

Overarching trends and recommendations to improve labour market access for displaced migrants

Key findings and recommendations

Overview

This policy brief will provide an overview of trends in labour market integration for displaced migrants across Sweden, Italy, Cyprus and Scotland. Specifically, this brief will: 1) discuss overarching policy parameters that define labour market integration frameworks for asylum seekers and refugees, 2) highlight the shared barriers that prevent migrants from fully engaging with employability services and 3) discuss issues to consider beyond traditional 'employability services' that may impact labour market integration for displaced migrants. It should be noted that while more context-specific recommendations are laid out in each country's full report, select recommendations corresponding to each thematic section are embedded throughout the brief.

GLIMER is informed by a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders and secondary analysis. This policy brief is reliant on policy documents, statistics and evaluations together with interviews with stakeholders from national, regional and local authorities and the third sector conducted in 2019 in all four countries. In Sweden, GLIMER members worked across the region of Skåne and the municipalities of Malmö and Eslöv, two municipalities in a close geographic distance and part of the Öresund region that connects Sweden to Denmark and continental Europe. In Italy, researchers worked in different locations covering the territory of Calabria, focusing on two main cities (Cosenza, Catanzaro) and in places with a high density of non-Italian residents (Lamezia Terme, Villa San Giovanni). In Cyprus, work consisted of ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, as well as the third sector in Nicosia. Lastly, in Scotland consortium members worked across several locations that included both the site of Dispersal

(Glasgow) as well as areas involved in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). This policy brief does not represent an exhaustive depiction of each country's findings. To access each country's full report, please visit: <http://www.glimer.eu/outputs/>

Policy framework

Migrants are often placed into different eligibility categories defined by legal status and financial standing.

Not all migrants are afforded equal opportunity to integrate into the labour market in their host country. First, state eligibility criteria almost universally exclude asylum seekers from employability services. Even in Sweden, where all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers alike, are encouraged to secure employment and where few formal barriers to employment for migrants exist, in practice asylum seekers are still excluded from employability services that would facilitate securing a job. Second, states like Cyprus and Italy have created a two-tiered system with regard to labour market integration where certain professional activities are favoured over others. This means that while asylum seekers are forced into low-skilled, low-paid jobs regardless of qualifications, other migrants are not restricted at all. This results in one set of stringent rules for refugees and asylum seekers that obstruct their ability to integrate into the labour market and a more lenient set of rules for others such as economic migrants and high-net worth individuals that enjoy full rights to live and work freely.

Centralised and decentralised labour market frameworks have different implications for migrants' labour market integration.

A disconnect between national policy and local implement-



ation was consistently identified across states. In Cyprus for example, social policy is centralised which means municipalities do not have a say in key decisions on integration policy although local authorities are best placed to assess needs. This means that although the central government does not provide support, such as funding, for integration actions, it still makes most of the decisions that guide policy.

Conversely, in Scotland, successes in employment/enterprise/employer engagement have been a result of intense local activity, not national policy or infrastructure, which has led to inconsistent/precarious support mechanisms. Likewise in Sweden, while responsibility for labour market integration lies with the state, it is complemented by municipalities who provide labour market training. Despite this effort for a decentralised framework, key political decisions at the national level, like cutting funding and staff, make it difficult for the Public Employment Service to live up to policy ambitions. Lastly, in Italy migrant workers are not always aware of their rights or have access to justice at work which means protection programmes at the local level need to be more direct and accessible.

Funding streams for labour market integration programmes vary, some more responsive to the particular needs of displaced migrants than others.

In Sweden, regions not only benefit from a funded and institutional multi-level governance framework to support and coordinate new arrival labour market integration, but the state also provides employment subsidies to stimulate labour demands for vulnerable groups such as refugees. Conversely, in Scotland there is very little funding for employability support that would not immediately or directly result in employment as funding for employability services are contingent on demonstratable 'employment' results. Requirements such as this are misaligned to the needs of refugees because displaced migrants are often very far from the labour market. Lastly, in Cyprus the main avenue for integration projects comes from project-based funding from European institutions which means decision makers are far removed from the local market's needs.

While progress continues to be made in this space, structural gaps in labour market integration persist.

For example, before migrants even step foot in Italy, there

is an entry quota system in place to control migratory flows. However, this system is inadequate in adapting to the needs of labour market demands. Similarly in Scotland, structural barriers to labour market integration lie with employers and policymakers where there is a gap between provision of traditional employability support and more innovative refugee enterprise/entrepreneurship and employer training. Lastly, in Sweden the Introduction Programme for new arrivals has proven to be too short to establish themselves in the local labour market as language training and other services offered require more time to master new skills.

