SIRIUS

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

Labour Market Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Lessons Learned and Best Practices

SIRIUS Blueprint D7.1

February 2021

Maria Mexi - University of Geneva

SIRIUS at a glance

Launched in January 2018, SIRIUS ("Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets") is a cross-national research project which provides evidence-based knowledge about which aspects play an *enabling role* and which play an *obstructing role* in relation to the integration of post-2014 migrants, refugees and asylum applicants (MRAs) in Europe. At the core of the project's conceptual framework is the idea that the labour market integration of MRAs is dependent on a pattern of concurring circumstances and features located at three different analytical levels: at the *macro* (state, sub-state and supra-state), at the *meso* (intra-societal), and at the *micro* (individual) levels. The research was conducted in seven European countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. The project's research tasks were spread over six work packages, each using a specific methodology to address the issue at hand.

At the macro-level of analysis, the *first work package* investigated labour shortages, skills needs and mismatches by examining skills and qualifications and their use in the labour market, the position of post-2014 MRAs in the workforce for all of the SIRIUS countries, and their variations, in order to build a comprehensive assessment of labour market barriers and enablers and advance forecasts and policy scenarios to inform policy design. The *second work package* unveiled how, and to what extent, legal and institutional regimes and socio-cultural environments of the seven European countries analysed by the project have a hindering or facilitating impact on the effective capacity of those countries to integrate post-2014 MRAs in the labour market. The *third work package* identified and assessed policy factors which facilitate or hinder the access and integration of post-2014 MRAs into the labour market, by examining specific policy discourses and public policies in each country under study and their variations. At the meso-level of analysis, the *fourth work package* examined and assessed in each of the seven countries the role of civil society organizations in facilitating or hindering the integration for post-2014 MRAs into the labour market and the society. Moreover, the *fifth work package* provided an in-depth comparative perspective on how the role of social partners facilitates or hinders the integration of post-2014 MRAs into the labour market. At the micro-level of analysis, finally, the *sixth work package* examined the individual trajectories of post-2014 MRAs into the labour market and more generally, into their host societies, and how barriers are experienced, and (re-)acted upon, in different country and socio-economic contexts. SIRIUS, employed a mixed methods approach and innovative dissemination plan involving online priority action networks, film essays, festival, job fair and an applied game along with scientific and policy dialogue workshops and conferences.

Introduction

This Blueprint is the outcome of SIRIUS's 3-year cross-national research conducted between January 2018 and December 2020. Five years ago, record-high inflows of MRAs were recorded in Europe. The effects of this mass migration are still being felt today. The ongoing covid-19 pandemic has overshadowed policy debates on migration issues, yet it is inextricably linked with the present and future of migration governance within the EU and globally. The pandemic is affecting the health, social conditions, job prospects, language training of already vulnerable migrants, as well as their labour market and broader social integration. It is also highly affecting public opinion. When the covid-19 pandemic began early in 2020, populists in Europe attempted to exploit the crisis for political gain, using migrants as scapegoats. With vulnerabilities and inequalities risk worsening long after the end of the pandemic, there is a risk of a new backlash in public opinion against migrants similar to the one that European societies experienced during the post-2014 influx of MRAs. Therefore, understanding how European countries are able to work out an evidence-based way to deal with migration and asylum - rather than a prejudice-based one - is crucial for scientists, policy-makers, stakeholders and society at large. It is in this context that the project, SIRIUS, has been carried out and evolved. The SIRIUS project took place as European countries were struggling to respond to the sudden influx of post-2014 MRAs. SIRIUS findings – presented in several reports and policy briefs - provide evidence-based knowledge about those factors which have enabled or constrained post-2014 MRA labour market inclusion in Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

Throughout 2020, as Europe were moving rapidly into the covid-19 crisis, the SIRIUS researchers sought to study and assess major consequences for MRAs in European labour markets. In this context, and as we move forward after the covid-19 pandemic, the Blueprint on *Labour Market Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Lessons Learnt and Best Practices* outlines key lessons and develops relevant policy pointers with the aim of assisting policy-makers and civil society actors in Europe to identify an *inclusive, rights-based,* integration approach[1] which underlines the value of diversity. At the core of this analysis is the idea that the pandemic - being a major test to European labour markets, social policies and solidarity mechanisms - could be a fundamental *make-or-break moment* for a fair future that is less immune to the 'virus' of precarity (Mexi, 2020). Thus, the purpose of the Blueprint is to increase awareness about how the ongoing crisis could be a unique opportunity to shift toward *building forward better*, supporting decent livelihoods for MRAs and leaving no one behind.

