



European Competence Centre for Social Innovation
ESF+ Community of Practice on Migrant Integration

Work Programme 2026

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Prepared by: Erika Borg in collaboration with the ESF+ Community of Practice on Migrant Integration team.

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Background

The ESF+ Community of Practice on Migrant Integration to date

The ESF+ Community of Practice on Migrant Integration (CoP MI) was launched in 2023. The 2026 Work Programme is the third one of the CoP MI. The objectives of the previous Work Programmes were clearly defined and closely aligned with the European priorities at the time.

These are:

2023-2024 Work Programme objectives:	2025 Work Programme objectives:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Programming and implementation of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and/or other related EU funding for third-country nationals, including people of migrant origin;2. Support for people fleeing Ukraine, notably in the context of the Temporary Protection Directive, mainly through CARE and FAST-CARE regulations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Addressing current and future realities of migration through the design of effective ESF+ programming and calls.2. Exploration of practices on how to involve the local level, employers, social partners and migrants in ESF+ funding.

Composition of members

The CoP MI has invested significantly in building and consolidating its membership through targeted outreach initiatives and individual networking with members, with the aim of fostering active and sustained engagement.

The composition of the CoP MI brings together representatives from 21 Member States, encompassing organisations with varying levels of experience in the implementation of ESF+ calls. This diversity provides the CoP MI with a rich and well-balanced forum of expertise.

At the end of 2025, the CoP had 151 members stemming from the following organisations:

23 Non-governmental organisations	13 Intermediate bodies
18 European Commission	13 Implementing organisations
48 Managing authorities (national/regional)	7 Non-profit organisations
28 Other ESF stakeholders	6 Line ministries

Working Group

Launched in late 2025, the **CoP MI Working Group** will facilitate the exchange of best practices and shared experiences. By identifying best practices and systemic challenges, the group will develop practical interventions to improve policy design and implementation. For 2026, the priority topic for the Working Group is **'Labour Market Integration and Retention of Migrants'**, with a focus on vocational training, education and skills recognition. Through 2026, the Working Group will hold a series of online meetings to consolidate its findings into actionable recommendations to guide CoP MI members towards proven ESF+ practices.

Aligning with EU contexts and priorities

The work of the CoP MI will remain aligned with the evolving societal context within the European Union and its priorities. This includes alignment with EU funding instruments, notably the current ESF+ and the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), as well as with relevant EU policy frameworks and strategies. These include the 2021–2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, the European Pillar of Social Rights and current and forthcoming initiatives such as the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The objectives of this Work Programme are closely aligned with the three overarching principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights: (i) equal opportunities and access to the labour market; (ii) fair working conditions; and (iii) social protection and inclusion. The ESF+ supports the achievement of the ambitious targets set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights¹.

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0558>, p. 5.

Meanwhile, the European Union is facing significant demographic change, characterised by an ageing population and a shrinking workforce. These trends pose growing challenges to economic sustainability, growth, and competitiveness, and highlight the need to increase labour market participation while supporting families in raising current and future generations. In this context, the ESF+ plays a central role by supporting the labour market integration of unemployed or inactive persons, such as women, young people, persons with disabilities, Roma communities and third-country nationals, while also assisting employers in identifying and retaining suitable employees. This is achieved through skills-matching measures, as well as upskilling and reskilling initiatives, which are aimed at building a workforce equipped to meet labour market needs.

These are closely aligned with the Union of Skills, which 'aims to support the development of quality, inclusive and adaptable education, training and skills systems to increase the Union's competitiveness, preparedness, security and democracy.'² This includes the integration of third-country nationals, as emphasised in the European Council Conclusions of 20 March 2025: 'further efforts should be made to enhance the acquisition, recognition and retention of skills across the EU, from the building of basic skills to engaging in life-long learning, reskilling and upskilling, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan.'³ These factors are often presented as challenges to the labour market integration of third-country nationals. A Skills Portability Initiative is currently under development and is expected to contribute to this objective in Q3 2026.

Finally, alongside quality employment and skills development, social inclusion will be a central priority of the National and Regional Partnership plans for the next programming period, from 2028 to 2034. While these priorities are framed as relevant to all members of society, they also explicitly address the specific socio-economic integration needs of third-country nationals. Promoting the inclusion of people furthest from the labour market is essential to tackling inequalities and discrimination, particularly among the most disadvantaged groups, and to fostering equal socio-economic integration across society. It also serves as a preventive measure against poverty and social exclusion, an increasingly pressing challenge within the European Union, which will be addressed in a comprehensive manner through the EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy, expected in Q2 2026.

