



## D2.5 Local Integration Strategy of TCNs into the Agri-food labour market



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## Introduction

The **Agri for Integration project** (101141071 – AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL), co-funded by the European Union through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), aims to foster the inclusion of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), particularly women, into local agri-food labour markets. By emphasizing sustainable agriculture, intercultural dialogue, and participatory governance, the project addresses both labour shortages in the agri-food sector and the socio-economic marginalization of migrants. Its bottom-up methodology includes collaboration with local authorities, agribusinesses, civil society organizations (CSOs), and migrant-led groups to co-design integration strategies that reflect local realities and needs.

The project is implemented in five EU countries, Italy, Greece, Spain, Sweden, and Slovakia, each chosen for its dynamic agricultural sector and migrant presence. The consortium includes local municipalities (e.g., Marineo, Trikala), research institutions (e.g., Harokopio University), social enterprises (e.g., PRISM), NGOs (e.g. Organization Earth), and migrant-support organizations (e.g., Support Group Network). Stakeholders engaged in the project represent:

- Local and Regional Authorities, guiding policy alignment and ensuring sustainability.
- Civil Society and Migrant-led Organizations, offering support services and advocacy.
- Agri-Food Sector Representatives, providing employment pathways and practical insights.
- Host Community Members, fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Through their involvement, the project seeks to develop replicable models of inclusive integration that respond to local labour needs while promoting equity and social inclusion.

**Work Package 2 (WP2)** is dedicated to developing a ***Local Strategy for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into the Agri-food Labour Market***. The groundwork behind this deliverable comes from the observations and evidence gathered from all WP2 activities: stakeholders mapping and workshop field visits and focus groups<sup>2 & 3</sup>, city audits<sup>4</sup> and best practices webinar<sup>5</sup>. All of these activities collectively helped to deliver the Local Integration Strategy.

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## 1. Methodological Framework

The development of the Local Integration Strategy (D2.5) followed a **bottom-up, participatory and evidence-based methodology**. It was designed to ensure that the strategy reflects both the **realities on the ground** and the **strategic policy priorities** at local and EU levels. The framework built upon a sequence of interconnected tasks and deliverables implemented in WP2, each generating knowledge, insights, and stakeholder consensus that informed the final strategy.

### Guiding Principles

The methodology was guided by the following principles:

- **Participation and Co-creation:** Active involvement of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), women TCNs in particular, alongside local authorities, civil society, migrant-led organizations, agribusiness representatives, and host communities.
- **Evidence-based Planning:** Use of data collected through field research, consultation activities, and policy audits to ensure that recommendations are grounded in real needs and practices.
- **Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:** Bringing together diverse actors to bridge perspectives between policy-makers, service providers, employers, and migrant communities.
- **Comparative and Transnational Learning:** Drawing from experiences in five EU pilot countries (Italy, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia) and from best practices across Europe.
- **Gender and Inclusion Sensitivity:** Ensuring that the specific challenges faced by women TCNs are highlighted and addressed within the strategy.

### Sources of Evidence

The Local Integration Strategy integrates findings from four main data sources:

#### 1. Stakeholder Partnerships

- Local Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships were formed in each pilot site, with 131 relevant actors in total.

- 5 Partnership formation workshops (one per pilot city) with 174 participants in total facilitated co-creation activities, ensuring early involvement in shaping objectives and priorities<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Consultation Activities

- **Field Visits** : 60 one-to-one interviews with diverse stakeholders (20 TCNs where half of them were women, 14 NGOs, 12 agri-food employers, 14 local authorities and host community representatives) across pilot sites, structured around standardized questionnaires.<sup>2</sup>
- **Focus Groups**: 5 country-level focus groups engaging 47 stakeholders in total, provided deeper insights into perceptions of integration, barriers, opportunities, and proposals for action.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Policy and Service Audits

- 5 City-level audits either in a group format or with a single participant engaging 17 stakeholders in total , based on the AMIF *Integra* toolkit, assessed existing policies, services, and integration measures.<sup>4</sup>
- These audits evaluated governance structures, service accessibility, employment support mechanisms, civic participation opportunities, and public attitudes towards TCNs.

## 4. Best Practices Review

- 18 best practices of TCN integration in the agri-food labour market from across Europe were identified and analyzed.<sup>5</sup>
- Practices were reviewed for relevance, effectiveness, transferability, and alignment with EU integration and employment policies.

## Analytical Process

The integration strategy was developed through a structured process:

- **Step 1: Data Collection** – Gathering quantitative and qualitative data through workshops, field visits, focus groups, and audits.
- **Step 2: Synthesis** – Consolidating findings into thematic categories: (i) current state of integration, (ii) challenges and barriers, (iii) existing support structures, (iv) emerging opportunities.

- **Step 3: Cross-country Comparison** – Identifying commonalities and differences across pilot sites to highlight shared challenges and unique local conditions.
- **Step 4: Best Practice Integration** – Linking local findings with European experiences to enrich the strategy with replicable solutions.
- **Step 5: Drafting of Strategic Objectives and Measures** – Defining clear, actionable objectives tailored to the agri-food sector, supported by evidence from the consultations and audits.

### Expected Outcomes of the Methodology

This methodology is not only about collecting data, but about building trust and cooperation among all the actors involved in the integration of TCNs into the agri-food sector. By engaging directly with migrants, employers, local authorities, and host communities, the process created a **shared understanding of challenges and opportunities**. The outcome is a strategy that does not come “from above,” but one that is shaped by those who live and work in the communities every day.

Overall this approach ensures that the final Local Integration Strategy gives a voice to TCNs, **resonates with local realities, supports practical solutions, builds common ground and connects the local with the European**. The recommendations are not only tailored to each city but also linked to wider EU priorities such as the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion and the European Green Deal. This helps ensure that local strategies contribute to bigger, long-term goals.

In short, the methodology transforms fragmented experiences into a **cohesive and actionable roadmap**, ensuring that the strategy is both **locally owned** and **European in scope**.



## 2. Current State of Integration in Pilot Areas

The integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into the agri-food labour market varies across the five pilot sites. Although each context presents unique socio-economic dynamics, common trends emerge regarding labour shortages, bureaucratic obstacles, and the need for better coordination of integration measures.

### Country/City snapshots

#### Italy

In South Italy, agriculture remains a central pillar of the regional economy, heavily reliant on seasonal and low-skilled labour. Field visits and focus groups revealed that TCNs, particularly from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, are essential to sustaining harvesting and food processing activities. Employers generally value the reliability and flexibility of migrant workers, but the lack of legal certainty regarding residence permits and work contracts continues to discourage formal employment.

The region benefits from a **strong presence of cooperatives**, which often act as stabilising forces in rural economies, as well as **positive municipal initiatives** that aim to promote inclusion. In recent years, the **growing role of social enterprises** has also provided innovative pathways for migrant participation in local food chains.

Despite these positive developments, **serious challenges persist**. Informal work remains widespread, leaving many migrants vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe conditions. Opportunities for structured training are scarce, language barriers limit participation, and coordination between local authorities and employers is weak, preventing the creation of more sustainable employment pathways.

From the perspective of municipal audits, **inclusion is acknowledged as a priority**, but strategies remain fragmented. Dedicated measures for the agri-food sector are often lacking, and much of the progress achieved relies heavily on **EU-funded projects** rather than long-term, institutionalised structures. This reliance creates uncertainty about the sustainability of integration efforts once project cycles end.



## Greece

In Trikala, the agri-food sector faces **increasing labour shortages**, particularly in livestock, harvesting, and food packaging. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the indispensable role of TCNs in addressing these gaps. **Employers often expressed openness to hiring** migrants, appreciating their contribution to sustaining agricultural productivity. At the same time, integration processes remain fragmented, heavily reliant on ad-hoc initiatives by NGOs, community centres, or individual employers.

