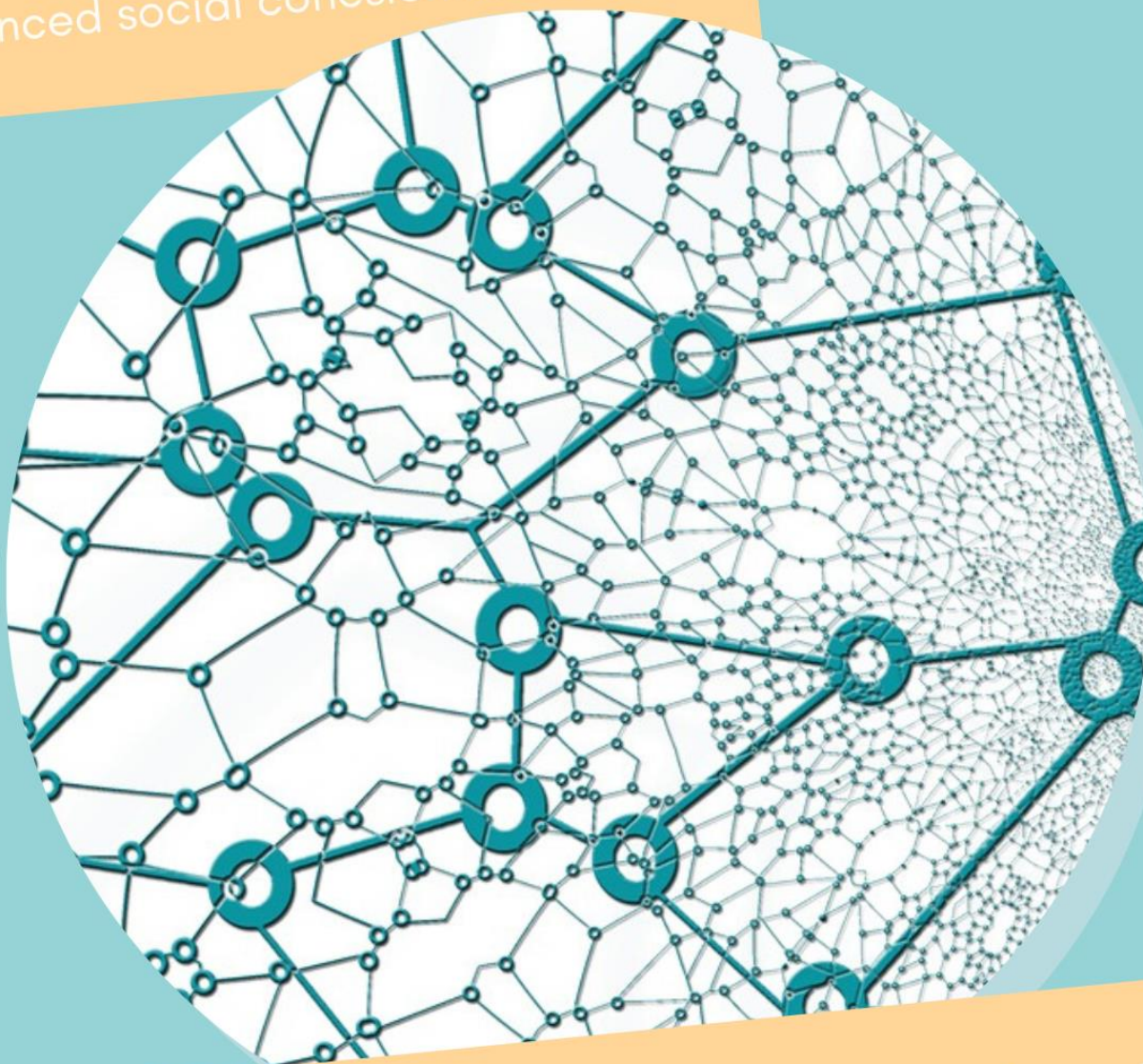


Include-EU

Regional and local expertise,
exchange and engagement for
enhanced social cohesion in Europe.



Labour market inclusion



The project is funded by the Asylum,
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Introduction



Includ-EU project description

The goal of Includ-EU is to contribute to building more inclusive and cohesive European societies by enhancing transnational knowledge sharing, cooperation, and partnerships between local and regional authorities in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain.

Includ-EU capitalizes on the diversity of local expertise and approaches as well as existing policy and practice in the field of integration. Funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, the project focuses on:

- a) improving knowledge and capacities to facilitate the integration of Third Country Nationals (TCNs);
- b) implementing and assessing pilot projects that promote the integration of TCNs at the regional and local level;
- c) establishing an informal network of regions and local authorities with different levels of expertise.

Aim of the briefing

One of Includ-EU's specific objectives is to enhance local and regional actors' knowledge and capacities to implement innovative integration measures, including through the analysis of existing good practices and the formulation of thematic policy recommendations.

In line with this, the aim of this briefing is to present the state of TCNs' labour inclusion in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain, focusing on possible implications for broader action. This document also examines existing good practices contributing to TCNs' labour market access and skills recognition in the European Union (EU) and formulates policy recommendations on how to improve these aspects further.

This briefing is the result of a collaborative mapping process of successful multi-stakeholder, multi-level, and public-private partnerships in different dimensions of TCNs' inclusion in the Includ-EU target countries, in line with the new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-27.

Labour market integration, access to vocational training, and skills recognition in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion

While the responsibility for integration policies lies primarily with the Member States, the EU has established a variety of measures to incentivise and support national, regional, and local authorities as well as civil society in their efforts to promote integration. In this framework, the EU Commission's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (the Action Plan) sets integration policy priorities, proposes concrete actions, provides guidance, and delineates funding opportunities to translate policy into practice in key areas of the integration process.

In the field of labour market inclusion, the Action Plan recognises the importance of employment as crucial for integration, particularly for inclusion into the host country's economic and social life, and access to decent living conditions. Early integration into the labour market also addresses the need for workforce, particularly in essential sectors which suffer from labour shortages and ageing population. For these reasons, the Commission aims to support the Member States in **improving employment opportunities and skills recognition** to fully value the potential of all migrants, particularly refugees and women.

In the framework of the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**, the Commission commits to developing a "**Skills and Qualifications Toolkit**" to support timely identification of skills and qualifications; ensure better **information about qualification recognition practices** and decisions in different countries through the [Europass portal](#);

and improve **transparency** regarding qualifications acquired in third countries, through the revision of the [European Qualifications Framework](#).

The Commission also identifies good quality, work-based **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** as a particularly valuable tool that should be further strengthened across Member States.

Lastly, the Action Plan provides for specific support for projects under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), promoting 'fast track' insertion into the labour market and VET, particularly for women.

In addition to these programmatic objectives, the European Commission promotes greater **workers' mobility and skills-matching**. In 2020, the Commission relaunched the **European Partnership on Integration** involving key social and economic partners. The partnership was first signed in 2017 to enhance the early integration of refugees into the labour market and promote a multi-stakeholder approach. Later in 2021, the Commission launched "**Talent Partnerships**," an initiative under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum that aims to address skills shortages in the EU and strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries. In addition, in the "**Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU**" **Communication** of April 2022, the Commission has outlined three pillars of measures to foster labour migration, namely legislative, operational, and future-oriented actions. Legislative measures include simplifying the procedures for the workers' admission and intra-EU mobility, and improving labour rights protection. As for the operational pillars proposed by the Commission, it proposes the development of Talent Partnerships with partner countries and an EU Talent Pool. Lastly, the Commission's long-term proposals cover long-term care workers, youth mobility, and start-up founders. Another flagship initiative in the field of labour inclusion is "**Employers together for Integration**", initiated by the Commission in 2017 to raise awareness about employers' action in support inclusion into the labour market.

The right to work and labour market access

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises **the right to work as a fundamental right of all persons**. Article 23(1) states that '[e]veryone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment'.

Other international human rights treaties codify the **universal and fundamental character** of this right. This is the case of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Article 11(1)(a) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Article 1 of the European Social Charter; and Article 15 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The right to work is recognized also for refugees in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Employment is fundamental for the realization of other economic and social rights. It is an essential condition to find decent accommodation and become part of the host's country economic and social life. In a context of ageing population and shrinking workforce in Europe, the inclusion of TCN's into the labour market has become instrumental to **meeting labour needs and welfare system sustainability**.

