

Keynote Speech

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Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here with you today.

I would like to thank the *National Agency Education for Europe* at the *German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training* (NA at BIBB), as well as the many other National Agencies, for having made this 2-days exchange possible.

More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, and more than 130.0000 people have already reached Europe by sea since the start of 2016.

The challenge for Europe to integrate such a high number of migrants and refugees is considerable, in particular for Germany which, in 2015, has received the highest absolute number of new asylum applications, but of course also for many other countries in Europe.

This challenge is aggravated by the fact that the vast majority of asylum seekers are low skilled people in

working age and children who have remained out of any education system for a long time before arrival.

Almost 30% of the asylum applicants in the EU in 2015 were younger than 18.

Around half of them (53%) were between 18 and 34 years old.

Moreover, despite the lack of concrete data, a significant number of minors have arrived to Europe unaccompanied. In Sweden, 43% of the asylum seekers registered in 2015 are under 18, out of which 50% (more than 35.000) are unaccompanied minors.

This is of course very high also on the EU and the European Commission's agenda.

Only a couple of weeks ago, Commissioner Tibor Navracsics - when exchanging views with the European Parliament - has reaffirmed that social inclusion, especially of young people, was his top priority. He underlined that education has a major role to play for the integration of the newly arrived refugees and migrants, as it is crucial in helping these people to find their place in our societies.

Education is the most powerful mean to provide migrants and refugees the right set of skills to achieve personal fulfilment, find employment, impart the values of the host societies and promote intercultural dialogue as a basis for integration.

Our urgent mandate is to integrate those thousands of newly arrived refugees into our mainstream education structures as early as possible.

But it is equally important to prevent underachievement of migrants in the longer run, and allow them to fulfil their potential.

We have to learn from previous migration waves.

There is consistent evidence such as PISA surveys that the education attainment of most migrants is significantly lower than that of their native peers.

However, it is clear that the problems with under-performance in schools, low basic skills and early school leaving are not directly linked to migration but to socio-economic disadvantages, which have been known long before migration reached the top of the political agenda.

Also there are disparities within Europe. The UK and Ireland are for example characterised by a high-skilled foreign-born population, while France, Germany and the Netherlands have more low-skilled immigrants. In Spain and Italy there are no significant differences between the educational levels of foreign and native populations.

However, in most of EU countries, previous migration flows have translated in highly segregated educational schemes.

We have to take measures to avoid mistakes done in the past to happen again.

The main responsibility lays of course with each Member State, but the EU can help overcoming the refugee challenge in Europe, including through its programmes such as Erasmus+, which is offering a range of funding opportunities. I will come back to it.

On the policy ground, the Commission has held a number of discussions with the Ministers of Education of our Member States to define specific tools to help them ensuring a quick integration of the migrants into their education system while guaranteeing equity and quality.

These could include peer learning, collecting good practice and developing guidelines that support integration of children in mainstream education.

On broader scope, all Commission services (with our colleagues from DG HOME affairs in the lead) are working together on a package of measures on integration of legal migrants that is scheduled to be presented before the summer.

The contribution of actions in the field of education, youth and sport will be along the following lines:

1. Supporting access to Education through language learning and better recognition of skills and qualifications

The Commission will provide concrete support on language assessment and language learning through the extension of the existing Erasmus + online linguistic support to refugees and newly arrived migrants.

The Commission is quickly mobilising its Peer Learning Activities to provide support to Member States through the sharing of knowledge and exchange of practices.

Earlier this month, Sweden has hosted the first Peer Learning exercise on welcome classes and skills assessment.

In June, Germany will host another Peer Learning Activity on assessment of language competences and unaccompanied minors.

Finally, we are working to be more efficient in the recognition of qualifications by supporting the training of staff in reception facilities.

2. A second contribution to the EU Integration action would be to provide concrete support to education staff to promote inclusiveness and prevent school failure

The existing public on line platform - School Education Gateway – will be used to provide support to the school community on how to best promote inclusive education and address specific needs of learners, through three specific tools, which will provide additional opportunities for policy-makers and practitioners at all levels to exchange experiences and examples on issues related to migrant learners and refugee integration.

