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## Policy Brief

### **Promoting the inclusion of migrant women: An initial assessment of the EU action plan for integration and inclusion and other EU initiatives**

Migrant women<sup>1</sup> are a very diverse group. They differ in terms of age, immigration status, cultural and ethnic background and in terms of their educational attainments, proficiency in the host country's language, qualifications, skills, and employment experience. However, despite their differences, migrant women as a group continue to face persistent challenges.

Research has shown that they often face a 'double disadvantage' due to their status as women as well as immigrants.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, there has been greater attention paid to gender equality at the EU level, as demonstrated by measures taken to promote the advancement of women in the 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy<sup>3</sup>; as well as an increasing recognition of the importance of taking a cross-cutting intersectional<sup>4</sup> approach when it comes to the inclusion of women.

Migrant women however, continue to come up against particular barriers when it comes to their integration that need to be considered when developing integration and inclusion strategies and policy.<sup>5</sup> Migrant women compared to men usually confront more obstacles when it comes to access to employment, training, language courses, and settlement and integration services. Moreover, within the group of non-EU migrants, refugee women are confronted with additional challenges - often related to their forced migration - including poor health, trauma, and lack of documentation of

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'migrant women' in this paper refers to non-EU born women. This can include women who migrate to join family, women who migrate for economic reasons, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

<sup>2</sup> Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad, Triple Disadvantage?: A first overview of the integration of refugee women, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 216, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018, p. 8.  
[https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage\\_3f3a9612-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage_3f3a9612-en#page1)

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Economic Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

<sup>4</sup> *Intersectionality* as defined in the European Commission's *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* refers to the combination of gender with other personal characteristics or identities'

<sup>5</sup> Mutual learning conference on "Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants", thematic discussion paper: Gender perspectives in integration policy approaches, 26 November 2020.  
<https://multimedia.getresponse360.pl/icf-zSG2y/documents/d63c5773-a33d-4d95-9d69-ef7d1164bba2.pdf>

their education and work experience.<sup>6</sup> In addition, migrant women experience multiple forms of discrimination based on factors including gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion and immigration status, putting them at a higher risk of experiencing violence, poverty and social exclusion.<sup>7</sup>

We have clearly seen that the COVID-19 pandemic has also disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, including migrants, and migrant women in particular.<sup>8</sup> The impact includes physical and mental health, as well as economic consequences, possible increase in discrimination and racism, and the impact of school closures on migrant children and their parents.<sup>9</sup>

### **The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)**

Progress however has been made in recognizing and addressing the particular challenges that migrant women face in the EU. The Communication from the Commission on the new Action plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) acknowledges that while the areas targeted in 2016 continue to be relevant, more concerted action is needed to strengthen the integration of migrant women.<sup>10</sup> The new Action plan recognizes that individual characteristics, such as gender, may present specific challenges to people with a migrant background, and proposes some gender-specific objectives in areas such as health, equal participation, and labour market access.<sup>11</sup> The plan also takes a more intersectional approach, taking into account the combination of personal characteristics in addition to gender and migrant background, such as a person's racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation and disability, which could pose specific challenges.

The communication also mentions mainstreaming gender as a key principle and value guiding the Action plan. In terms of actions in the main sectoral areas, it proposes as a priority to have more women participating in the labour market and that the specific challenges faced by migrant women when accessing healthcare be considered. When

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<sup>6</sup> Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018). op. cit. note 2

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament, *Report on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU* (2015/2325(INI)), 2016, p.18. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2016-0024+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

<sup>8</sup> The [European web site for integration](#) continuously tracks the impact of COVID-19 on migrant communities in a number of key integration areas across the EU.

<sup>9</sup> OECD (2020) [What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?](#)

<sup>10</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Economic Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.

[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/action\\_plan\\_on\\_integration\\_and\\_inclusion\\_2021-2027.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

it comes to social integration and participation, the plan also has as a priority to promote equal opportunities for participation of migrant women in society.

