

Two-pager EMN Netherlands

Early integration of applicants for international protection

The EMN Netherlands two-pagers analyse the results of EMN studies from a Dutch perspective. What are the key similarities and differences between Dutch policy and that of other European countries? For this purpose, EMN Netherlands also utilised information provided by participating countries for the studies.

Participating countries and research period

Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Latvia (LV), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK); Serbia (RS), Ukraine (UA). The information covers the situation in these countries up to February 2026.

Two-pager accompanying EMN inform:

'Early integration of applicants for international protection', August 2026

Research Questions

What are the primary early integration measures for applicants for international protection in EMN Member and Observer Countries? The focus is on contributions to successful integration, target-group specific adaptations, implementation, provision of information, challenges, good practices, and future developments.

This two-pager specifically focuses on interesting examples of early integration measures in the areas of language education, labour market orientation, and participation, as well as the link between early and regular integration measures.

Consequently, this document does not provide an exhaustive overview of all existing initiatives, but presents a selection of examples showing how various Member States implement these themes in practice. It does not address findings regarding monitoring, challenges, and good practices.

For this information please refer to the [EMN inform](#).

1. CONTEXT

The Asylum and Migration Pact strengthens the focus on integration from an early stage, after arrival in the country of destination and before the start of the asylum procedure. The Pact emphasises the importance of timely access to education, healthcare, and the labour market for asylum seekers with a high likelihood of being granted asylum. This provides a European framework for the early integration of applicants for international protection, allowing Member States room for practical implementation. Against this backdrop, the EMN inform mapped out the early integration measures that were in effect leading up to the Pact.

These measures refer to activities that increase the integration opportunities and self-reliance of applicants for inter-

national protection during the asylum procedure and reception, before a decision on the asylum application is made by the immigration services.

In many European countries, early integration is part of the reception and asylum procedure. Measures vary in form and intensity but primarily focus on language education, preparation for education, labour market orientation, and participation. In some countries, there is a clear link between early integration schemes and the regular integration programmes offered after an asylum status is granted, while in others, early and regular integration programmes are organised separately. The role of governments and civil society organisations also differs by country.

2. POLICY IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands focuses on the integration and participation of applicants for international protection at an early stage of the asylum procedure. Integration in the Netherlands begins before the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) has reached a decision on the asylum application. Through programmes provided by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), such as *Living and staying at a COA location* and the *Early Integration and Participation (VriP)* programme, applicants gain early access to information about Dutch society, language, education, and guidance

towards participation. A key component of the Dutch approach is the *Participation Desks (Meedoenbalies)*. At 38 of the 109 regular COA reception locations, these desks support residents in finding suitable daily activities and participating in society¹. By autumn 2026, this number will be expanded to 50 participation desks in total. The Participation Desk serves as an accessible, central, and recognisable point for asylum seekers to meet various organisations involved in (labour) participation. In collaboration with the Volunteer Work NL Association (Vereniging VrijwilligerswerkNL), local volunteer centres, and other (employer) organisations, applicants are linked to (volunteer) work², sports, recreation, and other social activities, regardless of the stage of their asylum procedure. The aim is to increase self-reliance, promoting social contacts, and strengthening the preparation for participation in Dutch society, before a residence permit has been granted.

3. TOOLKIT FOR EARLY INTEGRATION

Almost all participating countries³, except Hungary and Ukraine, implement early integration measures. There is a wide range of measures. Examples include:

- language education;⁴
- preparatory lessons for children for better integration into the education system;⁵
- labour market orientation in the form of internships, skills training, and vocational training programmes;⁶
- assistance with access to healthcare;⁷
- social and cultural orientation courses.⁸

The following sections detail the measures in the Netherlands and other EMN Member Countries regarding language education, access to the labour market, and the link between early and regular integration measures.

3.1. Language education

AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, **NL**, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.

The Netherlands offers early language education as an optional supplementary part of the broader programme *Living and Life at a COA location*, which provides residents with the knowledge and skills they need to live self-sufficiently in an

asylum seekers' centre (AZC). Through the COA, applicants can voluntarily follow basic Dutch lessons. For applicants whose asylum request is not handled via an accelerated procedure, the *Early Integration and Participation (VriP)* programme offers additional NT2 (Dutch as a second language) lessons taught by certified teachers.

