



## Policy Brief

# Fostering Migrant Integration Before Departure

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There is an increasing recognition that some groundwork for future integration in the country of destination can be laid in the countries of origin before the departure of migrants. Various actors can provide support to migrants by providing information about life and work in the new country, train in new languages and vocational skills, initiate the recognition of qualifications and facilitate job-matching with employers in the country of destination. Such support can be offered to both potential migrants and those who have completed immigration paperwork, including labour and family migrants, students and refugees awaiting resettlement. Good pre-departure services may thus support legal and safe migration, help protect migrants' rights and their socio-economic inclusion in receiving communities, as well as promote skill development and transferability and improve international job-matching.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) within an EU-funded project *HEADSTART: Fostering Integration Before Departure* undertook a *Review of Global Approaches and Practices in Pre-departure Integration Support Measures* that was completed in early 2015. IOM has been providing pre-departure services to migrants and refugees since the 1950s. The increasing complexity of global migration movements implied the need to take stock and assess the global experiences of a broad range of actors in this field, and suggest recommendations for delivery of relevant, effective and sustainable pre-departure integration services to various categories of migrants. The Review also considered pathways to improve coordination between pre-departure and post-arrival immigrant integration support. The Review analysed 106 pre-departure practices in four main thematic categories:

1. **Information and orientation** (basic information about the country and its institutions, daily life, social values and culture, labour market information, legal migration process and protection of rights, taxation and social security, access to education, access to healthcare);
2. **Skill development** (language training, life skills, professional skills related to employment);
3. **Job-matching** (active job search, counselling and recruitment assistance, entrepreneurship guidance)
4. **Recognition of skills and competences** (language, education, professional qualifications and skills).

This Policy Brief outlines key findings and recommendations developed based on this evidence.

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## Policy Framework and the Provision of Pre-departure Integration Support

Migration governance frameworks have a significant impact on the development and implementation of pre-departure measures, as well as on their sustainability and overall effectiveness. Such measures can only be effective if there are legal avenues open for migrants to use, and migrants are able to enter an environment that is conducive to integration. They work best when established in a transparent legal, policy and institutional framework that defines aims and priorities, and contains a clear division of roles and responsibilities.

A broad range of legislation, policies and practices related to pre-departure migrant support exists in countries of origin and destination, some focusing on incentives and voluntary participation, others being more prescriptive. There is a broad recognition of the importance of pre-departure support for integration and the role of countries of origin in the EU policy documents, such as the EU Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration (2004) and the renewed Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (2011). At the same time, several EU Member States and Australia have introduced certain pre-departure conditions in their immigration laws, requiring screening of migrants' language competences and/or culture of the destination country, and their skill set. These requirements have triggered the introduction of new pre-departure support measures. For instance, Goethe Institute has revised its approach to teaching German since the country passed legislation in 2007 requiring spouses from non-EU countries intending family reunification in Germany to demonstrate basic German language proficiency to qualify for an entry visa.

A number of countries of origin (Nepal, Philippines, Vietnam) impose mandatory pre-departure requirements, primarily aimed at upholding the welfare of their nationals and protecting the rights of their workers abroad.

Countries of origin and destination should consider cooperating closely in the design and implementation of pre-departure support measures. Their goals with respect to migration governance may diverge, but cooperation is critical to ensure overall protection of migrants' rights, to optimize the benefits of organized migration and to combat brain drain and brain waste. In support of its Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), the EU commits important resources to building migration capacity of third countries. Among the various initiatives supported within the Mobility Partnerships are several pre-departure measures, such as the creation of Migration and Mobility Resource Centres in the partner countries.

Bilateral agreements and less formal memoranda of understanding can serve as umbrella for the provision of pre-departure services. South Korea relies on MoUs to implement its Employment Permit System. At the same time, organized schemes under bilateral agreements may also suffer from excessive bureaucracy and lack of institutional capacity, and overall politicizing of migration as issue of bilateral diplomacy, which may result in job-matching predominantly happening outside of organized schemes.

The bulk of identified practices are implemented by state-related agencies or international organizations, with non-profit entities acting mainly as partners or referral organizations. Trade unions and educational institutes are also involved. Some initiatives by the private sector have been analysed, but given the relative difficulty of assessing information on the range and content of practices, additional research may be warranted. Involvement of multiple relevant actors from countries of origin and destinations could be better coordinated with more avenues for collaboration, including in the design of services.

## Pre-departure information and orientation

The majority of surveyed measures combined information provision and/or orientation with other categories of services (see page 1). The Review highlights two key assumptions for the provision of such assistance. First, [potential migrants need information long before their actual migration](#) to assist in their decision-making and planning. Second, migration typically involves a sequence of decisions, rather than one choice. Hence [services should be provided taking into account the need for a constant flow of information along the migration continuum](#) to help migrants make well-informed decisions.

Many migrants still prefer to resort to private networks and informal channels for information on migration, as suggested by surveys in Asia, South Caucasus, North Africa, New Zealand and Poland. But there is also evidence that migrants do turn to official sources, as in the Philippines, which highlights the importance of credible, legitimate and preferably free-of-charge sources of information.

Among other goals, such measures aim to ensure that migrants [know their rights and obligations, and have clear understanding of the expectations of the receiving society](#). Moreover, information is provided to enable migrants to [fully understand the implications of their respective legal status in the countries of destination, as well as the availability of effective redress mechanisms, should they experience violations of their rights](#).

Orientation measures [should acknowledge individual migrants in the context of family, community and society, and in their design be guided by cultural and behavioural norms of the clients, and their diverse learning styles](#).

Information dissemination is further enhanced by the availability of complementary online content, and individual or group support and counselling. Information on the adaptation process should be shared with entire family, and include coping mechanisms related to culture shock and impart an understanding of the inevitable changes in family dynamics.

Diplomatic representations, cultural institutes, development agencies or public employment services of the destination countries act as information hubs and/or orientation providers in the countries of origin. Although not always intentional, [post-arrival online resources in the countries of destination are often used by potential and travel-ready migrants in the countries of origin](#). Such institutions could hence adapt their services to specifically include pre-departure stage without a significant additional investment.

Cultural orientation services within [refugee resettlement programmes](#) provide useful insights and lessons learnt for programmes targeting various categories of migrants. Good practice examples include the [use of bi-cultural facilitators, information seminars with host communities and impact assessments through community consultations](#). At the same time, it is of utmost importance to [identify clear target groups for each service and adjust the content and delivery according to the specific needs and characteristics of the clients](#).

## Migrant Skill Development

In order to boost migrants' early labour market inclusion, pre-departure skill development services should seek to **combine professional, language and soft skills**.

Including soft skills (interpersonal communication, teamwork and others) in the curriculum helps migrants cope with the demands of their new life and work, and can serve to improve employability and productivity.

Regardless of the types of skills developed, migrants should be given an **opportunity to regularly apply and practice** what they have learnt after the completion of pre-departure

training and during their transition in the destination country to ensure retention of new competencies. **Long breaks between trainings and actual migration can be detrimental** in this regard.

Combining support for individual and group learning with e-based solutions, and **including employers in the design and implementation** of such measures can further improve their effectiveness. **Linking training curricula with those in the country of destination** improves skill retention and comparability, as in the examples of language training by Goethe Institute (Germany) and Learning Unlimited (UK).

## Job-matching

**Broad support to improve workplace readiness** should be included in pre-departure job matching measures. Such measures may include job interview and CV writing skills that are specific to the host country, an understanding of cultural norms in the workplace, the level of formality required and employers' expectations.

Consideration should be given to including **entrepreneurship** components in the content of pre-departure job matching measures. The potential of migrant entrepreneurship has so far been neglected at the pre-departure stage. Such assistance could include providing information about opportunities to access finance and support services in the destination country, developing business acumen, increasing language proficiency, and enhancing business management and marketing skills in general.

The **experience of private recruitment agencies** from countries of destination could be incorporated in the design of job-matching measures, as they often have first-hand access to employers.

Where pre-departure job matching measures use online databases, service providers could seek ways of making **greater use of existing tools in countries of destination and origin**. In particular the EURES job portal so far restricted for use by mobile EU citizens could be made available as a pilot to workers from selected partner countries.

Job matching measures could consider more tailored, individual approaches such as **the use of bi-cultural recruiters** (for example, the advisory services provided by GIZ to support the Make it in Germany welcome portal). Returned migrants and diaspora members could be considered for such a role.

## Recognition of skills and qualifications

More frequent, targeted assistance for the recognition of foreign credentials could be given at the pre-departure stage. These measures can support skilled migrants' early labour market integration and better utilization of their skills. The study found that current pre-departure measures in this area tend to focus predominantly on information provision alone.

Using [online certified tools](#) for the recognition of skills and qualifications during pre-departure support can significantly speed up the recognition process (see the case studies on ENIC-NARIC Austria and the work of VETASSESS in Australia). Another option for utilization at the pre-departure stage is to [identify and connect with existing support measures in destination countries](#) that deal with recognition of internationally obtained skills and qualifications.

## Cross-cutting issues and links between pre-departure and post-arrival

The study found a general dearth of impact evaluation in this field of practice. Pre-departure integration support measures benefit from [built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanism](#) that can assess both immediate and longer-term impacts. The Canadian Immigrant Integration Program and the Austrian Integration Fund conduct follow-up surveys with migrants at regular intervals after arrival to assess their integration progress and/or to extend further support.

Where resources allow, a specialized institution could be set up offering a neutral space serving as a “one-stop-shop” for potential, current and returned migrants to acquire information, such as those provided by [Migrant Resource Centres \(MRCs\)](#). Such an institution would ensure the centralized availability of services addressing the varying needs of migrants, including information dissemination, skill development, and counselling and legal services.

[Bridging mechanisms between the various phases of information dissemination and other service provision, including the pre-departure and post-arrival periods](#), should be fully addressed at the design stage. Coordination mechanisms should be defined in cooperation agreements with clearly specified roles and responsibilities. A [case management approach](#) could be considered to follow up on migrants' experiences post-arrival.

Pre-migration integration support should consider [using referral mechanisms](#), including through online communications, to connect migrants with advisors, counsellors, employers and other service providers in the country of destination. It is also recommended that such measures clearly outline migrants' next steps once the pre-departure phase is finished.

[Pre-departure trainers can be involved in post-arrival course design and delivery and vice versa](#). This can help service providers in understanding the circumstances migrants face in their country of origin while also learning first-hand about post-arrival challenges.

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Consult the IOM Review of Global Approaches and Practices in Pre-departure Integration Support Measures, Handbook on Migrant Resource Centres and all other [project materials at http://headstartproject.eu](http://headstartproject.eu)

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