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INTEGRATING REFUGEES INTO HOST COUNTRY LABOR MARKETS: CHALLENGES AND POLICY OPTIONS

By Maria Vincenza Desiderio

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Challenges and Policy Options

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	3
II. How Have Refugees Fared in Host Country Labor Markets?	5
III. The Specific Challenges Faced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers	9
A. Interrupted Trajectories and Difficulties Transferring Human Capital	10
B. Multiple Disadvantages and the Missing Link between Reception and Labor Market Integration	10
C. Legal Restrictions, Service Limitations, and Uncertain Status	12
IV. Policies to Support the Labor Market Integration of Refugees	15
A. Early Skills Assessment, Orientation, and Customized Training.....	15
B. Tailored Support for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications.....	20
C. Bridging Gaps through Flexible Education and Vocational Training	23
D. Alternative Paths for Refugees Facing Greater Barriers to Employment	28
E. Employment Matching	30
V. Conclusion	33
Appendix	36
Works Cited	37
About the Author	46



Executive Summary

As many countries face a large influx of refugees and other migrants, social and integration services are mired in emergency response. Without stepping up efforts to help newcomers settle in, the ramifications of the crisis could persist for generations. Helping new arrivals find jobs commensurate with their skills and experience—and with the potential for upward progression—can have positive effects on other indicators of integration, such as personal well-being and social cohesion. The case for up-front investments in labor market integration policies is especially compelling in countries facing demographic decline and skills shortages.

Of all immigrant groups, refugees and asylum seekers have historically had the greatest difficulty finding and sustaining decent work. These difficulties have proved persistent: in Europe, even after a substantial period of residence, refugee employment rates lag behind those of labor migrants and, in some countries, also of family migrants—let alone natives. Refugees are also more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than all other immigrant groups. In places where their employment rates are relatively good (such as the United States), refugees tend to be overrepresented in low-skilled work and to have low incomes.

Without stepping up efforts to help newcomers settle in, the ramifications of the crisis could persist for generations.

A number of factors explain this state of affairs. Compared with other migrants, those fleeing war, political instability, or natural disaster are less able to plan or choose their destination. Refugees' careers are further interrupted by an often long and arduous journey. Whether in transit or at final destination, asylum seekers and refugees face many obstacles to accessing jobs and training. The effects of psychological trauma and discrimination, while difficult to quantify, may stymie efforts to resume work. Shelters and social housing are often located away from the best job and training opportunities. Even where asylum seekers and refugees are allowed to work, opaque regulations and the extra burden on employers to comply with them can create a chilling effect against employing these groups. Asylum seekers tend to be worst affected by these rules: not only do they face legal regulatory obstacles to accessing work, but they are also often shut out from the most intensive integration programs. Where wait times for the processing of asylum applications are long, this significantly delays the start of the labor market integration path.

Countries facing a surge in asylum applications encounter a number of challenges and tradeoffs. These include:

- Removing barriers to entering work or education—but without creating incentives for economic migrants to exploit the asylum route
- Making the case for deep, up-front investments in integration, education, and labor market activities (in an already tight fiscal context) for the benefit of people who may, in the end, be required to return home
- Making timely investments along the migration continuum (including at the predeparture stage) with the understanding that many refugees follow nonlinear trajectories
- Creating incentives for employers to invest in recruiting and training refugees without distorting the market or undermining the integrity of the migration system
- Ensuring that refugees with the greatest labor market potential are swiftly bridged into employment—but without indefinitely sidelining the more vulnerable and lower educated.



Policy priorities to support the labor market integration of refugees fall into five main areas:

- **Early skills assessment and training.** A growing number of countries are trying to assess refugees' skills at the earliest possible stage, in an attempt to kick-start the labor market integration process and better shape the support measures needed to this effect. While early investments in skills assessment and training are likely to have the greatest impact, governments that offer labor market opportunities to asylum seekers while their claims are still being processed are, in effect, investing in people who may not be granted protection. Some have therefore adopted incremental approaches to skills assessment and provision, reserving more comprehensive offers for those granted refugee status. Other approaches have involved prioritizing groups of asylum seekers with historically high recognition rates, or those with the greatest labor market potential. As resettlement and relocation become more important routes to protection, countries are also keen to start the labor market integration process earlier. Predeparture programs can help lay the groundwork for further integration activities and engage the energy of refugees waiting to move. Wherever the process begins—in transit or at destination—basic skills screening and training must feed into a longer-term, robust qualification program if they are to yield the desired results.
- **Qualification recognition.** Effective systems to recognize newcomers' credentials are especially important in countries where a large proportion of occupations require formal qualifications. Moreover, in some top refugee destinations, skills shortages are more acute in regulated professions, whose practice by foreign-qualified professionals is conditional on recognition of newcomers' credentials. This process can be particularly lengthy and difficult for refugees. Recent innovations aim to speed this up (for instance, by mapping how Syrian and European education systems compare or by reviewing the qualifications of asylum seekers still in reception centers) or assess the skills of individuals who have lost their documentation (for instance, by expert panels or competency tests). Engaging businesses in this process (for example, by involving chambers of industry and commerce in assessing competence) can help ensure that would-be employers trust the designations.
- **Bridging offers.** Bridging programs help bring skilled refugees up to speed with labor market norms without asking them to restart their education from scratch. These programs, typically coupled with occupation-specific language training, are costly, so they have often been reserved for highly skilled or in-demand occupations such as doctors, teachers, and lawyers. Career pathway courses, such as those pioneered in Canada, through which people gain experience in lower-skilled occupations within their vocation while being trained in needed skills, can help offset these costs by enabling migrants to contribute to the economy—as well as their own livelihood—from day one. Recent innovations include “fast-track” and intensive programs that combine various targeted bridging tools, such as modular training to plug gaps in education and work experience, vocation-specific language training, and on-the-job and language-specific skill recognition. Sweden is the first European country to offer such fast-tracks, including for middle-skilled refugees with previous experience in shortage occupations.
- **Alternative pathways into activity.** For less-educated refugees, access to work may require long-term support starting with basic literacy, numeracy, language, and soft skills, to be followed by more advanced training in the form of mainstream education or targeted vocational modules. Programs to foster migrant entrepreneurship and volunteering opportunities offer an alternative pathway to labor market integration for new arrivals, including the less educated. In Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries where there is a dearth of low-skilled positions, new, unconventional jobs may be created. For instance, cultural mediators may both serve and originate from growing refugee communities.



- **Engaging employers.** Some big employers have launched flagship programs to hire and support refugees and asylum seekers. While these programs fit corporate social responsibility strategies, it remains to be seen whether they can be sustained and scaled. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which may find it difficult to absorb the risks of hiring migrant workers, pooling resources with associations or other employer groups can help minimize costs. Governments have also sought to engage employers in refugee integration by offering subsidies and other incentives. Subsidized jobs can help break a vicious circle: employers are wary of hiring anyone without host-country work experience, and any jobs they have on offer for refugees tend to be low skilled and can function as a trap instead of a stepping stone. Countries have also sought to simplify or reduce hiring regulations—but cutting red tape alone is unlikely to significantly alter the calculus that makes hiring and investing in asylum seekers too risky for most employers. And few countries are likely to make a radical move, as Sweden has, to allow asylum seekers to change their status to that of labor migrants if they have been in work for four months and have a job offer.

To take advantage of emerging innovations while meeting the scale of the current crisis in Europe, policymakers should step up efforts to improve coordination and accountability across the migration trajectory so that interventions can start early and policies at one stage of the process do not contradict those at another. This would also help to capitalize on the recent flurry of activity—including among employers and civil society—by sustaining and scaling what works, and by nurturing a whole-of-society response to current challenges. Stronger, more routine evaluation of integration programs is critical to both of these efforts. The successful labor market integration of refugees—and particularly the lesser skilled among them—is not a short-term endeavor. To sustain public support for refugee integration over time, policymakers will have to clearly communicate the different integration prospects of various refugee subgroups as well as the returns on investments in integration that can be expected for each of them.

I. Introduction

Ensuring the smooth integration of beneficiaries of international protection¹ is high on the agenda of policymakers across the Atlantic. While countries receiving large numbers of asylum seekers²—in Europe and elsewhere—are facing huge challenges in meeting the immediate needs of new arrivals, these countries are equally aware that they must look beyond registration, accommodation, and care and take early steps to support asylum seekers' socioeconomic inclusion, if they are to ensure that those who stay can thrive. Farther from the front lines, countries such as Canada and Portugal, which have committed to resettling a growing number of refugees (see Box 1), are also facing complex integration challenges.

- 1 A beneficiary of international protection is a person who has been granted refugee status on the basis of the 1951 Refugee Convention or another form of international protection, such as subsidiary protection status in the European Union. Since beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and refugees enjoy the same rights and conditions for labor market access and support, this report uses the terms “beneficiary of international protection” and “refugee” interchangeably, with the latter also including beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status, unless otherwise specified. The report also analyses the patterns and policies that apply to asylum seekers, given the importance of early integration for the labor market outcomes of those asylum seekers who eventually end up staying in the country of destination. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2010), www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10; “Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on Standards for the Qualification of Third-Country Nationals or Stateless Persons as Beneficiaries of International Protection, for a Uniform Status for Refugees or for Persons Eligible for Subsidiary Protection, and for the Content of the Protection Granted,” *Official Journal of the European Union* 2011 L 337/9, December 13, 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011L0095>.
- 2 In 2015, 1.26 million first-time asylum applications were filed in the European Union—more than double the figure in 2014 (563,000) and more than triple that of 2013 (373,000). See Eurostat, “Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age and Sex Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded) [migr_asyappctza],” updated March 18, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_asyappctza.



The early and successful labor market integration of newcomers—regardless of whether they moved for employment, family, or humanitarian reasons—is essential to their integration more broadly.³ It allows for economic self-sufficiency, prevents social exclusion and marginalization, and facilitates cultural and social integration by providing migrants with early access to mainstream networks and services. In addition, for those who fled conflict and violence, being economically active soon after arrival may help foster psychological well-being and a sense of belonging.

For receiving countries, the smooth labor market integration of beneficiaries of international protection is also an important way to prevent humanitarian commitments from creating unsustainable welfare and fiscal burdens, generating resentment in the resident population. Furthermore, as many of these countries face an aging population and growing labor shortages at various skill levels, they can ill-afford to miss out on the labor market potential of any immigrant group.

For those who fled conflict and violence, being economically active soon after arrival may help foster psychological well-being.

The education levels and geographical origins of asylum seekers and refugees are increasingly diverse. Those who come from countries with poor or disrupted education systems may have few options in the highly competitive labor markets of Europe and North America. Even those with mid- or high-level qualifications may find it difficult to find appropriate work. Education levels are often associated with country of origin. Thus, in 2014 and 2015, Iranians and Syrians tended to be more educated than the average refugee in Sweden and Germany, while Afghans and people fleeing the Horn of Africa tended to be less.⁴ In Finland, a 2016 skills survey of asylum seekers of various nationalities showed this variation: about one-third had at best a primary education, while another third had some amount of higher education.⁵ A similar pattern was observed in Germany in 2015.⁶

The specific challenges that hamper the successful labor market integration of refugees and asylum seekers across all skills levels persist, despite the at times massive investments of governments. This report provides an overview of these challenges, and analyzes the targeted support initiatives and

3 Meghan Benton et al., *Aiming Higher: Policies to Get Immigrants into Middle-Skilled Work in Europe* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/aiming-higher-policies-get-immigrants-middle-skilled-work-europe; Migration Policy Institute (MPI), “The Labour Market Integration of New Arrivals in Europe,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/labor-market-integration-new-arrivals-europe; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “Jobs for Immigrants Series,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.oecd.org/els/jobsforimmigrantseries.htm.

4 In 2014, 40 percent of Syrians in Sweden had at least an upper secondary education, while the corresponding share for Afghans and Eritreans stood at 20 percent and 10 percent, respectively. In Germany, around one-third of all adult asylum seekers who arrived in 2014 reported at least an upper secondary education. The corresponding share for Syrians was higher than 40 percent. Figures for 2015 confirm these trends, with more than half of Syrian asylum seekers having at least an upper secondary education, as compared to an average of less than 40 percent for all asylum seekers from the ten top countries of origin (data based on self-reported declarations and 73 percent survey coverage). See German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), *BAMF—Kurzanalyse: Ausgabe 3/2016 der Kurzanalysen des Forschungszentrums Migration, Integration und Asyl des Bundesamtes für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (Nuremberg: BAMF, 2016), www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalyse3_sozial-komponenten.pdf?__blob=publicationFile; OECD, “Is This Humanitarian Migration Crisis Different?” (Migration Policy Debates no. 7, September 2015), www.oecd.org/els/mig/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf; Susanne Worbs and Eva Bund, “Qualifikationsstruktur, Arbeitsmarkt-beteiligung und Zukunftsorientierungen” (issue brief, BAMF, January 2016), www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalyse1_qualifikationsstruktur_asylberechtigte.pdf.

5 Kaisu Piironen, “Educational Background, Work History and Learning Skills of Asylum Seekers” (presentation at the thematic event Measures to Support the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Mutual Learning Programme, European Commission, Brussels, June 22, 2016), <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15727&langId=en>. Information on educational attainment is based on self-declaration and is therefore likely to represent an overestimation.

6 BAMF, *BAMF—Kurzanalyse*.



structural policy levers available to overcome them. It focuses on recent innovations in the areas of skills assessment, training, and employment matching—including at the predeparture stage. The report also discusses the pivotal role of employers, and outlines policies that may enhance employer involvement in support measures as well as their willingness to hire refugees and asylum seekers.

The report focuses on Europe, where these policy innovations are being piloted with high levels of investment—and where the stakes are also high. Relevant examples and lessons from Canada and the United States are also discussed.

II. How Have Refugees Fared in Host Country Labor Markets?

Among all newly arrived migrants and across all skills levels, refugees—and even more so asylum seekers—have the greatest difficulty finding and sustaining work commensurate with their skills and experience. Lacking a job offer, a career plan, or family ties, refugees find themselves at a particular disadvantage upon arrival. In many cases, including in countries that have made significant investments in integration policies, this disadvantage takes a long time to fade.