Despite the universal nature of this right and the importance of opening labour markets to newcomers, **many countries in the world are reluctant to recognise the right to work of migrants**, particularly the most vulnerable ones, including refugees, or restrict their access to the labour market. This reluctance is often the result of fears and concerns about limited labour market capacity, crowding of certain sectors, competition with citizens for jobs, reduction in wages, deteriorating working conditions, and structural discrimination and bias. In fact, almost half of the 145 State Parties to the Refugee Convention put reservations on the right to work for refugees and, when they grant this right, they put conditions on access to the labour market for this group (Zettel and Ruadel 2018).

The state of TCNs' labour market inclusion in the EU

Despite the universal and fundamental nature of the right to work, **employment access, assistance, and rights are not fully granted to all individuals**, or differ significantly across countries.

According to the results of the MIPEX study, the majority of the countries considered (33 out of 56 across six continents) **delay full and equal access to the labour market for foreign residents**, and 15 of them deny immediate labour market access for migrants on temporary permits (MIPEX 2022).¹ Importantly, the situation has not changed significantly over the last five years in the majority of the countries considered, with no relevant labour market inclusion reforms undertaken to date (MIPEX 2022).

Similarly, **skills and qualification recognition** vary substantially across countries and represent a major obstacle to labour market inclusion. Out of the 56 countries considered in MIPEX index, 34 grant equal access, 13 apply different procedures for migrants and nationals, with more burdensome requirements for the former, and 9 countries have ad hoc or no procedures for titles recognition (MIPEX 2022).

As a result of burdensome requirements for skills recognition combined with structural discrimination and prejudice, migrants are unable to access jobs that better match their qualifications. They find themselves **confined to low-skilled occupations** or have to go through **lengthy and costly bureaucratic procedures** via consulates and embassies. Skills recognition is an even greater barrier for international protection holders who cannot obtain their documents from their country of origin, and for those migrants who have **non-formal and informal competences**.

Access to targeted support to labour market inclusion is another major weakness. The majority of countries considered by the MIPEX index lack or do not provide sufficiently targeted support to foreign-trained or low-skilled migrant workers, particularly women and youth (MIPEX 2022). For example, targeted language and professional training, mentoring, employment incentives, or measures for migrant youth and women are available in few countries only.

As for workers' rights, migrants with a permanent resident permit generally have the same access to **social security** as EU nationals.² Access to social security for temporary residents, on the contrary,

¹ The MIPEX measures policies in all EU Member States (including the UK), other European countries (Albania, Iceland, North Macedonia, Moldova, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine), Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, United Arab Emirates), North American countries (Canada, Mexico and US), South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile), South Africa, and Australia and New Zealand in Oceania.

² Despite this, strong limitations remain in the portability of pension and health care benefits for internationally mobile workers. EU Member States have undertaken bilateral social security agreements with third countries to improve this aspect (see ILO 2021).

vary significantly from country to country (MIPEx 2022). Migrant workers are more likely to face legal and practical obstacles to access to social security and social protection benefits because of their status, insufficient length of employment or residence, administrative barriers and poor coordination between social security schemes at home and in their host country, and the lack of information about their rights (ILO 2021, 20).

More generally, migrant workers are **often cut off from employment that matches their skills and aspirations**. This limits their inclusion and hampers their contribution to economic and social life. In Includ-EU countries, this is the result of interlinked structural and contextual factors.

In addition to the obstacles mentioned above, **language barriers and poor language skills** represent a major challenge in identifying and securing employment opportunities. Moreover, poor language skills also cause migrants to be unaware or have a poor understanding of their rights.

Conversely, **employers are often unaware about the regulatory framework regarding the right to work and the validity of certifications possessed by specific groups of TCNs**, such as asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, or struggle to navigate the administrative hurdles to hire them (OECD and UNHCR 2018).

In the case of both migrants and employers, the **streamlining of processes and dissemination of relevant information about labour rights are not ensured in a crosscutting fashion** among services, leading to de facto limitations in the exercise of specific rights, such as entitlement to participation in state programs for the promotion of employment (OECD 2019b).

In addition, **procedural barriers and bureaucratic hurdles discourage both prospective migrant employees and employers from starting regular work contracts**. Employers are often discouraged by the rules and procedures to hire non-EU citizens. Furthermore, companies and employers often lack knowledge on hiring schemes and diversity management (OECD 2019b).

When it comes to asylum seekers, delays in the examination of claims for international protection may lead to **protracted periods of exclusion from regular employment**. This hinders the chances of returning to employment later, has a negative effect on mental health and motivation, and pushes asylum seekers into informal and exploitative work relations (Hainmueller et al. 2016).

Although potentially attractive, **migrant entrepreneurship** remains a limited phenomenon in most Includ-EU countries due to barriers to accessing mainstream funding or financial support. Beyond this, TCNs may require specific training and coaching on access to capital and how to implement business ideas.³

Last but not least, **employment in host countries is all-too often out of reach for female migrants**. Due to a poor distribution of reproductive work and care responsibilities that penalize women, the latter do not have the basic enabling conditions to access the labour market on equal foot with men. In addition, the lack of targeted vocational training, employment support, and adequate and affordable childcare put women with TCN status in a particularly disadvantaged position.

As a result of these interrelated barriers, TCNs, especially those in a situation of vulnerability, are **more exposed to the risks of informal labour, including exploitation, housing deprivation, segregation, and social exclusion**.

Some sectors are particularly prone to migrant labour exploitation in Includ-EU countries, including agriculture, construction, domestic work, and hospitality (FRA 2019, 959).

³ On the challenges and opportunities of migrant entrepreneurship, see UNCTAD, 2018. *Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees*. Geneva. Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diae2018d2_en.pdf. Accessed 18 October 2022.

More generally, even when migrant workers have access to some form of employment, **they continue to be exposed to non-payment of contributions affecting the workers' social security and pension fund, unpaid sick leave, and exclusion from social insurance schemes, which may result in the failure to obtain a work and residence permit.**

Last but not least, migrant workers often face **discrimination and distrust** that affect their chances of finding regular employment. In fact, negative narratives of migration as a threat to culture, identity, the economy and the labour market tend to be deep-seated in society even when not rooted in evidence (Banulescu-Bogdan et al. 2021, 25). These narratives have gained salience with the rise of far-right populist parties across Europe (Dennison and Geddes 2018) and understanding their functioning is crucial to ensure a more balanced public debate and policy making on social inclusion (Banulescu-Bogdan et al. 2021, 25).



Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on TCNs' labour inclusion

The health emergency has brought to the fore the **essential role** of TCN workers in crucial sectors of the economy, including health and care, domestic work, and agriculture, exposing the precarious employment conditions that these workers face. The pandemic has also had a serious impact on employment opportunities for migrants as many industries were shut down or had to reduce their business significantly, leaving many people in uncertainty.

Some **sectors where TCN workers make up for a significant share of the workforce were particularly exposed** to the consequences of the health crisis. Many low skilled and vocational professions cannot be implemented remotely or virtually (fruit picking, cleaning, construction work, hospitality), leaving many migrants **out of work and without meaningful social interactions**. Moreover, migrants tend to work under temporary and flexible work contracts, and, as a consequence, many lost their jobs without severance pay or other benefits.

While some sectors, like hospitality, collapsed, others faced a **severe lack of labour force**. For instance, mobility restrictions prevented seasonal workers to reach Italy for the harvesting season, putting the national **agricultural sector** under strain. These migrant workers proved hard to replace due to a lack of suitable skills among Italian nationals. As a consequence, the '[Job in the Country' Platform](#)', created in Italy to tackle the lack of workers in agriculture, proved ineffective in addressing labour shortages. During the crisis, this prompted advocacy campaigns to recognize the importance of TCNs in key sectors, such as healthcare, agriculture, and delivery services.

Movement restrictions have particularly affected employees in **transport services**. In Slovenia, for instance, many of them were stranded without accommodation, resting place, or ways to return to their country of origin. Similarly, migrant workers in the **construction sector** found themselves in a vulnerable situation: while they were able to keep their employment, they had to work in overcrowded conditions with higher risks of contagion. Furthermore, many construction workers are trapped in contracts that limit their access to health care and confine them to overcrowded accommodation.

