

► **LABOUR-INT III:**

GUIDELINES ON HOW TO SYSTEMATISE
THE DELIVERY OF WELCOMING
SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND
MIGRANTS IN BULGARIA, ITALY,
POLAND AND SLOVENIA

► **SEPTEMBER 2026**

LABOUR-INT III project is implemented by a consortium composed by SGIEurope, ETUC, SMEUnited, Eurochambres, a large range of partners across Europe, and the involvement of several national, European and International organisations.

► PARTNERS



► SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS



LIST OF ACRONYMS

CARA	Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo
CAS	Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
EC	European Commission
EGM	Expert Group on Migration
EGWS	Expert Group on Welcoming Services
ESS	Employment Services of the Republic of Slovenia
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MRC	Migration Resource Centre
PA	Public Administration
PES	Public Employment Services
SAI	Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TCN	Third-Country National
WS	Welcoming Services

CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2. INTRODUCTION	7
3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	8
3.1 Overview of EU policies and frameworks on reception and welcoming services for TCNs in the EU	9
3.2 Relevant national policies and frameworks in focus countries	10
4. ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF WELCOMING SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN FOCUS COUNTRIES	11
Table 1. National authorities responsible for welcoming services for TCNs in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia	12
Table 2. LABOUR INT III project partners' role in providing reception and welcoming services to TCNs in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia	14
4.1 Information services and legal assistance	15
4.2 Access to social services	16
4.3 Language training and cultural orientation	17
4.4 Lessons learned and suggested next steps for improved performance	18
5. PROPOSED GUIDELINES TO SYSTEMATISE THE DELIVERY OF WELCOMING SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN THE EU	19
5.1 Guiding principles and overarching guidelines	20
5.2 Operational guidelines	20
5.2.1 Agreeing on a comprehensive set of welcoming services	20
5.2.2 Harmonising national and intra-EU welcoming procedures	21
5.2.3 Supporting local initiatives that promote TCNs' social inclusion	21
5.2.4 Developing contingency plans	21
Table 3. Summary of proposed guidelines to improve the delivery of welcoming services to TCNs in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia	22
6. FEEDBACK ON SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS FROM FOCUS COUNTRIES AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS	25
7. CONCLUSIONS	27
7.1 Summary of key findings	28
7.2 Main recommendations	28
8. ANNEXES	29
8.1 References	30
8.2 Glossary	31
8.3 List of organisations, agencies and other stakeholders interviewed	32

1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses current practices in providing welcoming services to Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) legally residing in the European Union (EU), with a particular focus on Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Welcoming services are defined as a broad set of community-oriented measures that aim to facilitate the longer-term integration and social inclusion of TCNs in the EU, regardless of their migration status. Building on recommendations and lessons learned from LABOUR-INT I and II, this document proposes a set of guidelines to improve the delivery of welcoming services to TCNs across these Member States and the Union more broadly.

The analysis draws on a bottom-up, multi-stakeholder methodology, incorporating perspectives from TCNs, social and economic partners, international organisations and policymakers at both EU and national levels. Data collection included a desk review of key documents, in-depth discussions with the LABOUR-INT III Expert Group on Welcoming Services (EGWS), and semi-structured interviews.

The report identifies substantial variation in the legal frameworks and operational practices for welcoming services across focus countries. All four have transposed core EU directives, such as the recast Reception Conditions Directive (EU) 2024/1346 and the Single Permit Directive (2024/1233), into national law. However, the degree of harmonisation with EU legislation and the effectiveness of

implementation differ significantly. Bulgaria and Slovenia face challenges related to capacity and reliance on ad-hoc funding, which result in uneven service provision. Italy benefits from a more structured, decentralised system but faces pressure from fluctuating migration flows, high demand for services and limited resource allocation. Poland's services are primarily geared toward short-term accommodation and basic needs, with limited support for longer-term integration.

Key challenges identified include inconsistent access to information and legal assistance, limited capacity among service providers, and a lack of systematic approaches to language training and cultural orientation. The guidelines proposed in this report aim to address these gaps by promoting harmonised procedures, enhanced cooperation mechanisms, and contingency planning at both national and EU levels. Feedback from national focal points and stakeholders highlighted residence status and access to housing as two major factors affecting TCNs' labour market integration. National policies that link residence permits to rapid work regularisation may push TCNs into irregular and exploitative employment. In contrast, longer-term welcoming services combined with housing support improve access to the labour market, especially for TCNs with higher vulnerabilities. Overall, effective delivery of welcoming services heavily depends on coherent political strategies that support both immediate reception and long-term inclusion of TCNs in their host communities.

Based on human rights and long-term integration principles, the report makes four main recommendations to improve the delivery of welcoming services for TCNs:

- ▶ first, national authorities in each EU Member State should clarify, either through a framework agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding, what welcoming services include, who is responsible and within what timeframe those services should be delivered;
- ▶ second, national welcoming service procedures should be harmonised across the Union. In practice, this step would include strengthening intra-EU coordination, establishing 'one-stop shops' in relevant public administration offices, and sharing minimum welcoming service standards across EU Member States;
- ▶ third, relevant authorities should support local initiatives that promote TCNs' social inclusion. This can be done, for example, by promoting community mentorship programmes, private sponsorship initiatives and partnerships with well-established local partners, especially on language training;

- ▶ fourth, national and EU authorities should develop contingency plans in case of sudden TCN inflows. Better housing and residence policies at the country level can prevent segregation, homelessness, and exploitative labour conditions.

Table 3 summarises additional recommendations and guidelines for improved service delivery. They are numbered and referred to in brackets throughout the document (e.g. #1 for guideline number 1). They also capture additional feedback from LABOUR-INT III stakeholders shared during the drafting process.

2.

▶ INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report is to propose a set of guidelines to improve the delivery of welcoming services for TCNs legally residing in the EU, with a special focus on Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Throughout this paper, welcoming services are defined as a broad set of community-oriented measures that aim to facilitate the longer-term integration and social inclusion of TCNs in the EU, regardless of their migration status. The welcoming services described in this paper are public, with references to complementary services provided by civil society, social partners and other actors. They include and partly overlap with reception services, which refer to the early, short-term support provided to some TCNs upon arrival, particularly refugees and beneficiaries of Temporary Protection Status, like Ukrainian Protection holders. These guidelines are intentionally designed for legally residing migrants and refugees in recognition of the fact that, while migrants with irregular status and asylum-seekers represent a significant percentage of TCNs in some cases, their reception into EU Member States falls outside the scope of this study. Cross-cutting issues, such as language barriers in providing welcoming services to TCNs, are addressed in more detail in LABOUR INT III document D2.5 *Guidelines for Public Employment Services on developing programmes for the integration of Third Country Nationals in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia*, which also focuses on the higher vulnerability of specific TCN groups, such as women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

A bottom-up, multi-stakeholder methodology was employed, gathering perspectives from TCNs, social and economic partners, international organisations and policymakers at EU and country levels. Data collection and analysis involved a desk review of key documents, in-depth discussions with the LABOUR-INT III Expert Group on Welcoming Services (EGWS), and semi-structured interviews with 45 stakeholders. Of these, 16 were TCNs (nine refugees/Temporary Protection status holders, seven migrants), including twelve women and four men from three focus countries. In addition, interviews were organised with representatives from public employment agencies, employers, trade unions, chambers of commerce, and NGOs across several EU countries. A list of the organisations interviewed is included in Annex 8.3. Due to their central role in the project, national focal points from each focus country were contacted multiple times to seek additional inputs and clarification.

