



# Migrants, Speak Up

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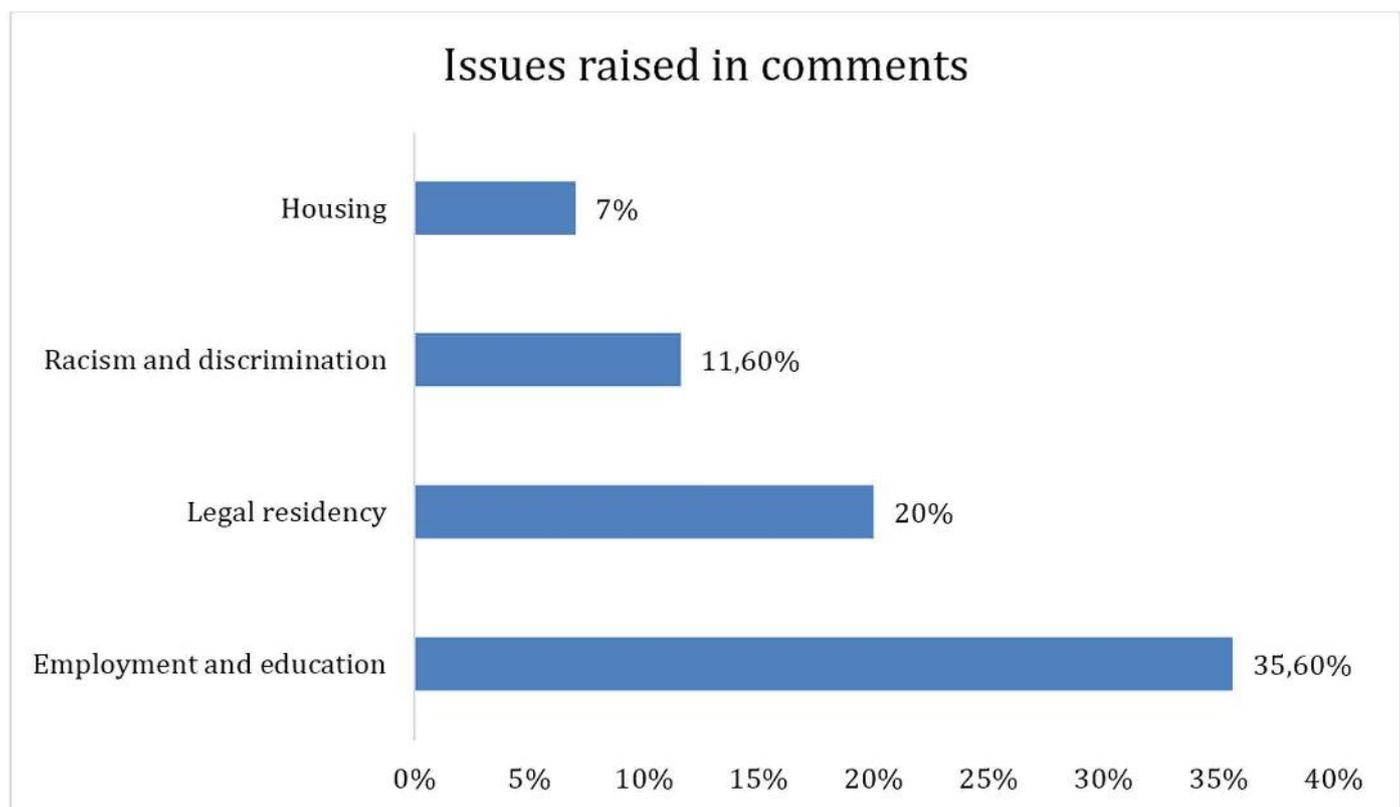
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## Introduction

Between 31st July and 7th November 2017, the European Network Against Racism conducted an online survey among migrants who had arrived in the last five years in Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Sweden. A total of 5,237 people responded to the survey, who could answer the question: “Is there anything else you would like to tell us?”<sup>1</sup>

well-being in Europe, employment, crime, police, housing, integration programmes and the main difficulties experienced. This analysis provides another opportunity amplify the voices of migrants and highlight the important issues they are facing. It is important to note that the issues raised will be more male-oriented as 76.4 % of the respondents were men.

