

SIRIUS

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

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Studying enablers and barriers in labour market integration dynamics for non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers: the SIRIUS conceptual framework

1. Introduction

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. In fact, 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'. 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 life conditions, to join family members already living here, to seek asylum from persecution, or sanctuary from humanitarian or environmental disasters.

Therefore, a medium to long-term strategy is required not only to accommodate, but also to integrate newcomers into their host societies. Moreover, an ageing European population, coupled with labour supply shortages, suggests European policymakers can adopt a coordinated approach to migration and asylum in connection with labour markets. In fact, the capacity for labour market opportunities to ensure the economic and social 'inclusion' of people within society holds true for host populations as well as migrants. Therefore regardless of one's migrant or native status, employment provides income, social identity, social connections, and it enables individuals to contribute to the growth and prosperity of the country through consumption and taxation.

However, 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. This heterogeneity (in economic structure, sectorial composition, labour force and demographic features etc.), combined with the substantial, but also 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)¹ migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in terms of effectively integrating into their host societies.

¹ SIRIUS does not study intra-EU or intra-EEA/EFTA migration (i.e. migration of EU/EFTA citizens between EU/EEA/EFTA countries others than the one of their citizenship) as we assume that, de jure at

Building on such premises, SIRIUS understands the labour market integration of non-EU migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as being dependent on a pattern of concurring circumstances and features located at different analytical levels: at the macro (state, sub-state and supra-state), at the meso (intra-societal), and at the micro (individual) levels.

Box: 1. Defining migrants, refugees and asylum applicants

A **migrant** is a person who establishes his or her usual residence in the territory of another state for a period that is either temporary (e.g. between three and twelve months) or on a long term basis (more than one year) or on a permanent basis, having previously been usually resident in another state. A migrant worker is therefore such a person who is undertaking (or has undertaken) paid employment in a state in which they are not a national.

An **asylum seeker or applicant** refers to a person who has submitted an application for international protection or has been included in such an application as a family member during the reference period. A first time asylum applicant for international protection is a person having submitted an application for international protection for the first time in any given country.

A **refugee** is a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it, and to whom Article 12 of Directive 2011/95/EU does not apply.

In fact, the possibility for a migrant to gain and maintain employment in a host country will depend upon the economic outlook and infrastructure of that country, on its legal/policy framework (whether migrants have access to work, and if so, if they access it as nationals do), including the availability of services to ease migrant access to the labour market (language courses, skills assessment, access to official job matching institutions) and cognate policies (e.g. housing, education, childcare). But public attitudes of the host country vis-à-vis migrants also play a key role here (given that 'inclusion' becomes a hard-to-implement strategy in a climate of social hostility).

However, whether a migrant can find a job also depends on his/her capacity to access those opportunities which emerge via social networks and through personal ties (social capital) that are consistently relevant for finding employment. Moreover, such networks and ties are one component of the meso-level infrastructure of European societies that are crucial not only for connecting people with potential job vacancies, but also for

least, access to labour markets and working as 'nationals do' are secured to them by EU norms (although limitations have applied or do apply to some of these).

embedding people within a neighbourhood, and are thus a fundamental element of community building.