Research constraints were due to limited time, data availability and geographic scope for this report. National focal points in focus countries provided access to relevant data, however this information was not always available in English or concerned a relatively small TCN group. To compensate for these limitations, efforts were made to consult an adequate number of other relevant stakeholders, starting with TCNs themselves.

3.

▶ BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This section analyses the main EU-level legal frameworks and tools used to deliver welcoming services to TCNs with regular refugee, migrant or temporary protection status. It starts by focusing on EU legislation on the provision of reception services to TCNs. For this reason, it makes a distinction between reception and welcoming services. As noted in Annex 8.2, the paper uses the phrase 'reception services' to indicate short-term measures to support TCNs upon their arrival in the EU. 'Welcoming services', on the other hand, encompass a broader set of intervention measures. They include both reception services and longer-term support for TCN integration and social inclusion. This section examines the benefits and limitations of normative frameworks on welcoming services and then explores relevant national legislation and initiatives in the four focus countries of Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia.

3.1

OVERVIEW OF EU POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS ON RECEPTION AND WELCOMING SERVICES FOR TCNs IN THE EU

At EU level, there is no single, unified framework governing the reception and welcoming services for TCNs. Legislation changes from country to country, depending on whether the individual applies for international protection or not. In the former case, the main EU instrument establishing minimum standards for the reception of TCNs is the recast Reception Conditions Directive (EU) 2024/1346, adopted as part of the 2024 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The minimum standards aim to ensure a dignified standard of living and comparable living conditions across Member States, covering TCNs' access to housing, food and clothing, financial allowances, health care (including mental health care), employment, education for minor TCNs and education support, such as language courses, civic education or vocational training. Compared to its previous iterations in 2003 and 2013, the 2024 Directive introduces stricter conditionality in case a TCN breaches accommodation rules or fails to participate in integration measures. It also allows Member States to withdraw benefits if an applicant for international protection is transferred to another Member State. EU Member States are required to transpose the Reception Conditions Directive into national law by June 2026, after which time they will need to apply all of its provisions¹.

In the latter case – for TCNs who do not apply for international protection, such as migrants and their families with regular status – their reception and rights in the EU are governed by a fragmented set of legal instruments. These include: the Single Permit Directive (Directive 2024/1233), which grants TCNs equal treatment and access to services and social security, but not social assistance; the recast Blue Card Directive (EU 2021/1883), which targets high-skilled TCNs and grants them certain rights in employment and social security; the Long-Term Residents Directive (Directive 2003/109/EC), which grants rights close to those of EU citizens to TCNs who have legally resided in a Member State for at least five years; and the Family Reunification Directive (Directive 2003/86/EC) granting minimum standards to legally residing TCNs. In financial terms, the Asylum,

Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is the EU's primary instrument for TCN integration at the national and local levels. Other EU funding instruments fund complementary services. For example, the European Social Fund Plus can fund TCN employment, social inclusion, education and skills while the European Regional Development Fund can be used to support social, health, education, housing and childcare services (#3).

Overall, EU legislation provides a complex and evolving framework for delivering reception and welcoming services to TCNs. Some stakeholders interviewed for this study highlighted the somewhat contradictory nature of two EU Directives in particular – the Reception Conditions and the 2008 Returns Directive –, which seem to point in opposite directions. The EU's unclear efforts to find a balance between welcoming arriving TCNs and deporting those staying irregularly in the Union have direct repercussions on the interpretation of EU legislation at national level.

In addition, stakeholder consultations underlined the need to clarify what public welcoming services labour migrants have a right to claim and access in the European Union. While the main focus of recent EU Directives has been to provide access to reception and welcoming services for asylum-seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of Temporary Protection status, these measures are perceived as targeting too narrow a group. Stakeholders noted how the roadmap to reception and welcoming services for TCNs with different statuses remains less defined. More efforts should be made at EU level to clearly identify the multiple pathways to reception and welcoming services that target the specific needs of different TCN groups, including labour migrants and seasonal migrant workers. Efforts should also be made to secure longer-term legal pathways for TCNs with a regular permit, so they do not quickly lose it due to administrative delays (#7, #8).

¹ The analysis presented in this section reflects current practice rather than anticipating likely changes following the transposition of the Reception Conditions Directive into national law.

3.2

RELEVANT NATIONAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS IN FOCUS COUNTRIES

Focus countries have incorporated EU legislation on reception and welcoming services for TCNs to varying degrees. They retain significant national discretion, which is reflected in their different legal frameworks. In particular:

Bulgaria has transposed EU Directives into national legislation with the amended Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (2014) and the 2002 Asylum and Refugees Act, which provides the main legal framework for TCNs and Ukrainian nationals benefitting from Temporary Protection Status. Welcoming services are primarily coordinated by the State Agency for Refugees and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Italy implements EU directives through the 1998 Consolidated Immigration Act and related decrees. Laws 113/2018 and 50/2023 introduced significant changes regarding the grounds for reception of asylum seekers. Italy has a multi-tiered reception system, including first-line reception centres (Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo, or CARA) and second-line integration facilities at the municipality level (Sistema di Accoglienza, or SAI). SAI is mainly reserved for TCN groups with higher vulnerabilities, such as women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Municipalities and NGOs play a key role in service delivery. Italy also has established temporary centres to manage excess numbers of TCN arrivals (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria or CAS).

Poland passed the 2003 Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners on the Territory of the Republic of Poland and the 2013 Act on Foreigners to comply with EU requirements. Recent amendments in early 2025 and 2026 reflect changing EU and national priorities with a plan to phase-out provisions stemming from activation of the temporary protection. The Office for Foreigners manages reception centers and coordinates integration programs, with a growing focus on Ukrainian nationals under temporary protection.

