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USING APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK PLACEMENTS TO SUPPORT FASTER LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF ADULT ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

SATELLITE ROUNDTABLE, 10 NOVEMBER 2015, THESSALONIKI

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The present document summarises the discussions of the satellite roundtable on asylum seekers and refugees, held on 10 November 2015 at the 2nd European Conference on Engaging SMEs in Apprenticeships, organised by Cedefop. The objective of the satellite roundtable was to discuss how work based learning and apprenticeships can support the efficient labour market integration of asylum seekers in the EU. Participants' profiles included European organisations, national employers' and employees' organisations, national ministries, and other relevant associations with experience on that issue. In total, 24 participants were present, representing EU institutions and more than 10 EU member states.

The debate departed from a set of questions: (a) what are the lessons from the past; (b) what are employers' views; (c) what are the obstacles; (d) is there a solution that may be implemented fast; and (e) what framework conditions are necessary.

Part 1. Introduction of debate from international and European perspectives

The discussions began by a short introduction from Antonio Ranieri, Head of Department at Cedefop, who referred to the positive impact in addressing skills gaps that migration has in Europe. He also mentioned that the term 'migration' can nevertheless be used in a negative way. Given the current humanitarian crisis and the very high influx of refugees in short time, negative concerns can be exacerbated and raising uncertainty about future developments. In this context, participants were invited to share ideas and practices on how apprenticeships and work based learning, more generally, can help ease the integration of refugees to the labour market.

Chair of the roundtable, Cedefop Expert Pedro Moreno Da Fonseca, briefly outlined the background of the refugee crisis, mentioning that nearly four million people have fled Syria since the war began, while the EU is expected to receive more than one million asylum applications by the end of 2015. High numbers of migrants arrive also from other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, such as Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Libya. This pressure is not likely to fade away soon given the nature of the reasons which generated the flow. For several countries with reduced experience in receiving refugees and asylum seekers, such as Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria, this is a

new, challenging situation. While the EU countries have quickly addressed the humanitarian crisis, the setup of a durable mechanism that addresses socioeconomic integration still remains a challenge. The socioeconomic integration of refugees can be eased by their swift labour market integration. Vocational training, work based learning, and in particular apprenticeships, may play a major role, since the latter are generally a safe route to a more secure employment.

The floor was then given to representatives of EU-level organisations, in particular the European Commission (EC), the European Training Foundation (ETF), and Eurochambers. EC's representative from DG Employment referred to the theme of the roundtable as a rapidly evolving area, acknowledging that there are current reflections on the most adequate policy response in the area of VET. At the recent EAfA stakeholder meeting that took place on 5 October 2015, the issue of refugees was highlighted as a new topic and discussions focused on the evaluation of prior learning and skills of refugees and how to integrate them in apprenticeships. The European Agenda on Migration outlines that without migration the EU's working age population will decline by 17.5 million in the next decade, reporting also recruitment difficulties and skills shortages facing Europe. Thus, migration presents an opportunity for Europe, although a particular challenge is the lack of recognition of qualifications acquired by migrants in their home country. In this respect, EC's representative mentioned that the EU intends to improve understanding of qualifications gained outside of the EU, through the European Qualifications Framework and the upcoming revision of Europass. Existing tools and web portals, such as the EU Migration Portal and Europe's Job Mobility Portal (EURES) play an important role in facilitating job matching for third country nationals already in the EU. Within the European Semester the Commission monitors and guides Member States policies to improve the integration of migrants into the labour market through education, including VET. The Youth Guarantee schemes also apply to migrant youth who are unemployed or have left education, offering them an apprenticeship, traineeship, employment or further training. Exchange of knowledge and best practices are facilitated through National Contact Points and the European Website on Integration, the European Migration forum and the EU Handbooks and Modules on integration.

EC's representative referred then to European VET related initiatives and events. On 16 and 17 November 2015, the Directors' General meeting on VET included for the first time a Workshop on the role of VET to support migrants and refugees. The European Pact for Youth, launched on 17 November, aims to boost business-education partnerships and improve provision of quality of apprenticeships, traineeships and entry-level jobs. There is also a specific reference to the large numbers of young migrants arriving in Europe and it is acknowledged that they could represent a valuable asset for the European economy in view of their diverse skills. Moreover, the 2016-2018 draft mandate for the ET 2020 VET working group on teachers and trainers in work-based learning aims to add new issues like the integration of migrants, while DG GROW has created a collection of innovative approaches from across Europe on that topic, including on the provision of training for migrants, which is available on their website.