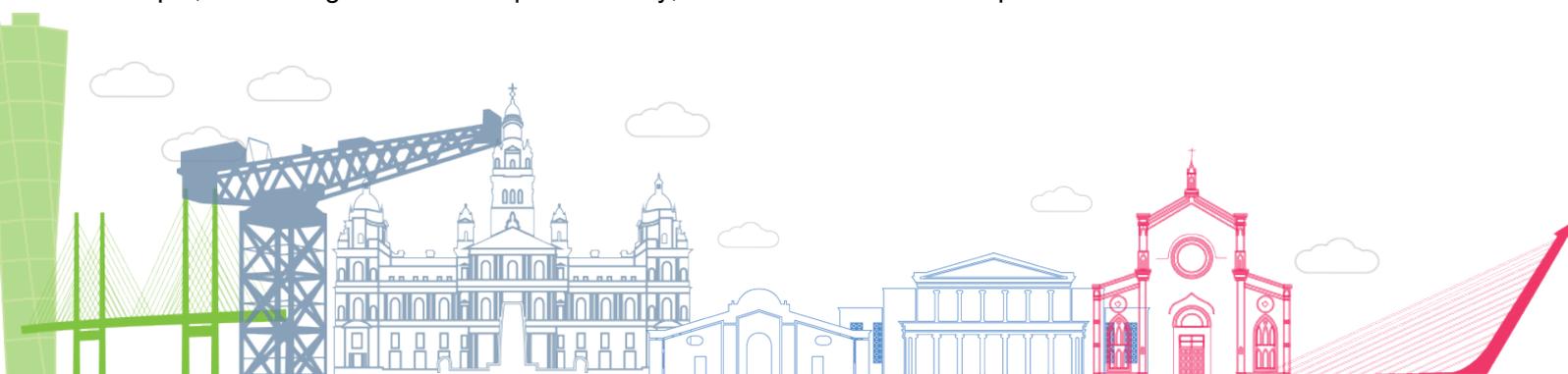
Recommendations:

- Eliminate tiered systems that favour some migrants over others and create equal access to employment services for all displaced migrants including asylum seekers.
- Ensure 'access quotas' are responsive to national and local labour market needs.
- Decentralise labour market integration policymaking and place more autonomy in hands of local authorities and municipalities.
- Ensure there is a national action plan on integration that includes robust indicators to measure success in regards to labour market integration.
- Diversify how funding is allocated to integration through employment programmes and services.
- Provide enhanced training/support for local officers to ensure labour market approaches are tailored to and appropriate for local markets.
- Eliminate inconsistent regulations that complicate collaboration between stakeholders and coordination of programmes at the local level.

Barriers to employability services

In addition to legal status implications, migrants' ability to engage with the local labour market is gravely impacted by other access barriers.

Displaced migrants often have to wait a certain amount of time between submitting their asylum application and being able to legally look for work. In Cyprus, for example, they currently have to wait one month before they can engage in employment which restricts their possibilities to find work/skills training and during which time their legal status becomes more precarious/slower to be defined.



On top of waiting periods, racism is a clear barrier for displaced migrants' ability to access the private sector on equal terms. Discrimination and stereotyping can negatively affect labour market integration as hostile environments among small businesses or businesses in resettlement areas can deter employers and organisations from employing refugees simply because they have little-to-no experience of doing so.

Geographic considerations also affect migrants' ability to integrate into the labour market. In Italy for example, migrants' opportunities tend to be in rural areas where public service provision is lower and where there is a lack of integration between housing/social/labour policies. Similarly in Scotland, there is a two-tier geography of displacement where more intensive support is provided outside Glasgow, but more services are available in Glasgow. As a result, there is a potential for smaller/rural local authorities to provide increased levels of support to resettled refugees.

From a recruitment and retention perspective, barriers are likely to persist if organisations and employers do not actively consider how certain labour market conditions, such as inappropriate interview practices, over-reliance on online recruitment resources and inappropriate language expectations, may affect refugees. Additionally, programmes focused on short-term approaches may leave successful integration reliant on the self-resilience of migrants themselves, instead of the system.

One size does not fit all when it comes to getting displaced migrants labour market ready.