Key Lessons Learned From 2025

Migrant integration remains a complex policy area, with diverse approaches across EU Member States reflecting different national contexts. As a result, it is rare for events to lead to a single, transferable solution applicable to all settings. However, this **diversity represents a significant added value**, as it enables a rich exchange of experiences, effective practices and expertise. These practices can be selectively adapted to strengthen existing national or local measures. Consequently, **topics are best addressed through a learning-oriented approach that prioritises the exchange of practices and expertise over the pursuit of one-size-fits-all solutions.**

Allocating sufficient time and **space for open discussion** during events is essential, as participants consistently identify this as one of their primary needs. Prioritising interactive exchanges enhances engagement, peer learning and the overall value of events.

As can be seen, particularly from on-site events, **engaging persons with lived experience** as speakers and presenters enables their expertise and perspectives to inform thematic discussions in a meaningful and practical way.

Main Priorities For 2026

The 2026 Work Programme identified members' areas of interest through a Co-Development Survey, complemented by discussions held during the first Working Group meeting. The feedback highlighted a continued need to focus on specific integration-related measures, **particularly labour market integration, migrant's well-being and social inclusion**, which will be achieved through three objectives:

1. Promoting labour market integration and retention of migrants.
2. Promoting the well-being and social inclusion of migrants through holistic support and civic participation.
3. Providing effective integrated support systems for migrants.

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0558>, p. 7.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0558>, p. 1.

The CoP MI will continue to apply the ‘building blocks’ methodology, with events designed and delivered in a participant-led manner. The objectives will be pursued through specific priority topics in the form of structured discussions, expert presentations, the exchange of effective practices at CoP MI events and the development of documented outputs. The events and outputs will prioritise knowledge-building, peer learning and networking. This will be achieved through a combination of on-site and online events, Working Group meetings and the development of output documents. In order to promote wider discussions and engagement, complementary topics may be addressed together.

Considering that migrant integration is addressed in all ESF+ priorities, namely social inclusion, education and skills, and employment, and that other EU funding instruments specifically support migrant integration, the CoP MI will promote the exchange of effective practices among Member States that implement migrant integration-related initiatives through ESF+ and synergic use of funds, thereby contributing to the implementation of initiatives under 27 National and Regional Partnership Plans as part of the upcoming Multi-Financial Framework 2028-2034⁴.

Work Programme Objectives and Activities

Taking into account the identified priorities, the CoP MI methodologies and, above all, member’s feedback, the **objectives** and respective **priority topics** of the Work Programme 2026 are as follows:

Objective 1: Promoting labour market integration and retention of migrants recognises the need to challenge narratives which have resulted in fragmented and short-term integration initiatives. Discussions will centre on fair recruitment measures, such as addressing labour exploitation, and on delivery of orientation training and retention measures, such as skills matching, skills recognition and up-skilling.

The ESF+ Specific Objectives⁵ that will be addressed under this objective are (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) (g), (h) and (i).

Priority topics:

1. Enhancing labour market integration through education, orientation training and skill recognition and acquisition.
2. Advancing socio-economic integration of third-country nationals through fair recruitment, skill-matching and development and retention measures.

Activities and deliverables under this objective will include discussions during Working Group meetings, the CoP MI Study Visit, the closing online event of the CoP MI and the guidance document.

Objective 2: Promoting the well-being and social inclusion of migrants through holistic support and civic participation responds to the need for a healthy, empowered and inclusive society as a foundation for sustainable growth and social cohesion. Key focus areas will include culturally sensitive, community-based and peer-support services, the sharing of good practices in promoting migrant participation in the local community and the empowerment measures for most disadvantaged groups.

The ESF+ Specific Objectives that will be addressed under this objective are (h), (i), (j), (k), (l) and (m).

Priority topics:

1. Empowering migrant and migrant-background community members.
2. Strengthening community participation and migrant leadership.

Activities and deliverables under this objective will include the first online event, a joint on-site event and a background document.

⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en.

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057>.

Objective 3: Providing effective integrated support systems for migrants reflects the complexity of migrant integration and the need for coordinated multi-dimensional responses. Adopting a cross-cutting perspective, it builds on the other two objectives while addressing the systematic and governance-related aspects of integration policy and service delivery.

The ESF+ Specific Objectives that will be addressed under this objective will depend on the specific topics and best practices shared.

Priority topics:

1. Delivering effective integration services such as employment, education, health and social services.
2. Strengthening the partnership principle and multi-level governance through enhanced collaboration between the government, the private sector and civil society, including migrant-led organisations and migrants.

