

LSE Maryam Forum

A NEW POLICY PARADIGM FOR THE POST- COVID WORLD

Proposals for change from the Maryam Forum platforms

Draft of 8 December 2020

Introduction

This draft contains the policy note that have been prepared by the Human Mobility working group (“co-lab”) under the Maryam Forum at the LSE in preparation for the Annual Conference on 8-9-10 December 2020.

Human Mobility: Towards Enhanced Integration and Social Cohesion

Context

The topic of migration and forced displacement takes central attention in national, regional, and global policies. However, the debate is often confounded by a political and populist narrative that is not founded in evidence. As such, the Maryam Forum Co-Lab on Human Mobility aims to focus on highlighting the research evidence base and propagating its conclusions amongst policymakers as well as private stakeholders to mobilise action and factual discussions around this emotive topic.

While we recognise the political sensitivities around migration related policies, in this note we describe some of the recent evidence supporting feasible policy solutions to improve integration of refugees in labour markets and promoting healthy attitudes towards them to bolster and preserve social cohesion.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Use technology to match labour market supply and demand for refugees

For resettled refugees, labour market integration starts by placing people in the location where they are more likely to be succeed. However, there are constraints when making this happen such as (1) the lack of information on both refugees and labour market characteristics, and (2) the state capacity to find the most appropriate matches. Academic research has developed data-driven matching mechanisms to enhance labour market integration. The introduction of this mechanisms as host countries’ policies is imperative.

1.1 Matching algorithms for asylum seekers and resettled refugees have positive effects on labour market outcomes: Technology allows to fill the information and capacity gaps in host countries facing humanitarian crisis. Then, using machine learning algorithms, this information can match the labour demand of specific locations, improving resettlement outcomes. Bansak et al. (2018), show that if refugees are placed in the areas where they are most likely to thrive, based on the area’s characteristics and their own, there are 40-70% gains in the likelihood to find employment opportunities, when compared with the current random assignment of refugees in Switzerland and the United States. Similarly, matching might also help to allocate refugees into localities with the capacity and willingness to receive refugees, where public, private organizations and NGOs are supportive of their integration (Jones & Teytelboym, 2017). This is an extremely **cost-efficient policy intervention** that could be widely implemented in reception and placement centres.

Recommendation 2: Use holistic active labour market programs for refugees

Refugees face three main barriers when accessing labour market: (1) Proficiency in the host country language , (2) knowledge of labour market, (3) lack of qualifications. (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018; Bucken-Knapp, Fakhri, & Spehar, 2019). Refugees also face institutional barriers that prohibit their legal access to the labour market, such as restricted occupations or difficulty in obtaining work permits. In addition, refugees may face discrimination in hiring decisions forcing them to accept lower paid and informal jobs. As such, the earlier refugees have access to the labour market and active labour market programs, the faster is their labour market integration (Desiderio & Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016, Marbach, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2018).

2.1. Prioritise language training and work first schemes: Language training is imperative to break basic cultural barriers. While training in schools is effective, the evidence suggests a multiplier effect when learning language in working places (For example, temporal workplaces). Strategies could include entrance schemes where refugees are allocated to temporal jobs where they also receive language training. As a result, refugees gain communication skills specifically related to a vocation, while acquiring work experience that opens further opportunities (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018; McHugh & Challinor, 2011). Such a policy requires strategic alliances between the private sector, and the public sector, particularly local governments. The duration of these programs varies depending on the refugee's skills level and the local requirements to enter the labour market. The inclusion of cultural orientation modules, and work places in community related areas is also recommended to enhance refugees' social networks. (Butschek & Walter, 2014; Desiderio & Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016).