The first three major issues that came out of respondent’s answers were the difficulties in relation to getting residency permits, finding work or education, and finding housing.



### *“It’s a dark era for migration”<sup>2</sup>*

In the analysis we examined the content of the answers to this question in order to determine the main issues for migrants coming to Europe. The key findings of the “Migrants, speak up” survey provide statistics on migrants’

In addition, difficulties with these issues lead to another broader issue, that of integration.

<sup>1</sup> Migrants: Speak up! Technical Report, [http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/technical\\_report\\_final\\_-\\_with\\_annexes.pdf](http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/technical_report_final_-_with_annexes.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from the comments.

In order to settle into a new country, you need the stability of residency, access to housing and being able to have access to employment and education.

Language barriers were also a major concern and further complicate the integration process.

The comments make it clear that the issues migrants face when coming to Europe are linked to discrimination and racism; indeed some comments go as far as comparing living in Europe to slavery.

It is interesting to note that the questions in the survey asked about migrants' experience in Europe only and it was their own comments that highlighted the impact of racism and discrimination on their lives.

For this analysis, distinct keywords used throughout the comments were determined to assess which issues were put forward the most. Regarding employment and education, 35.6% of the comments addressed this issue, 20% addressed getting legal residency documents in their country of destination, 11.6% mentioned racism and discrimination, and finally 7% of the comments mentioned the issue of finding housing.

## Methodology

The analysis was conducted on comments written in English, French, Arabic, Farsi, Somali and Urdu. Comments in Italian, Turkish and Chinese were not included due to lack of translation into English. A total of 1,059 comments were analysed.

In order to do this analysis keywords were determined according to the issues that were often mentioned. All the comments were compiled and searched with the use of the keywords. Several keywords related to one topic were used to determine how many comments addressed the issue. The percentage of keywords used by topic were then calculated out of the total amount of comments.

- For employment and education the following keywords were used: - job; work; - unemployed; - unemployment; - education; - university; - school; student.
- For residency the following keywords were used: - permit; - residency; - documents; - asylum.
- For housing the following keywords were used: - house; - apartment; home; - flat; - housing; - shelter.
- For discrimination the following keywords were used: - discrimination; - racism; - racist; - race; - slavery; slave.
- For distress the following keywords were used: - suicide; - depressed; help; - sad; - mental; - crazy; - psychological.

Once these percentages were calculated, the analysis was divided into four sections: Employment and Education, Residency, Housing and Integration.

The reason why Employment and Education are included under one heading is because they are both related. They are both occupations migrants will seek when coming to Europe, and of course depending on the situation, education is needed to find employment. Data from the “Migrants, speak up key findings” were used to complete the information.

## Employment and education

Having access to decent employment and education was by far the highest concern amongst migrants who responded to the last question.<sup>3</sup> The “Migrants, speak up key findings” had already revealed that being overqualified was one of the most important issues migrants faced when looking for employment. For instance, 55% of the Arabic respondents mentioned feeling overqualified for the job they were doing. 17% of those in Greece mention their legal status preventing them from doing jobs which match their qualifications. More than half of the Somali respondents (67.7%) report being treated worse than their colleagues. Most of the migrants surveyed have a high level of education: 25.4% of the respondents have an educational level of 17 years or more in total, followed by 12.6% having an educational level of 16 years. Merely 2.3% of the respondents have no education at all.

Being overqualified also comes up in the comments. One comment illustrates how jobs that do meet the respondents’ qualifications are sometimes refused to them for reasons linked to racism and discrimination.

