance of, for example, the EU's agricultural sector, ensuring the continuity of food production and supply chains. However, the pandemic has also highlighted the vulnerability of seasonal workers, who often live in precarious housing conditions and lack access to adequate sanitation, food, and health services. Seasonal workers are also particularly relevant in cities where tourism and hospitality are important economic sectors. Third-country nationals substantially help fill employment gaps and keep local economies afloat. To make sure that seasonal work remains attractive and European cities can keep

benefitting from their important economic contribution, the EU should ensure full compliance with the Seasonal Workers Directive, which sets out provisions for their dignified working conditions.

Finally, **entrepreneurship** should be fostered, by enlarging avenues for migration into the EU for the creation of businesses and start-ups. Small and medium enterprises contribute largely to cities' economic fabric, by creating businesses and jobs, revitalising local economies, bringing in innovation and attracting investment. Permits for establishing businesses should be facilitated, and TCNs should be given access to adequate training on the respective business and marketplace regulations. Cities can contribute to this, by providing guidance and support, and by connecting newcomers to local businesses that could serve as mentors. Besides economic benefits, this would also be of great societal value, as it can help raise third-country nationals' profile in their new societies, and mentoring programmes can facilitate exchanges between locals and newcomers. Such initiatives by cities should receive sustained support through EU funding.