

## Executive Summary

# From Refugees to Workers

## Mapping Labour Market Integration Support Measures for Asylum-seekers and Refugees in EU Member States

### Policy Context

According to Eurostat figures, the total number of asylum applications in Europe in 2015 reached 1.3 million, more than double the number in 2014 and more than three times the number in 2013, setting a record for the last 70 years. Whether or not this trend continues, all analysts agree that a large share of the incoming refugees will settle in Europe for good. (in 2015, 52% of total asylum applications resulted in positive outcomes, and a standard policy assumption is that at least half of the total number of asylum-seekers will stay over the long-term). There is also a broad consensus that how they integrate into the labour market, and the time they take to do so, will determine not only their long-term impact on the European economy, but their chances of integrating socially and economically into European societies.

### Study aims

The study aims first to identify the policies and practices implemented in different EU Member States to facilitate the labour market integration of recent refugees and asylum-seekers (i.e. those having arrived in 2015) and then to analyze these measures with a comparative perspective. The research is based on nine brief country case studies of the following EU Member States: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The study includes a review of the legal and policy framework governing refugees' and asylum-seekers' labour market access in each of the study countries and provides an overview of the different types of labour market integration measures targeting refugees, which includes measures initiated by civil society and private actors. Finally, the study identifies and discusses good practices and lessons learned in the different countries while bearing in mind the contextual factors affecting the impact of different measures.

### Key Findings

- The research shows that regardless of a country's stance toward the *arrival* of new asylum-seekers (and here increasingly more countries are tightening their policies), most of the countries surveyed are seeking to implement policies that facilitate refugees' integration into the labour market (excepting, notably, France and the United Kingdom). However, even in those more 'liberal' countries targeting asylum-seekers' rapid labour market integration, the administrative obstacles remain massive and often undermine the legal provisions.
- Despite the differences in social contexts, labour market structures and support measures, there are similarities across the countries in terms of the challenges, policy trade-offs and choices they face. This suggests that there is ample room for

- mutual learning, cooperation and even the development of Europe-wide solutions.
- The 85 measures identified and analyzed in the nine country case studies (see Appendix 10 of Volume II for details on each of them) point to the emergence of a “standard package” that is becoming a kind of “conventional wisdom” in policymaking targeting the labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. The four key elements of this package include 1) early skills assessment; 2) “introduction” programmes that feature cultural orientation, socio-professional orientation and/or training; 3) intensive language courses; 4) access to general job intermediation services. Programmes of this nature seem to offer obvious benefits but should be subject to testing and closer analysis in order to determine if there are better policy options or combinations.
  - Little is known regarding the effectiveness of different kinds of measures or the outcomes of policy practice, as, in most of the cases, labour market support measures are too recent to draw any conclusions about their implementation. But even when measures have been underway long enough to generate results, most countries have no systematic follow-up or impact evaluation of policy interventions. As a matter of fact, only the cases of Sweden and to a lesser extent Denmark and even less Germany can provide a sufficient body of evidence over time allowing for policy recommendations. For this reason, the analysis of the literature on former research on those experiences is crucial. All of the countries surveyed struggle with the gap between available and collected information on refugees (both individually and as a group) and the information required to design effective labour market integration measures and policies. This gap prevents researchers and policymakers from drawing solid policy conclusions.
  - The research shows a high degree of fragmentation and a thorough lack of coordination in the implementation of labour market support measures in the countries surveyed. There are simply too many actors intervening at the local, regional and national levels without any kind of coherent strategy or exchange of information. This lack of coordination across government levels and among actors threatens to undermine the effectiveness of labour market integration efforts. The labour market integration support measures for refugees and asylum-seekers has become a case in point for the need of powerful multilevel governance mechanisms to deal with current challenges in an integrated way (and this could include also the European level).
  - Asylum-seekers and refugees have specific needs, profiles and incentive structures that go far in explaining their relative underperformance in the labour market compared to the population in general and other migrants. Integrating refugees and asylum-seekers into the labour market therefore requires specific proactive support measures. The “mainstreaming” of refugees, that is, their referral to the active labour market policies and support measures offered by public institutions to national workers will not suffice, even though this is the more widespread policy approach implemented so far.
  - The research confirms the idea that the sooner support measures are implemented, the faster refugees can be integrated into the labour market. This clearly supports those who advocate the removal of legal obstacles to asylum-seekers’ labour market participation that are still maintained by many Member States. It also underscores the need to remove the administrative and practical obstacles that bar refugees from joining the labour market, even when they are legally entitled to do so.

## Policy Pointers

The inventory of labour market integration support measures conducted in nine EU Member States does not allow for clear-cut policy recommendations at this stage. It is too early (in most of the countries analyzed, systematic implementation of labour integration support measures has started within the last year), and we know too little about them. But comparability is there, both in terms of structural challenges faced and in terms of policy response to them.

### Mutual learning possible

These observed similarities in policymaking approaches provide ample opportunity for cross-national mutual learning. There is much to be learned from the experience of countries such as Sweden and Denmark that have a long track record of labour market integration measures targeting refugees. In addition, Member States can share the lessons learned in introducing mechanisms and thereby facilitate the rapid dissemination of promising initiatives.

### More information required

Developing an evidence-based policy will require the systematic generation and collection of information and data regarding the implementation, reach and impact of policies. In order to ensure an upward learning curve across Europe in this policy field, information and data on actions taken must be systematized. These actions must also be evaluated in terms of impact and cost-effectiveness and the labour market outcomes of beneficiaries monitored as well.

### Increase of resources commensurate with the social and economic stakes required

More resources must be directed at promoting the labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. Even if all the countries surveyed have in the last year substantially increased their budgets for this item, the resources committed thus far fall short of meeting the immediate needs required and are

in no way commensurate with the magnitude of the economic, social and even political consequences at stake here.

### Scope for EU-wide action

The EU is the appropriate level to establish an information-exchange platform and develop a pool of knowledge able to improve Member States' policymaking. This platform could serve not only as a forum of exchange among practitioners, but also as a forum for the generation of information and analysis of initiatives in this policy field (e.g., evaluating practices and developing policy guidelines). In some areas, such as the recognition of qualifications or the free movement of workers, the EU legal framework can facilitate the implementation of EU-wide initiatives. In addition, although EU funding covers only a small part of the total cost of facing the refugee crisis (including labour market integration measures), the European Commission has considerable leverage in promoting basic standards for policy practices and the collection of information and programme evaluation, which are key to ensuring the effective and efficient labour market integration of refugees.

### Further research needs

We need more data and more information on refugees and asylum-seekers, on their qualifications and skills as well as on their personal and professional profile, on their spatial distribution (in relation to the distribution of labour demand across the labour market). This can only be done through representative surveys of current and past refugees (surveys conducted so far among refugees are too partial and scattered). Then we also need more tracking studies of refugees, following up their professional track-record and their labour market outcomes over time. Finally, we need more (comparative) case studies of labour market integration support measures, and a more thorough and more systematic analysis of different kinds of them.

Even if it looks technical, the issue of labour market integration support measures and their impact on labour market integration of refugees has a key political bearing for the future of Europe.

## Background

The study has been produced by the Migration Policy Centre (MPC) at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute in Florence under the direction of Prof. Iván Martín.



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## The complete report including country case studies will be available in June

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