The experience of Sweden is a case in point. The government has made substantial investments in a refugee introduction program—which, since 2010, is primarily geared toward getting refugees into jobs⁷—and a wide array of other integration services. Yet a 2015 survey of refugees who had recently completed the two-year program revealed its limited success. Only one in four refugees who had settled in a municipality three years earlier was employed, and the vast majority worked in subsidized jobs.⁸

Lacking a job offer, a career plan, or family ties, refugees find themselves at a particular disadvantage upon arrival.

In Europe more broadly, preliminary figures from the 2014 Eurostat Labor Force Survey (LFS) ad-hoc module on the labor market situation of migrants indicate that working-age beneficiaries of international protection have lower employment rates than all other first-generation immigrants.⁹ On average across 12 European countries, 55 percent of beneficiaries of protection ages 15 to 64 were in employment in 2014, as compared to 58 percent of family migrants, 73 percent of labor migrants who had entered the

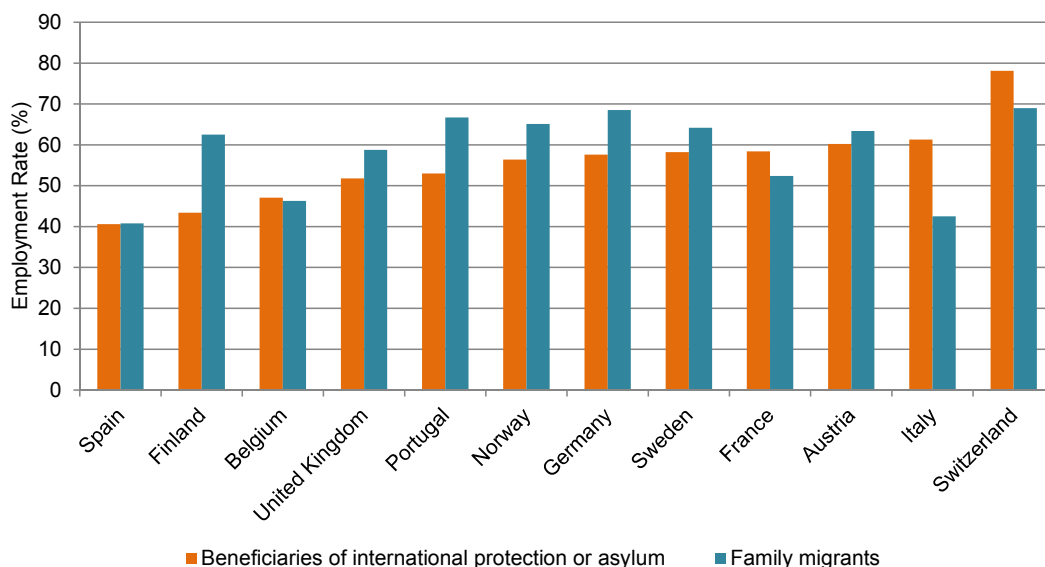
7 In 2010 the Swedish government moved responsibility for the introduction program from the municipalities to the Public Employment Service (PES), with the goal of making the program more geared toward labor market integration. The program's main pillars are language training, civic orientation, and labor market activities offered alongside a tailored introduction plan.

8 Women had on average a much lower employment rate than men. See Henrik Emilsson, "New Approaches to Facilitating Refugee Integration in Sweden: A Case Study" (discussion paper tabled at the 16th plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, MPI, Toronto, June 27–28, 2016). For a discussion of subsidized jobs see Section IV.E. of this report

9 Employment rate data of first-generation immigrants by age, years of residence, and reason for migration are available—and reliable—for Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Data used for this analysis refer to migrants ages 15 to 64. See Eurostat, "Employment Rate of First Generation of Immigrants by Sex, Age, Years of Residence and Reason for Migration [lfs0_14/1empr]," updated April 6, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/lfs0_141empr.

host country without a job offer, and 83 percent of those who were employer sponsored.¹⁰ (It should be noted, however, that these averages mask significant variations across countries, as well as some notable exceptions to the general trend.)

Figure 1. Employment Rate of Beneficiaries of International Protection and Family Migrants (ages 15 to 64) in Select European Countries, 2014 (all durations of stay)



Source: Eurostat, “Employment Rate of First Generation of Immigrants by Sex, Age, Years of Residence and Reason for Migration [lfsa_14/1empr],” updated April 6, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/lfsa_14/1empr.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the average employment rates of working-age refugees were 6 to 11 percentage points lower than those of family migrants in Sweden, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany. The gap was wider in Portugal and Finland, spanning up to almost 20 percentage points in Finland. Refugees were also at a greater disadvantage than family migrants in Austria, although the difference was less significant. Yet, in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Belgium, refugees had higher employment rates than family migrants. Unsurprisingly, in all countries refugees had lower employment rates than labor migrants, particularly when compared with those who arrived with a job offer.¹¹

According to the same survey,¹² the employment gap between beneficiaries of international protection and labor migrants who moved with a job offer persisted ten years after arrival. The wide variations in the gap (from 2 percentage points to more than 30 percentage points) across surveyed countries can be partly explained by differences in national labor migration policies: for example, the large gap observed in the United Kingdom might be due, at least in part, to the significant intake of highly skilled migrant workers. The picture with respect to family migrants was more heterogeneous. In Austria, Belgium, France, and Italy, beneficiaries of international protection had either caught up or consolidated their employment

¹⁰ The average employment rate for native-born residents across the 12 countries analyzed is 68.9 percent. See Eurostat, “Employment Rates by Sex, Age and Country of Birth (%) [lfsa_ergacob],” updated July 13, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/lfsa_ergacob.

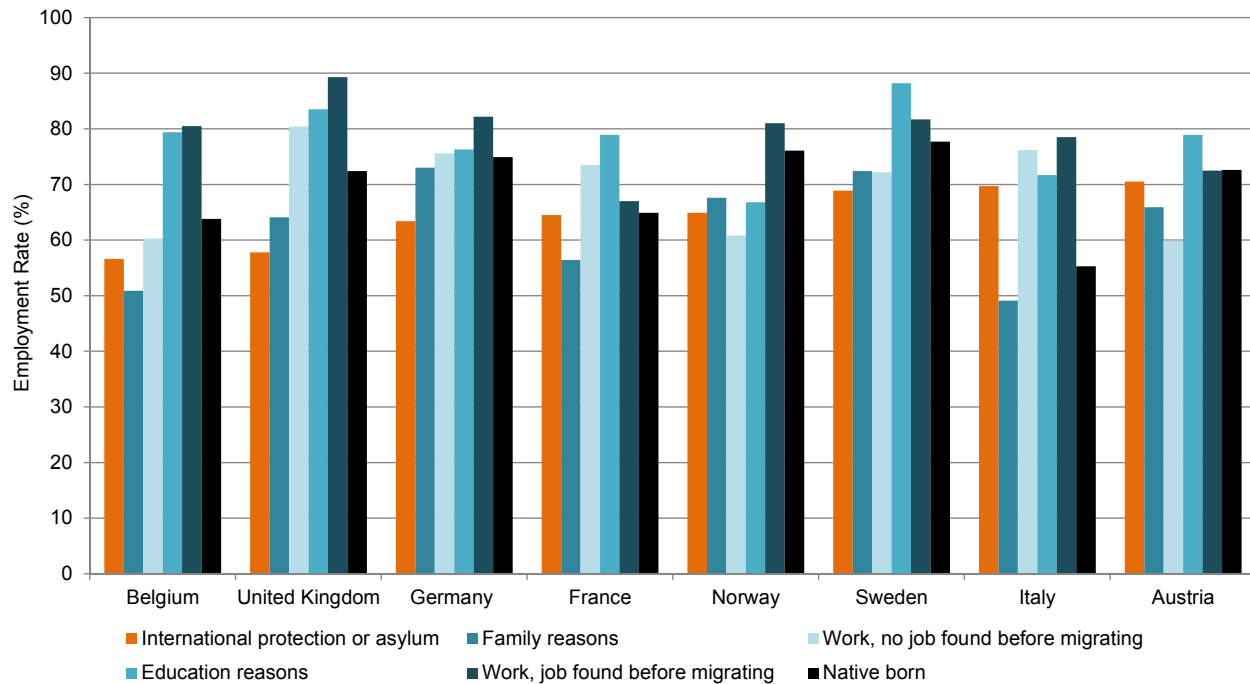
¹¹ See Appendix Table A-1 for more details.

¹² Relevant data are for a sample that includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.



advantage as compared with family migrants.¹³ However, in Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Norway, refugees continued to lag behind.

Figure 2. Employment Rate of Immigrants (ages 15 to 64) Residing for Ten Years or More in Select European Countries, by Reason for Migration, and Corresponding Figures for Native Born Adults, 2014



Note: In 2014, labor force survey data for France began to include the French dominions, representing a time series break with earlier data, but which has no effect on the data presented here.

Sources: Eurostat, “Employment Rate of First Generation of Immigrants by Sex, Age, Years of Residence and Reason for Migration [lfsa_14/1empr];” Eurostat, “Employment Rates by Sex, Age and Country of Birth (%) [lfsa_ergacob],” updated July 13, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/lfsa_ergacob.

The results portrayed in this analysis are broadly in line with the findings from the 2008 edition of the survey, which showed that on average across EU Member States, it took six years for working-age refugees to reach a 50 percent employment rate and converge with family migrants, and more than 15 years to reach a 70 percent employment rate and begin to catch up with labor migrants and natives.¹⁴

Refugees who do manage to enter employment soon after arrival are likely to be overqualified for their work.¹⁵ In fact, for those refugees with foreign qualifications, this likelihood is greater than for

13 France’s Longitudinal Survey on the Integration of First-Time Arrivals (ELIPA) shows that refugee employment rates converged with those of other newly arrived immigrant groups more rapidly: in four years, refugee women who received their first residence permit and signed an integration contract in 2009 caught up with all other migrant women who got their first permit in the same year; refugee men still lagged behind the corresponding group of nonrefugee migrants, although by only 6 percentage points. The composition of the inflows of newcomers in France (largely made up of family migrants), and the greater difficulties that labor migrants face in entering the French labor market compared with other European countries, may explain this divergence. See Virginie Jourdan, “Les premières années en France des réfugiés” (fact sheet, December 22, 2015), www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Statistiques/Etudes-et-publications/Publications/Numeros-parus-en-2015/Les-premieres-annees-en-France-des-refugies.

14 OECD, “Is This Humanitarian Migration Crisis Different?”

15 See, for example, Andreas Cebulla, Megan Daniel, and Andrew Zurawan, *Spotlight on Refugee Integration: Findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom* (London: Home Office, 2010), ii–iii, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/20116062/horr37-report.pdf.



all other immigrant groups.¹⁶ In many European countries, refugees who are able to secure a job are overrepresented in sectors with a large incidence of unskilled low-paid employment, such as agriculture, construction, cleaning services, hotels and restaurants, and retail trade.¹⁷ Moreover, in countries where the informal economy comprises a significant share of employment, refugees are also more likely to be found in irregular work.¹⁸

Despite high average employment rates, refugees earned less than other immigrant groups.

In the United States, where most refugees enter through the resettlement program rather than as asylum seekers, many refugees find employment quickly.¹⁹ Among new arrivals who participated in government-funded resettlement assistance programs, about half found employment within eight months.²⁰ Meanwhile, 2009–11 data on integration outcomes of the overall U.S. refugee population indicate that refugee women had employment rates identical to U.S.-born women (54 percent), while refugee men were more likely to be employed than U.S.-born men (67 percent versus 60 percent).²¹ But despite high average employment rates, refugees earned less than other immigrant groups, and nearly half (44 percent) were low income.²² Refugees' median household income increases with the length of their residence, though recent cohorts have made smaller earning gains over time than those who arrived in the 1980s.

This earning gap is correlated, at least in part, with refugees' high levels of underemployment in the United States. Government policies related to the labor market integration of refugees predominantly focus on early employment, and there is a tight time limit on eligibility for federal funding. The focus is on getting a job quickly, rather than on additional training that might lead to a job commensurate with a particular skill level.²³ This could have negative consequences for long-term earnings and career progression.

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- 16 Ana Damas de Matos and Thomas Liebig, "The Qualifications of Immigrants and Their Value in the Labour Market: A Comparison of Europe and the United States," in *Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/matching-economic-migration-with-labour-market-needs_9789264216501-en.
- 17 See, for instance, UNHCR, *Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria* (Vienna: UNHCR Austria, 2013), www.unhcr.at/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumente/03_profil_begriffe/dauerhafte_Loesungen/RICE-Austria-ENG.pdf; French Ministry of Interior and European Migration Network (EMN), Quatrième Etude Ciblée 2015, *L'intégration des bénéficiaires de la protection internationale sur le marché du travail: politiques et bonnes pratiques* (Paris: French Ministry of the Interior, 2016), www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/content/download/94655/738994/file/1-Etude-du-REM_Integration-des-BPI_final.pdf.
- 18 EMN, *Integration of Beneficiaries of International/Humanitarian Protection into the Labour Market: Policies and Good Practices* (Brussels: European Commission, 2016), http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn-studies-00_integration_of_beneficiaries_of_international_protection_eu_2015_en_final.pdf.
- 19 For a thorough discussion of refugee integration in the United States, see Michael Fix, Kate Hooper, and Jie Zong, *Refugee Integration at the National and State Level in the United States: Is There a "Lottery Effect"?* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming).
- 20 Data for fiscal year (FY) 2009 to FY 2014. See Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR), *ORR Indicators for Refugee Resettlement Stakeholders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), 7, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/508_compliant_fy_2016_orr_indicators_for_refugee_resettlement.pdf; ORR, *Statistical Abstract for Refugee Resettlement Stakeholders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014), 7–8, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/statistical_abstract_for_refugee_resettlement_stakeholders_508.pdf.
- 21 Marked differences in employment outcomes, however, exist across national groups; Iraqis and Somalis, for instance, have lower than average employment rates. See Randy Capps et al., *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2015), 16, www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges.
- 22 Ibid., 21–3.
- 23 Anastasia Brown and Todd Scribner, "Unfulfilled Promises, Future Possibilities: The Refugee Resettlement System in the United States," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 2, no. 2 (2014): 101–20.



