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**ANALYSES & OPINIONS**

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*Integration of Asylum Seekers in the EU labour market.*

*Let's not delay the process*

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*Key Words*

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*Abstract*

*Migration of people from their home countries to a new host country is an age-old phenomenon and just as old is the struggle associated with it. A substantial portion of those migrants is labour which relocates in search for better work opportunities. Although they do enter the host country but there is a long journey before such migrants can integrate fully with the host country, especially with its labour market. There are many hurdles in their way to a free and fair labour market which allows them to live a life of dignity. Through this blog, the authors intend to highlight few such obstacles faced by the migrants and the possible solutions which can be used.*

## ***Introduction***

The migrant crisis entails a continuous struggle for settlement and acceptance by the people who leave or are made to leave their homeland due to a number of reasons. There are several factors that can trigger people's movement such as the search for better opportunities, lack of resources in the country of origin or even a threat to one's own safety and security. As per the [IOM World Migration Report 2020](#), there were nearly 272 million global migrants in June 2019. Further, at the end of 2019, the number of those who were forcibly displaced all over the globe stood at 79.15 million. Out of these approximately 45.7 million people were asylum-seekers. As per [Eurostat](#), 416 600 asylum-seekers applied for international protection in the EU Member States in 2020, about a quarter less than in 2019.

EU Member States, as host countries, are required to facilitate the integration and inclusion of such migrants, a substantial number of whom are *prima facie* refugees fleeing persecution and serious human rights violation in their countries of origin. The focus of this blog post is on international protection seekers and their integration into the EU labour market, which is considered one of the most important steps in enabling refugees to become fully included members of the host society.

According to Article 2(i) of the Qualification Directive, an applicant for international protection (*i.e.* an asylum seeker) is a third-country national or stateless person who has made an application for international protection in respect of which a final decision has not been taken. Although applicants are in the process of awaiting a decision on their application for international protection, their inclusion and integration in the host society is no less important. As pointed out by [UNHCR](#),<sup>1</sup> a good reception policy for asylum seekers is vital for their eventual integration in legal, psychological, and social terms and should combine effective and adequate services with a swift asylum procedure. In the following paragraphs we will focus on labour market integration of asylum seekers as one of the crucial steps towards their successful integration and inclusion in the host society. The analysis will move from the [EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion \(2021-2027\)](#), highlighting its shortcomings and trying to offer possible solutions.

## ***Procedural Ease***

One of the first areas of concern is the length and complexity of the procedures for applying for international protection in the host country. Bureaucratic procedural

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<sup>1</sup> 'Integration of Refugees, Discussion Paper', UNHRC Nicosia July, 2014.

bottlenecks make it difficult for applicants to provide all the required documents and obtain the desired status. Therefore, streamlining of procedures and removal of excessively complicated administrative hassles is necessary. Also, information on procedures needs to be disseminated so that there is no ambiguity about the laws and procedural requirements. Furthermore, shortening the time span within which an application is accepted or rejected is another prerequisite for a successful integration of asylum seekers. Although the Procedural Directive sets a general six-month time limit for examining applications, many Member States have faced difficulties in ensuring timely decision-making.<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> A long delay in integration caused by procedural bottlenecks can drive asylum seekers towards resorting to illegal routes for ensuring their stay in the host state. This further enhances their vulnerabilities and makes future integration labour market integration and inclusion in the host society even more difficult.

### ***Orientation Period***

According to Article 15 of the [Reception Directive](#), asylum seekers are ensured access to labour market within a maximum of nine months from the date of their application for international protection. We believe that this time period should be reduced to a maximum of six months in order to expedite their integration into the labour market as well as improve their standard of living and access to social benefits.

This initial period in which asylum seekers are not able to access the labour market should be used to introduce them to the nature of the host country's labour market, trade practices, as well as culture and traditions. Special attention should be paid to improving basic language skills and apprising asylum seekers with the job, educational and housing conditions, and requirements of the host state. Needless to say, Member States and the EU should continue to provide accommodation facilities, other services, and basic social benefits during this period and if necessary for longer.

### ***Healthcare***

Access to adequate healthcare facilities is a prerequisite for the integration of the asylum seeker into the labour market of the host country. Special attention should be given to their physical and mental health in order to provide them with an easy and effective transition into the labour market. Vulnerable migrant groups, especially LGBTQI+, disabled migrants, minors and women should be provided with adequate

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<sup>2</sup> AIDA, Asylum Information Database, 'The Length of Asylum Procedures in Europe', UNHRC Nicosia, July 2014

support regarding mental and physical health. Asylum seekers should be informed about their options and the host state should take steps to overcome language barriers (*i.e.*, with the help of official interpreters, brochures in different languages or through persons with an approved status who speak the respective language) that otherwise make access to healthcare services more difficult.

