

NGO NETWORK OF INTEGRATION FOCAL POINTS

POLICY BRIEFING ON EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

'The fact that we can't work is really bad because we can't build our own future. We are dependents. For a human being this situation is the worst.'

ECRE



for integration
e p and migration
i m
programme

 **Caritas**
EUROPA

In 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBP) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication A Common Agenda for Integration, the Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.¹ This policy briefing relates to the implementation of CPB 3: 'Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigration, to the contributions immigrants make to the receiving society, and to making such contributions visible'

On June 3rd 2003, the European Commission issued a Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment.² This stressed that while immigration should be recognised as a source of cultural and social enrichment, particularly by contributing to entrepreneurship, diversity and innovation, its economic impact on employment and growth is also significant, as it increases labour supply and helps cope with short-term skills shortages. In addition, immigration tends to have an overall positive effect on product demand and therefore on labour demand.

Furthermore, the 'Handbook of Integration for policy makers and practitioners' 2005 says: "The Commission's first Annual report on Migration and Integration (2004) demonstrates that in all Member States the access to the labour market as well as the language skills and a sufficient level of education constitute the most important goals for securing successful integration. At the European level, labour market integration is the area with the most concretely defined policy objectives, as the 2003 Employment Strategy Guidelines propose to achieve a significant reduction in the unemployment gap between non-EU and EU-nationals by 2010".³ In addition, the EU Directives on 'employment equality' and 'race' form the legislative framework in the fight against racism and discrimination.⁴

Refugees and migrants are a very diverse group with different skills levels, language abilities, qualifications, work experiences and ambitions. However, what they do have in common is the fact they suffer higher levels of unemployment than the native population and are often found working in low-skilled, badly paid and temporary jobs. Due to the forced nature of their migration and their experiences, compared with other migrant groups, refugees often face additional difficulties in accessing the labour market.

Recommendations for the European Common Agenda on Integration

ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Policies and practices across Europe vary considerably regarding granting legal access to the labour market for different groups of migrants. Recognised refugees have unrestricted access to the labour market, but many Member States impose various restrictions for people with subsidiary forms of international protection. The legal right to work for asylum seekers varies across Europe. Some Member States grant access to the labour market early, after three months, while others do not respect the spirit of the EU Reception Directive⁵ and use various derogations to prevent asylum seekers from accessing the labour market.⁶

Imposed unemployment causes dependency on state benefits, social exclusion, poverty and de-motivation. Member States should ensure that refugees, people with subsidiary protection and other migrants with a residence permit have unrestricted access to the labour market. Moreover, asylum seekers should be allowed access to paid employment at the earliest possible stage in their asylum application process and not later than six months after arrival.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Lack of linguistic proficiency is one of the primary causes of refugees' and migrants' disadvantaged position in the labour market. The quality, availability and length of the programmes vary across Europe. The number of hours is often insufficient to achieve a language level necessary to progress towards further training, education or suitable employment. Some Member States provide language courses for asylum seekers, arguing that this is important to enable their participation and integration in society regardless of the outcome of their asylum procedure. Unfortunately, most Member States exclude asylum seekers from professional language courses.

Member States should facilitate refugees' and migrants' access to suitable language training as soon as possible after arrival. Such courses should be tailored, as far as possible, to the needs of refugees and migrants and provide the level of language necessary for them to access further training or find suitable employment. It is particularly important to make language training accessible to all asylum seekers.

PATHWAYS TO SUITABLE EMPLOYMENT

Sustainable employment is key in the integration process of refugees and migrants. At present, across Europe, refugees and migrants experience much higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than nationals. Many are unable to make use of their previous skills and experience and are often working in low skilled, temporary and badly paid jobs. They are also over-represented in the informal labour market due to lack of access to legal employment and the need to survive (in particular in countries with less developed social benefits systems). It is important to tackle this waste of human resources and better facilitate successful pathways to suitable employment (reflecting their skills and experience), instead of any kind of employment as soon as possible.

Member States should arrange for refugees and migrants to have access to schemes that provide job search training, followed by one-to-one employment support. Although individual employment support is labour-intensive it delivers results by making clients independent and able to compete in the labour market. Staff in employment agencies should be trained to address the specific needs of refugees and migrants, taking into account their skills, qualifications and professional backgrounds. Employment services should enable them to follow appropriate training (for a reasonable time period) without losing unemployment benefits. In addition, mentoring programmes for a wide range of professions should be available.

LABOUR MARKET SHORTAGES

As a result of demographic changes Europe will be increasingly in need of foreign labour to sustain economic growth. Across Europe, employers are experiencing difficulties recruiting

staff at both skilled and unskilled levels. Newly arriving and settled refugees and migrants can make a major contribution towards easing current and future labour market shortages.

