

# Integration: A Process Involving All

Advocacy Paper  
on the Integration of  
Migrants and Refugees



**Caritas** EUROPA

# Integration: A Process Involving All

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## ■ Background

Caritas Europa was created in 1971 as one of the seven regions of Caritas Internationalis, a Catholic relief, development and social service organisation. It brings together 48 organisations, which are active in 44 European countries. The organisation focuses its activities on issues relating to poverty and social inequality.

Most of its member organisations are actively engaged in tackling issues of migration and asylum all across the European Union as well as in the larger Europe. Caritas Europa's work in this field is to offer realistic solutions to people who, for whatever reason, need assistance as a result of being resident in a country other than their country of origin or former residence. Specifically, Caritas Europa's programmes include projects for the reception of asylum seekers, provision of legal and social counselling services, facilitation of processes for the integration of refugees and immigrants as well as resettlement and voluntary return programmes.

Caritas Europa recognises that integration is one of the greatest challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe. In 2004 Caritas Europa published a position paper entitled "Integration : A Process Involving All", based on the results of a consultation carried out among Caritas Europa member organisations and their subsequent contributions. The specific recommendations contained herein are based on the knowledge and experience gathered from that position paper and follow-up consultations.

For the purpose of this document we endorse the following UN definition of migrants as any person who changes his or her country of usual residence. A person's country of usual residence is that in which the person lives, that is to say, the country in which the person has a place to live where he or s/he normally spends the daily period of rest. Temporary travel abroad for purposes or recreation, holiday, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage does not entail a change in the country of usual residence.<sup>(1)</sup>

This definition includes immigrants, refugees, persons under subsidiary forms of protection, asylum seekers, persons seeking other forms of protection, migrants in an irregular situation and repatriates.<sup>(2)</sup>

From a Caritas perspective, children of migrants who are born in the country of immigration ought not to be defined as migrants. However they might require specific measures for integration, related to their migration background and their day to day reality in society. Hence, this paper is partly also applicable to them.

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1) United Nations. Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration - Revision 1. Series M, No. 58, Rev. 1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14), para. 32.

2) Caritas Europa recognises that, due to the absence of protection in their countries of origin, refugees have an independent legal identity and are entitled to internationally endorsed rights. Whilst Caritas Europa believes that most of the principles contained in this paper apply to refugees as well as migrants, the organisation acknowledges the important and substantive differences between migration control and refugee protection.

## ■ Principles and assumptions

Societies are not homogeneous nor are they static. We live in a plural, diversified, multiethnic and multi-religious Europe where mobility and migration are the norm. Societies need to work towards accepting different lifestyles and displaying a willingness to share rights and responsibilities.

Integration is a challenge for all groups in society and a touchstone of the ability to live in and maintain a peaceful co-existence in a diversified, open society based on the principle of equal opportunities for everyone.

Caritas Europa defines the following principles as basic prerequisites for integration :

- **Respect for fundamental rights**  
Democratic structures and the rule of law, together with freedom of expression and other fundamental rights codified in international law and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights are to be respected by all human beings. Governments have the responsibility to guarantee that every person can enjoy these human rights.
- **Equality**  
Equality requires that all members of the society, especially those at risk of exclusion, be accorded equal treatment. Migrants should therefore be treated in the same way as any other members of the society. Providing equal opportunities requires special measures such as accessibility to rights and services, information, orientation and training.
- **Participation**  
Participation is the lynchpin of integration – the two are inseparable. There can be no integration without participation and there can be no participation without an integration process taking place. Governments, opinion leaders and civil society in general have to develop a strategy that facilitates participation and makes the economic, social, cultural and physical environment accessible and welcoming to migrants.

**Integration is a long-term multidimensional and dynamic process. It aims at ensuring equal opportunities for the participation of all members of society irrespective of cultural or religious background, age, gender or nationality. Integration takes place throughout the social structure of society and implies mutuality as well as shared rights and responsibility.**

## ■ Objectives of an integration strategy

Measures that have their principal focus on integration should aim at equal social, economic and political rights for all members of society. This includes equal opportunities for access to the educational, health and social welfare systems as well as access to shaping political opinions and ensuring possibilities for political participation.

