



Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

EEPO Ad Hoc Request

European Commission

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European Employment Policy Observatory Synthesis

Challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in
successfully integrating into the labour market

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Executive summary

This report describes some of the challenges that asylum seekers and refugees face in integrating into the labour market in the EU-28, Norway and Turkey. The information is based principally on information collected from these 30 countries as part of the European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO) ad-hoc request on *Labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees*.

EU legislation provides for refugees – understood as all beneficiaries of international protection¹ - to have full access, and for asylum seekers to have some access, to the labour market. It also requires Member States to offer integration support to refugees. However, conditions of access for asylum seekers – and integration support provided to asylum seekers and refugees – vary between Member States. Furthermore, EU legislation on asylum does not apply in Denmark, Ireland, Norway, the UK and Turkey. Legislation also cannot prevent all of the practical obstacles affecting both refugees and asylum seekers, which include administrative, institutional, economic, education-related and societal/cultural challenges.

In all 30 countries, except Turkey, refugees are granted by either EU and/or national law the same access to the labour market as nationals and EU citizens. Immediate access to the labour market is granted to asylum seekers in only a few countries and in others, labour market access only happens after a certain period of time elapses and if a decision on the asylum seeker's application has not been reached. Administrative delays in processing work permits can also delay access to the labour market in practice.

In most countries asylum seekers have restricted access or – in Ireland, Lithuania and Turkey – no access at all. The following legal restrictions can apply to asylum seekers: limitations on the number of hours/months they can work (Netherlands, Austria), restrictions on eligible occupations (Cyprus, Hungary, Austria), age-specific restrictions (Austria), thresholds on wages earned (Denmark, Cyprus, Netherlands) and requirement to undergo a labour market test (Germany, France, Luxembourg, Hungary and Austria).

Several administrative challenges affect both refugees and asylum seekers. First, the length of time it can take for the asylum procedure to be finalised and for asylum seekers to be given access to the labour market (either as refugees or as permitted asylum seekers) creates a gap in employment history that has a negative impact on employability. Specifically, asylum seekers, who in most countries have to obtain certain administrative documents (work permits, employment licences, etc.), generate an 'administrative burden' when seeking employment, which deters some employers from hiring them.

Institutional support for the labour market integration of both refugees and – especially – asylum seekers is insufficient in several Member States. For example, in the Czech Republic, Denmark and Hungary, asylum seekers cannot access public employment services (PES), and in other countries (Estonia, Slovakia), PES are not effectively integrated into the integration services of other authorities or providers, which makes the integration support that PES can provide less effective. A lack of coordination between integration agencies was highlighted as a problem in several other countries.

Economic factors, such as high national unemployment rates and the availability of work within the shadow economy, also hamper refugees and asylum seekers in accessing the legal labour market. Reporting countries underlined that the legal/administrative obstacles to legal work described above and the negative attitudes of some employers drive refugees and asylum seekers into the shadow economy, where they can be at risk of exploitation and abuse.

Refugees and asylum seekers can be highly disadvantaged in terms of accessing work as a result of insufficient language skills, insufficient qualifications/education and problems

¹ Refugees under the Geneva convention but also beneficiaries of subsidiary protection

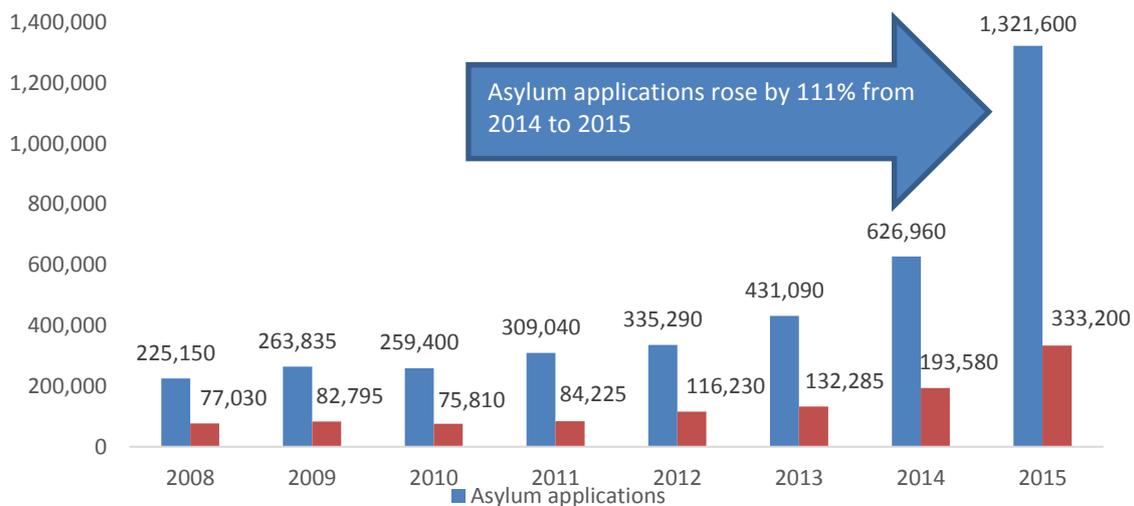
with officially recognising what their qualifications/skills equate to in the host country. In particular, there is an issue around the recognition of the qualifications of migrants and the transferability of their qualifications and skills. To address the linguistic issue, many countries offer language courses to support integration, but these are often not available to asylum seekers. Other types of integration support may also be missing, e.g. VET and additional courses for upskilling for those migrants with low levels of educational attainment. Furthermore, refugees and asylum seekers have particular needs in terms of style of teaching (sensitivity to cultural background and to trauma that may have been experienced) and flexibility in course times (e.g. childcare availability to enable active participation in integration courses), as well as in terms of the level of education attained. These needs are not always met through the language and other training courses available.

1. Introduction

The number of persons seeking international protection in the EU has risen significantly in the last three years. Naturally, the number of applicants being granted protection has also risen leading to a rise in both the number of asylum seekers and refugees resident in the EU (see Figure 1.1 below).

Figure 1.1 below demonstrates overall trends in the number of asylum seekers arriving in the EU and the number of applicants granted international protection over the same time period.

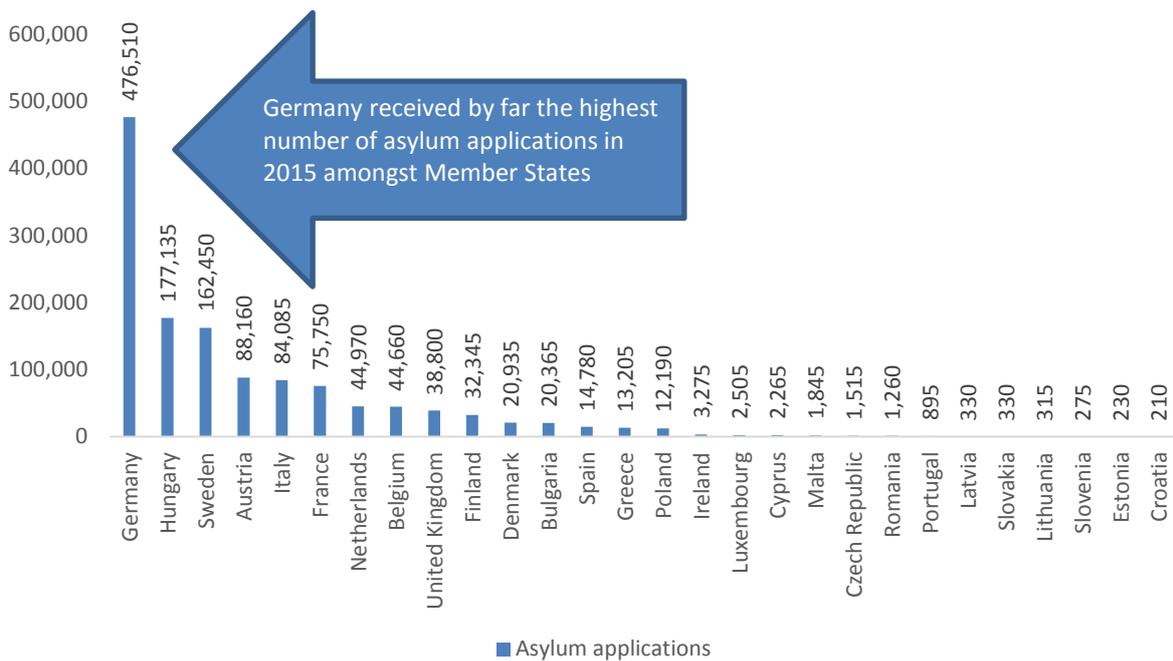
Figure 1.1 Trends in asylum applications lodged and positive decisions on international protection granted in EU28 2008-2015



Source: Eurostat databases *migr_asyappctza* and *migr_asydcfst* / *migr_asydcfina* combined

Figure 1.2 illustrates the number of asylum seekers registering in EU Member States in 2015. It demonstrates that some Member States (e.g. Germany, Hungary and Sweden) have much higher numbers of asylum seekers than others (e.g. Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia).

