

Getting serious with refugee integration in Europe: The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) project

Monitoring and improving refugee integration

The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) is a six-years long transnational project which aims to prepare key actors in the integration field in 15 EU Member States¹ to better face the current challenges and improve the integration outcomes of beneficiaries of international protection. Conflict situations tend to last longer and it takes currently on average 17 years, before refugees fleeing civil wars may eventually have a chance to return to their home country.² Hence, the long-term integration of newly arrived beneficiaries of international protection is without alternative and presents an immediate challenge for European societies.

NIEM will establish a mechanism for a biennial, comprehensive evaluation of the integration of beneficiaries of international protection to provide evidence on gaps in integration standards, identify promising practices and evaluate the effects of legislative and policy changes.

NIEM is developed against the background of the changing legal environment on international protection both at national and European levels, induced by the high numbers of new arrivals in the recent years. The project endeavours to provide evidence on some of the most burning discussions concerning these changes: Are EU standards on integration of beneficiaries of international protection well implemented? How are they impacting integration policies? Are policies aimed at beneficiaries of international protection having an impact on successful integration? What are the challenges and good practices, and which policy gaps need to be addressed?

NIEM design: Evidence from policies on paper to outcomes in practice

To answer these questions, NIEM is developing comprehensive, reliable and sustainable data collection methods on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. It will provide evidence that can support the establishment of integration policies maximising the potential of newly arrived beneficiaries of international protection. More than 150 NIEM indicators build and expand on the current EU integration standards and cover different areas and types of expertise, various stakeholders and diverse types of evidence.

The NIEM indicators include the following major integration **policy areas**:

1. General conditions
 - a. Impact of reception on integration
 - b. Mainstreaming and integration governance

¹ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden

² J. D. Fearon, *Why some civil wars last so much longer than others?*, [in:] *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 41, no. 3., 2004, pp. 275-301

2. Legal integration
 - a. Residency
 - b. Family unity and reunification
 - c. Access to effective nationality
3. Socio-economic integration
 - a. Housing
 - b. Employment
 - c. Vocational training and employment-related education
 - d. Health
 - e. Public relief and social security
4. Socio-cultural integration
 - a. Children's education
 - b. Language learning and social orientation
 - c. Building bridges and fostering participation

The wide range of indicators will allow NIEM to analyse the interlinkages among the accessibility and security of the residence permit for beneficiaries of international protection and their families and integration within the different socio-economic and socio-cultural fields.

Four **types of indicators** are used within each strand to offer comprehensive data on the efficiency of different integration policies:

1. Policy indicators: Are laws and policies in place to implement integration principles?
2. Administrative inputs: Has the government invested in the infrastructure to implement these policies and services in partnership with all relevant stakeholders (local authorities, social partners, NGOs)?
3. Financial inputs: Does the governments commit sufficient national resources and effectively use EU financial support?
4. Outcomes: Do beneficiaries of international protection who access and use these services have greater participation and well-being in society?

These four types of indicators offer a unique combination of input, policy (or sustainability) and outcome indicators which allows for anticipation and identification of the most pressing obstacles to integration, from the policies on the paper to the outcomes in practice and from the reception phase of asylum seekers to equal opportunities for beneficiaries of international protection.

NIEM also calls for the participation of **different stakeholders** – governments, local authorities, social partners and NGOs, as well as beneficiaries of international protection themselves. The indicators require the analysis of **different types of evidence** as well, including national statistics, quantitative and qualitative research, independent evaluation, internal audit and self-assessment.

NIEM starts in 2016 with the development of the indicators based on the → pilot project from Central Europe.

