

# Improving labour market access for refugees in Calabria

## Key findings and recommendations

### Executive summary

Access to employment is a key factor for migrant integration not only as a means of socio-economic incorporation, but also because it can help a person build relationships, support wellbeing and increase the sense of belonging to the local community. In the Italian context, the employment of migrants is constantly on the rise although only a small proportion are in highly qualified positions. However, there is an increase in migrant entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway.

In Italy, migrants' access to the labour market depends on their legal status and the reasons for their admission. In general, everyone has the opportunity to work including asylum seekers who gain this right just 60 days after a request for international protection. The right to work is overseen by the Ministry of Labour although it is the Regions which have competence in active labour market policies. Employment Centres (CPI), decentralized structures operating on a provincial basis, offer guidance and training services in agreement with the Regional government.

The research for this brief was carried out through semi-structured qualitative interviews with social workers, educators working on local integration projects, and local government officials in the towns of Cosenza, Lamezia Terme and Villa San Giovanni. Other interviews were conducted with mediators/experts from migrant associations, members of humanitarian organisations and representatives of the National Refugee Reception System (SIPROIMI). GLIMER Research argues that there is limited attention on the work being done to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into the labour market in Calabria. For GLIMER Research, a sustained focus by policy makers and employers is needed to address the challenges faced by displaced migrants. Particular attention should be directed to local labour market conditions in suburban areas with a high level of low-skilled and labour-intensive employment. This policy brief note takes into account the structural conditions of the economic situation in Calabria and suggests ways to improve the legal, controlled and facilitated access of refugees to the labour market.

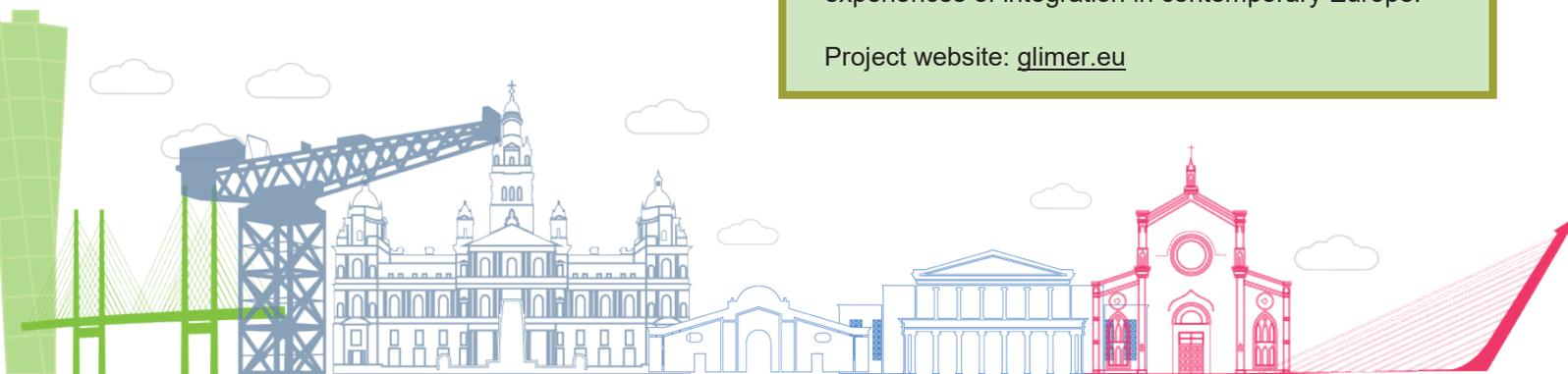
### Methods and empirical research

The GLIMER project is informed by a combination of policy analysis, and qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders. This policy brief is reliant on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, the third sector and community groups.

The GLIMER (Governance and the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees) project is jointly funded by JPI Urban Europe and Horizon 2020.