### ***Skill Recognition and Skill Generation***

As highlighted in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), recognizing competences and skills of asylum seekers, promoting their visibility and comparability with EU qualifications is key to faster and more appropriate inclusion into the labour market. In addition to vocational trainings and language courses that would help complement qualifications acquired abroad, an EU database of qualifications and skills already obtained should be created. While an asylum application is pending, the receiving state should collect and record information regarding the applicant's work experience and skills. This would ensure that applicants receive employment opportunities appropriate to their qualifications.

Special consideration should be given to women asylum seekers, as they are exposed to a higher risk of becoming stuck in domestic work, preventing them from participating in the labour market. To avoid such obstacles, Member States should undertake measures (*e.g.*, childcare services) so that women can participate freely in the labour market.

### ***Just and Fair Working Conditions with Wage Parity***

It is important that migrants are offered humane working conditions and that there is parity in the wages received by migrants and native workers. Member States should constantly look out for unregistered and abused asylum seekers and try to bring them into the mainstream through dialogue and support. Very often migrants are not able to raise their genuine concerns with the host State fearing any counteractive action against themselves. Therefore, efforts must be made to bridge the gap between asylum seekers and the State, so that the seekers can fearlessly approach the officials of the host State with their issues. It can be done by means of programs, events or workshops in order to facilitate free flow of communication between the host State and the asylum seekers.

### ***Incentives for Hiring Asylum Seekers***

In order to facilitate the entry of asylum seekers into the labour market, the perspective of employers must also to be considered. Indeed, the ambiguity of the applicant's legal status may discourage employers from hiring him/her.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, certain informative sessions could be provided by Chambers of Commerce or other institutions which would be useful for employers to understand the legal status of the applicant and to be sure of the legality of those hired. Measures should be taken to facilitate the employment of asylum seekers also in the public sector, for example, as language mediators for other asylum seekers or migrants, in case they have relevant knowledge of the two languages.

One of the major obstacles to the integration of asylum seekers into the labour market is the inability to change their legal status in the host state. Not being able to apply for long-term resident status if the asylum seeker enters the labour market and obtains employment is a significant discouragement for both asylum seekers and potential employers. Enabling change of status would encourage asylum seekers to enter the labour market legally while waiting for their applications to be processed and would also reassure employers about the stability of employees.

Last but not least, it is equally important to maintain a balance between the employment figures of asylum seekers and those of the local population in order to prevent any backlash from the latter, as well as to avoid labour market segmentation.

### *Grievance Redressing Cell*

All the recommended improvements would remain a dead letter unless accompanied by the creation of a specialised body deal with asylum seekers' complaints and issues regarding access to the labour market, exploitation, harassment, discrimination, procedural problems, or any other possible concerns. This body could include people from the migrant community as representatives to provide a comfortable and trustworthy environment. The work of the body could be facilitated through the creation of a digital platform easily accessible by applicants to address their grievances.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, it can be said that despite all the legislative and executive actions taken by various States and the EU, the ground reality suggests that we are still far away

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<sup>4</sup> Borri Giulia, Orria Brigida, Vailati Alex, "Ambiguous Welcomings: The Identity Construction of Asylum Seekers in Turin ,Italy", Urbanities, Vol. 4, No.1, May 2014

from putting in place a truly effective regime for assisting and supporting asylum seekers in their struggle for survival and growth. Integration within the host state is one of the most essential aspects of that support so that the asylum seekers can lead a peaceful life with ample opportunities to prosper. However, every long journey begins from a single step and by working on some of the recommendations discussed in this blog, Member States would take a huge leap towards successful integration of migrants with the labour market of the host country. Once successfully integrated within the labour market, it would be far easier for the migrants to integrate with the host state in other respects as well.

#### SUGGESTED READING MATERIALS

EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)

Integration of Refugees, Discussion Paper', UNHRC Nicosia July, 2014

AIDA, Asylum Information Database, 'The Length of Asylum Procedures in Europe', UNHRC Nicosia, July 2014

Borri Giulia, Orria Brigida, Vailati Alex, "Ambiguous Welcomings: The Identity Construction of Asylum Seekers in Turin , Italy", Urbanities, Vol. 4, No.1, May 2014

IOM World Migration Report 2020

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