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Initiatives on the employment integration of beneficiaries of international protection continued to be implemented and adjusted to address the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several evaluations were published throughout 2021, to assess the efficiency and impact of targeted employment policies.

The Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy extended its refugee employment and training programme for 2021-2022. The language component of the programme started in December 2021, providing Bulgarian language training for 180 academic hours at levels A1, A2 and B1. The programme has been running since 2016, but it was observed that only very few refugees were employed through it so far.1201

The employment rate of refugees and migrants reached a record high in Denmark, despite many of them losing their jobs at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.1202 The increase is linked to the current economic boom in Denmark. This has resulted in more women entering the labour market. To further increase the employment rate of migrant women, the Danish government proposed a reform plan to require migrants who receive social benefits to work or participate actively for 37 hours a week in order to receive full social benefits. The proposal was met with severe criticism,1203 but has not come into force since there has not been political agreement or an amendment yet. The independent Danish Knowledge Centre on Integration indeed observed that only 17% of Syrian women living in Denmark were employed, compared to 80% of Eritrean men and 38% Eritrean women. The centre notes that this may be due to education levels and trauma, as 40% of Syrian refugees arrived in Denmark with limited education and were more likelihood to be suffering from trauma.1204

In France, among the 21 integration projects that have received national funding for 2021, several focused on employment support to beneficiaries of international protection.1205 A study from the Jesuit Refugee Service France suggested that the labour market integration of beneficiaries could be more efficient if the various administrative hurdles for a work permit could be lifted for asylum applicants as well.1206

Switzerland launched a pilot programme for the employment integration of refugees and persons with temporary admission and concluded subsidy contracts with 14 cantons. The project offers compensation to employers who engage refugee workers. In addition, the pre-

apprenticeship integration programme was extended by 2 years and will offer apprenticeships in more fields of work, supporting refugees to obtain a federal certificate on their training and assisting them to find work.1207

The Swedish government noted that more recent beneficiaries of international protection could find employment and be integrated at a faster pace than those who arrived earlier.1208 To facilitate migrant women's employment, the Swedish government proposed to reserve 90 days of parental leave to each parent including for low-income families. So far only parents with an income high enough to qualify for sickness benefits have had 90 reserved days in their parental insurance.1209

Among civil society initiatives, the Finnish Refugee Aid and IKEA launched a project to employ beneficiaries of international protection for 3 months in an IKEA store following coaching sessions. They had the opportunity to try various posts.1210

Research institutes, think tanks, academia and civil society organisations published several reports analysing the labour market situation of beneficiaries of international protection. For example, a report within the RESPOND project analysed the education and labour market integration of beneficiaries in countries along the Eastern Mediterranean route: Turkey and Iraq, as source and transit countries, the transit countries of Greece, Italy and Poland, and the destination countries of Austria, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (before Brexit). The report observes that beneficiaries typically found work through their social networks, even when state support was available.1211 Another report from the same project noted the link between difficulties in accessing the labour market, the lack of income and the negative impact on health.1212

A study from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) compared the employment situation of beneficiaries of international protection in Austria before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that the pandemic had a particularly negative impact for the employment of women refugees and refugees with higher-level education. Persons from both groups were more likely to become or remain inactive.1213

The Dutch Inclusion and Community Platform published its sixth annual municipal policy monitoring of employment guidance and the civic integration of beneficiaries of international protection. It highlighted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic municipal workers has less contact with persons under their guidance and there were less municipal internships and volunteer jobs available for beneficiaries.1214

The Sociological Research Institute of the Georg August University in Göttingen, Germany published a qualitative study on the employment and employment-related training of refugees. The report observes that many refugees are highly motivated to find employment and they are often overqualified for the low wage, unstable jobs that they attain. Many employers take advantage of their temporary residence situation. The report concludes that these types of jobs isolate refugee workers and do not contribute to their integration.1215

Another analysis from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung finds that the German labour market would not be able to function without migrants and increasingly refugee workers.1216 The foundation

conducted research on self-employment opportunities for refugees and highlighted that many of the persons fleeing were entrepreneurs themselves in their home country, so it would be beneficial to have policies which support self-employment and start-ups. The report notes that the majority of refugees become self-employed after approximately 20 years of stay.1217 MPI Europe's report adds that many recently arrived beneficiaries of international protection face grim perspectives on the labour market after completing years of integration and skill-building programmes.1218

The Slovak civil society organisation, Human Rights League, published a report on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the labour market, noting that refugees must still overcome multiple legal and practical constraints to find employment. The authors underlined that limited resources are invested in integration, and a targeted programme for beneficiaries of international protection is absent. The circumstances often push beneficiaries to undertake precarious work with low wages and irregular salaries.1219

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