In Canada, too, resettled refugees compose the largest group of beneficiaries of international protection admitted every year.²⁴ In 2005, and four years after arriving, 56 percent of refugees had jobs, an almost threefold increase over the corresponding figure six months from landing.²⁵ This employment rate approached that of family migrants (60 percent, including accompanying family), but a significant gap remained between refugees and skilled workers, whose employment rate stood at 84 percent.²⁶ More recent data indicate that newly arrived refugees in Canada have very low median employment incomes, though income steadily increases over time.²⁷ Underemployment is also particularly pronounced among recently arrived refugees, who, of all newcomers, are the most likely to be overqualified for their work (65 percent of refugee women and 54 percent of men).²⁸

III. The Specific Challenges Faced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees' greater labor market disadvantages (as compared with other immigrant groups and natives) can only partly be explained by lower educational attainment.²⁹ Other factors—notably, difficulties transferring their skills, qualifications, and experience to the local context; limited opportunities to connect with local employers; and discrimination—are at play. While other migrants who arrive without job offers also encounter these challenges,³⁰ they tend to be more acute for refugees and asylum seekers, who have more limited opportunities to prepare for their migration and integration trajectories ahead of the journey, and hence face greater difficulties getting recognition for their qualifications, mastering the language, and accessing local networks in the destination country.

Moreover, asylum seekers and refugees face additional obstacles linked to their status and to the circumstances of their arrival in the receiving country. These may include legal restrictions on labor market access for asylum seekers in the first months after entry; ineligibility for introduction programs and other labor market integration services while their application is being processed; dependency on receiving-

24 For an overview of the situation in Canada, see Lori Wilkinson and Joseph Garcea, *Labor Market Integration of Refugees in Canada* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming).

25 These figures come from the 2005 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) and are described in Li Xue, *Initial Labor Market Outcomes: A Comprehensive Look at the Employment Experience of Recent Immigrants during the First Four Years in Canada* (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008), www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/LSIC-employment-outcome.pdf.

26 Ibid.

27 Data are from the Longitudinal Immigration Database. Government-assisted refugees who arrived between 2009 and 2013 had a median employment income of just \$11,900; the median incomes for privately sponsored and landed refugees were slightly higher, at \$16,500 and \$21,000 respectively, and thus matched or surpassed the median incomes for family migrants (\$16,600). See Statistics Canada, "Table 054-0018: Income of Immigrants, by Sex, Landing Age Group, Immigrant Admission Category, Period of Immigration, Family Status and Tax Year, 2013 Constant Dollars," accessed April 11, 2016, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=540018>.

28 The Western Canada Settlement Survey, as analyzed by Lori Wilkinson, Jill Bucklaschuk, Pallabi Bhattacharyya, Yi Shen, Iqbal Chowdhury, and Tamara Edkins, *Triangulation Study Final Report* (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). The survey is based on a simple random sample of 3,000 newcomers settling in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan between 2008 and 2013.

29 A recent report suggests that in Sweden, differences in educational level and type explain only a very small part of the employment gap between natives and refugees. See Pieter Bevelander and Henrik Emilsson, "Case Study Sweden" in *From Refugees to Workers: Mapping Labour-Market Integration Support Measures for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in EU Member States, Volume II: Literature Review and Country Case Studies*, eds. Iván Martín et al. (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Migration Policy Center, 2016), 123–35, http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/43505/Study_fromRefugeesToWorkers_2016_Vol_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

30 Employer-selected migrants are migrants who move to a country in response to a job offer. All other groups include family migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, as well as labor migrants who do not have an offer for employment prior to arrival in those countries that allow for job-seeking visas (i.e., that have supply-driven systems for labor migration).



country authorities' settlement and housing choices (which might not take access to social networks and job opportunities into account); protracted periods out of employment and/or training; and psychological distress associated with long and precarious journeys.

A. Interrupted Trajectories and Difficulties Transferring Human Capital

Asylum seekers flee countries ravaged by war, political instability, or natural disaster. While the displacement may be more or less abrupt, their decision to migrate is less likely to be guided by a career or family planning strategy than it is for other migrants. Moreover, uncertainty as to their final destination makes preparation—including learning a language—less feasible. A lack of control over their destination can also make finding jobs more difficult once they get there, given the more limited opportunities to establish contacts with local employers before arrival, and, in some cases, the absence of family and ethnic networks.

Time spent in transit and processing interrupts the careers of asylum seekers and other forced migrants.

Conditions in the country of origin may further complicate the complex process of obtaining recognition for qualifications and skills at destination.³¹ Asylum seekers may not have been able to obtain their documentation before fleeing or it might have been lost in transit. Younger people in particular may have been unable to complete education courses. Also, educational institutions and employers in origin countries may no longer exist or may not be in a position to provide referrals.

Moreover, the journey of a migrant seeking international protection is often long, and reception procedures are rarely swift. Time spent in transit and processing interrupts the careers of asylum seekers and other forced migrants. This can affect their employability, depending on how long they are out of work or education, and the type of work for which they are trained. The circumstances of the journey also matter: dangers en route and protracted stays in camps and other shelters can result in psychological trauma, health problems, and the deterioration of self-esteem and resilience.

B. Multiple Disadvantages and the Missing Link between Reception and Labor Market Integration

Upon arrival in the host country, refugees and asylum seekers often face additional challenges unrelated to work that nonetheless hinder their capacity to find jobs or access training and labor market integration support. Lacking broad family networks, new arrivals are often faced with competing demands on their time that, particularly in the case of women, may limit their opportunities to participate in training and job-seeking activities or obtain full-time employment. Temporary and insecure housing, especially when located away from centers of economic activity, can also delay or inhibit labor market integration.³²

31 For a thorough discussion of the existing obstacles to the smooth recognition of foreign qualifications in migrant-receiving countries and of the problems that such barriers pose for the successful labor market integration of migrants, and particularly newcomers, see Maria Vincenza Desiderio, "Qualifications, Skills and Integration," in *Rethinking the Attractiveness of Labour Immigration Policies: Comparative Perspectives on the EU, the US, Canada and Beyond*, eds. Sergio Carrera, Elspeth Guild, and Katherina Eisele (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2014), www.ceps.eu/system/files/RETHINKING%20LABOUR%20IMMIGRATION%20POLICIES_withcover.pdf.

32 Author conversation with a representative of the French Public Employment Service, Paris, June 27, 2014.



When receiving humanitarian arrivals, authorities face a tradeoff between swiftly securing appropriate housing on the one hand, and, on the other, matching new arrivals with available employment and training opportunities. Shelters and social housing are often located in peripheral or deprived areas where rents are lower and with them, public expenditure. Countries such as Germany and Sweden, confronted with huge and rapidly growing volumes of asylum applications alongside dwindling housing, have had no other choice but to prioritize immediate accommodation over longer-term labor market integration needs.³³

Employment-oriented dispersal strategies only work if there are enough well-located housing opportunities.

In Sweden, one task of the Public Employment Service (PES) is to ensure that refugees are dispersed across municipalities where local employment opportunities match their skills. However, in practice, the availability of housing facilities has been the only driver of settlement offers. Furthermore, the fact that the PES does not have offices in all Swedish municipalities hinders its capacity to address the actual needs of local labor markets. This is a significant drawback at a time when the scale of the challenge calls for refugees to be dispersed across the country, rather than just in a few municipalities, as recently required under law.³⁴ Responsibility for the territorial distribution of refugees will shift from the PES to the Swedish Migration Agency in 2017.³⁵

Employment-oriented dispersal strategies only work if there are enough well-located housing opportunities. Yet, in Europe and North America the need to provide stable accommodation to growing numbers of refugees has cast a new light on preexisting housing challenges. Thus, in Canada, various housing associations have recently called upon the government to commit to building 100,000 additional affordable housing units over the next five years.³⁶ In Sweden, the refugee surge has exacerbated a long-standing shortage of social housing. Alongside this, specific issues in providing appropriate accommodation for refugees have also emerged, such as the unavailability of affordable housing units for large families³⁷ and the resistance of local populations to the accommodation of refugee groups in centrally located, middle- to upper-class city neighborhoods.

Crucially, employment-gearred refugee accommodation strategies also depend on strong cooperation among reception services, training, and employment agencies and providers. Coordinating the different services needed to address the multiple disadvantages faced by asylum seekers and refugees on arrival in the host country has proved challenging for authorities at different levels of government and across

33 According to Eurostat data, Germany registered 441,800 first asylum applications in 2015; the corresponding figure for Sweden was 156,120. These data refer to filed cases, so they do not include the additional people who arrived in these countries in 2015 (around an additional half a million in Germany) and who are still waiting to file an application. This also explains the fact that, by July 2016 first asylum applications registered in Germany outnumbered the level of 2015, reaching 434,685. See Eurostat, "Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age and Sex. Monthly Data (Rounded) [migr_asyappctm]," updated September 14, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_asyappctzm.

34 Recent legal changes require all municipalities to settle recognized protection beneficiaries. See Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), "Sweden," in *A Study on Forced Migration in OIC Member Countries: The Policy Framework Adopted by Host Countries* (unpublished report prepared by MPI on behalf of the COMCEC Coordinating Office for the 8th meeting of the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group, forthcoming).

35 Ibid.

36 Sharad Kerur, "Refugees' Needs Expose Canada's Housing Crisis," *The Toronto Star*, February 5, 2016, www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2016/02/05/refugees-needs-expose-canadas-housing-crisis.html; Canadian Housing and Renewal Association et al., "Affordable Housing: A Foundation for Social Inclusion" (joint statement, 2016), www.chfcanada.coop/eng/pdf/joint_statement2016_housing.pdf.

37 It is not unusual for a refugee's nuclear family to be composed of ten persons or more—a family size far larger than the average in Europe and North America.



various portfolios. Lack of coordination also often involves duplication of efforts—a waste of resources that authorities can ill afford given competing demands on tight budgets.³⁸

C. Legal Restrictions, Service Limitations, and Uncertain Status

For asylum seekers, laws restricting access to the labor market and related integration services further hinder socioeconomic inclusion.³⁹ And since today's asylum seekers will become tomorrow's refugees, lengthy registration and application processing times⁴⁰ could prevent beneficiaries of international protection from getting a head start on the labor market integration process.

In most EU Member States, asylum seekers have to wait a certain number of months before they can take up employment.⁴¹ Since 2013, many European countries have shortened this waiting period—in line with the nine-month limit set by the recast Reception Condition Directive⁴²—but additional restrictions may apply. Thus, Sweden grants labor market access on arrival to asylum seekers who can prove that they are exempt from the obligation to have a work permit; similar requirements apply in Finland.⁴³ In Germany, where a three-month waiting period applies, until very recently all employers willing to hire

38 Even in the case of Sweden, where cooperation between the Public Employment Service (PES) and the municipalities is the pivotal governance mechanism for the introduction program, coordination has been less than optimal. In many cases municipalities have not been able to participate in the planning of introduction activities. Furthermore, outcomes of skills assessments have not been sufficiently communicated among the different authorities. As a result, a number of refugees have sat through three different and disconnected skills assessment interviews—with the Swedish Migration Agency, PES, and a municipality. See OECD, *Working Together: Skills and Labor Market Integration of Immigrants and Their Children in Sweden* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), www.oecd.org/publications/working-together-skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-sweden-9789264257382-en.htm.

39 Recognition rates for first instance asylum applications in Europe have more than doubled since 2010, to more than 50 percent in 2015, due to high recognition rates for applicants from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (which all have an average recognition rate of above 60 percent). See Eurostat, “First Instance Decisions on Applications by Citizenship, Age and Sex Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded) [migr_asydcfsta],” updated June 15, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_asydcfsta.

40 In Sweden, the average time for processing asylum applications was 7.5 months as of November 2015, but it is predicted to soon reach 18 months or even two years. In Germany, the average processing time was around 11 months in 2014, but it sometimes took as long as 18 months in 2015. See Asylum Information Database (AIDA), *Country Report: Sweden* (Stockholm: Caritas Sweden, 2015), 15, www.refworld.org/pdfid/569c963b4.pdf; AIDA, *Country Report: Germany* (Berlin: Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2015), 16, www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_de_update.iv_0.pdf; AIDA, *Country Report: Italy* (Rome: Italian Council for Refugees, 2015), 28, www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_it_update.iv_.pdf; Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, “Asylum Statistics March 2016: Backlog,” updated April 18, 2016, www.cgra.be/en/news/asylum-statistics-march-2016. In the United States, because of large backlogs, many asylum applicants currently face case processing times of 2 to 5 years depending on what part of the country they live in. These data refer only to the U.S. affirmative asylum system. As of June 2016, there were 170,380 affirmative asylum cases pending before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Case processing times for asylum cases in the immigration court system are not available. See USCIS, “Affirmative Asylum Scheduling Bulletin,” updated August 5, 2015, www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum/affirmative-asylum-scheduling-bulletin; USCIS, “Asylum Office Workload: June 2016,” updated July 21, 2016, www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Outreach/Upcoming%20National%20Engagements/PED_AsyumStatsJune2016.pdf.

41 In the United States, asylum seekers can apply for work authorization if they have not received a decision on their application 150 days after filing it and the delay is not due to lack of cooperation on the side of the applicant. In Canada, asylum seekers can apply for a work permit while waiting for their case to be adjudicated, provided they prove that they would otherwise need to rely on welfare for maintenance.

42 The recast Reception Conditions Directive requires Member States to grant labor market access to asylum seekers no later than nine months from the date they applied for asylum. Many Member States have gone beyond the minimum requirements and shortened the waiting periods even further. See “Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Laying Down Standards for the Reception of Applicants for International Protection (Recast),” *Official Journal of the European Union* 2013 L 180/96, June 29, 2013, Art 15, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033>.

43 In Sweden, asylum seekers are exempt from the need to have a work permit if they can prove their identity and that they have solid grounds for asylum. In Finland, asylum seekers able to provide a valid ID can access the labor market three months after arrival; the waiting period is six months for all other asylum seekers.



asylum seekers had to undergo a priority review—a more onerous version of the labor market test.⁴⁴ This test was widely criticized by the business community as a powerful deterrent against hiring asylum seekers. As a result, the new federal integration law approved in May 2016 has temporarily suspended this priority review requirement for employers in regions where the unemployment rate is lower than the national average.⁴⁵ The requirement that employers verify the protection status and the specific conditions for labor market access of, respectively, asylum seekers and refugees acts as a major obstacle to their early labor market integration.⁴⁶

Asylum seekers have also traditionally been excluded from government-led integration services for newcomers, such as introduction programs.⁴⁷ The Swedish introduction program focuses on getting beneficiaries of protection into work as soon as possible, but the fact that asylum seekers do not qualify for the program has limited the potential for early intervention.⁴⁸ Until 2015, however, the qualifications and work experience of arrivals were screened during the reception interview and input into a database used for employment matching and internship placement. This process was suspended at the end of 2015, when rising application numbers prompted attempts to speed up the reception process.⁴⁹

Asylum seekers have ... traditionally been excluded from government-led integration services for newcomers.