To achieve these objectives, structural measures and transcultural collective networks are necessary as well as an exchange and inclusion of diverse cultural practices insofar as they are compatible with human dignity and fundamental human rights.

## ■ Caritas priority topics

From the broad debate on integration, the scope of the brief covered by Caritas Europa comprises the following topics :

- Citizenship; political and cultural rights
- Mainstreaming the integration of migrants
- Transcultural competence
- Inter-religious dialogue
- Empowering migrants through projects
- Integration of migrants in special circumstances
- Integration of refugees with special needs
- Reintegration
- Integration of returning nationals
- Indicators of integration

A series of specific recommendations is made in respect of each of the above areas that it is hoped will encourage national governments and European bodies to develop a coherent integration policy framework.



## ■ Citizenship; political and cultural rights

Integration is dependent on the provision of political, social and cultural rights for all members of society. It is a process of many components, including subjective perceptions which are not measurable. It is, however, important that the legal and structural prerequisites are in place so that every individual has the opportunity to participate as an equal member of society.

The reality is that migrants of different status enjoy rights which differ from each other as well as from other members of society. This differentiated conferral of rights often results in the exclusion of those who cannot fully participate : e.g. unclear status for a long period of time, exclusion from the labour market, exclusion from participation in decision making. Society also loses important human resources and capacities for its own development. In the European Union, many refugees and asylum-seekers have skills which go to waste, in some cases because they are not given access to the labour market<sup>(3)</sup> and in others because their qualifications are not recognised by the authorities of their host countries. Facilitating refugees' access to employment in line with their qualifications would fulfil the call for "better use of existing skill resources in the EU"<sup>(4)</sup>.

### » Recommendations to governments :

- After no more than five years of legal stay a migrant should be entitled to apply for nationality. The conditions for naturalisation should be reasonably achievable.
- A migrant who seeks naturalisation should be entitled to retain the nationality of his/her country of origin (dual or multiple nationality).
- Children born in a country to parents who have resided there legally for a number of years should always be deemed citizens of that country by birth.
- The introduction of the European or civic citizenship should be supported.
- After a period of no longer than five years of legal residence, migrants should be entitled to permanent residence (this includes persons who are residing on the basis of temporary or subsidiary protection) and should enjoy the same rights as citizens.
- The definition of family should be extended beyond the core family, particularly regarding the needs of other dependent family members.
- Spouses, children and other dependent family members must have individual residence permits so that they are protected in case of divorce, death or domestic violence.
- The regulations for family reunification should be designed in such a way that the family unit is not endangered by unreasonable extended waiting and separation periods.
- Integration tests for children as a condition for the right of family reunification should be abolished.
- It is the duty of governments to protect and preserve the unity of the family and the rights of children to be with their parents even in cases of financial inadequacies.
- Voting rights in local, regional and European elections, with later possible extension to national level, should be given to all legally residing migrants to further their political participation.
- Political parties should be encouraged to include members of ethnic minorities, including migrants, among their candidates.
- The state must ensure that every person has the right to practice his/her religion, insofar as it is consistent with the rule of law and respect of fundamental rights.

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3) Under recently agreed EC Directives, little encouragement is given to States to utilise the potential of asylum-seekers and persons granted protection in their territory. The Directive on minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers (2003/9/EC of 27.1.2003) requires Member States to fix a minimum period during which asylum-seekers may not work, and permits States to give priority to EU, EEA and other third-country nationals in employment (article 11). The Directive on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals and stateless persons as refugees and persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted (2004/83/EC of 21.4.2004) leaves to States' discretion the question of whether and to what extent to grant beneficiaries of subsidiary protection access to the labour market, taking into account the local situation (article 26(3)). Family members are also given no assurance of rights to work or to residence permits (article 23(2)).

4) COM (2005) 390, Annex 6, p. 34.

## ■ Mainstreaming the integration of migrants

Mainstreaming takes place when specific groups in society (such as immigrants) are provided for within broad programmes or policies which address the needs of such specific groups as part of an integrated approach to addressing the needs of society as a whole.