Some important strengths can be observed. Local businesses show a **willingness to employ TCNs**, and **community centres have become hubs of support**, offering access to information, cultural mediation, and social services. These centres sometimes operate as **de facto one-stop shops**, demonstrating the municipality's efforts to create inclusive points of contact for migrants.

Nevertheless, challenges remain entrenched. **Bureaucracy is a constant barrier**, with difficulties in obtaining social security numbers or tax IDs delaying formal employment. Interpretation services are insufficient, vocational training opportunities tailored to TCNs are limited, and there is no comprehensive municipal strategy specifically targeting TCN integration in the agri-food sector. The audit confirmed that while some structures exist, integration goals and measurable targets for agriculture remain absent, leaving efforts inconsistent and under-coordinated.

## Spain

In Spain, the agri-food **labour market is diverse**, spanning from wholesale food markets to peri-urban farming. TCNs are present across different sectors, but their **integration is uneven**. Focus group participants highlighted that while metropolitan policies support inclusion broadly, sector-specific measures for agriculture are less visible.

Strengths lie in the **advanced municipal structures** that provide broad integration services, combined with the active role of NGOs that advocate for TCN rights and create employment pathways. Cooperatives are increasingly open to migrant participation, offering opportunities for **community-based models of integration**.

Despite this, **instability characterises much of the TCN employment landscape**. Seasonal contracts create insecurity, while language requirements and the precarious housing situation limit access to steady work. The recognition of foreign qualifications is also an unresolved issue,

preventing many migrants with prior agricultural or technical experience from advancing in the labour market.

Audit results highlight that integration services are well-developed at municipal level, but agri-food is not systematically prioritized, resulting in **missed opportunities to link employment and integration.**

## Sweden

In Sweden, the agri-food labour market is shaped less by large-scale farming and more by urban agriculture, food services, and green maintenance activities. Stakeholders described a **dual reality**: on one hand, TCNs bring motivation and prior agricultural experience; on the other, many programmes designed to support their integration fail to translate into stable employment opportunities.

There are notable strengths in Sweden's system. Municipalities such as Mölndal are offering internships and service placements to migrants, creating important **entry points into the labour market.** Civil society organisations play an active role in engaging TCNs, and digital access through libraries and community centres is widely available.

However, gaps remain significant. Many TCNs face **“project fatigue,”** having participated in numerous initiatives that provided training without sustainable employment outcomes. Language barriers persist, digital literacy is uneven, and recognition of prior agricultural skills is limited. Employers emphasised that while inclusion frameworks exist, they often fail to meet the practical needs of the agri-food sector.

Audit findings confirmed this picture: diversity policies are in place, but there is no dedicated focus on integrating TCNs into agriculture or food-related industries. **Integration pathways remain fragmented,** overly dependent on short-term initiatives, and disconnected from the long-term labour demands of the sector

## Slovakia

Slovakia illustrates the contrasts that can exist within a single country. Nitra has emerged as a national leader, adopting **a comprehensive Integration Strategy** for Foreigners until 2035 and establishing the COMIN Contact Centre as a one-stop shop offering multilingual counselling,

mediation, and employment support. This has created a more structured environment for migrant integration.

The city benefits from strong partnerships with NGOs, accessible public services, and EU funding that has supported innovative integration measures. Employers recognise the need for migrant labour, and municipal officials show political commitment to inclusion.

Yet, even in Nitra, the **agri-food sector has not been prioritised**. While migrants can access general employment support, sector-specific programmes for agriculture are largely absent, and no measurable employment targets exist for TCNs in this field. Job-matching remains limited, and national policies provide only partial guidance for municipalities. Outside Nitra, in cities such as Bratislava, integration measures are less coordinated, and migrants often face more precarious situations.

Audit insights confirm that Slovakia has made progress, particularly through Nitra's leadership, but the country still **lacks systematic integration measures tailored to the agricultural labour market**. Stakeholders agreed that stronger national and EU-level frameworks would be needed to ensure agriculture becomes a viable and attractive employment pathway for migrants.

## 2.2 Comparative Analysis

Across the five pilot sites, several cross-cutting patterns can be identified:

- **Labour shortages and reliance on TCNs** are universal, especially in labour-intensive agricultural and food-related tasks.
- **Administrative and legal barriers** (permits, social security, tax documentation) consistently hinder formal employment.
- **Lack of structured vocational and language training** tailored to agri-food is a common gap, particularly for women TCNs.
- **Fragmented policy frameworks exist:** while some cities have advanced strategies, none have dedicated, coherent approaches focused on agri-food.
- **Civil society plays a critical bridging role**, yet often without sufficient institutional or financial support.

- **Public perceptions and media narratives** remain mixed, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes and limiting opportunities for intercultural exchange.

In short, while the reliance on TCNs in the agri-food sector is clear, the structures to support their sustainable and inclusive integration remain underdeveloped. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge because current practices leave many migrants vulnerable and integration fragmented, but an opportunity because there is a strong foundation of demand, goodwill, and practical ideas that can be transformed into coherent strategies.

Lastly each pilots current state of integration is summarized on Table.1

<b>CURRENT STATE OF INTEGRATION IN PILOT AREAS</b>			
<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Audit Insights</b>
<b>ITALY</b>	Strong cooperatives, positive municipal initiatives, role of social enterprises	Informal work, limited training, language barriers, weak coordination	Inclusion priority but fragmented, EU projects fill in the gap
<b>GREECE</b>	High employer demand, active community centres, openness of businesses	Bureaucracy, lack of interpreters, absence of unified strategy, limited training	Municipal structures exist but no agri-food strategy/goals
<b>SPAIN</b>	Advanced municipal frameworks, strong NGOs, open cooperatives	Seasonal instability, language requirements, housing precarity, recognition issues	Good services but agri-food not prioritized systematically
<b>SWEDEN</b>	Municipal internship models, strong civil society, good digital access	Mismatch of training/labour needs, language/digital barriers, no recognition of prior skills	Diversity policies exist but agri-food not a focus, fragmented pathways
<b>SLOVAKIA</b>	Formal integration strategy, strong NGO partnerships, one-stop shop services	No agri-food focus, weak employment matching, reliance on national initiatives	Advanced governance in Nitra but agri-food not a strategic focus; other cities lag

***Table 1 ‘Current State of Integration’***

### 3. Key Findings from WP2 Activities

The development of the Local Integration Strategy was built upon a sequence of interconnected consultation and research activities under WP2. These activities provided a multi-dimensional picture of how Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), and especially women TCNs, interact with the agri-food labour market in the five pilot sites. The following section synthesises the main insights gathered from each stage of the process.

#### 3.1 Insights from Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The **Partnership Formation Workshops** brought together over 174 stakeholders across the five pilot sites and offered a compelling demonstration of how local engagement, when well-structured and inclusive, can yield high-value strategic input for integration planning.

Several core lessons emerged:<sup>1</sup>

- **Shared concern about fragmentation:** Stakeholders agreed that integration measures are often project-based and lack continuity, which undermines long-term impact.
- **Different levels of preparedness:** While some municipalities already had broader inclusion frameworks, others relied on informal practices and short-term initiatives.

**Priority issues identified:** Commonly highlighted priorities included streamlining administrative procedures, developing accessible vocational training (such as basic agricultural and livestock skills, seasonal work, cultivation practices, sustainable and organic farming techniques, food safety and hygiene standards, entrepreneurship and basic financial literacy for agri-food SMEs) and building stronger bridges between municipalities, employers and NGOs.