While the focus on promoting the inclusion and participation of migrant women represents a key step forward in recognising the gender dimension in EU integration policies, the Action plan falls short in terms of concrete targets and actions it intends to take at the EU and national level to support these gender-specific objectives. Besides offering support for inclusive entrepreneurship under InvestEU and promoting inclusive mentoring schemes for both women and men, the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion doesn't mention any other specific actions directly targeting migrant women or that it plans to undertake to support the gender mainstreaming priorities in the plan. There are also no gender-specific targets or common set of indicators developed to measure progress on migrant women's integration or enhance accountability.

Furthermore, while the Action plan takes an integrated approach to the inclusion of migrants by trying to create linkages with existing and upcoming EU strategies such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU's Anti-racism Action Plan and the Gender Equality Strategy, it is not very specific in terms of how these synergies will be developed and what concrete actions will be put in place to ensure that the different EU initiatives complement each other and work together to strength the inclusion of migrants, and migrant women and girls in particular.

### **The EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**

The adoption in March 2020 by the European Commission of a Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025<sup>12</sup> was an important development for the EU on gender equality. The previous "strategic commitment", based on a Commission staff working document, has been insufficient, which is why a multi-annual political strategy by the whole European Commission, implemented with the commitment of the EU and its Member States, is needed.

Eurodiaconia welcomes the strategy's priority to integrate a gender perspective in all EU policies and processes, as well as its recognition of intersectional discrimination and its call for an intersectional approach in gender equality policies. We also applaud the emphasis on using funding to support women and girls in the asylum and integration process and those that are victim of gender-based violence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Op. cit. note 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The strategy however falls short in that it does not specify any measures to ensure that policies implemented to ensure gender equality will be intersectional.<sup>14</sup> As the European Network Against Racism has indicated, there are no specific actions in the strategy to deal with the inequalities faced by women who are often overlooked in current gender equality policies, such as ethnic minority women. As an example they point to policies to close the gender gap, which often don't consider that many ethnic minority women are paid less in relation to white women and ethnic minority men.<sup>15</sup> To ensure intersectionality is taken into account in the strategy, they recommend proactive measures be put in place — including reviewing existing policies — to make sure that ethnic minority and racialised women are not made invisible in gender equality policies.<sup>16</sup>

### **The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**

In line with the EPSR, the Commission's Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion promotes the principle of granting equal opportunities to all to benefit from their rights and participate in the society, regardless of their gender and their background.<sup>17</sup>

While migrant women are not explicitly mentioned in the EPSR, each principle should be viewed using a gender lens, taking into account how women's intersectional identities influence their ability to exercise the rights outlined in the pillar. Furthermore, the forthcoming action plan to implement the pillar should specifically outline how it will build synergies with the EU's Gender Equality Strategy, the EU's Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion, and the EU's Anti-racism action plan, particularly when it comes to principle 2 on Gender Equality and principle 3 on Equal Opportunities.

### **The European Semester and recovery and resilience plans**

COVID-19 has provided clear evidence that inequalities between women and men are persistent and that unpaid and undervalued care – overwhelmingly provided by women – is the backbone of our societies. From bearing most of the load in terms of household chores and childcare, to working on the front line during the pandemic as shop workers, nurses, cleaners and care workers, to the extremely worrying increase in domestic violence, the disadvantage of gender in the labour market has been highlighted very concretely since the start of the pandemic.

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<sup>14</sup> ENAR, 2020. EU gender equality strategy: a missed opportunity to be truly intersectional.

<https://www.enar-eu.org/EU-gender-equality-strategy-a-missed-opportunity-to-be-truly-intersectional>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. Op. cit. note 10

If the Recovery and Resilience Plans of member states intend to support increased female labour market participation, including the participation of migrant women, then there must be targeted measures directed at those women experiencing the most challenges, including migrant women, whom due to the intersectionality of various factors, including their status as women as well as immigrants, are often at a greater disadvantage.

Successful integration and inclusion therefore depends on a package of measures that are tailor-made and give greater consideration to these specific challenges and to the migrant women's experience.