In order to effectively tackle social exclusion, governments must work in partnership with all key stakeholders to develop appropriate policies and deliver effective services. They must recognise that a number of initiatives fail because they are too narrowly focused on the symptoms of disadvantage. A more effective approach lies in making widespread improvements to general public services and to the experience and expectations that all groups within society have of these – in particular health, education and housing services. Insofar as any groups suffer from exclusion because they have settled in areas of poor economic opportunity, a major thrust of policy must be to promote local economic development and encourage higher levels of mobility as well as a more accessible housing market.

An important and complementary consideration is that work in favour of the integration of any group must not be at the expense of other members of society, especially other groups of disadvantaged persons.

### ►► Recommendations to governments :

- To promote a holistic approach to social inclusion which allows each individual in a society to develop his/her social, political and economic potential.
- To monitor and where appropriate change legislation with regard to elements leading to exclusion.
- To facilitate the participation of all groups within society in employment and access to all rights, resources, goods and services.
- To ensure access to the health system, housing and social benefits as fundamental rights. In all situations information and necessary support must be available to avoid undue hardship.
- To sensitise officials, and in particular the police, to issues such as racism which adversely affect society.
- To include the following in adult education: language tuition, literacy courses, courses geared towards vocational training/career development, socio-cultural orientation.
- To provide sufficient and appropriate resources as well as learning materials designed to facilitate the education of children with particular needs, including children living in an irregular situation.
- To ensure the availability of all necessary documents in a variety of appropriate languages.
- To provide migrants in an irregular situation with opportunities for a decent standard of living. Persons having applied to stay should not be kept in an administrative limbo. Permits should be issued, at least temporarily, opening access to labour market and health care<sup>(5)</sup>.

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5) Caritas Europa has also developed a position paper on the situation of undocumented migrants.

## ■ Transcultural competence

With increasing contact between different countries and their people, it is essential to acquire greater sensitivity to cultures other than one's own. Living takes place in a more and more complex and dynamic environment entailing new existential challenges. In this environment transcultural dialogue between different groups and subgroups in society gains more importance than ever before. Transcultural competence is a key for mutual respect and understanding<sup>6)</sup>.

Governments should guarantee a legal framework that affirms the observance of shared civil rights and responsibilities and provides laws against racism and xenophobia. To achieve this, governments should act to promote international policies that uphold human rights and the right to development.

Governments should consider the development of transcultural competence as an investment for an effective social order and therefore ensure that it forms an integral part of the political agenda.

### ► Recommendations to governments :

- To identify transcultural competence as a political project.
- To promote measures and structures, and encourage (politically and financially) initiatives that contribute to the development of transcultural competence in societies (for example exchange programmes between people of different cultural background over extended periods of time).
- To promote transcultural competence as a standard in education and in different areas of social life (politics, labour market, public service, media, etc.).

As a particular aspect of this latter recommendation, transcultural competence should form part of the job profile of government officials. This refers particularly to educators and school personnel, local authorities, hospital staff, social workers and others.



6) The concept of interculturality seeks ways in which such cultures could nevertheless get on with, understand and recognise one another. But the deficiency in this concept originates in that it drags along with it unchanged the premises of the traditional concept of culture. This concept considers cultures like different islands or spheres and underlines the separatist and homogeneous character of cultures. Such concept can not resolve the complex problems of a modern society. Cultural conditions today are largely characterised by mixes and mutual permeations. The concept of transculturality is based on the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures. In a modern society exist a number of ways of life, different social structures and cultures, which interpenetrate and interconnected with each other (after Welsch, Wolfgang: Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today, London 1999).

## ■ Inter-religious dialogue

Contact between people of different religious traditions has increased and so, to a greater degree than ever, religious plurality is a fact of life in Europe as in many other parts of the globe. In this context certain basic values and norms exist, irrespective of whether the religion itself is practised actively or not. Precisely at a time when people's religious feelings are being misused for political gain and a climate of mutual mistrust, hatred and violence is being fermented, inter-religious dialogue acquires a specific significance. A genuine recognition of faith identity is essential.

It is therefore essential that governments should seek to encourage knowledge of and respect for different faith traditions.