Employability services and job placements are more often than not programmed for a wide range of users, not specifically for displaced migrants. This means that they do not take into account their specific needs or backgrounds. In Cyprus for example, there are no screening mechanisms to assess refugees' qualifications. This has implications for the local economy because it cannot benefit from their talents in professions they may have been trained in their home country. Likewise in Scotland, an attempt to 'mainstream' services has led to limited specialist refugee employment services that take into account refugee specific barriers. For example, mainstream financing options for potential refugee entrepreneurs are limited because they require things that are inconsistent with immigration controls such as credit history and evidence of leave to remain that covers loan repayment periods.

Unfortunately, alternative sources that take these things into consideration are limited and underexplored.

Additionally, gender blind integration policies fail to cater for the specific needs of women which exacerbates exclusion. Women refugees face multiple forms of discrimination when trying to integrate into the labour market and, unfortunately, less labour market opportunities result in weaker social integration. Women require specific attention to be able to access job placements, like offering specific courses for those with caring responsibilities.

Furthermore, certain conditions such as inconsistent childcare and childcare provision only for women targeted services perpetuate gendered expectations that women fulfil caring duties and prevent women from fully accessing services.

Lastly, while language skills are a crucial part of employability skills/vocational training, states experience a mixed offering of language courses that are sometimes only partially covered by the reception system. Places like Scotland have tried to adapt their services and successes have been a result of dedicated local support, tailored approaches to local labour market conditions and importantly, a willingness to revisit approaches to language requirements. Therefore, more publicly run local language courses would be beneficial to migrants' integration into the labour market.

Recommendations:

- Change negative narrative around refugees engendered on evidence-based discussions on real-life needs of vulnerable people.
- Ensure job services and vocational training schemes cater to the different needs of displaced migrants.
- Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to labour market access and support migrant populations outside the main regions where they are clustered.
- Include gender considerations in all national and local integration policies.
- Create synergy between labour market and social integration through free and accessible childcare, stable accommodation, better access to public transportation, language training and strengthening social networks.
- Increase resourcing for refugee employability services that include: targeted services for women; support for



long-term potential; and consider funding potential from existing third and private sector partnerships.

- Support language interpretation provision across services.
- Match job placements with appropriate language courses oriented to the acquisition of technical terms and specific professional qualifications that take into account the local labour market.
- Make the workplace more inclusive and suitably adapted to migrants' personal needs by enhancing new skills and competencies.

Beyond employability

Can enterprise and entrepreneurship endeavours be a means to employability?

Migrants can be active participants in local labour markets outside of being traditional employees. However, while the appetite may be there on the part of migrants, traditional employability services do not always accommodate these more innovative paths. In Scotland for example, there is a gap between provision for employability support and refugee enterprise/entrepreneurship. Here, services are inconsistent because 'Business Gateway' programme offices only offer mainstreamed services that don't take into account refugee specific barriers. Likewise in Italy, current channels to regularise residence permits prioritise/favour certain professional activities over others which offers little space for entrepreneurship/self-employment.

There is a need for suitable vocational training and education for displaced new arrivals.

In Cyprus, although EU-funded projects implemented by NGOs and universities provide vocational training and skill-building courses for migrants, they are not usually linked to employment opportunities which weakens their impact. Likewise, Italy would benefit from new vocational courses and programmes that enhance previous skills. Lastly, while in Sweden people with temporary and permanent residence permits have access, there is a need for suitable vocational training for new arrivals with shorter/less developed educational backgrounds.

Engagement and partnership with third and private sectors need to be fostered.

A conversation about labour market integration is incomplete without touching on one critical component: the employers. Policies and protections can only go so far without buy-in from those who are doing the hiring. However, the reality is that the private sector and third sector nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have, until now, played a limited role in formal integration policies. For example, in Cyprus although NGOs have significant expertise and experience implementing initiatives to help refugees access the labour market, their role is not given due importance in national policymaking, hence, a more holistic approach is missing. Similarly in Sweden, new partnerships are attempting to close this gap through activities such as job matching efforts. Lastly, private sector employers in Scotland have shown interest in recruiting refugees and links are facilitated by the third sector and some resettlement teams after businesses either approached them or actively sought out business connections.

Recommendations:

- Promote further channels of access to stable residence for migrants and refugees by developing specific vocational learning pathways and skills.
- Expand labour market integration policies to include enterprise, entrepreneurship, and employer engagement.
- Improve financing options for refugee entrepreneurship by considering options for small-scale loans and revised repayment terms for refugee clients.
- Develop a national database of potential enterprise funding.
- Develop capacity for central governments to support refugee-employer brokering activities.
- Develop public information campaigns on the benefits of employing refugees.
- Strengthen collaboration with the private sector and facilitate pathways to employment.
- Strengthen the role of civil society by implementing more nonprofit-public partnerships.
- Link vocational training with job placements.

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