Even though I have graduated from the best universities in Iran and Europe and have work qualifications, I still have a lot of problems finding employment. I have been invited to start work on several occasions but every time they have expressed concern about my nationality”.

The discrimination faced by migrants when trying to find job opportunities is even sometimes compared to slavery: “They do not give foreigners any job or specialist position; even if you have the work experience they do not let you in. In truth, Germans give foreigners the work that they themselves are not prepared to do. This in itself is discrimination and modern slavery.”

The use of the adjective “slave/slavery” came up in the context of employment and education. Due to not having employment opportunities that matched their skills and being discriminated against, the feeling of modern slavery arises:

**“Our life here is a life of slavery. We work in order to enrich our employers and to not starve so that we can continue working and paying our rent.”** The words master and slave, rather than employer and employee, were used in some instances: “They want you to be a slave – in its modern guise, of course. Over-work and hard work is the problem for the migrant, for not much money, while for the master it is all about not much work for a lot of money.”

<sup>3</sup> Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

While one respondent states: “I am a PhD student. The extent of discrimination towards non-European students is remarkable, even to the point where, as a joke, the professor will say, ‘you are my slave’.”

Migrants are also sometimes forced to work in inhumane conditions:

“I am forced to work 17 hours a day and paid below the minimum wage and I am not given any days off to rest. If I complain, I am denied the work. People work 40 hours a week and get two days off. I am denied that right because of racism”.

Racial discrimination was mentioned in ENAR’s 2015-16 Shadow Report on migration<sup>4</sup>, which states that the difficulties migrants face in the labour market are also a consequence of stereotyping and discrimination based on their origin. The report gives the example of migrants of African origin being paid lower salaries in Italy.

Moreover, there is a lack of access to information that could help migrants find jobs that better match their educational and skills levels.

“I have had a high-level university education, but my Master in Engineering was obtained from Amir Kabir University, Tehran. In Germany I do not know how to continue my education or find appropriate work. There really is no authority that I can access in order to obtain the correct information.”

One describes the lack of recognition of

his qualifications as a war that blocks him from developing his career: “There’s an indirect war towards refugees with higher qualifications as they’re rejected in job applications for absurd reasons such as over-qualification for instance. They have put limits to refugees’ emancipation and career development. A refugee can’t progress in his career because the position is not adapted to his expertise or the salary for example.”

Certain comments demonstrate how migrants want nothing more than to find an opportunity to fully integrate their new country: **“I want to get a job to guarantee a stable revenue and improve my life conditions and fully integrate in social and economic life.”** Another comment develops this further: “I would like integration to be linked with job seeking and work permits. We want to show that we can have a job we couldn’t have had in our own countries and that we can sustain ourselves without social aid. We are here because of traumatising living conditions and we just want to serve the society and live in peace like everyone else.” In fact, preventing migrants from getting employment and education further leads them to feelings of despair: “I would like job opportunities because we’re left jobless, I feel I’m dying from staying at home and I’m depressed because of all that happened in the past. Syrians would love to work and integrate Swedish society but there are big obstacles.” Two comments from the questionnaire answered in Somali in relation to unemployment mention a fear of dying of hunger.

<sup>4</sup> ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016 p.29., [http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport\\_2015x2016\\_long\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport_2015x2016_long_low_res.pdf)

“I live without a job or social assistance. I fled my country because of the war but I am going to die of hunger here.” “We are suffering from unemployment and hunger. We have given up the hope of getting employment that could help us meet our needs.”

As a result of migrants being fingerprinted in the first country they arrive in or being relocated to another country/area within a country, there are also complaints about being settled in a place that lacks employment or studying opportunities. Being in a remote location with few job or education opportunities hinders the chance of migrants being able to find one or the other. One respondent explains: “I was settled in San Vincenzo [Italy] which doesn’t have a university or a vocational training centre.”