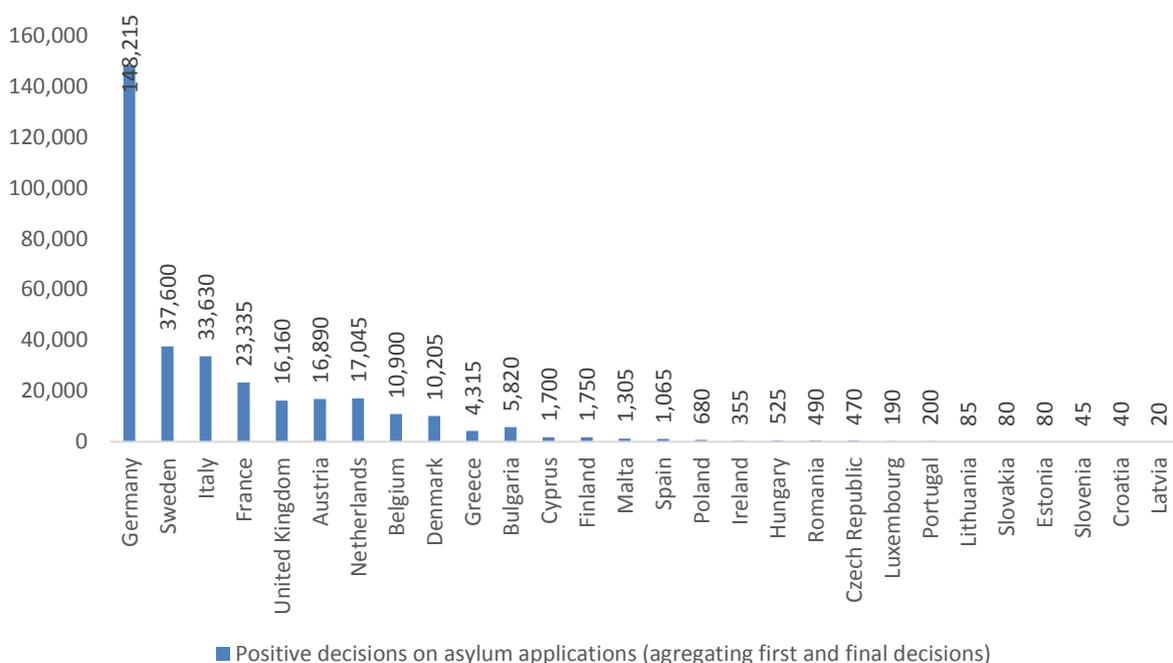
Figure 1.2 Asylum applications lodged in EU Member States in 2015



Source: Eurostat database migr_asydcfina

Figure 1.3 shows the number of positive international protection decisions made in 2015. It suggests that the Member States with the highest number of asylum applications are not always the ones with the highest number of refugees, since some Member States accept higher numbers of refugees than others and asylum applicants in some countries may be more likely to withdraw their initial applications (e.g. in Hungary).

Figure 1.3 Number of positive international protection decisions made in 2015



Source: Eurostat database migr_asydcfsta / migr_asydcfina combined

Labour market participation is considered by many as one of the most important factors supporting the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into host societies. In order to facilitate effective labour market access for asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to better understand the different approaches applied at national level as well as identifying and sharing good practices and successful measures across Europe.

The purpose of this synthesis was to identify the main challenges that asylum seekers and refugees face in terms of a successful integration into the labour market across EU Member States, as well as Norway and Turkey. This synthesis report draws on the information that EEPO country experts provided to an ad hoc request on the topic of the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The report specifically summarises the responses to the following question: *'What are the concrete obstacles/challenges faced by (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees in successfully integrating into the labour market?'* Of the 30 countries investigated, experts were able to identify several challenges. These are grouped into challenges related to legal barriers and administrative challenges, institutional and resourcing challenges, economic/labour market challenges, challenges due to either a lack of necessary skills and qualifications or due to issues with the recognition of qualifications, as well as social challenges faced by the asylum seekers and refugees in their integration into the host societies.

The report is structured according to the main challenges identified by the country experts. Overall, similar issues were identified by the experts, though the significance of these identified challenges may vary across countries.

The challenges to labour market integration identified within the Member States as well as in Norway and Turkey are similar for asylum seekers and refugees. These include educational and societal/cultural challenges, as well as economic challenges. Both asylum seekers and refugees face similar problems in integrating into the labour market, though for asylum seekers access to the labour market is also legally restricted in most Member States.

The main challenges were as follows:

- limited or restricted access to the labour market due to **legal** and **administrative barriers**,
- access being hampered due to a lack of **institutional support** or **poor resourcing** of available support,
- access to the labour market being further limited by low labour market demand (as a result of high unemployment in the countries or a low demand for low-skilled labour), which is a type of **economic/labour market challenge**,
- a lack of language skills, low level of education as well as issues to do with the recognition of existing qualifications, as part of **qualification/education challenges**,
- insufficient integration programmes, discrimination and tough cultural adjustment, as part of **social challenges**.

In some countries, other challenges, mainly relating to difficulties in meeting basic needs such as health or housing, were also identified. Costs associated with attending language training, which may include tuition but also indirect costs such as travel and childcare, can be a deterrent to taking part². Furthermore, 'sequencing' issues, such as receiving job-search support before the individual has sufficient language skills and / or without translation, can be another problem. It is also worth mentioning that the challenges

² European Migration Network (2016), Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices (forthcoming).

reported in this section are by no means exhaustive – in terms of the different country-specific challenges faced – but rather aim to provide an overview of the most pressing shared challenges across Member States.

The following section provides an overview of EU legislation on access to employment for refugees and asylum seekers. In the remainder of this report, the five sets of challenges are discussed in detail. The final section provides conclusions on the findings.

1.1 Overview of EU legislation on access to the labour market for asylum seekers and refugees

In accordance with EU legislation³, EU Member States are required to ensure access to the labour market for persons with refugee status and – in most Member States – also to persons with subsidiary protection status⁴. This study considers persons with refugee status and those with subsidiary protection status together under the umbrella term ‘refugee’. The EU asylum acquis also requires signatory Member States to facilitate the integration of refugees into society⁵ by introducing integration programmes⁶. Though EU legislation does not specify the format and content of these programmes, it suggests that they should include ‘where appropriate, language training and the provision of information concerning individual rights and obligations relating to their protection status in the Member State concerned’⁷.

Under EU legislation, most Member States⁸ should also provide access to the labour market to asylum seekers no later than nine months from the date when the application for international protection was lodged, if a first instance decision by the competent authority has not been taken and the delay cannot be attributed to the applicant⁹. However, Member States can decide on the conditions of access (for instance priority can be given to Union and EEA citizens and legally resident third-country nationals) though the Directive mentions that it should be ‘effective access’. Moreover, the EU acquis does not provide that Member States should support the labour market – nor any other type of – integration before they are granted status. As a result, Member States are not required to offer

³ Article 26 of the recast Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU) and Article 26 of the original Qualification Directive (2004/ 83/EC) on ‘Access to employment’.

⁴ Denmark is not party to the original Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC nor the recast Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU and is therefore not subject to the provisions of these directives on access to the labour market and integration of refugees. Ireland and the United Kingdom are party to Directive 2004/83/EC, but not to Directive 2011/95/EU, meaning that the provisions of the 2004 Directive still apply to the UK and Ireland, but not to other Member States signed up to the recast Directive.

⁵ Article 34 of the recast Qualification Directive and Article 33 of the original Qualification Directive on ‘Access to integration facilities’.

⁶ Under Article 33 of the original Qualification Directive, integration programmes needed to be introduced only ‘under the same conditions and restrictions as those provided for other third country nationals legally resident in their territories’, but under Article 34 of the recast Directive, the programmes need to be those which Member States ‘consider to be appropriate so as to take into account the specific needs of beneficiaries of refugee status or of subsidiary protection status, or create pre-conditions which guarantee access to such programmes’.

⁷ See Recital 47 of the recast Qualification Directive.