Recognizing the detrimental effects of delaying access to systematic labor market integration support, the Swedish government has devoted substantial resources in its 2017 budget to scaling up introduction activities provided to asylum seekers during the reception phase.⁵⁰ Similarly, in light of swelling processing times for first-asylum applications, Belgium and Germany have taken steps to open up their introduction programs to asylum seekers. As of November 2015, Germany made introduction courses (offering language instruction and civic orientation) available to asylum seekers from countries with high recognition rates, though demand for language instruction exceeds capacity.⁵¹ In Belgium, asylum seekers hosted in the Wallonia region can access a civic integration program upon filing their applications, while those located in Flanders have to wait four months.

In a May 2016 white paper, the Norwegian government announced that it would provide 50 hours of courses in Norwegian culture and social studies, as well as career advice, to asylum seekers in reception centers. These new integration reception centers offer full-time qualification programs to those asylum

44 The priority review (*Vorrangprüfung*) applied from the third to the fifteenth month after asylum seekers had filed an application, and aimed to ensure that no German jobseeker or migrant residing in Germany (with a more secure residence status) was available for the job offered to the asylum seeker.

45 The suspension applies for a period of three years and will not apply in regions with unemployment that is equal or above the national average. For discussion of these developments, see Victoria Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market: Challenges and New Initiatives* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming).

46 As in Germany, Dutch employers have reported that in the absence of administrative support and guidance from public authorities, the requirement to verify the asylum-seeking status of potential recruits is too cumbersome.

47 In France, the introduction program is reserved for newly arrived family migrants and refugees with a residence permit who have signed an integration contract. The immigration reform of March 2016 has provided for the substitution of the former Reception and Integration Contract (CAI) with the Contract of Republican Integration (CIR), which took effect in July 2016. The integration support provided has been adjusted to offer targeted assistance for access to employment and housing to beneficiaries of protection. See French Ministry of Interior, “Le contrat d’intégration républicaine (CIR),” updated July 12, 2016, www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Accueil-et-accompagnement/Le-contrat-d-integration-republicaine-CIR.

48 To qualify, refugees also need to have settled in a municipality, which often further delays the start of introduction activities.

49 OIC COMCEC, “Sweden.”

50 Ibid.

51 This includes Syrians, Iraqis, Eritreans, and Iranians (who have a recognition rate in Germany of above 60 percent), but excludes Afghans (who have a recognition rate below 60 percent in the country)—an omission that has sparked public controversy. See Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.



seekers with a good chance of being granted protected status.⁵² Danish Immigration Service and Asylum Centers provide language, skills training, and cultural integration courses. Adults staying at these centers are required to take a selection of the courses on offer, which tend to vary from one center to another.⁵³

Ad hoc integration and employment support measures have always been made available in reception centers by civil-society organizations and private service providers, or offered by municipalities.⁵⁴ However, the training and information delivered through such initiatives is most often perfunctory and available only for small numbers of asylum seekers, and, in many cases, has not helped connect recipients to more structured integration and training services.⁵⁵ Comprehensive, government-led introduction programs and efforts to match skills to jobs still tend to be reserved for refugees.

The insecure residence status of asylum seekers is itself a powerful obstacle to early labor market access.

Resource and capacity constraints explain the often limited availability of integration and employment support services for asylum seekers. Restrictions on labor market access are meant to avoid creating a pull effect for economic migrants, who might otherwise be tempted to misuse the asylum system to look for work. They are also designed to protect the local workforce from unfair competition. But where countries have long processing times, these restrictions and limitations may severely hamper the integration prospects of those asylum seekers who are eventually granted protection.

Furthermore, the insecure residence status of asylum seekers is itself a powerful obstacle to early labor market access. Employers may not be willing to invest resources in navigating cumbersome legal requirements, and assessing—and, where needed, upgrading—the skills of recruits or apprentices if their status is not determined. Additionally, when the permits granted to those who are given asylum are temporary, the continued residence in the host country may be conditional on finding work, which may put pressure on refugees to take jobs they are overqualified for as a way of securing residence, rather than invest in the more uncertain credential recognition and upskilling paths.⁵⁶ It also exposes them to exploitation by abusive employers.

52 Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, “From Reception Centre to the Labour Market—An Effective Integration Policy” (white paper, Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Oslo, May 11, 2016), www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld-st-30-20152016/id2499847/.

53 Ny i Danmark, “Conditions for Asylum Seekers: Education and Other Activities,” updated May 2, 2016, www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/asylum/conditions_for_asylum_applicants/education_and_other_activities.htm.

54 Since mid-2015 the Swedish Migration Agency has worked with civil-society associations devoted to adult education to organize introduction activities in reception centers. In 2015, these mostly focused on language education and general social orientation, and involved 73,000 participants. A more diverse range of courses is likely to be available as of 2017.

55 Author conversation with representatives of the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policies, and several local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) at the European Migration Forum, Brussels, April 6, 2016.

56 Sweden’s new law, adopted on July 20, 2016, makes first permits for recognized beneficiaries of protection temporary, and makes renewal of permits for subsidiary protection conditional on having a job. This has sparked debate as it may encourage beneficiaries to enter the labor market as early as possible, instead of participating in bridging training to enable them to find a job corresponding to their qualifications and experience. The law was passed in an effort to reduce the advantages (in terms of rights and residence conditions) obtained by beneficiaries of protection in Sweden as compared with other EU Member States and, thus, to curb the inflow of asylum seekers. With some exceptions, the law is retroactive for asylum seekers with pending claims. The law is considered a temporary response to an emergency situation, and is set to apply for three years. See Migrationsverket, “20 July 2016: New Law That Affects Asylum Seekers and Their Families,” updated July 20, 2016, www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/Nyheter/2016-07-20-20-July-2016-New-law-that-affects-asylum-seekers-and-their-families.html.



IV. Policies to Support the Labor Market Integration of Refugees

In light of the early and substantive investments needed to support the labor market integration of refugees, countries affected by a rapid surge in asylum applications have been grappling with multiple dilemmas, each centered on a difficult tradeoff. These include how to:

- Ensure that refugees can enter work or education smoothly and swiftly, while still sending a clear message that the asylum-seeking route is reserved for individuals genuinely fleeing persecution and disasters.
- Justify investments in integration, education, and labor market activities for asylum seekers, who might later be required to leave the country, when resources to support resident refugees and immigrants—and, in some countries, unemployed natives—are already tight.
- Muster the political and financial capital to invest in long-term labor market integration at a time when reception and settlement services are in emergency mode.
- Make timely and productive investments across the migration continuum when many refugees follow nonlinear trajectories, and services along the pathway are themselves in chaos.
- Ensure that employers will get returns on their investments in recruiting and training vulnerable migrants who have insecure residence status, without distorting the market and hampering the integrity of the migration system.
- Promote upskilling opportunities and adequate employment matching for educated and experienced refugees while acknowledging the possible tradeoff between finding a good-quality job and finding any job quickly.
- Make sure that refugees with the greatest labor market potential are fast-tracked into suitable employment without indefinitely sidelining the more vulnerable and less educated.

Promising approaches include: incremental labor market support provided throughout the protection continuum (from first reception and, in the case of resettlement, at the predeparture stage); early tailored orientation and training for particularly vulnerable groups of new arrivals; simplified processes for recognizing foreign qualifications; flexible access to mainstream vocational education; and strong cooperation between public authorities and employers in the offering of internships and job placement.

A. Early Skills Assessment, Orientation, and Customized Training

Reliable processes for assessing the skills and qualifications of new arrivals (other than those selected by employers for specific vacancies) are essential to properly match them with jobs.⁵⁷ As discussed, refugees and family migrants are often offered a preliminary skills assessment as part of introduction programs for

57 Maria Vincenza Desiderio, “Executive Summary,” in *Improving Access to Labour Market Information for Migrants and Employers*, eds. Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Anke Schuster (Brussels: International Organization for Migration, Regional Office for EU, EEA, and NATO, 2013), www.labourmigration.eu/research/report/23-improving-access-to-labour-market-information-for-migrants-and-employers.



new arrivals. While this is rarely sufficient to fully assess migrants' employability,⁵⁸ it can nonetheless be a useful first bridge to employment support services.⁵⁹ But depending on the length of asylum procedures, several months may pass until individuals have access to the skills assessment and employment-related activities offered as part of an introduction program. Furthermore, if dispersal policies do not take into account the results of skills assessments and profiling, this curtails opportunities to settle refugees where they are most likely to find appropriate work and training offers.

I. Early Opportunities for Asylum Seekers

A growing number of EU Member States have recently started to offer skills assessments to asylum seekers in reception facilities. Besides the services provided by reception authorities (e.g., in Norway and Sweden), skills screening may be offered in public shelters by civil-society organizations, alongside language and literacy classes and “soft skills” training (e.g., as in Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Spain).⁶⁰ However, the services provided are often quite basic and vary across locations and in response to demand.

A growing number of EU Member States have recently started to offer skills assessments to asylum seekers in reception facilities.

More structured programs have recently been piloted in Germany, where detailed screening of asylum seekers forms the basis of tailored training and employment support packages. Since July 2015, the Baden-Württemberg Integration Ministry (in cooperation with a range of public and private stakeholders) has operated a four-stage program in reception facilities in five cities. Newcomers are offered a personalized package of language classes, bridging courses and apprenticeships, mentoring, and combined language and vocational training programs.⁶¹ At the federal level, the “Early Intervention” program—jointly managed by the Federal Employment Agency (BA), the Ministry of Labor (BMAS), and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)—also aims to accelerate asylum seekers' transition into the labor market by profiling them in reception centers and making referrals to the local federal employment office for customized support.⁶² These services are offered to asylum seekers deemed likely to be granted international protection, with the goal of striking a balance between investments and outcomes in the early integration of newly arrived humanitarian migrants.⁶³

In Norway, and in response to similar concerns, a recent provision reserves admission to new integration reception centers for those asylum seekers with good prospects of getting protected status. These centers offer enhanced labor market integration activities, including self-registration of skills and competences,

58 Thus, for instance, the author's interviews with employers, training providers, and managers of the French introduction program have consistently pointed to the insufficient level and quality of the language, literacy, and vocational skills screenings. In particular, the skills assessment is considered too general to serve employment-matching purposes, notably when formal recognition of foreign qualifications is required to access professional practice. Similar problems were found in other countries. These interviews were carried out in May–July 2014 as part of the MPI project *The Labor Market Integration of New Arrivals in Europe*. See MPI, “The Labor Market Integration of New Arrivals in Europe.”

59 For instance, in France the outcomes of the skills screening offered to signatories of the Reception and Integration Contract (CAI) are automatically made available to the PES for tailored orientation and matching purposes.

60 Soft skills include, for instance, those required to successfully manage the interpersonal relations involved in professional life, as well as skills needed to adapt to evolving situations and working techniques.

61 For a detailed description of this initiative, see Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.

62 Susanne Koch, “Modellprojekt ‘Early Intervention’” (presentation, Bundesagentur für Arbeit, June 3, 2015), www.fes.de/wiso/pdf/integration/2015/030615/Koch.pdf.

63 In practice, the chances are determined based on the country of origin of asylum seekers. Those from Afghanistan, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Syria have high recognition rates such that they can participate in the early intervention program. See Volker Daumann, Martin Dietz, Barbara Knapp, and Karsten Strien, *Early Intervention—Modellprojekt zur frühzeitigen Arbeitsmarktintegration von Asylbewerberinnen und Asylbewerbern: Ergebnisse der qualitativen Begleitforschung* (Nuremberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, 2015), 9, <http://doku.iab.de/forschungsbericht/2015/fb0315.pdf>.



career guidance, employment-relevant language and cultural skills training, vocational training opportunities with local employers, and access to all labor market activation measures. The centers have been piloted in seven municipalities.⁶⁴

Finland has taken a different approach in its efforts to strike a balance between early investments in skills screenings and expected returns: newcomers are offered relevant services on an incremental basis along the protection continuum. In November 2015, an interministerial group approved an integration action plan that requires that asylum seekers in reception centers be provided with professional skills screening.⁶⁵ Those later granted protected status receive a more comprehensive skills assessment. The action plan provides for outcomes of the initial skills screening to be used to inform the choice of settlement location, so that refugees may be settled in localities with education or employment opportunities that match their skills.⁶⁶ As illustrated by the Swedish experience, however, a generalized and incremental skills assessment strategy of this kind requires more time from case workers and high levels of coordination around referrals, and may be difficult to implement for large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees.⁶⁷

*A generalized and incremental skills assessment strategy
... requires more time from case workers and high levels of
coordination.*

Early skills assessments of refugees and asylum seekers frequently reveal substantial gaps in host-country-specific human capital—notably, limited language skills and soft skills, and lack of recognized qualifications—that need to be addressed before they are able to participate in more sophisticated employment support and matching activities, or enter further education. Thus, customized orientation and introductory training⁶⁸ may be particularly useful for vulnerable migrants landing unprepared in an unfamiliar country. Similarly, for those refugees and asylum seekers bound for resettlement or relocation, skills screening, orientation, and initial training prior to departure may kickstart the integration process and help authorities plan for their arrival and settlement.

64 Haakon Hertzberg, “Measures to Support the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees—The Norwegian Way” (presentation at the thematic event Measures to Support the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Mutual Learning Programme, European Commission, Brussels, June 22, 2016), <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1072&langId=en&newsId=2555&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news>.

65 Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, “Action Plan on Integration to Take Account of Increasing Immigration” (press release, November 27, 2015), http://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/article/-/asset_publisher/kotouttamisen-toimintasuunnitelmalla-varaudutaan-kasvavaan-maahanmuuttoon?_101_INSTANCE_3qmUejglxZEK_groupId=10616.

66 Between January and March 2016, the Ministry of Education and Culture conducted a first skills assessment survey of around 1,000 asylum seekers in reception centers. The results paved the way for designing more structured skills assessment as well as training offers for asylum seekers. See Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, “Action Plan on Integration;” Piironen, “Educational Background, Work History and Learning Skills of Asylum Seekers.” See also Section IV.B. for an example of how screening and assessment may work in practice.