#### 3.2 Findings from Field Visits

The **60 one-to-one field visits** captured perspectives from diverse actors (TCNs, employers, NGOs, local authorities, and host community representatives).

Key observations include<sup>2</sup>:

- **Administrative obstacles** are the most frequently mentioned barrier, especially the delays in issuing social security and tax numbers.

- **Employers' dependence on migrant labour** is clear, particularly in labour-intensive tasks such as harvesting, livestock, and food packaging.
- **Host community perspectives** varied, with some residents expressing support for TCN employment, while others raised concerns about cultural and social adaptation.
- **Women TCNs** face double exclusion due to both gendered social roles and limited access to formal training and childcare.

### 3.3 Insights from Focus Groups

The comparative analysis of focus group discussions across the 5 countries highlights both **shared challenges and common priorities** regarding the integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into the agri-food labour market.

Stakeholders in all five pilots agreed **that integration is multi-faceted and long-term**, requiring the alignment of legal stability, training, employer engagement, and social inclusion. However, current efforts are widely seen as **fragmented, under-resourced, and hindered by bureaucracy**.<sup>3</sup>

**Key shared perceptions and challenges include<sup>3</sup>:**

- **Legal and administrative barriers:** slow, complex permit systems (e.g., seasonal permits, Decreto Flussi in Italy) that discourage formal employment.
- **Labour market mismatch:** employers need workers but face legal ambiguity; TCNs often lack recognised qualifications or sector-specific training.
- **Insufficient employer engagement:** employers are rarely included in integration planning and need support to adopt inclusive hiring practices.
- **Socio-cultural barriers:** language, lack of mediators, and negative stereotypes continue to hinder integration.

**Opportunities identified across countries include<sup>3</sup>:**

- **Strong labour shortages in agriculture** that could be addressed by employing TCNs more systematically.



- Recognition of TCNs' **existing skills and experience**, which could be validated and certified.
- **Community-level initiatives** and NGO support that already provide models of good practice.
- The potential to promote **entrepreneurship, youth engagement, and women's inclusion** as entry points into the agri-food sector.

Overall, stakeholders emphasised that **isolated initiatives are not enough**: integration must be embedded in a broader **policy and institutional ecosystem** that ensures continuity, coordination, and trust. Municipalities, CSOs, employers, and migrant associations are well-placed to lead this shift, but they require **policy reform, structured platforms, and long-term investment**

### 3.4 Insights from City Audits

The comparative analysis of city audits across the 5 pilots shows that while each city has unique contexts, several **shared structural barriers and converging priorities** emerge.

#### Common Challenges Identified<sup>4</sup> :

- **Lack of agri-food sector focus**: None of the cities had a dedicated strategy for integrating TCNs specifically into agriculture or food-related employment. TCNs were often grouped under general inclusion policies.
- **Fragmented and underfunded resources**: Municipal services for migrants are typically dependent on EU-funded projects or short-term initiatives, creating gaps in continuity and sustainability.
- **Weak political representation of TCNs**: Migrants are rarely included in decision-making structures or civic participation mechanisms.
- **Insufficient monitoring and evaluation**: Few municipalities systematically track progress or measure outcomes of their integration measures.

#### Converging Priorities Across Cities<sup>4</sup>:



- **Promote employability through agri-food jobs**, using training, recognition of prior skills, and job-matching services.
- **Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation**, particularly between municipalities, NGOs, and employers.
- **Invest in intercultural dialogue and public awareness** to improve host community perceptions.
- **Develop digital-first, accessible service models** (one-stop shops, online portals, intercultural mediators).

While capacities differ greatly, all cities face the same fundamental gap: the absence of **structured, sector-specific integration strategies for the agri-food labour market**. Addressing this gap will be critical for building sustainable, inclusive, and replicable models under the Local Integration Strategy.

### 3.5 Insights from Best Practices

The review of **18 best practices across Europe** added a comparative dimension to the strategy design. The 18 best practices across Europe highlights the diverse and innovative ways in which Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) are being integrated into the agri-food labour market. These practices vary from highly localised community projects to multi-country policy frameworks, but together they provide valuable lessons for the development of Local Integration Strategies in the five pilot sites.

**Selected Best Practices include<sup>5</sup>:**

- “Hon Kan” (She Can!) and Helhetslyftet (Sweden): tailored programmes combining language training with vocational internships, particularly empowering women TCNs through practical labour market exposure.
- Agrarian Test Spaces and Coop-era (Spain): innovative governance models that give new entrants (often migrants and youth) access to land, mentorship, and business planning support.
- Cultiviamo l’Integrazione (Italy): inclusive horticulture and urban agriculture projects linking skills development with cultural exchange and sustainable production.

- Landing & Le Jardin de Cocagne (Germany/France): urban and organic farming initiatives with strong social enterprise models, combining agroecology training with empowerment and employability.
- Melissa Network (Greece): a women-led hub that integrates language, childcare, psychosocial support, and creative expression into pathways that could be adapted to agri-food.
- INTEGRALITY (Italy, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Austria): a transnational framework promoting legal employment in agriculture, awarding ethical labels to compliant farms and raising awareness of migrant workers' rights.
- Slovak initiatives: one introducing social farming as a national model of “green care” for disadvantaged groups, and another IOM-led labour mobility scheme streamlining seasonal work permits with multilingual counselling.

## Lessons and Replicability

Across contexts, several lessons stand out:

- **Integration works best when training is combined with real work experience**, such as internships, apprenticeships, or cooperative farming.
- **Holistic approaches matter** – projects that also address housing, childcare, health, and psychosocial needs achieve stronger results.
- **Gender-sensitive models** are essential, particularly those that create safe, supportive environments for women TCNs.
- **Access to land and resources** (through land banks, test spaces, or municipal partnerships) is a critical bottleneck that innovative projects are addressing.
- **Intercultural mediation and mentorship** help bridge trust gaps between TCNs, employers, and communities.
- **Governance and sustainability:** successful initiatives are anchored in strong partnerships between municipalities, NGOs, employers, and TCN-led organisations. Projects depending solely on short-term grants face continuity risks unless institutionalised.

## Links to EU Strategies and the Green Deal

**The practices align closely with EU integration and sustainability agendas:**

- They operationalise the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021–2027) by linking skills, employment, and participation.
- They support the European Green Deal’s Farm-to-Fork Strategy, promoting sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and circular food systems.
- They contribute to the EU Pact for Skills, ensuring that TCNs gain certified competences relevant to local and regional labour needs.

Together, these best practices show that integration in the agri-food sector is achievable when economic, social, and cultural dimensions are addressed in tandem. For the pilot sites, the most transferable lessons involve creating flexible training linked to real jobs, embedding gender-sensitive approaches, strengthening partnerships, and institutionalising successful models into municipal strategies.

### 3.6 Synthesis of Key Findings

When looking across all the activities of WP2, a clear picture begins to emerge. The agri-food sector in every pilot site relies heavily on the work of Third-Country Nationals, and without them many farms, cooperatives, and food-related businesses would struggle to function. Employers consistently highlighted that TCNs bring reliability, adaptability, and a willingness to take on jobs that locals often avoid. In that sense, **TCNs are not just participants in the sector — they are indispensable to its survival.**

Yet at the same time, **the systems meant to support their integration remain fragmented and inconsistent.** In most places, efforts depend on individual employers, overstretched NGOs, or short-term projects rather than coherent municipal policies. Bureaucratic obstacles, such as delays in issuing social security or tax numbers, stand out as one of the most frustrating barriers for both TCNs and employers. Without these documents, even the most motivated worker or the most open employer cannot formalize employment.