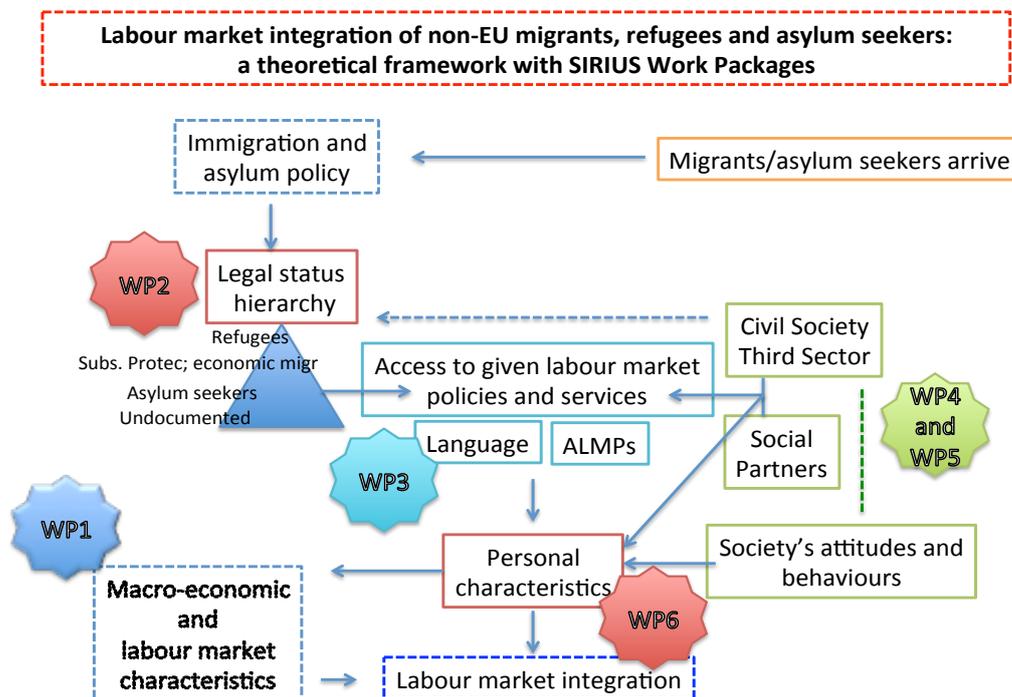
Finally, the employability of migrants will also depend on their own personality and (physical and mental) condition (talent, capacities, skills, education, personal attitude, but also age, gender and other personal factors). Thus, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have their own subjectivity with specific conditions and needs: policies aiming at integrating them in the labour market should therefore depart from a simplistic one size fits all model. Refugees and asylum seekers usually experience trauma and a level of psychological and physical stress which require specific services and time to make them ready to work, while so-called economic migrants who arrive with the primary aim to find employment are, at least from a psychological and physical viewpoint, already 'fit' for work. Hence, they require different services and timing to access employment compared to refugees and asylum seekers.

2. SIRIUS multi-dimensional conceptual framework

SIRIUS adopts a multi-dimensional understanding of '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- (organizational) and micro- (individual). 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 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in European countries. Therefore, SIRIUS's multi-dimensional conceptual framework unfolds through a sequence of six research work packages that comprise a coherent set of component actions addressing: a) macro-level barriers and enablers: labour market and, more generally, economic barriers and enablers (WP1), legal provisions (WP2), specific public policies (WP3); b) meso-level barriers and enablers: civil society (WP4), social partners (WP5), and; c) micro-level individual barriers and enablers (WP6).

In the following sections we present each of these analytical levels, while in section 3 we explain how the work packages develop and interact (figure 1 summarise our conceptual framework and related work packages).

Figure 1: SIRIUS conceptual framework and related work-packages



2.1 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 migrants, refugees, and asylum applicants. But macro-level features also include the institutional context of each country (e.g. centralized versus decentralized, as labour market policy competences, as well as cognate policies --e.g. housing, education, health -- are sometimes devolved to the local or sub-national levels), and therefore specific local/sub-national 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 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers 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 Member States to support migrants, refugees, and asylum applicants. 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, Valenta 2014; Kušniráková 2014).

Examining these aspects, SIRIUS provides evidence-based, policy-oriented inputs to help establish the necessary capacity to support diverse migrant groups in countries with little integration experience. This requires identifying and examining national actors, rules and practices in a variety of specific fields - such as, the labour market, social policy, education, housing and health care - to understand the key dynamics, define sound policies and improve the integration of migrants, refugees, and asylum applicants into the receiving societies.

Moreover, in conceptual and methodological terms, considering the macro-level dimension, SIRIUS builds upon a comparative framework: on the one hand, the project compares different forms of migration (so-called non-EU economic migrants, refugees and asylum applicants), on the other hand, through the variation between territorial levels and countries, the project can trace patterns of labour market integration and causal interrelations. The selected countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland) 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. Although 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” (Triantafillou 2011), differences in terms of policy making dynamics and policy implementation do exist and result in the establishment of diverse labour market and employment policy regimes (Anxo et al. 2010; de Beer and Schills 2009a, 2009b; Gallie 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Rothgang and Dingelday 2009). Moreover, we aim to study labour market integration policies in various cultural contexts encompassing as much as possible the diversity found across Europe.

Finally, our countries also differ in terms of other relevant institutional dimensions that may affect the dynamics underpinning the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Several studies have supported the idea that participatory and decentralized political contexts produce more responsive and redistributive policy making (Simon 1989, 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 decentralization and multi-level governance. Whereas countries like the Czech Republic maintain strong centralization and a weak culture of governance.

Hence, integration patterns may evolve differently depending on the political-institutional context in which one is located.

