

Barriers of Labour Market Integration of Humanitarian Immigrants in Sweden

YEMANE ZERAY MESFIN

yemane.zeray@mu.edu.et

ALEMU LETA MAMUYE

Mekelle University, Ethiopia

alemu.leta@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the 1950s, Sweden has been hosting large number of humanitarian immigrants. Following this inflow, their economic integration has become a key policy objective. Despite the government policies, immigrants' labour market outcomes lag behind. Their inclusion into the job market has been characterised as having a slower pace. However, specific studies related to challenges of labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants have been limited. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to fill the knowledge gap concerning the barriers of labour market integration of this group of immigrants. In analysing this, the paper used a mixture of qualitative, descriptive and explanatory approaches based on used secondary sources with an inductive method of analysis. As a base for the discussion, three theories: human capital theory, social capital theory and institutional theory are selected with identified regional and international legal frameworks for the labour market integration of mainly humanitarian immigrants. The finding of this paper shows that limited human capital with a low level of labour outcome, lack of recognition of qualifications of skill, lack of language proficiency, and a lack of social capital and networks that cumulatively led to discrimination are the main barriers that affect the labour market outcome of humanitarian immigrants. So, policy directions and implementations should focus on addressing these specific barriers coupled with extra activities such as the provision of demand tailored trainings and special treatment as part of intervention.

Keywords: barriers, integration, refugees, labour market, humanitarian immigrants



Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, Sweden has been receiving many migrants from different countries. Consequently, it has become a country of net immigrants and its ethnic composition has changed. As Englund (2003:6) explains “the Swedish population has to a great extent changed, from being relatively homogeneous to becoming heterogeneous”. This situation has prompted debates on integration policies in Sweden. Among those debates, one is the labour market integration¹ of humanitarian migrants,² which has moved to the forefront of political debate. Since the numbers of asylum seekers and refugee immigrants are large, their economic integration has become a key policy objective (Selvi, 2006). Due to this fact, as part of its multiculturalism policies, the government has designed various policies and strategies. According to Åslund, Forslund and Liljeberg (2016:31), “Sweden has for a long time had policies concerning the reception and labour market integration of refugees.”

Despite the government efforts and its policies, their labour market outcomes lag behind. The labour market integration of humanitarian migrants has been characterised as having a slower pace (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2016; Council of Europe, ND). Although the immigration debate in Sweden is rife with myths such as “immigrant workers take citizens’ jobs” (Council of Europe, ND), the reality is that employment rates among humanitarian migrants is low when compared to natives. Selvi (2006) states that immigrants have had a hard time to economically integrate and the results are high unemployment rates and low incomes for immigrants in comparison to Swedes. According to Lundh *et al.* (2002 cited in Selvi, 2006), the integration of immigrant groups is seen as a big political failure since many large groups of immigrants are living in Sweden unemployed, segregated and dependent on welfare. Evidence indicates that humanitarian immigrants in Europe, including Sweden, tend to be underrepresented in employment. According to a European Parliament report, between 1997 and 2010, the employment rates of refugees in Sweden 10 years after arrival were nine percentage points lower than in Germany (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2017). This is partly attributable to the fact that immigrants face different barriers. As Bevelander and Pendakur (2012) explains, there is clear evidence that humanitarian immigrants face barriers³ in accessing employment in Sweden. Due to these barriers humanitarian immigrants usually face difficulties in entering in to the host country’s labour market. Consequently, the unemployment level of these groups is often high.

Although many researches have conducted on the economic integration of immigrants, study

-
- 1 For the purpose of this paper, the writers used the definition of labour market integration by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to OECD, labour market integration is defined as “the process through which immigrants will tend to show the same range of labour market outcomes as the native population” (OECD, 2004:5).
 - 2 OECD (2004:5) defines humanitarian migrants as “those who have fled the country of origin as a result of war, persecution or threat to life or limb”.
 - 3 Many sources indicate that humanitarian immigrants face different barriers such as the language problem, inadequate human and social capital, and unfamiliarity with the culture in the new country.



that emphasises on the barriers of the inclusion of specific group of immigrants is less common. Specific studies related with challenges of labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants have been limited. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to fill the knowledge gap concerning the barriers of labour market integration of this group of immigrants.

Methodology and methods

The paper is solely based on literature review. Accordingly, secondary data collected from different published and unpublished materials such as a master thesis, journal articles, research reports and magazines. In addition, information from different websites were also utilised. The data collected from these secondary sources was reviewed, analysed and interpreted in the way pertaining to the paper.

Research approach

For this paper, a mixture of qualitative, descriptive and exploratory approaches was utilised. Qualitative approach can help the writers to understand the meaning of phenomena in the social world. In addition, it was useful to provide detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the research data. Descriptive approach is significant to research that is intended to answer the 'what question'. Furthermore, the approach is appropriate for research questions focused on discovering experiences (Kim, Sefcik and Bradway, 2016). The other approach used in the study is the exploratory approach. Exploratory study is "a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light'" (Sinnya and Parajuli, 2012:18). It is advantageous for a research topic when the researcher has few studies for reference. It also helps a writer to explore a topic if there is a little amount of information about it (Kumar, 2011). In the Swedish context, little is known about labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants. There is scarce evidence on the issue, and studies have not been conducted specifically on the topic.

Therefore, a mixture of qualitative, descriptive and exploratory approaches is ideal to understand and explore the barriers of labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants in the study area.

Data sources and collection instruments

In its method, the paper entirely depends on a secondary source. Since we did not experience first-hand information or participate in the events we are researching, we used secondary sources. It is a desk research that involved a review of scientific literature as well as legislation and policies in Sweden. Hence, the paper is based on the review of existing research literature on labour market integration of immigrants. It used both published and unpublished materials such as books, magazines, academic papers, government reports, newspapers, as well as websites and other digital resources.