⁸ Ireland and Denmark are not party to the Reception Directive and therefore not bound by this provision. The United Kingdom is a signatory to the original Reception Directive (2003/9/EC) and is therefore required to ‘determine a period of time, starting from the date on which an application for asylum was lodged, during which an applicant shall not have access to the labour market’. However, if a first instance decision has not been taken within one year of the presentation of an application for asylum and this delay cannot be attributed to the applicant, the UK, as a signatory to the original Reception Directive, is required to decide the conditions for granting the applicant access to the labour market.

⁹ See Article 15 of the recast Reception Directive (2013/33/EU).

language training, education or any other kind of support that might facilitate labour market integration for asylum seekers eligible to enter the labour market.

1.2 Legal and administrative challenges

1.2.1 Legal challenges

In accordance with the EU asylum acquis and national legislation, **asylum seekers and refugees have different legal status in all Member States**. In most Member States, this means that the two are subject to different rules on entry to the labour market. In accordance with the Qualification Directive¹⁰, Member States are obliged to authorise the unrestricted labour market access for refugees in accordance with rules generally applicable for all citizens, including national and EU citizens.

Distinct rules apply to asylum seekers. In **Norway**, asylum seekers are legally entitled to access the labour market after the asylum interview has been conducted and if they can prove their identity with a passport or national identity card. In Denmark, similarly to most Member States, asylum seekers are restricted from accessing the labour market for six months. In **Ireland**, asylum seekers are not allowed to access the labour market and in **Turkey** a similar situation applies, though the situation is somewhat complicated, as explained in the box below.

Box 1.1 The status of refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey and their subsequent access to the labour market

Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention but with a 'geographical exclusion' clause meaning that only those refugees coming from countries that are members of the Council of Europe may be identified as Convention refugees. Those seeking asylum from other countries may be granted a temporary protection status (conditional refugee status, humanitarian residence permit, or temporary protection), but this ultimately means that while the beneficiary may stay temporarily in Turkey, they must 'ultimately find a long-term solution outside Turkey [and] they do not have the ability to integrate into Turkish society'¹¹.

Given the recent increase in Syrian refugees arriving in Turkey, the Government introduced in February 2016 regulations regarding Syrian refugees' employment. This allows Syrians to work in the country after a period of six months, with temporary identification cards. They are restricted to working in the province that has issued their identification and no enterprise may have more than 10 % of its staff composed of Syrians, except when a job position has remained open for four weeks after its official registration with PES (in which case, the 'Syrian employment quota' will not apply). Provincial governors are responsible for authorising all identifications, except those for highly qualified roles, such as health workers or teachers, for which respective ministries will provide the permits. There are no quotas for Syrians employed in 'public-benefit associations' and in tax-exempt foundations who employ Syrians for humanitarian aid activities to other refugees.

1.2.1.1 Asylum seekers

As stated above, under EU legislation Member States have the possibility to regulate the timing of access to the labour market for asylum seekers, unless they have waited nine months or longer (12 months in the UK) for a decision on their application (these EU provisions do not apply to Denmark or Ireland, nor to Norway and Turkey). Table 1.1 provides a typology of Member States according to the time period they set from the

¹⁰ See Article 26 of the Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU)

¹¹ Internet: <http://www.refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/learn-more/turkey-asylum-basics/>

lodging of the asylum application to granting the asylum seeker access to the labour market.

Table 1.1 Typology of national restrictions on the time period before asylum seekers can access the labour market

Time period from lodging the application to when applicant can access the labour market ⁽¹²⁾	Countries in which this applies
No time restriction applies/from the moment of lodging the application	Greece ¹³ , Norway, Portugal, Sweden ¹⁴
2 months	Italy ¹⁵
3 months	Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania
4 months	Belgium
6 months	Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Luxembourg ¹⁶ , Netherlands, Poland, Finland ¹⁷
9 months	France, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Malta ¹⁸ , Slovenia, Slovakia
12 months	United Kingdom
Asylum seekers have no access to labour market	Ireland ¹⁹ , Lithuania ²⁰

While EU legislation requires Member States to open up the labour market to asylum seekers after a set period of time, it does not provide that the access should be 'full'.

¹² Before obtaining a decision on their application and only if they are not considered responsible for the delay in the decision.

¹³ Presidential Decree 220/2007 "on the transposition into the Greek legislation of Council Directive 2003/9/EC from January 27, 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers" Gov. Gazette 251/A/13-11-2007

¹⁴ Law on Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others 1994:137

¹⁵ Legislative Decree 142/2015 "Implementation of Directive 2013/33/EU on minimum standards for the reception of asylum applicants and the Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for the recognition and revocation of the status of international protection."

¹⁶ Loi du 18 décembre 2015 1 relative à la protection internationale et à la protection temporaire

¹⁷ In Finland, asylum seekers who have a travel document entitling them to international travel can work after three months.

¹⁸ Reception of Asylum-seekers (Minimum Standards) Regulations, Legal Notice 320 of 2005

¹⁹ The Irish Working Group on the Protection Process recommended in 2015 that 'provision for access to the labour market for protection applicants who are awaiting a first instance decision for nine months or more, and who have cooperated with the protection process (under the relevant statutory provisions), should be included in the forthcoming International Protection Bill and should be commenced when the single procedure is operating efficiently.'

²⁰ The situation is unclear in Lithuania. National legislation states that asylum seekers are not entitled to work or leave the country during the period of examination of their applications for asylum. Applications for asylum should, by the same national law, be examined within three months, and in exceptional cases the period can be extended to six months. However, there is no information on what happens if the examination period takes longer than six months.

Consequently, some Member States apply restrictions on the type of work that asylum seekers can undertake and the conditions under which they can work. The restrictions are summarised below.

- **Restrictions on number of hours/months worked:** In the Netherlands, asylum seekers can work for a maximum of 24 weeks a year. Similarly, in Austria asylum seekers can work for a maximum of 6 months per year²¹.
- **Restrictions on occupations:** In Austria, asylum seekers are restricted de facto to working in seasonal occupations such as agriculture and tourism. In **Hungary**, asylum seekers are prohibited from working in refugee camps, and in **Cyprus** asylum seekers may work only in certain unskilled areas (e.g. agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, manufacturing, waste management, wholesale trade and repairs).
- **Restrictions in terms of accessing PES services:** Asylum seekers may not access PES support in Denmark, the Czech Republic and Hungary, even if/once they are permitted to work.
- **Labour market tests:** Some countries (including Germany²², France²³, Luxembourg, Hungary²⁴ and Austria)) subject asylum seekers to labour market tests, which means that the availability and suitability of national or EU citizens and beneficiaries of international protection will be checked before the asylum seeker is allowed to take up the advertised job.
- **Discretion/responsibility for applying for licences/permits lies with the employer:** While this is not a legal restriction in itself, the fact that employers are legally required to apply for the work permit for the asylum seeker often generates practical obstacles. For example, Malta issues 'employment licences' for asylum seekers, the duration of which varies from three months for asylum seekers whose application is initially rejected to six months for those whose application is still pending. In practice, employers are deterred from applying for the permits because of their short-term nature and the administrative burden associated with the application (see also Sections 1.2.2 and 1.4.1). In Cyprus, employers must present a contract of employment to a District Labour Office (i.e. PES office) and have it approved.

1.2.1.2 Refugees

In all of the analysed countries, **refugees have legally unrestricted access to the labour market as well as employment-related support** such as vocational training as set out by the Qualification Directive²⁵. Although legally these groups do not face obstacles in terms of integrating into the labour market, they face other challenges, such as the administrative issues described below (Section 1.2.2).

²¹ See the 'Bartenstein-Decree' issued in 2004.

²² For a period of 15 months after the asylum seeker was granted access to the labour market, a 'priority review' is carried out by the job centre examining whether there is another job seeker qualified for the offered position, who is e.g. a German citizen or a foreigner with a secure residence permit.

²³ European Migration Network, Ad-Hoc Query on access to the labour market for asylum seekers, Requested by AT EMN NCP on 23rd January 2015, Compilation produced on 3rd June 2015. Internet:

http://emn.ypes.gr/images/docs/EMN_QUERIES/EMN_QUERIES_2015_TILL_7_2015/654_emn_ahq_access_to_the_labour_market_for_asylum_seekers_wider_dissemination.pdf

²⁴ See: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/hungary/reception-conditions/employment-education/access-labour-market>

²⁵ See Article 26.2 and 26.3 of the Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU)

1.2.2 Administrative issues

The administrative issue that most negatively impacts on the labour market integration prospects of refugees is the **length of the asylum procedure**. In some countries (e.g. **Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovakia, the United Kingdom**), processing the asylum applications takes several months. The inability to access employment for several months creates a gap in the employment history of asylum seekers, with negative effects on their prospects when they seek 'normal' work. It can also have a psychological (as well as a reputational) impact on refugees, with the lack of employment (and in some cases subsequent poor societal integration) making them less active or mobile in seeking employment, even once they are legally able to. In countries such as **Austria**, which were strongly affected by the inflow of asylum seekers and refugees in 2015, the average duration of the asylum procedures increased, from four months in 2014 to six months in 2015²⁶.