---

[1] See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/policy-lab

Key lessons and policy pointers

Policy investments into the labour market and social integration of post-2014 MRAs have long been considered as crucial for the long-term sustainability of the European workforce. Various empirical studies (e.g. Kahanec and Zimmermann 2009, 2016; Zimmermann, 2014; Blau and Mackie, 2016), before the outbreak of the covid-19 crisis, had pointed to the economic opportunities of migration and, on this basis, suggest ideas of how Europe could achieve a fair and effective allocation of migrants that preserves European principles and European unity. While the current period is a very different situation than the one Europe faced during the 2014-2015 migration crisis, these empirical findings must be taken into consideration in the vein of evidence-based policy-making by national and European policy-makers in their efforts to establish a well-functioning integration policy in the post-covid-19 era.

Policy-makers and civil society stakeholders can capitalize on several lessons learnt – first and foremost, the value of taking a step back, mobilizing resources, and rethinking barriers and enablers fundamental to potential integration of MRAs and ways to build durable multi-stakeholder synergies and results. There is a possible eruption of a second big migration crisis due to the economic consequences that Covid-19 will eventually leave behind (Marmefelt, 2020) especially in developing countries in Africa and elsewhere. Therefore, crafting the next generation of integration policies at national and EU levels becomes of high importance in the post-covid-19 recovery phase. In view of the above, the following pointers to best practice have been put forward:

► Integrating MRAs' needs in post-covid-19 recovery plans and strategies

In all the European countries studied by SIRIUS, the covid-19 crisis has reinforced a number of *key challenges* MRAs were facing even before the pandemic - such as language barriers and limited access to information, uncertainty related to their employment and legal status, ineffective administrative and legal structures, health insurance issues, the absence of a supportive family or community network, isolation, increased vulnerability and precarity in the face of work exploitation, a general atmosphere of xenophobia in society and (perceived) cultural barriers, and limited access to institutional support in situations of abuses (refer to Bagavos and Kourachanis, 2020; Collini et al, 2020; Gheorghiev et al, 2021; Mexi, 2020; Ndomo et al, 2020; Spyratou, 2020).

More particularly, SIRIUS fieldwork in the seven countries shows that the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerable and precarious position of MRAs especially by weakening their

legal status (mainly temporary migrants), rights, opportunities, and socio-economic standing (Federico, 2018; Sirius policy brief n. 2, 2019). Precarity has both immediate and future implications for MRA labour market integration. As policy-makers continue their policy-making efforts to address the adverse impacts of the covid-19 pandemic, it is critical that MRAs are integrated in recovery plans and strategies (Zenner and Wickramage, 2020) as full participants to ensure inclusive and sustainable recovery (European Economic and Social Committee, 2020). The next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), which has been paired with the Next Generation EU initiative that aims to assist Member States with post-covid-19 recovery is an opportunity to fund and design labour market policies that are attuned to the need of MRAs.

SIRIUS findings show that existing national policies do not adequately support and prepare the MRAs for entry and integration into labour markets. For instance, job matching and career counselling services (offered as part of the integration programme) sometimes push migrants and refugees to jobs that are deemed low status (such as cleaning and driving), or which are otherwise perceived as suitable for non-natives (such as health care). We find that there is a tension between public policy goals of trying to push MRAs into work as quickly as possible, and finding jobs that match the ambitions and potential of individual MRAs. In some cases, there were also indications that employment services case workers undervalued MRAs potential to work in skilled jobs. In countries with strong active labour market policies, such as Finland, Denmark and Switzerland, the assistance was valued in some respects by the migrants, but also some degree of coercion was felt, in terms of being pushed into jobs deemed appropriate by case workers. This was particularly a problem in Denmark, where migrants felt the government's policy of 'jobs first' was pushing them into positions which did not reflect their education and skills. While some of this might reflect market demand for certain professions, which case workers are obliged to take into account, it might also indicate a need for training case workers to value migrant skills.