Slovenia has transposed EU legislation with the amended 2002 Aliens Act, which included provisions on the rights of asylum seekers and their reception, and the 2011 Foreigners Act. A significant step forward was the 2016 International Protection Act, which transposed Directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions for asylum seekers. This law introduced a comprehensive and harmonised legal framework to ensure compliance with EU standards regarding the rights, accommodation, healthcare, education, and social rights of asylum seekers. These services are coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Overall, differences in the legal frameworks governing reception and welcoming services for TCNs in focus countries reflect these nations' changing roles from transit to, increasingly, destination countries. For example, Slovenia has put in place a moderately supportive legal framework that remains dependent on project-based funding and fragmented service delivery. On the other hand, Italy has long established a structured system to deliver reception and welcoming services through decentralised approaches.

4.

▶ ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF WELCOMING SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN FOCUS COUNTRIES

This section maps the main practices followed in LABOUR-INT III focus countries to provide welcoming services to TCNs. It then describes opportunities and challenges faced by national focal points and other relevant project partners to help TCNs start a new life in the EU. As clarified in the Introduction, the welcoming services described in this section encompass access to a combination of reception and longer-term assistance for TCNs. They include access to initial orientation, housing, food and clothing, health care, education for minors, language and cultural training, employment and financial allowances.

Each focus country has a central authority responsible for providing welcoming services. These authorities work in coordination with social partners – employers' and workers' organisations, chambers of commerce and industry – civil society and local actors, either on a systematic or ad hoc basis. Table 1 summarises current responsibilities in each focus country, alongside practices followed by relevant lead agencies. It also lists other official stakeholders providing welcoming services.

TABLE 1.
NATIONAL AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR WELCOMING SERVICES FOR TCNs IN BULGARIA, ITALY, POLAND AND SLOVENIA

Focus Country	National authorities responsible for TCN reception	Main responsibilities
Bulgaria	• State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers (SAR) • Migration Directorate within the Ministry of Interior • Social Assistance Agency • The National Legal Aid Bureau (NLAB)	• Grants refugee status and manages reception for applicants for international protection. • Manages accommodation for irregularly staying TCNs and coordinates migration policy through its Social Assistance Directorates (SADs), provides protection for unaccompanied children, including refugees, by placing them in a suitable environment (foster families, family-type care centres) • Provides mandatory representation and legal defence for unaccompanied minor
Italy	• Ministry of the Interior, Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration • NGOs, nonprofit organisations and private companies selected by prefectures • Municipalities, local authorities	• Oversees the reception of asylum seekers and applicants for international protection, operating through reception hotspots (CAS) and local prefectures • Manage reception centres (CARA) • Manage second-level reception and integration services (SAI) for vulnerable TCN groups in collaboration with NGOs
Poland	• Office for Foreigners, Ministry of the Interior and Administration	• Manages reception facilities for TCNs (esp. applicants for international protection), with both executive and financial responsibilities for reception services
Slovenia	• Ministry of the Interior, , Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants	• Oversees procedures and the overall system within which reception services operate , responsible for the reception and accommodation of applicants for international protection, including the management of reception centres; The Government Office provides initial orientation, housing, food, clothing, basic support material reception allowances, initial language courses and integration programmes, basic/emergency healthcare.

LABOUR-INT III project partners provide access to either some or all welcoming services. Sometimes, they are the direct service providers in addition to playing a coordinating role. Table 2 clarifies their role in each focus country. Complementing the procedures summarised in Tables 1 and 2, national authorities and LABOUR-INT III focal points have adopted the following welcoming practices:

In Bulgaria, reception services include a basic minimum support package addressing immediate needs, including accommodation, language courses, and orientation sessions. However, capacity is a challenge and access to social services and integration support largely depends on project-based funding and the involvement of the Bulgarian Red Cross, UN agencies, such as IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, and nongovernmental organisations, like Caritas Sofia. The NGO sector provides most essential integration and welcoming services beyond accommodation, including language training, employability support, cultural orientation and adaptation, as well as legal assistance. These services are often critical for facilitating migrants' initial integration, yet they remain largely dependent on project-based funding and are not always sufficient to meet long-term needs. This approach may lead to uneven service delivery across the country, with a focus on temporary rather than long-term solutions.

In Italy, the two-tier reception system provides basic services to arriving TCNs, including accommodation, food, basic healthcare and preliminary legal advice. Access to longer-term support is mainly reserved for a minority of TCNs in especially vulnerable situations, such as those entering Italy via humanitarian corridors, unaccompanied children and women surviving exploitation and abuse. Under the SAI system, this type of services includes housing, language training, labour and local integration support at the municipal level. However, high demand and fluctuating migration flows strain capacity, limiting TCNs' access to stable integration pathways, particularly if TCNs live in isolated areas. This often creates tensions in host communities, with many TCNs living without housing or public transport services. Specifically in Apulia, many migrant workers live in segregated areas away from the city, often exploited by organised crime (caporalato, or gangmaster system) in the agriculture sector. On their end, local chapters of the national trade union CGIL address these issues by providing additional legal and administrative support to TCNs, and defending their basic social and labour rights in close coordination with local authorities.

In Poland, services towards international protection applicants as well as beneficiaries of temporary protection include information provision, basic healthcare, and language courses, but integration support for regular migrants remains limited. The system is mainly geared toward short-term accommodation and basic needs, with less emphasis on long-term integration. Local authorities and NGOs are often under-resourced, and there is a need for more systematic support for regular TCNs, including Ukrainian nationals benefitting from Temporary Protection Status.

In Slovenia, service provision includes information, legal assistance, and language training, but delivery is often ad hoc and heavily reliant on NGO partnerships and EU funding. Asylum seekers benefit from emergency health care coverage thanks to a cooperation agreement between the Health and Foreign Affairs Ministries. TCNs with international protection status are entitled to free health insurance, as Slovenian residents, until they find employment, after which time they are eligible for private insurance. Some reception activities are implemented by NGOs selected either through public calls for proposals or because they provide services free of charge. TCNs may also turn to trade unions or the Employment Service of the Republic of Slovenia (ESS) for questions. Practical challenges, such as infrastructure limitations, funding constraints, and political dynamics, cause variation in service provision. Stakeholders interviewed for this report highlighted the need for clearer guidelines and stronger networks to support TCN integration (#3, #5, #10, #15).

TABLE 2.
LABOUR-INT III PROJECT PARTNERS' ROLE IN PROVIDING RECEPTION AND WELCOMING SERVICES TO TCNS IN BULGARIA, ITALY, POLAND AND SLOVENIA

Focus country and national focal point	Project partners' contribution to reception and welcoming services in focus countries within and/or outside the LABOUR-INT III project								
	Initial orientation	Housing	Food & clothing	Health care	Education for minors	Language & cultural training	Employment-related support	Social benefits	Other services (please specify)
Bulgaria									
CARITAS Sofia	x				x	x	x		
Italy									
SMILE Puglia									
CGIL	x						x		Administrative support; protection of social and labour rights
Poland									
OPZZ	x					x			
Slovenia									
ZRSZ - ESS	x	x			x	x	x	x	
ZSSS									Protection of labour rights

In assessing the delivery of reception and welcoming services for TCNs across these focus countries, several recurring issues emerge which can be grouped around

the provision of information and legal assistance, access to social services, language training and cultural orientation.