The length of time taken to process documents legally required for work also creates a major obstacle to labour market access in several countries (e.g. Italy, Luxembourg, Malta). For example, in Italy, although asylum seekers are entitled to register with the PES, in practice they face difficulties in obtaining a residence permit that allows them to work, due to long and complex administrative procedures in obtaining this permit. In **Malta**, recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (SP) and beneficiaries of temporary humanitarian protection (THP) are entitled to access the labour market, both as employees and self-employed workers. However, in order to do so, such persons require an employment licence issued by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). The maximum duration of the employment licence is 12 months and is renewable. In such cases, the person is granted an employment licence in their own name. Obstacles in this area include the application costs: a new application costs EUR 58 while annual renewal costs EUR 34.

In **Austria**, the new Asylum Act (introduced in January 2016) risks posing difficulties for the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees, because it states that asylum will be granted only for three years, after which it will have to be approved again. Apart from an increased administrative burden for asylum authorities, temporary asylum status could weaken refugees' position in the labour market, as it might deter employers from providing long-term employment due to the uncertainty of their residence. For more on the effects of temporary residence status on employers, see Section 1.7.7.

In rare cases, employers may be uncertain about the employment rights of refugees and the beneficiaries of 'subsidiary protection'. For instance, in **Portugal**, the format and text of the residence permit issued by the Foreigners and Frontiers Service (SEF) frequently raises doubts about whether this includes a work permit. In view of this uncertainty, employers might give preference to other candidates whose status does not raise doubts. In terms of access to social services, in most countries the unemployment insurance system is based on contributions, leaving asylum seekers and refugees who are looking for their first job with no financial support. Hence, they first need to be in employment, before being eligible for unemployment benefits.

1.3 Institutional challenges

The **lack of institutional support** for labour market integration in the form of **insufficient integration programmes**, which are often **fragmented within countries** (i.e. different regions have different programmes, such as in **Belgium**), poses challenges for asylum seekers and refugees in terms of their labour market integration. Other countries such as the **Czech Republic** and **Slovenia** reported issues in relation to **project funding** as well as a lack **sustainability of EU-funded projects** for refugees. In

²⁶ According to the Ministry of the Interior, cited in Internet: derstandard.at/2000028941068/Das-oesterreichische-Problem-mit-der-Asylstatistik

Slovenia, certain integration activities are reliant on EU and project-specific funding, which impacts negatively on the sustainability and continuity of activities. However, some Slovenian pilot projects are planned to become mainstreamed.

Challenges in relation to support provided by PES were mentioned in several countries. A lack of resources within the PES has a negative effect on their work with refugees. Examples in several countries show the need to better integrate PES measures with other integration programmes such as language courses. Specifically, in **Italy**, the critical issue that remains is the shortage of integration programmes targeted at both asylum seekers and refugees: even though in theory asylum seekers and refugees can access **labour market integration measures** such as vocational education and training (VET), language training and civics, in practice these are often not available. In **Slovakia**, the role of PES is limited and arguments for a vital role in activating the target groups are made. Although asylum holders and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have in principle equal access to ALMPs as Slovak or other EU Member States nationals, in reality, only a small number of persons with granted international protection register with PES and make use of the activation measures. Thus, the PES could support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees by means of existing active labour market policies (ALMPs) and also through professional information and counselling services, and possibly through involvement in the provision of integration allowances. In **Hungary**, the PES is not prepared to deal with the specificities of refugees; there is no targeted programme for refugees, while counselling services and training are offered in Hungarian. In **Estonia**, the combination of PES measures with other integration programmes is emphasised. The current measures seem uncoordinated, and it is unclear whether there is a systematic sequencing of measures to avoid unnecessary duplication of measures introduced by different bodies. In **Finland**, there is a lack of personnel resources in the PES and emphasis on the self- / e-services.

Other institutional challenges affect the practical access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market. This includes **a lack of staff in the various government agencies**. For example, in **Slovakia**, social service NGOs contracted by the Migration Office are understaffed to provide targeted and individualised services. In addition to financing issues, this is also partly because social workers and other professionals involved are burdened with excessive administrative activities, including project administration and regular weekly reporting to the Migration Office.

Challenges also include a lack of cooperation/coordination between institutions within countries. For example, in **Luxembourg**, problems with the length and complexity of the administrative procedure are reportedly due in part to the lack of staff dealing with work permits in the government agencies. In **Sweden**, there are promising efforts to coordinate the various interventions at different levels and between different authorities: the few evaluations performed suggest that these measures have had a beneficial impact on the labour market integration of migrants experiencing difficulties in getting a foothold in the Swedish labour market.

Besides challenges due to a lack of institutional support, **a lack of knowledge of the host society, culture and labour market can create an obstacle to the labour market**. Eight countries (Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia) note such a challenge. For example, in **Cyprus** a key obstacle to labour market integration is said to be differences between the cultural and social norms of newcomers and those prevailing in Cyprus. New arrivals from different cultural, social and religious backgrounds may experience difficulties in adaptation that will make labour market entry more challenging. In **Malta**, given the cultural differences and the challenges they present, one of the recommendations put forward by the Aditus Foundation and the UNHCR Office in Malta (2013), following research with refugees, is the provision of comprehensive information on life in Malta, including general information on the Maltese lifestyle as well as information pertaining to cultural norms and practices. In the **Netherlands**, NGOs assist refugees in making them aware of cultural differences. Lack of knowledge of the training system and the functioning of the labour market is a significant

issue in Germany, Norway and Slovenia²⁷. A lack of knowledge of the host society, culture and labour market is a reason why comprehensive and accessible civics course for new refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants is important. Such courses have been shown to be lacking in some countries.

1.4 Economic and labour market challenges

1.4.1 Restrictions on fields and occupations for asylum seekers

As discussed in Section 1.3.1, in some countries (i.e. Cyprus, Hungary, Austria) asylum seekers with legal access to work are restricted in the fields or occupations in which they can participate. In addition, in **France**, some jobs in the civil service are restricted to French nationals and others require a French diploma²⁸.

There is a negative impact of short-term or unclear work permits on the employability of asylum seekers. In some countries (Spain, Luxembourg, Malta, Austria), the unclear or limited duration of asylum seekers' access to employment can also serve as a disincentive for employers to take them on. In **Luxembourg**, employers can be hesitant to work with asylum seekers to support their applications for temporary work permits ('AOT permits'), because the results from the investment are not guaranteed so long as the status of the asylum seekers is unclear. If rejected by the government, the asylum seeker would have to quit work immediately after six months. In **Spain**, until asylum seekers' applications are formalised and accepted, asylum seekers are provided with provisional identification (known as the 'red card'), which entitles them to work legally. However, this expires every three to six months, which reduces the incentives for employers to hire these people as many perceive this permit as temporary and uncertain²⁹. This is a similar situation to Malta's employment licences for asylum seekers (see Section 1.2.1.1). More generally, in **Slovenia** and the **United Kingdom** – countries where asylum seekers cannot work while their application is pending – for those who are later recognised as refugees, this period of inactivity can lead to integration challenges (see also Section 1.2.2 – Administrative issues). In the UK, it is reported that this earlier period of inactivity may be viewed negatively by employers when recognised refugees later come to apply for work; in Slovenia, there are cases when the authorities did not process asylum applications within the statutory period of six months, leaving asylum seekers pending and unable to spend this time productively.

1.4.2 Intense competition and impacts of the economic crisis

While it is common for refugees to have unrestricted legal access to the labour market (see Section 1.2.1 above – Legal Challenges), in practice they may face high competition in accessing work. The impacts of the wider economic crisis – in particular, the low levels of labour demand and high levels of unemployment among resident nationals – have played a role in increasing the competition and difficulties for refugees in integrating into the labour market (and for asylum seekers when permitted to work). This was noted by several countries, including Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Finland. For instance, in **Greece**, many of the roles that would have been traditionally filled by low-skilled entrants from other countries were lost, as they were in the sectors most badly hit by the crisis (notably construction, transport and retail). Greek families are also less likely to employ domestic and care workers in the context of the crisis – jobs traditionally taken on by foreign women. In **Bulgaria**, the weak inflow of investment has reduced forecasts for labour demand, in both the short and medium term. This intense

²⁷ Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices, European Migration Network – Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming).

²⁸ However, temporary jobs in the civil service are open to foreigners.

