



**EUROPE
MUST
ACT.**

Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Employment

**People on the Move and the Labour
Market**



**Topic of the
Month Europe
Must Act
2024**

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An Introduction to People on the Move and the Labour Market

The right to work and having a job that provides healthy and fair working conditions are issues that concern us all. This is because decent employment promises more than a source of income, it also brings independence, a sense of purpose, a source of stability and can be good for mental health.

Zooming in on refugees and asylum seekers, having access to decent work helps people to become a part of their new community, as they not only begin contributing financially but also enhance language skills and make friends.

However, despite the many benefits and the fact that many have the right to access employment, often, people on the move face significant barriers to obtaining decent employment. This can be for a variety of reasons, from legal and language barriers to intersecting racial [1] and gender discrimination [2].

Combined, these challenges to successfully entering the labour market lead to the denial of the important advantages of work as well as increasing the likelihood of exploitation, as people on the move are pushed towards working in the informal economy—where they are vulnerable to abusive working conditions and economic shocks that lead to job loss and poverty[3].

Here, Europe Must Act aims to dig a little deeper into the topic of employment for people on the move. In doing so, we not only hope to highlight the barriers and difficulties many face but also argue the many positives that employment has, dispelling all too common negative perceptions when it comes to this element of the world of work.

"My name is foreigner

I work here

How to work hard

I know, but

Do the Germans know too?"

"Benim adım yabancı

Burada çalışıyorum,

Ne çetin çalıştığımı,

ben biliyorum ama,

Alman da bilir mi acaba?"

"Mein Name ist Ausländer

Ich arbeite hier,

Wie hart ich arbeite, aber

Ob die Deutschen es auch wissen?"

November 7th 1981

Image and Poem sourced from
[wave-network](https://www.wave-network.org/)

[1] Moa Bursell, *The Multiple Burdens of Foreign-Named Men—Evidence from a Field Experiment on Gendered Ethnic Hiring Discrimination in Sweden*, *European Sociological Review*, Volume 30, Issue 3, June 2014, Pages 399–409, <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcu047>

[2] Yuliya Kosyakova, Zerrin Salikutluk, Jörg Hartmann, *Gender employment gap at arrival and its dynamics: The case of refugees in Germany*, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Vol 87, 2023, 100842, ISSN 0276-5624, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2023.100842>.

[3] UNHCR, *MUN Refugee Challenge, Background Guide: Refugees' Access To Jobs And Financial Services*, UNHCR.

The Right to Work for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the EU

What is the situation for asylum seekers?

The EU has been working on reforming its asylum system (see [this recent post](#) we did on it). As a part of this, there have also been changes in the reception standards for asylum seekers. The “Direction on Reception Conditions” from April 2024 stated:



Image sourced from [Pexels](#)

“Registered asylum-applicants will be able to **start working sooner and their integration prospects** will improve, under a draft law agreed by Parliament and Council.”

According to the directive, asylum seekers should be able to work or get access to qualification courses a maximum of six months after requesting asylum (until now it was nine months). The quality of reception is supposed to be ‘harmonised’ throughout the EU, meaning people should be treated equally no matter which EU member state they have filed their asylum request in.

At the same time, the directive’s stated goal is also to hinder asylum seekers from moving between EU member states as they can only receive support and have access to the labour market in the country in which their asylum request is being processed[4].

As we will see later on, EU member states so far have different approaches here. While in some countries people may start working after only a few weeks, in others they may have to wait for several months after applying for asylum. Another crucial difference among member states is the kind of support they offer asylum seekers to find access to the labour market.

[4] As detailed in a briefing on the directive: “Article 17(a) thus establishes that applicants are not entitled to material reception conditions (excluding necessary health care and subsistence and basic needs) when they are irregularly present in a Member State other than the one in which they are required to be present. In connection to this provision, the proposal requires Member States, where necessary, to assign applicants a residence in a specific place (Article 7) and link that residence to the right to material reception conditions (Article 7(2)).”