Beyond the impact on individual sectors of the economy, **the pandemic exacerbated existing problems in accessing the labour market.**

First, the **enforcement and protection of labour rights** was jeopardised by the restrictions. In Slovenia, the national lockdowns resulted in an increase of layoffs and abuse of labour regulations. The same goes for the already insufficient supervision over legality and safety by the government authorities.

Second, **access to information** about rights, duties, and employment opportunities became even more challenging than under non-emergency circumstances, further exposing migrant workers to administrative delays and exploitation. The fast-changing regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic proved often contradictory or unclear. TCNs had difficulties accessing or interpreting accurate information, facing uncertainty and situations of irregularity.

In the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch Refugee Agency reported that migrants struggled to navigate information on their rights and obligations related to work, income, integration requirements, taxes, and benefits. Standard information platforms were only available in the Dutch language, and specialised support centres were required to close their doors as per national safety measures. Particularly during the so called 'first wave' of the pandemic in 2020, the lack of clear information was deeply felt by TCNs in the Netherlands, at least until national and local governments as well as NGOs and employers rolled out their respective pandemic contingency plans.

Third, **administrative delays due to the pandemic affected recruitment and the issuance of residence and work permits**. According to the OECD International Migration Outlook report (2020), for example, in Spain the whole migration system has been affected by administrative delays, with the exception of work permit procedures for health care and agricultural workers. The same report highlights that all procedures regarding collective recruitment of foreign workers were suspended in 2020, considerably affecting the recruitment of seasonal agricultural workers.

In Greece, migrants with expired legal documents were not accepted as eligible to be employed, although the Greek Asylum Service prolonged the validity of the specific documents. Migrants residing in temporary accommodation sites under quarantine failed to complete all required administrative procedures on time and, consequently, were excluded from key services.

Fourth, **completing integration requirements and attending language classes and traineeships became very difficult or impossible at the height of the pandemic, with long-term consequences for social inclusion**. Online activities, while promptly activated in all Includ-EU countries, could not make up for the loss of in-person training, both due to the lack of interpersonal contact and the unavailability of computer and internet access.

Relatedly, TCN workers were particularly exposed to the effects of the pandemic on **mental health**, with consequences on skills development. Mandatory quarantine and job loss put migrant workers under severe mental pressure, isolation, and uncertainty.

Last but not least, **undocumented migrants**, who already faced precarious working conditions, were **forced into destitution**, with no income from informal employment opportunities and less opportunities to access their support networks in the midst of the emergency.

These delays in the labour integration process are expected to have a protracted effect: the inability to practice the local language, gain useful soft skills, build a network, strengthen job skills, and sustain a level of mental health needed to perform in the workplace, are going to hinder individual employment prospects.



Mitigation measures

In many Includ-EU countries, **national authorities focused their efforts on regularising migrant workers and extending residence permits**. To make up for labour shortages in key sectors, most notably agriculture, **Italy** undertook a targeted regularisation for TCNs who had already been employed in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, long-term care, and domestic work. A first regularisation stream granted 6-month permits to TCNs whose papers had expired after 31 October 2019, provided that they were in Italy at the time of the first lockdown and had previously worked in the sectors listed above. Another stream targeted TCNs present in Italy with new employment or irregular contracts in the above sectors (EMN and OECD 2020b). However, a total of only 207,542 requests were submitted, less than 15 per cent of which in the agricultural sector (Italian Ministry of Interior 2020).

Furthermore, Italy extended all residence permits (Art. 103, Law 27/2020) and other documents required to access financial support measures (EMN/OECD 2020a). However, employers were not always aware of this extension, resulting in fears to hire TCNs with ‘expired permits’.

Despite the mobility restrictions in place, in Italy TCNs with an Italian residence permit who were temporarily abroad at the time of the lockdown were allowed to return. This measure certainly mitigated potential job losses, but many migrant workers still had to face particularly high material and mental costs linked to mandatory quarantine.

In Spain, among other measures, the national government granted residence and work permits for at least 2 years to all young immigrants employed in the agricultural sector during the pandemic. Although certainly much-needed, these mitigating measures did not reach many other migrant workers, who found themselves in a situation of high vulnerability due to their status or employment sector.

Unemployment benefits and social support were other mitigating measures put in place during the emergency. In Italy, for example, migrants holding a regular permit were entitled to unemployment benefits and compensations like Italian nationals, subject to the fulfilment of certain criteria, although unfortunately the latter weren’t always compatible with the contracts held by TCNs. In other countries, like Slovenia, NGOs have focused their advocacy efforts on expanding all COVID-related measures to include the protection of migrant workers’ rights.



Labour market inclusion during humanitarian crises: the influx of people fleeing Ukraine

Russia’s attack on Ukraine has caused an **unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe**. Months into the war, one-third of Ukrainians have been displaced, with over 7.1 million displaced people in Ukraine and an estimated 15.7 million in need of humanitarian assistance and protection (UNHCR 2022).

To offer quick and effective protection to those fleeing Ukraine, the European Commission has urged the activation of the **Temporary Protection Directive**. Under the Directive, Ukrainian citizens and non-Ukrainian citizens who are unable to return to their country of origin will receive immediate protection, including protection of residency rights, access to the labour market and recognition of qualifications, access to housing, social welfare assistance, medical or other assistance, and means of subsistence (European Commission 2022).

As of June 2022, there have been at least 5.5 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe, and 3.6 have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes. Around 8.4 million border crossings have been registered out of Ukraine, while 3.1 have been reported back into the country since February 2022 (UNHCR 2022).

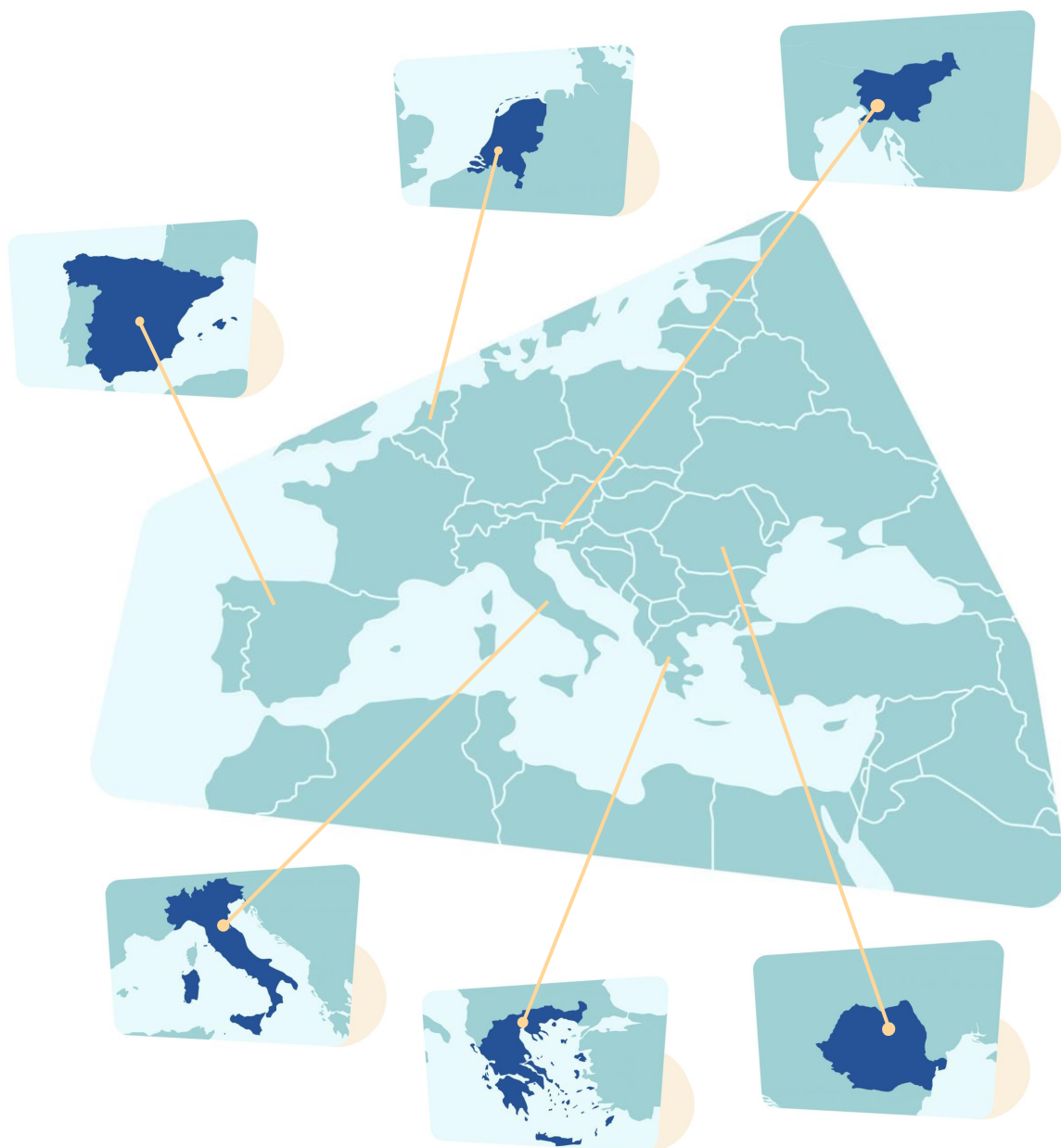
Several months into the conflict, the outlook of displacement within and outside Ukraine is still unclear. At the same time, after the first emergency response phase, **access to employment has become one of the key challenges for subsistence and long-term integration** of Ukrainian refugees.