Another recurring theme is the **gap between existing training programmes and the real needs of both migrants and the labour market.** Stakeholders stressed that TCNs need practical, hands-on training delivered in multiple languages and aligned with the agricultural calendar. Classroom-based theory or generic upskilling initiatives often fail to connect with the day-to-day realities of harvesting, livestock care, or food processing.

The **absence of structured intercultural mediation is also striking**. Employers and local authorities repeatedly called for “bridge persons” — individuals who can guide both sides through language, cultural, and administrative complexities. Without this support, misunderstandings flourish, and opportunities are lost.

Particular attention must also be paid to **women TCNs, who often face a “double burden.”** Alongside the usual obstacles of bureaucracy, language, and lack of training, they also struggle with childcare responsibilities and greater exposure to informal or unsafe working conditions. Their voices during consultations made clear that without targeted measures — such as mentoring, safe pathways to employment, and access to childcare — they risk being excluded from opportunities in the agri-food sector.

Perhaps the most striking lesson is that **integration cannot succeed if it continues to be treated as a collection of projects**. Stakeholders across all five pilot sites stressed the need for long-term, coordinated municipal strategies that set measurable goals, allocate resources, and involve all relevant actors — from farmers and cooperatives to NGOs and local administrations.

In short, **the findings of WP2 point to both a challenge and an opportunity**. The challenge lies in the fragmented, ad-hoc nature of current integration practices. The opportunity lies in the fact that there is strong demand for TCN labour, widespread recognition of their contribution, and clear ideas on how to make integration work better. If municipalities and stakeholders can turn these insights into structured, systemic policies, the agri-food sector can become not only a source of employment for TCNs, but also a model for inclusive growth and social cohesion.

## 4.Challenges and Needs Analysis

The consultation process across the five pilot sites revealed that while the agri-food sector depends heavily on Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), the conditions under which they participate are shaped by significant barriers. These challenges are not isolated or country-specific; they are systemic issues that repeat across contexts, limiting both the economic potential of TCNs and their social integration. This chapter summarises the main challenges identified and the corresponding needs that a Local Integration Strategy must address.

**Administrative and Legal Barriers:** One of the most pressing challenges identified concerns the complexity of administrative and legal procedures. Obtaining work permits, residence permits, social security numbers, and tax identification numbers is often a lengthy and uncertain process, leaving both TCNs and employers in a state of limbo. Employers, in particular, voiced concerns about the risk of penalties when hiring workers whose documentation is incomplete or unclear, which discourages them from offering formal contracts. At the same time, existing legal frameworks are slow to adapt to the realities of the agri-food sector, where seasonal labour shortages demand more flexible and responsive systems.

### Needs

- Simplification and acceleration of administrative procedures.
- Clearer guidance for both TCNs and employers, ideally through a single point of contact or one-stop shop.
- Regularisation pathways that match local labour market demand, reducing reliance on informal work.

**Employment and Skills Development:** The pathway from arrival to meaningful employment in the agri-food sector remains fragmented and difficult for many TCNs. Training opportunities are limited and often disconnected from the actual needs of the labour market. Programmes that do exist frequently overlook the importance of combining practical skills with language support, leaving many migrants unable to fully benefit. Employers noted that safety knowledge and sector-specific skills are frequently lacking, creating barriers to formal employment. Women TCNs face particular disadvantages, as limited childcare options and gender-blind training programmes further restrict their opportunities.

## Needs

- Tailored vocational programmes combining practical skills with language learning.
- Recognition and validation of prior experience and informal skills from countries of origin.
- Job-matching mechanisms that connect trained TCNs with actual labour market opportunities.
- Gender-responsive training, mentoring, and support systems to facilitate women's participation.

**Social Inclusion and Intercultural Mediation:** Integration challenges extend beyond the workplace into the broader fabric of social life. Many TCNs find themselves isolated, with little support to participate in community activities or civic life. The absence of trained intercultural mediators and interpreters makes everyday communication difficult, leading to misunderstandings between TCNs, employers, and service providers. At the same time, negative stereotypes and unbalanced media coverage continue to shape public opinion, reinforcing prejudice and making social inclusion harder to achieve.

## Needs

- Establishment of intercultural mediation services to bridge communication gaps.
- Public awareness campaigns and community events showcasing positive contributions of TCNs.
- Greater support for civic participation and migrant-led initiatives, ensuring TCNs are seen as active members of the community, not just workers.

**Infrastructure and Daily Life Barriers:** Even when TCNs secure employment, daily life challenges often undermine their ability to sustain it. Housing shortages mean that many migrants live in overcrowded or poor-quality accommodation, sometimes far from their workplaces. Transport to rural farms and agri-food facilities is frequently unreliable or unaffordable, creating barriers to consistent participation in the labour market. In addition, digital exclusion prevents many TCNs from accessing online training, administrative services, or job application platforms, further widening the gap between them and host communities.

## Needs

- Affordable housing initiatives linked to employment programmes.
- Reliable transport solutions, possibly coordinated by municipalities and employers.
- Digital literacy programmes and access to technology as part of integration support.

**Institutional and Governance Gaps:** A recurring issue across the pilot sites is the lack of coordinated, long-term strategies at the municipal level. While community centres and NGOs often provide vital services, they do so in isolation, without a unifying framework that connects their work to local economic and social policies. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are rare, which makes it difficult to measure progress or identify gaps. Most importantly, integration measures remain heavily dependent on short-term, project-based initiatives, raising questions about their sustainability once external funding ends.

### Needs

- Development of formal, long-term municipal strategies with measurable objectives.
- Structured partnerships between municipalities, employers, CSOs, and TCN-led groups.
- Stable funding mechanisms that go beyond project cycles.

**Gender-Specific Challenges:** For women TCNs, the barriers are compounded. Many are excluded from informal networks where job opportunities are shared, leaving them with fewer options for entry into the agri-food labour market. Unsafe or precarious working conditions are a recurring concern, and cultural expectations around caregiving often limit their mobility and availability for training or employment. Without targeted interventions, women risk remaining on the margins of both the labour market and society at large.

### Needs

- Safe employment pathways that explicitly target women.
- Access to childcare services connected to training and employment initiatives.
- Mentoring programmes linking women TCNs with role models in the agri-food sector.

The analysis highlights a dual reality: TCNs are indispensable to the agri-food sector, yet their integration is obstructed by systemic barriers.



The needs are clear and consistent: simplify bureaucracy, tailor training to real labour demands, support social inclusion, invest in infrastructure, build long-term municipal strategies, and address the specific situation of women. Meeting these needs will not only strengthen the agri-food sector but also contribute to more cohesive and resilient local communities.

Lastly, all challenges and needs are summarized on Table.2

<b>Challenges Vs Needs Matrix</b>		
<b>Challenge Area</b>	<b>Key challenges</b>	<b>Identified needs</b>
<b>Administrative and Legal</b>	Complex permits and documentation delays; fear of penalties; weak alignment with labour demand	Simplify and accelerate procedures; clear guidance; one-stop shops; regularisation linked to demand
<b>Employment and skills development</b>	Fragmented training; language barriers; lack of safety knowledge; exclusion of women	Tailored vocational + language programmes; recognition of prior experience; job-matching; gender-sensitive training
<b>Social inclusion and intercultural mediation</b>	Limited mediation; weak civic participation; negative stereotypes	Intercultural mediators; awareness campaigns; support for migrant-led initiatives
<b>Infrastructure and daily life</b>	Housing shortages; poor transport; digital	Affordable housing; reliable transport; digital literacy and access
<b>Institutional and governance</b>	Lack of strategies; poor monitoring; dependence on short-term projects	Long-term municipal strategies; structured partnerships; stable funding
<b>Gender-specific challenges</b>	Women excluded from networks; unsafe conditions; caregiving limits mobility	Safe employment pathways; childcare access; targeted mentoring for women

*Table 2 ‘Challenges & needs matrix’*

## 5.Strategic Objectives for Local Integration

The **Local Integration Strategy** builds on the findings of WP2 and sets out a pathway to transform the integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) in the agri-food sector from fragmented, project-based initiatives into a coherent and sustainable framework. **Six strategic objectives have been identified.** Each objective responds to the key challenges outlined in Chapter 4 and is accompanied by concrete supporting actions that will help municipalities, employers, and civil society actors turn commitments into reality.

