



NOVAMIGRA

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

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Valuing Gender Equality: Ideas, Practices and Actors in Everyday Integration Work — Integration and the Value of Gender Equality in Germany, Hungary, Po- land and Sweden

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The Refugee Reception Crisis, Gender Equality and Values²

The refugee reception crisis of 2015 impacted countries in the EU in very different ways, and the ways in which the crisis was addressed politically were therefore equally diverse.³ Overall, 2015 meant an abrupt increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Europe, igniting discourses of alarm, invasion, and fear across the EU, but also vast political and social mobilisations of solidarity. In the course of the refugee reception crisis the visibility of gender equality as a European value has been reinforced. At the same time, the normative power of gender equality in the EU has changed: gender equality has been instrumentalized to, for example, justify the quasi-closure of borders, or by European politicians to argue for the difference between Europeans and non-Europeans.

Values commonly denote what a community or an individual deem desirable. Hence values provide a personal or a socially, culturally or politically shared orientation, not only regarding what is worth striving for, but also what one *is*; one's identity. Norms and values are crucial components of the self-image of both people and nation states. However, this self-image does not develop in a vacuum, rather it is reinforced in reaction to what is identified as *Other*. Put differently, the national self-image provides an idea of an 'us' versus 'them'.

When it comes to gender equality as a European value, the European Union has a long history of gender equality promotion. Nevertheless, while gender equality is a fundamental concept in EU and national law, its scope, meaning, and the strategies to achieve it remain highly contested. Gender equality has several dimensions, each of which is the product of historical struggles and reinterpretations. Among these are women's fight for access to the labour market, equal pay for equal work, and the struggle to level the imbalance between paid and unpaid work — such as housework or caring for children, the elderly and the sick. Other central struggles have been, and continue to be, accessing the right to vote and political representation, sexual and reproductive rights, and ending gender-based violence.

Key discussion points

This policy research alert is a companion piece to a longer report with the same title “Valuing Gender Equality: Ideas, Practices and Actors in Everyday Integration Work” on gender equality and integration in four European countries—Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden (DOI [10.17185/dupublico/72831](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/72831)). Our key discussion points revolve around three focal points: firstly, integration work in relation to gender equality as a *value*, *idea* or overarching *ideal* that is conveyed, secondly, in relation to *everyday practices* that are enacted as a way of achieving gender equality, and, thirdly, in relation to *actors* who engage with gender equality through integration work.

² This policy research alert is a companion piece to a longer report on gender equality and integration in four European countries—Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden: B. Suter, I. J. Ramsøy, and Franziska Böhm, ‘Valuing Gender Equality: Ideas, Practices and Actors in Everyday Integration Work — Integration and the Value of Gender Equality in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Sweden,’ NOVAMIGRA, D3.3c Briefing Paper, September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/72831>

³ It is important to keep in mind that the refugee reception crisis is only one of several crises that the European continent faced in the past two decades. Europe experienced a financial crisis, a security crisis, a refugee reception crisis and is currently in the midst of yet two other crises — the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. These crises further exacerbate existing inequalities, including those based on gender.

Gender equality as a core value of European societies has been an ambiguous project. While on the national level gender equality is valued differently throughout the union, in the field of migration, many actors across the political spectrum have instrumentalized gender equality into a divisive line separating ‘Europeans’ from ‘non-Europeans’.

Gender equality as a value has a central place in various integration courses. As this report has shown, most teachers are as adamant about the importance of this value as they are about presenting it in both a neutral and an inclusive way. Examples include referring to national and international legislation or highlighting the universal bearings of gender equality by emphasizing our common humanity. Generally, it was emphasised that value transformation needs time, experience and trustful encounters, and that the courses were seen as a starting point and not endpoint of this process. Further, the study points out that while many teachers see themselves as representatives of the nation, they showed great reflexivity concerning how to represent the nation, or any other community they felt part of. Europe – or the EU – seldom figured as a frame of reference.