4.1

INFORMATION SERVICES AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE²

It is important to note that TCNs tend to approach Welcoming Services staff at different stages of their integration journey. In particular, migrant workers and students usually reach out to relevant contact points while they are still in their country of origin. Some rely on Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), such as those established by IOM in Ukraine. This type of outreach highlights the potential role of pre-departure information and orientation in shaping access to welcoming services for arriving TCNs. However, other TCNs do not necessarily approach Welcoming Services staff upon their arrival in a Member State. They may prefer to keep a low profile and avoid being noticed, fearing deportation, especially if their legal status remains uncertain. With an EU average of less than 20% of asylum-seekers obtaining refugee status³, and a considerable backlog of asylum applications at the country level, particularly in Italy, reaching TCNs with temporary status proves challenging. Those benefitting from Temporary Protection Status represent an exception to the rule as they can access welcoming services and job opportunities right away. On the contrary, for the vast majority of TCNs with other statuses, there is a need for clearer guidance on their rights, obligations and available support. This support should include cultural mediation and legal assistance upon TCNs' arrival in the EU.

Legal, financial and capacity constraints limit the ability of PES and Welcoming Services staff to orient TCNs effectively. Some key informants highlighted the challenge of adjusting to the fast-changing EU and national legislation, particularly in the lack of periodic training. As one interviewee admitted in explaining how to interpret recent legislative changes in migration policy, 'we do improvisation'. This legal uncertainty is compounded by the fact that the entities responsible for providing reception and welcoming services to TCNs are often understaffed. As a result, TCNs may receive confusing or contradictory guidance, increasing the risk of exposure to illegal practices and informal employment opportunities.

At the community level, lack of regular training and legal uncertainty may lead local authorities to deny access to social services to TCNs, for example, access to primary education for a TCN minor, as was the case in one incident reported by a key informant⁴.

What seems to be working well in addressing these challenges is relying on the advice of the most experienced staff in Welcoming Services and PES offices. These professionals often combine a high degree of institutional knowledge with creative solutions. This approach, however, remains ad hoc and requires more adequate support from national authorities to be sustainable over time.

² This section complements and should be read together with section 5.1 of the document *Towards a multistakeholder approach to skills-matching: an assessment of current skills-matching practices for Third-Country Nationals in the European labour market*, also produced as part of the LABOUR-INT III project.

³ See Eurostat asylum applications monthly statistics: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_applications_-_monthly_statistics#Highlights.

⁴ See also Colombi, D. Näre, L., Palumbo, L., Merikoski, P., & Marchetti, S. (2024) *Irregularised migration in Europe*, Policy Brief, I-CLAIM, p. 7.

4.2

▶ ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES

TCNs legally residing in the Union should have access to social services, broadly defined as a set of provisions that ensure the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of individuals and their families⁵. Depending on their particular status and national legislation, TCNs may have access to housing, food and clothing, health care, employment-related support and certain social benefits⁶, while education for TCN minors is generally protected under EU law. In practice, however, capacity constraints represent a major barrier to access. This is mainly because current migration policies in focus countries tend to reduce public support for TCNs. As a consequence, on average, the public systems supporting the delivery of basic social services for TCNs are either not fully developed or are gradually deteriorating due to lower resource allocation for implementing reception and welcoming policies (#3). Alternatively, the state may outsource some welcoming services to private service providers, who usually charge a fee. This scenario raises questions about TCNs' actual ability to exercise their right to access social services in the EU (#1).

On an imaginary spectrum of TCN support infrastructure, Italy presents the most structured public system, although mostly for vulnerable TCN groups only. Refugees and asylum-seekers can register with the National Health service to receive care; registered asylum-seekers have access to reception centres, although they experience housing shortages and delays; and social assistance includes help with integration, legal aid and social benefits, depending on their income assessment. Bulgaria and Slovenia offer similar support, however, refugees and migrants must find their own housing, with limited state intervention. In Poland, only a fraction of migrants legally residing in the country is entitled to the same assistance; support to regular migrants is usually more limited. NGOs and faith-based organisations play a more prominent role with this population group, providing access to social services either on an ad-hoc or EU-project funding basis.

Two specific issues deserve special attention in relation to TCNs' access to social services. The first one is that some TCNs, or their accompanying relatives, require additional health care support, which may not be covered by state insurance or may not be granted until they get a more permanent legal status. This situation often leads TCNs to cover the extra insurance costs out of their own pocket. In some cases, however, private insurance costs are prohibitive, leading TCNs to stay home to care for themselves or their sick relatives. In turn, their inactivity becomes a barrier to gainful employment and social inclusion in their new country. A second issue is that administrative loopholes can prevent some TCNs from starting a business to survive. A couple of TCNs interviewed for this report explained how they could not open a bank account in their host country due to their migrant status. They believe their nationality of origin may have been a factor in the bank's decision not to give them access to credit. While PES and Welcoming Services may consider entrepreneurship as a later stage in TCN integration, for many TCNs it is the only viable option to start a new life in the EU. It is therefore recommended that welcoming service packages for TCNs include at least an introduction to entrepreneurship (#16, #17).

⁵ Based on Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁶ TCNs' access to employment is addressed in detail in two other LABOUR-INT III documents: *Report on the recognition of regulated and non-regulated qualifications of Third-Country Nationals* and the abovementioned *Towards a multistakeholder approach to skills-matching: an assessment of current skills-matching practices for Third-Country Nationals in the European labour market*.

4.3

▶ LANGUAGE TRAINING AND CULTURAL ORIENTATION

As explained in other LABOUR-INT III documents, TCNs' ability to speak the local language is crucial to their initial orientation and entry into the EU labour market. Across the focus countries, all interviewees singled out language training as indispensable yet inadequate in its current form (#3, #7, #16). As part of the welcoming services package, TCNs should receive language training at least at A2 level when, in fact, some TCNs do not achieve that level of proficiency long after their arrival. Arab speakers feel at a particular disadvantage in learning languages like Polish or Bulgarian, due to the vast differences in alphabetic characters and word roots between Arabic and Eastern European languages.

On a related note, all relevant stakeholders interviewed are keenly aware of the importance of learning the host country language at a level that will allow TCNs to integrate successfully. Some stakeholders, such as the employer association Confindustria in Apulia, have even experimented with strategic partnerships between employers and public literacy schools (Scuole per l'Alfabetizzazione or CPAs) to promote advanced Italian courses, with a view to hiring the most proficient language learners after graduation. These creative solutions, however, remain ad hoc and require long-term engagement by both parties, which has not been the case in Apulia (#16).

In terms of socio-cultural orientation, while it may be considered less important in the early stages of TCN integration, it plays an essential role for arriving TCNs. It helps them to understand how to 'think differently', as one Bulgarian interviewee noted, and fosters mutual learning by both newcomers and service providers (#12, #15). It also accelerates adaptation and job search in the new country. Stakeholder consultations pointed out how reception services tend to prioritise language learning without allocating adequate time for TCNs to understand their new context. Cultural orientation therefore tends to come at a later stage. This may contribute to compound delays in TCNs' integration process and to the risk of social isolation.

Cultural mediators, intercultural interpreters and fellow TCNs already residing in the EU can play a crucial role in helping newcomers orient themselves upon arrival. For example, as part of a partnership among IOM, Italy's Ministry of the Interior and its Department of State Police, cultural mediators were deployed to assist new arrivals on search and rescue boats or help migrants navigate bureaucracy in their host communities. In other cases, TCNs resort to informal groups of fellow nationals to learn about their new environment. These groups can be a useful resource of support (#15); however, they may also spread misinformation about changes in national legislation or employment opportunities. Some interviewees referred to online group chats as a source of potential scams.

In summary, stakeholders interviewed strongly recommended providing adequate language training and cultural mediation immediately upon TCNs' arrival in the country, because local language and culture play a central role in disseminating better information about TCNs' rights and access to services from the outset.

4.4

LESSONS LEARNED AND SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

Discussions with key stakeholders pointed to several important lessons learned in focus countries. Firstly, the inherent tension between the politics of migration and the operational reality of providing welcoming services to TCNs must be recognised (#2). Providers of welcoming services – whether in public administration, NGOs or other entities like employer associations – are fully aware that they deliver some of the most progressive, supportive services to TCNs in a context where European and national public opinion have yet to fully accept their successful integration. Political and operational realities often conflict, leaving these stakeholders to navigate their complex interactions.

Secondly, service provision should be tailored to different TCN profiles, including economic migrants and seasonal migrant workers. While early intervention measures tend to target refugees and beneficiaries of international protection based on clear reception procedures, the picture is less clear for other TCNs. Feedback from focus countries reveals that labour migrants and seasonal workers find it especially challenging to access welcoming services, even when they are entitled to them free of charge. Public Administration offices should ensure TCNs have a comprehensive view of the welcoming services available to them, including an understanding of their civic, social and economic rights, such as housing and benefits (#1, #2, #3, #5). Employers should complement these longer-term services by providing information, referrals, onboarding and other workplace integration tools for their TCN workers (#3). For higher consistency and better social integration, the provision of these services should comply with minimum standards agreed at EU level (#7).

Thirdly, due to the complexity of service delivery, practitioners are keen to explore positive models from other countries that may be relevant to their national context. In this regard, Germany and Canada were the most frequently cited countries that could provide practical recommendations on welcoming services and TCN integration more broadly. Several stakeholders pointed to the German system in particular as a positive model of welcoming service delivery thanks to its holistic, decentralised and fast-track approach to TCN integration. This lesson exchange would be especially beneficial to Bulgaria and Slovenia, which are transitioning from transit countries to destination countries (#8).

Fourthly, there is a collective acknowledgement that the most effective welcoming service delivery starts *before* TCNs arrive in the EU. While pre-departure orientation falls outside the scope of this study, most informants interviewed for this report underlined the importance of assessing the effectiveness of EU welcoming services throughout TCNs' journey, starting with orientation in their countries of origin. Future research could investigate this further, including by building on innovative examples of pre-departure orientation and training in Germany and Canada (#8).

5.

► **PROPOSED GUIDELINES TO SYSTEMATISE THE DELIVERY OF WELCOMING SERVICES FOR REFUGEE AND MIGRANTS IN THE EU**

This section suggests several guidelines to standardise the delivery of welcoming services for TCNs legally residing in the EU. Building on primary and secondary sources, these recommendations include guiding principles and overarching guidelines, which have already been identified in other LABOUR-INT III documents, as well as more specific operational guidelines summarised in Table 3.

5.1

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND OVERARCHING GUIDELINES

Stakeholder consultations confirmed the importance of following two guiding principles in delivering welcoming services to TCNs: respecting their rights to reside in the EU in safe and dignified living conditions, and promoting their longer-term integration (#1). The former principle highlights protection as a key factor, particularly for vulnerable refugees and migrants. It sheds light on the positive impact that Temporary Protection Status has had on the specific group of Ukrainian TCNs, and on the importance of securing legal residency status as a key determinant of successful integration. The latter principle underscores the importance of adopting inclusive, participatory approaches to welcoming TCNs. It confirms the need to continue taking a multi-stakeholder approach to labour market integration, within and beyond LABOUR-INT interventions.

The recommendations below also draw on the overarching guidelines outlined in other LABOUR-INT III documents, which are not repeated here for brevity. These broader guidelines include building on previous LABOUR-INT recommendations on the delivery of welcoming services for TCNs; strengthening coordination in focus countries, ideally by appointing a senior official as National Coordinator or by establishing 'one-stop shops' for information dissemination and TCN support, with clear accountabilities (#10); increasing the staffing and resources of public administration offices, especially Welcoming Services offices; and developing a basic set of monitoring indicators from the outset to track and compare progress across countries (#6).

5.2

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

LABOUR-INT III project partners face critical challenges as they strive to improve the delivery of welcoming services for TCNs. At the same time, they can take several concrete steps to achieve this objective. These steps can be summarised under four main categories: agreeing on a comprehensive set of welcoming services, harmonising national and intra-EU procedures, promoting local solutions and developing contingency planning.

5.2.1

Agreeing on a comprehensive set of welcoming services

As a first step, LABOUR-INT III national focal points can take the lead in clarifying what is included in a standard TCN welcoming service package in each country. They can do so by agreeing on a standard definition and basket of services to be delivered to TCNs in coordination with relevant national authorities and the European Commission (#3). Some national focal points are already aware of what

should be provided at the reception and welcoming stages of TCN labour market integration. For others, these expectations remain subject to arbitrary interpretation. Similarly, national focal points should agree on a standard definition of 'systematising the services of welcoming services'⁷. This paper recommends it should be about standardising and improving the quality and availability of welcoming services for TCNs, building upon good practices. As a second step, the paper recommends harmonising existing systems providing welcoming services to TCNs in LABOUR-INT III focus countries, with the ultimate objective of sharing guidance on EU welcoming service provision across the Union (#4).