Galgóczi et al. [5] (2021) have provided an overview of the situation in the EU member states Denmark, Austria, Finland, Italy, France, Greece, Spain and Germany. Therein it shows that the kind of assistance that countries offer varies greatly from no targeted support at all to outsourced support by NGOs or to institutional but 'differential'[6] support.

It is also very dependent on the political landscape of the time in each country, whereby right-wing governments who introduce more restrictive policies tend to leave a greater mark. Galgóczi et Al. call this tendency "the swinging of an asymmetrical pendulum" that over time leads to less support for asylum seekers' integration into the labour market across the EU.

While the new EU directive promises to equalise these differences among countries, many organisations are critical of its impact and ability to fairly and humanely distribute asylum seekers in the EU countries. They raise concerns about human rights violations at the borders (and beyond the borders of the EU) as well as stricter rules for who gets recognized as an asylum seeker (and who gets deported). All of which, impacts whether people are prevented from accessing 'better' regulations for reception standards and their opportunity to integrate and join the local labour market.

What is the situation for refugees?

Bear in mind that refugees and asylum-seekers are treated differently in front of the law. Notably, those who have been recognized as refugees or deserving of 'subsidiary protection' should get access to employment and education immediately (Article 26).

For example, those who fled Russia's attacks in 2022 from Ukraine have been recognized as refugees and given immediate access to the EU labour market as a temporary measure that is still ongoing (currently until March 2025). As a result, they have integrated faster into the OECD labour market than any other refugee group. However, there are obstacles beyond the legal right to work that have prevented Ukrainian refugees from seeking or finding jobs, such as language barriers, lack of job offers, discrimination in the labour market, and uncertainty due to their temporary refugee status.

For more information, the Center for East European and International Studies has done a comparative analysis of the situation of Ukrainian refugees across the EU. It emphasises some of the difficulties encountered by refugees and compares the opportunities they have in the EU with what they had in Ukraine. Ultimately, they describe how:

[5] Galgóczi, Béla et Al., 2021, *Between and between: integrating refugees into the EU labour market*. Brussels: ETUI

[6] Typical for the German case: asylum seekers are categorised according to their prospects of having a positive outcome in their asylum procedure. Those with good prospects get comparatively easy and early access to qualification programmes, others fall behind. (see: Schwenken, Helen, 2021. *Differential inclusion: The labour market integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in Germany*)

"While overall living conditions were reported as comfortable, income disparities and varying perceptions of aid provision highlight regional differences. Attitudes towards refugees, employment opportunities linked to language proficiency, and contrasting evaluations of services also vary across the host countries."

Labour Exploitation

As we have laid out, people arriving in the EU have varying possibilities of accessing the labour market, depending on their legal status. According to a group of researchers in the UK from 2016[7], difficulties in obtaining employment may prompt people to seek work in unregulated ways. This can be especially true for those with an insecure status, such as asylum seekers, who are not allowed to work for a given amount of time during their asylum process and who at the same time receive limited access to welfare. Employers can exploit the unregulated status of workers and commit breaches of labour rights, such as withholding payments or neglecting working standards.

A research team from Poland[8] came to similar conclusions. According to them, even the given time limit of six months, the maximum time after which asylum seekers should be allowed to work, is too long. The mental well-being of people may depend on how fast they are able to work and sustain themselves. Otherwise, they may be pushed into unregulated sectors where people face a lot of exploitation as employers make use of their precarious legal status.

It's also important to consider how there is often a 'gendered division' of labour in the EU. Migrant and refugee women are working in some of the least socially recognized but most systemically relevant jobs, for example in the domestic work sector as carers. Domestic work is embedded in the history of slavery. Today, we see the continuation of this history in many ways, due to the exploitation that some workers endure in this sector. This is due, in part, to women tending to have less access to labour 'integration' schemes, thus having fewer possibilities of accessing formal or more recognized jobs.