Between May and June 2022, UNHCR conducted 4,871 protection profiling and monitoring interviews with refugees from Ukraine in key host countries in Europe (UNHCR 2022). Research participants responded that the main urgent needs are cash, employment, and accommodation (around 40 percent of respondents for each), followed by medical treatment and material assistance (around 20 percent for each) (UNHCR 2022, 14). In addition, refugees responded that language barriers are one of the main issues to access the job market, and reported difficulties in finding reliable and up-to-date information on available employment opportunities (UNHCR 2022, 18).

The growing demand for labour inclusion emerged also during the [May 2022 online exchange carried out by the Includ-EU Team with IOM Romania](#). The exchange focused on how to derive lessons for better long-term inclusion from the response to displacement from Ukraine. During the meeting, project partners, local authorities, and EU institutions found that multi-level partnerships with the private sector are particularly important. It is also paramount to address the demand for inclusion in the field of education, labour, housing, and services simultaneously, by taking a distinctive holistic approach to inclusion.

Labour market inclusion in Includ-EU countries

The following section focuses on the state of TCNs' labour market inclusion in the six Includ-EU partner countries, including the main barriers and avenues for access to employment, training, as well as skills recognition and assessment at the local, regional, and national level.



Greece

In 2009 Greece entered a severe financial crisis which led to the adoption of a series of austerity measures to reform the public sector, pension schemes, taxation, and the labour market. Unemployment rose significantly and the GDP fell steadily in the years following the crisis. In 2019, Greece reported the highest unemployment rate (17,3 per cent) among all EU states (Leivaditi et al. 2020).

TCNs legally resident in Greece have access to the labour market and general support measures. However, the state of the economy, combined with the difficult migrant reception situation, makes the Greek local labour market difficult to access for TCNs, particularly for asylum seekers. Most recently, Law 4636/2019 introduced a six-month time limit before asylum applicants are allowed to be regularly employed. Beneficiaries of international protection have access to remunerated employment or self-employment on the same terms and conditions that apply to Greek citizens, provided that they hold a valid residence permit (Art 69 of Law 4375/2016 and art 27 of Law 4636/2019).

To be employed, all residents in Greece, including asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, must obtain a Tax Registration Number (AFM) and a Social Security Number (AMKA). The AFM is issued by the competent Tax Office upon presentation of the asylum seeker card or residence permit and proof of residence. The issuance of the AFM is recurrently subject to delays, mostly related to identification and proof of residence (AIDA 2019). The issuance of the AMKA is similarly challenging due to delayed responses and non-homogenous administrative practices. In addition, in July 2019 the incoming government revoked the provision granting asylum seekers eligibility to receive an AMKA, leaving many people in a limbo (Leivaditi et al. 2020). Later in 2020, the new provision was amended, and asylum seekers became entitled to get the Temporary Number for Insurance and Healthcare for Foreigners (PAAYPA), although this procedure, too, is subject to significant delays.



Italy



According to a recent report in Italy TCNs earn 30 per cent less than Italians, and in 3 out of 4 cases there is no clear explanation for this, except for forms of discrimination in the labour market and at the workplace (ILO 2020).

Despite this, TCNs contribute 9 per cent of the Italian GDP (*Fondazione Moressa* 2021). Although their contribution is largely recognized, according to the 2020 MIPEx results, Italian policies for migrants' labour inclusion are only slightly favourable: non-EU citizens do have access to employment and self-

employment, but the lack of targeted support addressing the specific challenges encountered by foreign-trained or low-educated workers make them less likely than EU citizens to find secure jobs which reflect their qualifications and skills (MIPEx 2020).

According to the Consolidated Law on Immigration (TUI) (Legislative Decree 286/98, amended by Law 189/2002), TCNs who intend to work in Italy must obtain an authorization to work by the Immigration Desk of the prefectures as well as a work visa by the Italian Embassy in their country of origin before entry. Once in Italy, they receive a residence permit which will last as long as their work contract. Since their stay is linked to the latter, this provision gives employers disproportionate power over TCN workers.

Additionally, work permits for TCNs are capped and the government is required to develop a "long-term programme on immigration policy and foreigners on State territory" every three years. However, the long-term programme has not been published for more than 15 years and the number of these pre-set entry quotas has decreased drastically, including in sectors which face severe labour shortages.

Asylum seekers and international protection holders who are hosted in the reception system have the right to work after 60 days from registration of their application, and have access to orientation services offered by reception service providers. Asylum seekers and international protection holders are also encouraged to register with Public Employment Services (PES). Vocational trainings are available both within the reception system, and are supported by AMIF or through national or European Social Fund (ESF)-funded programmes delivered through local authorities.

The Netherlands

The Dutch national employment insurance agency UWV reports that, as of October 2020, 61 percent of the residents with migrant background have some form of regular, tax-paying employment. For those without a migrant background, the same figure is only slightly higher (69 per cent) (RTL News 2020).

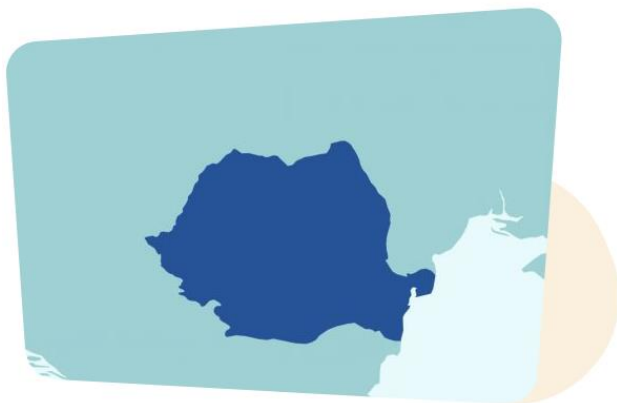
Anyone with a migratory background is granted support and information to access the Dutch labour market through expat desks, both physical and virtual, present in at least 12 cities. These desks provide legal advice, referrals, workshops, as well as information about housing and relocation for foreign workers who are preparing to settle.



Asylum seekers are not allowed to work during the first six months after lodging an asylum claim, after which they have restricted access to the labour market until they secure a residence permit. During the initial six-month period, asylum seekers can work for 24 out of 52 weeks, and only if they have a foreign nationals' identity document, and their employer is in possession of a '*tewerkstellingsvergunning*' certificate work permit. This document certifies the employer's capacity to recruit migrants and adhere to the relevant state regulations. Asylum seekers who earn an income while in the asylum system have a portion of their standard living allowance deducted by the *Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers* (COA), the national body responsible for the housing and wellbeing of asylum seekers in asylum centres. While the rationale for this rule is clear, it can also act as a deterrent for migrants to seek and declare paid employment during their asylum procedure.

