

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

The missing link: Promoting refugees' skills-based mobility within Europe

The Common European Asylum System prohibits the mobility of persons entitled to international protection within the European Union, making it more difficult for displaced persons to rebuild their lives even after arriving in Europe and receiving protection status. Recent developments soften this strict policy of immobility for some. In this context, intra-EU mobility based on refugees' skills could become a game-changer. The tools are there. What is needed now is to connect these initiatives so that more displaced persons can use their skills for their benefit and that of receiving countries.

In its recent annual report on the state of asylum within the European Union, the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) considers complementary pathways important for expanding solutions for displaced persons. [According to the EUAA](#), “resettlement or other alternative pathways to protection, such as humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, study programmes or channels used for labour migration, may provide a viable way ahead” for displaced persons who are not able to return to their origin country. This is in line with broader momentum behind complementary pathways, as seen for instance in the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#). Discussions have focused on the global context—but the benefits of this approach also ring true within the European Union.

As research from the Transnational Figurations of Displacement (TRAFIG) project has shown (see [working paper no. 9](#) and [policy brief no. 6](#)), displaced people, including applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, can also face situations of protracted displacement within the European Union: They lack mobility within the European Union due to EU legal frameworks and, as consequence, may not be able to rebuild their lives in the member state in which they first arrived. Intra-EU mobility could, just as in the global dimension, play a viable role in helping more displaced persons rebuild their lives. It could well be linked to labour opportunities. The tools are all there:

- the European Union is working on an EU-wide talent pool;
- organisations are providing national support networks to help refugees find employment and to support employers interested in hiring refugees; and
- recent developments have softened mobility restrictions for refugees.

What is needed now is the political will to connect these dots so that more displaced persons can make use of their skills for their benefit and that of receiving countries.

At the same time as displacement is rising, the European Union is facing a demographic decline and labour force shortages, meaning that migration could help to mitigate the consequences of an ageing continent. The skills and talents of refugees—when properly assessed, recognised and matched—could contribute considerably to maintaining the European Union's economic growth. In this context, efforts to identify and acknowledge displaced talent—and make this known to potential employers—are critical.

The TRAFIG project mapped and interviewed some of these initiatives to learn from their experiences and assess whether their practices could be replicated in other countries, thereby promoting cross-border cooperation within the European Union. The aim was to understand how to connect the dots—or, in other words, how to fill the gap between the available skills and talent of displaced people, typically misused or underused, with the needs and opportunities of EU labour markets.

What is already being done?

Many, mostly non-governmental, organisations have been leading initiatives to facilitate labour market integration and increase the employability of refugees through different projects and tools, such as training courses, job matching services, recognition of skills and private sector engagement.

Recognising skills and qualifications

Recognising the professional and educational credentials of refugees and other migrants is a prerequisite for enabling them to fully utilise their skills, benefiting both local labour markets and refugees. But the procedures for recognising foreign degrees and skills are often complicated, and the responsibilities are not always clear. Moreover, many refugees lack formal documentation such as certificates. As a result, many face lengthy, tedious and often inefficient skills recognition processes.

Various initiatives aim to facilitate the recognition of skills. The Council of Europe's [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#) (EQPR) provides a methodology to assess refugees' qualifications, even if formal documentation is lacking. It entails five steps: 1) application, 2) review of documentation, 3) desk research, 4) interview and 5) outcome. The result is a comprehensive document (a qualifications passport) that presents crucial information to employers and/or educational institutions, such as the highest qualification achieved, relevant work experience, language skills and information on the next steps for skills recognition.

With its "[Show your skills initiative](#)", the Bertelsmann Stiftung is contributing to making visible the skills and competencies of refugees who do not have a formal qualification, thus facilitating their labour market integration in Germany. With a range of tools, this initiative assesses various competencies such as social and soft skills, professional orientation in different sectors and vocational and professional skills. All assessment tools created are available for free and in multiple languages and can be used within and beyond Germany.

Several initiatives also exist at the national level. The [IQ Network—Integration through qualification in Germany](#) aims to improve employment opportunities for people with a migration background by ensuring that their professional qualifications acquired outside of Germany more frequently lead to employment commensurate with their levels of education. This state-led consortium encompasses key actors relevant to the recognition of qualifications, including Chambers of Commerce, municipalities, social partners, civil society, technical colleges and language course providers.

Making displaced persons' talent visible and accessible

Refugees face challenges in making their skills visible—and this becomes a particular problem for those with relatively small networks in host countries and those who lack information on country-specific labour market opportunities, including recruitment and workplace policies and structures.¹ The task of matching potential candidates with job vacancies requires complex support mechanisms and the creation of effective employer networks on the one hand and networks with refugees as potential employees on the other. International job matching remains costly and ineffective and is hampered by a lack of resources and know-how concerning the employment of migrant workers, especially in the case of member states and employers with

limited immigration experience. There are many existing public and private models of job-seeker profile platforms, including European profile-building tools (e.g. [EURES, the European public employment services](#)), but in most cases, they are not well-suited to serve third-country nationals (TCNs).