Image sourced from [Pexels](#)

[7] Dwyer, Peter; Hodkinson, Stuart; Lewis, Hannah; Waite, Louise (2016). Socio-legal status and experiences of forced labour among asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, (1), 1-17. doi:10.1080/21699763.2016.1175961
[8] Sobczak-Szelc, Karolina, et al. (2023). *From reception to integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Poland. Chapter Eight: Integration of asylum seekers and refugees on the labour market.* DOI: 10.4324/9781003196327-8.

Employability, Unemployment and Barriers to Employment

- In 2023 the group with the highest average unemployment rate across EU countries was “citizens of a non-EU country” (12.4%).
- The European Commission’s website on integration describes how it takes refugees 20 years to have a similar employment rate to native-borns in that country.

Statistics such as these indicate the difficulties there are for people on the move to access employment and local labour markets in Europe.

When it comes to refugees and asylum seekers, there is often a tendency to focus on individual factors, such as work experience and educational attainment, however, more recently it has been argued that there is a need to place these factors within a wider context[9]. Here we aim to do just that, outlining some of the different barriers that impact people on the move’s ability to access employment.

Barriers to the labour market for Refugees and Asylum seekers in the EU

From very concrete and comparable legal stipulations (that still vary from country to country) to the more qualitative impacts of social and/or cultural capital, there are a wide range of barriers that intersect and combine to form someone’s experience [10] of the labour market in Europe.

Legal barriers

As previously touched upon in the sections above, the legal barriers that people on the move face in entering the labour market can have a huge impact on someone’s experience and will also differ depending on the country that they settle in.

Access to employment will also depend on a person’s migration status. It’s been argued that a process of hierarchization has taken place across Europe through a plethora of legal acts and the growth of securitization[11]. The result of this is that people on the move can be placed into a hierarchy of rights according to what level of access they have to the labour market. With nationals and EU nationals at the top end of the scale, with few restrictions, and asylum seekers at the bottom.

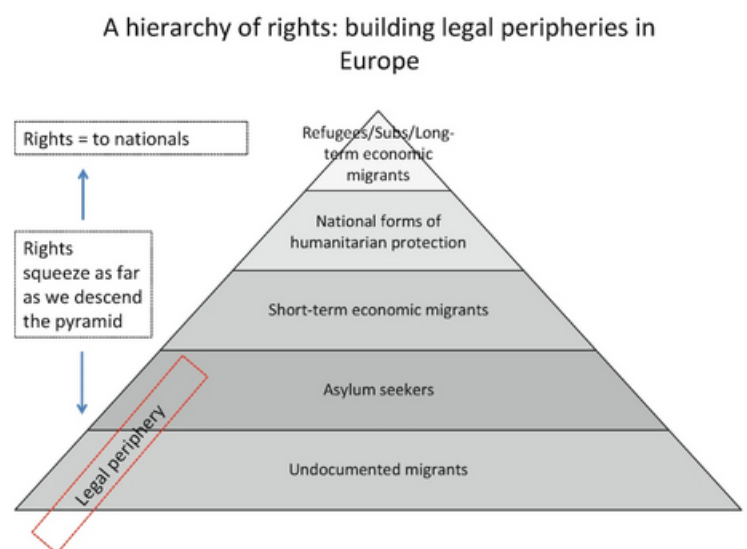


Image sourced from [Europe’s Legal Peripheries: Migration, Asylum and the European Labour Market](#)

[9] A. Neergaard, J.K. Schenner (2019), *Asylum-seekers and refugees within Europe and labour market integration*, Vol. 25(1) 13–24, DOI: 10.1177/1024258919829995

[10] Ibid

[11] V. Federico, S. Baglioni (2021), *Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers’ Integration in European Labour Markets*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67284-3_1

The same study also highlights how, differences in countries and migration status, create a variety of time limits for when people on the move are able to access national labour markets:

	Asylum seekers	Refugees	Subsidiary protection	National form of temporary protection	Economic migrants – short term	Economic migrants – long term	Undocumented migrants
Czech Rep.	YES after 1 year stay	YES	YES	YES	YES if the worker has a contract prior to entering the country	YES	NO
Denmark	YES after 6 months stay	YES	YES	YES	YES but with a work permit	YES but with a work permit	NO
Finland	YES after 3 months stay if they have travel documents/5 months without them	YES	YES	–	YES but with a work permit	YES but with a work permit	NO
Greece	YES after 6 months stay	YES	YES	–	YES subject to the labour market's demand	YES	NO
Italy	YES after 60 days from application of refugee status	YES	YES	YES	YES subject to the labour market's demand	YES subject to the labour market's demand	NO – But if they work, they have certain labour rights
Switzerland	YES, after 3 months if the labour market allows	YES	YES	YES, after request for work permit	YES if allowed by the conditions for permit to stay	YES	NO – But if they work, they have certain labour rights
UK	YES, after 12 months but only in shortage occupation list	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES with specific visa	NO

Table and data sourced from [Europe's Legal Peripheries: Migration, Asylum and the European Labour Market](#)

On top of these legal restrictions, there are a variety of other structural differences that mean people on the move struggle to access work as nationals do. This is because different reception systems, programmes and regulations are in place, creating structural barriers that limit people's opportunities, for example:

- Access to vocational training and unemployment benefits,
- Rights to self-employment and working in the public sector[12]

The briefly outlined reasons above are important for identifying how barriers to each labour market are different depending on the nation-state but also the extent to which states create disadvantages in the labour market, restricting equal access and protecting "native workers".

It's also important to keep in mind that these legal structures and regulations are only the "theory" and that people's experiences are likely to be very different in practice. For example, in the UK, asylum seekers have access to the national labour market after 12 months. However, as they are limited to the shortage occupations list they often struggle to find work, particularly if they are unable to have their qualifications recognised[13].

Education and transference or recognition of qualifications

Access to education and the ways that the process of being on the move can disrupt education and training is a commonly discussed barrier to employment. As UNHCR highlight, only 37% of refugees are enrolled in secondary school (as opposed to over 80% worldwide) and only 6% are enrolled in higher education.

[12] Ibid, p9

[13] Refugee Action, [Lift The Ban: Why giving people seeking asylum the right to work is common sense](#), Refugee Action.

As education and training has a huge impact on employment and career progression there is an obvious need here for governments to support people on the move, to help empower them and rebuild their lives.

However, as the same UNHCR report points out, the difficulty in accessing education and training is not the only skills and qualification barrier that exists. Another important, related barrier is the difficulties that people on the move face in having their qualifications recognised and/or transferred.

There are huge differences between which countries are open to accepting foreign titles and qualifications and where they'll accept them from - creating a rigid barrier, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers who often aren't able to plan their migration to the extent where they have their original qualification documents, which have been translated or notarized.

The Horizon 2020 SIRIUS WP5 report, identified through their interviews and survey that the issue of qualifications and skills recognition was a recurring barrier as they describe the "path to having them recognized is often long and perplexing"[14]. The result is that many people on the move are limited to certain sectors, such as construction or domestic work, and that they're more likely to be hired with lower wages or conditions.

Transferring qualifications is not only a problem of recognition but also one of bureaucracy. A recent movement in Spain demonstrates the difficulties in completing the process of applying for "homologación" (where university studies are transferred and recognised). Applicants are often met with excessive delays, with one case waiting a total of 8 years for a process that should take 6 months [15].

This is another example of the importance of looking past the legislation and examining what happens in practice. Whilst it will vary from country to country and nationality to nationality, it provides clear evidence that a significant barrier to work or further education is created due to delays in the bureaucratic process, keeping people in limbo as they wait for their skills to be recognized.

For more examples in Spain, take a look at the Justa Ya! Project, where multiple testimonials describe waiting months and years for their medical and engineering qualifications to be transferred, barring them from their profession in the meantime.