Bringing together researchers and practitioners from five lead institutions – the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Università della Calabria, Malmö Universitet and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies – it researches how issues relating to governance impact displaced peoples' experiences of integration in contemporary Europe.

Project website: [glimer.eu](http://glimer.eu)



## Context

### Overview

Currently, admission to the Italian territory for migrants seeking work (including seasonal work) and self-employment is only possible - except for some professional roles that are allowed overtime - within the so-called annual maximum entry quotas established by the corresponding decrees of entry planning for work by the President of the Council of Ministers.

The so-called "flows decree" also includes quotas for the conversion of residence permits from study/training/work experience to paid employment and self-employed work. The maximum quota of entries established in the flow decree is then allocated at regional level to the territorial Employment Centres (CPI). There is a clear and central role played by the flows decree: it is the only instrument for regulating migratory flows, even if the flows decree is increasingly seen an instrument that is profoundly inadequate.

### The Calabrian context

In Calabria, displaced migrants have been important in the territorial spread of newcomers to areas outside of the major cities, with a particular increase for municipalities of a small size. Therefore, it is possible to identify distinct local systems with a high intensity of migrant labour: (1) agricultural systems specialized in seasonality and work, (2) minor agricultural systems characterized by animal farming, flower cultivation and production and (3) tourism and other seasonal activities. Finally, it is worth mentioning that many of these areas have been noted for their welcoming policies with the area from Badolato to Riace known locally as the 'spine of hospitality' [*Dorsale dell'ospitalità*], thanks to the pioneering experiences involving the reception of asylum seekers and refugees.

In many cases, migrants change jobs (construction, agriculture, tourism), or move to different locations, from

areas in the interior where seasonal agriculture activities are located, to areas on the coast for the tourism sector.

### The semi-decentralized governance of labour integration

The governance of public policies on the labour market inclusion and integration of migrants in Italy is entrusted to the Ministry of Labour. The central unit is responsible for the financial resources related to migration policies and, among its numerous tasks, for the development and management of the registry system for non-EU workers. A multi-level coordination is used to keep track of the employment of migrants, fortified by direct communication with the Italian Regions. Currently, a multi-year programme of labour policies and migrant integration is in force in a total of 17 Italian Regions, including Calabria.

The operational arm of these policies are the so-called Employment Centres (CPI), which are public offices coordinated by the Regions that are responsible for matching supply to demand in the labor market. They also support specific employment initiatives and the local implementation of active labour policies. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018, Calabria has a total of 15 Employment Centres (structured on a provincial basis), in addition to 25 offices and local information points relating to the CPI.

According to the latest estimations of the Italian Ministry of Labour, between 77% and 88% of migrants have used these employment services in Calabria and the province of Cosenza has a very high rate of non-specialised workers in the agricultural sector (5,361), with a majority of workers in the age group between 25 and 34 years (2,735), with a fixed-term contract. Most of these positions are filled by men and although labour market conditions for women are improving they are still confined to certain sectors.



## Findings

GLIMER research has identified several gaps regarding the employment and social integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, which concern the following topics:

1. **Mechanisms of migration flow management**

The system to control migratory flows through entry quotas seems to be a tool that is inadequate to adapt to the needs of labour market demands in Italy.

2. **Regularization of residence permits**

Access channels for the regularisation of residence permits prioritise the attractiveness of certain professional activities and offer little space for seasonal work, entrepreneurship and self-employment. These aspects are reflected in a substantial lack of services for vocational training.

3. **Comprehensive reform of the ordinary reception system (SPRAR, SIPROIMI)**

Recent reforms of the reception system have excluded asylum seekers from support services including employability training. As a consequence, their legal status becomes more precarious and slower to be defined, which also restricts their possibilities to find work or skills training.

4. **Specific programmes for job placements that include vocational training**

The semi-decentralized management of labour market integration offers considerable potential for job placements which are programmed for a wide range of users but not specifically for displaced migrants. In this sense, it would be useful to support the integration of these migrants with new vocational courses and the enhancement of previous skills.

