

# The European benchmark for refugee integration: Are EU countries improving their policies?

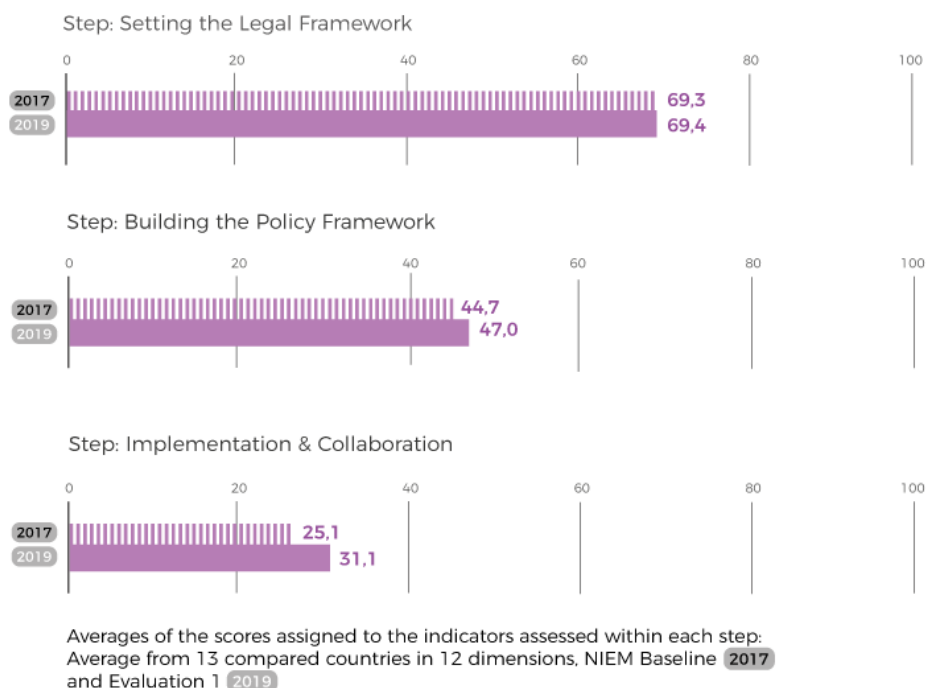
## Findings of the new NIEM report

The new NIEM [Comprehensive European Report](#) has assessed the refugee integration framework of 14 EU member states as of 2019, using 120 indicators and scoring country results on a scale from 0 to 100. In a Q&A with the coordinating researchers of the project, **Carmine Conte** and **Alexander Wolffhardt** from the [Migration Policy Group](#) explain the key lessons from the first evaluation study.

### Q: Are governments working harder to improve refugee integration after the arrival of more than a million people in the EU under international protection?

*Alexander Wolffhardt:* Not really. Neither with regard to the legal framework, nor in policies and measures supporting integration or in the collaboration with civil society and across levels of government, has there been much progress. In NIEM we analyse, in a very practical manner, the concrete steps governments need to take for a comprehensive approach in line with EU and international law. But after assessing 12 areas where laws, policies and partnerships can make a difference for the perspectives of refugees, the only significant positive dynamic across countries is seen in the collaboration of governments with various actors. Nevertheless, on average, this step remains to be the weakest aspect among the countries compared both in 2017 and 2019.

#### Overall change 2017 to 2019



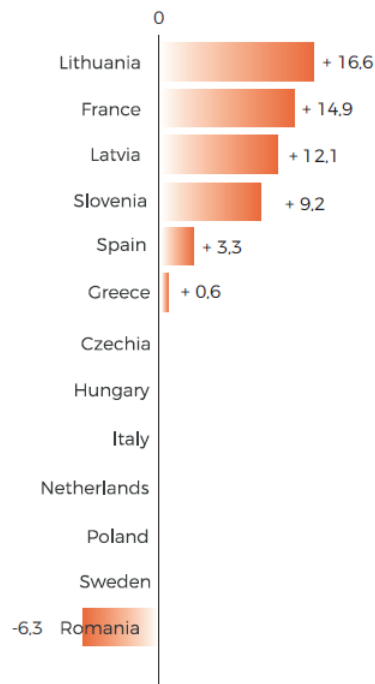
### Q: How many countries make deliberate efforts to lift their standards and ensure that beneficiaries of international protection are given the fair chance to integrate?

*Alexander Wolffhardt:* Very few. Among the 14 countries investigated, France improved in ten of twelve assessed areas of integration from 2017 to 2019, followed by Lithuania, Latvia and Slovenia.

These countries have made progress by either systematically reforming their overall approach to refugee integration, or through efforts in key policy areas. Important roles in these improvements include mainstreaming and cross-governmental collaboration, but also the involvement of NGOs and the receiving society. Employment is one area of integration where this pattern is visible in particular, as shown in the graph below.

