



JRS Malta

Integration through Employment Project

Policy Asks

Meeting 18th of April 2017

JRS Malta

Policy Asks – Breakfast Meeting, 6 September 2017

Policy Asks – Meeting with Social Affairs Committee, 18 April, 2018

Commonwealth Insights, CPF 2015 Series:

“The history of migration illustrates the profound and multiple associations between migration and human vulnerability. It is important to recognise and acknowledge this. Yet, migrants have been and continue to be dehumanised in both policy and media discourses. As the scale of international migration has increased, new narratives have been constructed that challenge the humanity of migrants and demonise the timeless process of migration. Instead there is a need to recover and embrace migration; and a growing and compelling need to enforce and respect migrant rights and voices.”¹

SDGs Framework:

5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment;

10.c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent;²

¹ Migration and resilience, Commonwealth Insights, CPF2015 Series, Discussion Paper, Commonwealth Foundation [Online]: <http://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/cpf2015/>

² Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

The following is a summary of the conclusions and policy recommendations emerging from the breakfast meeting on employment of refugees and asylum seekers, organized by JRS Malta on September 6, 2017.

As a starting point, it is important to stress that the absence of an Integration Policy and the consequent lack of direction and cohesion in the services and support offered to facilitate integration, coupled with the complex and often highly bureaucratic regulations impacting migrants settling in Malta, has a very real negative impact on employment relationships. In this regard, meaningful and constructive progress in this area is contingent on the development of an integration policy that looks beyond the basics and mere survival and aims at ensuring that all people living in Malta thrive in every sphere of life.

In order to reach this goal there is an urgent need to open up spaces for dialogue and deliberation about the Integration Policy and to publish the policy for public consultation as soon as possible. The dialogue should go beyond a discussion of the specific programmes and services envisaged, and provide the opportunity for deliberation, involving institutions, civil society and the public, of different integration models and best practices employed worldwide, with the aim of identifying the best model that could work for the Maltese context. This approach would serve to ensure the development of a policy that can foster organic progress in integration.

Further to this preamble this document will outline generic policy recommendations have would have a tangible impact on employment and specific employment-focused policy asks

Generic Policy Recommendations

We note that a number of developments have taken place since the below policy recommendations were presented. Mainly the Integration Policy and action points were launched last December and the programme is underway. We are looking forward to the implementation of the programme and its impact on refugees.

Offer migrant-oriented, systematic and intensive language courses, for both English and Maltese, and cultural orientation classes. These should be offered at different locations on the islands (e.g. South/Central/North and Gozo) so as to facilitate participation and include the option of evening classes to allow for working migrants to be able to attend for them.

Offer tangible incentives for people attending such courses, such as Government's own proposal, for completion of such courses to facilitate the individual's application for long term residence.

We would like to note that incentives need to be framed within the framework of opportunity and inclusion rather than one which is an obstacle, and that leads to exclusion, directly or indirectly.

Establish a legal pathway to regularization for rejected asylum seekers who have lived in Malta for 5 years or more and have not been returned to their country through no fault of their own.

Improve access to finance: Invite banks for discussion on how asylum seekers, regardless of status, can open their own bank account in a regular manner for paid work they carry out in Malta. Explore ways to widen the availability of banking services for refugees and asylum seekers living and working in Malta in order to improve their current extremely limited access to finance.

Employment-focused Policy Recommendations

We note that considerable positive developments took place at JobsPlus in relation to assisting persons with protection living in Malta. Particularly the first three recommendations below are addressed by JobsPlus. JobsPlus is also increasing its capacity to offer services to persons with protection through the Employment Support Services for Migrants. Asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers can use the services of the Job Brokerage office. One group that remains particularly vulnerable is migrants who enjoy protection by another EU

country, mainly but not only Italy, and who are looking for work in Malta. These migrants have no rights to work in Malta but a number of them are in fact finding irregular employment here. The situation becomes even more complex when injuries or accidents at work happen, as these workers are not entitled to any benefits or services but require them during a very vulnerable moment in their own life. We are aware that this is a contentious issue, but wish to bring this discussion to the table.

Set-up a skills' register at JobsPlus for migrant people living in Malta to facilitate their integration through employment. One possible way of achieving this goal is by looking at the model already used by African Media Association and exploring further windows for collaboration to strengthen that practice.

Explore methods to valorize and capitalize on the diverse academic and technical knowledge and skills that asylum seekers bring with them and that may not have been previously available in Malta's educational and employment fields. This goal could be achieved by using the skills register as a way of highlighting these potentially novel contributions migrants can make and by initiatives raising awareness among employers of the added value migrant workers can provide to their businesses and to the economy in general.

Explore ways to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, skills and competencies for people fleeing from war and in whose countries conflict and violence makes it more difficult to identify or contact Universities and/or educational institutions. *In this regard a body complementary to MQRIC that assesses and recognizes the presence of skills and competencies when the relevant educational and training institutions are not contactable, or do not fit within the evaluative framework adopted across the E.U, would serve to prevent neglecting refugees and asylum seekers talents and proficiencies.*

The following points remain relevant and key in helping migrants to integrate through employment. We would like to also recommend looking into bridging the gap between refugees who possess an MQRIC certificate that recognizes their qualification and the process to register with a Professional body / Council. While we recognize that Professional standards need to be respected, pathways may need to be identified to help refugees with recognized certificates to reach standards to register with professional bodies and exercise as professionals.

Render work permits more accessible, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers in a financially vulnerable situation, by removing the first-time fee. To start a discussion between the relevant authorities about the renewal period for work permits and ID card, particularly for rejected asylum seekers. At the very least, implementing a 6 month instead of a 3 month renewal would serve to reduce the current high bureaucratic obstacles to stable employment and financial independence.

Explore the possibility of offering around the clock childcare services that take into account the needs of parents working on a shift basis or outside regular working hours, which usually means 'office hours', with the aim of overcoming one the main obstacles to female employment in this population.

Start a discussion about the need to foster inclusive workplaces where employees of all cultures and religions feel respected and equal. Such a discussion should eventually lead to development of clear policy guidelines regarding the creating inclusive workplace cultures *which specifically sets standards to achieve such inclusion and equality.*

Finally, we would like to note that a supply of foreign labour is required by the Maltese economy. Bringing more workers to Malta will increase the diversity of people and the variety of cultural backgrounds within our society, a reality that needs to be managed. Often migrant workers are coming from vulnerable groups and find themselves in a new country. We need to have the necessary support structures to be able to host workers in a dignified manner. We recommend that more enforcement and mechanisms of protection are put in place to safeguard the rights of workers and facilitate their integration into Maltese society.