5. **Protection for victims of the *Caporalato* racket, and identification of safe production routes**

In Calabria, a significant percentage of migrants who do not have access to the labour market are intercepted by the *Caporalato* racket, a peculiar and illegal form of exploitation of agricultural workers. This happens due to the limited presence of safe production routes against organized crime.

6. **Inspection mechanisms in the workplace and against criminal activities**

An increase in workplace inspections, not only during the production phase but also in the mechanisms of workforce recruitment are needed to fight the penetration of organised crime. In certain areas the detection and selection of low-skilled workers seems to be almost totally overseen by mafia bosses.

7. **Local and regional authorities and Labour information services**

Several studies and field interviews revealed that migrant workers often do not know their rights or have access to justice at work. Migrants' information and protection programmes at the local level need to be more direct and accessible.

8. **Accommodation support, self-reliance, and prolonged methods of assistance**

The main areas where migrants have job opportunities in Calabria are in rural zones with little public service provision. Combining housing policies with social and labour integration (as in some cases analysed) would lead to the decrease in social tensions as well as the breaking down of barriers related to access. Moreover, integration programmes appear to be focused on a short-term approach, leaving the successful completion of the integration process to the self-resilience of migrants themselves.



## Findings continued

### 9. Work experience and Italian language courses

Inevitably, Italian language skills are a crucial part of employability skills and vocational training. In Calabria there is a mixed offering of language courses that is only partially covered by the intervention of the SPRAR / SIPROIMI reception system. This has had its funding cut with knock on effects for beneficiaries. Collaboration between local administrations and social cooperatives is fruitful but cannot be a substitute for more publicly run courses.

### 10. Professional skills and gender balance

In Calabria, the presence of migrant women calls for specific attention to these workers' needs to access job placements (e.g. specific courses for those with caring responsibilities) and to learn skills in a way that is better supported. Often, even women become victims of the *Caporalato* racket. Some of them are unable to access the labour market due to difficulties in combining language learning with starting work.

## Recommendations

Below, we make ten recommendations designed to improve labour market integration and provision for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Calabria. Recommendations are grouped into five distinct themes, and are as follows:

### Reshaping policies on the management of migration flows and regular admissions to the Italian territory:

1. Revise the 'access quotas' mechanism and make it more responsive to national labour market requirements.
2. Promote further channels of access to stable residence for migrants and refugees, through the development of specific vocational learning pathways and skills development.

### Extend the range and territorial implementation of reception policies for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers:

3. Establish an adequate ordinary reception system that complies with national labour legislation and also offers a safeguard to asylum seekers.
4. Allow access to all employment services for asylum seekers, granting them registration and use of residence rights.

### Enhance the control of employment as a form of fighting the *Caporalato* and illegal forms of recruitment:

5. Ensure widespread protection for victims of the *Caporalato* racket, through the identification of safe production routes and incentives for the legal recruitment of migrants by small producers.

6. Improve inspection mechanisms in the workplace and against criminal activities to prevent illegal infiltration and illicit use of workers and incomes.

### Make the workplace more inclusive and more suitably adapted to the migrant's personal needs by enhancing new skills and competences:

7. Encourage local authorities to provide specific programmes for job placements but also the provision of public transport.
8. Support local and regional authorities to improve information services for workers about their rights as well as access to justice and security at work.

### Coordinate integration strategies at the local level in order to promote faster personal autonomy of migrants:

9. Support the protection of asylum seekers and refugees by providing (where appropriate) accommodation, as well as prolonged methods of assistance.
10. Match job placements with appropriate Italian language courses that are also oriented to the acquisition of technical terms and specific professional qualifications, taking into account the local labour market.

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*This policy brief is supported by our full report available at: [glimer.eu/outputs](http://glimer.eu/outputs) | Further enquires: [michaelagh.broadbent@ed.ac.uk](mailto:michaelagh.broadbent@ed.ac.uk)*