### ► **Recommendations to governments :**

- Government officials at every level should be sensitive to religious diversity.
- The knowledge about the diversity of religions should be part of all curricula in primary and secondary education. Additionally, this knowledge should be emphasised and further strengthened in any professional formation provided by authorities to their staff. In a practical sense, this should result in allowing everyone to live their faith with integrity in terms of prayer, nutrition and dress.
- Governments should provide for legislation banning all forms of religious discrimination.



## ■ Empowering migrants through projects

The United Nations Organisation acknowledges the link between migration and development and the need for co-responsibility between countries in strengthening the capacity of migrants.

"Migrants make a valuable economic, political, social and cultural contribution to the societies they have left behind. The remittances that migrants send home play an important part in alleviating poverty in countries of origin, and can also support the development process if the governments of those countries provide a conducive environment for economic growth"<sup>(7)</sup>.

Empowering migrants through projects can not only have a tangible positive impact on the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of these projects but can also demonstrably assist in promoting "brain gain" and minimising the inevitable impact of "brain drain".

Caritas Europa is committed to working to integrate migrants and to enable their participation in society at all levels and in every aspect of national life. An inclusive approach in designing and planning projects for migrants demonstrates a genuine interest on the part of governments in building societies based on mutual respect.

With the participation of migrants, there is the potential for a new common awareness and the consequent task of participating, with responsibility and dignity, in a common destiny and discovering together the laws needed to sustain a peaceful co-existence. All members of society should exercise their rights and responsibilities, always seeking opportunities for mutual fulfilment.

### ► Recommendations to governments :

- Governments should encourage statutory and voluntary organisations to involve migrants and refugees in planning, development, evaluation and implementation of their work.
- Governments should establish a fund for pilot projects of migrant associations.
- EU programmes should facilitate the application of migrant and refugee organisations.
- Funds should be paid on time and with due regard to the fragility and necessity of migrant and refugee organisations.



7) Report of the Global Commission on International migration, "Migration in an interconnected World : new directions for action", 2005, p. 23.

## ■ Integration of migrants in special circumstances

Integration policies should take into account the specific needs of some groups of migrants.

### ▶ Recommendations to governments :

- Minors should be offered support to ensure equal opportunities in education and participation as well as preparing for successful integration in the labour market. They might particularly be in need of accompaniment and support in finding their identity between the cultural diversities/background of their own family and the receiving society.
- In working with minors and their parents, governments need to make available cultural mediators who can play a significant role in the integration process.
- Integration programmes should include a specific focus on women, especially with regard to education and empowerment. There is need for training programmes geared at better access to education and the labour market for migrant women.
- Care services for the elderly should take into account the specific needs of elderly migrants, in social, cultural and religious terms. As elderly migrants may wish to retain their traditions, they should be provided the opportunity to do so.
- Traumatized migrants should be provided with specialised assistance. Upon request, specialised personnel such as psychologists and doctors should be available to migrants. The specialised personnel should have easy access to cultural mediators and should be offered training in transcultural competences.
- Basic rights must be ensured for migrants in an irregular situation, such as urgent medical care, education for minors and counselling.



## ■ Integration of refugees with special needs

There are several international documents dealing with the special situation of refugees and asylum-seekers, the most important of which is the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1968 Protocol. The Convention clearly spells out who is a refugee<sup>(8)</sup> and the kind of legal protection and other assistance he or she should receive from States who are parties to the document.

The refugee integration process begins with the phase of reception and is influenced by the quality and length of the asylum or resettlement procedure. The quality of reception has enormous impact on the eventual integration of those granted refugee status. Refugees often encounter a range of social, economic and legal disadvantages, particularly in the reception phase, as a result of increasingly hostile national policies and practices of service providers in European countries. Failure by governments to address these potential barriers can result in the marginalisation of refugees, which in turn can have a negative impact on the whole society.

Refugee integration strategies should be compatible with social protection arrangements and should enable refugees to use their skills and knowledge, engage in meaningful employment and achieve self-sufficiency either personally or as a member of their family or ethnic group. Such strategies should incorporate an age perspective (meeting particular needs of refugee children, young people and older refugees) and a gender perspective (meeting the particular needs of refugee women or men).

While remembering that "refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances", and taking into account the pre-migration history of each person, it must be appreciated that refugees may have special needs due to the fact that they often face a number of barriers to integration resulting from their experiences of flight and involuntary exile :

- Sudden isolation from family, country, culture that they could not prepare for.
- No influence on the choice of country of asylum and resulting from it lack of supporting social network he/she can refer to on arrival.
- Physical and mental health issues relating to past trauma and the trauma of exile, torture and other forms of violence.

Refugees often encounter various problems in full enjoyment of health care rights: inflexible administrative procedures, financial requirements, no understanding of national health systems, lack of awareness of refugee/gender specific needs by medical professionals, language and cultural difficulties. Integration strategies in the area of health care should aim to overcome these barriers – establish interpreting and mediation services, promote health education and prevention programmes, provide gender specific health services when requested/recommended (female medical professionals for female refugees, family planning counselling), meet particular needs of refugees who have experienced torture or other trauma (special assistance, treatment and rehabilitation programmes), ensure age and gender-sensitivity. Access to healthcare should not be limited to emergency healthcare only. Physical and mental health services, for both urgent and chronic needs, should be made available also to asylum-seekers upon arrival in a country of asylum.

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8) Article 1 of the Convention defines a refugee as "A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution".

## ► **Recommendations to governments :**

- To ensure lifting barriers in accessing vocational training – lack of information, costs, gender specificity, needs of special vulnerable groups.
- In cases where refugees cannot provide documented proof of their past education in their country of origin, to ensure flexible alternative ways for refugees to gain access and be accepted to further education for which they are qualified on the merit of their past education.
- To sensitise school staff to the effect of refugee experiences on children's learning processes.
- To develop appropriate methodologies to assess gaps in refugee children's educational progress and recognise competency in mother tongue languages.
- To promote personal development of refugees while improving their opportunities for contributing to the society through participation in the labour market.
- To sensitise employers to the existence of valuable skills and knowledge among refugees and to grant incentives for employers to engage refugees.
- To involve public and private sector employers in on-the-job training.
- To promote self-employment as an important element of the labour market and a source of self-sufficiency for many refugees.
- To promote access to public employment (municipalities, national administrations, etc.).
- To disseminate positive images of refugees and best practices in employment through intercultural training and public awareness campaigns.
- To introduce legislation to fight discrimination in the labour market and the workplace, and promote equality of opportunity.
- To increase refugee women's participation in employment programmes, bearing in mind cultural and religious restrictions.
- To consider the special situation of those refugees nearing or past retirement age.
- To encourage the media to draw up some principles of best practice in this area.

Caritas Europa also urges politicians and all involved in public discourse to make a resolute commitment to give leadership in and to promote the use of accurate and sensitive terminology in the debate on asylum. We all have a responsibility to increase public awareness on the issue, emphasising that refugees are fleeing human rights abuses and are entitled to protection.

Bearing in mind that most of these recommendations are also valid for other migrants, the organisation promotes specific attention to their application regarding refugees.

## ■ Reintegration

Reintegration is a term typically applied to the medium or long-term socio-economic and psychological process of refugees, internally displaced people and migrants returning to their countries of origin and becoming functioning, contributing members of the society. It has cultural, social and economic dimensions.

When migrants return to their countries of origin, either voluntarily or by force, they often face a variety of problems, despite the fact that they are citizens of their countries with defined rights. Many of these problems are around issues of property rights, discrimination and participation in economic and social and cultural life.

Reintegration is a process requiring the formulation of strategies that should :

- Identify and secure the needs of all returning migrants, regardless of age, gender, marital status or socio-economic background. Special consideration should be given to those with particular needs, e.g. minors, the disabled and minorities. Human rights protection must be accorded in particular to refugees who are returning to a country from which they once fled.
- Ensure the establishment of a trans-national network of humanitarian and development agencies including inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as donors.
- Include provisions ensuring that returning migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons are insofar as possible, treated with no less concern for their safety and dignity than are members of the local community.
- Ensure that reintegration and rehabilitation assistance both precedes and follows returnee movements and that it is appropriate to the needs of the individual.
- Consider and address the psychological aspects of reintegration, both with regard to personal/family breakdown in the country of residence and the level of challenge confronted in the country of origin.
- Allow returnees and local communities to be fully informed of repatriation, rehabilitation, reintegration, and development programmes, and be actively involved in their preparation and implementation if the local situation allows for it.
- Include reconciliation work.
- Target both the country of origin and return communities by including infrastructure rehabilitation and self-reliance components in the reintegration assistance.

### » Recommendations to governments :

- To promote businesses, to invest in countries of return, and to develop conditions for economic security.
- To promote vocational training and adult education of migrants as the preparation for the return of qualified manpower to countries of return.
- To engage in joint planning with NGOs and migrant organisations in order to enhance cooperation between the country of departure and the country of return.

## ■ Integration of returning nationals

Some European countries, usually after historical political changes such as the end of World War II or the breaking up of the former Soviet Union, face vast movements of persons returning to their country of nationality, often after many years or even a lifetime abroad.

The reasons for repatriating are as diverse as the root causes of migration, be it controversial economic reforms, inadequate democratic institutions, violation of human rights, rising xenophobia and intolerant nationalism, the contrast between the quality of life in the country of residence and that in the country of nationality.

Repatriates have specific needs. Many of them have never lived in the country to which they "return". Often they have insufficient knowledge of the country of their nationality. Some also lack sufficient knowledge of the language, and many of them live in inter-ethnic families. Often, these migrants are unwelcome and regarded as foreigners on their return.

### ► Recommendations to governments :

- To establish a legal basis addressing repatriation, including provisions for family reunification and also for inter-ethnic families.
- To develop multi-faceted repatriation programmes, including language tuition.
- To offer integration programmes (e.g. counselling, orientation in the new country) to the repatriates.
- To learn from international experience such as that acquired by governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations in Germany.



## ■ Indicators of integration

A multiplicity of factors have an influence on the integration process of migrants: socio-economic situation, residence status and length of stay; access to resources and structures which are an intrinsic part of society; institutional and political structures; the number of migrants; the distance between country of origin and country of destination; family networks; inter-ethnic relations; causes and course of migration; subjective attitudes and expectations etc.

All these aspects need to be taken into consideration when defining indicators. Research related to indicators of integration should include comparison between relevant reference groups of the receiving society .

Legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural frameworks are relevant for the elaboration of indicators of integration :

- **Legal integration** : This concerns the elimination of legal barriers to integration and the establishment of equal rights for all members of society. This can be achieved by e.g. easier access to citizenship for migrants with the possibility of acquiring or maintaining double/multiple citizenship or by granting rights of status to migrants equal to those granted to nationals.
- **Socio-economic integration** : Includes e.g. equal access to the labour market, access to training and to the housing market, as well as the potential for mobility in these fields. We highlight in particular the recognition of foreign qualifications and access to job specific permanent education.
- **Socio-cultural integration** : Knowledge of language(s) is a key and a powerful vehicle for integration. If a migrant understands and speaks the language(s) of the country of residence, the possibility of becoming an integral part of society and playing an active role in it are greatly increased. Language tuition should be an essential part of any integration policy and should be accessible, affordable and available as soon as possible after a migrant's arrival.

Fair and equitable access to jobs; educational, social and health systems is the key to equal opportunities, participation and co-responsibility within society.

Important steps in this field are the participation of migrants in associations, the furtherance of co-determination and rights of choice of layout in the living and recreational sectors, and also the inclusion of immigrants in the communal, child and youth work of the community. In this process, special attention must be given to the key role played by women and mothers, and by culturally mixed youth groups.

It is crucial to take into account that individual achievements in integration can only be measured, if in the receiving society adequate opportunities for integration are available and structural hindrances to integration are taken into account and effectively tackled.

Caritas Europa hopes that these considerations and recommendations will be perceived as a constructive contribution to the discussions on integration of migrants and refugees and declares its readiness to collaborate with governments in their efforts towards improving integration policies.



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