### A. Simplify Administrative Pathways

**Strategic objective:** A recurring barrier identified across all pilot sites is the complexity and length of administrative procedures. Without residence permits, tax identification numbers, or social security registration, TCNs cannot access formal employment, and employers are discouraged from hiring them. To address this, the first strategic objective is to simplify and accelerate administrative pathways.

**Supporting actions include:**

- **Establishing local one-stop shops** where TCNs can receive all necessary information and assistance with permits, documentation, and employment rights in one place.
- **Training** municipal staff and frontline service providers in intercultural skills, so they can offer guidance that is not only efficient but also culturally sensitive.
- Developing **clear communication materials** in multiple languages to guide TCNs and employers through each administrative step.
- Collaborating with national authorities to create **seasonal permit schemes** that better reflect the cyclical labour needs of agriculture, reducing reliance on informal work.

### B. Strengthen Employment and Skills Development

**Objective:** For many TCNs, employment in agriculture is the main entry point into local economies. Yet, training opportunities are scarce, fragmented, and often poorly matched to actual labour market needs. The strategy's second objective is to create training and skills development pathways that are accessible, practical, and relevant.

### Supporting actions include:

- Designing **vocational training programmes** that combine hands-on agricultural skills with language learning and workplace safety modules.
- Introducing **dual training models**, where participants split their time between classroom instruction and on-the-job practice with local employers.
- Establishing a system for **recognition of prior learning**, allowing TCNs to receive certification for skills they already possess from their country of origin.
- Building partnerships with local agricultural cooperatives to provide **apprenticeships and internships**, ensuring that training leads directly to employment opportunities.
- Developing targeted **programmes for women**, with flexible schedules and linked childcare services, so they can access training without sacrificing family responsibilities.

### C. Expand Intercultural Mediation and Mentorship

**Objective:** Cultural misunderstandings and communication gaps frequently hinder TCN integration, both in workplaces and in communities. The third objective focuses on expanding intercultural mediation and creating mentorship structures that build trust and mutual understanding.

### Supporting actions include:

- Recruiting and training **intercultural mediators** who can facilitate communication between TCNs, employers, and public authorities, reducing the risk of conflict and misunderstanding.
- Establishing **mentoring programmes** that pair TCNs with local farmers, agribusiness managers, or community leaders who can guide them through both professional and cultural adaptation.
- Providing diversity and inclusion training for employers and municipal officers to help them build more welcoming workplaces and services.
- Supporting peer-to-peer initiatives where experienced TCNs **mentor newcomers**, sharing practical knowledge and building solidarity.

### D. Address Daily Life Barriers (Housing, Transport, Digital Access)

**Objective:** Employment integration is not only about jobs; it is also about ensuring that daily life conditions allow TCNs to participate fully in the labour market. Without access to housing, transport, or digital tools, employment opportunities often remain out of reach.

**Supporting actions include:**

- Creating housing partnerships between municipalities, employers, and cooperatives to develop affordable accommodation close to agricultural sites.
- Organising transport solutions such as subsidised bus routes, employer-sponsored shuttle services, or carpool networks connecting TCNs with workplaces in rural areas.
- Expanding digital literacy programmes so that TCNs can access online job platforms, e-learning courses, and administrative services.
- Ensuring that TCNs have access to affordable internet and devices, possibly through municipal lending schemes or NGO partnerships.

## **E. Promote Social Inclusion and Public Awareness**

**Objective:** Integration goes beyond economic participation. For TCNs to become valued members of host communities, there must be opportunities for intercultural exchange and positive narratives about their role in society. The fifth objective is to strengthen social inclusion and public awareness.

**Supporting actions include:**

- Launching public campaigns that highlight the contributions of TCNs to the local economy and culture, countering negative stereotypes.
- Supporting migrant-led initiatives in areas such as food cooperatives, cultural associations, or local festivals, giving TCNs visibility and agency.
- Encouraging schools and community centres to run intercultural activities that bring local residents and TCNs together.
- Collaborating with local media to share success stories of TCNs in agriculture and food enterprises, shifting the public narrative towards inclusion and opportunity.

## F. Ensure Long-Term Governance and Sustainability

**Objective:** A major weakness of current integration measures is their dependence on short-term projects. The final strategic objective is to build governance structures that ensure integration is part of long-term municipal strategies.

### Supporting actions include:

- Encouraging municipalities to formally adopt **local integration strategies**, complete with measurable indicators, dedicated budgets, and regular progress reports.
- Establishing **multi-stakeholder coordination platforms** that bring together municipalities, CSOs, employers, migrant associations, and community representatives on a permanent basis.
- Embedding integration actions into municipal budgets to ensure continuity after EU project cycles end. As well as exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships, cooperative membership fees, or revolving funds to strengthen sustainability beyond EU project cycles.
- Developing **monitoring and evaluation systems** that allow municipalities to track progress, identify gaps, and adapt policies over time.

## Cross-Cutting Priority: Gender Equality

Across all six objectives, **gender equality must be a guiding principle**. Women TCNs face unique challenges and require targeted measures to ensure they are not left behind. This includes creating safe employment pathways, linking training with childcare support, and developing dedicated mentoring programmes. Gender sensitivity should not be an add-on but a central feature of all actions under the strategy

Overall, the strategic objectives outlined on Graphic.1, provide a **comprehensive roadmap** for making the agri-food sector a genuine driver of integration. By simplifying administrative procedures, strengthening skills, expanding mediation, addressing daily barriers, promoting inclusion, and ensuring sustainability, municipalities can transform fragmented efforts into long-term, systemic change. Together, these objectives not only improve the lives of TCNs but also enhance the resilience and competitiveness of the agri-food sector and foster stronger, more cohesive local communities.

The strategy is built on a set of **guiding principles that ensure both relevance and sustainability**. At its core lies **participation**, meaning that TCNs, host communities, and local stakeholders are not passive beneficiaries but active partners in co-designing and shaping integration pathways. Every measure proposed is the result of **evidence-based action**, rooted in the data gathered from field visits, focus groups, city audits, and the review of European best practices.

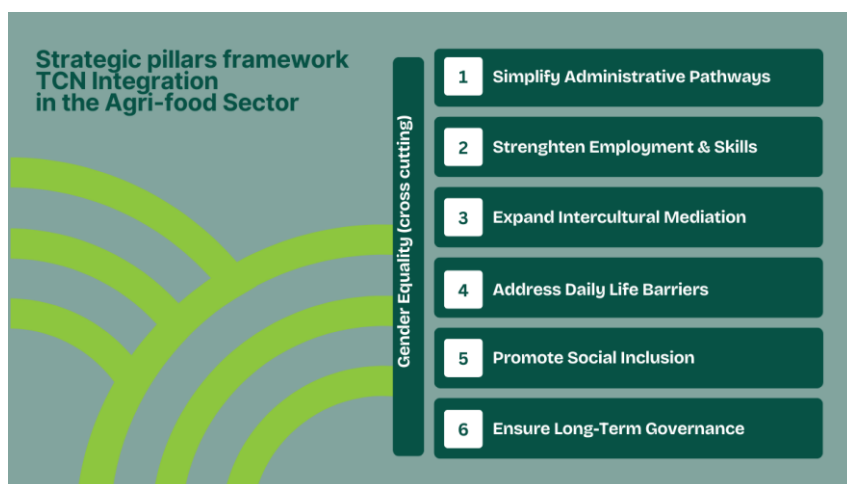
A strong emphasis is placed on **gender equality**, recognising that women face specific barriers that must be addressed across all pillars of the strategy through tailored measures and targeted support. Equally important is **local ownership**: municipalities and local actors are positioned at the heart of implementation, ensuring that actions are not limited to short-term project cycles but embedded in long-term policies and structures.