Once migrants receive a residence permit, they are permitted to work free from restrictions, and can apply for jobs with all employers (not only those who possess a *tewerkstellingsvergunning* certificate). Unfortunately, many migrants struggle to secure meaningful work until they improve their Dutch language skills, and upskill, retrain, and become familiar with the Dutch culture.

Romania



TCN workers in Romania have access to the labour market, basic information, and related services and recognition procedures. They also enjoy the same access to training and social security as Romanian nationals. Nevertheless, immigrants' skills development and employment prospects are limited (MIPEX 2020).

Overall, Romania continues to be a country of emigration. According to data of the government's Department for Romanians Abroad, the country has one of the largest emigrant populations in the EU, with

approximately 5.6 million nationals living abroad as of 2019 (*Ministerul pentru Romani de Pretutindeni* 2020). This figure has increased by 64.29 per cent since 2016 when, according to the OECD, around 3.6 million people born in Romania were living abroad (OECD 2019a). The main drivers of emigration are socio-economic, including lack of job opportunities, low incomes, difficult access to education and health systems, especially in rural areas and medium-size cities, living conditions, bureaucracy, etc.

The state of the economy and the negative demographic trends have led to severe labour shortages. According to the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017), Romania is expected to see its population shrink by 17 per cent between 2017 and 2050 to a projected 16.3 million. Therefore, labour migration is expected to become increasingly important. Certain sectors (e.g. hospitality, construction) and geographic areas are more affected, resulting in growing pressure from the private sector on the Government to increase the number of work permits issued for TCNs. The Romanian Government has responded by increasing the annual contingent of non-EU workers, especially in the construction and services sectors.

Slovenia

The number of TCNs with a regular employment in Slovenia has increased by over 80 per cent in the past five years. At the end of October 2019, there were 101.200 TCNs employed, the majority coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina (49.600), followed by Serbia (12.900), and Kosovo (9.600).⁴

According to the MIPEX findings, Slovenian policies are slightly unfavourable for TCN workers. The latter face significant obstacles and receive weak targeted support to access the labour market. TCNs have limited opportunities to access or change jobs. In addition, only certain categories have access to the non-regulated private sector jobs on the same conditions as Slovenian nationals. Similarly, access to employment and skills development measures differs between TCN residents and EU citizens (MIPEX 2020).

More broadly, in Slovenia migrants are often isolated, and have limited opportunities to connect with local employers and create local networks (NIEM 2018). Asylum seekers face more difficulties in this respect because they are not allowed to work for the first nine months after applying for asylum in case their asylum claim has not been decided upon in this period. Even later, asylum seekers and refugees face difficulties entering the labour market in Slovenia due to poor knowledge of workers' rights, mistrust, and stereotypes (NIEM 2018).⁵



⁴ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

⁵ To address this challenge, in 2016, IOM examined the extent to which beneficiaries of international protection are able to integrate into the labor market in Slovenia, the support services available and the measures planned in the field of labor market integration by key stakeholders. IOM also developed a handbook to help employers find necessary information regarding the employment of asylum seekers and refugees, and a toolkit for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection describing the employment market and the job seeking process in Slovenia.

Spain



In the last three decades, Spain has become a destination country for many TCNs. Its immigration system is driven by the demand for low or middle-skilled foreign labour and characterised by poor skills and qualification recognition and a generally weak protection of migrant workers' rights, particularly in sectors where informality is widespread, like agriculture and domestic care (Hooper 2019).

As of July 2022, the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration has registered a total of 2,378,437 foreigners affiliated to social security.

Of the total number of foreign workers, around 65.5 per cent comes from non-EU countries and 34.5 per cent from the EU. The largest groups of foreign contributors were from Romania (339,053), Morocco (285,046), Italy (163,826), Colombia (122,192), and Venezuela (118,147). Around 56.8 per cent are men, while 44.2 per cent are women (*Ministerio de la Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones* 2022).

TCNs residents in Spain have access to the labour market and general employment support as EU nationals. The conditions are generally favourable, although they receive no targeted support that takes into account the specific needs of foreign-trained or low-educated individuals (e.g. language and professionals training, mentoring and orientation) (MIPEX 2020). Despite this, many migrants work in the informal economy and face situations of exploitation and vulnerability (Hooper 2019).

Promoting greater TCNs' labour market inclusion in Europe

Access to the labour market proves increasingly challenging for TCNs, due to both structural factors and the recent consequences of the COVID-19 health emergency. Against this background, existing good practices in Includ-EU countries show that it is important to continue to strengthen training and employment support, job coaching and mentorship, skills' assessment and validation, placement services, employment through social cooperatives, and promote regular work both at the legal and policy level.

1. Language skills, vocational training and employment support

To improve the chances of entering the labour market and securing a livelihood, it is paramount to invest in human capital development by promoting the **early activation of professional training courses** combined with specialised **language learning**, and other **orientation** services, starting from the pre-departure stage. Employment services can include self-employment support; training and employment guidance; providing information to prospective employers about hiring procedures; and supporting access to credit for migrant entrepreneurs through information services at the national and regional levels.

As the examples in box 1 suggest, active engagement in training and employment programmes contributes to TCNs' inclusion into the local environment and the development of **trust-based personal networks** that can be instrumental to find



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subsequent employment opportunities. In addition, these good practices illustrate how **cooperation** between employers, NGOs, and civil society can contribute to improve employability.



Good practices at a glance

Hands on Deck for Hands in Healthcare - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): Ministry of Health, Municipalities of Lelystad, Almere, Dronten, Noord-Oostpolder and Urk, Axion, Zowelwerk

To simultaneously solve high unemployment rates among migrant women and labour shortages in the healthcare sector, the Dutch Ministry of Health established eight regional pilot projects for the period 2008-2013.

Of the eight regional pilot projects that were launched, the pilot entitled *Handen aan de Ploeg voor Handen in de Zorg* (Hands on Deck for Hands in Healthcare) was the most successful. Together with 10 employers in the healthcare sector it managed to train and employ 24 migrant women to work in the health sector during its implementation. This included lessons in Dutch, mathematics, and courses relevant to working effectively within the Dutch health sector, such as counselling and knowledge on how to care for patients. The project focused on gender and cultural sensitivity, not only by specifically targeting unemployed migrant women, but also by raising awareness among the employing institutions on gender and cultural differences.


The project included diversity trainings for employers and the elaboration of diversity guidelines on how to support migrant women's transition from unemployment to employment in the health care sector.

HELIOS – Employability support - Greece

Implementing actor(s): International Organization for Migration, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Danish Refugee Council Greece (DRC Greece), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Solidarity Now, INTERSOS, Municipality Development Agency Thessaloniki S.A (MDAT), Metadrasi, PLOIGOS, KEDHL, Technology and Human Resources Institute (IATAP)

The HELIOS project aims to promote the inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection currently residing in temporary accommodation schemes through integration courses, independent accommodation programmes, employability support, integration monitoring, and sensitization activities targeting the host community.

Specifically, participants in the HELIOS project have access to employability support in order to become familiar with the Greek labour market and job research modalities and, in parallel, acquire increased awareness of their professional profile. In this framework, HELIOS beneficiaries are offered structured individual job counselling sessions to develop a career plan and assess their interests and skills. HELIOS also liaises with the private sector to organise employability events where beneficiaries



have the chance to meet with potential employers, learn about the nature of available work opportunities, and ask information on contract terms, working conditions, etc.



ACOL - Programa Treball i Formació (Work and Training Program) - Spain

Implementing actor(s): Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan government); Servei d'Ocupació de Catalunya-SOC (Public Employment Service of Catalonia); Secretaria d'Igualtat, Migracions i Ciutadania (Secretariat for Equality, Migration and Citizenship); NGOs with a work centre in Catalonia

The ACOL programme is a grant of the Work and Training Programme of the Employment Service of Catalonia. It targets non-profit organizations based in Catalonia to facilitate access, through them, to a residence visa for migrants with irregular status.

To achieve its objectives, ACOL gives funding to NGOs which then hire and provide training to migrants without a regular permit. The amount of the grant for each employment agreement is 18,759.96 euros (this includes the salary and the contribution to the Social Security). The mandatory training actions can be carried out through professional certificate training modules (between 80 and 200 hours) or transversal training modules (between 60 and 80 hours).