A framework agreement or Memorandum of Understanding by national authorities, in collaboration with trade unions and civil society, can help clarify what specific measures should be taken and within what timeframe (#4, #5). This type of agreement would also help distinguish between short-term reception measures from longer-term welcoming services,

⁷ In line with the original title of this document and as expected under the LABOUR-INT III grant agreement.

as in some cases they overlap. In line with the definitions used for this report, welcoming services should encompass a broader set of interventions, such as language training, cultural orientation and community support. They should last for an adequate period of time, ideally for the first year of TCNs' residence in the EU. As explained above, it is not advisable to wait until the reception phase is over before providing welcoming services, because some of these services may be just as essential for TCNs to survive. If TCNs have indeed to wait, they should be informed about what to expect when upon arrival (#3).

5.2.2 Harmonising national and intra-EU welcoming procedures

Building on the previous guidelines, there needs to be a shared understanding of what welcoming services include across the EU. Currently, there are wide differences across focus countries – and sometimes even within the same country, as in the case of Italy, which has established a decentralised service system. These differences are mainly due to how public administrations have set up the provision of reception and welcoming services at national level. Staffing constraints also play a role in how national procedures are followed. Nevertheless, it is still possible to improve the consistency of welcoming service provision across the Union. In this regard, LABOUR-INT III national focal points suggested creating more opportunities to regularly connect with their counterparts in other regions and countries (#7). They would like to establish a network of welcoming service practitioners who can share best practices and collaborate to solve common problems, including, for example, how to interpret EU legislation above and beyond national adaptation requirements (#8).

A higher level of cross-border coordination would also help address challenges in receiving and welcoming TCNs moving from one country to the other. Facilitating intra-EU cooperation mechanisms would improve the delivery of welcoming services because it would help map mobility trends, identify specific TCN groups in need of assistance, and assess the likely impact of administrative or legislative changes in one country on its regional neighbours (#9).

5.2.3 Supporting local initiatives that promote TCNs' social inclusion

Operationally, TCN reception and welcoming services are provided at the local level. Promoting local initiatives that support TCNs upon arrival would therefore strengthen the existing infrastructure of service delivery and facilitate TCNs' inclusion in their host communities. In practice, focus countries could support local initiatives by assessing what already works at the community level (#11); promoting community mentorship programs (#13); exploring private sponsorship initiatives, following Canada's example⁸ (#14); establishing migrant advisory boards or local immigration committees that can advise on the most context-appropriate welcoming services (#15); and partnering with well-established local partners to carry out regular monitoring visits to check on TCNs' overall well-being (#16). Other initiatives could be taken in consultation with TCN representatives themselves (#17).

5.2.4 Developing contingency plans

Over the last decade, the remarkable geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe have shown LABOUR-INT III project partners the importance of preparing for TCN population movements ahead of time. A key recommendation from stakeholder consultations is therefore to strengthen the development of national and intra-EU contingency plans in case of massive influxes of TCNs from outside the Union (#18, #19).

At national level, all stakeholders involved in reception and welcoming services should engage in periodic discussions convened by the relevant national authority on available resources and additional resource requirements in case of sudden high-volume movements of TCNs. These discussions should be based on timely data, trends analysis and anticipatory measures in key locations. Because of the cross-border nature of TCN movements, adequate contingency planning also requires close coordination with reception and welcoming service counterparts from neighbouring countries. This can be improved by sharing relevant

⁸ It should be noted that Canada's private sponsorship programme differs from similar EU schemes in important ways. First, it follows one common system for sponsoring refugees, while EU schemes vary by Member State. Second, Canadian private sponsors are clearly responsible for TCNs' settlement and financial support for one year, while EU sponsors may share some responsibilities with the state and the duration of the programme may also vary. For more details on Canada's refugee sponsorship programme, please see here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/sponsor-refugee/private-sponsorship-program.html>.

data analysis and anticipatory action plans, and pooling available resources in strategic locations in the region, in collaboration with relevant EU authorities. In this regard, the European Migration Network (EMN) is a particularly relevant resource of information. Established in 2008, the EMN brings together EU migration and asylum experts to provide

information, including case law, on emerging issues related to migration and asylum in Europe. Over the years, the EMN has documented significant variation in how EU migration and asylum legislation is applied across Member States, which has created much legal uncertainty for TCNs and the public administration officials who work with them⁹.

TABLE 3.
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED GUIDELINES TO IMPROVE THE DELIVERY OF WELCOMING SERVICES TO TCNS IN BULGARIA, ITALY, POLAND AND SLOVENIA

	Proposed guideline	Who should act?	Expected result
Guiding principles			
1	Respect for TCNs' human rights, including in the workplace, in line with relevant international standards	All stakeholders, including political leadership at the country level	TCNs start a new life in the EU in safe and dignified living and working conditions. They enter the labour market based on the principles of non-discrimination, fair recruitment and decent working conditions
2	Promotion of TCNs' integration in EU society	All stakeholders, including political leadership at the country level	TCNs are able to contribute to the EU labour market fully and successfully by obtaining timely legal residence status, securing decent housing and accessing quality jobs
Operational guideline 1: Agreeing on a comprehensive set of welcoming services			
3	Clarify what is included in the standard reception and welcoming service package, with adequate resource allocation for each service provided	- National Coordinator - Relevant central authorities	Relevant stakeholders better manage mutual expectations. Labour market integration pathways are more clearly designed in coordination with PES. Employers share more accurate information and referrals with their TCN workers
4	Establish a Memorandum of Understanding with other national stakeholders	- National Coordinator - Relevant central authorities	There is a pre-agreed division of labour and a more systematic sequence of service provision
5	Define a timeframe for the provision of reception and welcoming services	- National Coordinator - Relevant central authorities - Project partners	More clarity about what TCNs are supposed to receive and by when. Stakeholders can better manage their expectations and division of labour
6	Develop a basic set of monitoring indicators to track and compare progress across countries	- European Commission - National authorities	Monitoring of key indicators, e.g. TCNs' access to welcoming services, the quality of the services they receive, etc.

⁹ See for example European Migration Network (2026) *Safe countries of origin and safe third countries; criteria for identifying and examining applications in light of the new Asylum Procedure Regulation (EU) 2024/1348*, p. 11.