[14] S. Baglioni (2020), *Social Partners Barriers and Enablers*, SIRIUS [D5.2], https://www.sirius-project.unipr.it/wedit/fileman/Uploads/Documents/WP5_Social_Partners_Enablers_and.pdf, p141

[15] Frías Goytia, Gabriela L. & Emili, Añez-Torrico, & Miranda Alejo, Judith Carmen. (2024). *Titulaciones en el Limbo: "El Drama de solicitar Homologación y/o equivalencias de títulos universitarios Bolivianos en España- Un Informe Especial"*. 10.13140/RG.2.2.33955.05925.

Logistical Barriers

Even when asylum seekers and refugees meet all of the required conditions to work in their welcoming country, they may struggle to find employment for more spatial or logistical reasons.

The most prominent example of logistical barriers is when it comes to asylum seekers in refugee camps. Refugee camps often represent the harshest form of spacial isolation where asylum seekers are made to stay far away from the closest cities or towns and are sometimes subject to curfew. This makes it difficult to maintain social contact outside of the camp and implies a significant barrier to accessing work.

Whilst refugee camps are often seen as an extreme version of this, that is not to say that it doesn't impact refugees in other areas. Asylum seekers and refugees in Europe are often subject to dispersal policies which "commonly requires that individuals seeking humanitarian protection settle in specific locations across the receiving country"[16]. This means that they're placed in disadvantaged areas where accommodation may be cheaper but there is also reduced work opportunities.



Image sourced from Europe Must Act

Location therefore begins to create a significant barrier to employment for two reasons:

- Firstly, being placed in areas where there is very little employment, even for the native population.
- Secondly, there may be very few transport options or public transport may be expensive to the point where further movement becomes inaccessible.

Language Barriers

"The ability to communicate and speak the host country's language represented a significant challenge for more than two-thirds of the respondents who require it to meet their basic needs. Accordingly, language training courses were identified as a pressing need by three-fifths of the respondents."

[16] F. Fasani, T. Frattini, L. Minale, (2022), *(The Struggle for) Refugee integration into the labour market: evidence from Europe*, *Journal of Economic Geography*, Volume 22, Issue 2, p377. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbab011>

This recent report concerning Ukrainian refugees in Europe exemplifies a prolific barrier to labour markets in Europe for refugees and asylum seekers. Learning the local language is an important factor for both social and economic integration and while there are different provisions of language courses across each European country they are not offered for free everywhere.

Often language courses are provided by non-state entities in the third or private sector and there are varying degrees of whether language integration is recognised as a duty of the state[17]. This is despite the fact that asylum seekers who have attended language courses have been found to boost their employment probability to the same level as asylum seekers who have a matching mother tongue to their welcoming community[18].



What this demonstrates is a way in which location and language barriers can be considered together. Firstly, by considering the benefits offered for refugees and asylum seekers whose language skills match that of their welcoming community, as language is repeatedly highlighted as significantly important.

On top of this, it highlights the double impact that dispersal and spatial restrictions policies can have on asylum seekers and refugees. Not only is there the possibility of being placed in an area with less work, but it may also be the case that there is limited access to language courses, such as this example in the UK.

Alternatively, there are also cases of countries with multiple languages, where refugees are restricted to areas that don't correlate with their existing language skills. This has been highlighted in Switzerland, as German, Italian and French-speaking refugees and asylum seekers were randomly allocated to different regions meaning that some weren't able to use their existing language skills.

A final consideration is the role that local or regional languages can play. There are many reasons that it's important to preserve local or regional languages, particularly as a way of preserving minority cultures within a country. However, as with dominant languages, this can become a barrier for refugees and asylum seekers who may speak the dominant language in a country but not the local language. Therefore, they may struggle to gain access to employment, particularly when it comes to public sector jobs.

This final example demonstrates how, above all, it is crucial for refugees and asylum seekers to gain access to language courses for national, local or regional languages to help people overcome this barrier to employment and join their community.

[17] V. Federico, S. Baglioni (2021), *Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Integration in European Labour Markets*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67284-3_1

[18] D. Auer, (2017), *Language Roulette - The Effect of Random Placement on Refugees' Labour Market Integration*, NCCR-On the Move, Working paper #11

Stereotypes Around Migration and the Labour Market

While there are various reasons for a person to leave their home in search of rebuilding their lives somewhere else, there are common stereotypes that over-emphasise or even fabricate the economic reasons for migration, such as entry to the labour market or welfare system. This has become particularly prolific since migration has been used as a political scapegoat for unemployment and reduction in social welfare.

Those conceptions are rooted in the migration rhetoric that portrays it as a problem rather than an opportunity or commitment to human rights and backs the position of leaders who polarised these arguments for their political will[19]. They actively draw a line between “them” and “us” and therefore frame migrants as the cultural “other” or threat due to real or perceived differences[20].

For that reason, migration is an ideal topic for certain groups and the media to push half-truths and lies to spread anger, fear and prejudice. As the stereotypes are mostly linked to sensitive matters such as jobs or security or symbolic meanings like identity or religion, it is easy to believe these narratives, rather than the reality that is placed in a more complex phenomenon [21].

Stereotypes are typically oversimplified responses that obscure the underlying realities of individuals or groups as well as generalizing complex situations[22]. They do not necessarily stem from previous experiences and can easily become fictionalised. While some stereotypes, such as "the Swiss are always punctual," may seem benign and do not significantly impact individuals' rights or lead to extreme discrimination, others can be weaponized to justify exclusionary or prejudiced behaviours. Therefore, distinguishing between harmless stereotypes and contexts, and those that can inflict harm and dehumanise is crucial for understanding their impact on societal attitudes and policies.



Defence, migration and the Green Deal: Key issues at stake in the EU elections

Screenshot taken from [France24.com](https://www.france24.com)
headline

[19] Volpicelli, S. (2015), *Who's Afraid of . . . Migration? A New European Narrative of Migration*, in IAI WORKING PAPERS 15, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1532.pdf>

[20] Kadianaki, I., Avraamidou, M., Ioannou, M., & Panagiotou, E. (2018), *Understanding media debate around migration: The relation between favorable and unfavorable representations of migration in the Greek Cypriot press*, *Peace and Conflict*, 24(4), 407–415, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000285>

[21] Neidhardt, A.-H., & Butcher, P. (2022), *Disinformation on Migration: How Lies, Half-Truths, and Mischaracterizations Spread*, *Migration Information Source*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/how-disinformation-fake-news-migration-spreads>

[22] Volpicelli, S. (2015), *Who's Afraid of . . . Migration? A New European Narrative of Migration*, in IAI WORKING PAPERS 15, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1532.pdf>

One prevalent and intensively utilized stereotype in political discourse is the characterization of so-called "bogus" asylum seekers. This label presupposes individuals as "fraudsters" or "fake" claimants often even before they initiate their asylum process and request international protection. This dynamic also underscores the constructed notion of a "genuine" asylum seeker, delineating which groups are widely accepted and which are not[23].

The discussions around "fake" asylum seekers are particularly fueled by far-right politicians and groups who promote anti-migration rhetoric. A study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), which conducted a network-driven analysis of social media accounts and online outlets linked to anti-refugee disinformation and hate, revealed that the spread of stereotypes and disinformation was crucial for the political agendas of the far-right. These groups closely cooperated with conspiracy theorists and extremists.

Afghans have been particularly stigmatized as "bogus" asylum seekers over the past decades. They are often perceived as migrating to Europe solely for economic reasons rather than genuine asylum claims. Despite facing life-threatening conditions in Afghanistan, most European countries only shifted their narratives after the fall of Kabul and the Taliban's takeover. This shift was driven by increased media coverage and reports on the Taliban's brutality and the severe conditions in Afghanistan, leading to a markedly different public narrative regarding Afghan asylum seekers[24].