In 2019, 123 migrants got a job in local NGOs for a period of 12 months and were able to apply for and obtain residence and work permits. Family members of these regularized migrants benefited indirectly from the programme by also getting their regularization through family reunification. Migrants hired through the programme gained work experience that became essential to access the labour market.



On-the-job Training Programme - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS)

Since 2017, Slovenia's Employment Service has been implementing an on-the-job training programme for international protection holders to strengthen the beneficiaries' skills and knowledge and improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

ESS also provides personalized counselling services to strengthen its users' linguistic and intercultural competencies. Part of the counselling is also about managing expectations related to the remuneration and career prospects.

ESS works closely with employers to implement the on-the-job training programme. Government agencies and NGOs are also formally or informally included in this practice to complement each other's work.

2. Empowerment, coaching and mentorship



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Negative perceptions from employers and society can exclude migrants from education and employment opportunities. This can lead to higher unemployment rates, social exclusion, and contribute to a negative self-image and low self-esteem at the individual level.

The initiatives in box 2 illustrate how it is possible to address this aspect of labour inclusion by **improving the perceptions** of migrants among employers while also **strengthening TCNs' problem-solving and networking skills**. The projects described below combine job-search tools with a holistic approach that also develops learning and language skills, education, and social networks through a mix of activities (internships, training, volunteering) and guidance from mentors.



Good practices at a glance


Empowerment Brabantse Alloctonen - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): Stichting Palet, PSW Arbeidsmarktadvies, Provincie Noord-Brabant, ROC Koning Willem I College, ROC Midden-Brabant, Stichting Marokkaanse Jongeren 's-Hertogenbosch, pact Brabant

Empowerment *Brabantse Alloctonen* was an initiative that empowered young migrants in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant toward employment through promotion teams and youth mentors, and by developing guides and workshops on the topics of migrant youth empowerment and intercultural sensitivity. Specifically, promotion teams were groups of young people who undertake joint activities to improve their own position, and that of their peers, on the job market or in education.

Activities included making contact with potential employers in order to obtain internships and apprenticeships, organising debates, and offering practical support to job seekers. Active participation and empowerment of beneficiaries was enhanced through the participation of Moroccan and Turkish diaspora organisations.

The initiative lasted two years (2005 – 2006) and embraced gender and age sensitive approaches by enforcing a gender quota (target group 50% male 50% female) and a maximum age of 25. A total of fifteen promotion teams were set up in the province, of which fourteen were still active one year after



the initiative formally ended. The efforts of these promotion teams have resulted in 250 additional internships, the permanent appointment of a migrant youth representative within the local Employers' Organisation, and reportedly increased the levels of self-esteem of migrant youth.

The project's large scale (provincial) in combination with the well-established link with regional administrative networks made the initiative particularly impactful. Information on bottlenecks and identified solutions were communicated easily within the network, which facilitated steep learning curves among the implementing actors.



ESIRAS Slovenia – Employability and Social Integration - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Slovenian Red Cross

Between January 2018 and 31 August 2019, the Slovenian Red Cross implemented the ESIRAS Slovenia Project – Employability and Social Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Beneficiaries took part in skill-gaining workshops such as training in basic communication, acquiring a driving license, basic numeracy skills, new technologies workshops, CV writing, and preparation for job interviews.

Trained volunteers offered beneficiaries support with learning, practicing skills obtained through courses, writing resumes, and finding job openings. The project also focused on strengthening basic computer skills. Additionally, with the help from interpreters and volunteers, cultural/professional mediation was provided to facilitate participation at vocational trainings, communication with employers, first day at work, etc. With the help from a project's contractual partner Legal-Informational Centre for NGOs (PiC) free legal counselling was offered alongside with courses on legal framework related to employment or social integration conditions of beneficiaries.



Refugees Investing in Participation – the VIP Project - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): Vluchtelingenwerk (Refugee Council the Netherlands), 60 municipalities and 250 companies

In the project VIP (Refugees Investing in Participation), the Dutch Refugee Council focused on supporting migrants' access to the labour market through internships, volunteering, and company visits. Each participant was assigned to a personal coach, ensuring that activities were tailored to individual needs.

The Dutch Council for Refugees, furthermore, offered workshops and training to companies participating in the project to ensure preparedness, cultural sensitivity, and mutual engagement in the activities.

The project started in 2015 and ended in December 2017. In total, almost 1,200 refugees completed the programme, 400 job coaches were deployed, 60 municipalities and 250 employers participated. Given its success, a second phase of the project (VIP2) was launched in November 2017 and ended in November 2020.

3. Skills assessment and validation

The assessment and validation of TCNs' skills continue to be one of the greatest barriers to labour inclusion. To address this, **strengths, hard and soft skills, as well as individual preferences should be assessed with standard tools and reflected in the design of employment plans.** In addition to valuing TCNs' competences, fast-track skills assessment procedures should be expeditious, clear, transparent, time-bound, and accessible to cater to the employers' needs in a timely manner.

The projects in box 3 aim to promote the recognition of skills and competences, the valorisation of TCNs' competences in relation to the specific needs of the local context, the consolidation and enhancement of public employment services, and the collaboration among public, third and private sector organisations.



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Good practices at a glance


Curing the Limbo - Greece

Implementing actor(s): Municipality of Athens, in partnership with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA)

Curing the Limbo (2018-2021) is a European pilot programme led by the City of Athens and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative.

Curing the Limbo proposes a holistic social inclusion model to address the issue of long-term forced "inactivity" affecting a large part of the refugee population. The programme supports refugees that have been granted asylum and currently live in Athens to overcome social exclusion.

In the framework of the project, IRC developed employment services including "Job Readiness Trainings" to learn how to manage employment expectations, workplace culture and rules, and interview practice. The output of this activity will be a Job Readiness Training Guide, which will include transferrable lessons that may be applied to EU cities.



While conducting the refugee skills assessment, the project staff, supported by IRC, will also work to identify interested employers in growth sectors, training providers, financial services providers and other private sector stakeholders that can support employment service provision for refugees. The mapping will be used by employment specialists to identify opportunities and provide information to refugee beneficiaries.



COMMIT – Migrants Competences - Italy

Implementing actor(s): Tuscany Region (Lead Actor), ANCI Toscana, Consorzio Metropoli Scs Onlus, F.I.L Formazione Innovazione Lavoro Srl, Servizi Lavoro Società Consortile a R.L. and Solidarietà Caritas

COMMIT is a project funded by the AMIF-PRIMA funds (2014-2020) and is part of a broader set of actions carried out in the Italian region of Tuscany. The objectives of the project include improving multi-level integration governance, strengthening the skills of service workers, improving the validation and certification of migrants' skills, encouraging innovative actions in the field of migrant labour inclusion.

In pursuing these objectives, COMMIT operates both at the regional level to strengthen existing services, and at the local level to experiment innovative solutions to enhance TCNs' employment prospects. At the same time, the project encourages the direct participation of all stakeholders, including its beneficiaries, and promotes the presence of cultural mediators in local public employment services in collaboration with the private sector.

Last but not least, the project is part of Tuscany's regional legislative framework. In the long term, this will contribute to its sustainability.



Skills2Work - Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom

Implementing actor(s): IOM, in partnership with Društvo Odnos in Slovenia, Leone Moressa Foundation in Italy, Menedék in Hungary, African Young Professional Network in the Netherlands, Radboud University in the Netherlands and Foundation for Refugee Students – UAF in the Netherlands

An AMIF-funded project, [Skills2Work](#) aimed to promote early and sustainable employment for refugees through better skills validation practices, integration services, and private sector engagement. The project was implemented in nine EU Member States including Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom, in the period 2016-2018.

Specifically, the project activities focused on strengthening skill validation and the early job-matching of refugees, based on both existing good practices and consultations with national stakeholders. Skills2Work also aimed to facilitate coordination, referral and access to job integration services for refugees by developing policy guidelines. At the same time, the project raised awareness among employers about the skills of participating international protection holders by showcasing successful job-matching stories and facilitating professional networking.