2.2. Improve qualifications assessments: Due to the labour market frictions and lack of qualification transferability, refugees are often overqualified for the jobs they do (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018). The complexity of qualification validation and the impossibility to claim the qualification in the country of origin are the prime reasons for this friction. Host countries **could consider more flexible screening processes, incorporating translation services, and standardizing cross-country educational frameworks** (Barbino, 2020; McKenzie & Yang, 2015) . Joint efforts between the United Nations, Governments and private sector are oriented to use block chain technology as a mechanism to preserve refugee identity information, while making it transferable across different locations (Barbino, 2020). Also, interviews with experts and competency test are mechanisms to provide skills qualifications. They could be sponsored and elaborated together with representatives of the industry to have credibility and generalized recognition in the labour market (Desiderio & Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2016).

2.3. Use entrepreneurship and volunteering programs for low-skilled refugees: Refugees are a heterogeneous group. Many of them lack complete education and skills to join the labour market. In this case, entrepreneurship programs and volunteering opportunities are powerful options. They help to create social networks and prevent exclusion, while enhancing skills that increase future job opportunities. These strategies need coordinated action between government, business and civic society organizations (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). For entrepreneurship programs, it is recommended to start with skills training, incorporating long-term assistance, and opportunities to access to credit, and understanding of bureaucratic regulations (Vision Europe Summit, 2016).

2.4. Expand labour laws to protect refugees and provide them the right to work: In many countries refugees face difficulties in obtaining legal work permits pushing them into informality and precarious employment. This is particularly a problem in fragile states and emerging economies. Denying refugees legal right to work places them at a serious disadvantage and exposes them to exploitation and trafficking (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2014). It forces them to take perilous decisions, perpetuates aid-dependency, and increases their vulnerability to health issues and workplace hazards. Governments in host countries facilitate regulatory frameworks and innovate to build capacity and provide the right to work to refugees (Zetter, Ruaudel, & Schuettler, 2018). Effective right to work procedures may benefit host countries (Özdemir, Kickbusch, & Coşkun, 2017).

2.5. Recognize the gendered nature of migration, displacement, and integration: Labour market programs should place particular attention to women and their inclusion in resilience programming, access to employment opportunities, legal permits, and financial services (Senthanaar, MacEachen, Premji, & Bigelow, 2020). UN WOMEN (2018) recommends empowering women through information sharing, rights awareness, promoting accountability against gender-based violence, and creating safe spaces for networking and socialising.

Recommendation 3. Redesign the Asylum Process with a Focus on Integration

Effective labor market integration starts when refugees enter the migration path. Besides the violence they fled from, refugees can also be on risk of deprivation, gender-based exploitation, and life threats when located in camps or placements. Cumulative exposure to violence and traumatic events have long-term impacts in refugees' physical and mental health, complicating any social integration process. (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017).

3.1 Timely asylum decision: Recent evidence suggests that lengthy asylum decisions are particularly detrimental to refugees' labour market outcomes primarily due psychological discouragement even more than skill atrophy. Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Lawrence (2016) find that an additional year of waiting for an asylum decision causes between 16% and 23% decline in employment rates compared to the average rate of employment. As such, ensuring fast and adequate asylum processes, perhaps with the use of technology, can lead to more favourable economic and psychosocial outcomes.

3.2 Pre-departure orientation: For resettled refugees, who do not have to take perilous journeys to their destinations, pre-departure programs may facilitate refugees' integration by smoothing cultural and labor transitions. Effective programs do not provide just general information in the host country. In contrast, they embrace cultural orientation with bicultural trainers, language courses, knowledge on the labour market recipient, early qualifications assessment, job search orientation and support for job applications when it is possible (Mousa, 2018).

3.3. The role of local communities as reception cities: Frontline cities are key to promote better reception processes and faster asylum-decision processing. Entrance cities need to build capacity to respond effectively to refugees' needs while easing the path for their future integration. This cannot be achieved without multisector alliances that promotes innovation (Oliver, Dekker, Geuijen, & Broadhead, 2020). Multilateral and international cooperation can

facilitate this by providing technical assistance and funding (Kegels, 2016). It is important to ensure refugees to receive user-friendly roadmaps to access public services, to received guidance from cross-cultural trained locals, and to provide information to facilitates labor integration (Schreieck, Zitzelsberger, Siepe, Wiesche, & Krcmar, 2017).

