

Help refugees integrate and contribute

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Filippo Grandi

At a joint high-level conference in Paris in January, the heads of the OECD and UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) called on governments to scale up their efforts to help refugees integrate and contribute to the societies and economies of Europe.

In 2015 more than 1 million people crossed the Mediterranean Sea to look for international protection in Europe. In total, about 1.5 million claimed asylum in OECD countries in 2015. This is almost twice the number recorded in 2014 and was the highest number ever recorded. Yet, asylum seekers represent only about 0.1% of the total OECD population and represent less than 0.3% of the total EU population.

The OECD and UNHCR stressed not only the moral imperative but also the clear economic incentive of helping the millions of refugees living in OECD countries to develop the skills they need to work productively and safely in the jobs of tomorrow.

“Integration is a dynamic two-way process which requires both the individual and society to make considerable efforts,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said at the joint conference. “In order to play a full role in the social,

economic and cultural life of their host country, refugees need to achieve equality of rights and opportunities. States have an important role in this process, ensuring that refugees play a positive and active part in the integration process, particularly in terms of the services provided to them and in ensuring that they are received by welcoming communities.”

The OECD also released a report at the conference on *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection*, which provides the main lessons from the experience of OECD countries in fostering the integration of refugees. The report highlights many good practices to tackle key barriers and support lasting integration of refugees and their children. It stresses the importance of early intervention, including providing access to language courses, employment programmes and integration services as soon as possible, including for asylum seekers with high prospects to remain. It also stresses the need to help migrants settle where jobs are and not necessarily where housing is cheaper. The report also underlines the need to adapt integration programmes to reflect the diversity of migrants in terms of skills and the specific needs of refugees.

“Far from a problem, refugees can and should be part of the solution to many of the challenges our societies confront,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría at the Paris conference. “They bring the hope of a better life and a better future for their children and ours. But to realise this potential, a substantial investment is needed to provide immediate support and help the refugees settle and adapt and develop their skills. It is a difficult and costly task in the short term, with a high pay-off for all in the medium to longer term”.

[Read Mr Gurría’s full speech](#)

[More information on migration and refugees](#)

[See also “We are entering a new era of migration” by Jean-Christophe Dumont, in OECD Observer No 303, September 2015](#)

References

Making Integration Work <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251236-en>