



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

SIRIUS POLICY BRIEF N. 4 – NOVEMBER 2019



**SIRIUS**

Skills and Integration of Migrants,  
Refugees and Asylum Applicants  
in European Labour Markets

**THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANISATIONS (CSOs) IN LABOUR  
MARKET INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND  
REFUGEES IN EUROPE: POLICY LESSONS  
FROM THE SIRIUS RESEARCH**

## INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in the implementation of labour market integration policies and services. The importance of CSOs, following the so-called migration crisis, has even increased since 2014 as the public sector struggled to satisfy the increased demand for labour market integration services. The post-2014 era contributed to a higher diversification of civil society organisations and to the emergence of transnational solidarity movements operating independently of the institutionalised systems of integration, national funding, and transnational intergovernmental organisations. The support of CSOs is often vital as regards the assistance provided to refugees and asylum seekers.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this policy brief is to understand both the demand and supply expected from and provided by CSOs in the area of labour market integration services. In other words, the SIRIUS project focused not only on how CSOs react to the needs of MRAs but also on what MRAs expect and receive from them.

Therefore, in this policy brief we present evidence and policy considerations about the role CSOs play in labour market integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs), with the aim to present the key areas of labour market integration initiatives, following an overview of social processes and mechanisms that operate as barriers or enablers of post-2014 MRAs integration in European labour markets across the seven countries studied in SIRIUS (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). We focus on post-2014 MRAs given the peak in migration and asylum figures Europe has experienced in 2015 and 2016.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Our findings suggest a high degree of differentiation among CSOs, not only across states but also within states, determined by the specific traditions of civil society in host countries as well as the diversity of MRAs groups and depending on their familiarity and experience with civil society.

Moreover, our comparative analysis has contributed towards mapping different functions that CSOs have across different national contexts. CSOs work as important actors enhancing not only integration *into* the labour market but also integration *through* the labour market. CSOs are important language course providers, and thanks to their social, legal, and administrative guidance, CSOs help MRAs in overcoming ineffective administrative and legal structures. These activities are provided by the majority of CSOs across SIRIUS countries. Several CSOs in these countries also assist MRAs 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, CSOs assist MRAs in their efforts to have their skills and qualifications recognised. Moreover, by providing mentorship, training programmes, volunteering, or even direct employment, CSOs contribute to the development of MRAs' skills and competencies and provide platforms to enhance the agency and autonomy of MRAs. However, such capacities are unevenly spatially distributed, it is rather rare in the Czech Republic and Denmark, it is somewhat developed in the United Kingdom, and more strongly developed in Finland, some areas of Italy, among the solidarity movement organisations of Greece, and in the Canton of Geneva in Switzerland. Moreover, CSOs either individually or collectively, frequently raise the problematic situation of illegal practices on the part of employers, exploitation, human trafficking, or underpaid wages. Last but not least, CSOs help to mitigate and, often together with MRAs, struggle against the hostile context of a widespread atmosphere of xenophobia.

Our comparative analysis suggests that CSOs potentially work as important enablers of MRAs labour market integration, especially in those areas not covered by public policies. More specifically, we have identified key external and internal enablers facilitating the position of CSOs in the area of labour market integration and, consequently, the position of MRAs on the labour market as well.

We have identified the following **external enablers** of MRAs integration:

- One of the most important external enablers facilitating labour market integration initiatives is the state, which in all SIRIUS countries significantly subsidises a number of counselling and educational services provided by CSOs.
- In addition to national state support, CSOs commonly benefit from funding and expert-driven support from transnational governmental and inter-governmental institutions. In this regard, important roles are played by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) as well as by country offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Similarly, the European Migration Forum and the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) sometimes enable national initiatives.
- Other external enablers are the existing and newly developed transnational horizontal networks between national and transnational civil society actors, which on several occasions served as an important resource of knowledge and information exchange as well as a tool for sharing innovative practices.
- Lastly, a favourable external context and developed cooperative and social entrepreneurship culture enhance the effectiveness of integration programmes in several countries, in particular, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. This favourable culture of collaboration enhances the emergence of new partnerships between CSOs on the one hand and cooperative and social entrepreneurship culture on the other hand. This can also be seen in the case of

Danish networking organisations, which manage to build links between employers and MRAs or between states and MRAs.