However, in April 2022, the European Commission presented the [Skills and Talent Package](#), consisting of legislative and non-legislative measures to boost the attraction of talent to the European Union. The large-scale displacement of people from Ukraine following the Russian invasion has undoubtedly accelerated and contributed to widening the scope of the measures in the package, which include labour market integration measures for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Interestingly in the current context, the EU Talent Pool is designed to be the first EU-wide platform and matching tool for candidates from non-EU countries. By summer 2022, the Commission intends to launch a pilot EU Talent Pool for people fleeing Ukraine to member states. This pilot will map their skills and match them with employers in the European Union.

Central to the Talent Pool is the [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#), which DG Employment developed in 2017. This tool allows TCNs to upload and create skill profiles following a set of online questions. To be successful, it requires facilitators on both ends: Organisational structures that link and support beneficiaries of international protection to enter their skills in the profiling tool and organisational structures that raise awareness among employers to employ TCN talent, including beneficiaries of international protection.

Creating networks for refugees and employers

Several initiatives and networks support refugees or other migrants to find employment in EU countries. In some cases, stakeholders have also launched networks that reach out to the private sector to promote the employment of refugees.

In Germany, [Litus Novum](#) offers coaching, intercultural communication, work environment sessions, anti-racism training and other services to facilitate the integration of refugees into the labour market. In Finland, [Start-up Refugees](#) focuses on labour market integration by supporting beneficiaries of international protection and migrants searching for jobs and entrepreneurship. Among others, they map refugees' skills and needs, help to create skills profiles and upload those on their database. [Solidarity Now](#) provides similar support in Greece. While these organisations mainly work at the national level, all showed an openness to providing services at the transnational, EU level (interviews conducted for the TRAFIG project).

Given the need for specialised talent in the technology sector, [MigraCode](#), a European network, promotes open/free technology education for refugees and migrants in schools in Spain, France, Greece, Belgium, Croatia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Italy and Denmark, in cooperation with corporate tech partners. It is in the process of creating a database (similar to [LinkedIn](#)) where students can create and regularly update their professional profiles to showcase their talent.

¹ Cedefop & ICMPD (forthcoming), Working paper: Intra-EU skills-based mobility of adult refugees - Findings of a pilot project between Greece and Portugal.

While most refugee employment initiatives have also developed networks with employers to facilitate recruitment, some initiatives do not directly work with refugees but instead focus solely on engaging with employers to promote the employment of refugees. The [TENT partnership for refugees](#), a non-profit organisation with headquarters in the United States, launched in 2016, mobilises the global business community to hire refugees. The network currently consists of over 200 major companies all over the world committed to integrating refugees into their host communities. In Germany, the [NETZWERK Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge](#) (network of companies integrating refugees) brings together companies already committed to (or planning to support) the integration of refugees. It raises awareness about the possibility of hiring refugees, offers support regarding regulatory affairs, answers questions from companies related to the employment of refugees and offers mediation and support to companies once they hire refugees.

The missing link: Allowing people to follow opportunities within the European Union

Contrary to the refugee immobility inherent in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), recent developments can be seen as starting points for softening the restrictive stance toward mobility rights for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. First and foremost, in the face of the unprecedented displacement from Ukraine, the European Union [triggered](#) the EU Temporary

Protection Directive ([Council Directive 2001/55/EC](#)), which—connected to the pre-existing visa-free regime for Ukrainians—allows Ukrainians to move to the EU country where they see the best opportunities for continuing their lives despite displacement. Second, the 2020 New Pact on Migration and Asylum proposes reducing the waiting time for granting a long-term residence permit from five to three years. This is still under discussion but could lead to earlier mobility rights, under certain circumstances, for beneficiaries of international protection. Third, relocation has seen new momentum with the French Presidency's first step in the gradual implementation of the New Pact: a voluntary solidarity mechanism in which several countries have agreed to relocate a set number of people ([reportedly](#) 10,000 per year) who disembarked at the European Union's external borders.

While all these mobility measures are connected to large-scale arrivals of people and are built to support the countries most affected, they still provide momentum for increasing intra-EU mobility for displaced persons following job opportunities in other EU countries. The EU Talent Pool could play a central role, but it requires supporting networks to inform, guide and support refugees to make the most of the talent pool to spotlight their skills. Yet, network structures for awareness-raising among employers so they indeed utilise the refugee talent within the talent pool are equally important. However, these measures do not stand alone: They could be well connected with already existing national and transnational initiatives within the European Union, such as those mentioned above.

Linking refugees with skills-based mobility opportunities



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