	Proposed guideline	Who should act?	Expected result
Operational guideline 2: Harmonising welcoming services procedures			
7	Agree specific minimum standards for welcoming services across the EU, particularly for housing, access to public infrastructure, language training and legal pathways to the labour market	• Relevant EC • National authorities	More clarity about what is included in the standard reception and welcoming service package in different focus countries; TCNs have adequate time to secure legal status; they can access work in urban areas; reduced number of segregated areas; reduced incidence of TCNs living in isolation and at higher risk of exploitation
8	Establish a network of Welcoming Services practitioners across the EU	• LABOUR-INT III national focal points • National Coordinators • Social partners	Improved coordination across the Union; collective problem-solving of common challenges; discussion of successful legal pathways to TCN residence and employment in the EU and around the world (e.g. in Canada)
9	Facilitate intra-EU cooperation mechanisms to improve service delivery	• LABOUR-INT III national focal points • National Coordinators	Information and analysis of relevant cross-border movements are shared for discussion and collective problem-solving; labour market information systems better anticipate skills needs across the EU
10	Strengthen existing coordination mechanisms or establish 'one-stop shops' to link welcoming services with other support for TCNs in each country	• National Coordinators in collaboration with LABOUR III national focal points • Social partners	Systematise the delivery of welcoming services; better manage TCNs' expectations; improve efficiency
Operational guideline 3: Supporting local initiatives that promote TCNs' social inclusion			
11	Assessing what already works at the community level	• Local partners • Community leaders	Tapping into existing resources without duplicating efforts; exploiting available potential
12	Engaging local city governments in contributing to welcoming service delivery through systematic coordination with national and EU authorities	• Relevant EU and national authorities • Line ministries	Better structured provision of welcoming services; timely cultural orientation; more effective contribution of TCNs to their host communities
13	Promoting community mentorship programs	• Local partners • Community leaders	Encouraging community engagement and social inclusion
14	Exploring private sponsorship initiatives, following Canada's example	• Local partners • Community leaders • National focal points	Encouraging community engagement and social inclusion
15	Establishing migrant advisory boards or local immigration committees	• Local partners • Community leaders	Encouraging community engagement and social inclusion; fostering cultural orientation

	Proposed guideline	Who should act?	Expected result
16	Partnering with well-established local partners, with a special focus on language training, access to PES, introduction to entrepreneurship and skills-matching support for TCNs	• National focal points • Community leaders	Encouraging faster and more effective community engagement in TCNs' labour market integration and social inclusion; reduced risks of exploitation, including through strengthened oversight of local recruitment practices
17	Establishing new initiatives in consultation with TCN representatives (e.g. migrant and diaspora organisations)	• Local partners • Community leaders • Project partners	TCNs feel more encouraged to make a meaningful contribution to their host communities, including through entrepreneurship initiatives
Operational guideline 4: Developing contingency planning			
18	Convene nationwide discussions on contingency planning	• National Coordinator • Relevant national authorities	Joint anticipatory analysis and action through a multi-stakeholder approach; improved preparedness by labour market institutions to support timely labour market integration in the event of sudden inflows
19	Create opportunities for cross-border contingency planning discussions	• National Coordinators in relevant countries • EU regional stakeholders	Undertake joint anticipatory analysis and action; strengthen regional coordination

6.

▶ **FEEDBACK ON SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS FROM FOCUS COUNTRIES AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

LABOUR-INT III partners and national focal points had the opportunity to reflect on the preliminary findings from this report for approximately five months, from November 2025 to May 2026. They then shared additional feedback either in writing or in individual phone sessions.

In addition to the reflections summarised in the other LABOUR-INT III documents¹⁰, many stakeholders highlighted two issues as particularly relevant to welcoming services and TCNs' successful labour market integration: TCNs' residence status and their access to housing (#2). Interviewees noted how different types of residence permits impact on TCNs' situation differently, depending on whether they are refugees or seasonal workers or beneficiaries of Temporary Protection or minors, etc. It is therefore important not to over-generalise in describing TCNs' experience with welcoming services in the four focus countries.

In this regard, feedback **from Italy** is particularly significant, given the country's 50-year experience with a variety of TCN profiles. According to the trade union CGIL, Italy's immigration legislation itself poses a challenge to providing adequate welcoming services. This is because it requires TCNs to regularise their work permits – which are linked to their residence status – within eight days of arrival in the country. As explained in the LABOUR-INT III document *Towards a multistakeholder approach to skills matching: an assessment of current skills-matching practices for Third-Country Nationals in the EU labour market*, this requirement results in the vast majority of TCNs (up to 80%) losing their legal basis to stay and work in Italy almost immediately. As a consequence, many of them accept working illegally in exploitative conditions, often moving around the country in search of seasonal work.

Lessons learned from Italy show that the bigger issue in designing appropriate welcoming services for TCNs is planning for their long-term integration into the host country. Even those TCNs who manage to have their work permit validated may prefer to work without a legal contract to keep their right to stay at the Temporary Reception Centres (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria or CAS) as long as possible. CAS centres offer basic housing, food, and health care while national authorities examine each TCN's case¹¹. Women and unaccompanied minors usually benefit from additional support. However, if TCNs find a job in the formal labour market, they are no longer eligible for reception services and must adjust to their new situation by themselves. This national policy may therefore act as a major disincentive to effective TCN integration (#2, #3).

On the other hand, feedback from beneficiaries of Temporary Protection status **in Slovenia** confirmed that when reception services are extended and provided as part of a broader package of welcoming services, TCNs' entry into the local labour market is more successful. Supporting TCNs' housing through rental subsidies or a dedicated number of housing units is crucial during this transition, as it allows TCNs, especially female heads of household, to live in urban areas and rely on existing infrastructure, such as public transport. Under these conditions, they can find employment more easily or even work from home, often reconciling employment with family obligations. On the contrary, TCNs from other focus countries, or without Temporary Protection status, face discrimination in looking for a place to live, which may segregate them into isolated areas with no basic infrastructure. In some cases, they become homeless and particularly vulnerable to exploitative work (#2, #3, #7).

Based on these country-level learnings, it is evident that political leadership plays a decisive role in designing effective welcoming services for TCNs. When there are concerted efforts to sustain not just their reception, but also their longer-term integration through legal and housing support, TCNs' contribution to the labour market tends to be more positive. Conversely, if government policies create loopholes or implementation gaps in the delivery of welcoming services, TCNs are likely to adopt alternative strategies to sustain themselves, increasing the risk of falling into informal and illegal employment (#1, #2).

¹⁰ Particularly in LABOUR-INT III deliverables D2.1 *Report on the recognition of regulated and non-regulated qualifications of Third-Country Nationals in the EU: the case of Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia* and D2.2 *Towards a multistakeholder approach to skills matching: an assessment of current skills-matching practices for Third-Country Nationals in the EU labour market*.

¹¹ See <https://osservatoriomigranti.uniba.it/il-sistema-di-accoglienza/>.

7.

