POLICYBRIEF

INDIVIDUAL ENABLERS AND BARRIERS IN LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN EUROPE: POLICY LESSONS FROM THE SIRIUS RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of WP6 is to understand nuances and dynamics of labour market integration (LMI) from the insider (Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers' --MRAs) perspective, hence it has the three following objectives: to analyse MRAs' insights into barriers and enablers of Labour Market Integration (LMI); to analyse the difference/similarity between the official knowledge about LMI and the MRAs' experiences on the ground; and to create a comprehensive narrative of LMI that would present the findings to wider, non-academic audiences.

This critical understanding of how MRAs efficiently use their skills and overcome integration barriers is useful to contribute to a more responsive policy framework that would understand and address their needs, experiences, and aspirations. In this context, the micro-level research takes a closer look at the needs of MRAs, with a specific focus on what migrants themselves consider to be barriers for and enablers of integration.

To understand migrants' capabilities and agency, we do not only look at their lives over the last five years but also explore their more distant memories long before their migration. Analysis of their past experiences enables our better understanding of their motivation for emigration, of barriers and opportunities they were facing and of their individual capacity for change and resistance. Looking back into their past also enables us to explore in-depth the reciprocal relationship between their agency and the socio-cultural context.

The analytical accent was specifically placed on the turning points and emerging epiphanies of MRAs lives. We mostly emphasize the narrative thematic analysis emerging from biographies and its combination with data from other levels of inquiry, but we also include ethno-dramatic

representations (two or three dynamic migrant-tales and a short ethno-theatrical text from national teams) as analytical additions to and illuminations of our emerging narrative-biographic themes.

Our findings reveal that there are various combinations of personal agency and capacity at play, with contextual opportunities acting as both enablers of and barriers for migrant agency. Some migrants react to change by rejecting the contextual requirements of the country of settlement, while others may be more persistent in their integration efforts. The mode of migrants' agency depends on their agency resilience, which they have learned and mastered through their crucial events and epiphanies, through sometimes rather hard life experiences that underpin their non-linear migration paths. The reasons for emigration can be related to the overall socio-economic and political conditions in the country of origin or to more personal issues. Such decisions can emerge as an outcome of the autonomous process of reflection about life and life-chances. Alternatively, the person may experience the pressure of other actors involved (which is a typical case in migrant trafficking). Sometimes there is a mix of both paths in migrants' emigration histories where self-made decision mixes up with a proactive external push.

We can summarize the results in the following points:

- Migrants can enter the labour market in the conditions of informational transparency, with a full respect to their human rights. In such conditions of equity, migrant-newcomers have the right to work and to obtain regular employment. In other cases, the only available choice for their less fortunate counterparts with no right to work is the irregular market. In either case, they join the labour market by occupying a position and fulfilling tasks that are often different from their previous professional experience back home. Newcomers usually find themselves overqualified at the moment of labour market entrance, hence they have to mobilize their personal and character related resources to deal with such a situation in a constructive manner.

- Recognition of educational attainment and skills is one of the main factors that facilitates the labour market success. Although unanimously considered a key aspect of the labour market functioning, the mechanisms for the recognition of educational credentials and related skills acquired is an inefficient procedure in most of the Sirius countries. This is the aspect around which macro and micro intersect precisely because it is from this that the perception of MRAs in a negative or positive sense can significantly change. Failure to recognize personal skills is the major element of frustration or even loss of autonomy and trust even in institutions.

- Migrants' commitment couples with opportunities provided by local civil society organisations, and the experience of volunteering offered by CSOs becomes a valid surrogate of work experience in the country of settlement.

- Volunteering is not only an important way in the labour market because it provides work experience in the country of settlement but also because it enables access to new personal networks and ties.

- Migrants' commitment and volunteering can have a negative or positive connotation depending on the context, the functioning of the integration mechanisms and above all the recognition of skills of MRAs. The social commitment of MRAs as the only possibility of accessing the labour market can have a frustrating and discriminatory connotation for themselves. At the same time the ability to network or to be on the net can be a test of autonomy and self-confidence or binding links.

The critical analysis of the needs of migrants and refugees suggests several policy implications. In general, in all countries the perspective of migrants suggests that stakeholders are not necessarily aware of the problems of MRAs nor their perception of LMI barriers, and enablers do not mirror the needs of MRAs. We further discuss the adequacy of LMI alongside the six following dimensions: (1) administration services, (2) language provision, (3) public discourse, (4) labour market integration, (5) social and health care provision and schooling, and, finally, dealing with (6) the dark sides of employment related to working conditions and contracts.