The struggle for gender equality originated from the unequal treatment of women compared to men, and as a result of this, gender equality has come to be seen as an issue that concerns women more than men. Indeed, a majority of practices of integration work aimed at achieving gender equality are concerned with migrant and refugee women and their empowerment. The measures discussed and highlighted in the report reflect the importance of taking into account the heterogeneity of the target group. Being sensitive to specific needs and subjective positions of individuals is seen as essential for empowerment work to prosper. Aspects of age, skill level, family constellation, and health conditions, for example, may create different needs and concerns. The report also shows that issues concerning masculinity and non-binary gender identities in relation to gender equality are significantly more marginalised but have increasingly found their way into integration work. The challenges men and LGBTQI+ people face in the migration process in regard to their (gender) identities are increasingly recognized and thematized.

The gender and ethnic identities and positions of the actors involved in integration work matter. Integration work is predominantly carried out by women, both in the public sector and in the third sector through paid and unpaid work. To a large extent this division of labour corresponds to traditional views on gender roles, with women doing the work in the lower paid or unpaid care sector. However, we have seen that this type of work also offers pathways to empowerment for women, people with migration experience and other minorities. Furthermore, the role model function that some of these people come to hold is not to be underestimated, from both a gender and an integration perspective. Also, it is indisputable that the type of actors — states, state institutions, NGOs and NGO funders — heavily steer the course of work towards gender equality in their framing and funding of work that aims to achieve it.

So how can the view from below inform our understanding of gender equality as a European value?

The report has shown that as a value gender equality in integration work plays out in a multifaceted way. And yet, following the integration workers’ reflections and experiences, their ideas and practices, a series of recurring invariable points crystalize: First, the meanings of and struggles for gender equality are dependent on class, ‘race’, ethnicity, sexual orientation, bodily ability, and other social markers of the actors — in this case, both the integration workers and participants. Second, how gender equality as a value is seen — as European, as national, universal, or not recognised as a value at all — may

change from one situation to the other, and is dependent not least on which issues of gender equality dominate the political and public debates in a given place. Following from this, expressions of gender equality and practices towards reaching gender equality can take different forms in different contexts and in different situations. Third, equally relevant is the insight that specific ideas of gender equality do not emerge in a vacuum but are historically embedded. The ideas of gender equality we hold today have evolved over time and through various struggles whose perspectives have shifted over time, but in particular over the last hundred years. Fourth, the transformation of norms and values, both in individuals and in society, takes time and is not a static process. It is continuously under construction and undergoing constant (re-)negotiation. For integration work, time and trust, and tools to create awareness of one's own values are essential.

The report also neatly points to issues that transcend refugeehood or migranhood. Child care arrangements, for example, not only result in a higher participation of refugee women in integration courses but also supports women's access to the labour market in general. Another example is work on masculinity that recognizes that gender equal relationships decrease men's violence against women in general and not only among the foreign-born population. Issues pertaining to the value of gender equality are therefore intrinsic to society at large, and not only to the field of integration. This perspective is important to keep in mind when addressing gender equality in integration work, not at least in policy-making.

The EU as one policy realm has committed itself to gender equality as a value — an overarching ideal — and the lessons from this report aim to support the EU in living up to these commitments. The current crisis can be seen as an historical conjuncture for paving a new way for gender equality to gain its full potential as a European value. We see the lessons learned from the ground as a small but important step in this direction.

Policy recommendations

Based on our field research on integration and gender equality in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Sweden, we provide some policy-relevant recommendations, drawing on findings from the interviews with integration workers.

Present gender equality as a value which is universally fought for, rather than dependent on a national, European or Western context and thereby account for the diversity of the value itself and the struggles for gender equality in and beyond the West.

- ◆ Gender equality is often presented as a national trait, as a Swedish or German (European) value (national culture, national value or national norm). This risks rejection and may exclude individuals who may not feel part of the nation. Gender equality should be presented as a value independent of national cultures. Conveying gender equality should allow for varying interpretations of the value itself. **Stakeholders: National, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, especially integration workers.**

Offer conditions for integration work which foster trust and provide space for mutual communication and reflexivity among newcomers and society at large.