Thus, following a “most different system design” (Przeworski and Teune 1970) we aim to be able to highlight both the similarities and differences in the responses towards those issues surrounding the labour market integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and develop analyses explaining such patterns and variations.

Box 2: Skills and Skill levels

In SIRIUS we adopt the multidimensional ILO definition of **skills** as “the ability to carry out the tasks and duties of a given job”, and we also follow the ILO in our macro-level analysis when studying the skills levels of migrants and refugees by adopting the **ILO-ISCO-ISCED based categorization of skills**.

This means that we use the four ISCO-88 skill levels:

(a) The first ISCO skill level was defined with reference to ISCED category 1, comprising primary education which generally begins at the age of 5, 6 or 7 and lasts about five years.

(b) The second ISCO skill level was defined with reference to ISCED categories 2 and 3, comprising the first and second stages of secondary education. The first stage begins at the age of 11 or 12 and lasts about three years, while the second stage begins at the age of 14 or 15 and also lasts around three years. A period of on-the-job training and experience may be necessary, sometimes formalised in apprenticeships. This period may supplement the formal training or replace it partly or, in some cases, wholly.

(c) The third ISCO skill level was defined with reference to ISCED category 5, (category 4 in ISCED has been deliberately left without content) comprising education which begins at the age of 17 or 18, lasts about four years, and leads to an award not equivalent to a first university degree.

(d) The fourth ISCO skill level was defined with reference to ISCED categories 6 and 7, comprising education which also begins at the age of 17 or 18, lasts about three, four or more years, and leads to a university or postgraduate university degree, or the equivalent.

(Source: <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco88/publ2.htm>).

2.2 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 (e.g. where to find a potential employer but also accommodation). More specifically, civil society organizations and the reaction of local communities and non-governmental organizations are crucial players in ensuring integration to be effective (or indeed, can be significant opponents to it). Frequent and meaningful interaction between migrants and Member State citizens is considered to be a significant tool for opening societies for all migrants, but especially for refugees. Brücker et al. (2014) find more generally strong positive correlations between migrants’ intention to stay and their life satisfaction with the absence of discrimination, and in this sense, civil society organizations are key actors.

Given the lack of systematic research findings on the impact of refugee participation in associations and civil society organizations, SIRIUS fills a gap on what role civil society actors - in different countries with diverse cultures and socio-economic conditions - play in the integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers into society and the labour market.

Moreover, and still at the meso level of analysis, we will study the role played by social partnerships in the dynamics of labour market integration (cfr. Box 3). Studies reveal (e.g. ILO 2016; Eurofound 2016) that particularly at the sectorial level, representative organizations 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 at the workplace and are organizations which have experience in being versatile in times of austerity and crisis (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013). Concurrently, recent studies (e.g. 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 up-take in the employment of refugees and asylum seekers, ranging from uncertainty about the rules governing refugees and asylum seekers' rights to 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, SIRIUS 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 migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers into the labour market.

Box 3: Defining social partners and social dialogue

Social partners are those actors who are engaged in various forms of **social dialogue** which encompasses negotiations and consultations between representative organisations engaged in the field of employment such as trade unions, employers' organisations as well as policymakers. Such dialogue may be informal or formal depending on the policy context and can take place at different scales such as national, regional, or firm (company) level as well as within and across different sectors. Social dialogue processes are often designed to ensure a more democratic and consensus building approach to resolving issues between labour and management and can produce formal arrangements for securing standards on pay, security, health and safety and employee benefits such as collective bargaining agreements.

2.3 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 well-being, 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, socio-demographic characteristics

(age, gender, educational background) of the recent cohort of post-2014 non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers will be studied, alongside their qualifications (via educational attainment levels—see Box 2) and their personal and professional profile. We will pay particularly close attention to women and young people as they are - in this sense, very similar to many EU citizens - in a less favourable position to gain full-time, decently paid, employment, despite the fact that much of the economic development of the host countries will depend on their capacity to successfully integrate these groups into their labour markets.

Moreover, at the micro-level of analysis SIRIUS aims to target more specifically the needs and aspirations of post-2014 non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and what they consider as barriers and enablers to potential avenues for integration. Our project will disentangle 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.