The pervasive use of stereotypes and media narratives has severely impacted policies and the lives of those targeted, as these false narratives, driven by discriminatory agendas and disinformation, obscure the legitimate challenges they face and delay compassionate and accurate responses.

Conclusively, it shows the inability of the EU to provide a positive and common approach towards migration, resulting in increasing stratification of stereotypes and misconceptions in European public opinion[25].



Image sourced from Europe Must Act

Therefore, the need to promote a positive narrative of migration that looks below the surfaces of simplified and fear-driven accusations has become more than necessary. For more information, the UN has created a guide with the Seven Key Elements on Building Human Rights-Based Narratives on Migrants and Migration and created a StandUp4Migrants toolbox to provide inspiration.

[23] Ferreira, N. (2022). Utterly unbelievable: the discourse of 'Fake' SOGI asylum claims as a form of epistemic injustice. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 34(3-4), 303-326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeac041>

[24] From "bogus" asylum seekers to "genuine" refugees; shifting discourses and attitudes towards Afghan migrants | COMPAS. (2021), <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/article/from-bogus-asylum-seekers-to-genuine-refugees-shifting-discourses-and-attitudes-towards-afghan-migrants>

[25] Volpicelli, S. (2015), Who's Afraid of . . . Migration? A New European Narrative of Migration, in IAI WORKING PAPERS 15, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1532.pdf>

The Importance of Access to Work - Better employment, Better for Everyone

A recent news report from the European Labour Authority described persistent labour shortages across the EU. Statements like this are often used as a jumping-off point to discuss the positives of migration as a solution to some of Europe's labour and ageing population issues. For example, the report itself states that "workers born outside the EU help mitigating shortages." However, we maintain that this doesn't suffice as an argument for welcoming people on the move or even as the *only* reason for allowing them to work.

Instead, we'd like to explore this a little further in the context of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe by delving into the positives of access to work and exploring an interesting, community-led, initiative in the Netherlands. Through this, we hope to demonstrate alternatives to the slightly cynical and self-serving proposed solutions where the focus is "to ensure that migrants' skills will match the future EU labour market and fill its gaps"[26]

Why is access to work important for people on the move?

It's important for people on the move to have access to work because, from a very basic perspective, it's a fundamental human right as well as a right that is protected in the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol and EU legal frameworks.

This is valuable to keep in mind as an initial starting point, to explain where the right to work for refugees comes from in Europe and to highlight that "[d]iscrimination in accessing work within the EU is governed by anti-discrimination laws aimed at fostering equal opportunities for all."

Article 24

LABOUR LEGISLATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY

1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the same treatment as is accorded to nationals in respect of the following matters:
 - (a) In so far as such matters are governed by laws or regulations or are subject to the control of administrative authorities: remuneration, including family allowances where these form part of remuneration, hours of work, overtime arrangements, holidays with pay, restrictions on home work, minimum age of employment, apprenticeship and training, women's work and the work of young persons, and the enjoyment of the benefits of collective bargaining;
 - (b) Social security (legal provisions in respect of employment injury, occupational diseases, maternity, sickness, disability, old age, death, unemployment, etc.);

Image sourced from the 1951 Refugee Convention

However, access to work is important for people on the move for more than just legal reasons.

"I learned that work is not only measured by the financial return one gets. I started measuring the value of my work by the change I created by helping vulnerable children. Some of them also took me as a role model." Abdel Halim al Qasir,
ILO Job Search Club Facilitator

The European Network for Racism highlights how being able to work benefits individuals, employers and society. From an individual perspective, it helps people to gain economic independence and purpose, as well as helping to facilitate language learning and a greater understanding of the culture and community they are now part of.

An alternative study from 2021, also found that beyond giving a sense of self and purpose some participants reported that work was important for their health, for providing structure to their lives and to feel that they were contributing to society[27].