EMN Member and Observer Countries implement early language education for applicants for international protection in various ways. In many countries, language education is a key part of the initial reception, with variations in intensity, target group, and combination with other integration measures. Seven EMN Member Countries⁹ offer (part of) the language education online. Austria, for example, offers free online German language lessons via the *Sprachportal*, with more than seventy live online lessons per week and extensive learning materials. Poland combines physical lessons at reception locations with online language education for both children and adults, and also provides preparatory education and homework guidance for school-aged children. Bulgaria focuses on labour market integration through a programme of 180 hours of Bulgarian language training at various levels.

In several countries, language education is closely interwoven with social orientation and preparation for participation. Luxembourg links intensive language integration courses to workshops on digital skills, independence, and Luxembourgish society. Additionally, applicants participate in interactive sessions on themes such as healthcare and gender equality as preparation for further participation in the integration programmes offered.

Furthermore, EMN Member Countries differ in the extent to which participation in language education is mandatory. In Spain and Finland¹⁰, participation in language education is compulsory. Repeated unauthorised absence can lead to sanctions, such as a reduction in financial support or, in Spain, the temporary or permanent (partial) withdrawal of reception facilities.

Language education for minor applicants

A number of EMN Member Countries also integrate early language acquisition into regular education for minor applicants. In **the Netherlands** and Belgium, children who do not

1 In addition to the 38 participation desks, the COA has 'Participation Desks light' at approximately 100 locations, where there is no structural cooperation with volunteer centres and limited deployment from the COA.

2 The legal task and responsibilities for the placement of asylum seekers into work are not assigned to a single party in the Netherlands. Consequently, they lack the support that is available for other groups (people with a distance to the labour market). This can lead to regional differences, temporary initiatives, and inefficient use of resources.

3 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, **NL**, PL, SE, SI, SK; RS.

4 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, **NL**, PL, SE, SI, SK; RS.

5 BE, FI, FR, HR, LT, **NL**, PL.

6 BE, BG, EL, ES, HR, IE, IT, LV, **NL**, RS.

7 BE, BG, CY, EL, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, LU, **NL**, SE.

8 BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LU, LV, **NL**, SK; RS.

9 AT, CY, FR, LU, **NL**, PL.

10 As of June 2026, participation in Finnish language classes is no longer mandatory. Only participation in the course on Finnish society remains obligatory.

yet sufficiently master the language of instruction first attend special newcomer classes before transitioning to regular education. Slovenia also offers additional language support and learning guidance to children entering the education system, with schools taking their language development into account during the first school year. Croatia allows children of applicants to participate in pre-school education for two years, giving them extra time to learn the language and prepare for primary education.

3.2. Early integration in relation to the labour market and vocational and labour market orientation

BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LU, LV, **NL**, SK and RS.

The Netherlands stimulates early labour market orientation through, among other things, *Promising Matching (Kansrijke Koppeling)*. In this process, applicants whose asylum application has a high probability of success, are screened during reception for work experience, education, and labour market opportunities, in order for applicants to be as much as possible accommodated in a region where their chances of sustainable participation are high. Additionally, residents of COA locations can participate in (volunteer) work and other participation activities via the Participation Desks, allowing them to gain work experience, build a network, and prepare for participation in Dutch society.

Many EMN Member Countries use early integration measures to promote labour market orientation and labour participation of applicants for international protection. In doing so, countries combine early access to the labour market with vocational orientation, skills training, individual guidance, and cooperation with employers and civil society organisations.

A number of EMN Member Countries focus on rapid access to work.¹¹ Bulgaria and Croatia grant applicants access to the labour market three months after the submission of the asylum application. This is combined with subsidised employment, vocational training, and an allowance for participation in these courses as well as travel costs, enabling applicants to gain work experience during the asylum procedure and become economically independent more quickly. In Italy, applicants can gain access to the labour market sixty days after the asylum application. The Italian government also provides opportunities for applicants to participate in internships, volunteer work, and vocational training. In **the Netherlands**, the Dutch government is currently investigating whether the waiting period for applicants after which they are allowed to enter the labour market should be shortened from 6 to 3 months.