The analysis furthermore identified the following **internal enablers** of MRAs integration:

- First, flexibility and a lower degree of bureaucratisation compared to public administration allow CSOs to account for the specific needs, aspirations, and experiences of individual MRAs.
- Second, this personalised approach is linked to the capacity of CSOs to grant MRAs some agency in their integration efforts and to determine their own path to integration. Compared to public services, CSOs frequently have a stronger potential to understand the personal needs of MRAs and to foster their agency. In addition to MRAs in general, this focus concerns more specific groups, such as youth and women migrants, as has been emphasised in Finland.
- Third, CSOs work as important enablers of labour market integration due to their networking capacity. CSO representatives function as brokers who help MRAs connect with public officials, employers, trade unions, politicians, and even with (although very rarely) journalists. Collaboration with the mass media is primarily focused on alternative and marginal rather than mainstream or tabloid media.
- Fourth, the role of networking is not only social, providing MRAs with access to social networks which they could not access otherwise, but also cultural; CSOs representatives ensure cultural mediation, supporting MRAs both culturally and linguistically. More specifically, CSOs can provide MRAs with information about national cultures and norms and assist them with translation. Therefore, CSOs representatives connect actors who would otherwise remain disconnected. Furthermore, CSOs have the capacity to understand and perceive the needs of MRAs and articulate them towards the state, employers, and other relevant external stakeholders.
- Fifth, the agency of MRAs in some national contexts is enhanced thanks to the provided space for the involvement of MRAs in CSOs, either through professional work or through volunteering, often participating in language counselling services. In the Finnish context, for example, CSOs work as important job providers. Moreover, in some national contexts (e.g. Finland, the UK, Switzerland) migrants themselves actively establish organisations with explicit integration objectives.
- Sixth, MRAs appreciate the psychological benefits which come with the personalised approach taken by CSOs. This personalised method can help foster the self-confidence of MRAs and prevent their alienation not only during the process of job-searching but in integration more broadly. Several MRAs also appreciated that the non-profit ethos, differentiated from the public administration, helps to avoid the stigmatisation of MRAs commonly diffused among public officers.
- Seventh, some CSOs provide expert knowledge, gather evidence, and participate in research projects.
- Eighth, a number of CSOs apparently provide MRAs with valuable sources of soft knowledge considering labour market integration services and enhance their orientation on the labour market. More specifically, they provide MRAs with important, simple, but not always available answers to the following questions: Where to go? What service to use? And whom to contact and how? Furthermore, CSOs provide assistance in the administration of work permits and work contracts, which, as suggested in the WP4 report, is currently complicated and bureaucratised.
- Ninth, CSOs are important as reflexive actors in the policymaking process, providing input, although only taken into consideration accidentally rather than systematically, for policy change through advocacy. In this vein, CSOs locate the importance of labour market integration in the broader context, articulating a more holistic vision of integration. Therefore, they remind that labour market integration cannot work on its own, in a separate work-related bubble, but that labour market integration must also be developed hand in hand with broader social and cultural integration. In other words, CSOs can work as discursive shifters, as subjects who can potentially correct somewhat limited mainstream national integration policies where integration has a very narrow meaning. Through their advocacy capacities, CSOs also contribute to

protecting MRAs' rights by articulating issues such as human trafficking and the illegal conduct of employers.

Third, our findings suggest in their work in the area of labour market integration, CSOs do not function exclusively as enablers; their functioning is determined by external pressures and can be limited due to internal restrictions which hinder their integration initiatives.

Next, the analysis identified the following **external barriers** hindering labour market integration initiatives:

- First, considering the instability, temporality, and uncertainty of the state support of CSOs, the dependence on funding influences the very existence of civil society organisations. Their dependence on public funding, therefore, may hinder the contribution of CSOs to labour market integration objectives.
- Second, the subsidising of CSOs by public administrations influences the agenda of NGOs, defines the (un)desired target groups, or determines the nature and spectrum of the provided services. National funding can also be used as a tool to subsume integration services under the principles of migration securitisation.
- Third, some CSOs mentioned the problem of co-optation of the originally non-governmental nature of integration services of the state. The process of co-optation results in the exclusion of CSOs from the arena they (co-)created and in which they operated. In other words, in cases of co-optation, CSOs would open a new path of integration policies, establish integration courses, or start implementing mentoring services. However, once established, the provision of these services would lose state support and become secured exclusively by public administrations.
- Fourth, the sphere of CSOs can similarly be co-opted and strategically misused by private business providers, as happened in the United Kingdom or Greece. This idea emerged notably in national contexts where the number of emergency ad hoc services introduced in response to the so-called 'migrant crisis' in 2014 attracted a number of actors with opportunistic business-driven interests rather than a social mission. This co-optation can also be strongly developed in those national contexts where funding preferences prioritise established, usually bigger, and financially stable organisations; in particular, in the UK context, this means favouring even for-profit companies.
- Fifth, the distrust and suspicion of MRAs would also suggest there are a series of socio-cultural barriers influencing the interaction between CSOs and MRAs. These barriers prevent MRAs from stronger use of CSOs services. In particular, these circumstances have been observed in relation to closed ethnic and national communities who have established their own networks that provide the same functions otherwise ensured by NGOs. These communities approach CSOs only rarely, perceiving them as formal organisations and often conflating their position with the position of the public service. Viewing CSOs as 'official' and 'formal' organisations, they struggle to develop trustful relationships. The conflation of CSOs with the state also occurs due to the low visibility of civil society organisations and the low familiarity of MRAs with the services provided by CSOs.
- Sixth, the insufficient use of CSOs services is also determined by culturally-based understanding of personal honour; some MRAs would simply not approach CSOs as a matter of personal honour, perceiving a free service as a symptom of their own personal failure.
- Seventh, that the service of CSOs is provided for free would further increase the distrust of some MRAs, who would understand the counselling as lacking expertise and being 'insufficiently professional', regardless of the know-how, experience, and education of CSOs' volunteers and employers.
- Eighth, the success of integration programmes is hindered sometimes by NGOs being awarded very little recognition from policymakers, and their recognition remaining only tokenistic, as observed in the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. In other words, some CSOs viewed the space provided by public authorities to them as a formalistic tick-box exercise.

Finally, the analysis identified the following **internal barriers** hindering labour market integration initiatives secure by CSOs:

- First, the effectiveness of integration services can suffer from the low engagement of MRAs in CSOs. Some CSOs would explicitly suggest that the key objective of NGOs is to provide professional services, regardless of the participation of MRAs in CSOs everyday activities. However, the low participation of MRAs can reinforce the processes of othering and objectification; MRAs are, therefore, *a priori* understood as passive and somewhat incompetent actors with deficits.
- Second, labour market integration services have been hindered due to the lack of experience and know-how of some CSOs, in particular, those established in an emergency context as a reaction to the so-called migrant crisis. The operational capacity of these newly established CSOs was further limited (although not necessarily) due to limited networking capacities, undermining the possible role of CSOs as brokers mediating the relations between MRAs and employers or the public administration.
- Third, some CSOs and their employees tend to operate in a 'professional bubble', which prevents them from considering the individual situations of MRAs holistically as well as understanding their sociocultural expectations. An inordinate focus on the professional identity of CSOs social workers accompanied by excessive expertisation and prioritisation of technical skills can undermine the sociocultural potential of CSOs.
- Fourth, the excessively professionalised ethos of CSOs is sometimes closely intertwined with the implementation of accountability measures, based on quantification and inadequate attention given to the nature of activities. The approach prioritising statistical evidence instead of experience can, for example, contribute to the fact that CSOs act as actors who extend the state's pressure on MRAs to get a job at any cost instead of considering the position and experience of MRAs.
- Fifth, the capacity of CSOs to understand the personal needs of MRAs and to foster their agency is marginalised by the pressures of bureaucratisation and institutionalisation. Similar to the excessive emphasis given to expert knowledge, the bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of CSOs undermine the flexible nature of organisations and foster their more or less deliberate reluctance to take into account the specific experiences and skills of individuals.
- Sixth, the previously mentioned dependence on external funding can influence the internal nature of CSOs and undermine the contentious and transformative character of CSOs. The dependence on funding can, therefore, marginalise critical voices within CSOs, leaving the contribution of CSOs towards integration to rest on individualised service provision rather than collective action. An excessive alignment with state integration policy, embracing a narrow understanding of integration, is apparent in Denmark, where refugee and asylum seekers commented that CSOs tend to repeat state discourses and simply put into practice state policies.
- Seventh, the manifest example of internal barriers is represented by CSOs who embrace perspectives opposing integration. The post-2014 context contributed to the emergence of CSOs with anti-migration perspectives and which would explicitly resist any integration effort.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building upon the aforementioned main findings, the most relevant policy implications are:

- Economic sustainability and continuity in the financing of CSOs should be strengthened by governmental policies in order to secure knowledge transfer and further develop the professional capacities of CSOs. Financial support for CSOs should also reflect on the

uneven geographical distribution of provided services. The state support should contribute to a higher degree of cohesion and encourage CSOs to promote their services in peripheral areas.