Finally, EC's representative mentioned various funds available for fostering the integration of people of migrant origin, including the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The ESF can support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees if they are legally able to participate in the labour market, focusing on social inclusion in terms of employment, education and training, language courses and capacity building, as well as awareness campaigns targeting both host communities and migrants. There is also some scope to support migrants through the Fund for European Aid for the Most

Deprived (FEAD), while a financing decision on a preparatory action called ‘Supporting active inclusion of disadvantaged migrants in Europe through development and testing of local centres for social and economic integration’ is to be adopted by the Commission College soon.

ETF’s representative referred to the wider mission of the organisation to support partner countries in the EU neighbourhood regions. Syria has been one of ETF’s partner countries since 20 years and between 2002 and 2005, ETF undertook a project to introduce the concept of apprenticeship schemes to Syrian vocational education for the first time. However, recent developments made the organisation to suspend its work both with Syria and Libya. ETF’s representative presented the work of the organisation on migration, mentioning ETF’s publication on ‘Leaving for work, leaving for good?’¹, and a position paper on ‘Migration and skills development agenda in ETF partner countries’², drafted before the big influx of refugees. The first provides an overview of the project on migrant support measures from an employment and skills perspective (MISMES), reporting key findings and recommendations from in-depth case studies developed in the context of mobility partnerships (i.e. Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Morocco, and Tunisia). The second describes an ETF position on how positive results for migrants and their home and host countries can be achieved from the migration-skills development nexus, discussing the concepts of ‘brain drain’, ‘brain gain’, ‘brain waste’ and ‘brain circulation’. ETF’s representative noted that brain drain in Syria is a serious issue for the development of the country, since especially the first waves of refugees who fled are the well-educated and the better off.

Another point raised by ETF was that focusing only on apprenticeships might be a narrow approach to deal with migration, given the high number of asylum seekers and the relative low number of apprenticeships placements available in Europe. Should work-based learning be of use, it needs to be included in a ‘multi-package’, with VET, continuing education and adult education, placing language learning at the front. The example of a residential college for refugees in Austria was then mentioned, to indicate a good practice aimed at providing accommodation, practical training, language courses and guidance to asylum seekers, recognised refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status. ETF’s representative noted also that there is a lot to learn from Turkey which currently has more refugees than all the rest of Europe. Bilateral agreements between home and host countries need to be established, since most of these people want permanent migration.

Box 1. Integration House Vienna

Integration House Vienna was developed with the aim to support the integration of persons with subsidiary protection status, asylum seekers and recognised refugees. It offers support to find accommodation and solve health issues, and organises psychological and career counselling projects in collaboration with different organisations. Valuing intercultural work and multilingualism, Integration House Vienna is promoting the use of multicultural teams, the use of migrants’ languages and

¹ ETF (2015). *Leaving for work, leaving for good? Evidence from ETF partner countries on migrant support measures from an employment and skills perspective.*

http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/MISMES_summary

² ETF (2014). *Migration and skills development agenda in ETF partner countries: position paper.*

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/eventsmgmt.nsf/\(getAttachment\)/B65025BE3526A415C1257EB4002BDF08/\\$File/ETF%20Position%20Paper%20on%20Migration%20and%20Skills_EN.pdf.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/eventsmgmt.nsf/(getAttachment)/B65025BE3526A415C1257EB4002BDF08/$File/ETF%20Position%20Paper%20on%20Migration%20and%20Skills_EN.pdf.pdf)

psychological care in order to empower the groups and to increase their level of independence. Moreover, the range of activities include different types of support structures to find jobs and apprenticeships and to develop a good knowledge of Austrian regulations related to the tenancy law, social and family law, educational and employment issues. Financial advices, psychosocial assistance, organisation of childcare and conflict management classes are also provided.