67 As discussed in Section III.C., following the surge in asylum applications at the end of 2015, Sweden had to abandon the skills screening and filing component of the reception interview.

68 More generally, this consists of basic language instruction. Initial language instruction is available to asylum seekers in reception centers in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Language courses are also available from the day of filing an asylum application in Sweden and Germany. In Australia, refugees with few skills or difficult prearrival experience are eligible for the Special Preparatory Programme (SPP), which offers up to 400 hours of introductory language training prior to the 510 hours of language training offered to all humanitarian entrants. For more details, see AMES Australia, “Special Preparatory Program,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.ames.net.au/learn-english/special-preparatory-program.html.



2. Predeparture Policies

As resettlement becomes an increasingly important route (see Box 1), the question of whether and how refugees might be prepared for success in the resettlement country before they depart has become more urgent. Policymakers have begun to realize that the time lag between refugees' journeys and resettlement decisions offers a window of opportunity to prepare for integration. For example, the European Commission has flagged predeparture integration support, including in the context of resettlement schemes, as the first of five priority areas in its new integration action plan.⁶⁹

Box 1. Resettlement and Relocation

In North America and Europe, a handful of countries—whether on the frontline, in key transit corridors, or popular final destinations—are particularly affected by large numbers of asylum seekers. In response, resettlement and relocation schemes are on the rise. Thus, in September 2015, the European Council adopted a two-year plan to allow 160,000 asylum applicants to be relocated from Greece and Italy to other Member States. In July 2015, the Council adopted a scheme for the resettlement of 22,000 refugees from outside the European Union. According to an EU-Turkey agreement signed in March 2016, the European Union must resettle more refugees sent by Turkey in exchange for the return to Turkey of Syrian nationals who made their way to the Greek islands.

Across the Atlantic, Canada and the United States have also stepped up resettlement efforts since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. Between November 4, 2015 and April 3, 2016, Canada admitted 26,213 Syrian refugees, and the Minister for Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship suggested the number could reach 50,000 by the end of 2016. Meanwhile, the United States met its pledge to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016 (October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016).

Sources: European Commission, "Relocation and Resettlement State of Play" (fact sheet, April 11, 2016), http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160412/factsheet_relocation_resettlement_en.pdf; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees," updated March 18, 2016, <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10772>; Susana Mas, "Syrian Refugees Booked on 1st Flights to Canada Total 305," CBC News, December 2, 2015, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/syrian-refugees-first-flights-briefing-1.3346988; Government of Canada, "#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures," accessed April 11, 2016, www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp; White House, "Statement by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice on Syrian Refugee Admissions" (press release, August 29, 2016), www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/08/29/statement-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice-syrian-refugee.

Thus far, predeparture support for refugees bound for resettlement tends to consist of the provision of basic information and cultural orientation, and, at best, a few hours of language instruction. For instance, since 2003 Norway has provided cultural orientation courses (lasting four days for adults and two days for children under 15) delivered by trainers who have lived in Norway for some time and who share a similar background as the refugees to be resettled. Ten hours of language instruction are provided as part of the Danish cultural orientation program. Brief language instruction modules are also offered through the Dutch and the German cultural orientation programs. Similarly, refugees bound for resettlement in the United States receive three to five days of orientation services on the resettlement process, their rights and obligations, and life in the United States.

⁶⁹ European Commission, "Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region, Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals" (COM [2016] 377 final, June 7, 2016), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016D0377>.



All these modules are somewhat basic: the information provided is too general to significantly advance integration.⁷⁰ But a more substantial provision of language and vocational training promises results. A 60-hour English-language course piloted with funding from the U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in camps in Kenya, Thailand, and Nepal was shown to improve the preparation and self-confidence of refugees bound for resettlement in the United States.⁷¹ Other recently piloted predeparture schemes have also shown positive effects among different groups of prospective migrants (see Box 2).

Box 2. Predeparture Skills Training and Matching Programs

Germany recently piloted various predeparture training, credential recognition, and matching initiatives in an effort to cooperate with origin countries to prepare migrants to fill labor vacancies. Some of these programs, run by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), have been successful in preparing qualified migration candidates for labor market integration in Germany, due in part to strong industry involvement. Such programs focus on highly educated migrants, and might be difficult to replicate on a large scale for resettled refugees, many of whom have a lower level of educational attainment.

For educated refugees, at minimum, a package of language and soft skills training, combined with matching and referral services, may offer great value—not only by promoting successful integration outcomes, but also by fostering psychological well-being. Such services might offer refugees a way to use their time waiting for resettlement productively.

Source: Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Kate Hooper, *Improving Migrants' Labour Market Integration in Europe from the Outset: A Cooperative Approach to Predeparture Measures* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/improving-migrants-labour-market-integration-europe-outset-cooperative-approach.

Successfully scaling up and/or transferring some of these experiences to refugee resettlement, however, requires a comprehensive strategy that takes into account the specific dynamics of the resettlement process and—to the extent possible—adapts to them. For instance, one of the key bottlenecks to expanding and scaling up predeparture language classes in refugee camps is the last-minute nature of resettlement location decisions. When these are fixed, refugees are under pressure to organize a number of practical and administrative details (e.g., undergoing health and safety checks and gathering required documentation) before their imminent departure. They may not be able to attend more than a few hours of training.

More broadly, investments in predeparture integration measures are more likely to bear returns if such measures are embedded in a holistic strategy to support integration along the migration continuum. Indeed, the results of initial predeparture language or vocational training may be negated by a long interruption due to administrative delays in the settlement process at destination—especially since the initial training tends to be quite basic—unless learners continue to practice. Internet tools and apps

70 See International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe, *Welcome to Europe! A Comprehensive Guide to Resettlement* (Brussels: ICMC Europe, 2013), www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC%20Europe-Welcome%20to%20Europe.pdf; Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, “Portugal e os Refugiados,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.refugiados.acm.gov.pt/.

71 Church World Service (CWS), “Pre-Resettlement CWS ESL Pilot Project Boosts U.S.-Bound Refugees’ Skills, Confidence,” updated January 19, 2012, <http://cwsglobal.org/pre-resettlement-cws-esl-pilot-project-boosts-u-s-bound-refugees-skills-confidence/>.



might be very helpful in this respect.⁷² In addition, predeparture services should systematically refer new arrivals to destination-country integration desks and services to aid their smooth transition.

All in all, to genuinely support refugees' employment, early and targeted integration measures—be they at the predeparture or postarrival stage—need to refer newcomers to more structured/in-depth vocational training, qualifications recognition, and employment support programs. Without a clear pathway to these more intensive programs, refugee outcomes are likely to flatline, sparking frustration among migrants and service providers alike.⁷³ Deep cooperation among all the stakeholders involved in providing integration services at different stages of the migration and settlement process is key to achieving this goal.

Finally, if predeparture training, screening, and matching mechanisms are to be useful instruments in helping receiving countries prepare for new arrivals, an important question remains: How can stakeholders ensure that profile information is not used to separate out the better-qualified refugees, thus putting the lesser-skilled at a disadvantage?

B. Tailored Support for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

Skills and qualifications assessments, even when careful and comprehensive, cannot guarantee that foreign-qualified migrants will be granted access to the practice of a regulated profession or, in many cases, even to further education in their country of destination. Official recognition of foreign diplomas and training credits is generally required for admission to academic or vocational training courses. On top of this, the recognition of professional qualifications is compulsory for regulated professions, and may also be required in nonregulated fields at the discretion of employers.

Qualifications assessments ... cannot guarantee that foreign-qualified migrants will be granted access to the practice of a regulated profession.

In light of the obstacles that refugees face in gaining recognition for qualifications acquired abroad, a number of countries have introduced tailored recognition procedures for this group. The fact that asylum seekers are arriving in countries experiencing demographic and workforce decline has reinforced arguments for leveraging newcomers' skills to tackle shortages. Although the educational and professional background of many arrivals cannot be matched to existing vacancies, receiving countries are keen to harness any skills that can.

Tailored recognition procedures for refugees often rely on individual interviews alongside expert panels, competency tests, and witness testimony to make up for missing documentation. In some

72 As demonstrated, for example, by a Goethe-Institut initiative that provides family migrants with predeparture language instruction. For a thorough discussion of predeparture measures for labor market integration, see Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Kate Hooper, *Improving Migrants' Labour Market Integration in Europe from the Outset: A Cooperative Approach to Predeparture Measures* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/improving-migrants-labour-market-integration-europe-outset-cooperative-approach; Anna Dimitrijević, "Online Learning: My Path to Germany," Goethe-Institut, September 2015, www.goethe.de/en/spr/mag/20603993.html.

73 Author conversation with a provider of basic integration services to asylum seekers in reception services in Italy participating in the European Migration Forum, Brussels, April 6, 2016. Without links to structured vocational training and employment support services, or to employers, basic skills assessments and training provided by NGOs in reception centers may have negligible results. Instead, service providers may thrive as a result of new or expanded market opportunities, while migrants and host communities see few real benefits.



cases, they may also involve the business community as a way to certify the value of nonconventionally acquired qualifications.

I. Flexible Assessment Methods

Countries that have adopted special qualifications recognition procedures for refugees have often used Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) techniques. For instance, the Netherlands (which has used APL techniques in integration policies and mainstream employment programs since the late 1990s) has been working with refugee organizations and the business community since 2012 to offer an “indication of education” or proof of Dutch equivalent credentials based on information provided by refugees.⁷⁴ More recently, expecting a rise in credential recognition requests by Syrian refugees, the Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Education (EP-NUFFIC) published a detailed overview of the Syrian education system that explains how Syrian degrees map onto Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.⁷⁵ The aim is to facilitate the work of credential assessors and regulators in the recognition process, as well as to indicate to the migrants and their prospective employers the value of Syrian qualifications in Dutch schools and the labor market.⁷⁶ This initiative is part of a broader set of measures launched by EP-NUFFIC in 2015 to enhance the recognition of refugee qualifications. Other measures include providing refugees in welcome centers with information on EP-NUFFIC recognition services; hiring and training new credential evaluators with Arabic language skills; making available a handout on the admission of refugees without documentation, aimed at higher education institutions, and promoting flexible ways to grant access to this group; and enhancing the efficiency of procedures for assessing refugee qualifications, including through the creation of a new database for processing applications and compiling results.⁷⁷

Since 2013, Norway has made it possible for refugees unable to obtain recognition under usual procedures to have their qualifications assessed by a commission comprised of academics and a representative of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), through a tailored procedure that includes an interview and written tests.⁷⁸ By May 2015, NOKUT had received around 500 applications under the UVD procedure, of which 220 had obtained formal determination. More than half of the applicants who received a positive decision in 2013 subsequently accessed either a relevant job or the opportunity to continue education in Norway; more than four in five

74 The program is run by the Dutch Center of Expertise for International Credential Evaluation (Internationale Diplomawaardering, IDW). For a thorough discussion of the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) procedures in the Netherlands (*Erkenning Verworven Competenties*, EVC) and their development in the context of the country’s lifelong learning strategy, see Inge van der Welle, *Recognition of Qualifications and Competences of Migrants—The Netherlands* (Brussels: International Organization for Migration, Regional Office for EU, EEA, and NATO, 2013), <https://publications.iom.int/books/recognition-qualifications-and-competences-migrants>. See also Organization for Internationalization in Education (EP-NUFFIC), “Information for Refugees,” updated January 18, 2016, www.epnuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/information-for-refugees#; IDW, “Inburgering’: Orientation on the Dutch Labour Market,” accessed May 16 2016, www.idw.nl/orientatie-arbeidsmarkt.html.

75 See EP-NUFFIC, “Insight into Syrian Education System,” updated December 15, 2015, www.epnuffic.nl/en/news/ep-nuffic-news/insight-into-syrian-education-system; EP-NUFFIC, *The Syrian Education System Described and Compared with the Dutch System* (The Hague: EP-NUFFIC, 2015), www.epnuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-syria.pdf. Similar comparative overviews are available also for the educational systems of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iran, and Iraq.

76 A similar initiative has been launched in Canada by World Education Services (WES).

77 Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion, “Promising Practice in the Area of Labour Market/Social Integration of Refugees: Diplomawaardering voor vluchtelingen” (white paper, European Commission, Brussels, January 2016), <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1208&langId=en&refugeeId=44>.

78 The procedure was piloted in 2011-12.



participants expressed high satisfaction with the system.⁷⁹ Moreover, since May 2015, NOKUT, in close cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), has developed a fast-track recognition procedure for refugees hosted in reception centers and camps, to inform settlement decisions and further training opportunities.

In Canada in mid-2016 World Education Services (WES), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) specialized in international credentials assessment, launched a pilot project aimed at developing a specific qualifications assessment path and dedicated testing methods for Syrian refugees who cannot meet standard documentation requirements.⁸⁰ This may be scaled up to include additional groups and, perhaps, expanded to include the United States.

2. Working with Employers

Innovative programs that involve employers in the recognition of professional qualifications seek to obtain employer buy-in and ensure that statements of recognition will be considered favorably. Since 2015, six chambers of industry and trade and skilled crafts (IHKs and HWKs) in Germany have worked with the Federal Institute for Vocational and Professional Education (Bunderinstitut für Berufsbildung, BIBB) on the Prototyping Transfer program, which aims to provide professional qualifications to refugees who lack written certificates.⁸¹ The program revolves around a qualification analysis, carried out by relevant experts from the chambers, which can take the form of an in-depth interview, a work sample, or a test, or a short period of supervised practice in an enterprise. If the analysis concludes that the refugee's skills compare to those required to practice the corresponding profession in Germany, an equivalency certificate is issued. It applies only to nonregulated professions, and is not deemed sufficient for proving the knowledge and licenses required for practicing a regulated profession. The project also remains small in scale; around 50 qualifications assessments were carried out between January 2015 and April 2016.⁸²

The strength of this approach is the hands-on involvement of the German chambers, which makes it more likely that employers will value the resulting credentials.⁸³ Similarly, in Sweden, a recently launched program to fast-track skilled refugees into shortage occupations offers validation of their professional qualifications based on industry-driven procedures.⁸⁴

79 Successful migrants are issued the same recognition document delivered under the ordinary procedure, stating the equivalency of the foreign qualification with a Norwegian higher education diploma. The program's outcomes for 2013–14 point to an improvement in the early labor market or education transition of refugees, including in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health fields. For a detailed description of the procedure and its results, see Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), "Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-Procedure)," accessed June 9, 2016, www.nokut.no/en/Foreign-education/Other-recognition-systems/Recognition-Procedure-for-Persons-without-Verifiable-Documentation/; Marybeth Gruenewald, Jeanie Bell, and Stig Arne Skjerven, "Countries in Crisis: Credential Evaluation for Interrupted or Undocumented Studies" (presentation at the NAFSA 2015 Annual Conference & Expo, Boston, May 27, 2015), <https://shelbycearley.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/countries-in-crisis-credential-evaluation-for-interrupted-or-undocumented-studies-slides.pdf>.

