Migrants, refugees and asylum applicants' integration via labour markets: in Short policy lessons from the social partners

Research topic: The integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum applicants (MRAs) via labour markets is not a straightforward task, due to the specific issues relating to migration and refugee/asylum statuses and to the extent of heterogeneity apparent across contemporary labour markets in Europe. SIRIUS understands the labour market integration of MRAs as being dependent on a pattern of concurring circumstances and features located at different analytical levels: at the macro (state, sub-state and supra-state), at the meso (intra-societal), and at the micro (individual) levels. In this abridged version policy brief we present evidence about the 'meso' dimensions of integration by exploring views and perceptions of social partners on the integration of non-EU migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in European labour markets.

Research data: Our research presents findings from a four-month long process of field work of interviews with social partners (gathering overall 123 interviews) complemented by an experts' survey which managed to collect responses from 293 additional social partners' representatives across our seven countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom).

Findings: Our findings reveal that some of the key issues that had been discussed by extant studies, and in particular the dilemmas faced by unions vis-a'-vis migrants (e.g. if they are to include them among their beneficiaries and members, how to mitigate the potential competitive spirals newcomers bring in the receiving society labour markets, how to avoid social/wage dumping, etc..) are still relevant.

Our data also show the social partners' awareness about the higher (than local workers) risks migrants incur for their health and safety due to the poor regulations of migration and asylum which often confine newcomers to employment in the irregular economy, or to jobs requiring lower skills, leading to wasted talent, demotivation, and potential social isolation.

Furthermore, our survey reveals the appreciation that social partners have of newcomers' skills, of their potential for the wellbeing of our societies and economies, a potential which very often remains unrealised. This is due to reasons that are at a time pertinent to our society's regulation of migration (migration and asylum law, recognition of skills and educational attainment levels, services to improve newcomers' capacities to adapt to our labour markets, etc..) and a time connected with the characteristics of the migrants themselves (language proficiency, social capital, personal well-being and health). Such results are fully consistent with the analyses we have carried out in previous work packages, providing us with robust (triangulated) evidence about the further efforts policy makers, but social partners too, should engage in.

Recommendations: Our main recommendations are (1) create further social dialogue opportunities; (2) develop a more coordinated multi-actor effort based on dialogue and mutual understanding; (3) discourage framing people's skills on the simple basis of their reason to migrate; (4) improve the support of private sector in including the most vulnerable groups of newcomers; (5) widening the access to language classes provision and change restrictive policies; (6) improve job search support along with skills matching, skills profiling, job mentoring; (7) increase employment inspections and minimum wages legislation.