Source: UNHCR (2013). *Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria* (pp. 59-71). <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5278dc644.html>

Eurochambers' representative began his presentation by highlighting the fact that nowadays in Germany 100.000 fewer young people are leaving college compared to ten years ago and this trend continues downward. Due to population ageing and the retirement of the post-War generation, there is currently a shortage of skilled employees, which German businesses consider a risk for their development. In this respect, refugees are seen as an important potential pool of skilled employees that can help the economy. Young refugees who plan to stay for a long time in the country need, therefore, to receive training as soon as possible. Eurochambers' representative mentioned the central role that chambers play in the delivery of VET and apprenticeship schemes, arguing that in some cases chambers have already extended and adapted such services to refugees. German chambers for example have launched more than 100 projects to help integrate refugees in education, further training and employment, and Austrian chambers have developed programmes for mentoring and language learning.

Box 2. Together for the Prospects of Refugees

In Germany, a joint declaration by the partners in the alliance for education and further training signed on 18 September 2015, including stakeholders from the Federal Government, the economy, trade unions and the federal states, wants to support the humane treatment of refugees and open up new perspectives in their education and work. Therefore, the partners suggest to:

- Develop and launch German courses
- Strengthen training as a basis for integration
- Prepare refugees for the reality of training and employment
- Promote training and employment
- Identify potentials and recognise refugees' qualifications
- Allow for employment subject to social insurance contributions
- Create safe residence for training and embarking on a career
- Start early with active employment promotion
- Provide rapid information for businesses and skilled employees
- Establish 'Welcome guides' to mediate between businesses and refugees
- Encourage and support voluntary commitment

Source: [https://www.bmbf.de/files/BMWi_Allianz_Perspektiven_Fluechtlinge_s03_\(2\).pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/files/BMWi_Allianz_Perspektiven_Fluechtlinge_s03_(2).pdf)

Although many funding opportunities are available on a European scale level, Eurochambers' representative noted that these are still fragmented. Thus, he recommended a more integrated approach comprising intra and extra EU transit countries plus the country of destination and mentioned that Eurochambers is elaborating such an approach, towards which the EC has expressed an interest. However, this would require an additional level of EU funding and programme mixture, as well as interdepartmental

cooperation, beyond what is usual. Eurochambers' representative also mentioned that apprenticeships are not an absolute solution and that such an approach would probably take time to make an effect. More comprehensive responses for refugees should be achieved, taking into consideration additional elements, such as validating competences, language training and cultural integration.

Part 2. Discussions on national perspectives

Moving on to the second part, the roundtable participants discussed policies and practices implemented in their countries. At first, the representative of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO) referred to the lack of apprentices in some trades and the initiatives of the Austrian government to give access to young refugees to all professions facing shortage and not just to professions with apprentices' shortage. Refugees who applied for asylum are allowed to start an apprenticeship placement in professions with a lack of people, even before a positive decision is announced. A recent pilot project of the WKO to help place refugees in apprenticeships, named 'WKO Jobprofil'³, is an online competence test aimed at identifying the professional interests and strengths of young people. Available in four languages (Arabic, English, French and German), the pilot phase of the test is carried out with 150 young refugees and is organised in 30 sessions. Each session has 5 participants and lasts for 100 minutes. It takes place in test centres in the presence of test-support personnel and an interpreter, while an evaluation talk with a psychologist is organised afterwards. The results serve as a basis for a cross-regional exchange of young refugees in companies facing lack of apprentices or skills shortage. WKO's representative also highlighted the importance of transmitting this message to the public and resolving negative reactions. To this effect a catalogue of answers to possible questions from the public was disseminated to members and local offices of the WKO.

Representative of the German Federal Employment Agency (BA) referred to the high numbers of refugees that Germany is expecting until the end of 2015 (approximately one million according to Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel), noting that the country has no previous experience with humanitarian migrant inflows on such a large scale. He also acknowledged that the situation cannot be resolved with just one solution or project, highlighting that the high number of asylum applications causes higher demands on: (a) registration and accommodation (infrastructure); (b) claiming asylum (processing procedure); and (c) integration into training and employment (processes of integration and placement). Although the first waves of refugees entering Germany were highly qualified, the latest forecast qualification of unemployed refugees indicates that 81% have no formal qualification, 11% have completed vocational training, and 8% have an academic education (August 2015).