- ◆ Value transformation at adult age is an inner journey that cannot be imposed from the outside. It engenders a process that allows for the making conscious of one's own values through reflections on the topic in conversation with others. The conversation should be based on mutual respect and an openness towards different opinions. The aim of the conversations should be to build trust rather than to impose certain values. **Stakeholders: local authorities, civil society organisations.**

Safeguard all women's rights, including migrant and refugee women.

- ◆ National governments should continue and increase their efforts in safeguarding women's rights and in enabling gender equality for all women, including refugee and migrant women. This includes enforcing the legal norms enshrined in European and national legislation, and working towards implementing gender equality as a social norm. **Stakeholders: National, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, integration workers.**

Empower migrant and refugee women, through facilitating access to integration activities.

- ◆ Migrant and Refugee women are among the most vulnerable groups in society. Empowering migrant and refugee women in particular through information on society, rights, and obligations is of high importance to facilitate their fair access to opportunities. It is essential to have access to integration courses, the labour market, health care facilities, legal representation and so on. To ensure this access, knowledge about one's rights and opportunities is of utmost importance.
- ◆ One practical aspect is to provide childcare opportunities in integration work where women receive information, learn the language and are empowered to build networks in their new surroundings. Providers of civic orientation, language courses and other integration activities should consider childcare opportunities in order to enable more women to participate in these courses. While such services are important to families as a whole, childcare arrangements especially result in a higher participation of refugee women in educational and labour opportunities in the countries they reside in. **Stakeholders: National, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, integration course providers.**

Be attentive to the needs of all different target groups, such as the LGBTQI+ community, parents, women, and men.

- ◆ Migrants and refugees are a heterogeneous group; their social markers (age, ethnicity, race, class, religion, sexual orientation and gender identities), their experiences, and their struggles differ. Integration work should be sensitive to the needs of all genders by being attentive to context, situation, people's identities, and social positions. Providing opportunities for example for men to share experiences and voice vulnerabilities, including LGBTQI+ issues in the discussion on gender equality in general, and

providing gender-separate spaces are three ways to develop tools for gender equal value transmission through integration work which recognizes individuals needs for safe spaces and facilitates cultural sensitivity. **Stakeholders: national, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, integration workers.**

Promote academic research on gendered migration and integration including studies of masculinities.

- ◆ Integration work should include men – refugee and migrant men as well as men in general – in the debate on gender equality as individuals (not only as husbands or fathers) that both benefit from and contribute to challenging rigid gender norms. This includes shifting the public debate beyond single narratives toward the heterogeneous experiences of men and the multitude of migrant masculinities. This also warrants a greater academic focus on gender equality to engage with men and masculinities in general and in regard to migration in particular. **Stakeholders: European commission, funding bodies on national, regional and local level, civil society organisations.**

Increase project and NGO funding for sustainable work with the empowerment of migrants and refugees.

- ◆ In many countries, civil society organisations are crucial actors in working towards the gender equality of men, women and LGBTQI+ people with migration experience. The work conducted by NGOs is often conducted on a project basis and often relies on funding from the EU, from regional governments or other local bodies. Strengthening these actors necessitates measures to remedy some of the issues that these organisations struggle with: the uncertainty pertaining to future funding, a lack of continuity, and unstable work conditions for staff. **Stakeholders: European commission, national, regional and local authorities.**

Enable reflection among the educators and integration workers to account for the fact that value transformations are long term processes.

- ◆ Facilitate space for reflection among educators and other integration workers involved in value transmission to promote an understanding of the significance of time and sensitivity to historical trajectories when discussing and promoting value transmission and changes. Educators should therefore be encouraged to reflect on the expectations they themselves bring into the courses and how these might influence their pedagogy and encounter with course participants. **Stakeholders: national, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, integration workers.**

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About NOVAMIGRA

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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