



Task Force 10
Migration

Policy brief

HUMAN MOBILITY: TOWARDS ENHANCED INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

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ABSTRACT AND CHALLENGE

The topic of migration and forced displacement takes central attention in national, regional and global policies. However, the debate is often confounded by a political and populist narrative that is not grounded in evidence. As such, this policy brief highlights the research evidence base and aims to propagate its conclusions amongst policy makers as well as private stakeholders to mobilise action and factual discussions around this emotive topic. While we recognise the political sensitivities around migration-related policies, in this policy brief we describe some of the recent evidence supporting feasible policy solutions to improve integration of refugees in labour markets and promote healthy attitudes towards them to bolster and preserve social cohesion. The set of interventions we put forward range from using technology to match labour market supply and demand for refugees to adopting holistic active labour market programmes for refugees and redesigning the asylum process with a focus on integration, with frontline cities playing a key role to promote better reception processes and faster asylum-decision processing. Through a number of tools governments, business and civil society should actively leverage research and evidence to counter disinformation about refugees, a task that has become even more urgent during the COVID crisis.



PROPOSAL

RECOMMENDATION 1: USE TECHNOLOGY TO MATCH LABOUR MARKET SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR REFUGEES

For resettled refugees, labour market integration starts by placing people in the location where they are more likely to succeed. However, there are constraints when making this happen such as (1) the lack of information on both refugees and labour market characteristics, and (2) the state capacity to find the most appropriate matches. Academic research has developed data-driven matching mechanisms to enhance labour market integration. The introduction of such mechanisms into host countries' policies is imperative.

1.1 Matching algorithms for asylum seekers and resettled refugees can improve labour market outcomes:

Technology can fill the information and capacity gaps in host countries facing humanitarian crises. Using machine learning algorithms, this information can match the labour demand of specific locations, improving resettlement outcomes. Bansak et al. (2018) show that if refugees are placed in the areas where they are most likely to thrive, based on the area's characteristics and their own, there is a 40 to 70 per cent gain in the likelihood of finding employment opportunities, when compared with the current random assignment of refugees in Switzerland and the United States. Similarly, matching might also help to allocate refugees into localities with the capacity and willingness to receive refugees, where public and private organisations and NGOs are supportive of their integration (Jones and Teytelboym, 2017). This is an extremely **cost-efficient policy intervention** that could be widely implemented in reception and placement centres.

RECOMMENDATION 2: USE HOLISTIC ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET PROGRAMMES FOR REFUGEES

Refugees face three main barriers when accessing the labour market: (1) proficiency in the host country language, (2) knowledge of the labour market and (3) lack of qualifications (Bredgaard and Thomsen, 2018; Bucken-Knapp, Fakhri and Spehar, 2019). Refugees also face institutional barriers that prohibit their legal access to the labour market, such as restricted occupations or difficulty in obtaining work permits. In addition, refugees may face discrimination in hiring decisions forcing them to accept lower paid and informal jobs. As such, the earlier refugees have access to the labour market and active labour market programmes, the faster their economic integration (Desiderio and Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016; Marbach, Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2018).

2.1 Prioritise language training and work first schemes:

Language training is imperative to break basic cultural barriers. While training in schools is effective, the evidence suggests a multiplier effect when learning language in working plac-



es (for example, temporary workplaces). Strategies could include entrance schemes where refugees are allocated to temporary jobs where they also receive language training. As a result, refugees gain communication skills specifically related to a vocation, while acquiring work experience that opens further opportunities (Bredgaard and Thomsen, 2018; McHugh and Challinor, 2011). Such a policy requires strategic alliances between the private sector and the public sector, particularly local governments. The duration of these programmes varies depending on the refugee's skills level and the local requirements to enter the labour market. The inclusion of cultural orientation modules, and workplaces in community-related areas is also recommended to enhance refugees' social networks (Butschek and Walter, 2014; Desiderio and Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016).

2.2 Improve qualification assessments:

Due to labour market frictions and lack of qualification transferability, refugees are often overqualified for the jobs they do (Bredgaard and Thomsen, 2018). The complexity of qualification validation and the impossibility to claim the qualification in the country of origin are the primary reasons for this friction. Host countries **could consider more flexible screening processes, incorporating translation services and standardising cross-country educational frameworks** (Barbino, 2020; McKenzie and Yang, 2015). Joint efforts between the United Nations, governments and the private sector are oriented to use block chain technology as a mechanism to preserve refugee identity information, while making it transferable across different locations (Barbino, 2020). Also, interviews with experts and competency tests are mechanisms to provide skill qualifications. They could be sponsored and elaborated together with representatives of the industry to have credibility and generalised recognition in the labour market (Desiderio and Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016).

2.3 Use entrepreneurship and volunteering programmes for low-skilled refugees:

Refugees are not a monolithic group. Many refugees lack education, certificates or skills to join the host country labour market. In this case, entrepreneurship programmes and volunteering opportunities are important pathways towards integration. They help to create social networks and prevent exclusion, while enhancing skills that increase future job opportunities. These strategies need coordinated action between government, business and civic society organisations (Shneikat and Alrawadieh, 2019). For entrepreneurship programmes, it is recommended to start with skills training, incorporating long-term assistance, opportunities to access credit, and understanding of bureaucratic regulations (Vision Europe Summit, 2016).