Finally, language barriers come up as an issue, for example in Germany, where theoretical training courses for the job market are offered, but only in the German language, making it difficult for migrants to participate before having learned the language. “There are no training courses for migrants that prepare them to access the job market... the theoretical trainings are offered in German by German trainers. How can a migrant understand? I’m strongly opposed to the theoretical training system.”

## “Our life is worse than animals”

### Residency

With regard to residency, the length of the application process poses the most serious problems.

It is mentioned in about 20% of the total comments regarding residency. Respondents report waiting up to eight years to hear back on their residency application, while others complain about meeting all the criteria to receive their residency and yet still receiving a negative reply. One respondent explains: **“I am still dependent on the migration services. It has been eight years and I still don’t have my documents. Now I have a reason to stay in Sweden because I have a daughter with Swedish citizenship... but immigration services still won’t give me a residency permit.”** While another states: “Where I am, the procedure of issuing documents are not respected at all. I have been in this town for 5 months and they still haven’t delivered any residency permit yet.”

Migrants who have received a negative answer regarding their residency then need to invest further time and money in a lawyer to try and appeal the decision. Legal documents are often not translated and this prevents migrants and refugees from having access to proper legal support. They are not always aware of the laws, their rights, and often need to pay for a translator. Some comments mention that they receive their residency permit after its expiry date or close to it: **“Getting a residency permit is very difficult. I have been living in Greece for two years now, and I only got a permit after a year and half, meaning I have only six months left.”** Another comment highlights deliberate discrimination by police in relation to residency permits: **“The immigration police act arbitrarily, and I have personally witnessed them snatching papers from migrants who don’t fully understand the language and tearing them up...”**

Unfortunately, because they need residency, migrants submit themselves without protest to the insults and barbarity of the Italian immigration police, and for me this is most unfortunate for Europe.”

Aside from the waiting time to receive their residency, the actual duration of the residency is reported as an issue. Then, when the residency permit is due to expire, there are issues with finding information on its renewal: “My residency permit for Italy expires in a month and I don’t know what to do. I have searched for help everywhere possible and asked for an extension, without results.”

The fingerprinting procedure when arriving in the European Union is also mentioned as a concern. Once a migrant has been fingerprinted in one country, he is required to stay in that same country. This can create further complications for migrants if they try to move on to another country where there are more opportunities for them. “My asylum application has been rejected in Germany so I have to go back where I entered, in Italy. I went through all this suffering during my journey, passing the Mediterranean Sea, being beaten up and mistreated in Libya... I suffered all this because I had a goal, studying. I would rather stay in Germany to continue my studies. I am keeping up with my studies very seriously but they want me to go back to Italy?” It can also lead to families being separated if their fingerprints were not taken in the same country: “It has been about three months since my brother and I, who had been living with our family in Austria for two years,

were again deported to this country due to us having our fingerprints registered in Italy.” Migrants find this law inhumane and it is preventing them from moving on to countries with more opportunities:

“The fingerprinting law is very inhumane and illogical, as it results in people like me and my spouse spending a great deal of time in countries that we have tried so hard to get to, only to eventually be deported to Italy or to countries already full of refugees, where we will remain lost and without purpose.”

Furthermore, a few comments mention the distinction made between applicants coming from Afghanistan and applicants coming from Syria. “The obscene difference between Arabs and Afghans in the case investigation process” one mentions, while another denounces, “They are behaving in a discriminatory manner in Sweden, with the Arabs on one side and Afghans on the other”. In 2016, the European Union announced a deal with Afghanistan to repatriate Afghan nationals who did not fulfill conditions to stay back to Afghanistan. Under this repatriation deal, the EU can deport asylum seekers coming from Afghanistan, and this is the “discriminatory” process the respondent is probably referring to. This is not limited to refugees coming from Afghanistan. As ENAR’s 2015-16 Shadow Report on migration<sup>5</sup> highlights, Member States have been updating their safe countries list in order to deport refugees more easily.

5. ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016 p.17, [http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport\\_2015x2016\\_long\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport_2015x2016_long_low_res.pdf)

Hungary now recognises Serbia as a safe country, while Germany recognises several Balkan States as safe countries of origin. This not only makes it almost impossible for refugees from these countries to apply for asylum, but it also allows people who had already settled in Germany to be deported back to these “safe countries”.

**“What do we need to do to live a normal life in some corner of the world like a normal person?”**

## Housing

Housing was not mentioned as often as residency and finding employment or education, but it was a key issue for migrants settling in Europe. The “Migrants, speak up key findings” had already shown that Greece had the worst conditions in regards to housing and that overcrowding was the most common issue in Greece and Italy. An average of 3.63 persons per room (hostels, hotels and detention centres) was reported for all the countries.

Most complaints in the comments concern finding permanent housing, an issue the survey results revealed that Syrians and those on temporary protected status struggled the most with.

Problems with finding housing are connected to racism and discrimination. One person from Somalia currently in Italy reported being afraid of arson. ENAR’s 2015-16 Shadow Report on migration highlights that racist attacks against migrants include arson and other attacks on

asylum seekers’ and refugees’ accommodation, as well as incitement to hatred/threats and physical assault.<sup>6</sup>

He also mentions that accommodation is only provided until legal residency is obtained, and then the migrant or refugee is on his own. He explains how important it is to find proper housing in order to settle into a country: “Life is all about housing and food and after comes education and after that employment.” Another comment shows that, before anything else there is a need to find shelter. The person commenting intends to study for a doctorate but lives in an overcrowded homeless shelter with no facilities and high use of alcohol and cigarettes. When he asked for help from the Budapest department for asylum seekers, they responded: “if you don’t like it, then get out of this country”. This lack of access to accommodation creates barriers: “Not having accommodation because you don’t have a fixed residency permit makes it difficult to plan your life.”

Racist and discriminatory behaviour by landlords is reported: “Landlords do not rent property to migrants, and don’t trust them”.

Another respondent explains that his landlord takes advantage of him: “My landlord does not want to give me back the money that was paid to him by mistake. He despises me, treats me in a racist way and does not want to listen to me.” A more extensive comment sheds light on another case of exploitation by a landlord:

<sup>6</sup> ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016 p.33

a student from Iran says he was robbed and extorted by his landlord. He tried to lodge a complaint with the police and go to court but did not have the resources to do so. He received a similar response when trying to protest: “you shouldn’t have come to our country” and “if you come here you have to accept all of the conditions”. These reactions overlook the fact many migrants have not come to Europe by choice and a few respondents state that many would rather go back to their home country if they could. “We’re seven to eight people living in one place. A place no one can live in, we eat and sleep in the same place. We are treated as slaves but we don’t say a word for the sake of food and because our homeland can’t provide us with a decent life currently.”

**“I have spent my life on migration, I don’t want to be a refugee anymore”**

## Integration

In the “Migrants, speak up key findings”, participation in integration programmes was found at 33.4% overall, with the highest being 51% in Germany and the lowest 10.9% in Greece.

All the above issues constitute barriers to the integration of migrants into their new society. As previously mentioned, migrants expressed concerns about the fact that legal documents are not translated into more languages, making it nearly impossible for a migrant to know their rights upon arriving in the country and having to spend high amounts in order to afford representation. About 15.7% of the total comments mention distress about their new lives in Europe, out of which 128

comments mention needing help. “I was a completely normal person who was satisfied with his life. But from the day I arrived in Europe, every day I expect to die and am suffering from many psychological problems.” Some mention wishing to return to their home countries, wishing the situation there would get better: “Oh, how I wish the situation in my country would improve so that I can return there”. Racism was also mentioned:

“Black Africans are treated unfairly because of colour. My little children have gone through what they are not supposed to be going through all because of colour. We are still suffering even after three and half years of integration.”