The main results of Skills2Work included the establishment of a European network of experts, municipalities, interest groups, employers, and academics; a directory of good practices across Europe; a handbook with guidelines supporting initiatives in the field of labour market integration; and, lastly, a platform with information for employers, municipalities, and international protection holders to facilitate participation in the labour market in the nine countries involved.

4. Placement



Matching supply and demand on the labour market, particularly at times of global economic uncertainty, proves particularly challenging for TCNs. The latter tend to be less familiar with the local context compared to native-born residents, and encounter additional barriers in securing a stable livelihood.

The role of employment agencies and placement services is instrumental to identify relevant job opportunities, access guidance for the active labour research, support insertion into the labour market, and maintain a constant dialogue with potential employers. The examples in box 4 shows how private-public networks can help achieve these objectives in diverse national contexts.

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Good practices at a glance



CELAV Work Mediation Centre - Italy

Implementing actor(s): Municipality of Milan, together with A&I and the local and regional system of services for employment

CELAV (Work Mediation Centre) is a general service of the Municipality of Milan offering job placement to the unemployed. CELAV also supports the creation of networks with local services (e.g. social



services) and caters specifically to the most fragile and vulnerable groups of society, including asylum seekers and international protection holders, and people with disability.

Specifically, the activities of CELAV aim to facilitate the matching between job supply and demand; offer training courses in cooperation with other public and private bodies; activate internships and on-the-job trainings; and design and implement projects for the integration of specific categories, among which TCNs.

Additionally, CELAV offers consultancy and capacity building services to companies who need to receive information and guidance on TCNs' hiring procedures; the same is offered for asylum seekers and IPHs hosted in the reception centres managed by the Municipality.

CELAV contributes to mainstreaming inclusion services while paying attention to specific needs. Its multi-disciplinary teams and extensive network of private employers, training centres, third sector organizations and employment agencies are other important factors for the success of this service.

CELAV can also count on a comprehensive strategy to support TCNs labour inclusion. Yearly the Centre supports 2,500 beneficiaries, among which 600 TCNs. It offers around 1,500 internships/inclusion programmes and the employment rate of its users is 30 per cent (and up to 60 per cent when it comes to youth).



Agreement between the National Employment Agency and the GII - Romania

Implementing actor(s): General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII) and National Employment Agency

The main objective of this agreement is to support TCNs legally residing in Romania who have lost their jobs as a consequence of the pandemic to find suitable job opportunities. Under the Romanian system, TCNs with work permits have 90 days to find a new employer at the end of their contract, if they resign, or in case their contract is terminated. Through this agreement, the County Services of the GII refers unemployed TCNs to the county employment agencies. The latter offer counselling and job market orientation services to support TCNs in finding employment and continue to live and work in Romania. The National Employment Agency and the GII are in charge of monitoring the results of the agreement.



Partnership between IOM Romania and AFSRU - Romania

Implementing actor(s): IOM Romania and the Romanian Association of Temporary Work Agents (AFSRU)

The Romanian Association of Temporary Work Agents (AFSRU) is the largest Romanian association for temporary work placement. Its role is to connect job placement agencies and their clients to the beneficiaries of the project. AFSRU provides support in identifying temporary and/or permanent job opportunities and assist users in drafting CVs and motivation letters. When needed, AFSRU may also provide counselling for job interviews or professional induction for the positions identified.

Through this partnership, IOM Romania refers TCNs to AFSRU for guidance and counselling on labour market opportunities. The implementation of the project is monitored through monthly meetings on job placement results.

5. Specific needs

In a context of multiple barriers to labour market access, **creating work opportunities** for TCNs with limited employability due to skills-mismatch, poor language skills, weak social networks, and prejudice is a successful medium-term solution which also has the potential to **enhance long-term employability**.

Box 5 presents the examples of a traditional cheese cooperative in Greece and a restaurant in Slovenia which create employment opportunities where they do not exist or are difficult to access for asylum seekers and refugees. Both initiatives also contribute to wider social inclusion and revive the local economy and social fabric, with mutual benefits for both newcomers and receiving communities.



5 © Moe Magners / pexels.com



Good practices at a glance

Cheese cooperative “Irina” of Tilos - Greece

Implementing actor(s): Swiss Municipality of Meinier, Municipality of Tilos, UNHCR, inhabitants of Tilos island

The small cheese Cooperative “Irina” of Tilos was created in 2018 to revive organized animal husbandry and processing in the island, while offering work to the asylum seekers who reside on the island through the ESTIA project (Greek Reception System-apartments). For the local government of Tilos, the refugee crisis was a unique opportunity to revive its primary sector island, an area that urbanism and the shift to tourism led to wilting.

The Cooperative promotes the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees within the local community. The municipality of Tilos and local partners (farmers, shepherds, workers) have contributed with their know-how and work efforts: land, agricultural machinery, part of the flock of goats, buildings, a parcel to receive the production unit, supervision for the implementation in place of the project and the training of the interested beneficiaries. The project will be completed by the end of 2023 - beginning of 2024.

Social cooperative Skuhna - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Institute for Global Learning and Voluntariat Institute

Skuhna is a social enterprise that runs a restaurant providing authentic food from Africa, Asia and South America. Currently, it is the only restaurant in Slovenia that offers food from all around the world in one location.

People with various legal statuses (asylum seekers, refugees, citizens) can improve their skills and secure employment at Skuhna. During the project implementation, 8 migrants received hospitality training and 6 of them were later employed within the programme.

Skuhna was launched in 2012 by the NGO Institute for Global Learning in partnership with Voluntariat Institute and received funding from the European Union and the Slovenian Ministry of Labour. The restaurant opened in 2014 and, by the end of the project in 2015, it started a partnership with the Open Kitchen initiative in Ljubljana, selling food at the local weekly market.

Skuhna continues to be successful and is also part of the Mentoring Scheme for Social Enterprises, a project funded by the EU Cohesion Fund and the Slovenian Ministry of Economic Development and Technology.

6. Promoting regular work



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Barriers to skills recognition and validation, and difficult access to regular employment opportunities make TCNs, particularly asylum seekers, refugees, those on temporary permits, and women, particularly exposed to exploitative work conditions.

The exposure of migrant workers to the risks of informality and labour exploitation was made worse by the pandemic. During the peak months of the crisis, it became very important to ensure that migrant and refugee workers did not fall into irregular status. Several EU countries, like Italy and Spain among Includ-EU countries, took measures to facilitate the extension of work or residence permits or automatically renew documents related to asylum status. This to ensure access to services and continuity of work in regular conditions.

Box 6 presents two key examples of measures to prevent and counter widespread labour exploitation in Spain and in Italy, in the specific context of the COVID-related emergency and in terms of more structural solutions.

In Spain, the agricultural sector has been hit hard by the lack of seasonal workers, most of whom are TCNs. In order to create opportunities for regular employment in the formal economy, Spain allowed youth aged 18 to 21 and without work rights to work in the formal economy.

In Italy, the Su.Pr.Eme. programme is part of Italy's National Plan to tackle labour exploitation in agriculture in the Southern regions of Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Sicily, through the promotion of specific interventions and enhanced inter-institutional cooperation.



Good practices at a glance

Order stating that all foreign youth from third countries who worked in the agricultural fields during the pandemic will have a 2-year renewable work and residence permit - Spain

Implementing actor(s): Spanish Secretary of State for Migration, General Direction of Migration

In April 2020, in order to provide an adequate response to the emergency situation caused by COVID-19, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food adopted urgent measures in the area of agricultural employment to encourage the temporary recruitment of workers. In this framework, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration granted extraordinary measures to extend the work permits that were due to expire before June 30, 2020. In addition, Spain allowed youth aged 18 to 21 and without work rights to work in the formal economy, granting a two-year permit.

In accordance with the extension agreed by Royal Decree Law 19/2020, these measures were in force until 30 September 2020. The order approved from the General Direction of Migration provides legal security to all these young people working in essential sectors. After the expiration of Royal Decree Law 19/2020, these young people will have access to a residence and work authorization, valid throughout the national territory.

In addition, in October 2021, Spain approved an ambitious reform of the Aliens Regulation to promote the inclusion of unaccompanied minors by ensuring that they do not stay undocumented and consolidating their access to the labour market from the age of 16. The reform has established a specific regime for young people who have been granted protection, extending the duration of residence permits and allowing young people between 18 and 23 years of age to obtain a work permit (La Moncloa 2021).