80 For more details, see Sulaf Al-Shaikhly and Bryce Loo, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Methods for Credential Assessment" (presentation, World Education Service, April 22, 2016), http://knowledge.wes.org/rs/317-CTM-316/images/2016-04-22-KRE-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis-WES-Presentation.pdf?mkt_tok=eyJpLjoiT0dVNFhqRXpOamc0W-mpsbsIsInQiOjoiTnJXWEIQ1dyc3dEN294bE9aSlAyNmh2ZjhHcUJocXNoZjZRU0xob1FKUGxyMjBVI4NGISWjRLUWZsU0txbElsYWZETzZnUjdWWEN6NGkyUUhNZz09In0%3D.

81 For an overview of the program, which is initially funded for three years, and a list of participating chambers of industry and trade and skilled crafts (IHKs and HWKs), see Carolin Böse, Dinara Tusarinow, and Tom Wünsche, "Recognizing Vocational Qualifications of Refugees—Examples from 'Prototyping Transfer,'" Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), accessed January 2016, www.bibb.de/en/39350.php; *Sächsische Zeitung*, "Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsabschlüsse soll erleichtert werden," *Sächsische Zeitung*, April 1, 2015, www.sz-online.de/nachrichten/anererkennung-auslaendischer-berufsabschluesse-soll-erleichtert-werden-3072789.html.

82 Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.

83 Participation in a chamber is mandatory for German employers, and these chambers play a strong quality assurance role in the maintenance of high industry standards. Hence, their endorsement of refugee qualifications fosters trust.

84 For more information on the program, see Section IV.C. of this report; Government Offices of Sweden, "Fast Track—A Quicker Introduction of Newly-Arrived Immigrants," accessed June 14 2016, www.government.se/articles/2015/12/fast-track---a-quicker-introduction-of-newly-arrived-immigrants/.



3. Recognition for Asylum Seekers

Most recognition programs are reserved for refugees and other beneficiaries of protection with a valid residence permit. Thus, in some countries, migrants may have to wait one or more years to even start the process. Special recognition procedures for refugees (as described above) may take even longer than standard practices. For all these reasons, starting these procedures early, as in Germany⁸⁵ or Finland (see Box 3), may help beneficiaries of protection into jobs that correspond to their qualifications.

Box 3. Metropolia's Technology and Engineering Pilot Program

With funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki Metropolia University is piloting a special recognition procedure for asylum seekers, with a view to rolling it out across Finland if successful. The university has partnered with Helsinki immigration services and Luona Oy, the organization that runs reception centers in Finland, to identify and profile potential pilot participants. Other partners include Finland's Employment and Economic Development Offices.

In light of the university's strong engineering program, expected sectoral skills shortages, and the typical profile of asylum seekers in Finland (men ages 20 to 29 years, many of whom have experience in the field of technology), the pilot has focused on technology. Thirty immigrants who arrived at the end of 2015—mainly from Iraq, but also Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, and Belarus—had their math and digital skills tested alongside their competence in the field of technology and engineering using sample case studies from Metropolia's engineering coursework. (If none of the given case studies matched a participant's area of expertise, a general problem-solving engineering case study could be requested.) The pilot test was conducted in English, Arabic, and Finnish. Almost all of the participants obtained recognition.

The results and feedback from the pilot will be used to further develop the assessment and recognition methods. It is planned that, after the pilot phase, the activities of Metropolia's center for the demonstration and recognition of the professional competences of asylum seekers and immigrants will expand to health care and social services. The center will also function as a one-stop-shop for competence assessment and qualifications recognition for asylum seekers living in reception centers in southern Finland, as well as refugees and other immigrants who hold a residence permit. Moreover, as of May 2016, the center had begun to provide tailored guidance on employment matching, entrepreneurship, and further education to asylum seekers and other migrants whose competences were assessed.

Sources: Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Science, "Metropolia Started Recognition of Competence and Guidance Services for Immigrants," updated May 2, 2016, www.metropolia.fi/en/about-us/news-and-events/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=5475&cHash=54df1aa89628cae1103b0b518afd1d68; Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Science, "Metropolia to Establish a Centre for the Assessment and Demonstration of Asylum Seekers' Competence," updated February 8, 2016, www.metropolia.fi/en/about-us/news-and-events/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=5389&cHash=53de2ed7811f0d032b3b870fbd0b98dd.

C. Bridging Gaps through Flexible Education and Vocational Training

The process of assessing skills and qualifications often reveals gaps that need to be filled before refugees can access the jobs for which they were trained. The approach used in addressing these gaps depends on country-specific recognition rules, labor market and training structures, and available funding, as well as on the extent of the gaps themselves. Obviously, a lack of proficiency in the host-country language must be tackled to allow refugees to fully utilize their skills. Differences between foreign and local credentials for mid- to high-skilled workers may be addressed through some

⁸⁵ This is done through Germany's Early Intervention program, described in Section IV.A.



combination of bridging courses, vocational-specific language training, internships, or supervised work periods. More broadly, the flexible provision of mainstream education and training might also help plug gaps without requiring that newcomers take courses in subject matter they already know.

I. Bridging Programs for Skilled Migrants

Bridging and other tailored training programs—especially those with a work component—are the gold standard for skilled migrants. They compensate for country-specific differences in the training and practice of a given profession without making people restart their educations and careers from scratch. They also go a long way toward improving migrants’ employment and self-sufficiency prospects, as well as the capacity to use their valuable skills. However, the provision of tailored bridging programs is a resource-intensive effort—in terms of the funding, time, and human resources needed to design and supervise the training⁸⁶—and hence is best justified in cases where a significant number of migrants have foreign-acquired credentials in occupations that are in high demand in the receiving country. Moreover, guarantees need to be in place to ensure that the quality of professional services is not lowered by shortcuts to labor market access for foreign-trained individuals.

The provision of tailored bridging programs is a resource-intensive effort.

Bridging programs have existed for some time, though few have targeted refugees. There are a number of different models and some notable recent innovations:

- **Career pathway courses.** Canada has been a front-runner in bridging courses offered to newly arrived migrants to speed up qualifications recognition and encourage optimal employment matching. In particular, the country has made considerable use of the career pathway approach that allows skilled migrants to gain experience at the bottom of the ladder of the vocation for which they are trained while working to remedy gaps. Recently, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and its provincial and territorial counterparts have worked with professional associations, regulators, and employers in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) sectors to explore alternative career pathways to be pursued while foreign-qualified migrants work toward the requirements for licensing.⁸⁷
- **Bridging courses for highly educated migrants.** Elsewhere, programs have focused on high-value regulated professions such as those in health care. Since the early 2000s, Sweden has offered academic bridging courses for the recognition of the qualifications of highly educated immigrants. While these have been limited to a few professions—including medical professionals, teachers, and lawyers—they have had a demonstrated positive impact on both employment matching and wages. A 2014 evaluation indicated that foreign-

86 In the context of the implementation of the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Nurses with the Canadian province of Quebec, French authorities decided not to require a bridging course as a compensatory measure for the full recognition of Quebec-qualified nurses, given the technical and administrative difficulties of designing and organizing such a course. Similarly, it might be challenging to organize the supervised training of foreign-qualified professionals in the health sector, given that this would add to the regular workload of already stretched service providers. For a discussion of the advantages of bridging courses and compensatory measures for the recognition of qualifications, and of the practical challenges that the creation and implementation of these measures present, see Dovelyn Rannveig Mendoza, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Maria Vincenza Desiderio, Brian Salant, Kate Hooper, and Taylor Elwood, *Reinventing Mutual Recognition Arrangements for the 21st Century: Lessons from International Experiences and Key Insights for the ASEAN Region* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, forthcoming).

87 See OECD, *Working Together*. See also BioTalent Canada, “Alternative Career Paths for Internationally Educated Health Professionals,” accessed August 25, 2016, www.biotalent.ca/en/alternatcareers.



qualified teachers who participated in the courses were 18 percent more likely to find relevant employment.⁸⁸ The work-based Building Bridges program for refugee doctors in the United Kingdom offers paid medical work placements for six months in National Health Service (NHS) hospitals, coupled with intensive training to meet licensing requirements. The program has had good results in accelerating refugee doctors' access to the practice of their profession, although their overall numbers remain small.⁸⁹ In Norway, the government is set to introduce bridging courses for migrants who have teaching or nursing qualifications from their countries of origin.⁹⁰

- **Bridging courses for mid-skilled occupations.** In Germany, the Foreign Skills Approval unit of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Berlin (IHK Berlin) offers bridging training for foreign-qualified migrants who receive partial equivalency as a result of the assessment of their qualifications. These courses may be provided by external education providers or through internships. Since May 2016, IHK Berlin has also promoted a new German Employment Agency program that offers refugees four-month introductory courses to the German dual vocational training system. NGOs working in the vocational training sector have also recently started to provide similar services.⁹¹
- **Fast-track courses for refugees.** The Swedish government has committed to investing SEK 1.669 million (more than 180 million euros) in measures aimed at getting introduction program participants into jobs faster and reinforcing other labor-market-oriented activities over the period 2016–19 (see Box 4).⁹² Since May 2016, Norway has also taken steps to provide a similar fast-track offer to newly arrived refugees with the best chances of getting a job and/or with skills that are high in demand in the Norwegian labor market.⁹³

88 See Susan Niknami and Lena Schröder, “Using Bridging Courses to Make Better Use of Migrant Skills” (presentation, Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University, 2014), www.oecd.org/els/mig/Schroder.pdf.

89 Training includes preparation courses for Professional Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) exams, tailored English classes to help refugee doctors achieve the International English Language Test (IELTS) scores as prescribed by the regulating bodies, and National Health Service (NHS) employability training. Volunteering opportunities have also been provided to offer foreign-trained health professionals an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a working environment and keep up with professional standards while meeting licensing requirements. While numbers remain relatively small, with 821 refugee doctors supported over the 2011–13 period, one in four participants was able to enter a medical position at a level corresponding to his or her qualifications immediately after completing the program, and roughly half managed to secure employment in associated health profession positions. See Refugee Council, *Refugee Health Professionals Impact Report—Sept 2011 to Aug 2013* (London: Refugee Council, 2014), www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/0756/Building_Bridges_Impact_Report_Sept_11_to_Aug_13.pdf; Refugee Council, *Building Bridges Impact Report 2014–15* (London: Refugee Council, 2016), www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/6701/BuildingBridges_ImpactReport2014-15.pdf.

90 Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, “From Reception Centre to the Labour Market.”

91 See, for instance, the Kiezkuechen project that, since 2015, has provided short language and vocational training courses in the restaurant sector for new arrivals in Berlin; Bildungsmarkt Unternehmensverbund, “Kiezküchen gmbh,” accessed June 10, 2016, www.bildungsmarkt.de/bildungsmarkt/kiezkuechen.

92 Government Offices of Sweden, “Fast Track—A Quicker Introduction of Newly-Arrived Immigrants.”

93 Hertzberg, “Measures to Support the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees.”



Box 4. Fast-Track Program, Sweden

The Fast-Track Program, rolled out in Sweden in December 2015, aims to swiftly bridge skilled refugees into shortage occupations while preserving industry and employment standards. The program is a collaboration of the Public Employment Service (PES), relevant education and training agencies, and trade unions and employer confederations, which have taken strong ownership of the initiative.

In each sector where social partners expressed an interest—most often noting skills shortages—and agreed to support refugees’ upskilling and employment matching, fast-tracks were designed and made available to skilled refugees enrolled in the introduction program. Following an assessment of qualifications carried out by PES, foreign-trained chefs; butchers; health-care providers in 21 occupations (including doctors, dentists, nurses, and pharmacists); and teachers (including preschool teachers) may be offered tailored bridging packages. Further sectors being considered for inclusion in the program include tourism and transport, construction, energy, and electronics.

The program combines language-specific validation of professional knowledge acquired abroad through supervised work experience and/or knowledge tests, supplementary vocational training (when needed), professional certification, and work authorization based on industry-specific procedures, mentoring in the workplace, and vocational-specific Swedish-language lessons. The training components are coupled with work placement offers and other employment matching tools.

Source: Government Offices of Sweden, “Fast Track—A Quicker Introduction of Newly-Arrived Immigrants,” accessed June 14 2016, www.government.se/articles/2015/12/fast-track---a-quicker-introduction-of-newly-arrived-immigrants/.

2. Vocation-Specific Language Training

Alongside problems getting their credentials recognized, insufficient knowledge of the host-country language—at the level required for professional practice—is one of the key reasons why employed refugees are so often overqualified for their positions. Vocation-specific language courses that focus on the vocabulary and syntax needed in a given profession help new arrivals swiftly enter the labor market in jobs that match their skills and experience.

Sweden—and particularly municipalities in Stockholm county—is a front-runner in providing such training, through the Swedish for Professionals (SFX) program. SFX combines vocational and language training in highly skilled occupations (such as teachers, engineers, and economists), as well as skilled trades (such as craftsmen). Recent additions include an intensive course aimed at entrepreneurs.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Germany has offered its ESF-BAMF program since 2007, which combines vocational-specific language classes with skills building and work placement.⁹⁵ Such programs usually have better outcomes than general language courses in terms of participation and labor market integration trajectories.⁹⁶ However, it has proven challenging to scale up such initiatives; the number of qualified instructors is inadequate, and a critical mass of students in a given vocation is needed to justify the significant investment involved.

The individualized nature of skills deficits and the diverse refugee profiles make it challenging to scale up tailored bridging programs while keeping costs reasonable. In many cases—including for the considerable numbers of young refugees and unaccompanied minors who would have to resume their

94 Swedish for Professionals (SFX), “SFX—Swedish for Professionals,” accessed June 9, 2016, <http://sfx-yrke.se/eng>.

95 The ESF-BAMF courses consist of 730 units, of which more than half are devoted to general German-language lessons, 140 to profession-specific language lessons, and 160 units to an internship. See Bundesministerium des Innern (BMI), *Migration and Integration: Residence Law and Policy on Migration and Integration in Germany* (Berlin: BMI, 2014), www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Broschueren/2014/migration_and_integration.pdf?__blob=publicationFile; Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.