## Employment

### Overall change 2017 to 2019 by country



Average of the scores assigned to each step  
(as the average of the indicators assessed within each step)

### Q: Are achieved standards under threat?

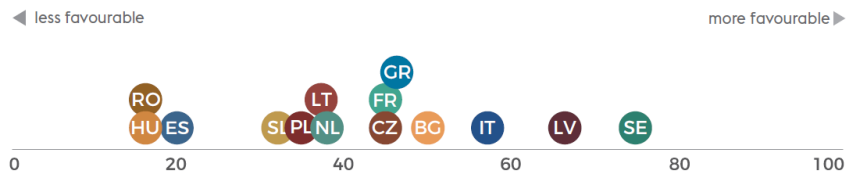
*Carmine Conte:* Unfortunately, in some areas. If we look at how individual countries are doing, Romania tops the list of countries with a negative dynamic, having scored worse in five areas of integration in comparison to 2017. Hungary and Italy saw deterioration in three dimensions each. If we compare how countries score in the different dimensions, residency, housing and health are the sectors which saw the highest number of countries deteriorating. Here, three countries each scored worse than two years earlier.

### Q: When you compare important policy areas across EU countries, are integration standards equally high?

*Alexander Wolffhardt:* They should, but in reality, conditions vary. For example, if we compare education and housing, and here policy-related indicators, policies can be considerably more favourable in one area than in another. What is more, such gaps even grow. While in education five countries improved from 2017 to 2019 across all types of indicators, in housing, three countries did worse.

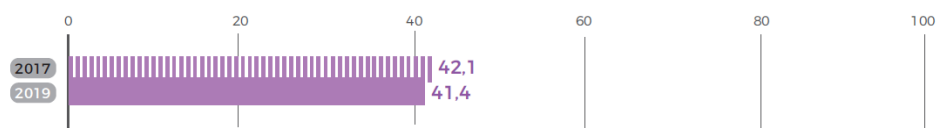
## Education vs. housing

### Step: Building the Policy Framework

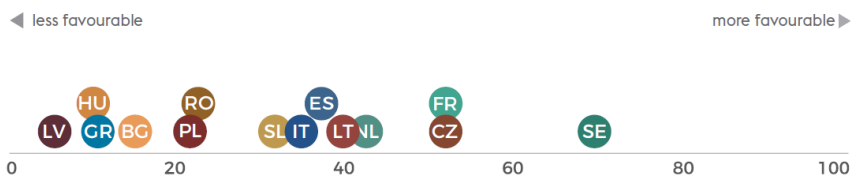


Assessed indicators:

- Access to education for groups of special concern
- Administrative barriers to education
- Awareness raising about the specific situation of beneficiaries of international protection regarding education
- Placement in the compulsory school system
- Length of language support
- Regularity of orientation and language programmes and targeted education measures



### Step: Building the Policy Framework



Assessed indicators:

- Access to housing for vulnerable persons
- Awareness raising about the specific challenges of beneficiaries of international protection on the housing market
- Targeted housing advice, counselling, representation
- Provision of targeted temporary housing support
- Provision of targeted long-term housing support
- Period of targeted housing support
- Administrative barriers to accessing public housing
- Housing quality assessment



### Q: The different status of recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is hotly debated in many countries. Are there any developments?

*Carmine Conte:* Scarcely, and this leads to worrying inequalities. The gap that can be seen in nearly all countries for these protection groups remains with regard to residency, family reunification and citizenship rights. It narrowed a little in France and Poland, but in Italy, the difference in opportunities awarded to these two groups grew even wider.

**Q: For the first time, NIEM also looked into provisions for asylum seekers in this report. Why did you decide to do so?**

*Carmine Conte:* Because it matters, and countries only half-heartedly provide early support, if at all. Once recognised, beneficiaries of international protection face fewer hurdles and have more chances to integrate (e.g. find a job and enter the labour market). We have analysed provisions for asylum seekers in 31 indicators, and with the exceptions of Latvia and Spain, countries make positive provision only in roughly half of them. Generally, conditions are better in health and education than in employment, vocational training and even language learning.

**Q: What continues to be the biggest challenge then?**

*Alexander Wolffhardt:* In the end, many governments still have to realise that refugee integration is more than just about legal provisions, and to act on this insight. This is not to say that equal access rights are not important, but they are only the starting point. For countries to do better, it is necessary to recognise that refugee integration requires active investment, supporting policies and the collaboration and mobilisation of the entire society. These are missed opportunities, and governments eventually act against their own interests if they ignore the potential for faster and more comprehensive integration that is embedded in civil society and the local level and involves refugees themselves in developing solutions.

**Carmine Conte** is the Legal Analyst at the Migration Policy Group.

**Alexander Wolffhardt** is the Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Group and NIEM's Research Coordinator.

[NIEM](#) (The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism) is the largest independent monitoring of refugee integration in 14 EU countries.

For media enquiries, please email Hind Sharif at [hsharif@migpolgroup.com](mailto:hsharif@migpolgroup.com).