

Working Group 16:

The business case for better refugee and migrant integration that can contribute to Europe's growth

Background

The long-term economic impact of large-scale refugee flows into the European Union is not easy to predict. The economy of the main destination countries will most likely benefit in the short term. However, the long-term impact depends on the successful integration of refugees into the labour market. Access to employment for refugees and all other migrants is closely linked to a number of fundamental rights, such as slavery and forced labour, freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work, the freedom to conduct a business, non-discrimination, and fair and just working conditions. For all immigrants, decent employment and steady income is also important for accessing and enjoying rights. Member States often include economic resource requirements for access to family reunification, long-term residence status and national citizenship.

The role of the private sector has been less often focused on, despite its crucial role in recruitment and employment practices, and the treatment of migrant workers. This is particularly important since businesses sometimes exploit migrants in vulnerable situations, particularly those who are low skilled. Businesses should not only make sure that migrants are treated lawfully as workers. Proactive engagement with migrants should be of direct interest to companies due to the improved productivity and increased competitiveness that it can bring. In addition, successful migrant integration with the support of businesses has the potential to impact positively on economic growth. Finally, the principles of corporate social responsibility are of major importance for the private sector to systematically address issues related to refugee integration.

One other avenue for ensuring decent employment for migrants is allowing migrants to become self-employed and set up their own businesses. Migrants often face discrimination when accessing employment, which is one reason for a high rate of migrant entrepreneurship within OECD member countries. Migrants who wish to engage in entrepreneurial activities face several obstacles, such as access to finance; businesses can provide support in this area as well.

Objectives

This workshop sought to explore the links between integration and the economy, and the opportunities that they present to each other, with a focus on the role of business. For all immigrants, access to decent employment and engaging in business activities is closely linked to the realisation of many fundamental rights. The workshop addressed the private

sector's engagement with migrants in general (and refugees in particular), while discussing how the private sector can contribute to successful integration and the upholding of rights. Furthermore, it explored to what extent efforts are needed to ensure that obstacles to refugees setting up businesses themselves are removed.

Speakers

- Gabriela Sonnleitner, CEO Magdas Social Business, Magdas Hotel
- Joana Adesuwa-Reiterer, Founder and Chair of the NGO 'Exit', JOADR;
- Sari Salojärvi, Manager of an integration programme for educated asylum seekers, Hanken University
- Sheena Keller, Research Officer, FRA

Main messages

1. Access to decent employment is crucial for migrant integration and the realisation of fundamental rights. Migrants are not only employees, but also employers, consumers and taxpayers, linked to the global economy. This is why employing migrants is of interest for businesses.
2. Obstacles for businesses to employ migrants or for migrants to set up their own businesses need to be reduced. These include uncertainty regarding the individual's legal/residency status and the need for professional support, which requires investment by businesses as well as by authorities.
3. Awareness needs to be raised that social responsibility and investment in migrant integration can be used as a marketing case by businesses.

Promising practices

- [Hanken & SSE Executive Education](#) - a business-led initiative for training skilled asylum seekers, Finland.
- [Magdas](#) - this social business initiative is a hotel run by refugees, Austria.
- [Joadre](#) - a private business network set up from an NGO working against human trafficking.

Next steps

- Authorities at all levels should raise awareness of the the economic advantages of helping migrants integrate into the labour market.
- Governments and policy makers should remove legal obstacles for asylum seekers looking to access the labour market.
- Businesses should transfer other models (and promising practices) to other countries.
- Public authorities and businesses should facilitate public-private cooperation on migrant integration.

- Authorities at all levels should map the skills of newly-arrived immigrants in order to connect them with potential employers.
- Policy makers, employer associations, and trade unions should discuss the need for flexible payment schemes during training periods without compromising fundamental rights.