²⁹ CEAR. *The refugees in Spain and Europe 2015 report*.

degree of competition for work can mean that employers are more prone to offer refugees temporary 'trial' contracts (as occurs in **Cyprus**) or low-paying jobs with poor working conditions (**Lithuania** and **Poland**). Though a slightly distinct situation, the limited number of low-skilled jobs in **Norway** can also be an obstacle to the employment of many refugees.

The economic context in some countries makes it especially hard for migrants with low-level qualifications to find employment. In **Spain**, for example, unemployment is high (19.9 %) among Spanish nationals, and even higher among immigrants, at 28.4 % (employment rates for the fourth quarter of 2015)³⁰. In **Poland**, too, the ongoing relatively high general unemployment rate is most significant for people with low or no qualifications (both nationals and migrants).

In **Austria**, asylum seekers aged up to 25 may, following a labour market test, apply for apprenticeships in occupations with shortages, such as cutter, roofer or power engineer. However, given that in reality very few vacancies for apprenticeships exist in these occupations, this development is unlikely to improve the situation of young asylum seekers in the labour market in practice.

1.4.3 Exploitation and undeclared work

Reporting countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Malta and Turkey) underlined that the legal/administrative obstacles to legal work (described above) and the negative attitudes of some employers can drive refugees and asylum seekers into the shadow economy, where they can be at risk of exploitation and abuse. In the **Czech Republic**, mainly due to asylum seekers' limited language skills and limited information about job opportunities, it is said to be 'typical' for them to enter the shadow economy while their application is being processed. In **Turkey**, Syrian refugees are primarily engaged in low-paid and unregistered agricultural work, having replaced the unskilled local workers at lower wages. In **Malta**, asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse; issues highlighted include low wages, unpaid wages, long working hours, irregular work, unsafe working conditions and employment in the shadow economy. In **Greece**, the difficult labour market situation of asylum seekers is aggravated in the current context of financial crisis in the country. As a consequence, asylum seekers may resort to working in the shadow economy, which in turn subjects them to further poverty and vulnerability.

1.5 Education/qualification challenges

In order to access the labour market, relevant skills and competences are essential. Many refugees and asylum seekers have **skills gaps** – including of course language skills – which present a challenge to their smooth integration into the labour market. For those refugees and asylum seekers with relevant skills, competences and even qualifications, these may not be (formally or *de facto*) recognised in the country they have arrived in. The challenges associated with the education, training and qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers are discussed in the following section.

1.5.1 Limitations on education/training for asylum seekers

With specific reference to asylum seekers, it is worth noting that access to education and training, skills profiling and recognition of existing qualifications is likely to be limited in most countries (see Section 1.2.1). Efforts to support labour market integration usually do not commence until asylum is granted and this process can last up to three years in some countries³¹. This in itself presents a challenge as it can lead to loss of skills and

³⁰ Spanish Institute of Statistics (INE), Labour Force Survey.

³¹ According to the Asylum Integration Database (AIDA): www.asylumineurope.org

demotivation, as well as 'gaps' in the CVs of the individuals concerned, which can be detrimental to the process of applying for jobs.

However, in some countries there are some measures to support asylum seekers. For instance, in **Belgium**, the reception centres for asylum seekers organise different training sessions such as language and computer lessons. Language training is also offered to asylum seekers³² in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany³³, Greece, Spain, Estonia, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Turkey³⁴. **Sweden's** Migration Agency is responsible for an initial mapping of the occupational and educational background as well as employment history of the asylum seeker/refugee, and this commences during the asylum period. A more comprehensive mapping is carried out later by the PES.

1.5.2 Language skills

The language barrier faced by refugees and asylum seekers is cited as one of the greatest challenges to labour market integration in the majority of countries concerned. A strong working knowledge of the language of the country acts as a stepping stone to future employment. For those with a good command of the language in question, it may also help towards improved job opportunities and potential for higher earnings³⁵.

Furthermore, faced with a language barrier, refugees and asylum seekers are unable to fully navigate and access further information, services and training opportunities that may be available to support them to move into the labour market. For instance, in **Bulgaria**, refugees are required to have an understanding of the Bulgarian language in order to have access to mediation and other services at the Labour Offices. In **Germany**, the Federal Labour Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA) can place asylum seekers and refugees in apprenticeship schemes, if the person is suited (good language skills are necessary, otherwise the counsellor may consider that the person is not ready to place³⁶).

Many countries offer support to acquire language competences. This support varies in terms of the level of competence that can be acquired and the availability of places. The level of language that can be acquired through the training is considered to be insufficient for labour market integration in **Spain, France and Slovakia**.

Furthermore, language courses in some Member States (e.g. Germany, France, Slovenia) are often made available only to permanent residents or persons with likely prospects of staying in the country, which would include refugees, but may exclude some asylum seekers³⁷. The delay in providing language training is an issue in **France and Slovenia**. In Slovenia, only when receiving refugee status does a person have the option of joining an

³² List based on information provided in the EEPO country articles and also on OECD, 2016, Making Integration Work, Refugees and others in need of protection. Internet: <http://www.oecd.org/migration/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants-9789264251236-en.htm>

³³ Language training is only provided in Germany to asylum seekers who are likely to remain in the country

³⁴ Conditional on holding an International Protection Applicant Identity document with identification number

³⁵ Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., *Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices in Ireland*, European Migration Network – Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming).

³⁶ Ulrike Büschel, Volker Daumann, Martin Dietz, Elke Dony, Barbara Knapp, Karsten Strien: Abschlussbericht Modellprojekt Early Intervention – Frühzeitige Arbeitsmarktintegration von Asylbewerbern und Asylbewerberinnen Ergebnisse der qualitativen Begleitforschung durch das IAB, IAB Forschungsbericht 10/2015

³⁷ See Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., *Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices*, European Migration Network – Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming).

intensive Slovenian language course and learning about the culture and system of the country. This represents a major obstacle, as the refugees have to support themselves, even if they do not meet the relevant conditions for doing so (e.g. knowledge of the Slovenian language). Similarly, in **France**, the six-month French courses included in the welcoming and integration contract (WIC) are delivered six months or one year after recognition of refugee status.

Some countries face restrictions in terms of the availability of language training provision. In the **United Kingdom**, the past five years of austerity have affected the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses and language courses in general, thereby restricting access for refugees and asylum seekers. In **Malta**, although language courses are offered by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), for instance, these courses are not being provided on a regular basis, thus making it harder for refugees to register for such courses³⁸. The Malta Migrants Association (MMA) also pointed out that access to basic educational opportunities, including language training, is limited³⁹.

Where language training is provided, learning the language may be difficult. For example, in **Belgium**, a survey of refugees⁴⁰ found that language learning is difficult for 62 % of respondents. These difficulties are mainly due to the lack of contact with the local population, the lack of childcare places, the frequent changes of teachers and the lack of intensive courses.

In a number of countries, the complexity of the language to be learned is cited as barrier. For example, in the government-controlled areas of **Cyprus**, the main language is Greek, spoken with strong elements of a dialect and a distinctive accent. There may also be low motivation among refugees and asylum seekers to learn a new language if they already have language skills in, for example, English or German, and therefore wish to seek asylum in a country where this language is spoken. **Bulgarian** is said to be difficult to learn, because it is from a different language group to those of the refugees and asylum seekers. In contrast, in **Estonia**, although services for refugees and asylum seekers are available in Estonian, English and Russian, many do not have knowledge of any of these languages⁴¹.

In the **Czech Republic, Italy** and **Austria**, some challenges were identified regarding the delivery of language training. In Austria, there is some overlap in basic German language courses which are provided by several institutions. There is some debate as to whether the PES should be responsible for financing the majority of the language courses or whether other institutions should co-finance these courses. Similarly in **Italy**, language training provision is said to lack coordination, with many different stakeholders, funding and services with partial overlap. In the **Czech Republic**, the course in Czech language provided to refugees out of detention centres has been discontinued due to administrative, coordination, and funding problems within the responsible ministries. The courses still continue in asylum integration centres but they host a very small share of refugees (less than a hundred). In **Austria**, limitations on the number of *free* places offered by the PES can deter language learners. The PES applies 'positive discrimination' in favour of women: there is an attempt to fill 50 % of the course places with women, even though men represent approximately 75 % of the total number of refugees.

³⁸ Camilleri, C., *A report on national integration policies in Malta*, 2014, Internet: http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/32018/INTERACT-RR-2014_04.pdf?sequence=1

³⁹ Malta Migrants Association, 'Mind D Gap: Together We Can Make a Difference' (public consultation), 2015, Internet: https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/Integration/11.Malta%20Migrants%20Association.pdf

⁴⁰ Caritas International, *Réfugié cherche travail : Résultats d'une étude sur la formation et l'emploi menée auprès de réfugiés*, 2014.