MRAs need to be part – as a target population - of the *next generation* of labour market integration strategies and programmes, as this can contribute to the realization of equality and social justice. In general, the eligibility of specific migrant groups to participate in labour market integration programmes should be expanded. SIRIUS research has found that the eligibility varies from country to country, as do the availability of specific services. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Denmark programmes are mainly offered to newly arrived refugees, while in others such as in Finland and in Greece they are offered to all job-seeking migrants. In the United Kingdom, programmes are only offered to resettled refugees, which have been chosen in collaboration with the United Nations. Groups that could be included are: *Asylum seekers*, who have not yet received their asylum decision. Because of the long wait

for asylum decisions in many countries, extending eligibility for these programs for to asylum seekers with good prospects for a positive decision might allow more rapid integration, reducing the burden on public finances. *Economic migrants*: although they already have work, and do not necessarily have time to engage in integration training, many would like better access to language training, which would allow them better job opportunities. *Parents who are caring for children* sometimes miss out on integration programmes because they are not in the job market during their eligibility period, or do not have the time. More flexibility in the organization of the programs, or in the eligibility period, might improve access for this group (see Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019; Sirius policy brief n. 3, 2019).

Furthermore, what the findings show is that to enhance responsiveness of policies, national authorities should involve all stakeholders, including municipalities, civil society and MRAs in the planning, monitoring and implementation of a *long-term integration strategy* and programmes that will strengthen all aspects of integration, combat racism and xenophobic attitudes, and help all people recover from the pandemic (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The crisis, thus, provides an opportunity to value MRAs for their crucial contribution to societies and economies, while reconsidering and tackling the structural barriers to their labour market integration.

► Ensuring quality employment and fair working conditions for MRA workers

MRAs are significantly disadvantaged due to weaker protection of rights, precarious short-term contracts, and weaker unionization. Ensuring that new jobs are quality ones that allow MRAs to enjoy a decent standard of living and contribute to their well-being and to a robust economy should lie at the core of an *inclusive, rights-based, and human-centric integration agenda*.

Job quality was already a concern before the covid-19 crisis and even before the 2008-09 global economic crisis. At the turn of the century, there was a political consensus in Europe, set out in the Nice Council Conclusions (December 2000), around the idea of quality work as a necessary element in delivering competitiveness and full employment. In 2010, following the adoption of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission's Communication identified better job quality and working conditions as one of the four key priorities for achieving the EU 2020 employment target. Yet, the fallout from the global economic crisis, and the internal devaluations and fiscal consolidation policies adopted, have led to an erosion of the European Social Model, and the notion of quality jobs appears to have taken a backseat since then.

Poor-quality jobs can lead to income insecurity, social exclusion, poverty in old age and poor physical and mental health. Concurrently, quality jobs are an essential feature of a well-

functioning economy. Quality jobs give workers better job satisfaction, improved skills and greater motivation, which in turn lead to stronger, more productive and more innovative enterprises (OECD, 2014). This period of crisis in which we find ourselves is not only a threat but also an opportunity to lay the basis of a better socio-economic model with a strong focus on MRAs and their situation. SIRIUS findings show that the limited political will and capacities of state institutions, including local governments, to craft and implement enabling policies, along with weak governance arrangements and spaces for the co-construction of policy, have impacted the possibilities of designing and implementing collaborations to solve problems. Strong multi-stakeholder dialogue and continued efforts are needed to put forward a *Roadmap for Quality and Decent Employment* with appropriate measures at the European and national levels and with specific targeted interventions to invest in quality and sustainable employment to counter the increase of in-work poverty, precariousness, poor working conditions and labour market segmentation currently facing MRAs in several countries. Such a Roadmap should be course-altering, but also a catalyst for needed change.

Policy-makers need to empower MRAs to advance decent working conditions and enhance jobs security, through prioritising this in the European Labour Authority. In this context, it is also important that governments and social partners ensure that international labour standards (ILO 2020a), the promotion and the realization of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, other relevant international labour standards, and *human rights* more broadly - as a framework for ensuring decent work and inclusive integration - are at the centre of national responses and recovery plans in the post-covid-19 era. More efforts are required to build and establish a common understanding about the necessity to promote equality of opportunity of treatment for MRA workers with regard to fundamental principles and rights at work and ensure – in accordance with internationally agreed normative standards, such as the widely ratified ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) - that MRAs are not being subject to discrimination, stigmatization and harassment in their workplace based on their ethnicity, skin colour, country of origin, occupation or travel history (International Commission of Jurists, 2020).