This general distress could result from waiting up to years to know if they will be granted residency and from not being able to build a life in Europe through studies or employment. “I am so very fed up with living. All I live for is my 7-month-old daughter. I have been living in this country for about three years without receiving any response from the migration department. It has really been a waste of my time, time in which I could have completed three years of education and secured a good job.”

Migrants come to Europe looking for a better life, but face further desperation upon arrival. A few comments coming from migrants who had a stable life in their home country and came to Europe to improve their quality of life, now feel regret and humiliation for not having been able to do so. “I had hoped for the day when I would be a part of this society and have work and an income that would facilitate my education.

Because my conditions in Iran prior to my migration here were not bad, I am embarrassed to return to Iran because of the worse conditions to be found here and embarrassed to admit that I lived for ten years under conditions in which it was difficult to find anyone willing to talk to me. The biggest mistake of my life was to come to this country, in which it is like you are slowly drowning.” One comment mentions that they have found no more freedom in Europe than in their home country.

As shown in the sections above, there are also reports of institutional abuse, whether from the government itself, the police, lawyers or landlords. Racism and discrimination are also reported at this level, not just from individuals.

The three previously identified issues of residency, housing and employment/education definitely stand in the way of the integration process: “Finding work and accommodation, as it is very cramped and overcrowded. I cannot study and improve my language. It is very stressful for me not to be able to learn the language and integrate with the people here.”<sup>7</sup>

## “Our life here is a life of slavery”

### Migrants with disabilities

An important issue that came up, though only a handful of times, was the issue of migrants with disabilities.

It seems “there are no infrastructures and policies to help migrants with disabilities”. One migrant explains: “I need to have disability papers. However, in Germany no one cares about disabled migrants,

no one questions whether you are disabled or healthy... They wrote that I am fit and healthy even though one of my feet and two toes on the other have been amputated.” Another person indicates that his family has not been receiving proper support for their physical and mental disabilities for as long as eight years: “I’ve been living in Greece for eight years now. My situation is very bad. My mother and one of my brothers have a disability, while the other is mentally ill. We need help. We live in a very difficult situation, with no health care and no proper roof to protect us.”

Another migrant with polio who had come to Europe hoping to find more tolerance towards his disability was disappointed to find he was wrong, he writes: “I have had a disability since childhood, I have polio. I expected to be granted asylum, but this has not happened. They gave me residency for one year, which they can terminate at any time they want... I now feel bad about European countries. Here too there is a negative view of those with disabilities, both in society and by the government.”

These comments demonstrate that more support should be provided to migrants with disabilities who apply for asylum in Europe.

7. ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016 p.18.

## Conclusion

It should come as no surprise that the three main areas of concern are employment and education, residency and housing. Decent housing, access to a job or education and a residency permit are essential to integrate within a new country and society.

Although the questions asked in the survey were more generally about migrants' experiences of life in Europe, the respondents' answers brought up issues of racism and discrimination. They are almost constantly mentioned when they speak about the three main issues identified. In addition, some of the comments mention distress in relation to their new lives. Both the survey findings and the comments highlight the difficult reality of people who try to find a better life in Europe.

## Key recommendations

1. EU Member States should focus on developing long-term and comprehensive integration plans, instead on focusing only on limiting the flow of migrants coming to Europe.

2. Equal treatment and non-discrimination should be mainstreamed into legislation, policies, and practices relating to migration, in particular in the areas of employment, housing, and the justice system.

3. Integration measures should be put in place at the earliest possible moment in the migration process, and should include promoting early access to language learning and welcome classes; facilitating early skills assessment and recognition of qualifications; ensuring rapid access to the labour market and vocational training; and facilitating access to housing and health-care.

4. Residency/permit procedures should be improved to facilitate the integration of migrants, in particular with regard to length of procedure and accessible information about the process, in as many languages as possible.

5. National governments should develop labour market integration plans for all migrants, addressing issues of exploitation, skills recognition and acquisition, career progression, mobility and vocational training.



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