2.4 Expand and harmonise labour laws to protect refugees and provide them the right to work:

In many countries refugees face difficulties in obtaining legal work permits, pushing them into informality and precarious employment. This is particularly a problem in fragile states and emerging economies. Denying refugees the legal right to work places them at a serious disadvantage and exposes them to exploitation and trafficking (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2014). It forces them to take perilous decisions, perpetuates aid-dependency and increases their



vulnerability to health issues and workplace hazards. Governments in host countries facilitate regulatory frameworks and innovate to build capacity and provide the right to work to refugees (Zetter, Ruaudel and Schuettler, 2018). Effective right to work procedures may benefit host countries (Özdemir, Kickbusch and Coşkun, 2017).

2.5 Recognise the gendered nature of migration, displacement, and integration:

Labour market programmes should place particular attention on women and their inclusion in resilience programming, access to employment opportunities, legal permits and financial services (Senthanaar, MacEachen, Premji, & Bigelow, 2020). UN Women (2018) recommends empowering women through information sharing, rights awareness, promoting accountability against gender-based violence and creating safe spaces for networking and socialising.

RECOMMENDATION 3. REDESIGN THE ASYLUM PROCESS WITH A FOCUS ON INTEGRATION

Effective labour market integration is not independent of refugees' migration path. Besides the violence they fled from, refugees can also be at risk of deprivation, gender-based exploitation and life threats when located in camps or placements. Cumulative exposure to violence and traumatic events has long-term impacts on refugees' physical and mental health, complicating any social integration process. (Esses, Hamilton and Gaucher, 2017).

3.1 Timely asylum decision:

Recent evidence suggests that lengthy asylum decisions are particularly detrimental to refugees' labour market outcomes primarily due to psychological discouragement even more than skill atrophy. Hainmueller, Hangartner and Lawrence (2016) find that an additional year of waiting for an asylum decision causes a decline of between 16 and 23 per cent in employment rates compared to the average rate of employment. As such, ensuring fast and adequate asylum processes, perhaps assisted by technology, can lead to more favourable economic and psychosocial outcomes.

3.2 Pre-departure orientation:

For resettled refugees, who do not have to take perilous journeys to their destinations, pre-departure programmes may facilitate refugees' integration by smoothing cultural and labour transitions. Effective programmes do not just provide general information about the host country. In contrast, they embrace cultural orientation with bicultural trainers, language courses, knowledge on the labour market, early qualifications assessment, job search orientation and support for job applications when this is possible (Mousa, 2018).

3.3 The role of local communities as reception cities:

Frontline cities are key to promoting better reception processes and faster asylum-decision processing. Entrance cities need to build capacity to respond effectively to refugees' needs while easing the path for their future integration. This cannot be achieved without multisec-



tor alliances that promote innovation (Oliver, Dekker, Geuijen and Broadhead, 2020). Multilateral and international cooperation can facilitate this by providing technical assistance and funding (Kegels, 2016). It is important to ensure that refugees receive user-friendly roadmaps to access public services, guidance from cross-cultural trained locals, and information that facilitates labour integration (Schreieck et al., 2017) .

RECOMMENDATION 4. GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD ACTIVELY LEVERAGE RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION ABOUT REFUGEES

Tackling hostility – often expressed in the form of xenophobia and discrimination – towards refugees should be at the top of the migration agenda. The cost of tensions between communities is poorer social cohesion and a lack of shared prosperity. Drouvelis, Malaeb, Vlassopoulos and Wahba (2019) find experimental evidence in Lebanon that cooperation between refugees and their host communities is significantly lower than it is amongst homogenous groups of refugees or the host communities. Further evidence suggests that tensions between the two communities are worsening over time, particularly in fragile host states like Lebanon.

4.1 Information is a powerful tool to reduce hostility and improve social cohesion:

The role of media and public figures such as politicians is key in propagating positive attitudes (Alrababa'h et al., 2020; Böhm, Theelen, Rusch and Van Lange, 2018). Information has three characteristics: (1) explaining transparently the public effort to receive and resettle refugees and the how governmental policies support this goal, (2) emphasising a humanitarian element of assisting individuals under plight and shared prosperity and (3) presenting with evidence the actual costs and benefits of refugee integration in host countries (Alrababa'h et al., 2020; Böhm et al., 2018; Esses et al., 2017).

4.2 Schools as multicultural integration environments:

Interventions in refugee children promote both short-term (through family integration in communities) and long-term integration (children themselves) in the labour market. Governments investing in inclusive education programmes would actively promote cross-cultural relations and prevent segregation practices within schools. These programmes could combine elements for language skills training, social cohesion and pro-social behaviour, besides inter-ethnic exposure. In addition, programmes could aim at training school staff to create multicultural curricula and enhance cultural diversity narratives in their teaching. Moreover, programmes could include parental engagement with interpretation mechanisms to overcome language barriers and to boost education (Block, Cross, Riggs and Gibbs, 2014).

4.3 The COVID crisis further highlighted the central contributions that refugees and migrants make to their host countries:

Refugees and migrants constitute a central component of many countries' workforce. They often work in jobs that are instrumental to the functioning of the economy and make valu-



able contributions to their societies across a diverse range of industries including the health and care sector, public transport, schooling, universities and R&D, Indeed, refugees contributed in the ongoing COVID-19 crisis to saving lives, providing essential services and developing new treatments, despite their skills being undervalued and their rights being withheld. In fact, given their vulnerability, they may have been disproportionately affected by the economic ramifications of the crisis. The pandemic also showed in many parts of the world that the overall health of the community is as good as that of its weakest link. The Overseas Development Institute (2020) introduced a tool that tracks refugees' contributions which range from delivering food parcels to providing healthcare, making drugs and vaccine innovations, and providing shelter to key workers, amongst others. As such, promoting positive contributions of refugees may contribute to enhancing attitudes towards them.



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