Migrants identify these following needs useful to understand the policy work:
- concerning the education, migrants identify the need for better matching of educational training with market skill demands; the need to enhance MRAs freedom to engage in educational training of choice at the appropriate level; and the need to recognise MRAs educational qualifications obtained in host countries.
- Concerning the recruitment practices, migrant identify the need of transparent and fair labour market ones and the need to evaluate and reform the underlying structure of LMI practices such as recruitment norms. Finally, this is linked to the importance of social networks and with the need to a strict regulation against network recruitment.
- Concerning the recognition of skills, migrants identify the need to a system that allows de facto equal and fair valuation of MRAs labour market capacity and a national database.

In almost all countries involved, in a different way, there is a general need for greater rationalization of the rules concerning the labour market and immigration, it is necessary to fill a fragmentation both in the regulatory framework and between institutional actors and stakeholders.
There are certainly some aspects necessary to enhance the possibilities of accessing the labour market as of specialised language programmes and legal counselling, many of these interventions need to be calibrated and lowered in the specificities of the contests but also tailored to individual expectations. It's necessary a synergistic approach to integration simultaneous employment, education, and language learning.

In the case, as the Finland one, where Integration of MRAs is largely an official state responsibility and is implemented through active labour market policies it's important to work about the gap between integration policy discourse and policy response because of the missing MRA perspective. In the line of a synergic approach, we need a procedure of recognition of skills which is designed to meet the realities of migrants' lived experiences. With the acknowledgement of migrants' skills and qualifications there is a chance of reinstalling aspirations, the feeling of value and a wish to pursue a career where one can fulfil one's potential in the LMI process.

The aspect of the recognition of skills is central in all the different contexts whether the context manages to have active policies or in contexts where the debate on enhancement is far away because there are obstacles concerning fundamental issues, such as the legal status of residence and the insecurity that exists until the acquisition of residence permits. In all contexts it is necessary to pass from the creation of the conditions for a linear enhancement of skills but at the same time institutional mechanisms and tools are needed to certify skills starting from motivations and aspirations.
These same aspects are so absent in the public debate and more necessary in the contexts of fragility and vulnerability of the labour market, in these the job and legal status precariousness influence the real possibilities but also the attitude and aspirations of MRAs. Migrants' agency, of course, intertwines with the segmented nature of European labour markets, which allocate employment resources according to an invisible division of workers as if in castes. In this case it is necessary to have greater control of distortions such as the emergence of intermediation actors for recruitment but at the same time structural labour reforms are needed within which to often insert the betrayed expectations of MRAs. An important element is the value of networks or even the role of civil society organized in different ways. What emerges from our research is that the role of these actors grows as state control decreases but that at the same time, in all the different contexts, there should be an effort of complementarity among these actors and elements. In this line of work towards

complementarity and synergy between active policies and the role of civil society, the aspect of permanent critical reflection on the real capacity of both to take into account the aspirations or the recognition of skills of MRAs remains central.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The SIRIUS research project looks at the enablers and barriers of labour market integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Our research is organised into several work packages, and this report details the findings of the sixth work package, building on our previous research in work packages. Work package one analyses the labour market position of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the SIRIUS countries. Work package two details the legal frameworks of each SIRIUS partner country relevant to inhibiting or enabling integration. Work package three focused on migrant labour market integration (LMI) policies and services. Work package four focused on the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in LMI. Work package five focused on the views and role of Social Partners in MLI. The work package upon which this policy brief is based addressed the following objectives: (a) to analyse MRAs' insights into barriers and enablers of LMI; (b) to analyse the difference/similarity between the official knowledge about LMI and the MRAs' experiences on the ground; (c) to create a comprehensive narrative of LMI that would present the findings to wider, non-academic audiences. The research presents findings from a four-month long process of field work of interviews with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, we have conducted 100 semi-structured narrative-biographic interviews with post-2014 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in 7 countries, namely: 16 interviews in Greece; 10 in Italy; 11 in Switzerland, Finland and the UK each; 14 in the Czech Republic; and 27 in Denmark. The smaller samples in Italy, Finland, Switzerland, and the UK were caused by the recent coronavirus and related quarantine.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME

Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets (SIRIUS)

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FURTHER READING	WP1 Report – Labour Market Barriers and Enablers – Comparative report on the position of post-2014 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the labour market (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications) WP2 Report – Legal Barriers and Enablers – Comparative report on the legal, institutional and socio-cultural analysis (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications) WP3 Report – Policy Barriers and Enablers (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications) WP4 Report – Civil Society Barriers and Enablers (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications) WP5 Report – Social Partners Barriers and Enablers (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications) WP6 Report – Individual Barriers and Enablers (available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications)