

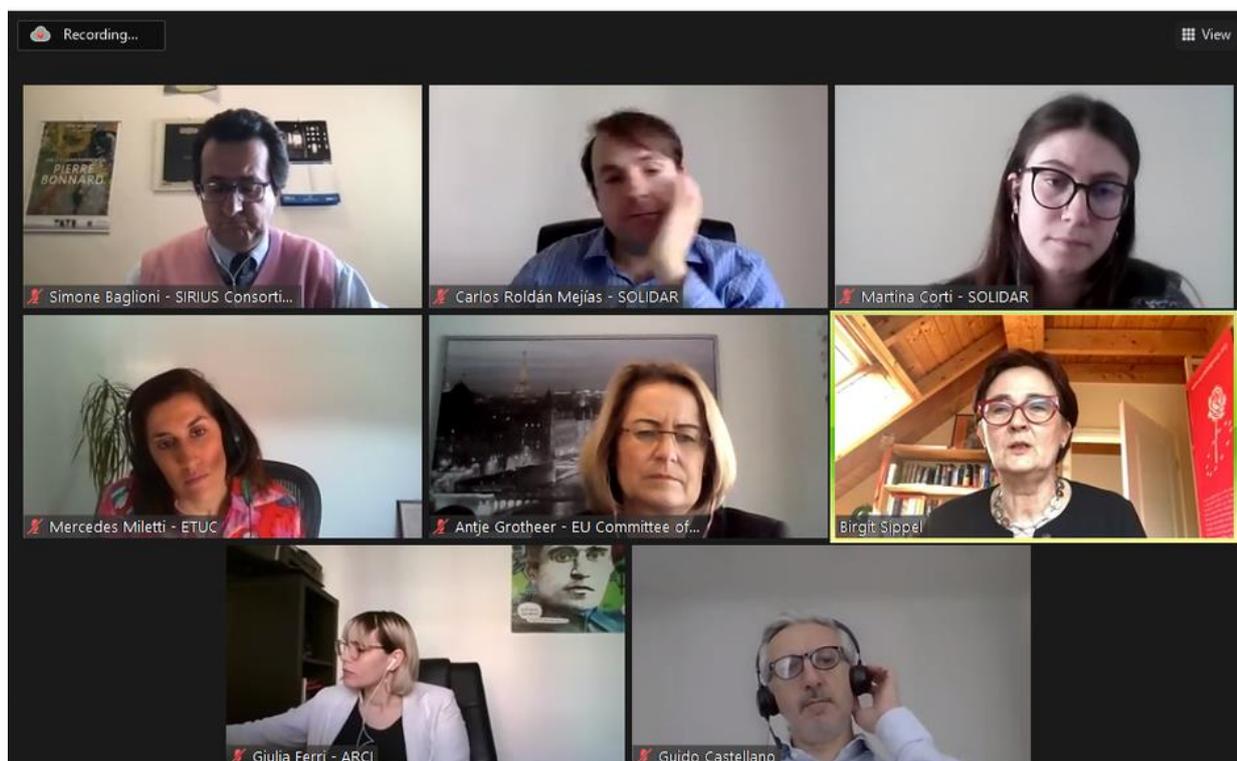
## ACTIVITY REPORT SIRIUS PROJECT POLICY ROUNDTABLE

### ENSURING MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS' LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION DURING COVID-19

31<sup>ST</sup> OF MARCH 2021 | 14:00 – 16:00 | ZOOM

#### Introduction

The SIRIUS (Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets) project is an evidence-based way of understanding the implications of post-2014 fluxes of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs) without falling into the trap of prejudices. The project builds on a multi-dimensional conceptual framework in which host-country or political-institutional, societal and individual-related conditions are **either enablers or barriers** to integration via labour market. The geographical scope includes seven European countries (the U.K., Italy, Greece, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland and Switzerland) with different degrees of exposure to the migration and refugees flows, and different institutional and socio-economic contexts.

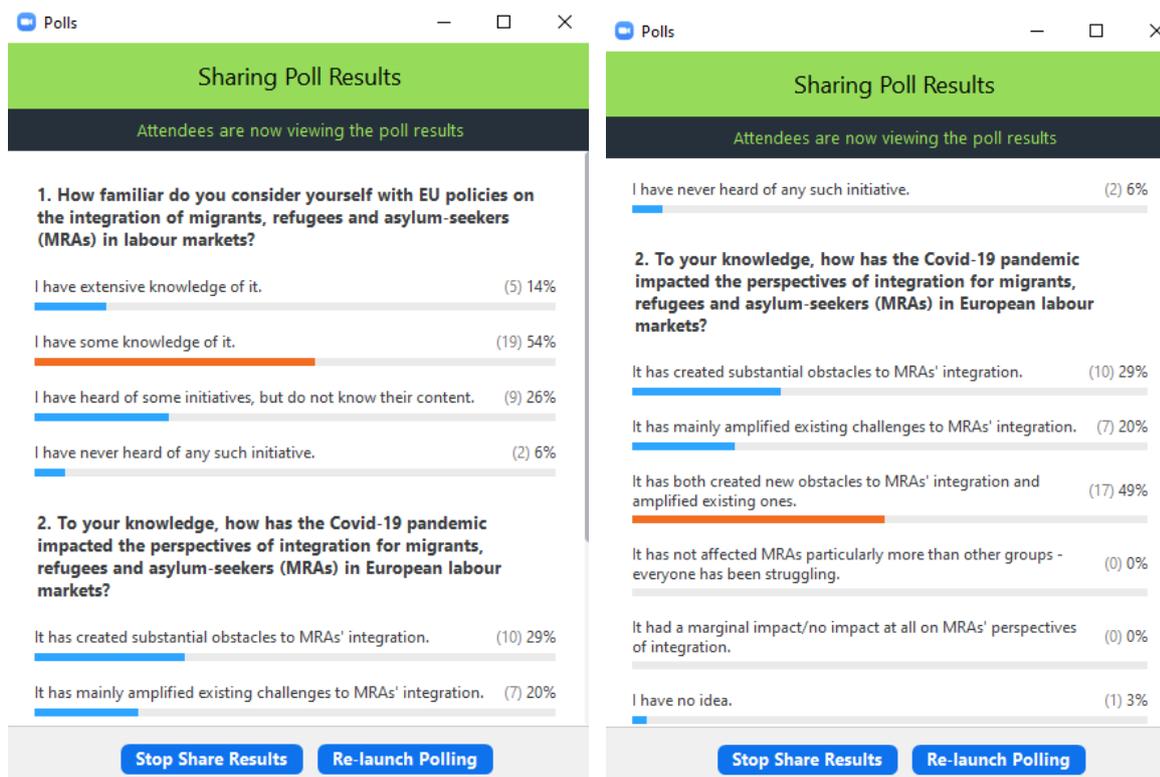


On 31st March 2021, **SOLIDAR** organized a roundtable as project partner, to present the latest project research on the impact of Covid-19 on the participation of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers (MRAs) in European Labour markets. The discussion brought together representatives from European civil society, European trade unions, and European policy-and-law makers and experts, with various backgrounds and expertise to discuss the findings. Our panelists also exchanged views on the latest EU milestones related to migration and integration, notably the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 and the approved new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

The event, moderated by Carlos Roldán (SOLIDAR), and supervised by Violeta Meotto and Julie Martinaud (both SOLIDAR) brought together the following speakers:

- Birgit Sippel, MEP Germany, and S&D spokesperson in the LIBE committee
- Antje Grotheer, EU Committee of the Regions, CIVEX Commission
- Guido Castellano, Programme manager – EU policies, European Commission, DG HOME, E.1 Funds programming and Procedures Unit
- Mercedes Miletti, Policy advisor on migration at the European Trade Union Confederation
- Pr. Simone Baglioni, University of Parma, Italy and SIRIUS Coordinator
- Giulia Ferri, Project coordinator, expert and regional reference for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) - ARCI APS
- Martina Corti, Social Affairs Fellow, SOLIDAR

69 participants were present. Before starting the event, two questions were asked to the participants, whose results are displayed below.



## Keynote speech

**Birgit Sippel, S&D MEP** – opened the meeting with a keynote speech highlighting the importance to link the reflection around integration and inclusion to the question of migration procedures. Starting with that latter aspect, she addressed the disappointment that the European Commission’s proposal for a New Pact on Migration and Asylum caused. Far from initiating a long-awaited concrete solidarity mechanism towards both the Member States and the vulnerable people at the borders of Europe, the proposal was essentially a continuation of the Dublin system, with no solidarity measure made mandatory for Member States. The Screening regulation featured in the proposal raises further concerns for the safeguarding of fundamental rights at the external borders. Ms Sippel then shifted the conversation towards integration and inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, citing some of the specific challenges these groups face in their labour market integration: the risk of exploitation, the scarcity of training opportunities and the inadequacy of recognition of skills procedures.

## Presentation of the research

**Simone Baglioni, University of Parma and SIRIUS Coordinator**, then took the floor to present the project and the component discussed in that event, 3ocused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The MRAs have been particularly vulnerable due to their high representation both in employment sectors hardest hit by national lockdowns and unemployment (tourism, retail, domestic work or leisure) and in the “frontlines” sectors (care, parcel distribution and logistics...). At the same time, furlough or income support schemes did not apply to them due to their legal status or their employment conditions. The refugees who were beneficiaries of integration services and resettlement or reunification programmes saw the former moved online or cancelled, and the latter suspended, leaving them disengaged and isolated. In many cases, losing a job entailed delayed, or jeopardized, access to long-term residence, benefits, or housing. Prof. Baglioni ended his presentation with a list of policy recommendations and a call for a coordinated action between the EU, the national governments, civil society and unions to mitigate these harmful effects.

**Martina Corti, Social Affairs Officer in SOLIDAR**, presented SOLIDAR’s analysis and perspective on the New Pact and on the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion. Overall, SOLIDAR’s opinion of the Pact is negative due to a focus on securization and externalization of borders, to the detriment of ensuring respect of fundamental rights and newcomers’ inclusion. On the other hand, SOLIDAR believes the Action Plan to be promising. Despite concerns over a seemingly patronizing outlook, SOLIDAR welcomes the needs-based approach that the plan introduces. An important recommendation from SOLIDAR regarding the Action Plan would be that the Joint Scoreboard that it proposes be integrated in the Social Scoreboard, to increase its capacity to measure equality and integration aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar).

## Discussion

**Mercedes Miletti, Policy advisor on migration at the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)** provided us with an overview of the European trade unions' actions to make labour markets more inclusive to migrants. Her intervention emphasized how fundamental it is that all workers organize, including the irregular migrants, echoing with that remark the findings of the SIRIUS project on the enabling role of social partners and Unions in labour market integration. She presented the platform [UnionMigrantNet](#), destined to provide a network of contact points for informing and assisting migrants in Europe. Agreeing with SOLIDAR's recommendation on embedding the Joint Scoreboards, Mercedes expressed skepticism towards the promotion of entrepreneurship and self-employment as a way of countering MRAs' unemployment, invoking the precariousness of these options as is seen with platform workers. She also stressed that regularization of undocumented migrants is key, together with the demystification of this policy tool.

**Giulia Ferri, project coordinator and expert on migration in SOLIDAR Italian member ARCI APS**, presented her organization's work with MRAs to make sure no one was left behind in these turbulent times. In addition to managing and supporting reception and integration centres, ARCI operates a toll-free hotline for asylum-seekers and refugees, offering assistance and information to foreigners wishing to apply for asylum; it also provides a mapping of support initiatives for refugees. She notes that the pandemic rendered ARCI's work slower and harder.

**Antje Grotheer, member of the Committee of the Regions**, was the rapporteure of the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum ("the new Migration package", as she prefers to call it, underlining the lack of consistency of the ensemble of measures). She presented the text, adopted with a majority in the Plenary session of March 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2021, as strongly progressive. Echoing Birgit Sippel's skepticism about the solidarity mechanism, she showed some criticism towards the fact that the first entry point element is maintained, overburdening border regions. Ms Grotheer then went on to present local and regional initiatives to support MRAs, such as the Safe Harbours Initiative in Germany. Eventually, reminding that building inclusive societies is an investment for societies as a whole, she called for an open dialogue between the EU and the regional level, as well as support local initiatives involving CSOs and national authorities.

Last but not least, **coordinator of European Commission's DG HOME Funds programming Guido Castellano** told us about the functioning of the Asylum and Migration Fund in the next budgetary period. The allocation for the fund in the final approved budget turned out less than what the Commission anticipated, and indisputably less than the amount needed, making it all the more necessary to be strategic with spending. One of the AMF's objectives is precisely dedicated to developing legal migration to Member States, and a minimum 15% of the total amount shall be dedicated to fulfilling this objective. Guido's presentation underlined that Member States will be bound by a partnership principle by which they have to closely involve local and regional authorities and relevant stakeholders in the definition, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. The programmes will also be designed in a way to ensure synergies and convergence with other funds, such as the European Social Fund ESF+, towards the EU's objectives.

The general discussion insisted, among others things, on the **benefits of proper inclusion of MRAs** not only for themselves, but also for the European labour markets and societies. The **recognition, validation and acquisition of skills** for non-EU natives remains a weak point of integration policies. Strong agreement emerged on the necessity to **create legal pathways for migration** and to resort to **regularization** more extensively, as well as on the importance of **shifting the narrative to a more positive one emphasizing MRA's rights**. Another thing panelists all acknowledged is the need to **better coordinate the policies on migration and those on integration**, including by fostering synergies between EU initiatives and funds related to these issues.