⁴¹ Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., *Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices*, European Migration Network – Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming).

1.5.3 Low levels of skills, qualifications and work experience

In Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Turkey, lack of educational attainment, skills and work experience is identified as a key issue for refugees and asylum seekers. For example, in **Bulgaria**, according to the State Agency for Refugees, in December 2015 the education level of asylum seekers was as follows: 30 % did not declare any educational level; 26 % had completed elementary education; 24 % had completed primary education; 15 % had completed secondary education; 4 % had completed university and 1 % had completed college education. People with low levels of education can access elementary occupations and professions, which in Bulgaria are underpaid compared to other European countries. Refugees and asylum seekers may also not be aware of the opportunities available to them to improve their level of education.

However, there is a recognition that refugees and asylum seekers are not a homogeneous group when it comes to educational profiles; for instance, it is noted in the country report for **Austria** that asylum seekers from Syria, Iran and Iraq completing the Competence Check⁴² are found to be well qualified, whereas among Afghan asylum seekers there is a high share (mainly unaccompanied minors) who did not finish compulsory schooling.

Turkey faces a significant issue in this respect. Half of all Syrian refugees are hosted by Turkey. More than half of these (54 %) are below the age of 18. A significant share of these children are war orphans. They will remain in Turkey no matter what the outcome of the conflict. Unless given a chance to complete their formal education, Turkey will have hundreds of thousands of low-skilled young workers in the very near future, just at a time when the country had begun to have an impact on its own low-qualified population, through legislation requiring 12 years of mandatory schooling.

For refugees and asylum seekers with low levels of qualifications/skills, it may be very difficult to improve their qualifications/skills once they have migrated. In **Belgium**, for example, refugees are encouraged towards the 'fastest track to employment', which discourages them from undertaking higher-level studies. The Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS) often guides refugees to qualified and short training that does not always match their profile or their skills, in order to follow the 'fastest track to employment' principle. Moreover, many refugees are 'activated' by the CPAS in accordance with Article 60⁴³. This status allows refugees and asylum seekers to undertake a first work experience placement and practise a national language. Unfortunately, the offer is not varied and does not provide a stepping stone to a better job. After one or two years, refugees have to seek employment again.

1.5.4 Recognition of qualifications and skills

For those refugees and asylum seekers who do already possess qualifications, a barrier to entering the labour market in many countries is the lack of opportunities to have these qualifications recognised. In addition to the recognition of qualifications, another issue is the recognition of skills. Some refugees and asylum seekers may have relevant professional experience, which is not recognised in the form of a qualification (possibly

⁴² That is to say, a pilot project implemented by the PES Vienna: refugees participate in a five-week course during which their competences are checked through individual coaching and testing. The course is held in their native language and aims at identifying the competences and skills of the participants. The Austrian-wide roll-out phase of this type of course is planned for 2016.

⁴³ Article 60 § 7 is a form of social assistance and involves procuring employment for a person who is not in the labour market and integrating the beneficiary in the system of social security and the labour process. This system allows refugees and asylum seekers access to a first professional experience in Belgium.

because there is no requirement for a formal qualification in their country of origin). The validation of skills (non-formal and informal learning) is therefore another challenge that requires further attention in some countries.

In **Belgium**, for example, the validation of skills in terms of education is difficult and complex for asylum seekers and refugees: the aforementioned survey among refugees⁴⁴ found that 68 % of respondents had a high school or higher education diploma but only 17 % requested qualification recognition. Moreover, many newcomers have professional experience for which a formal qualification was not necessary in their country of origin. Validation of skills is available for only a limited number of occupations. For the others, refugees must first complete vocational training in the same industry before being able to use these skills on the job market.

In **Hungary**, the procedure for the recognition of qualifications and university diplomas is said to be complicated and expensive. Tests for recognition of foreign qualifications are conducted in Hungarian, which requires a relatively high level of command of the language. In the **Czech Republic**, too, obtaining equivalence certificates of apprenticeship qualifications and also of college diplomas is very difficult due to both language barriers and complicated and lengthy administrative processes.

In **Spain**, as a consequence of the difficulties and duration of the process of validating education diplomas obtained in the country of origin, which can take years, people are often pushed into jobs below their educational attainment level, involving loss of expertise and employability. The problem of overqualification is also mentioned in other countries, including France and Austria. It is also reported that in Spain these difficulties in validating competences and skills also occur in other areas, such as driving licences. In **Cyprus**, there are well-established procedures for the recognition of degrees and other educational achievements. However, procedures take time and effort, even when all the necessary documents can be provided in their original (or certified original) form.

In **Malta**, research findings by the European Network Against Racism⁴⁵ indicate that non-EU qualifications are often not recognised. Furthermore, research carried out by local NGO Aditus Foundation and the UNHCR Office in Malta in 2013⁴⁶ indicates that most interviewees were unaware of the Malta Qualification Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC) or the possibility of having their skills, qualifications and experience recognised and accredited in Malta. Another obstacle is the difficulty in obtaining the necessary certificates from their country of origin. The Malta Migrants Association (MMA) argues that even when refugees are aware of the possibility of their qualifications being recognised, it is a protracted process, in some cases taking up to five or six months. The situation is even more laborious for those who require a warrant to practise their profession: once they have their qualifications recognised, they then need to start another process to be able to work in Malta⁴⁷.

For those who are able to go through the recognition process, it may be necessary to pursue further studies. In **Norway**, one challenge identified is the lack of 'bridging'

⁴⁴ Caritas International, *Réfugié cherche travail : Résultats d'une étude sur la formation et l'emploi menée auprès de réfugiés*, 2014.

⁴⁵ Attard, S., Cassar, C. and Gauci, J.P. (2013), *Racism and related discriminatory practices in Malta*, 2013, European Network against Racism. Internet: <http://www.pfcmalta.org/publications-and-research.html>

⁴⁶ Aditus Foundation and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office in Malta, *Nitkellmu? Refugee integration perspectives in Malta*, 2014, Internet: http://www.unhcr.org/mt/media/com_form2content/documents/c8/a629/f40/Nitkellmu_report.pdf

⁴⁷ Malta Migrants Association, 'Mind D Gap: Together We Can Make a Difference' (public consultation), 2015, Internet: https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/Integration/11.Malta%20Migrants%20Association.pdf

between offers for a person whose degree is not considered fully equivalent to a Norwegian one. Citizens from countries outside the EU/EEA can apply for recognition/authorisation in order to practise professions regulated by law. In some cases, additional studies may be required before a recognition/authorisation is granted.

1.5.5 Lack of targeted and/or tailored support

Few Member States provide targeted support tailored to the specific needs of refugees or asylum seekers. Recent work undertaken by ICF for DG HOME^{48, 49} has found that most Member States (e.g. **Belgium, Germany, Croatia, Austria, Sweden**) target their programmes at third-country nationals or newly arriving non-nationals, though among these **Austria** and **Sweden** recognise that beneficiaries of international protection faced specific obstacles to accessing support and/or had specific integration needs, and therefore enforced specific provisions or conditions of access for beneficiaries of international protection within the wider programme. Other Member States (e.g. **Poland** and **Slovenia**) offer integration services only to beneficiaries of international protection.

Reporting as part of this current study has found that the lack of tailoring of labour market integration support causes challenges to labour market access in **Ireland** and **Hungary**. In Hungary, counselling services and training opportunities are offered in Hungarian (translation is not ensured). Moreover, enrolment in state-administered vocational training is conditional on having completed primary education, which is a requirement for refugees as well⁵⁰.

1.5.6 Variation in provision of education and training for migrants/ Coordination of services

An issue with regard to education and training identified in some countries is the fact that there is a variation in provision and/or that there are problems in terms of the coordination of services. In **Austria**, for example, the pilot Competence Check in Vienna has no standard design. For example, in one province Competence Checks are carried out in the mother tongue of the refugees; in another province, they are carried out in German. Some Competence Checks include an in-depth stocktaking of all formal and informal competences, while others check only skills relevant to the labour market. Similarly, in **Belgium** a civic integration programme organised by the regions is applied differently from region to region. In **Estonia**, a set of programmes and measures is offered to refugees, but it remains unclear whether and how the measures are coordinated, i.e. how these will support each other and whether there will be a systematic and clear sequencing of measures to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Some examples of countries which allocate responsibility for the coordination of services to refugees and asylum-seekers include Spain and Sweden. In **Sweden**, the PES has to act as a coordinator between the various authorities involved in the integration of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, namely the Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*), Municipalities and County councils (*Kommuner & Länsstyrelser*). In **Spain**, the Ministry of Employment and Social Security is responsible for the integration of refugees. A network has been established to improve the coordination of integration support services offered to refugees and asylum seekers among the involved organizations, to increase the capacity of its members and to raise awareness. The centres managed by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security and the NGOs involved in the management of other centres form the Ariadna Network⁵¹, funded by the ESF. This network is aimed to

⁴⁸ ICF, *Evaluation of the Qualification Directive: Case Study 3: Access to integration facilities (Article 34)*, forthcoming.