Recommendation 4. Governments, business and civil society should actively leverage research and evidence to counter disinformation about refugees

Tackling hostility—often expressed in the form of xenophobia and discrimination—towards refugees should be at the top of the migration agenda. In fact, the cost of tensions between communities is poorer social cohesion and a lack of shared prosperity. Drouvelis, Malaeb, Vlassopoulos, & Wahba, (2019) find experimental evidence in Lebanon that cooperation between refugees and their host communities are significantly lower than they are amongst homogenous groups of refugees or the host communities. Further evidence suggests that tensions between the two communities are worsening over time, particularly in fragile hosting states like Lebanon.

4.1 Information is a powerful tool to reduce hostility and improve social cohesion: The role of media and public figures such as politicians is key in propagating positive attitudes (Alrababa’h et al., 2020; Böhm, Theelen, Rusch, & Van Lange, 2018). Information has three characteristics: (1) Explaining transparently the public effort to receive and resettle refugees and the integration mechanisms, (2) emphasizing a humanitarian element of assisting individuals under plight and the shared prosperity, (3) presenting with evidence the real size of individual costs of refugee integration in host countries (Alrababa’h et al., 2020; Böhm et al., 2018; Esses et al., 2017).

4.2 Schools as multicultural integration environments: Interventions in refugee children promote both short-term (through family integration in communities) and long-term integration (children themselves) in the labour market. Governments investing in inclusive education programs would actively promote cross-cultural relations and prevent segregation practices within schools. These programs could combine elements for language skills training, social cohesion, and pro-social behaviour, besides the inter-ethnic exposure. In addition, these programs could aim at training school staff to create multicultural curricula and enhance cultural diversity narratives in the teaching. Moreover, programs could include parental engagement with interpretation mechanisms to overcome language barriers and to boost education. (Block, Cross, Riggs, & Gibbs, 2014).

4.3. The COVID crisis further highlighted the central contributions that refugees and migrants make to their host countries: Refugees and migrants constitute a central component of many countries’ workforce. They often work in jobs that are instrumental to the functioning of the economy and make valuable contributions to their societies across a diverse range of industries including the health and care sector, public transport, schooling, universities, and R&D. Indeed, they contributed in the current COVID-19 crisis to saving lives, providing essential services, and developing essential treatments, despite their skills being undervalued and their rights being withheld. In fact, given their vulnerability, they may have been disproportionately affected by the economic ramifications of the crisis. The pandemic also showed in many parts of the world that the overall health of the community is as good as that of its weakest link. The Overseas

Development Institute developed a tool that tracks their contributions which range from delivering food parcels, providing healthcare, making drugs and vaccine innovations, and providing shelter to key workers, amongst others (Overseas Development Institute, 2020). As such, promoting positive contributions of refugees may contribute to enhancing attitudes towards them.

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Appendix: List of co-lab participants

Dominik Hangartner	ETH Zurich and LSE (Academic Lead)
Angelo Martelli	LSE (Academic Lead)
Bilal Malaeb	LSE (Academic Lead)
Mr Fadi Abilmona	UNDP
Ali Ali	University of Sussex
Francesco Aureli	Sanità di Frontiera ONLUS and Ortygia Business School
Erik Berglof	AIIB and LSE
Marine Casalis	ETH Zurich
Myriam Cherti	UN International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Gibral Faal	GK Partners and LSE
Marta Foresti	ODI Europe
Camilla Jelbart	Norwegian Refugee Council
Shaza Jondi	ILO Regional Office for Arab States
Shaden Khallaf	UNHCR
Andrea Milan	IOM Global
Piroska Nagy-Mohacsi	LSE
Doménica Avila,	Student leader
Mahima Andrew	LSE student
Santina Bevacqua	LSE student