Finally, the strategy ensures **alignment with EU policies** such as:

- EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027: supporting training, employment, and civic participation of migrants<sup>6</sup>
- The Green Deal’s Farm-to-Fork Strategy: fostering sustainable agricultural practices and addressing workforce needs in the green transition<sup>7</sup>
- The Pact for Skills: upskilling and reskilling workers, with a focus on sectors facing labour shortages<sup>8</sup>
- National Integration Plans (where they exist, e.g. Slovakia’s Integration Strategy for Foreigners 2035): ensuring coherence with local priorities

At the same time, it is not enough to simply identify objectives. To ensure that these ambitions translate into measurable results, it is crucial to develop a specific implementation framework that clarifies responsibilities, timelines, and resources, along with a robust monitoring and evaluation methodology to track progress and adapt policies where needed. Both the implementation framework and monitoring approach must be adapted to the current status of each country in integrating TCNs into the agri-food sector.





*Graphic 1 ‘Strategic Objectives of the TCNs integration framework’*

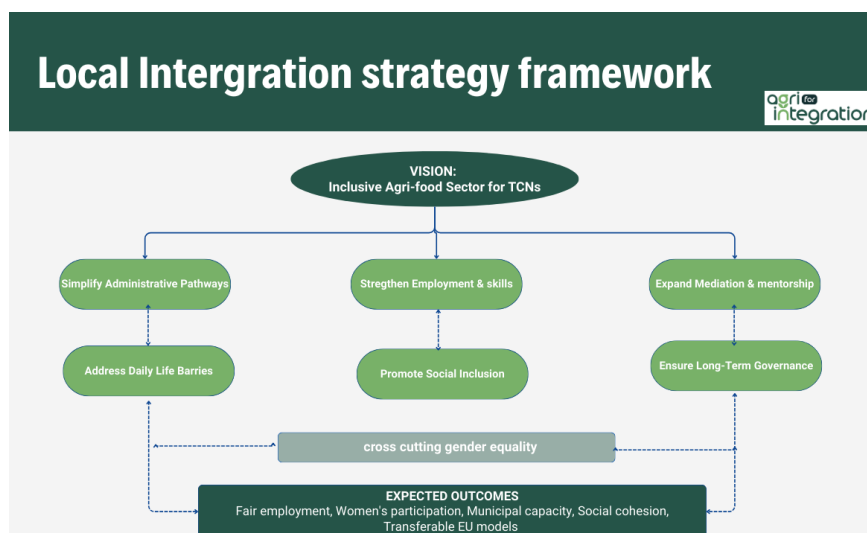
## Expected outcomes

As demonstrated on Graphic.2, the implementation of this Local Integration Strategy is expected to generate meaningful change both for TCNs and for the communities that host them. At the most immediate level, it will **increase the number of migrants employed in the agri-food sector under fair and formal conditions**, giving employers the stable workforce they need while offering TCNs secure livelihoods. By embedding gender-sensitive measures, the strategy will also ensure that **women TCNs have greater opportunities to participate**, overcoming barriers linked to childcare, cultural expectations, and limited access to training.

Beyond employment, the strategy aims to **strengthen the capacity of municipalities** to deliver long-term, sustainable integration measures. Local authorities will be better equipped to coordinate actors, allocate resources, and monitor progress, making integration part of everyday governance rather than a temporary project. In parallel, greater opportunities for intercultural dialogue and community engagement will help to **improve perceptions of TCNs among host communities**, reducing stereotypes and fostering trust.

Finally, the strategy is designed not only for the five pilot sites but also as a model for others. By collecting evidence, testing solutions, and sharing results, it will produce **transferable approaches that can be replicated across Europe**, helping other municipalities facing similar labour shortages and integration challenges. In this way, the framework contributes both to local resilience and to the broader European ambition of building inclusive, sustainable societies.





*Graphic 2 'Local Intergration strategy expected outcome'*

## 6. Implementation Roadmap

The Local Integration Strategy can only succeed if it is translated into a clear and **realistic roadmap**. This roadmap ensures that strategic objectives move from paper to practice, outlining how municipalities, civil society, employers, and TCNs themselves will work together over time. Rather than treating integration as a set of isolated measures, the roadmap creates a phased process where short-term actions build foundations for medium-term initiatives, which in turn prepare the ground for long-term systemic change.

### Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation is, by its very nature, a shared responsibility. Municipal and regional authorities have the central role of coordinating efforts, adopting policies, and providing resources.

- **Municipal and Regional Authorities:** Lead the design and adoption of local policies, allocate resources, and establish one-stop shops and integration hubs.
- **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** Provide direct support to TCNs, including legal assistance, cultural mediation, and vocational training.
- **Migrant-led Organizations:** Ensure the voices of TCNs are represented in decision-making and co-create solutions that reflect lived experiences.
- **Agri-food Businesses and Cooperatives:** Offer employment opportunities, participate in mentoring, and provide feedback on skill needs.

- **Educational and Training Institutions:** Design and deliver tailored vocational programmes, validate prior learning, and integrate language support into training.
- **Host Community Members:** Participate as mentors, trainers, or volunteers in intercultural activities, contributing to social cohesion.
- **EU and National Authorities:** Provide policy guidance and funding opportunities to ensure alignment with wider integration and employment frameworks.

### 3 Phases of implementation

The roadmap unfolds in three phases: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. Each phase builds logically on the previous one, ensuring continuity and reducing the risk of fragmented implementation.

#### ○ **Short-Term (0–12 months): Laying the foundations**

The immediate priority is to **establish the structures that will support the strategy**. This includes:

- Organize "Hands-on training sessions for TCNs to familiarize themselves with local cropping systems and fundamental agricultural practices
- Implement a training programme for host community members, including public authority employees, agri-food employers, and VET trainers, focusing on raising awareness of legal, cultural, and systemic barriers to integration."
- Consolidating multi-stakeholder partnerships, introducing intercultural mediators, and piloting one-stop shops or info days in places popular among TCNs (e.g. local associations, cultural/ community centers etc) where TCNs and employers can receive guidance.
- Awareness campaigns should begin early, as public perceptions strongly influence the success of integration measures.

#### ○ **Medium-Term (1–3 years): Expanding and institutionalising**

Once pilot actions are tested, they should be expanded and integrated into **mainstream municipal services**:

- Vocational training programmes need to expand in scale and establish stronger connections with direct job placements in the agri-food sector. This can be achieved through initiatives such as networking events that bring together employers and trainees, mentorship schemes with experienced professionals, on-the-job apprenticeships, and collaboration with local cooperatives and food enterprises to ensure practical pathways into employment.
- Certification systems for prior learning should be developed, giving TCNs recognition for skills they already possess.
- Mentoring schemes should also be scaled up, ensuring that they reach not just a few beneficiaries but a significant proportion of the migrant workforce.
- Municipal integration strategies must at this stage move from discussion to adoption, embedding measurable targets into policy frameworks.
- Partnerships with employers should now also address practical needs such as transport to rural workplaces and access to affordable housing.
- **Long-Term (3+ years): Embedding systemic change**

The final phase **focuses on sustainability**.

- Actions that proved successful in earlier phases should be institutionalised into municipal budgets and governance structures, reducing dependency on external project funding.
- Intercultural training for employers and municipal staff should become routine practice, not an occasional initiative.
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be fully operational, ensuring that integration progress is regularly assessed and policies are adapted based on evidence.
- At this stage, municipalities should also invest in disseminating results, sharing knowledge with other regions, and supporting the replication of effective models across the EU.

## Resource Mobilisation

For the roadmap to succeed, resources must be mobilised strategically. Financially, EU funds (such as AMIF, ESF+, and Green Deal instruments) can provide crucial support, but municipalities need to progressively commit **local budgets to ensure continuity**. **Human resources** are equally

critical: cultural mediators, trainers, and case managers must be recruited and retained. Finally, **digital resources** – particularly e-learning platforms, job-matching tools, and monitoring dashboards – should be embedded in municipal systems to modernise service delivery.

## Anticipating Risks and Ensuring Resilience

The roadmap acknowledges that **risks are inevitable**. Administrative delays could undermine confidence in one-stop shops; employer reluctance might slow down the uptake of formal contracts; community resistance could emerge if integration is framed as a threat rather than an opportunity; and sustainability could falter if funding ends abruptly. Each risk has **clear mitigation strategies**: simplifying procedures and appointing case managers, incentivising employers and showcasing positive role models, investing in awareness campaigns, and embedding integration measures into long-term municipal budgets.

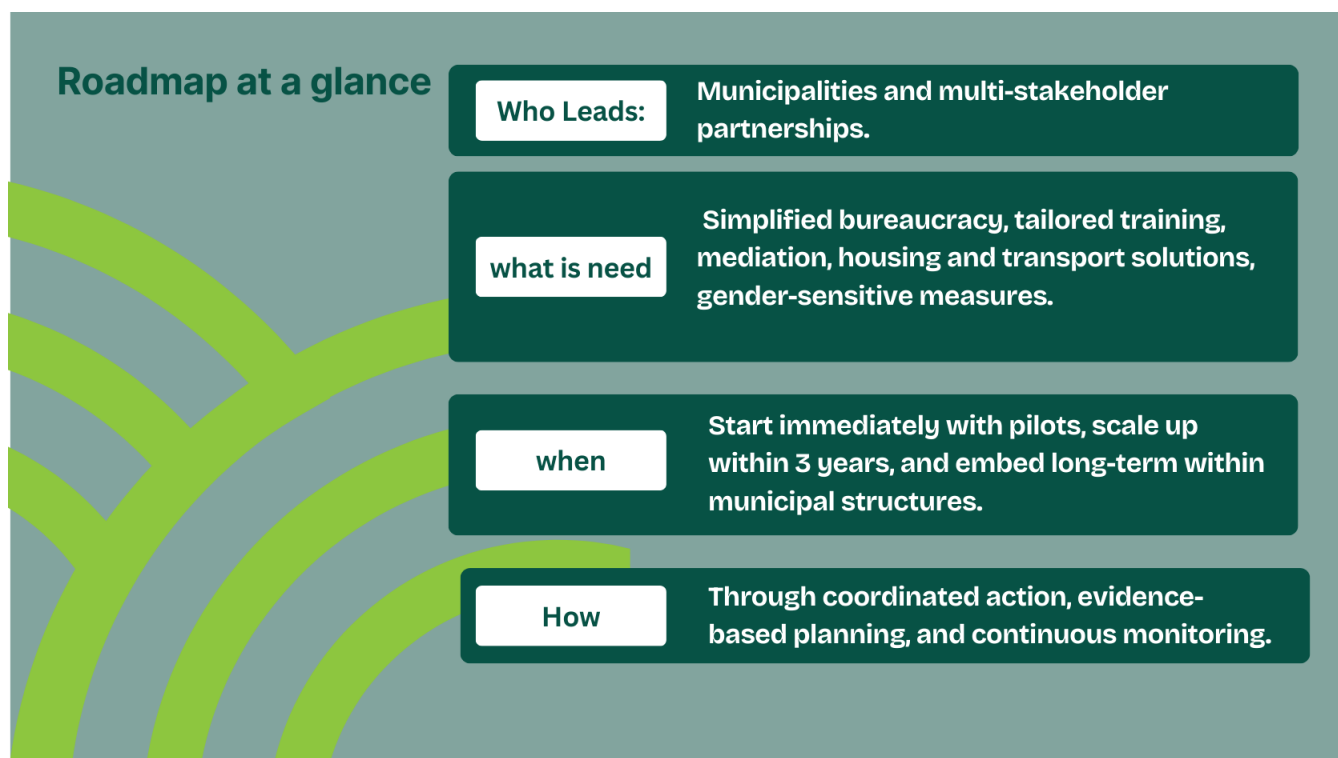
To summarize each risk category should be combined with the proper mitigation strategies:

- **Risk of administrative delays** → Simplify procedures and assign case managers in one-stop shops.
- **Risk of employer reluctance** → Provide incentives for formal employment contracts and showcase success stories.
- **Risk of community resistance** → Invest in awareness campaigns and intercultural dialogue events.
- **Risk of sustainability gaps** → Embed actions in municipal policies and secure long-term funding streams.

Overall, the implementation roadmap is more than a timeline; it is **a coherent pathway that transforms fragmented initiatives into systemic change**:

- In the short term, it provides visible results that build trust.
- In the medium term, it scales and institutionalises measures so that they become part of everyday practice.
- In the long term, it secures sustainability, ensuring that integration in the agri-food sector is no longer dependent on temporary projects but embedded in governance structures and local economies.

By following this roadmap, municipalities can create a future where TCNs are not only part of the agricultural workforce but active contributors to resilient, inclusive, and thriving communities. (see the summary of this Roadmap in Graphic 3)



**Graphic 3 ‘The Roadmap at a Glance’**

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential to ensure that the Local Integration Strategy achieves its objectives, adapts to emerging challenges, and remains accountable to stakeholders.

**A robust M&E framework provides municipalities and partners with the tools to measure progress, identify gaps, and refine actions over time.**

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) goes beyond checking whether activities have been implemented; it is about creating a **learning system** that continuously improves the integration process. In the context of the Local Integration Strategy, M&E serves as both a mirror and a compass: a mirror that reflects how well actions are working on the ground, and a compass that guides future decisions and policy adjustments.

**Analytically, M&E has four intertwined purposes.**

- It provides a mechanism to **track progress** against the strategic objectives by measuring concrete indicators such as the number of TCNs trained, employed, or accessing municipal services. This ensures that commitments made in the strategy translate into tangible results.
- It allows stakeholders to **assess impact**, not only in terms of economic integration but also in terms of social cohesion, gender equality, and community perceptions.
- It functions as an **accountability tool**, making municipalities, employers, and civil society actors answerable to both beneficiaries and funders, including the European Commission.
- It creates a structured process for **learning and adaptation**, identifying where measures fall short and enabling rapid adjustments to improve effectiveness.

From a narrative perspective, M&E is what transforms the Local Integration Strategy **from a static document into a living framework**. By embedding monitoring at regular intervals and evaluation at key milestones, the strategy remains dynamic and responsive to changing conditions, whether they are shifts in labour market demand, new migration flows, or evolving community attitudes. It also **strengthens trust**, as TCNs can see that their feedback leads to real changes, while local authorities and employers gain evidence to support their investment in inclusive practices.

In this sense, monitoring and evaluation are not the final steps in the process but an integral part of the strategy's **continuous cycle of improvement**, ensuring that integration in the agri-food sector is effective, equitable, and sustainable over the long term.