Member States should promote the benefits of hiring refugees and migrants to employers and develop systems that provide incentives for employers to hire them. Employers' motivation and commitment in contributing to the integration of refugees and migrants in the labour market can be sustained by offering them information, advice and financial incentives. Employers need to be made aware of the potential and diversity of the workforce as a competitive factor. Moreover, Member States need to promote the potential of this workforce in order to combat the view that it is a 'threat' to the national workforce.

DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE

Many refugees and migrants experience discrimination and prejudice in the job seeking process. Employers often do not trust foreign qualifications or do not value work experiences gained from abroad. Well-qualified job seekers are sometimes not invited to interviews because of their foreign names and perceived lack of language skills is often used as a reason for not hiring refugees and migrants. Discrimination is often fuelled by the negative portrayal of migrants, refugees and in particular asylum seekers by elements of the media and politicians from various political parties.

Governments, politicians and their parties, the media and educational institutions all have a role to play in fostering understanding and solidarity, and ensuring accurate and balanced public information on migration and refugee issues.

¹See Council Conclusions, Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, 14615/04 of 19 November 2004 and the Communication from the European Commission on A Common Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, September 2005, COM (2005) 389.

²COM(2003) 336 final

³European Commission, European handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners, 2005, page 10.

⁴Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation and Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

⁵Article 11 of the Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers requires that "Member States shall decide the conditions for granting access to the labour market, if a decision at first instance has not been taken within one year of the presentation of an application and this delay cannot be attributed to the applicant".

⁶See ECRE's report The EC Directive on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, November 2005, p.14-16

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

THE NETHERLANDS

Emplooi and Job Support are two organisations that operate at the national level and help refugees find suitable employment. Emplooi operates in close cooperation with the Dutch Council for Refugees, as well as with Job Support, which is part of the University Assistance Fund (UAF) Foundation for Refugee Students. Together, these organisations have so far helped approximately 11,000 refugees find employment over a period of 12 years. For more information: www.emplooi.net and www.uaf.nl

SPAIN

Under the EU-initiative ENEAS-EQUAL, actors including the Dirección General de Integración de los Immigrantes, ACCEM, CEAR and the Spanish Red Cross are involved in a programme, which promotes access to the labour market for asylum seekers and persons under humanitarian protection. For more information: www.eneas-equal.mtas.es/ingles/index.htm

SWITZERLAND

The association Cocomo (Coaching Coordination Mobilisation, see www.cocomo.ch) is setting up a network between local businesses, social services and refugees. It offers different models of practical skills assessment, traineeships and coaching.

ITALY

The IntegRARsi project funded by the EQUAL initiative, involves 8 local municipalities, the Association of Italian Municipalities (Anci), the 4 major protection organisations (CIR, ICS, ARCI and Caritas), IOM, CENSIS (Italian Centre for Social Studies and Policies) and Formautonomie. Its objectives include the availability of information and orientation services for asylum seekers, the development of regional models in order to transfer good practice and raising awareness of refugee and asylum seekers' rights. For more information: www.integrarsi.anci.it

PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Refugee Council, together with the vocational centre Centro de Formação Profissional para o Sector Alimentar (CFPSA), set up a pilot project aimed at integrating asylum seekers in vocational training courses in areas such as the catering sector where there is a shortage of workers, in order to give them direct access to the labour market. For more information: <http://viaas.refugiados.net/a1.html>

This policy briefing has been produced by the NGO Network of Integration Focal Points, which brings together 28 non-governmental organisations in 19 European countries in the refugee and migration field with the aim of advocating for better integration policies and practices for refugees and migrants in Europe. The Network is coordinated by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) in liaison with Caritas Europa. The Network was established in June 2005 and received financial support from the European Commission (INTI preparatory Actions 2004) and the Network of European Foundations (European Programme for Integration and Migration) from September 2006 to February 2007.

This policy briefing is part of a series of six on the integration of refugees and migrants in Europe addressing the following topics: Housing; Introduction and language courses; Assessment of skills and recognition of qualifications; Vocational training and (higher) education; Employment and employment support; and Civic and political participation.

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is an umbrella organisation for cooperation between almost 80 European non-governmental organisations in 31 countries concerned with refugees. For more information: www.ecre.org

Caritas Europa is one of the seven regions of Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organisations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories. For more information: www.caritas-europa.org

For more information on both organisations' positions on refugee/migrant integration:

ECRE's *The Way Forward: Europe's role on the global refugee protection system – 'Towards the Integration of Refugees in Europe'*, July 2005
Caritas Europa's *Integration – A process involving all*, March 2004

FRONT COVER: This quote has been taken from ECRE's *Refugee Stories* project, which relates the experience of men and women who have sought sanctuary in one of 12 EU countries over the past ten years. More information: www.ecre.org/refugeestories/

DESIGN: barry@lowenhoff2.demon.co.uk