96 Benton et al., *Aiming Higher*.



schooling before being able to access employment—making mainstream education and workforce training systems more flexible and accessible could be a pragmatic and more cost-effective strategy.

3. Adapting Mainstream Systems to Diversity

The rationale for opening up mainstream education and training systems is that it allows learners from diverse backgrounds to join training at their level, rather than having to (re)start from the beginning. Generally, the ease with which newcomers can join education pathways later in life depends on how an education system is organized. Systems that emphasize lifelong learning and nonlinear education trajectories—as in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom—tend to be more open to the integration of foreigners as well as to nationals who have received part of their prior education in a different track or system.

Openness to nontraditional learners also depends on the specific education track or level. Academic tracks tend to be less rigidly regulated than the vocational path. For instance, various German initiatives facilitate refugees' access to academic courses, notably making use of e-learning and other distance-learning options.⁹⁷ But there has been limited support for making significant changes to the traditional dual vocational education system. This dual system, which combines secondary-level vocational education with apprenticeships, is a German trademark praised for its support of school-to-work transitions and the perpetuation of high industry standards. The system remains difficult for newcomers to access; even second-generation children find themselves at a significant disadvantage when seeking apprenticeship places.⁹⁸

The ease with which newcomers can join education pathways later in life depends on how an education system is organized.

In light of the massive refugee inflows, the German government has begun consulting key stakeholders to explore how the system might be made more flexible and modular, for instance, by breaking up courses into separate units that can be accessed separately and do not require that all trainees start from the beginning. In this context, BIBB has taken initial steps to create a set of modules for various professions. There are concerns, however, that these changes would jeopardize the high standards that make the dual system so trusted by employers, and the process has faced strong resistance from employers' representatives. Unions have also opposed reform plans that pursue the goal of refugee integration by offering them more favorable options than those available to natives and other immigrant groups.⁹⁹

In general, reforms of the mainstream education and vocational training systems are likely to attract the necessary public support only when the impact on traditional learners is taken into account and minimized, and when they benefit all interested stakeholders, rather than just one group (of newcomers). In today's rapidly changing knowledge economies, where much of the learning occurs outside traditional institutions, public support for such reforms might gain momentum.

97 Among these initiatives is the Kiron University project, initiated by Berlin students, that facilitates university access for refugees by offering remote e-learning and recognition of credits acquired in this way. Participants may subsequently enroll for one year at one of 23 partner universities in Germany. See Kiron, "The Kiron Team," accessed June 9, 2016, <https://kiron.ngo/about/team>; Betterplace.org, "Enable a Study Program for a Refugee!" accessed June 9, 2016, www.betterplace.org/en/projects/36608-enable-a-study-program-for-a-refugee. Similar smaller scale-initiatives have been implemented by individual universities.

98 For a discussion of the rigidities of the vocational training system of Germany and other European countries, and challenges posed to new entrants, see Benton et al., *Aiming Higher*. For a discussion of the German dual vocational training system and the underrepresentation of immigrant children in apprenticeships, see OECD, *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol.1): Labor Market Integration in Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2007), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/jobs-for-immigrants-vol-1_9789264033603-en.

99 Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.



D. *Alternative Paths for Refugees Facing Greater Barriers to Employment*

Mid- to highly skilled refugees with specialized professional experience can benefit greatly from intensive vocational and language-training programs. However, for the majority of newly arrived refugees—whose educational and professional background is not advanced or specific enough to support a bridging track, let alone be matched with existing skilled vacancies—promoting access to jobs may require more structural and protracted support. Such support may be best provided over time rather than all at once. Basic literacy, numeracy, language, and soft skills are likely to be an important first step before mainstream vocational training. Entrepreneurship, volunteering opportunities, and unconventional jobs may also offer viable options. For vulnerable refugees these activities may need to be paired, or preceded, by psychosocial support.

I. *Fostering Entrepreneurship*

Acquiring a job in the highly developed labor markets of many EU and OECD countries may be a long-term challenge for refugees, and require years of (re)training, at high cost to the public purse as well to migrants' self-reliance, esteem, and social integration.¹⁰⁰ For those who lack adequate credentials or skills to enter the local labor market, entrepreneurship may offer a valuable alternative, including as a way to gain initial work experience in the host country (experience that may aid a subsequent transition into employment).

Over the past two years, measures to support entrepreneurship among migrants have gained new momentum in many receiving countries, not only as an instrument to enhance the host country's competitiveness by fostering highly technological or innovative migrant business ventures, but also as a broader immigrant integration tool. Moreover, in the context of increasing refugee inflows, several initiatives have been launched that specifically target this group of newcomers and provide tailored start-up support that includes advice, training, mentoring, and, in some cases, access to microfinance. Broader initiatives in support of migrant entrepreneurship are generally open to all resident migrants in a given area and, thus, may also serve refugee integration. Of those specific to refugees, some offer more targeted services, such as psychological and social support (see Box 5).

Box 5. Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship Programs

In 2016, the German Chamber of Trade and Industry (IHK) began to offer monthly start-up classes for refugees in Berlin. Beneficiaries of international protection with entrepreneurial experience in their country of origin receive a one-day introduction to the specific requirements and support available for starting a business in Germany, and in Berlin in particular. Sessions are conducted in German and Arabic, and involve successful refugee entrepreneurs as mentors. Besides valuable information, this initial contact with IHK offers a unique opportunity for refugees to connect with the local business community—and hence access to networks of entrepreneurs, providers, clients, and credit institutions, which is key for business success. Participants also learn about the chamber's mainstream entrepreneurship support activities. As previous research has demonstrated, the most effective and sustainable initiatives to foster migrants' entrepreneurship link them to mainstream support.

In the Netherlands in 2015, the nongovernmental organization Incubators for Immigrants, run by local entrepreneurs, launched a comprehensive support program to help newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees realize their business ideas. Services include tailored training and counseling, mentoring, legal and regulatory assistance (in applying for migration permits as well as business registration), and support in leveraging start-up funds and finding workspace. By mid-2016 the organization had received around 40 business plans from asylum seekers and refugees.

¹⁰⁰ Barriers are particularly high in tightly regulated labor markets with compressed wage structures and few low-skilled jobs.



Box 5. Migrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship Programs (continued)

While it is too early to evaluate the impact of these initiatives on the socioeconomic integration of the most recent arrivals, results of earlier initiatives indicate that participants—while few in number—enjoyed positive effects, as did their families.

For instance, the Dutch Association for Refugee Students (UAF) runs *Startende Ondernemers*, an entrepreneurship support program that provides a combination of counseling, training, and mentoring to highly educated refugees over the course of one year. The program has supported 40 refugees since its establishment in 2006, 30 of whom were able to start a business at the end of the year. The Rural and Agricultural Integration within a Supportive Environment (RAISE) project, run by civil-society organizations in Serbia between 2009–11 and subsequently replicated for an additional two-year period with funding from the corporate sector, provides another interesting example of holistic entrepreneurship support for refugees and internally displaced persons. The project targeted refugees in reception centers and assisted their transition into rural communities and the establishment of small businesses in agriculture, farming, and crafts. Alongside intensive entrepreneurship training, mentoring, networking, and counseling, and micro start-up grants (2,000 euros), the program provided beneficiaries with psychosocial counseling. Social workers made weekly visits to refugee households to facilitate their recovery from trauma and integration into the local community. Overall, a total of 128 refugees participated in the two phases of the project, and 108 microenterprises were created, 81 of which were still operating two years after the conclusion of the project. Moreover, all of the families involved managed to integrate successfully in the local community.

In the United States, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) of San Diego has long-standing experience in empowering refugees as entrepreneurs. Between 2011 and 2014, IRC ran the San Diego Refugee Entrepreneurial Agriculture Program (REAP), which provided refugee farmers in San Diego County with training, resources, and technical support to create and expand their own independent farming businesses. Other projects have involved urban farming and microenterprise businesses.

Sources: IHK Berlin, “Registration for the Start-up-Class for Refugees 2016,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.ihk-berlin.de/produktmarken/Service-und-Beratung/finanzierung/Start-up-Class-anmeldung/3298098; Incubators for Immigrants, “Incubators for Immigrants,” accessed June 9, 2016, <http://incubatorsforimmigrants.com/>; UAF, “Startende ondernemers,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.uaf.nl/wat_doet_het_uaf/projecten/startende_ondernemers; Settlement Services International (SSI), “Ignite Small Business Start-Ups,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.ssi.org.au/services/ignite; Jock Collins, *Igniting the Entrepreneurial Passion of Newly-Arrived Refugees in Sydney* (Sydney: University of Technology Sydney and Settlement Services International, 2015), www.ssi.org.au/images/stories/documents/publications/Ignite_Report.pdf; Fondacija Ana I Vlade DIVAC, “Sub-Projects: Rural and Agricultural Integration in the Supportive Environment,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.fondacijadivac.org/Sub-Projects/377/Rural-and-Agricultural-Integration-in-the-Supportive-Environment.shtml; Maria Vincenza Desiderio, *Policies to Support Immigrant Entrepreneurship* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/policies-support-immigrant-entrepreneurship; Author conversation with representatives from the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), the Start-Up Services/Migrant Enterprises, and the Vienna Business Agency conducted in Brussels, February 23, 2016; International Rescue Committee (IRC), “The IRC in San Diego, CA,” accessed August 25, 2016, www.rescue.org/united-states/san-diego-ca; IRC, “IRC in San Diego’s Refugee Entrepreneurial Agriculture Program,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Research, Education & Economics Information System, accessed August 25, 2016, <https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/crisprojectpages/0225980-irc-in-san-diegos-refugee-entrepreneurial-agriculture-program.html>.

Entrepreneurship initiatives typically leverage refugees’ soft skills, rather than formal qualifications. In some cases the support can build on the refugees’ previous experience in running a business in their country of origin, or in their capacity to bring new products and services to the host economy (e.g., cuisine). Even those entrepreneurial activities that do not bring high added value or productivity increases to the overall economy may equate to significant improvements in individual and household well-being, and contribute greatly to refugees’ social integration in mainstream communities, not least for refugee women. Carefully considered policies to support refugees’ entrepreneurial activities also



offer a positive paradigm for the integration process, whereby refugees are empowered rather than assisted.

2. Volunteering and Unconventional Jobs

Where paid employment or entrepreneurship opportunities are not easily available to newly arrived asylum seekers or refugees—as might be the case, for instance, in countries and localities whose labor markets have been hard hit by economic crisis—volunteering might offer a valid first foothold in the labor market. Despite the obvious limitation of not being offered a salary, refugees enrolled as volunteers may acquire needed soft skills (e.g., as they learn the host country’s “codes” for professional interpersonal relations), expand their social networks, and practice the local language—all elements that may help their future transition to paid employment and their overall social integration. Furthermore, the contribution that refugee volunteers bring to the host community can help shape a positive image of refugees, thus reducing tensions and fostering social cohesion. In Italy, the Emilia Romagna region has provided volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers since 2015, within the guidelines of regional authorities.¹⁰¹ Importantly, working as volunteers can only benefit refugees if any risk of exploitation is offset, especially as some may still be affected by the psychological wounds of forced work in their countries of origin or during migration.

The fact that most positions in OECD labor markets require high-level skills or formal qualifications may be a significant obstacle to the labor market integration of less-educated refugees. However, the surge in refugee inflows and, more broadly, the growth of foreign-born populations in many OECD countries may also create unconventional job opportunities that require the diverse skills of refugees. Thus, for instance, public services (e.g., in hospitals, employment services, and other social services) in the European countries most affected by the refugee crisis are in need of cultural mediators that can help understand the needs of new clients and better serve them. Requalifying newly arrived refugees for basic health-care jobs, such as those of health-care assistants, or as preschool teaching assistants might offer more paths to employment. Yet these jobs would still require a minimum level of language proficiency and an understanding of the rules and codes of the host society.

Working as volunteers can only benefit refugees if any risk of exploitation is offset.

E. Employment Matching

All of the measures described above in support of the early and successful labor market integration of beneficiaries of international protection work best if employers are involved in their design and implementation.

Employers are best placed to assess the skills required to fill vacancies. Bridging programs for formal qualification recognition and access to professional practice tend to be more efficient when carried out in the context of supervised employment. Gaps are more swiftly filled on the job than in the classroom, and daily practice in the receiving country’s working environment accelerates the learning of the

¹⁰¹ Author conversation with a representative from the Emilia Romagna regional government at the Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Paris, April 28, 2016. See also Emilia Romagna Regional Government, “Attività di volontariato per i rifugiati, ecco le linee guida,” updated August 26, 2015, www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/notizie/2015/agosto/attivita-di-volontariato-per-i-rifugiati-ecco-le-linee-guida.



language and soft skills, as well as access to social networks.¹⁰² For newly arrived refugees, who often lack formal proof of their qualifications and work experience, internships and apprenticeships offer an important way to prove their skills while getting a foothold in their host country's labor market. In addition, supervised work experience and apprenticeships offer a first salary to newly arrived refugees, and with it, foster self-esteem along with the opportunity to support themselves and their families.

I. Internships and Apprenticeships Sponsored by Private Firms

Over the past two years, the large and fast-growing inflows of migrants seeking protection in Europe have triggered a host of dedicated employment-matching and internship initiatives led by large firms or employers' associations. In Germany, Siemens, in cooperation with the city of Erlangen, launched a program in 2015 offering paid internships at a local branch to asylum seekers with graduate degrees and good German or English proficiency. The program also includes workplace orientation, skills assessment and training, as well as an "anti-rumor campaign"¹⁰³ to combat discriminatory attitudes among staff members. In 2016, the program was rolled out to an additional ten German cities, offering a total of 100 internship places.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in Stuttgart, Porsche offered a special "integration year" (2015–16) featuring a paid apprenticeship as well as language training for 13 beneficiaries of international protection selected in cooperation with the local job center and vocational training schools. Eleven of the 13 beneficiaries will pursue their career at the car manufacturer either in employment or apprenticeship. A second edition of the program will start in November 2016.¹⁰⁵ In the United States, large hospitality firms such as Hilton and Marriott have long offered employment opportunities to resettled refugees.¹⁰⁶

So far, refugee integration measures from multinationals have primarily served corporate social responsibility strategies. On paper, such initiatives have great potential not only to accelerate and improve the labor market integration of beneficiaries of international protection, but also to address labor shortages. But it is unclear whether these programs can be sustained and scaled, or whether they will prove ephemeral. In particular, they are unlikely to be a good fit for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which often struggle to fill unmet vacancies. SMEs face higher resource constraints on workforce training—including for native employees—compared with bigger firms, while at the same time they may expect lower returns in terms of the visibility of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Recruiting migrant workers is rarely an option for such firms, let alone investing in internships and training for refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁰⁷

102 On the added value of supervised work experience as compared with other tools for bridging skills and qualifications gaps, see Maria Vincenza Desiderio, "How Can the EU Step Up Its Action in Facilitating the Process of Recognition of Migrants' Qualifications and Skills?" (discussion paper prepared for the Expert Group on Economic Migration, April 2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=19241&no=3>.