► Valuing the contribution of civil society organizations and establishing appropriate tracking and monitoring systems

SIRIUS research conducted before and during the pandemic has found that the third sector represents a *key pillar* in mitigating several of the integration barriers experienced by MRAs (see Numerato et al, 2019; Sirius policy brief n. 4, 2019). The importance of civil society organizations has increased since 2014, though – as SIRIUS findings show – disabling

environments associated with their funding, weak initial conditions, assets and competencies have rendered some civil society organizations not only inherently fragile but also amenable to those populations at the bottom of the ladder in terms of endowments and capabilities.

SIRIUS findings provide strong evidence of noteworthy, best practices about how civil society organizations are able to successfully address several of the challenges faced by MRAs and act as effective actors in policy-making and agents of social change. Evidence also shows a positive appreciation on the part of MRAs themselves for the service that civil society organization provide and the role they play.

SIRIUS fieldwork finds that that civil society organizations work as important *enablers* of MRAs labour market integration, especially in those areas not covered by public policies. More particularly, civil society organizations have been found to be important language course providers for post-2014 MRAs, and thanks to their social, legal, and administrative guidance, civil society organizations help MRAs in overcoming ineffective administrative and legal structures. These activities are provided by the majority of civil society organizations across SIRIUS countries. Several civil society organizations in these countries also assist MRAs with the recruitment process, providing courses and advice on how to prepare for an interview, how to write a CV, or how to draft a cover letter. Furthermore, civil society organizations assist MRAs in their efforts to have their skills and qualifications recognised. Additionally, by providing mentorship, training programmes, volunteering, or even direct employment, civil society organizations contribute to the development of skills and competencies of MRAs and provide platforms to enhance their agency and autonomy. Overall, civil society organizations – the support of which is often vital as regards refugees and asylum seekers - have direct experience with and knowledge of the impact the recent crisis is having on so many people who are vulnerable in one form or another.

All in all, two key conclusions derive from these good practices:

The first is that civil society organizations are an important bridge between MRAs, public authorities, experts and employers. They must use that experience and knowledge to monitor and assess what is happening and work towards the articulation and development of inclusive integration that ensures every person's fundamental right to live a life of dignity and fully participate in society, and that allows MRAs to overcome the sense of instability that is spreading everywhere and to regain control over their lives and futures. Ultimately, policy responses based upon robust monitoring, impact assessment, and sex-disaggregated data can support more evidence-based economic policy measures. Recognizing this particular role of civil society organizations in the wider MRA policy landscape requires, first and foremost, shaping *enabling* policy environments, so that civil society organizations do not end up working

in silos. Civil society organizations that provide services to MRAs experiencing exclusion are in a position to give a voice to the experience of the people they serve, a voice that tends to have few outlets for expression or influence in national public discourses, as SIRIUS research finds – and these accounts can have an impact within and beyond country borders.

A second conclusion is that the promotion of civil society organizations in decision-making structures - through channels of policy co-production - can be a significant tool for achieving social inclusion and cohesion with a strong focus on MRAs, from local to European levels. While important, this also raises some issues, such as how to institutionalize civil society organizations in governmental structures; and how to establish permanent and effective mechanisms for civil society actors' participation in policy management, which should be treated cautiously so as to avoid the emergence of antagonistic relations between the civil society organizations and state actors.

In this time of crisis recovery, the growth of the third sector often requires public policies to recognize the particularities and added value of the civil society organizations working with MRAs in economic, social and societal terms (e.g., forms of governance, outreach of vulnerable groups). As several civil society organizations heavily depend on public funding, it is worrying that many governments are currently reallocating funds to pandemic management and that this may mean that civil society organizations' budgets are likely to be trimmed and their operations will be adversely affected.

► Enhancing MRAs representation and voice and promoting their labour market integration

EU and national leaders and parliamentarians must listen and engage actively with those MRAs whose voices have been neglected and they have been systematically left out of labour market discourses and policy-making. Informal work arrangements and limited bargaining power can put MRAs at higher risk of losing their jobs or seeing their pay cut during crises. MRAs need to be collectively and individually empowered through the support of their collective action and unionization (ILO, 2020d). Enhancing representation and voice means enhancing the capacity of MRAs to engage with various dimensions of the political arena, such as voice, contestation, advocacy, co-construction, negotiation, networking, and building and sustaining coalitions and alliances.