⁴⁹ Some MS provide integration services also for other EU nationals

⁵⁰ Migration Strategy of Hungary adopted by Government Decree 1698/2013. (X. 4.).

⁵¹ Further information at www.redariadna.org

improve the coordination of integration support services offered to refugees and asylum seekers among the involved organizations, to increase the capacity of its members and to raise awareness. An electronic platform used by all of them (the so-called SIRIA, a system of information about the programmes for refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers) enables follow-up of each single case. This approach, by which the Ministry coordinates with a small number of NGOs as regards the provision of social and employment services, may be effective and easy to coordinate; it is uncertain though if this is an adequate model to manage larger amounts of asylum seekers and refugees.

The format of educational provision for refugees and asylum seekers can affect how successfully they learn. Teaching in a language that the learner understands can be important but is often not available in Member States (often the national language or a contact language such as English or Russian is used). Some refugees and asylum seekers have had little or no experience with formal education and may be illiterate or unused to European teaching styles. In view of this, alternative teaching styles involving pictures and teaching of writing scripts can be effective.⁵²

1.6 Societal challenges

There are significant social obstacles and challenges that hinder the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers. One of the most significant is discrimination against them, both by society in the host country generally and by employers.

1.6.1 Discrimination by employers / society at large

One of the most frequently reported obstacles to labour market integration is discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers. This was noted in 10 countries: Denmark, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden.

In some cases, this relates to general societal discrimination. In **Croatia**, the Centre for Peace Studies⁵³ has recognised several central problems that influence the degree of success in the integration of foreigners into Croatian society, one of which is discrimination against migrants, along with a lack of public awareness about the issue of migrants in Croatia. In **Lithuania**, a report on an NGO institutional capacity-building project⁵⁴ found that xenophobia is one of the issues that severely undermines job search opportunities for refugees. In **Malta**, a report⁵⁵ mentions discrimination in its many forms as a significant obstacle to the labour market integration of migrants in general. For instance, the report notes that some Muslims feel they cannot take the risk of negotiating working hours that would allow time for prayer, for fear of losing their employment. Gendered obstacles have also been reported and the participation of female sub-Saharan African refugees has remained low in comparison to their male counterparts. The report also notes that Muslim women wearing the hijab encounter obstacles in terms of labour market integration. Negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers are also in evidence in **Latvia**, **Slovenia** and **the Netherlands**. In the latter, political parties, like the PVV, which have

⁵² European Migration Network (2016), Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices (forthcoming).

⁵³ See Internet: <http://www.cms.hr/hr/vise-o-programima/azil>

⁵⁴ See Internet: http://www.pagalba.org/xinha/plugins/ExtendedFileManager/demo_images/Pabegeliu_integracija_Lietuvoje_2014_copy.pdf

⁵⁵ Attard, S., Cassar, C. and Gauci, J.P. (2013), *Racism and related discriminatory practices in Malta*, 2013, European Network against Racism. Internet: <http://www.pfcmalta.org/publications-and-research.html>

negative views about accepting asylum seekers into the Netherlands⁵⁶, are growing in popularity.

The issue is more directly related to discrimination by employers in **Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden**. More specific detail is given in the report for Hungary where prejudices against refugees exist among employers, making job seeking more difficult, even for highly qualified persons. The sudden upsurge in the inflow of asylum seekers and the anti-immigration government communication campaign in 2015 further deepened the stereotypes⁵⁷. Refugees tend to find employment within their own network, e.g. in small enterprises run by refugees. In this regard, the job clubs and various counselling and networking events organised by NGOs are crucial in establishing contacts as well as for exchanging information and obtaining advice. Employer discrimination is often fuelled by a fear of the perceived or real administrative burden that may result from employing an asylum seeker (see Section 1.2.2).

1.6.2 Lack of social networks

A lack of social networks also creates a barrier for refugees and asylum seekers in finding a job. In **France**, an occupational network or one's social network can serve as a solid support for integration into the labour market, yet in most cases refugees lack contacts and personal networks or occupational opportunities. In the **Netherlands**, the success of job-seeking is dependent on the network of the jobseeker. In many cases, jobs are given to acquaintances. The PES is trying to connect refugees with local companies in order to create and strengthen the occupational networks of refugees. In **Austria** too, lack of networks is an obstacle; this was the case, for example, during immigration from the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

However, the involvement of diaspora networks in the host country is a source of support for refugees. In **Bulgaria**, one of the ways refugees start work is to find a job with the employers of their diaspora in Bulgaria⁵⁸. Thus there is no language barrier in the first years of their stay and the transition to local living conditions is facilitated. However, in some cases this situation is linked to undeclared work. In the **United Kingdom**, there are many established networks of migrants from different countries that newcomers can access for support without the need for English language skills. The role and importance of these was highlighted in a Home Office-sponsored survey of new refugees to the United Kingdom⁵⁹. This survey found that frequent contacts with relatives, friends and religious and other civic organisations appeared to enhance employment prospects, but that these were not as important as pre-migration education and occupation – in other words, the skills the refugees brought with them.

Recent studies⁶⁰ have identified integration programmes for refugees which incorporate group activities and social networking both with other refugees, diaspora groups and local communities, as good practices.

⁵⁶ NOS, 'De Hond peilt PVV op 41 zetels, geen toenadering Rutte-Wilders', 10 January 2010, retrieved from NOS Politiek, Internet: <http://nos.nl/artikel/2079632-de-hond-peilt-pvv-op-41-zetels-geen-toenadering-rutte-wilders.html>

⁵⁷ Interview with social workers at one of the Budapest-based Family Protection Services. Interview with Adrienn Kiss, an expert on migration policies.

⁵⁸ Krusteva, A., *Labour immigration in Bulgaria*, 2011, Internet: <https://annakrusteva.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/labor-migration-in-bg/>

⁵⁹ Home Office, *Spotlight on refugee integration: Findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom* (Research Report 37), 2010, Internet: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116062/horr37-report.pdf

⁶⁰ Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., *Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices*, European Migration Network – Economic and

Also, orientation courses that provide beneficiaries with opportunities to meet other people can be effective in orienting them to the host country's culture and can also provide a way to facilitate integration through the creation of relationships. EU-funded projects have brought together beneficiaries to visit museums, tour host cities and take excursions to parts of the country in several Member States⁶¹.

In **Sweden** it is noted that the effort to coordinate the various interventions at various levels and between various authorities as well as the early intervention in the form of civic orientation and ALMP measures targeted towards newly arrived migrants are promising. The few evaluations performed suggest that these measures have had a beneficial impact on the labour market integration of migrants experiencing difficulties in getting a foothold into the Swedish labour market.

1.7 Challenges related to the specific vulnerabilities of refugees and asylum seekers

Asylum seekers and refugees also face several challenges that are driven by their specifically vulnerable position in society. First, many persons seeking asylum have faced psychological and physical traumas that can greatly affect their mental and physical health and thus their capacity and desire to go out and search for work. Second, refugees and asylum seekers who do not have access to work and who are reliant on sometimes insufficient benefits and welfare support may face difficulties in searching for and finding work either because they have to prioritise finding food and housing or because a lack of housing prevents employers from recruiting them.

1.7.1 Psychological barriers

The country reports for Denmark, Germany, Spain, Austria, Portugal and Slovakia referred to the fact that refugees and asylum seekers face obstacles and challenges due to psychological trauma resulting from experiences in their home country, travel to the host country, and separation from their families. They also face uncertainty and risk while waiting for asylum decisions and in finding work. As noted in the case of **Spain**, this means that there may be a need for recovery from traumatic experiences during their first phase of integration. In **Portugal**, in some cases, refugees make active use of the support offered to them in order to gain some psychological stability, but in many other cases their psychological state reduces their concentration and endurance. The central body responsible for receiving refugees and asylum seekers makes a systematic assessment of the needs of all incoming persons and psychological support is offered when needed.

It is worth noting that other research⁶² suggests that professional counselling regarding psychological and social issues is provided in 18 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Finland, France, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK). Special trauma counselling for migrants suffering from consequences of e.g. torture, war and trauma from fleeing their country of origin is offered in six Member States (Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia, the UK) by NGOs.