103 Anti-rumor campaigns are often city-level initiatives and aim to dispel anti-immigrant views and fight discrimination through civic engagement by native citizens. In Europe, the city council of Barcelona has been at the forefront of such initiatives. See Ajuntament Barcelona, "BCN Acció Intercultural," accessed September 13, 2016, <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/actualitat-antirumors>; Cities of Migration, "Fighting Fiction with Facts: the BCN Anti-Rumour Campaign," updated September 14, 2011, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/fighting-fiction-with-facts-the-bcn-anti-rumour-campaign/.

104 Siemens AG, "Siemens Introduces Sustainable Program for Integrating Refugees" (press release, September 29, 2015), www.siemens.com/press/en/pressrelease/?press=/en/pressrelease/2015/corporate/pr2015090359coen.htm; Siemens AG, "Successful Integration of Refugees at Siemens" (presentation at the IAVE Forum, Berlin, May 19, 2016), www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Siemens-Forum-Presentation.pdf.

105 See Porsche, "Porsche Integration Programme Creates Prospects for Refugees" (press release, March 9, 2016), www.porsche.com/uk/aboutporsche/pressreleases/pcgb/?lang=none&pool=international-de&id=387421; for preliminary results, see also Porsche, "Integration Year for Refugees a Success" (press release, August 15, 2016), <https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/company/porsche-responsibility-integration-programme-refugees-career-prospects-12805.html>.

106 Som Nath Subedi, "Resettled Refugees Are Not a Burden on the U.S.: Guest Opinion," *The Oregonian*, December 14, 2013, www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/12/resettled_refugees_are_not_a_b.html.

107 For a discussion of the greater obstacles that SMEs face to recruiting immigrant workers as compared with bigger firms, see Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Anke Schuster, eds., *Improving Access to Labour Market Information for Migrants and Employers* (Brussels: International Organization for Migration, Regional Office for EU, EEA, and NATO, 2013), www.labourmigration.eu/research/report/23-improving-access-to-labour-market-information-for-migrants-and-employers.



One solution to these challenges is for SMEs to pool their resources and share the costs of identifying, training, and hiring migrants. In France, for instance, the Employers' Groups for Labor Market Insertion and Qualification (GEIQs) aim to address labor shortages by recruiting disadvantaged people (e.g., unskilled and immigrant youth, and the long-term unemployed). These groups pool a mix of private and public resources that are then used to provide vocational training, mentoring, and apprenticeships to potential employees.¹⁰⁸ More recently, in Germany chambers of industry and crafts have been very active in offering training and matching opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers. These initiatives may benefit affiliated enterprises by reducing the information costs and risks involved in refugee recruitment.

2. Government Support for Employers to Hire and Train Refugees

Along with private initiatives, government support may also help to reduce the difficulties and risks involved when employers recruit vulnerable candidates with limited labor market credentials and unstable legal status.

Support can fall into a number of categories:

- **Subsidized work experience.** Sweden has a long-standing tradition of subsidized employment opportunities that share the costs of hiring disadvantaged job candidates between the employers and the public purse. Refugees can access both “step-in jobs” (for humanitarian or family migrants who have been in the country for fewer than three years) and “new-start jobs” (for the long-term unemployed and newly arrived migrants). In both cases, the employer receives a public subsidy ranging from one- or two-thirds of the gross salary in the case of new-start jobs to as much as 80 percent of the employer’s wage costs for step-in-jobs, which must also be combined with Swedish language classes. While these programs can operate as an important stepping stone and allow newly arrived refugees to get a foothold in the local labor market relatively quickly, the jobs on offer are largely low skilled and the opportunities for career progression are limited. Evaluations of the program’s impact and cost-effectiveness have been mixed.¹⁰⁹
- **Support for employment matching.** In light of increased asylum seeker inflows and demand from employers, the Swedish Migration Agency was recently involved in creating a database of companies interested in offering internship opportunities to asylum seekers, with the aim of matching these opportunities with suitable candidate profiles.¹¹⁰ The new contact points recently established by the German Employment Agency (BA) throughout the country also serve the same goal.¹¹¹
- **Cutting red tape and securing residence status.** Other ways to improve incentives for employers to recruit refugees and asylum seekers include to simplify administrative requirements and/or help employers navigate them, or to facilitate rapid access to secure residence status for asylum seekers with employment potential. The Swedish government recently introduced the possibility of changing the status of rejected asylum seekers with an employment permit. The individuals in question would need to have been regularly employed for at least four months in a job that complies with Swedish collective agreements

108 Opcalia, “GEIQ—Employer Group for Integration and Qualification,” accessed June 9, 2016, www.opcalia.com/qui-sommes-nous/opcalia/branches-adherentes-interprofession/geiq-groupement-employeurs-pour-linsertion-et-la-qualification/.

109 Migrants who have been offered new-start jobs have a higher probability of being in employment three years after arrival, but this effect has not been demonstrated for step-in jobs. In 2012, the Swedish government spent SEK 339 million (39 million euros) on step-in jobs for 6,641 newcomers. The state investment in new-start jobs for migrant newcomers over the same period was SEK 410 million (47,000 euros). See Bevelander and Emilsson, “Case Study Sweden.”

110 Susan Fratzke, MPI policy analyst, conversation with a representative of the Swedish Migration Agency, Malmö, April 11–15, 2016.

111 Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.



(between social partners, such as trade unions and employer representatives) and that pays a monthly gross salary of at least SEK 13,000 (around 1,400 euros), and have a one-year job offer from the same employer for a job meeting the same requirements.¹¹² It is unlikely, however, that countries with less liberal labor migration systems or where social partners have less responsibility in labor market regulation will follow this example.

The uncertain residence status of asylum seekers is a bottleneck that significantly constrains opportunities for early labor market integration. While on-the-job training and apprenticeships offered at the asylum-seeking stage have the greatest potential to accelerate employment transitions once migrants get protected status and unrestricted labor market access, employers have little incentive to offer these programs without guaranteed returns on investment. Beyond corporate social responsibility, it is hard to see the economic rationale for a firm to invest in training asylum seekers who might be obliged to leave the country in the middle of their training or before having a chance to join the workforce. To address this challenge the new German law on integration has provided for the temporary suspension of negative decisions for asylum seekers enrolled in the dual vocational training system. This will also extend beyond the period of the training, granting vocational education and training (VET)-trained asylum seekers the possibility to stay in the country for a further 2.5 years, provided they manage to find a job corresponding to their vocation six months after the end of the training.¹¹³

It is hard to see the economic rationale for a firm to invest in training asylum seekers who might be obliged to leave the country.

Furthermore, in some cases, the length of the training combined with very little earnings may put off asylum seekers and refugees. Thus, in Germany, misaligned interests have emerged between employers willing to invest in training refugees in the three-year dual vocational training system, and refugees who prioritize quickly earning a family-sustaining wage.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in Sweden, new legal provisions that make first permits for beneficiaries of protection temporary may push permit holders to prioritize finding a job quickly (to secure permanent residence) over participating in an internship or the fast-track program.

V. Conclusion

In recent years, several countries have introduced a host of innovative policies to meet the long-term challenge of integrating refugees into the labor market. Yet, despite the significant investments being made, the solutions adopted so far have not always been equal to the challenge. While rigorous analyses of returns on investments in the labor market integration of refugees are still lacking, this report points to several key elements that policymakers might consider when designing labor market integration strategies for refugees:

- ***Crafting a coherent strategy across the migration continuum.*** Effectively tackling the multiple disadvantages that hamper refugees' labor market integration requires a comprehensive set of policy measures in different areas (e.g., integration, education,

¹¹² Migrationsverket, "Asylum Seekers Who Have Got a Job and Want to Apply for a Work Permit," updated March 1, 2016, www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Working-in-Sweden/Employed/If-you-are-in-Sweden/Asylum-seekers-who-have-a-job.html.

¹¹³ For more details, see Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.

¹¹⁴ Rietig, *Integrating Refugees into the German Labor Market*.



housing, employment, and social policies) to be provided coherently and incrementally at the different stages of the journey and settlement process. This can only happen when all services provided are coordinated and embedded in a multidimensional and multistakeholder strategy to support refugee integration.

- **Improving coordination and accountability.** For refugees' reception, assistance, and labor market integration to be jointly addressed as part of a holistic process, all actors and agencies with a stake in the process need to work together and be held mutually accountable for outcomes. At a time when the unprecedented scale of the crisis has overstretched human and financial resources, adding these additional coordination responsibilities may seem impractical. Yet policy coordination is at least as important as the actual design and content of each policy measure to realize the value of initiatives and prevent duplicating or undermining efforts. Similarly, greater coordination is required to ensure that integration initiatives can effectively build upon experience and recent innovations in mainstream education, training, and employment policies, instead of working in siloes. Civil-society actors and local authorities involved in efforts to improve the integration of newly arrived refugees have been calling for the establishment of coordination mechanisms and a consolidated framework of actions for refugee integration.¹¹⁵ In the medium term, economies of scale and more focused efforts—and results—are likely to offset initial investments in setting up coordination mechanisms.
- **Engaging employers at every stage.** Improving the multistakeholder governance of refugee integration is also conditional—crucially—on the enhanced involvement of employers. To achieve this, it is essential that governments acknowledge that employers—in addition to humanitarian migrants—need support throughout the integration process, and provide them with adequate services and incentives.
- **Devising different strategies for different groups.** Early skills assessment, qualifications recognition, and bridging training offers seem to provide an ideal path for streamlining the successful labor market integration of skilled refugees. Yet, for the lesser skilled and more traumatized among them, early integration in the highly competitive labor markets of many receiving countries might not be an option. Alternative pathways could be considered that may involve seminal training and microfinancing for starting up a small business, volunteering, or unconventional employment opportunities. All in all, policymakers should consider—and communicate—that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to refugee integration, and that different subgroups may need a different set of policy measures and different length of support to integrate successfully. Metrics of success would also have to vary depending on the group in question.
- **Investing more in evaluation.** Governments should also step up efforts to gather concrete evidence on the socioeconomic outcomes of their integration investments in each specific policy area. Policymaking in this area has not consistently relied on evidence of what works and what does not; this problem has been exacerbated by fast-paced developments in refugee reception. As experience in implementing refugee integration programs increases, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should become routine and evidence should feed more consistently into policymaking. This latter process would also require the definition of metrics to evaluate returns on investments in the labor market integration of refugees. Such evaluation should not be restricted to employment outcomes but also take into account the impact of measures on broader areas of interest such as, notably, social cohesion.

115 Luca Lixi, *A Long-Term Approach to Sustainable Labour Migration and Successful Integration—The Voice of Civil Society* (Brussels: European Migration Forum, 2016), www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/soc-20160406-07-eurmigrforum-summary-report_en.pdf.



- **Supporting and scaling what works.** Alongside growing investments in government-funded programs, the media hype surrounding the unfolding refugee crisis has been accompanied by considerable civil-society activity and the emergence of many promising initiatives. Although most of this has been small in scale, this bottom-up trend is a key driver of successful refugee integration, since civil society can help mobilize public support. But these initiatives need support to be sustained over time, and to ensure their fit as part of a coherent package of services—from the most tailored and specific to mainstream initiatives—available in each country and locality to improve refugee labor market integration pathways. Apace with publicly funded programs, policymakers should also assess the outcomes of civil-society-led initiatives and contribute to better organizing, coordinating, and scaling up those shown to have positive results.
- **Winning public confidence.** A number of European countries have seen enthusiastic public participation in refugee reception and integration support, but are simultaneously witnessing concerns that public expenditure, corporate social responsibility, and NGO activities are increasingly being channeled to refugees. Effective communication about who is in need of protection, what measures governments are taking to tackle this challenge, and the medium- to long-term benefits anticipated for the general population is essential to stimulate a balanced public debate and generate public support for these measures, particularly in countries with strained labor markets. Evaluation of policy investments is the stepping-stone to such a communications strategy.

Achieving successful refugee labor market integration is a resource-intensive, long-term endeavor for receiving countries and localities. Policymakers have a key role to play in maintaining momentum and ensuring that recent innovations are patiently and pragmatically channeled into concrete achievements. Ultimately, demonstrating the successful integration of humanitarian migrants is crucial for governments to attain public support for relevant policies, while also fostering social cohesion.



Appendix

Table A-1. Employment Rate of Immigrants (ages 15 to 64) in Selected European Countries, by Reason for Migration, 2014

Country	Family Reasons	Education Reasons	Work, Job Found before Migrating	Work, No Job Found before Migrating	International Protection or Asylum
Austria	63.4	55.2	81.6	66.4	60.2
Belgium	46.3	55.6	86.8	67.1	47.1
Finland	62.5	73.7	85.9	80.2	43.4
France	52.4	69.8	73.1	72.7	58.4
Germany	68.5	60.3	87.7	76.0	57.6
Italy	42.5	60.9	78.8	74.5	61.3
Norway	65.1	68.2	86.0	74.6	56.4
Portugal	66.7	71.2	79.7	69.4	53.0
Spain	40.8	60.8	64.8	63.2	40.6
Sweden	64.2	78.9	88.5	64.4	58.2
Switzerland	69.0	74.3	89.9	82.1	78.1
United Kingdom	58.8	65.9	92.8	85.9	51.8
Average	58.4	66.2	83.0	73.0	55.5

Source: Eurostat, "Employment Rate of First Generation of Immigrants by Sex, Age, Years of Residence and Reason for Migration [lfso_14/1empr]," updated April 6, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/lfso_1411empr.



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