- CSOs are an important bridge between MRAs, public authorities, experts and employers. However, the networking capacities should be further developed through linking projects and supported by public authorities. Effective communication platforms of different actors might increase consensus over policies, increase participation of different actors in migration policies and strengthen the cooperation within the sector. Considering their impartiality and high credit they have among MRAs, CSOs might serve as leaders of platforms of actors who might strengthen the broader consensus in migration policies.
- CSOs in many countries are heavily dependent on public financial resources. It might diminish their own agenda and capacity to criticize public migration policies. Safe spaces where CSOs can discuss and critically reflect upon the policies of their donors should be established. Umbrella organizations might work as such spaces. These spaces providing feedback for state or local policies seem to be crucial for the development of good practices in migration policies. These spaces might also stimulate the self-reflexivity of CSOs; for example, if current approaches are falling short of effectively integrating MRAs, then CSOs can jointly develop ideas for developing fresh strategies.
- Dependence on public financial resources also shifts the CSOs agenda. Nevertheless, everyday contact with MRAs might make CSOs more sensitive to MRAs' needs than public authorities. For these reasons, channels through CSOs that can influence services funded by public authorities should be established and further supported.
- CSOs contribution to labour market integration is not generally recognised. Awareness campaigns, emphasising the positive experience and expertise as well as their capacity to provide an understanding of MRAs needs should be supported. These campaigns might increase public trust in state policies on the one hand and MRAs' trust in services provided by CSOs on the other hand. At least part of MRAs meets with CSOs for the first time in their lives, and they might understand well what kind of organization they are and how they operate.
- As migration is a transnational phenomenon and CSOs face similar challenges across the EU, the transnational networks should play an important role in public discussion and steering the third sector in individual member states.
- In the project, numerous examples of good and innovative practice have been identified. However, in many cases, experience with innovative practices is not shared across national borders and transferred to different contexts. For these reasons, there is space to spread social innovations in the field of labour integration and support their implementation in different contexts. On the other hand, innovative potential of CSOs should also be supported and developed.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The SIRIUS research project looks at the enablers and barriers of labour market integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Our research is organised into several work packages, and this report details the findings of the fourth work package, building on our previous research in work packages one, two and three: Work package one analyses the labour market position of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the SIRIUS countries. Work package two details the legal frameworks of each SIRIUS partner country relevant to inhibiting or enabling integration. Work package three focused on migrant labour market integration (MLI) policies and services. Work package four focus on the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in MLI. More specifically, this work package addressed the following objectives: (a) to explore the views of CSOs representatives concerning recent migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers and their employability and integration potential; (b) to analyse the role of civil society organisations from the

viewpoint of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; (c) to identify the transnational links between national organisations and foreign and transnational CSOs, including international institutions and structures (the EU, UN, etc.); and (d) to analyse the reaction of CSOs to the post-2014 migration flows and their ability to respond to the negative perceptions of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Europe. First, we reviewed existing academic literature and available primary and secondary documents about the involvement of CSOs in MLI. Second, we conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with CSO representatives. Third, semi-structured interviews with pre- and post-2014 MRAs who had personal experience with CSOs were carried out. Last but not least, a triangulation of data was conducted via regular diaries collected by a CSO which is a member of the SIRIUS consortium.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets (SIRIUS)

**COORDINATOR** Professor Simone Baglioni  
Glasgow Caledonian University  
Glasgow  
United Kingdom  
[Simone.Baglioni@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:Simone.Baglioni@gcu.ac.uk)

**CONSORTIUM**

Charles University – Faculty of Social Science  
Prague, Czech Republic

European University Institute – Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies  
Florence, Italy

Glasgow Caledonian University – Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health  
Glasgow, United Kingdom

Multicultural Center Prague – MKC  
Prague, Czech Republic

National Technical University of Athens – Applied Mathematical and Physical  
Sciences  
Athens, Greece

Roskilde University – Department of Social Sciences and Business  
Roskilde, Denmark

Solidar  
Bruxelles, Belgium

Solidarity Now – SN  
Athens, Greece

University of Florence – Department of Legal Sciences  
Florence, Italy

University of Geneva – Institute of Citizenship Studies  
Geneva, Switzerland

University of Jyväskylä – Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
Jyväskylä, Finland

<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Awarding body: European Union, Horizon 2020 Research programme H2020-SC6-REVINEQUAL-2017 Project reference: 770515
<b>DURATION</b>	January 2018 – December 2020 (36 months).
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: 2 500 000 €.
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="http://www.sirius-project.eu">www.sirius-project.eu</a>
<b>FOR MORE INFORMATION</b>	Contact: Professor Simone Baglioni ( <a href="mailto:simone.baglioni@gcu.ac.uk">simone.baglioni@gcu.ac.uk</a> ), Dr Thomas Montgomery ( <a href="mailto:thomas.montgomery@gcu.ac.uk">thomas.montgomery@gcu.ac.uk</a> ), Dr Francesca Caló ( <a href="mailto:francesca.calo@gcu.ac.uk">francesca.calo@gcu.ac.uk</a> )
<b>FURTHER READING</b>	<p>WP1 Report – Labour Market Barriers and Enablers – Comparative report on the position of post-2014 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the labour market (available on <a href="https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications">https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications</a>)</p> <p>WP2 Report – Legal Barriers and Enablers – Comparative report on the legal, institutional and socio-cultural analysis (available on <a href="https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications">https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications</a>)</p> <p>WP3 Report – Policy Barriers and Enablers (available on <a href="https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications">https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications</a>)</p> <p>WP4 Report – Civil Society Barriers and Enablers (available on <a href="https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications">https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications</a>)</p>