The BA responds to the increasing demands on the above mentioned issues by setting in place projects on the employers' side. At 9 locations in Germany, an early intervention project includes the identification of talents and their placement in employment or vocational training, while approximately 6,500 integrations have occurred via trial positions and training programmes in companies. A lot of regional initiatives also take place, such as the Stella project in the city of Offenburg, where 40 refugees are currently integrated in the labour market and 5 refugees are included in vocational training. Moreover, the BA organises joint projects with employers and partners aiming to provide guidance and help with language acquisition and professional integration. The

³ WKO (2015). *Fachkräftepotenzial Flüchtlinge*. [Skills potential of refugees]. <https://www.wko.at/Content.Node/kampagnen/fachkraeftepotenzial/index.html>

BA also works in close contact with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and has created integration points in every agency, which would help the profiling process until the end of the year. For the success of BA's activities, personnel and financial support are considered important factors. Therefore, the BA aims to recruit additional specialists for integration, career advisors, counsellor benefits systems' specialists, rehabilitation consultants, and assistants in entrance to improve case processing. Financial support adds up to at least 855 million euros in 2016, disaggregated by 640 million for expenditures in the area of minimum income benefit, 150 million for funds earmarked for integration in the area of unemployment insurance, and 65 million for staff in the area of unemployment insurance.

The political framework in Germany needs also to be adjusted to the situation. The BA has already addressed a number of framework conditions to the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, including the simplification of access to the labour market by temporarily waiving the priority review ('Vorrangsprüfung') and opening temporary work for refugees. It has also suggested the extension of qualification offers, which would allow for access to language training before the asylum application decision, approval of early supportive benefits regarding placement and training, and nationwide guarantee for school attendance of young refugees no later than 3 months after having applied for asylum. Finally, cooperation with network partners would help to exchange data between BAMF, AA/JC, Aliens Authority, municipalities and states.

Another initiative to improve labour market integration of adult migrants in Germany is the nationwide network 'Integration through Qualification' (IQ). The network is financed by national and European funds and is organised in 16 regional networks and 5 competence centres. In the 2015-2018 phase, the network's focus is threefold: (a) counselling on recognition and job training; (b) qualification measures in the context of the Recognition Act of 2012; and (c) development of intercultural competence, particularly among labour market stakeholders. Representative of the MigraNet-IQ Network Bavaria⁴ noted that many migrants are not officially registered in the country, while several of them avoid being registered. In close contact with the Ministry for Labour, the IQ fosters the establishment of particular classes for refugees in vocational schools, the opening up of accompanied apprenticeships, and secure residence permit for at least 3 years to complete the apprenticeship, plus 2 years to work. However, the system currently discussed in a political level is a 1+1+1, which companies would not be particularly interested in.

Additional 'bridging measures', adopted from Canada and the Ontario bridging programmes, include providing internationally trained migrants with flexible access to full qualifications, as well as training and workplace experience which does not duplicate what they have already learned. This would mean, for example, that bridging training for medicine and education professions would include filling knowledge gaps through specialised courses or acquiring the necessary language proficiency. These training options would ease the way to full recognition of existing qualifications and foster a faster integration in the labour market. A central objective of the network in 2015-2018 is that regardless of residence status, the professional qualifications acquired outside Germany should lead to employment appropriate to a migrant's level of education. IQ's representative also raised the importance of building networks among relevant stakeholders, which could give support to communities, individual schools, and teachers.

⁴ IQ Network Bavaria (2015). *MigraNet*. <http://www.migranet.org/>

Other measures proposed included developing the intercultural competences of all professionals dealing with refugees and other migrants, increasing migrant support in legal issues, social security, health and other everyday life issues, as well as increasing training offer. Measures aimed at supporting employers were also highlighted, namely increasing language sensitivity, developing intercultural competences, creating the role of integration officers, introducing trained coaches and developing webinars. Involving mentors with an immigrant background in guiding and supporting migrants was also referred to as a double push for integration.

The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is another German institution working on the implementation of the Recognition Act and reporting annually on facts and analyses accompanying the federal report on VET. Selected findings of the BIBB data report are also translated in English. The 2014 report⁵ contains data on apprentices with migrant background, indicating an increase in their number since 2007 in all areas of competence. Approximately a quarter of the apprenticeship applicants in 2012 had an immigrant background, although the transition from general to vocational education continues to be more difficult and slow for them. BIBB also advertises the recognition portal⁶, a tool providing guidance on how to get one's qualifications and skills recognised, which is currently being developed as an app in multiple languages. BIBB's representative referred to the KAUSA initiative⁷ which aims to support, inform and advise young people, self-employed individuals and parents with migrant background in training issues, through service centres and various activities. Developing an apprenticeship culture could be further enhanced via intercompany training centres, some of which have already targeted at entrepreneurs with migrant background in an effort to attract more young migrants and set the good example. BIBB's representative also raised the issue of qualifications for in-company trainers, reflecting on how to achieve more diversity in a company and arguing that trainers should acquire intercultural skills.