3. Operationalization

3.1 Macro level focused Work-packages: WP1, WP2 and WP3

WP1 will provide a comprehensive labour market analysis assessing the skills (cfr. our operational definition as presented earlier in Box 1) by means of educational attainment levels, of the three groups, providing concrete insights into the barriers and enablers fundamental to their potential integration, predicting mismatches between labour supply and demand, and explaining the reasons behind the rates of unemployment and inactivity while taking into account sectorial shortages and needs. Concurrently, the research undertaken in WP2 and WP3 will shed light on the macro-level conditions under which, respectively, legal frameworks and policy measures, including a wide range of public policies to facilitate labour market integration – employment activation policy, education and training, social welfare, housing and care policy - are most effective. In parallel, the research will seek to advance understanding of the contribution of EU priorities to national policymaking, illustrate best practice in policy design, delivery, coordination and governance, and ultimately feed project results into the development of the next generation of integration policies at national and EU levels, leading to a more effective targeting of measures and allocation of resources.

3.2 Meso level focused Work-packages

At a meso-level, WP4 and WP5 will build bridges between the macro- and micro-level WPs by bringing to the fore the societal barriers and enablers for integration. A central hypothesis underpinning SIRIUS is that the structure of institutions - such as the labour market, education and social welfare systems - and their relation with other societal sectors such as civil society organizations and the social partners, as well as their underlying assumptions, create climates of fragility which in turn shape society's

perceptions about migrants and refugees and what collective demands and individual aspirations are legitimate in developing their pathways to employment. Drawing, therefore, upon an understanding of integration as a social construction through which society and institutions justify and distribute specific resources and opportunities, WP4 and WP5 delve into the ways in which major civil society and labour market actors open gateways for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and among them young people and women, to the labour market or society at large. Within these caveats, the analysis of the role of social partners in WP5 is complemented by an organisational study of civil society organisations in WP4. The purpose of the study is to inquire into whether or not such organisations are able to provide post-2014 non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with connections to other social contexts and with opportunities that can be decisive for gaining a foothold into the labour market, or indeed if they obstruct employment and social integration.

3.3 Micro-level focused Work-packages

As labour market integration across the three groups of migrants is influenced not only by the legal/policy frameworks and configurations shaping labour market access but also by the individual characteristics found within each group, WP6 (on individual-level dynamics) seeks to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms and processes through which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers themselves strive for inclusion, and which strategies they adopt to cope with barriers and seize new opportunities. WP6 will adopt a gender and age sensitive approach: women and young people are a consistent section of refugee and asylum seeker groups, as well as economic migrants, while simultaneously representing the 'weaker' segment of the employment spectrum (youth and female unemployment rates are higher than those of the other categories across the EU, moreover these two groups experience greater exposure to precarious employment, see also Kofman 2000; Pedraza 1991). Given these specificities, young people and women are among those migrants and refugees/asylum seekers who potentially are (or are at least perceived to be) in direct competition for jobs with native workers who are themselves confronting challenges to locate good quality work. Therefore WP6 considers also the point of view of host societies' citizens (by means of a film documentary). The findings of WP6 will be juxtaposed with the findings of WPs 1, 2 and 3 and give researchers and policy-makers insightful inputs about what is required to support post-2014 migrants cope with whatever challenges they may encounter during their fragile transition period in destination and transit countries. This will open the ground for more nuanced academic research and evidence-based policy-making.

4. To conclude

Labour market and social integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum applicants has 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 utilize 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 applicants 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 of the migrants and refugees end up.

For such reasons, a central aim of SIRIUS 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 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Such a policy framework will be premised within a broader normative Human Rights Approach to decent work (and migration), putting people as rights holders at the centre of the project's analysis (ILO 1999; Solidar, 2011). This is of crucial importance to counter xenophobia and to reinforce a duty of solidarity within and across the EU. Regardless of their 'native', foreign, asylum seeker or refugee status, the rights of people to live their lives with dignity should be respected. Therefore, irrespective of their legal status, migrants, like all other human beings, should not be subject to exploitation, or precarious and unsafe working conditions.

Moreover, although we believe labour market integration can be a strong tool for social and civic integration, governments should not base their decision on whether or not to grant asylum upon the employability potential of the claimant. Furthermore, a focus on development implies that the systematic respect for the rights of migrant workers all across the migration process is key to enabling these migrants to become agents of change in both their countries of origin and their host countries. These are all crucial aspects of the project, as spelled out in the research questions and in the specific work packages which combine multiple quantitative and qualitative methods in order to generate new, cross-national data that will not only explain those factors which enable or constrain the labour market inclusion of post-2014 non-EU migrants, including refugees and asylum applicants, but will also capture new ways for empowering migrants, refugees and asylum applicants in European labour markets.

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