The eTwinning community for schools in Europe will also contribute to addressing the challenge of teacher support.

Finally, early childhood education is a key means to promote integration. Therefore, the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care will be adapted to the needs of migrant children.

3. A third contribution would be to promote intercultural awareness through youth and sport.

In the area of youth, a new Expert Working Group will reflect on the contribution of youth work as well as informal and non-formal learning in the integration of refugees and migrants.

The group will provide a practical toolbox encompassing specific suggestions and proposals for Member States policy makers and youth workers.

Finally, the Commission is elaborating a mapping of good practices on social inclusion of migrants through Sport initiatives, which will provide an adequate knowledge of the current initiatives and their impact will inspire stakeholders to build on new projects.

Which specific funding opportunities addressing refugees does Erasmus+ offer?

Erasmus+ is an instrument to help achieve EU policy goals.

Already during 2014 and 2015, Erasmus+ and its predecessor Programmes (Lifelong-learning and Youth in Action) provided financial support to more than 260 projects which dealt with the integration of migrants in education.

At the "Market place for projects", yesterday afternoon, you certainly had a chance to get presented some of them.

In 2016, the Commission is reinforcing the support that Erasmus+ provides to projects which either involve refugees, asylum seekers and migrants or address the theme of refugees.

First of all, in 2016, we have made social inclusion the first thematic priority when selecting the strategic and collaborative partnerships in the field of education, training, youth and sport, which amount to EUR 400 million in the 2016 Erasmus+ budget.

In the light of the critical context, particular attention will be given to support projects involving refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and/or focussing on the topic of the refugees' crisis in Europe.

Also in 2017, social inclusion in education, training, youth and sport will be considered "the priority among the priorities".

Knowing that more than 1700 strategic and collaborative partnerships were funded in 2014 and provisional figures for 2015 show a similar trend, we expect a significant number of projects addressing social inclusion of refugees as a result of the 2016 Erasmus+ Call.

First application deadlines for strategic partnerships, in the fields of Education & Training [31 March] and Youth [2 February] have already passed. It is however too early for first results, as selection procedures are currently ongoing.

In addition, mid-March we have published a call for proposals on inclusion, with a budget of 13 M€, to scale up and disseminate successful actions developed at grass root level to prevent violent radicalisation and foster the inclusion of disadvantaged learners, including people with migrant background.

We know that successful practices do already exist, all over Europe, and include all levels from pre-school to vocational training, often involving a large number of stakeholders. Upscaling and disseminating these already existing practices means increasing their systemic impact.

The call for proposals supports three project strands:

- Strand 1: Transnational cooperation projects in the fields Education, Training and Youth.
- Strand 2: Large-scale volunteering projects in the field of Youth
- Strand 3: Networking of Erasmus+ National Agencies in the field of Youth

Applications for this call for proposals are to be submitted by 30 May 2016.

We have also adapted the Erasmus+ programme more specifically in the field of Higher Education by mobilising online tools targeting teachers, trainers and youth workers. We have put in place a special contract to provide online language learning for newly arrived migrants.

About 100.000 licences for online language assessments and 100.000 licences for online language courses will be

made available to refugees over a period of 3 years, starting from summer 2016.

The recognition of the refugee's qualifications being also an important issue, the NARIC recognition centres in Norway, UK, France, the Netherlands and Italy have been granted funding through Erasmus+ to develop a toolkit for staff working with recognition centres and higher education institutions as well as on the labour market.

As you see the Erasmus+ programme provides a number of funding opportunities to contribute tackling the refugee challenge. We count on you to take largely advantage of them, across educational fields and countries.

My colleague, Marta Gutierrez Benet, who is participating in the Panel Discussion later this morning, will have the opportunity to give you more details on these funding opportunities.

To conclude, I wish you all a fruitful second day, I look forward to hearing about your discussions and I wish you good luck with your future projects - we hope to see many of them.

Thank you.