

INTERSECTING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

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Enabling newly arrived migrants to participate in the labour market remains a key objective of immigrant and refugee integration policies. Yet it is not just a matter of employment policy and instead is linked to a variety of other policies. Based on a review of relevant literature on the integration of recently arrived migrants compiled in the SPRING review report on evidence on integration policy practices this brief discusses some of these links, suggesting that for successful policies on migrant employment a holistic approach is required.

Context:

Employment is widely considered a major avenue for integration and a primary expression of an individuals' active participation in society. Most immediately, employment provides a livelihood and financial independence and is thus an important element of individual's ability to 'function' and navigate in society. Yet it also provides opportunities for social interaction: Even if work-related social relationships are generally of a weaker nature such weak ties are important, by providing opportunities for socially connecting to others and providing a bridge to existing networks. Finally, employment also matters in terms of identity, both in terms of individual identity and in terms of wider social recognition by others, which is also crucial for individuals' well-being. Importantly, employment provides a sense of normality: it structures daily lives of individuals; socially, it makes individuals visible as contributing members of society. This is not

specific to migrants. Yet, realizing individual aspirations of meaningful life and finding social recognition through work is arguably even more relevant and pressing for recently arrived humanitarian migrants in their attempts to find a position within society. Employment thus is about much more than participating in labour markets, but it is a core element of sociality in contemporary societies.

Employment is thus linked to other domains in multiple ways and thus is not solely an issue of employment policy. Employment both impacts and is shaped by other policy areas, including legal status and citizenship, education and training, welfare, and housing and policy makers.



Integration Challenges:

Rights and legal status has long been considered as foundational for the exercise of and development migrants' capabilities (Ager and Strang 2008). For humanitarian migrants who arrived after 2014 it has been even more relevant and has shaped their access to employment (See SPRING evidence repository page on rights and legal status).

- Humanitarian Migrants often lack rights to access to employment for long periods of time while waiting for the conclusion of their case, before which no or only limited access to employment or employment related training is possible.
- As a result of limited access to employment migrants often resort to informal employment, especially in countries with less rigid controls, excluding them from regular access to welfare and health services and making them more vulnerable to exploitation.

The **lack of skills and qualifications** required to successfully navigate European labour markets remains a key **barrier to humanitarian migrants' access to employment** and requires adequate educational and training offers responding to specific needs, as detailed in the SPRING brief on employment.

- Migrants often lack formal recognition of qualifications, but also their existing competences are often not identified and validated. In addition, lack of language proficiency, including vocation-specific language proficiency are important hurdles.
- But migrants also often lack access to adequate training and education programmes that would address both address specific gaps and build on existing competences.

Apart from constituting important issues in their own right, housing and the location of migrants has important employment implications:

- Dispersal policies adopted by many countries are usually based on different types of aggregate quotas for new arrivals and impose mobility restrictions on these and certain other categories remaining dependent on welfare (p.95ff). Yet these policies generally don't consider individual profiles, preferences and relevant job opportunities in areas of settlement.
- The location of housing disadvantaged communities, including in remote localities combined with poor transport has shown to have negative integration outcomes, including on employment. Settling migrants in institutional accommodation, remote locations or otherwise marginalised communities may reduce opportunities for social interaction and thus for building up social capital, indirectly impacting on employment. Institutional accommodation also has been shown to reduce well-being and increases mental health risks.
- Housing transitions from initially provided accommodation and shared housing facilities to the regular housing market has been shown to be difficult for many recent migrants. Public authorities, however, have only limited instruments available to influence these transitions in the short term.

Welfare services are crucially important to address poverty risks related to unemployment and inactivity, for example as a result of ill-health, including mental health.

- Migrants in general and humanitarian migrant have unequal access to welfare, especially non-contributory welfare entitlements. These are particularly restricted for migrants from outside the EU.
- As a corollary, welfare uptake tends to be framed as the main problem to be addressed and a disincentive for employment participation, rather than addressing poverty risks and exclusion from employment as the primary objective of welfare policy.
- Evidence suggests that humanitarian migrants are more likely to suffer from ill health, including mental health linked both to pre-and post-migration stressors. These include, amongst others, a precarious legal status, poor living conditions, poverty and racism and discrimination. Yet there is a lack of dedicated support.

Solutions:

Providing legal access to employment and reduce legal barriers

- In recognition of negative consequences of delayed labour market access Article 15 of the Receptions Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU) foresees asylum seekers to be provided with access to employment within nine months, although some Member states provide more favourable conditions. For example, asylum seekers in Belgium can access a temporary employment permit, if their case remains undecided after 4 months. It is valid 12 months is terminated in the case of a negative decision.
- The granting of immediate access to employment to Ukrainians and certain third-country nationals following the Decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC) has been can serve as a model for other categories of (humanitarian) migrants.
- Several countries offer regularisation on the basis of work. Germany, for instance a temporary right to stay is granted for tolerated persons undergoing vocational training or engaged in employment in shortage occupations for at least 18 months.

Validating formal and informal skills and providing adequate training and education.

- In Austria the 'competence check' piloted in 2015 in Vienna and since rolled out to other regions entails a detailed assessment of skills, qualifications and language knowledge as well as specific training linked to both competences and gaps identified. Vocational competence tests, implemented in Germany provide another example.
- High-quality and vocation-specific language training improves employment outcomes as research on Germany has shown. In Sweden, 6-month training in professional Swedish are offered with support from the Public Employment Services

Improve mobility options and access to affordable housing

- Dispersal policies should consider migrants' profiles and characteristics of regions of settlement and look beyond the short-term availability of housing and rigid distribution criteria. Thus, A data-driven algorithmic assignment of refugees to different localities in Switzerland demonstrated a significant

increase of employment prospects, would refugees be assigned on the basis of a matching of individual profiles and local labour market characteristics and needs.

- Providing information on available housing support as well as concrete housing options and establishing structures mediating between landlords and (prospective) tenants can be an effective way to improve access to housing in a policy area with limited policy instruments allowing to change conditions in the short term. Information websites such as the Refugees Wien website or a guide for housing practitioners developed by the Scottish Refugee Council can be named as examples.

Pursue active labour market policies to prevent poverty and welfare dependency and increase well-being.

- Equality in access to welfare and health services has the capacity to increase well-being and reduce poverty. In relation to access to health it can be shown that in countries with more liberal access self-reported health amongst refugees is better than in more restrictive contexts.
- Rather than focusing on disincentivizing uptake of welfare underpinned by coercive policies active labour market policies should be pursued that enable migrants to participate in employment and to be self-sufficient, using a wide array of policy instruments including skills assessment, training, job counselling, financial incentives for employers, information for employers, and job fairs, amongst others (see in detail the SPRING brief on employment).

References:

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