Moving to the case of Spain, representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Terrassa referred to the Spanish system for reception. Social service is provided in city councils where refugees can register and ask for residence permit. Once they have registered, they can have free access to health services, social guidance and food. At a second stage, they are provided with career guidance and counselling to identify their competencies and help bridge the skills gap. Training in culture and language is also considered essential to achieve those competences that would give them equal access to the labour market. A step by step integration is envisaged, for example through welcome classes for migrant minors, organised year-around, so that integration could be eased and affect less the 'local' group. It was further argued that the focus should be on apprenticeships for adults, while the integration process should first assess migrants' skills, provide them counselling, and eventually enable them to work in actual working environments.

At this point, the Chair of the roundtable referred to women activation and noted that it is important to develop measures for both young and more mature women, in order to achieve their successful integration. One participant mentioned the KVINFO's Mentor

⁵ BIBB (2014). *VET data report Germany 2014: selected findings*.

<http://www.bibb.de/veroeffentlichungen/en/publication/show/id/7722>

⁶ German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2015). *Recognition in Germany*.

<http://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/>

⁷ KAUSA (2015). *Koordinierungsstelle Ausbildung und Migration* [Coordination unit vocational training and migration]. <http://www.jobstarter.de/de/kausa-21.php>

Network⁸ in Denmark, an initiative that pairs up refugee and immigrant women with women who are established members of the Danish society, who act as mentors. These help migrant women familiarise themselves with all aspects of Danish society. Another participant referred to the idea of part-time apprenticeships in Germany, a model which could be useful for young women who need to take care of their children. Lastly, a Bulgarian representative presented a suggestion on how to integrate refugees and immigrants through apprenticeships. The central objective of this potential project would be to create a network of organisations to develop appropriate tools for preparing refugees and immigrants, with permanent residence status, to operate as trainers and mentors.

The fact that there is a large mass of unaccompanied minors in the current inflow was also discussed. It was mentioned that framework conditions should be raised to allow for simplified pathways to the labour market by these young people. An increase in qualifying offer would be important to achieve this purpose. An increase in VET and work based learning offer could be especially effective, also contributing to reduce early school leaving, among young migrants.

Part 3. Conclusions

The following key messages were highlighted by the Chair of the roundtable and agreed by the participants, at the close of the meeting, reflecting the debate held:

- For an effective response, an integrated approach should be adopted, providing comprehensive information on destination possibilities and conditions for integration, in transit support, support at arrival and follow-up on initial integration measures. This approach should be developed making coordinated use of diverse funding options in collaboration with all countries involved in the flow of refugees, including transit, and potential arrival countries.
- Framework conditions should be established (e.g. the German case) to ease integration in the labour market, education and training systems, by facilitating and accelerating access to residence and working permits;
- Establishing programmes which develop language, social and civic competences of refugees is a fundamental pre-condition for peaceful and successful social and economic integration;
- Identification of migrant subgroups, their needs and characteristics is fundamental to tailor policy measures and truly effective integration programmes, with a rational use of resources;
- There is a need for awareness raising actions concerning the issues involved, the policy responses and the integration programmes developed, among the general population, especially in the countries with less experience with immigrant integration;
- Guidance and counselling by practitioners with multicultural training and thorough information about training, education, health, social security systems and labour markets is fundamental to facilitate arrival and integration processes;
- Integrating multicultural practices and developing intercultural competencies should also be a fundamental component in the training of teachers and trainers;
- The situation of women must be carefully addressed with counselling and activation measures for adult women and mentoring for younger women;

⁸ KVINFORM - Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Diversity (2015). *Mentor network*.
<http://kvinform.org/mentor>

- Unaccompanied minors must also be carefully supported with combined social security and career guidance provisions and adequate training/learning offers;
- Training vouchers can be used as a way to increase access to a diversified training offer by both young and adult learners;
- Apprenticeships, as well as other work based learning systems and programmes can have a role to play but as part of a more comprehensive and holistic response which includes diverse training options, social and career support as well as diverse financing possibilities.

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