Given the depth and duration of the covid-19 crisis, employers' organizations and trade unions can play an essential role in the labour market integration of MRAs. MRA organizations need support to take equal part in decisions over rights at work, including representatives of MRA

workers amongst stakeholders in the European Labour Authority, and by promoting MRA representation in unions and collective agreements. Policy responses need to guarantee better the rights of MRAs to freedom of association and collective bargaining which are crucial to negotiating fairer working conditions and addressing decent work deficits.

► Strengthening social dialogue mechanisms can help to ensure the realization of equity and social justice

SIRIUS research provides evidence for only a few cases of social dialogue having occurred across the seven countries in the field of labour migration, before the outbreak of the pandemic. Yet, social dialogue has an important role to play in *building consensus* on the necessary policy and legal reforms and ensuring social justice and decent work for all especially in times of crisis recovery (Papadakis et al, 2020). Social dialogue processes and mechanisms are also critical to contributing to the realization of inclusive rights-based integration for MRAs, especially migrant workers in the informal economy in the agriculture industry of Southern regions who – as SIRIUS findings show - are in extremely precarious situations, often not covered or insufficiently covered by formal social protection arrangements, and lack voice and representation in social dialogue processes.

Strengthening social dialogue in this respect requires enhancing the capacity of state actors and workers and employers' organizations to take action on *two fronts* – first, the development of integrated strategies to support *formalization of work*. This is crucial for the MRAs who generally have difficulty finding employment in formal work, and; second, addressing the entire range of priorities to improve MRA labour market integrations prospects. As SIRIUS fieldwork and interviews with social partners show (see Baglioni and Montgomery, 2020; Sirius policy brief n. 5, 2020), social partners in all seven countries studied stress the need to have more language classes provisions for MRAs, but also different migration policies, given that, legislation makes it very difficult for third country nationals, and in particular for asylum seekers, to enter the labour market and gain regular, stable and decent employment. Social partners consider also that better job search support services, along with skills matching and skills profiling, and job mentoring, could improve the employment situation of third country nationals. Furthermore, enhancing agency of MRAs through information campaigns, enriching capacities of MRAs to represent themselves in trade unions and supporting trade unions to be more open to MRAs and to effectively overcome language and cultural barriers have also been found to be critical aspects of an *inclusive integration policy*. Additionally, anti-discrimination and anti-exploitation policies (or a more effective implementation of these) would help too.

In general, the consequences of the covid-19 crisis, and especially its devastating impact on the livelihoods and incomes of MRA workers and enterprise owners, add even greater urgency to the promotion of sustainable formal employment opportunities in European economies (International Organization of Migration, 2020). Coordination among social partners, inclusion of migrants' associations in social dialogue activities (currently, in some countries e.g. Italy, Greece the participation of migrant associations such activities is relatively marginal) can help voice their need beside the important role played by the third sector.

► Prioritizing social investment and economic stimulus to support inclusive rights-based MRA integration

Social innovation and investment especially at local level has a positive, preventive impact on the health and well-being of MRAs, ensuring long-term savings for public budgets and improving the labour force's skills (Patuzzi, 2020). This may include inter alia the introduction of common social standards at the EU level[2], emphasizing that inclusive societies are more resilient societies and recognizing that inclusive growth is not only about the most effective ways of promoting growth, but also about closing the gaps between those who are powerful and better-off and those who are poor and excluded.

National recovery policies and incentive packages should prioritize social innovation and investment programmes targeting MRA workers and enterprise owners. In this area, national policy-makers should act proactively and exploit the new knowledge generated through EU peer learning and the use of existing EU governance frameworks that promote the exchange of best practices and provide guidance to Member States – particularly the Open Method of Coordination mechanisms and venues for collaboration. These are vital tools for pushing for support of innovative MRA-focused social and employment policies, along with considering how integration benchmarking architectures can effectively mature into national and local policy-making tools to promote the integration of MRAs.[3]

More broadly, as the socio-economic effects of the pandemic can lead to declining wages and deteriorating working conditions overall (ILO, 2020b), the economic support measures foreseen to address these effects should ensure that MRAs are not left out and that economic stimulus is not only available to nationals. Civil society organisations and human and civil rights

---

[2] Important social standards are quality and sustainable employment, adequate income support throughout the life cycle and universal access to quality and affordable care, social, health, housing, education and life-long learning services (see Social Platform, 2016).

