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New EMN inform examines early integration of applicants for international protection

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The latest EMN inform outlines early integration measures for applicants for international protection across EMN Member and Observer Countries, covering delivery, responsibility and funding during the asylum and reception process.

Overview

The inform examines the types of early integration measures provided to applicants for international protection by EMN Member and Observer Countries, including how these measures are delivered, which authorities are responsible for them, and how they are funded. For the purposes of this inform, the EMN developed a definition of 'early integration measures', which can be considered as an activity that supports integration and self-sufficiency for applicants for international protection during the asylum and reception process, before a final decision on their application is made. The inform draws on contributions from 25 EMN National Contact Points, comprising 23 EMN Member Countries, Serbia and Ukraine.

Early integration measures across countries

Most responding EMN Member and Observer Countries implement early integration measures, but access, coverage and focus vary, with some limiting them to specific groups such as vulnerable applicants. Activities are primarily coordinated and overseen at national level, often through ministries or national reception agencies, and supported by local authorities and in collaboration with non-governmental organisations.

The most common early integration measures are language courses, civic and cultural orientation, and vocational or labour market orientation. These are typically free of charge, and in most countries, participation is voluntary. Where compulsory elements exist, such as language or civic courses, they are usually linked to reception rules.

Tailored support and communication

Sixteen EMN Member Countries and Serbia adapt early integration measures based on age, gender, vulnerability, qualifications, or educational level, with targeted support for children, women, unaccompanied minors, and vulnerable people.

The inform highlights the importance of ensuring applicants are aware of the support available. In 22 EMN Member Countries and Serbia, communication and dissemination efforts take place through national reception or housing structures. Activities include the use of digital platforms such as websites and social media, printed materials including leaflets and brochures, and word-of-mouth within the networks of applicants for international protection.

Good practices and challenges

Responding countries report a range of challenges in delivering effective early integration measures. These include financial constraints, staffing shortages, organisational fragmentation, long waiting times, and external pressures such as fluctuating arrivals and hostility from some parts of the local community.

Most responding countries rely on indirect monitoring or broader integration evaluations to assess the impact of early integration measures, while only Latvia and Germany report systematic approaches to doing so.

Good practices reported by responding EMN Member and Observer Countries include rapid early intervention, provision of information, language learning, civic and vocational education, and coordination between public authorities, civil society and local communities.