

European Dialogue on Skills and Migration

23 May 2017

Key points from the discussions

Key messages from the High-level Panels¹

- The Commission is launching the initiative "Employers for Integration"² to give visibility to the activities put in place by employers to support the integration of refugees and other migrants into the labour market and encourage other employers to launch similar initiatives.
- A swift and effective integration of refugees into the labour market is a social and economic imperative. Many refugees are there to stay and we cannot afford their integration to fail. Effective integration is a shared interest of the hosting society and of the individual concerned.
- Many efforts at national and EU level have been made already to promote integration in the labour market but action needs to be intensified to ensure things actually happen on the ground with the support of employers, social partners and civil society organisations.
- Employers have a key role in this context. Their initiatives to facilitate/promote integration represents a business interest (finding the right skills) for the company to grow and prosper but also show companies' commitment and responsibility in contributing to build cohesive societies.
- To make migrants' integration happen in an organisation, management must be fully on board in order to remove possible obstacles (legal, financial). Moreover, the other employees must also be on board and convinced that integration will not be made at their expenses and that they will also benefit from a more diverse working environment.
- Experimentation and time are necessary for the company to identify the skills of refugees and migrants, for instance through internships.
- A multistakeholders approach involving economic and social partners and public authorities (EU, national, regional and local) is necessary to raise the challenge of the integration in the labour market.

¹ **Speech Commissioner Avramopoulos:**

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/avramopoulos/announcements/speech-commissioner-avramopoulos-second-european-dialogue-skills-and-migration_en

Speech Commissioner Thyssen:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/thyssen/announcements/speech-second-european-dialogue-skills-and-migration-brussels_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/european-dialogue-skills-and-migration/integration-pact_en.

Thematic discussion 1: Identifying obstacles to the integration on the labour market and finding solutions together

- The obstacles to integration into the labour market are multi-faceted and linked to: limited knowledge of the host-country language; the level of education as well as the lack of recognition of existing skills; the uncertainty of the legal status and other institutional barriers; the lack of networks and knowledge about local workplace culture; and sometimes the presence of discriminatory practices.
- Beyond the concrete support measures, it is important to manage expectations on both sides (employers, migrants) as it helps to avoid disappointment – overall one has to be aware that integrating refugees into the labour market may take more time than initially expected. It is also important to provide continued support after placement to ensure long term employability.
- Refugees face specific obstacles that need to be addressed and understood as they can delay/prevent quick labour market integration (in particular psychological traumas). At the same time, one should not forget other categories of migrants who lack the support to integrate the labour market, in particular those coming for family reasons.
- Some promising practices exist or are being experimented in several Member States such as: providing clearer information on the legal aspects (through hotlines, one-stop shop or guide for employers); strong collaboration with local public employment services; organising language courses during vocational training (rather than in a sequential approach); collaboration between all actors, at local and regional level; assessment of skills that take into account also informal competences and not only formal qualifications.
- Generally speaking, it is the right moment to capitalise and consolidate existing initiatives. Actors may be lost in the mass of information, websites and available apps; it is therefore important to identify what did work and what did not.

Thematic discussion 2: How to reach out to refugees and other migrants: matching skills with employers' needs

- To facilitate an effective matching between employers' needs and availabilities in terms of skills and competences, it is key to put refugees in direct contact with employers, for example through company visits and orientation days.
- In the matching process, it is crucial to look beyond formal skills to take into account informal competences as well as the motivation of the candidates.
- Civil society organisations can play a key role in bridging between employers and refugees. However, to make the matching successful it is essential that any matching process is built on the real needs and reality of the companies.
- Innovative practices such as "speed dating" events (e.g. quick encounters between employers and refugees) and online matching tools can support employers in finding refugees with the skills they are looking for.

Thematic discussion 3: Employers' initiatives for integration in the workplace

- The time spent in reception centres awaiting the result of the asylum procedure, which can cause a lot of frustration, could be used to start a learning path; commitment and eagerness to learn and work by asylum seekers and refugees are often remarkable. Legal certainty and an effective system to find the people they need is however crucial for employers.
- Many companies – especially small ones - highlighted that they would not have been able to do what they did without other actors, such as Chambers of commerce, NGOs or other institutions, mainly because they did not have sufficient administrative or legal capacity.
- Employers appear motivated by serious problems in finding staff with the needed skills and also by a commitment to “do their share” (corporate social responsibility); several companies mentioned that their initiatives were prompted by reading a newspaper article or following a contact with another actor engaged in the field.
- Commitment from management is crucial. Internships can also be very valuable and can be a path to long-term placement. Some internship programmes have a very high success rate, with refugees finding permanent jobs afterwards; mentoring also gives good results.
- Several positive experiences were reported. Feedback from employees is mainly positive and asylum seekers and refugees are pleased to work and be seen as professionals. The benefits stressed by employees are manifold and include the fact that they better relate to events taking place in Syria or Yemen, for example.
- While the obstacle of language is among the issues of biggest concern for companies, it was also stressed that the obstacles can be overcome in many ways and that sometimes it is easier in small firms, sometimes it is easier in large firms where English is most commonly used.