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# Introduction

*Simone Baglioni and Francesca Calò*

Decent and sustainable employment plays a significant role in the economic and social inclusion of people within society. This is also the case for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs). Regardless of one's migrant or native background, employment provides income, social identity and social connections, and it enables individuals to contribute to the economy of the country. For decades, European governments have addressed migration primarily through border management and security policies, while the integration of new arrivals has remained an ancillary policy concern (Geddes and Scholten, 2016). Integration has become a policy taboo in some European countries following the peak in requests for asylum in 2015, and the instrumental use of migration by political entrepreneurs across the continent since the so-called 'refugee crisis' (Dennison and Geddes, 2018). Still, men, women and children continue to arrive in Europe, and the quality of the processes involved in their settlement in European societies, and the contribution that they make to the social and economic development of Europe, are inextricably linked to their prospects of finding and sustaining decent work. That is true regardless of the reasons motivating their journey, whether they are among us to seek employment and improve their living conditions, to join family members already living here, to seek asylum from persecution, or sanctuary from humanitarian or environmental disasters.

However, data and analyses of labour market integration of migrants depict an alarming situation. For example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data show that in the EU27, in the last two decades (2002–2020), the employment rate of the foreign-born population has always been lower than that of the native-born population, highlighting a sharper decrease from 2019 onwards. Moreover, foreign-born workers are more likely to work at atypical times than native-born (OECD, 2021), evidencing that often migrants are employed or work in more precarious and insecure positions than native workers. In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the scenario: the negative effects of the pandemic have contributed to the deterioration in the job (and

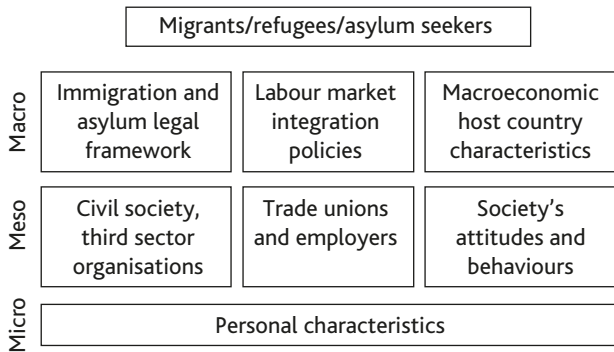
life) quality of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers (Baglioni et al, 2021). In fact, newcomers often work in sectors that have been badly hit by the pandemic, such as hospitality and leisure, or domestic work and care. COVID-19 quickly led to a drop in migrant employment in these sectors as a result of the policies implemented to contain the pandemic (OECD, 2021). The drop was twice that of native-born employment, for example in construction, where migrants often are employed more often than native workers as subcontractors (OECD, 2021), showing that COVID-19 created further inequalities and discrimination among people. However, on a positive note, in the sectors that were least affected by the crisis, such as scientific and technical activities (which have a lower share of migrant workers), migrants benefited more from employment growth than their native counterparts.

Such figures suggest that the integration of migrants via labour markets is not a straightforward task, due to the specific issues relating to migration and refugee/asylum statuses, but also due to the extent of heterogeneity apparent across contemporary labour markets in Europe (Könönen, 2019; D'Angelo et al, 2020; Federico and Baglioni, 2021; Calò et al, 2022). This heterogeneity (in economic structure, sectoral composition, labour force and demographic features, and so on), combined with the substantial, but also the uneven, legacy of the wider economic crisis on European labour markets, has created a highly differentiated economic and social environment across countries, and, consequently, the space for variations in policy implementation leading to the potential for a diverse range of outcomes for (non-EU) migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in terms of effectively integrating into their host societies.

Building on such premises, our book, a research output of the Horizon 2020 EU-funded project SIRIUS, understands the labour market integration of MRAs as being dependent on a pattern of concurring circumstances and features located at different analytical levels as explored in Figure 1.1: at the macro (legal framework and policy framework), at the meso (civil society organisations) and at the micro (individual) levels. Our book adopts then a multidimensional understanding of the 'labour market integration' in which an individual's capacity to seek (and retain) employment is determined by a concurrent set of factors located at three different analytical levels: at the macro (legal/institutional/policy), meso (organisational) and micro (individual) level (as presented in Figure 1.1).

From this perspective, the legal and political-institutional, societal and individual-related conditions function either as enablers or as barriers that affect the labour market access of non-EU MRAs in European countries. The chapters of our book reflect these analytical levels, providing a comparison of seven European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, United Kingdom and Switzerland).

**Figure 1.1:** The multidimensional framework of analysis of migrant labour market integration proposed in the book



### The macro level

At the macro level, integration depends on the characteristics of the labour market itself, on the specific policy/legal framework of asylum and migration, and the various labour market institutions facilitating or obstructing the labour market integration of non-EU MRAs. But macro-level features also include the institutional context of each country (for example, centralised versus decentralised, as labour market policy competences, as well as cognate policies – for example, housing, education, health – are sometimes devolved to the local or subnational levels), and therefore specific local/subnational policy may need to be considered along with the national and European level. Labour market institutions across member states are differently prepared to address the needs of MRAs and to support them adequately. There are uneven levels of experience and infrastructure for effective service provision including the financial resources necessary for programmes, but also there are variations in the readiness of countries to support MRAs. In Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, for instance, member states with long-standing and advanced policies, there is some existing evidence on the success or failure of different integration measures. In contrast, very little is known about integration schemes established in new destination countries in Central and Eastern Europe but also in Southern Europe. These countries seem to create policy as situations arise and often with little knowledge of their refugee population (Burnett, 2015), although countries such as the Czech Republic tend to adopt more systematically ad-hoc EU-grant driven schemes than other EU Central-Eastern member states (Drbohlav and Valenta, 2014; Kušniráková, 2014).

The selected countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom and Switzerland) were selected because they vary considerably in terms of their political-institutional approaches towards

unemployment and the labour market as well as their approaches towards welfare state provision more generally. On the one hand, there is evidence for a ‘contingent convergence’ (Eichhorst and Konle-Seidl, 2008) of instruments, goals and outcomes in labour market regulations, employment and social policies that have the common principal purpose of a ‘work-first approach’ (Triantafyllou, 2011). On the other hand, there are differences in terms of policymaking dynamics and policy implementation that result in the establishment of diverse labour market and employment policy regimes (Gallie, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Rothgang and Dingeldey, 2009; Anxo et al, 2010). Finally, our countries also differ in terms of other relevant institutional dimensions that may affect the dynamics underpinning the integration of MRAs. Several studies have supported the idea that participatory and decentralised political contexts produce more responsive and redistributive policymaking (Calamai, 2009; Costa-i-Font, 2010), which sets the scene for a broader range of ‘integration’ related policies. Hence, we also consider how various countries differ in terms of political institutional opportunities offered to public and private actors to deal with integration. Countries like Switzerland, and to a certain extent also the United Kingdom, have an institutional design that supports subsidiarity as well as decentralisation and multilevel governance. Whereas countries like the Czech Republic maintain strong centralisation and a weak culture of governance. Three chapters in the book focus on the macro-level context.

**Chapter 2**, by Christos Bagavos, Konstantinos N. Konstantakis, Panayotis G. Michaelides and Theocharis Marinos, provides a macro-contextual overview of the countries, investigating labour shortages, skills needs and mismatches by examining skills and qualifications and their use in the labour market to assess the position of post-2014 MRAs in the workforce and identify barriers and enablers for their labour market integration. The chapter investigates the position of post-2014 MRAs in the workforce to build a comprehensive assessment of labour market barriers and enablers. The chapter presents cross-national comparative research at two levels. At the first level, it focuses on the characteristics (skills and qualifications) of post-2014 MRAs in each country under investigation, to evaluate the integration progress and determine the drivers behind unemployment and inactivity. At the second level, the chapter focuses on specific features of each country, including productive structure, employment composition by sector of economic activity, occupations and skills, labour flows, unemployment rates, level of skills as well as the overall macroeconomic situation.

**Chapter 3**, by Veronica Federico, assesses how far legal frameworks of migration and asylum work as enablers or obstructers of non-EU MRAs’ integration in European labour markets across the seven countries studied in the book. It does so by gathering and critically analysing information on the political, legal and institutional context of migration governance for

each country, and by comparatively discussing national situations. When legal issues are at stake, newcomers' integration heavily depends on the legal status that is attributed to them. In fact, entry and settlement in European countries are subject to strict limitations for non-EU nationals, but such limitations take different shades according to a given European country and a given migrant status.

**Chapter 4**, by Nathan Lillie, Ilona Bontenbal and Quivine Ndomo, discusses migrant labour market integration policies and services in the seven countries. The empirical work underpinning this chapter emanates from two main research tasks: policy discourse analysis; and assessment of existing policies and their outcomes. A policy discourse analysis was conducted to identify and analyse how issues of labour market integration are discussed by policymakers and policy actors. By analysing the findings of the discourse analysis together with the assessment of policies, which forms the second part of the chapter, the consistency between policy rhetoric and policy goals is evaluated. The second part of the chapter consists of a policy assessment in which the barriers to labour market integration and existing policies to remedy them are identified, categorised and evaluated. This was performed using a meta-analysis of the existing national literature, and interviews with policy experts, implementers and beneficiaries. The chapter suggests that welfare policy regimes play an important role in shaping labour market integration policy, but this is more due to the residual effect of having certain active labour policy structures and the existence of professional employment services rather than employer demands or a deep-set political consensus.

## The meso level

At the meso level, integration depends on the availability of supporting infrastructure playing an 'enabler' role vis-à-vis the refugees and migrants themselves. This refers to ethnic networks and civil society organisations that enable migrants and refugees to access information about the labour market and how to enter it, which means access not only to legal knowledge but also practical issues (for example, where to find a potential employer but also accommodation). More specifically, civil society organisations and the reaction of local communities and non-governmental organisations are crucial players in ensuring integration to be effective (or, indeed, can be significant opponents to it). Frequent and meaningful interactions between migrants and member state citizens is considered to be a significant tool for opening societies for all migrants, but especially for refugees.

Given the lack of systematic research findings on the impact of refugees participation in associations and civil society organisations (see [Garkisch et al, 2017](#), for a systematic review), our book fills a gap on what role civil society actors play in the integration of non-EU MRAs into society and

the labour market. Moreover, and still at the meso level of analysis, the role played by social partnerships in the dynamics of labour market integration is explored. Studies reveal (for example, [ILO, 2016](#)) that particularly at the sectoral level, representative organisations for employers and workers are critical in assisting the integration process for migrants and refugees, through collective bargaining processes, and by alleviating the concerns of workers relating to wages and working conditions. Trade unions have an important role in respect of the provision of support services, including representing their rights in the workplace, and are organisations which have experience in being versatile in times of austerity and crisis ([Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2019](#)). Concurrently, recent studies (for example, [OECD, 2016](#)) show that many employers do not see an immediate business case for hiring refugees or asylum seekers. Studies cite several reasons for the slow uptake in the employment of refugees and asylum seekers, ranging from uncertainty about the rules governing refugees' and asylum seekers' rights, labour market access and uncertainty about their skills and qualifications, to lower productivity due to a lack of host-country language skills, at least initially, and public opinion that is sceptical about hiring refugees or asylum seekers. Against this background, our book aims to provide an in-depth comparative perspective on how the role of social partners facilitates or hinders the integration of post-2014 non-EU MRAs into the labour market. Two chapters focus upon the meso level.

**Chapter 5**, by Dino Numerato, Karel Čada and Karin Hoření, presents and discusses the role of civil society organisations in the labour market integration of MRAs. It examines the positions of civil society organisations and how they are perceived by newcomers by means of face-to-face interviews with both civil society organisations and migrants having made use of their services. The findings suggest that civil society organisations can work as important actors enhancing not only integration into the labour market but also integration through the labour market. Civil society organisations are important language course providers, and thanks to their social, legal and administrative guidance, they help migrants in overcoming ineffective administrative and legal structures. Several organisations also assist migrants with the recruitment process, providing courses and advice on how to prepare for an interview, how to write a CV or how to draft a cover letter. Furthermore, civil society also assists newcomers in their efforts to have their skills and qualifications recognised. Moreover, by providing mentorship, training programmes, volunteering or even direct employment, they contribute to the development of migrants' skills and competences and provide platforms to enhance their agency and autonomy. However, such a capacity is unevenly spatially distributed. Furthermore, civil society organisations help to mitigate and, often together with migrants, struggle against the hostile context of a widespread atmosphere of xenophobia.

Although the authors conclude that civil society organisations primarily work as enablers of newcomers' integration in the labour market, their critical analysis also suggests that civil society can in some nuanced ways also hinder labour market integration.

**Chapter 6**, by Simone Baglioni, Thomas Montgomery and Francesca Calò, discusses the role that social partners and social dialogue can play by enabling or not the integration of MRAs in the European labour market. It presents findings from a four-month process of fieldwork of interviews with social partners (gathering 123 interviews) complemented by an experts' survey which managed to collect responses from 293 additional social partners' representatives across the seven countries discussed. The experts' responses reveal that some of the key issues that had been discussed by extant studies, and in particular the dilemmas faced by unions vis-à-vis migrants, whether they should be approached as potential new members or whether they should be monitored to prevent salary dumping, are still relevant. Our data also show the social partners' awareness about the higher (than local workers') risks to migrants' health and safety due to the poor regulations of migration and asylum which often confine newcomers to employment in the irregular economy, or to jobs requiring lower skills. However, our study also reveals the appreciation that social partners have of newcomers' skills, of their potential for the wellbeing of our societies and economies, a potential which very often remains unrealised. What we can take from this analysis of social partners is the need for both policymakers at various levels of government and social partners to commit to create further social dialogue opportunities. Too few cases of social dialogue have occurred across our seven countries in the field of labour migration, but social dialogue seems to us a (if not the) fundamental tool to solve problems occurring in such a polarised domain of migration, and in what is even a more contentious one, that of labour migration.

### **The micro level**

At the micro level, integration depends on the specific capacity of a given migrant/refugee, that is, her/his skills, education, language proficiency, age, psychological and physical wellbeing, entrepreneurial potential and so on. In order to understand the different ways in which migrants and refugees themselves experience labour market integration in their host societies, sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, educational background) of the recent cohort of post-2014 non-EU MRAs should be explored, alongside their qualifications and their personal and professional profile. Moreover, at the micro level of analysis our book aims to target more specifically the needs and aspirations of post-2014 non-EU MRAs and what they consider as barriers and enablers to potential avenues for integration. Our book will



explore those factors that are necessary to inform the design of integration policies and programmes in ways that are inclusive of our target groups' needs and voices. One chapter focuses upon the micro level of analysis.

Delving into everyday experiences of a range of migrants and hearing their voices, [Chapter 7](#), by Irina Isaakyan, Simone Baglioni and Anna Triandafyllidou, discusses how newcomers exercise agency to seize opportunities offered by their country of settlement and mitigate the effect of the turbulent social, political and economic circumstances they are often met with. The micro-level research takes a closer look at the needs of migrants, with a specific focus on what migrants themselves consider to be barriers for and enablers of integration. To understand migrants' capabilities and agency, the authors not only looked at their lives over the last five years but also explored their more distant memories long before their migration. Analysis of their past experiences enables a better understanding of their motivation for emigration, of barriers and opportunities they were facing and of their individual capacity for change and resistance. Looking back into their past also favoured an in-depth analysis of the reciprocal relationship between their agency and the sociocultural context. The analytical accent was specifically placed on the turning points and emerging epiphanies of migrants' lives as well as on issues of intersectionality which heavily determine migration outcomes.

## Conclusion

Labour market and social integration of non-EU MRAs have a key political bearing for the future of Europe. Decisions concerning whether or not to implement inclusion or integration policies also involve decisions over the allocation of resources. In a scenario where there is a limited capacity for public expenditure, the decision to utilise resources to facilitate labour market entry for migrants requires political leadership, as well as an evidence base for policy planning. This is particularly crucial when considering those citizens who are currently struggling to enter the labour market and who may feel challenged by decisions to allocate resources in order to ease the access of migrants to the same pool of jobs. Therefore, labour market integration policies cannot be isolated from the context of specific local or national labour market conditions and each and every decision must carefully consider the need to integrate both native and migrant workers.

At present, the current practice in many countries to limit the local labour market access of asylum seekers and refugees (at least before they are officially recognised) is highly problematic. These increased restrictions have been ineffective in avoiding or controlling the flows of refugees and other migrants; instead, we have continued to witness increased efforts by migrants to reach Europe, which in turn has exposed vulnerable migrants

to even greater physical and other risks, as well as abuse, including abuses in the informal labour market where many migrants and refugees end up. For such reasons, a central aim of our book is to contribute towards developing a policy framework for an inclusive integration agenda, outlining an optimal mix of policy pathways for the labour market integration of native workers as well as non-EU MRAs.

The last chapter of our book, [Chapter 8](#) by Maria Mexi, presents and discusses recommendations for an optimal policy mix to inform the design of policies and programmes that will provide post-2014 migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, with greater protection through decent work in the years to come. The legal recommendations address, for example, the need to revisit the international and European frameworks responding to forced displacement, to better integrate the humanitarian, development and labour market perspectives. The lessons learned and best practices identified by earlier chapters allow, among other things, to measure the effectiveness of proactive employment policies targeting migrant cohorts, and evaluate the responsiveness of multistakeholder partnerships in terms of putting forward innovative policies and practices at national and local levels with a view to mitigating xenophobic attitudes and tensions. Responses that address the needs of both post-2014 migrants and host communities – whether through programmes targeting job creation, education, vocational training and skills development, social finance and cooperatives – are critical in ensuring that public discourses become more constructive and supportive. [Chapter 8](#) also adds to the conceptual framework, discussed earlier in this chapter, to explain the role of concrete measures to make efficient use of the skills of migrants, the channels through which these affect the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the combination and sequence of measures leading to the best outcome for a given group of beneficiaries.

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