There are also positives for employers hiring refugees and asylum seekers, as they're able to increase the different perspectives in their workforce. In particular, refugees and asylum seekers can offer tangible skills, such as knowledge of other cultures and languages, which facilitates market expansion as well as a visible commitment to corporate responsibility.

On top of this, a report from the Council of Europe goes into detail about the societal benefits of migrant and refugee employment. It explains how it contributes to improved societal cohesion, avoids the high costs of marginalisation and highlights a study that projects:

“that refugees’ integration could in the long-term lead to a GDP growth between 0.2% and 1.6 % above the baseline, depending on the designing and the financing of integration policies.”(p11)

Combined, the inclusion of people on the move into the labour market is important because it has multiple positives, whether that is preserving international and national legal commitments to equal opportunities or promoting greater social cohesion—all of which goes beyond simply filling European labour shortages.

Case Study: The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad/Plan Einstein Approach - The Netherlands



This initiative in Utrecht was set up in response to the debate concerning refugees and asylum seekers. As has been seen across multiple European countries, the discussion between the view that the human rights of refugees must be protected and the view that national interests must be protected created a political impasse at a national level in the Netherlands [28].

[27] L. Fedrigo, M. Cerantola, C. Brazier, J. Masdonati, (2021). *Refugees' Meaning of Work: A Qualitative Investigation of Work Purposes and Expectations*. *Journal of Career Development*. 50. 089484532110663. 10.1177/08948453211066343.

[28] Geuijen, K., Oliver, C., Dekker, R. (2020). *Local Innovation in the Reception of Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands: Plan Einstein as an Example of Multi-level and Multi-sector Collaboration*. In: Glorius, B., Doornik, J. (eds) *Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities*. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25666-1_12

U-RLP Journal 6: One year later

Whilst the target beneficiaries were refugees and asylum seekers, the inclusion of the local community aimed to create connections, improve social cohesion and promote mutual benefits.

Although the project was planned to last for just one year and the original asylum reception center has closed down, it's success has meant that it has adapted to a new center in Haydn and the city council has guaranteed a structural budget of 1.8million euros for the next four years.



UIA Expert Daniel de Torres reflects on main takeaways from the project one year after its closure: "Thanks to the lessons learned, the project's approach has been adjusted and its commitment to inclusion from day one has been consolidated. To this end, it is considered essential to identify the needs and interests of the neighbourhood's residents in order to provide resources, spaces and tools that are relevant to both asylum seekers and neighbours. This facilitates motivation and the creation of personal and social networks that fosters inclusion."

Screenshot taken from uia-initiative.eu

Moreover, they describe the impact and influence it has had and will have on future approaches:

"In Utrecht there is a broad recognition and political consensus on the need to maintain the project's focus in the future. At the moment a majority of 43 from the 45 City Council members (representing 10 from the 12 political parties) endorse the Plan Einstein approach. It has thus been decided that if new reception centres for asylum seekers are opened, they should be based on the Plan Einstein approach".

This local project has also had an impact on a national level as a motion has been requested to research the possibility of taking the same approach across other parts of the country.

Ultimately, it highlighted how local projects are not only able to overcome the political impasse of national politics to affect change but also how their success can spread, have a wider impact and demonstrate the power of more creative, community-based solutions.

Important Voices, Solutions and Other Resources

- **Picum**
- **International Domestic Workers Federation**
 - Campaigns: <https://idwfed.org/campaigns/>
- **Justa Ya! Project**
- **#StandUp4Migrants**
- **Refugee Action: Lift the Ban**
- **Hello Europe**



Stock Image sourced from [Unsplash](#)



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***We're volunteers and asylum and migration is a complex topic. This means we try to include a variety of opinions and approaches to a topic. We do our best to research and use our expertise accurately however, we also believe it's vital to encourage healthy discussion and stop misinformation. Therefore we encourage any feedback or constructive criticism of our work.**

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Europe Must Act (EMA) is a growing grassroots movement, bringing together volunteers and NGOs to campaign for the humane and dignified reception of refugees in Europe.



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2024**