▶ CONCLUSIONS

7.1

► SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The assessment of welcoming services for TCNs in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia highlights both progress and persistent gaps in the effective delivery of long-term support to newly arriving TCNs. While all focus countries have made efforts to transpose EU directives and develop national frameworks, their implementation remains fragmented. It is also often dependent on the availability of public funding,

including project-based funding, as well as the involvement of civil society organisations. Additional factors to consider include capacity constraints in Welcoming Services offices, legal uncertainty, and inconsistent access to housing support, which hinder the longer-term integration of many TCNs in focus countries.

7.2

► MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these challenges, this report recommends, first and foremost, respecting TCNs' rights and promoting their long-term integration into the EU as guiding principles for the effective delivery of welcoming services (#1, #2). In terms of operational guidelines, evidence from Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and Slovenia calls for improvements in service delivery in four different ways:

- **by agreeing on a comprehensive set of welcoming services in each EU Member State.** National authorities should clarify, either through a framework agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding, what welcoming services include, who is responsible and within what timeframe those services should be delivered (#3 to #6);
- **by harmonising welcoming service procedures across the Union.** This can be done by strengthening national and intra-EU cooperation mechanisms, establishing 'one-stop shops' in relevant public administration offices, and agreeing on minimum welcoming service standards, particularly for housing, public infrastructure and access to labour market information (#7 to #10);

- **by supporting local initiatives that promote TCNs' social inclusion.** This can be done, for example, by promoting community mentorship programmes, private sponsorship initiatives and partnerships with well-established local partners, especially on language training (#11 to #17);

- **by developing contingency planning** to ensure the resilience and adaptability of welcoming services in case of massive TCN arrivals. This step implies convening national and cross-border planning discussions to improve preparedness and TCN labour market integration (#18, #19).

The operational guidelines proposed in this report build on lessons learned from the LABOUR-INT III project and its previous iterations, as well as feedback from stakeholders in focus countries. It is recommended to test them as appropriate to foster more consistent, equitable and sustainable welcoming services for TCNs across the EU.

8.

▶ ANNEXES

8.1

REFERENCES

ActionAid and openpolis (2025) *Centri d'Italia: Accoglienza al collasso*, available at https://migrantidb.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/rapporti_pdf/centri_ditalia_accoglienza_al_collasso.pdf [accessed 2 May 2026].

Asylum Information Database and ECRE, *Country reports*, available at <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/> [accessed 16 January 2026].

Business Fights Poverty and VISA (2025) *Turning Potential into Prosperity: How Europe can help refugee entrepreneurs thrive*, London.

Colombi, D., Näre, L., Palumbo, L., Merikoski, P., and Marchetti, S. (2024) *Irregularised migration in Europe*, Policy Brief. I-CLAIM.

European Commission (2025) *Mid-term review of the Commission Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2025) 162 final.

European Migration Network (2026) *Safe countries of origin and safe third countries; criteria for identifying and examining applications in light of the new Asylum Procedure Regulation (EU) 2024/1348*, available at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/417cf58a-4b64-4d04-9346-b6f755df2c8a_en?filename=2025_EMN_inform_safe_countries_of_origin_and_safe_third_countries.pdf [accessed 15 May 2026].

European Union (2024) *Directive (EU) 2024/1346 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection*, available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL_202401346 [accessed 23 June 2024].

European Union Agency for Asylum (2025) *Practical Guide on the Management of a Reception Centre. Focus on the arrival phase*, Luxembourg: EUAA, available at https://www.euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2025-12/2025_Practical-Guide-on-the-Management-of-a-Reception-Centre-%20Focus-on-the-arrival-phase_EN.pdf [accessed 4 March 2026].

Government of Canada, *How to sponsor a refugee*, available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/sponsor-refugee/private-sponsorship-program.html> [accessed 2 October 2025].

International Organization for Migration (IOM)(2024) *Enhancing Labour Market Inclusion for People Displaced from Ukraine: IOM's Experience*, Geneva: IOM.

Willekers, L. (2023) 'Voices of Hope: The Vital Role of Cultural Mediators in Supporting Migrants', Reliefweb, 15 November 2023, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/italy/voices-hope-vital-role-cultural-mediators-supporting-migrants> [accessed 15 October 2025].

8.2

GLOSSARY
Delivery:

Term used in this document to indicate both the provision of welcoming services and the systems that need to be in place to provide those services. It is also used as a synonym for the first term 'services' in the phrase 'to systematise the services of welcoming services' to avoid any potential confusion in using the same term to indicate two different meanings.

Reception services:

A set of short-term measures aiming to support Third-Country Nationals, particularly asylum seekers and vulnerable groups, upon their arrival in the EU. Typical support provided through reception services is housing, food, health care, and financial allowances.

Social services:

A set of provisions that ensure the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of individuals and their families¹². Social services for TCNs legally residing in the EU vary, depending on their particular status and legislation of the Member State where they reside. TCNs may have access to housing, food and clothing, health care, employment-related support and certain social benefits. TCN minors are generally entitled to free public education in the EU.

Welcoming services:

A set of services supporting longer-term integration and social inclusion for all Third-Country Nationals, regardless of their status. Welcoming services often aim to foster TCNs' broader sense of belonging and participation in their host country. Typical support provided through welcoming services is orientation, language and community support.

¹² Based on Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8.3

▶ LIST OF ORGANISATIONS, AGENCIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Chambers of Commerce and Employer associations:

- ▶ Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- ▶ Confindustria Puglia
- ▶ OZS Slovenia
- ▶ PIMEC Spain
- ▶ SGI Europe
- ▶ WKOE Austria
- ▶ ZDH Germany

EU Institutions:

- ▶ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)
- ▶ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)

Non-Governmental Organisations / Foundations:

- ▶ CARITAS Sofia, Bulgaria
- ▶ SMILE/ Fondazione Maierotti Puglia

Public Employment and Welcoming Services:

- ▶ ESS-ZRSZ Slovenia

Third-Country Nationals living in Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia:

- ▶ 16 in total, originally from Belarus, Iran, Russia, Syria and Ukraine
 - ▶ Twelve women, four men
 - ▶ Nine Refugees/Temporary Protection Holders, seven migrants

Trade Unions:

- ▶ CITUB, Bulgaria
- ▶ CGIL Italy
- ▶ ETUC
- ▶ OPZZ Poland

Other stakeholders:

- ▶ FIERI Consulting (author of LABOUR-INT I and II research reports)



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or DG HOME. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Report produced by Dr. Farida Bena, September 2026



► **SGI Europe**

info@sgieurope.org
+32 (0)2 219 27 98



► **ETUC**

etuc@etuc.org
+32 (0)2 224 04 11



► **SMEunited**

info@smeunited.eu
+32 (0)2 230 75 99



► **Eurochambres**

eurochambres@eurochambres.eu
+32 (0)2 282 08 50