[3] See, e.g., https://www.mipex.eu/

movements should be aware of this danger and putting resources into advocacy supporting MRA rights.

► Building socially responsive responses and systems of social support that are inclusive of MRA workers

Given the depth and duration of the covid-19 crisis and its impact particularly on vulnerable groups (especially refugee women, see ILO 2020c), the resilience of social protection systems must be improved to enable them to provide protection to the entire population in need. SIRIUS evidence shows that unemployment benefits are another important element for understanding the *legal barriers and enablers or best practices* for the labour market integration of MRAs. Noteworthily, Switzerland and Italy are the countries that present fewest restrictions in accessing unemployment benefits: all are entitled to such benefits in the same way as nationals, except undocumented migrants and asylum applicants who are not allowed to work in Switzerland. Moreover, in Greece, refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and long-term economic migrants can access the unemployment register and receive all benefits and services in the same way as Greek citizens do, whereas asylum seekers can do so only after having completed the application procedure. This is somewhat similar to the situation in the United Kingdom, where refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary and national temporary protections are treated equally with British citizens, but long-term economic migrants must be granted indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. Similarly, in the Czech Republic solely refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and long-term economic migrants are entitled to unemployment benefits. Concurrently, in Denmark, only refugees and long-term economic migrants holding a permanent residency permit can receive unemployment benefits, while, in Finland, unemployment benefits are made conditional upon permanent residency, which excludes asylum applicants and short-time economic migrants.

Overall, while many countries have extended social protection coverage to nationals, MRAs have been found to be *less likely covered on par* by social protection mechanisms because of discrimination and the type of jobs they have (ILO, 2020e). Including MRA in social protection measures and other risk pooling mechanisms, including cash transfers and social health protection, in parity with nationals, is crucial to preventing them from experiencing further downward slips and ensuring *equity and solidarity* in financing. Further effort should also encouraged in the provision of child and elderly care services to ease MRA women's entry into the labour market – this is important for countries such as the Czech Republic, Greece and Italy where the gender gap is still large and not only for MRAs, but also for natives.

In general, as a best practice, SIRIUS findings call for *stepped-up social protection interventions* especially for those who have suffered more from the health emergency, which would represent a promising path towards reducing social and labour market exclusion for MRAs and inequality, as well as acting as a basis for labour market inclusiveness during recovery.

► Recognizing MRAs skills and their positive contribution to post-covid-19 recovery

SIRIUS research conducted before the covid-19 crisis shows that, although MRAs have a variety of skills, they often encounter difficulties in the countries that host them to get recognition of their qualifications, skills and diplomas acquired in their home countries (refer to Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019; Sirius policy brief n. 3, 2019). In particular, as a good practice, only Denmark, Switzerland and Italy (with the exception of asylum seekers) are open to the recognition of foreign qualifications; yet, in Italy the recognition process, being long and complex, substantially jeopardises the legitimate expectations of migrants. The United Kingdom recognises exclusively qualifications from selected countries of origin, on the basis of a common table of conversion. In the Czech Republic and Greece, the formal equalisation of qualifications is substantially undermined by the requirement of the official certificates issued by competent authorities, which is an unreasonable requirement for refugees and asylum seekers who often escape their countries in chaotic circumstances or whose countries' administrations have collapsed through conflict and violence. In between lies Finland, where it is not diplomas but proof of citizenship that is required, as to allow for fair conversions (again, a requirement that is very difficult to be fulfilled by refugees and asylum seekers). Noticeably, in all countries where this is allowed, MRAs have to specifically apply for recognition and in the most favourable of cases, such as in Finland, this is done during the permit application process.

There is a pressing need to tackle the hurdles surrounding the recognition of MRA contribution and skills, as this issue is expected to have strong negative impacts on the growth capacity of countries well into the future. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, MRAs have been at the frontlines in many of the occupations that have proved essential to the effective delivery of the covid-19 response, i.e. in medical professions and emergency services, food retail, logistics and agriculture (Baglioni, Calò and Lo Cascio 2020; PICUM, 2020). On average, in the European Union, 13 per cent of all key workers are migrants (Fasani and Mazza, 2020), while countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Czech Republic depend on foreign-born workers in the critical sector of healthcare services (OECD, 2019). As countries emerge from the pandemic, issues of MRA skills and qualifications should acquire importance and be dealt

with vis-à-vis the much-needed contributions that MRA can continue to provide to our societies and economies, ensuring long-term recovery.