Various countries focus on an early inventory of skills and personal guidance towards work.¹² Spain develops an individual trajectory for each participant, mapping competencies, work experience, and educational needs. This is similar to the personal approach used in **the Netherlands**. Based on this, applicants in Spain receive guidance on career choices, application skills, vocational training, and, where appropriate, support for self-employment. In Greece, the *Orientation Hubs* plan is currently being developed. Under this plan, the labour and educational profile of applicants is already being determined during the initial reception. Based on this, they are specifically referred to language education, vocational training, or vacancies as soon as they are permitted to work.

4. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The role of civil society organisations varies among the EMN Member and Observer Countries. In 22 countries, national agencies are involved in the implementation or coordination of early integration measures.¹³ In some countries, implementation lies largely with government agencies themselves. For example, in Austria, 'basic rules in reception centres' courses are coordinated by the *Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services*, and language education is provided via the Austrian Integration Fund. In Luxembourg and the Czech Republic national government agencies also play a central role in the organisation of reception and integration measures.

In other countries, governments work closely with civil society organisations to implement early integration measures. In France, NGOs provide support with learning the French language, access to rights, and social participation. In Sweden, NGOs and other civil society organisations make a significant contribution by offering activities in language education, social orientation, and labour market preparation. In total, ten EMN Member Countries¹⁴ collaborate with NGOs in the implementation of language courses.

Also in **the Netherlands**, cooperation exists with civil society organisations. For instance, the Participation Desk is a collaboration between the COA and the Volunteer Work NL Association. At a local level, the coordinator of the Participation Desk works with a volunteer centre affiliated with the Volunteer Work NL Association. Additionally, there are an increasing number of pilots and initiatives where municipalities, COA, UWV (Employee Insurance Agency), civil society organisations, and employer organisations collaborate to support asylum seekers on their path to the labour market and integration into Dutch society.

11 BE, BG, HR, FR, IE, SK; RS.

12 BE, BG, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LT, **NL**, SK, RS.

13 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, **NL**, PL, SE, SI, SK, RS.

14 BE, BG, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, **NL**, SE, SK.

These differences show that early integration can be organised both through public provisions and through cooperation with civil society organisations.

5. LINKING EARLY AND REGULAR INTEGRATION MEASURES

Early integration measures take place during the asylum procedure, before a residence status has been granted. After an applicant has obtained an international protection status, the standard civic integration programme(s) begins. The link between these two phases makes it possible to continue the knowledge and skills acquired during the asylum procedure in subsequent steps towards participation, education, and work. In most countries, links exist between early and regular integration measures, although the degree of coherence varies.

Some countries have a direct link, where participation in early measures explicitly continues into or is incorporated within the regular integration programme.¹⁵ Other countries have thematic coherence between early measures and regular integration programmes without them being formally linked.¹⁶ A third group of countries has no structural link between the two phases; early measures may contribute to integration but are not part of a continuous trajectory.¹⁷ This also applies to **the Netherlands**, where early measures, such as language education and activities aimed at self-reliance within the COA, may contribute to a better start of the further integration process, but are not formally linked to regular integration trajectories.

In Germany and Spain, both phases are strongly integrated. In Germany, early and regular measures are both carried out

under the responsibility of the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF), ensuring a continuous approach. Early measures prepare applicants for participation in the regular *Integrationkurs* after obtaining the right of residence. In Spain, language education, social orientation, and labour market preparation are simultaneously offered to both people with a pending asylum application as well as those who have already received an asylum status. This allows people whose asylum application has been granted to transition more easily to a follow-up phase providing further support towards independence and social participation.

In France, Lithuania, and Luxembourg, early and regular measures are aligned. In France, early integration measures serve as preparation for the regular integration trajectory, where, for example, language skills acquired during the asylum procedure can be credited at the start of the integration contract after the recognition of international protection. In Lithuania, information on needs and progress from the reception phase is used for individual integration plans, while Luxembourg builds on previous participation in early integration modules within the regular integration programme.

For the full description of the research and a comprehensive overview of all existing early integration measures in the participating EMN Member and Observer Countries, please refer to the full [EMN inform 'Early integration of applicants for international protection'](#).

More information can be found in the [EMN inform](#).

¹⁵ DE, ES, FR.

¹⁶ FI, LT, LU, LV, SE, SI.

¹⁷ AT, BG, EE, EL, HU, IE, NL, PL, SK; RS.