Also, under article 30(2) of the recast Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU), signatory Member States (all except Denmark, Ireland and the UK) must provide: "under the same eligibility conditions as nationals of the Member State that has granted protection,

Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming), and in ICF's *Evaluation of the Qualification Directive: Case Study 3: Access to integration facilities (Article 34)*, forthcoming.

⁶¹ European Migration Network (2016), Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices (forthcoming).

⁶² European Migration Network (2016), Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices (forthcoming).

adequate healthcare, including treatment of mental disorders when needed, to beneficiaries of international protection who have special needs, such as ... persons who have undergone torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or who have suffered from armed conflict". Under article 25(1) of the recast Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU), Member States "shall ensure that persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious acts of violence receive the necessary treatment for the damage caused by such acts, in particular access to appropriate medical and psychological treatment or care".

1.7.2 Difficulties in meeting needs

In seven countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom), refugees and asylum seekers face challenges in meeting their basic livelihood needs, especially housing, which can affect their psychological and physical capacity to search for work.

In **Spain**, some face severe poverty and homelessness, sleeping on the streets or moving from one shelter to another every few days. There is also a housing problem in **Poland**, where the cost of finding suitable housing on the open market is high compared to wage levels. On the other hand, the public/social housing possibilities are limited within most municipalities (for both nationals and foreigners). Even if communities are held responsible for the provision of housing for refugees, the number of council flats is limited. In practice, refugees are often forced to rent flats on the open market, which is expensive, and often landlords do not want to rent the properties to this group of people. However, only 3.7 % of homeless people using homeless shelters in Poland are not Polish citizens⁶³. In **Slovakia**, too, refugees often face problems associated with satisfying basic needs, especially accommodation, which has to be co-financed by the beneficiary. Lack of affordable housing is perceptible especially in areas with low levels of unemployment. As a result, refugees are often located in areas with high levels of joblessness and a lack of job opportunities. The expert for Denmark notes the concentration of ethnic minority refugees in isolated communities ('ghettoes').

In many countries, such as the **United Kingdom**⁶⁴, integration into the labour market is part of a wider integration process. It is not just about providing access to the labour market, but also embraces housing, health, education and the social services that underpin the individual's ability to work. However, refugees differ from other migrants to the extent that in some countries they are directed to a particular area of the country (dispersed) and so do not have the same choices as migrants, who can choose to live where they want (for example, in an area with established communities from their home country).

With regard to asylum seekers, poor living conditions in reception centres are an issue in **Bulgaria**, and conditions are criticised by Bulgarian and other EU countries' NGOs and mass media as well as at the level of EU institutions. Bulgaria is a transit country for most asylum seekers; a major reason for this is that asylum seekers plan to move to countries with higher living standards and more generous social protection systems⁶⁵.

⁶³ Internet: <http://wiadomosci.ngo.pl/wiadomosc/1661282.html>

⁶⁴ A discussion of the content of other integration programmes is provided in Gusciute, E. and Quinn E., *Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices*, European Migration Network – Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin (forthcoming), and in ICF's *Evaluation of the Qualification Directive: Case Study 3: Access to integration facilities (Article 34)*, forthcoming.

⁶⁵ See Forum for Arabic Culture (in Bulgaria), Internet: <https://arabculture.wordpress.com>

It is worth noting that other research⁶⁶ suggests that good practices in relation to housing support includes:

- Prolonged stay at reception facilities to allow for a **gradual adjustment/a transitional period** between organised accommodation and independent accommodation.
- Establishment of special transitional facilities for beneficiaries of international protection such as **'start-up' flats** for beneficiaries who were recently granted protection or special **integration asylum centres** for beneficiaries.
- Provision of **assistance/housing counselling** to help beneficiaries secure housing.
- **Priority** being **given to beneficiaries** in allocation of social housing.
- Taking into account **employment opportunities** in a **housing dispersal policy**.

1.8 Concluding remarks

On the basis of the challenges put forward in the country reports, a number of concluding points can be identified, as follows.

- EU legislation provides for refugees to have full access to the labour market and for asylum seekers to have some access. It also provides for Member States to provide integration support to refugees and equal access to PES support⁶⁷. However, the legislation does not specify *how* access should be provided to asylum seekers and, as a result, conditions of access for asylum seekers vary between Member States. Furthermore, EU legislation does not apply to all 30 countries analysed for this report. Legislation also cannot prevent all of the practical obstacles affecting both refugees and asylum seekers.
- The societal and cultural challenges faced by refugees in successfully integrating into the labour market are also those that asylum seekers will face if they are given refugee (or humanitarian protection) status. However, asylum seekers are more likely to be affected by administrative and subsequent economic challenges. For example, if asylum seekers' applications are pending for a long time, this period of inactivity will make that integration even more difficult (for example, employers may look at this period negatively and it may affect the asylum seekers' interest in work).
- In addition to the legal barriers that might completely prevent asylum seekers from accessing employment, those who *can* work in some Member States experience restrictions in terms of the fields or occupations in which they can participate.
- The low levels of labour demand and high levels of unemployment in certain countries – particularly as a result of the economic crisis – have increased competition for jobs and created challenges to entering the labour market (low levels of integration, risk of inactivity and over qualification for some low-skilled jobs). The situation is exacerbated for non-nationals, who might experience increased discrimination from employers and society at large because of economic pressures.
- Limited education and training services are made available for asylum seekers in the countries reviewed. While they wait for their asylum application to be processed, they are likely to lose existing skills and become demotivated.

⁶⁶ European Migration Network (2016), Synthesis Report on the Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market: Policies and good practices (forthcoming).

⁶⁷ Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:337:0009:0026:en:PDF>

- Many refugees and asylum seekers have low levels of qualifications and skills. It is important to provide them with opportunities to increase their skills, in order to help them to access and progress in the labour market. This could also involve facilitating better access to education by organising level tests and entrance exams when the required diploma cannot be provided by the refugees and asylum seekers.
- In some countries there are issues regarding the provision of education and training for refugees, that is to say variation depending on where the opportunity is provided, and poor coordination. These issues should be identified and acted upon in order to ensure equal access and efficient and effective provision.
- Language is a key barrier to employment and, without adequate language skills, it is also very difficult for migrants to access support services available to them (including education and training opportunities). Language training is essential for refugees, but this needs to go beyond a basic level in order to prevent them from ending up in low-skilled jobs, without opportunities to progress due to their limited language competences. Language teaching should ideally be provided during the asylum process (at least for those that are likely to be granted asylum) to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers completing the obligatory period before entering employment are able to access the labour market and – where necessary – additional training as soon as possible (without being hindered by a language barrier).
- The way that languages are taught can support or hinder language learning. At least one EU-level study has argued that alternative and adaptive teaching styles (e.g. use of pictures and basic teaching on writing scripts) can be more effective than 'traditional' styles of teaching when teaching (some) refugees and asylum seekers with specific learning needs. It would be useful for Member States to share the good practices they identify across the EU, and also with Norway and Turkey.
- Given the diverse characteristics of both asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to carry out an early profiling exercise of prior education and skills to ensure that tailored learning can be offered to suit their needs. It is also important to provide targeted learning opportunities, as mainstream provision may not be appropriate.
- Checks should also be made for mental health issues that might have resulted from traumas experienced by asylum seekers and refugees and support should be offered to try to overcome these.
- For those with existing qualifications and skills, a process of recognition is important. Where possible, this process should be efficient and accessible, i.e. language and cost should not present a barrier to using the process.
- In a number of countries funding is project-based, and this creates challenges for the sustainability of the activities and the results if the services and support are not mainstreamed. Even during the lifetime of the project, the uncertainty of the funding could have an impact on the sequencing of the support.
- The complex and diverse needs of these groups require better coordination of services and provision across different levels. Consideration might also be given to longer-term integration programmes, particularly for those with more complex needs.
- Employers play an important role not only in providing jobs but also in providing training opportunities. Challenging perceptions, offering targeted incentives and reducing the administrative burden should be considered to boost the hiring of refugees and those asylum seekers allowed to work. This could take the form of awareness-raising campaigns or employer incentive programmes.
- Social networks and peer-to-peer support are highly valuable to integration both into society and into the labour market. This is a mutual process whereby social networks facilitate entry onto the labour market (not least because the refugee/asylum seeker is happier and therefore more capable of searching for and gaining work), but also

because being in work increases the likelihood of establishing a social network. Though not discussed in detail in this report, refugee integration programmes that incorporate group activities and social networking – with other refugees, diaspora groups and local communities – have been identified as good practice in other recent studies.

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