European countries and institutions have a strong interest in investing in *MRA-inclusive labour markets* and in embedding the structural contribution of, and reliance on MRA in *national skills-related policy design*. Recognition of prior home country education and experience, both in terms of formal recognition of certificates and employer recognition in recruiting should improve. Visible in all the SIRIUS countries, was a perceived need by migrants to start their education from the beginning again, because of a devaluing of foreign qualifications. More should be done to convert foreign qualifications into domestic equivalents, and to promote to employers the value of these qualifications. Programs at education institutions designed to bring foreign qualifications up to local standards should be considered.

Looking ahead, we found a strong consensus on the normative and pragmatic reasons and potential value of integrating MRAs into European labour markets among the different stakeholders, which underline the awareness of the issue (see also ILO, 2020f). It remains to be seen whether such consensus could be taken as an opportunity for building a more inclusive, rights-based, integration agenda and shaping a future that avoids repeating the errors of the past.

References

Baglioni, S., Calò F. and M. Lo Cascio, 2020, "Covid-19 and labour migration: Investigating vulnerability in Italy and in the UK", *Quaderni di Economia del Lavoro* (111): 109-129.

Blau, F. D. and C. Mackie (2016) (Eds.), *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Washington DC: A Report of the National Academies.

European Economic and Social Committee (2020), "EESC Proposals for Post-COVID-19 Crisis Reconstruction and Recovery: *The EU Must be Guided by the Principle of Being Considered a Community of Common Destiny*." Available on: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/resolution/eesc-proposals-post-covid-19-crisis-reconstruction-and-recovery-eu-must-be-guided-principle-being-considered-community

Fasani, F. and Mazza, J. (2020), "Immigrant Key Workers: Their Contribution to Europe's COVID-19 Response." IZA Policy Paper No. 155. April 2020. Available on: https://www.iza.org/publications/pp/155/immigrant-key-workers-their-contribution-to-europes-covid-19-response

Human Rights Watch (2021), *World Report 2021: Events of 2020.* Available on https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021

International Commission of Jurists (2020), "The Impact of COVID-19 Related Measures on Human Rights of Migrants and Refugees in the EU." Briefing paper, 26 June 2020. Available on: https://www.icj.org/eu-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-human-rights-of-migrants-and-refugees/

International Labour Organization (2020a), "ILO Standards and COVID FAQ - Key Provisions of International Labour Standards Relevant to the Evolving COVID-19 Outbreak, v. 2.1". Available on: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/genericdocument/wcms_739937.pdf

International Labour Organization (2020b), "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work." Third edition. Available on: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_743146/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization (2020c), "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work." Fourth edition. Available on: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_745963/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization (2020d), "Protecting the Rights at Work of Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Persons During the COVID-19 Pandemic." ILO Policy Brief, 19 June 2020. Available on: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_748485/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization (2020e), "Social Protection for Migrant Workers: A Necessary Response to the Covid-19 Crisis." ILO Brief, 23 June 2020. Available on https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/Brochures/WCMS_748979/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization (2020f), "Protecting Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic". ILO Policy Brief. 30 April 2020. Available on https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_743268/lang--en/index.htm

International Organization of Migration (2020), "Migration Factsheet No. 6 – The Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants: Synthesis Analysis Drawing on IOM's World Migration Report Series." Available on: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/MPR/migration_factsheet_6_covid-19_and_migrants.pdf

Kahanec, M. and K.F. Zimmermann (Eds.) (2009), *EU Labor Markets After Post-Enlargement Migration*. Berlin: Springer.

Kahanec, M. and K.F. Zimmermann (Eds.) (2016), *Labor Migration, EU Enlargement, and the Great Recession*. Berlin: Springer.