Activities and deliverables under this objective will include the first online event, the closing online event of the CoP MI, the background note and the guidance document.

Objectives	Priority Topics (PT)
01 Promoting labour market integration and retention of migrants	01 PT 01 Enhancing labour market integration through education, orientation training and skill recognition and acquisition.
	01 PT 02 Advancing socio-economic integration of third-country nationals through fair recruitment, skill-matching and development and retention measures.
02 Promoting the well-being and social inclusion of migrants through holistic support and civic participation	02 PT 01 Empowering migrant and migrant-background community members
	02 PT 02 Strengthening community participation and migrant leadership
03 Providing effective integrated support systems for migrants	03 PT 01 Delivering effective integration services such as employment, education, health and social services
	03 PT 02 Strengthening the partnership principle and multi-level governance through enhanced collaboration between the government, the private sector and civil society, including migrant-led organisations and migrants.

Event Calendar

Date	Title	Format	Priority Topics	Aim of the event
April	From Service Provision to Empowerment: ESF+ Supported Pathways to Migrant Leadership	Online event 1	<p>03 PT 01 Delivering effective integration services such as employment, education, health and social services.</p> <p>03 PT 02 Strengthening the partnership principle and multi-level governance through enhanced collaboration between the government, the private sector and civil society, including migrant-led organisations and migrants.</p> <p>02 PT 02 Strengthening community participation and migrant leadership.</p>	The event aims to support members in the development of long-term integration strategies that ensure an effective initial service provision, while progressively enabling migrant leadership and active participation within communities, in line with ESF+ objectives.
June	Creating Opportunities for the Future: Labour Market Orientation and Support for Migrants	On-site event 1: CoP MI study visit	01 PT 02 Advancing socio-economic integration of third-country nationals through fair recruitment, skill-matching and development and retention measures.	The event will provide participants with an in-depth understanding of ESF+-supported approaches to promoting sustainable, equitable and fair labour market integration.
October	SIF 2026 (TBC)	On-site event		TBC
October	Preventing the Social Exclusion of disadvantaged groups through Innovative ESF-Funded Activities	On-site event 3: Joint CoP on-site event	02 PT 01 Empowering migrant and migrant-background community members.	The event aims to deepen participants' understanding of ESF+-supported approaches to preventing social exclusion of disadvantaged groups through a field visit to Greece. This will showcase promising practices and facilitate peer exchange across Communities of Practice.
November	Showcasing ESF+ Interventions to Address Labour Market Integration and Social Integration of Migrants	Online event 2	<p>01 PT 01 Enhancing labour market integration through education, orientation training and skill recognition and acquisition.</p> <p>03 PT 01 Delivering effective integration services such as employment, education, health and social services.</p>	The event will build on discussions of the 2026 Working Group to highlight effective practices supported by the ESF+ that promote sustainable labour market integration.

Planned Outputs

Date	Format	Topics
April	Background note	ESF+ interventions to match service provision to the needs of migrants and host communities at different stages of integration
November/December	Guidance document	Mapping ESF+ interventions for labour market and social integration of migrants.

Annex I

Achievements and Outputs of the COP MI in 2025

Type of event / output	Date	Topic
Online event	4 March 2025	1st Plenary Session 2025: Co-Developing the Community of Practice on Migrant Integration Journey: Past to Future
Online joint event of CoPs on Employment, Education and Skills; Material Support; and Migrant Integration	20 March	The First Joint Online Event of the Three Communities of Practice Exploring synergies between material support and skills training and related services in reducing poverty and the social exclusion of migrants and other persons in vulnerable situations.
Study visit, Salerno, Italy	21-22 May 2025	Labour market paths: synergic use of ESF+ and AMIF for tackling labour exploitation and vulnerable migrants' integration
Social Innovation Forum 2025	1-2 October 2025	Workshop: Increasing accessibility and adaptability of services: Rethinking resilience for migrant integration in changing societies through a multi-level approach
Study Visit, Helsinki, Finland Joint CoPs Event with Material Support, Employment, Education and Skills and Migrant Integration	12-13 November 2025	Uniting Efforts: From Material Support to Skills Development for a Strong Social Europe
Output	Survey	Co-Developing the CoP on Migrant Integration 2026 Work Programme
Online event	11 December 2025	Drafting ESF+ Calls for proposals for Migrant Integration: Strategies, Insights, and Collaboration

Note: A summary report is drawn up following each event. For more detailed information, please refer to the [CoP MI Teams files section](#) and [ESF+ SI+ initiative website](#).