## Monitoring Tools and Methods

**Selecting the right tools and methods** for monitoring is crucial to ensure that data collection goes beyond numbers and captures the real experiences of TCNs, employers, and host communities. A **balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative methods** allows municipalities to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and adjust policies in real time. At the same time, the choice of tools should remain flexible and context-sensitive, reflecting each country's institutional capacity, available resources, and existing data systems. What matters most is that the methods used generate reliable evidence that links directly to the strategic objectives outlined in Chapter 5, enabling stakeholders to see not only what has been achieved but also where further action is needed.

The tools presented below therefore offer a common reference framework, which each municipality can adapt to its local realities and priorities.

- **Baseline and follow-up surveys** with TCNs, employers, and local stakeholders.
- **Administrative data collection** on permits issued, employment contracts, training participation, and service use.
- **Stakeholder feedback mechanisms** through focus groups, interviews, and partnership meetings.
- **Digital monitoring platforms** where municipalities upload progress indicators and reports.
- **Annual review workshops** bringing together stakeholders to validate progress and adjust priorities.

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Measuring results is a critical element of any integration strategy. Without clear indicators, it is impossible to know whether actions are producing the desired outcomes or to identify where adjustments are needed. The following **set of KPIs provides a structured way to track progress**, but they are not intended as a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, they should be adapted to the current status, capacity, and policy context of each country and municipality, ensuring that



measurement reflects local realities as well as broader EU priorities. The indicators are presented here in direct relation to the strategic objectives defined in Chapter 5, allowing for a coherent link between planned actions and the evidence required to evaluate their success..

### **Simplify Administrative Pathways**

- Average time to issue work/residence permits.
- Number of TCNs supported through one-stop shops.

### **Employment and Skills Development**

- Number of TCNs enrolled in agri-food training (disaggregated by gender).
- Number of TCNs successfully placed in agri-food jobs.
- Number of employers engaged in job-matching or training programmes.

### **Intercultural Mediation and Mentorship**

- Number of cultural mediators deployed.
- Number of mentoring pairs established and sessions completed.
- Satisfaction rate of TCNs and mentors.

### **Daily Life Barriers**

- Number of TCNs with access to affordable housing linked to employment.
- Number of transport solutions established (subsidised buses, employer-organised transport).
- Percentage of TCNs with access to digital literacy training.

### **Social Inclusion and Public Awareness**

- Number of intercultural events organised.
- Perceptions of TCNs in local media and surveys.
- Number of TCN-led initiatives supported by municipalities.

### **Governance and Sustainability**

- Adoption of formal municipal integration strategies.
- Budget allocated to TCN integration measures beyond project funding.
- Frequency of monitoring and evaluation reports produced.

### Cross-cutting: Gender Equality

- Percentage of women TCNs participating in training, mentoring, and employment schemes.
- Number of childcare solutions linked to integration programmes.

### Responsibilities

Clear allocation of responsibilities is essential for turning the Local Integration Strategy into action. Integration cannot succeed if duties remain vague or fragmented among different actors. By defining who is responsible for each part of the process, the strategy creates **accountability, coordination, and ownership at every level**. At the same time, these responsibilities should not be seen as rigid or identical across all pilot sites: they must be adapted to the **institutional capacity, governance traditions, and current integration frameworks** in each country and municipality. The following roles and responsibilities are therefore presented as a common framework, designed to ensure that all strategic objectives are supported by the right mix of actors — municipalities, civil society, employers, TCN organisations, and national/EU institutions.

- **Municipalities:** Lead monitoring at local level, ensure data collection and reporting.
- **Civil Society and Migrant-led Organisations:** Gather feedback from beneficiaries and contribute to qualitative evaluation.
- **Agri-food Employers:** Provide data on employment, mentoring, and workplace integration.
- **Research and Academic Partners:** Analyse data, ensure comparability across pilot sites, and provide evidence-based recommendations.

### Evaluation Cycle

Defining a clear evaluation cycle is essential to ensure that monitoring **efforts are not sporadic but embedded in a regular rhythm of review, reflection, and adjustment**. Without such a cycle, integration strategies risk becoming static, unable to respond to changing labour market

demands, migration patterns, or community dynamics. **The evaluation process must therefore provide both consistency and flexibility:** consistency through set intervals of data collection and reporting, and flexibility by allowing municipalities and stakeholders to adapt the depth and frequency of evaluation to their own capacity, governance culture, and policy context. The following cycle offers a structured approach — from quarterly monitoring to annual reviews and a final comprehensive assessment — ensuring that the Local Integration Strategy remains a living framework that evolves alongside local realities.

- **Quarterly monitoring:** Collection of core indicators and progress updates.
- **Annual evaluation:** In-depth analysis of outcomes, stakeholder workshops, and adjustment of measures.
- **Final evaluation:** Comprehensive assessment of strategy impact, identifying lessons learned and transferable models for replication in other EU contexts.

The M&E framework is not only about accountability but also about learning. By embedding feedback loops and participatory evaluation, municipalities and stakeholders can adapt measures to evolving realities — ensuring that integration remains responsive, inclusive, and sustainable.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

The Local Integration Strategy demonstrates that Third-Country Nationals are not only necessary for the sustainability of the agri-food sector, but also represent an opportunity for strengthening local communities and economies. The research activities carried out in the pilot sites confirmed several key insights:

- **Reliance on TCNs is universal:** Across all pilot sites, agriculture and food production depend heavily on migrant labour.
- **Barriers are systemic, not local:** Bureaucracy, fragmented training, and weak policy coordination are challenges repeated in every country.
- **Integration is possible but underdeveloped:** Successful examples exist, but they are often project-based and not institutionalised.
- **Women TCNs require targeted support:** Gender-specific obstacles risk excluding them unless addressed through childcare, mentoring, and safe employment routes.
- **Municipal leadership is essential:** Where local authorities are proactive, integration is more structured, inclusive, and sustainable.

The strategy also underlines the importance of combining **bottom-up consultation** with **evidence-based planning**. By giving a voice to TCNs, employers, NGOs, and host communities, the strategy reflects real needs while aligning with broader EU frameworks such as the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, the Green Deal's Farm-to-Fork Strategy, and the EU Pact for Skills.

To ensure that the Local Integration Strategy has lasting impact, the following steps are recommended:

### 1. Adoption by Municipalities

- Each pilot city should formally adopt the strategy within local councils or integration committees, ensuring political commitment.

### 2. Operationalisation through Action Plans

- Translate the strategic pillars into concrete municipal action plans, with timelines, budgets, and designated responsibilities.

### 3. Capacity Building and Training

- Provide training for municipal officers, employers, and civil society actors to implement new tools such as job-matching, mentoring, and one-stop shops.

#### **4. Integration into WP3 and Beyond**

- Ensure that the outputs of this strategy feed directly into the training, mentoring, and awareness activities of WP3, creating continuity between planning and implementation.

#### **5. Monitoring and Evaluation Roll-out**

- Deploy the monitoring dashboard, allowing regular data collection, feedback loops, and progress reporting.

#### **6. Scaling and Replication**

- Disseminate results at national and EU levels, encouraging replication in other municipalities with strong agri-food sectors.

#### **7. Securing Long-Term Sustainability**

- Advocate for the integration of these measures into municipal budgets and national integration frameworks to reduce reliance on project-based funding.

**Finally, the Local Integration Strategy is not the end of the process but the foundation for systemic change.** By institutionalising these measures, municipalities and stakeholders can transform fragmented initiatives into sustainable pathways that ensure TCNs are not only workers in the agri-food sector, but also recognised and valued members of their host communities.

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