Marmefelt, T. (2020), "COVID-19 and Economic Policy Toward the New Normal: A Monetary-Fiscal Nexus after the Crisis?". Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Monetary Dialogue Papers, European Parliament. Available on: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_IDA%282020%29658193

Mexi, M. (2020), "The Future of Work in the Post-Covid-19 Digital Era," *Social Europe*. Available on: https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-future-of-work-in-the-post-covid-19-digital-era

Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (2014), *Employment Outlook 2014*. Available on: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2014_empl_outlook-2014-en

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019), "Recent Trends in International Migration of Doctors, Nurses and Medical Students." Available on: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/recent-trends-in-international-migration-of-doctors-nurses-and-medical-students_5571ef48-en

Papadakis, K., Mexi, M. and Cauqui, R. (2020), "Peak-level Social Dialogue as a Governance Tool during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global and Regional Trends and Policy Issues." International Labour Organization. ILO Research Brief. October 2020. Available on https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/briefingnote/wcms_759072.pdf

Patuzzi, L. (2020), "Driving Migrant Inclusion through Social Innovation: Lessons for Cities in a Pandemic." Migration Policy Institute Europe and International Organization for Migration Available on: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migrant-inclusion-social-innovation-cities-pandemic

PICUM (2020), "Non-Exhaustive Overview of European Government Measures Impacting Undocumented Migrants Taken in the Context of COVID-19," March-August 2020. Available on https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Non-exhaustive-overview-of-European-government-measures-impacting-undocumented-migrants-taken-in-the-context-of-COVID-19.pdf

Social Platform (2016), "EU Social Standards: Ensuring Every Person's Fundamental Right to Live a Life in Dignity and Fully Participate in Society", Position Paper, Available on: 'EU Social Standards: Ensuring every person's fundamental right to live a life in dignity and fully participate in society'

Zenner, D. and Wickramage, K. (2020), "National Preparedness and Response Plans for COVID-19 and Other Diseases: Why Migrants Should be Included." Migration Data Portal, 14 May 2020. Available on: https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/national-preparedness-and-response-plans-covid-19-and-other-diseases-why-migrants-should-be

Zimmermann, K. F. (2014), "Migration, Jobs and Integration in Europe." Migration Policy Practice 6, 4ff.

SIRIUS reports & Policy briefs

Baglioni, S. and Montgomery, T. (2020), "Social Partners Barriers and Enablers", WP5 SIRIUS report. Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

Bagavos, Ch. and Kourachanis, N. (2020), "Labour Market Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Lessons Learnt and Best Practices Report on Greece," WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/index.php/news/sirius-greek-team-new-report-key-findings-and-covid-19-impact-labour-migration

Bontenbal, I. and Lillie, N. (2019), "Policy Barriers and Enablers", WP3 SIRIUS report. Available onhttps://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

Collini, M., Federico, V. and Pannia, P. (2020), "Policy Recommendations – Italy," WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/news/sirius-italian-team-new-research-report-policy-recommendations-and-covid-19-impact-migrant

Federico, V. (2018), "Legal Barriers and Enablers", WP2 SIRIUS report. Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

Gheorghiev, O., Hoření, K., Švarcová, M., Numerato, D. and Čada, K. (2021), "Policy Recommendations - Czech Republic," WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/index.php/news/sirius-new-report-covid-and-labour-migration-czech-republic

Mexi, M. (2020), "Policy Recommendations on the Labour Market Integration of Migrants - Switzerland," WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/news/sirius-swiss-team-new-report-covid-19-and-migration-and-policy-recommendations

Ndomo, Q., Bontenbal, I. and Lillie, N. (2020), "Policy Recommendations on the Labour Market Integration of Migrants – Finland," WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/index.php/news/sirius-new-report-effects-covid-19-labour-migration-finland

Numerato, D., Karel, Č., Hoření, K. (2019), "Civil Society Barriers and Enablers", WP4 SIRIUS report. Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

SIRIUS POLICY BRIEF N. 5 – March 2020, "The Role of Social Partners in Labour Market Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Europe: Policy Lessons from the SIRIUS Research". Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/policy-briefs

SIRIUS POLICY BRIEF N. 4 – November 2019, "The Role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Labour Market Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Europe: Policy Lessons from the SIRIUS Research". Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/policy-briefs

SIRIUS POLICY BRIEF N. 3 – May 2019, "Migrant Labour Market Integration Programmes: Policy Lessons from the SIRIUS Research Project". Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/policy-briefs

SIRIUS POLICY BRIEF N. 2 – January 2019, "Labour Markets, Post-2014 Migrants and Refugees in Europe: Evidence and Thoughts for Better Integration". Available on https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/policy-briefs

Spyratou, D. (2020), "Policy Recommendations, Greece Country Report: Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on Labour Market Integration", WP7 SIRIUS report. Available on: https://www.sirius-project.eu/index.php/news/impact-covid-pandemic-and-migrant-labour-greece-sirius-solidarity-now-report-out-today