➔ The origin of NIEM: A pilot supporting new destination countries

The pilot project of NIEM ([Refugee integration and the use of indicators: Evidence from Central Europe](#)) was organised with the aim to evaluate against these standards the integration policies of four Central European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria) in 2012-2013. As many of them have now become potential new destination countries, the evaluation served as a guidance for the establishment of better integration policies. Although beneficiaries of international protection were guaranteed generally the same rights as national citizens, the results identified the following major gaps:

- *Data gap*: Data collection systems are fragmented and there is a lack of reliable and accurate data about the integration of beneficiaries of international protection, that would allow efficiency assessment and progress monitoring of integration programmes and funding;
- *Cooperation gap*: There is no systematic cooperation among key stakeholders on integration (among different ministries, among different levels of governance and with social partners and NGOs), meetings and consultations processes tend to happen only on an ad-hoc basis;
- *Targeted support gap*: Integration measures follow a narrow interpretation of the equal treatment principle, failing to take into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of beneficiaries of international protection;
- *Interest gap*: Policy makers prioritise other issues and are often not interested in the improvement of integration policies, due to the small numbers of beneficiaries of international protection;
- *Funding gap*: The lack of continuous funding for promising practices makes the integration process intermittent and incoherent.

The first two years of the project are dedicated to the creation of baseline reports, which will evaluate the current situation of the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the 14 participating countries. A comparative European-level analysis interprets these country reports in a broader, EU-wide context. In order to monitor and evaluate the long-term effects of the current policy and legal changes and to draw conclusions for further action, the baseline reports will be followed by two evaluation rounds in 2019 and 2021.

From results to impact: Alliances for better refugee integration

To turn the results and evidence of NIEM into tangible and concrete improvements of integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the partner countries, each project partner establishes national coalitions. These national coalitions, involving representatives of public institutions, academia, NGOs, migrant organizations and beneficiaries themselves, will be aimed at:

- promoting NIEM and its outcomes in each participating country;
- tightening relations between key stakeholders, experts and practitioners; and
- monitoring the implementation of the recommendations and advocating for their mainstreaming in the participating countries.

In addition, an international NIEM coalition involving key European stakeholders will complement the national coalitions and advocate for the improvement of integration policies of beneficiaries of international protection on the EU level. Through this early and continuous involvement in the project activities of key stakeholders in integration policy and practice, the results of NIEM reports

can contribute to the shaping of European and national policy solutions. Thus, NIEM will allow for ongoing adaptations of integration policies towards beneficiaries of international protection

Moreover, the results of NIEM are helpful beyond the policy objectives. Its evidence on policy gaps and potential integration capacities is essential in addressing the fears and reservations of those European citizens, who are not against the idea of asylum, but rather perplexed and doubtful about their country's integration capacity and the possible consequences of the increased number of beneficiaries of international protection.

NIEM Partnership

NIEM is led by IPA, the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw. MPG, the Migration Policy Group, is the coordinating research partner responsible for elaboration and further development of the NIEM indicators and the comprehensive comparative reports. Other strategic partners are the UNHCR Regional Representation for Central Europe and Representation in Poland, the Polish Ministries of Interior and of Labour and Social Policy, and the University of Warsaw.

Project partners conducting research and organising national coalitions in the 15 partner countries

- Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants, Association Multi Kulti Collective (Bulgaria)
- People in Need (Czech Republic)
- France Terre d'Asile (France)
- Berlin Institute for Empirical Research on Integration and Migration, Humboldt University (Germany)
- Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants (Hungary)
- Fondazione ISMU – Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity (Italy)
- Providus (Latvia)
- Diversity Development Group (Lithuania)
- Maastricht University (Netherlands)
- Institute of Public Affairs (Poland)
- Centro de Estudos Sociais, University of Coimbra (Portugal)
- The Foundation for an Open Society (Romania)
- Peace Institute (Slovenia)
- CIDOB – Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (Spain)
- Malmö University (Sweden)

NIEM is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union.

NIEM team at the Migration Policy Group

Judit Tánczos, Legal Policy Analyst jtanczos@migpolgroup.com
Alexander Wolffhardt, Policy Analyst awolffhardt@migpolgroup.com