

Migrant Labour Market Integration and the Role of Civil Society Organisations: Policy Lessons from the SIRIUS Research

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

Research data: Our study focuses on policies in seven European countries, namely the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Our research is based on interviews with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as well as with CSO representatives. In total, national teams collected 134 interviews with representatives of CSOs and 173 with migrants, refugees and asylum applicants (MRAs). Moreover, we reviewed existing academic literature and available primary and secondary documents about the involvement of CSOs in labour market integration. Last but not least, a triangulation of data was conducted via regular diaries collected by a CSO, which is a member of the SIRIUS consortium.

Findings: CSOs work as important actors enhancing not only integration *into* the labour market but also integration *through* the labour market. CSOs are important language course providers, and thanks to their social, legal, and administrative guidance, CSOs help MRAs in overcoming ineffective administrative and legal structures. These activities are provided by the majority of CSOs across SIRIUS countries. Several CSOs in these countries also assist MRAs with the recruitment process, providing courses and advice on how to prepare for an interview, how to write a CV, or how to draft a cover letter. Furthermore, CSOs assist MRAs in their efforts to have their skills and qualifications recognised. Moreover, by providing mentorship, training programmes, volunteering, or even direct employment, CSOs contribute to the development of MRAs' skills and competencies and provide platforms to enhance the agency and autonomy of MRAs. However, CSOs capacities are unevenly spatially distributed. Besides integration support, CSOs either individually or collectively, raise awareness of the problematic situation of illegal practices on the part of employers, exploitation, human trafficking, or underpaid wages. Last but not least, CSOs help to mitigate and, often together with MRAs, struggle against the hostile context of a widespread atmosphere of xenophobia.

Recommendations: Based on the number of enablers and barriers facilitating and hindering the integration role of CSOs, our main recommendations are as follows: 1) to secure the economic sustainability of CSOs from public funding, in order to enhance knowledge transfer and develop the professional capacities of CSOs; 2) to support the networking potential of CSOs considering their capacities to bridge the views of MRAs, public authorities, experts and employers; 3) to establish safe spaces where CSOs can discuss and critically reflect upon the policies of their donors; 4) to allow CSOs to influence the nature of integration services funded by public authorities; 5) to recognise CSOs contribution to labour market integration through awareness campaigns, emphasising the positive experience and expertise as well as their capacity to provide an understanding of MRAs needs; 6) to promote the establishment of transnational networks, and 7) to support and develop the innovative potential of CSOs by sharing and transferring good practices across national borders and different contexts.