As of June 2022, over 9,300 minors and young people between 18 and 23 years old have been able to access the labour market. 3,504 of those who have obtained a work permit are minors and 5,817 are former youths under guardianship. This data represents more than 60 per cent of the objective, the target being 15,000 (La Moncloa 2022).



“Supreme and Più Supreme” against agricultural labour exploitation - Italy

Implementing actor(s): Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Apulia Region, another 4 Southern Italian Regions and other partners

Labour exploitation of migrant workers in the agricultural sector is not uncommon in Italy. Many agricultural firms strive to maintain competitiveness by lowering costs or relying on informal labour. Out of 430.000 irregular agricultural sector workers, 100.000 are victims of gangmastering and severe labour exploitation, of which 80 per cent are migrants. Both male and female migrants are employed in this sector also through their social networks. While both male and female migrant workers are exposed to risks of labour exploitation, female workers are more often than men exposed to additional risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Su.Pr.Eme. Italia (Sud Protagonista nel superamento delle Emergenze in ambito di grave sfruttamento e di gravi marginalità degli stranieri regolarmente presenti nelle 5 regioni meno sviluppate) is a programme financed by the AMIF Emergency Funds of the European Commission through the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

The programme aims to support between 18 and 21 thousand seasonal migrant workers in agriculture in the five Regions involved. In addition, it will strengthen regional and inter-regional governance in this area.

Su.Pr.Eme. is part of the framework of the National Plan to tackle labour exploitation in agriculture in the regions of Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Sicily, through the promotion of specific interventions and enhanced inter-institutional cooperation. It includes actions to improve housing conditions, especially in informal settlements, fight labour exploitation through prevention, control and direct support to workers, promote access to healthcare services, and greater social participation. Additionally, through a specialized team of cultural mediators deployed across the country, IOM guarantees individual follow-up with potential victims of labour exploitation, referring them to counter-trafficking networks.

Includ-EU's contribution to labour market inclusion

In addition to promoting the good practices presented in this briefing, Includ-EU has launched a pilot project to promote the early integration of resident permit holders, including access to quality employment opportunities.

The City of Tilburg, in the Netherlands, implements the project **Integration+**, which responds to the EU's **integrated service provision and labour market integration** thematic priorities. The City of Tilburg aims to centralise information and orientation for migrants residing in the Region of Hart van Brabant while in reception (around 350 beneficiaries and status holders). The pilot expands an existing *Welkomhuis* (welcome house) to a one-stop shop.

The focus of the project is on comprehensive integration orientation at an early stage, i.e. before resident permit holders are relocated from asylum centres to the Region's municipalities. Coordinated support is offered through a network of service providers (including employers) with relevant expertise, increasing efficiency and avoiding duplication of roles and information, or miscommunication.

Information is accessible in **different native languages** spoken in the region. A **platform for employers** to reach out to the participants is also available.

The Integration+ programme commences after 3-6 weeks from the arrival of a migrant to the Hart van Brabant region, and enables the participants to choose their integration paths and participate in tailored activities. In fact, the focus of the project is on individual needs and aspirations, without forgoing a practical approach toward labour inclusion. The activities foreseen also include volunteering and enhancement of soft skills.

This new model for the **early integration** of resident permit holders is **managed by the Municipalities within the Hart van Brabant region**, based on the new Dutch Civic Integration Law, which focuses on the **active participation of the beneficiaries**, early integration measures starting with language learning, education, and labour inclusion.

Conclusions

The importance of protecting the fundamental and universal right to work and ensure dignified conditions for TCN workers has gained new impetus, and so has the centrality of employment for social inclusion, TNCs' livelihoods, and the welfare of host societies. The COVID-19 crisis has brought greater awareness about **the relevance of the role played by TCNs performing low-skilled occupations** within EU societies and their economies, especially during periods of forced closure.

Still, **comprehensive policies for skills recognition and validation, language and vocational training, and effective access to quality employment for TCNs continue to be missed targets** in Includ-EU countries. Effective access to quality employment opportunities proves challenging for non-EU migrants, due to both longstanding structural factors and external shocks, ranging from security crises, the COVID-19 response, and energy concerns.

Against this background, therefore, it is crucial to **capitalise on existing experiences and good practices across Includ-EU partner countries to design, promote, and implement long-term structural responses** to realise the right to dignified work conditions of all migrants, especially the most vulnerable ones.

The overview of the most successful practices implemented across Includ-EU countries suggests that the following areas of labour inclusion should be prioritised:

- ⇒ **Ensure timely and targeted access to language courses, vocational training, and employment support:** it is paramount to continue investing in the early activation of professional training courses, specialised language learning, and orientation and employment support services, particularly for women and since the pre-departure stage. Improving the availability and access to these services **from 'day one'** enables TCNs to secure jobs that match their qualifications and formal and informal competences. Moreover, **active engagement** in training and employment programmes contributes to TCNs' inclusion and the development of **trust-based personal networks**. Employment services and projects tailored to foreigners may include self-employment support, and training and employment guidance. Currently, these initiatives are mostly project-based and depend on the initiative of individual local authorities. Instead, they should be promoted and implemented on a **systematic and structural** basis across all Includ-EU countries. Specifically, support to public services is a key area for the sustainability of labour inclusion interventions and should be strengthened.
- ⇒ **Expand the opportunities for migrant workers' empowerment through coaching and mentorship:** guidance from mentors combined with training, internships, and the use of job-search tools can contribute to TCNs' empowerment in **designing their own professional future** as well as establishing **trust-based networks** with employers and the host society at large. These interventions can also help

improve public perceptions, and **create awareness** about the significant role of TCNs in local economies.

- ⇒ **Promote fast-track skills assessment and validation for swift insertion into vocational training and the labour market.** The assessment and validation of TCNs' skills continue to be one of the greatest barriers to labour inclusion which confines this group of workers to low-skilled jobs. The **valorisation of migrants' competences** in relation to specific local needs should be pursued through **uniform tools and individual employment plans** that take into account **strengths, hard and soft skills as well as individual preferences**. To this end, it is crucial to ensure **better information about qualification recognition practices, employment schemes, and workers' rights** among both potential employers and employees.
- ⇒ **Consolidate and enhance public employment services through the collaboration among public and private actors, and third sector organisations to improve the match between supply and demand.** This should come with better information and orientation on available services for both prospective employers and employees. Actions in this area should also involve **capacity building** activities on diversity management targeting employers and **mediation** services to facilitate work relations before and during employment.
- ⇒ **Support social entrepreneurship and other projects favouring TCNs' insertion into the labour market.** Project-specific social cooperatives create work opportunities for migrants with limited employability due to poor knowledge of the local language, cultural barriers, weak social networks, and prejudices. These opportunities can be instrumental to provide formal employment opportunities and ethical and fair working conditions. Moreover, social entrepreneurship provides **an opportunity to** further develop individual skills, and build connections with the local community.
- ⇒ **Tackle labour exploitation through structural legal and policy reforms.** Efforts to eradicate labour exploitation, particularly in key sectors, like agriculture, have mostly focused on context specific measures and sanctions with limited effectiveness. Large-scale projects launched in this field suggests that national and local authorities should intervene urgently to design and promote **structural labour market integration measures** to promote the **regularisation** of migrant workers, advocate for greater dialogue among all actors involved, ensure access to decent work, create, or provide channels for **labour supply and demand matching outside of the informal sector**, and raise awareness about regular employment opportunities.
- ⇒ **Promote cross-cutting and holistic labour market integration initiatives:** implementing labour market integration measures is a cross-cutting effort. It requires **concerted efforts** by government bodies, regional and local authorities, public employment services, and other stakeholders. In addition, in order to be successful, labour inclusion should be pursued by advancing inclusion in other spheres of integration, too, most notably housing, health, access to services, and education. These dimensions of integration are deeply interdependent and call for **a holistic approach that focuses on migrants' wellbeing and empowerment** in all spheres of work and social life. For these reasons, it is crucial to continue to **advocate for structural and holistic reforms** to plan, design, and implement policies in a concerted and consistent way **across issue-areas and national, regional, and local governance levels**.

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Labour market inclusion



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