Data analysis and interpretation

In analysing the data, inductive methods of analysis and interpretation were employed. The method is significant to analyse data that is related to exploring under-researched phenomena (Thomas, 2006). In addition, the inductive approach is ideal for a study that does not begin with an hypothesis or use research questions to narrow the scope of the study. Therefore, due to the abovementioned significance, an inductive approach of analysis was employed.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in a manner that is consistent with ethical issues. Since the study used a qualitative approach and is based on secondary sources, it strictly followed ethical principles. We did not deliberately use someone else's language, ideas or other original material without acknowledging its source; we have identified and acknowledged the work of other writers.

Theoretical framework

In different periods, many theories have been developed to explain the diverse factors that facilitate or hinder immigrants' economic integration into the labour market of destination countries, but for the purpose of this paper we focus on three theories that are relevant to explain the current situation in Sweden.

Human Capital Theory

It is the first theory that emphasises the significance of individual skills for the labour market integration of immigrants. The theory states that immigrants play a vital role in integrating into the labour market by using their human capital endowment (Gayibor, 2015). It further argues that the chance of landing a job is determined by the level of human capital accumulated by the individual. The central assumption is that "the probability of obtaining a job increases with the level of human capital a person has" (Sanchez, 2014:16). It is widely believed that human capital⁴ plays a central role in the labour market integration. As Selvi (2006) mentions, these human skills and qualifications are important factors on how well an immigrant will be assimilated into the host country's labour market.

Although human capital plays a significant role in labour market integration, it depends on whether immigrants' skills are transferable and migrants are favourably selected to the labour market of the host country (Selvi 2006; Cathrine Hansen, 2008). With regard to transferability, the theory explains that the role of immigrants' human capital partly rests on whether the skills, education and qualifications can be transferred to match the host county's labour market demands (Selvi 2006). In other words, "if the human capital is sufficient and compatible to host society, the labour market integration is expected to be successful" (Cathrine Hansen, 2008:18). However,

4 Human capital refers to language skills, education, working skills, and knowledge about a host country. It also includes individual motivation, ambitions and adaptability (Cathrine Hansen, 2008; Selvi, 2006).



in the case of international migration, the education and skills of migrants may not be perfectly transferable between countries. According to Chiswick (2008 cited in Cathrine Hansen, 2008), the motive for migration is an important determinant for transferability of skills. Compared with economic migrants, humanitarian migrants often have particular difficulties with the transferability of their credentials. Their skills acquired in their home country might be less transferable to the receiving country than labour migrants' skills (Cathrine Hansen, 2008).

Besides the transferable issue, immigrants' labour market integration depends on whether they are favourably selected or not. Here, the argument is that "the higher degree of positive selectivity, the more successful the immigrant will be on the labour market and the reverse effect if there is a negative selectivity" (Selvi, 2006:29). Therefore, it is expected that humanitarian migrants will have more difficulties in integrating into the receiving country in comparison to economic migrants who probably have planned their move and then are favourably selected (Ibid, 30).

Social Capital Theory

Unlike human capital theory, this approach emphasises the role of the social network in facilitating immigrants' integration into the labour market. The argument here is that "access to and use of social capital and networks are important channels for information about and recruitment to jobs" (Cathrine Hansen, 2008:2). The theory explains that the social network of the immigrant is significant for their economic integration. In comparison to the human capital theory, the theory argues that social network and structures are other determinants for economic integration (Selvi, 2006). This is due to the fact that "people with extensive networks are better able to gather information and exert influence at work; this enhances their task performance and career prospects in many settings" (Kabuya, 2008:23).

Kabuya (2008) further states that the social network is a major factor to ensure a successful integration on the job market. This is because members in the network form a unit in order to exchange information, pieces of advice and experience for their betterment. This, in return, increases their chances of pulling jobs on their sides (Kabuya, 2008). The studies indicate the fact that social capital has a positive effect on the labour market integration of immigrants. Creating opportunities to generate social capital will be beneficial for immigrants' integration into the labour market and lack of social capital can be tied to unemployment (Sanchez, 2014).

Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993 cited in Selvi, 2006) argue that the economic integration of immigrants can be affected by structural factors. Since people are embedded in social relations and networks, their success in the labour market is determined by these relations (Selvi, 2006). Although immigrants are considered as rational, their social relations might influence their economic choices. Social structures and issues such as norms, values and class could hinder people from doing what they like to do (ibid). Hence, social formations can support or disrupt an immigrant's economic integration.

Generally, the theory argues that social contacts improve the chances of getting a job. People with extensive networks have a better chance to get job than others.



Institutional Theory

The theory argues that policies and institutional frameworks of host countries play a dominant role on labour market outcomes (Sanchez, 2014). Here, the central assumption is that destination countries' institutional factors, such as admission status, the immigration policy and integration policies, might affect the success of immigrants in the labour market. It is widely believed that the policy of the receiving state might facilitate or impede labour market integration. According to Selvi (2006), principles, rules and conventions that regulate individuals' travels and migration between states determines the success of labour market integration. Many states have integration rules and principles that are intended to help immigrants and refugees in the process of integrating into the new society. Therefore, these institutional factors can play a vital role on whether the immigrants can have a positive labour market attachment or not (Selvi, 2006). For example, different states have policies that encourage and allow immigrants to participate in the labour market. Although policies facilitate integration, there are also other legal and administrative procedures that can impede the process of labour market integration. Since refugees arrive under different circumstances, the admission criteria and administrative procedures appear to affect their labour market integration.

According to the European Commission (2016), several administrative challenges affect both refugees and asylum seekers. First, the length of time it can take for the asylum procedure to be finalised and for asylum seekers to be given access to the labour market creates a gap in employment history that has a negative impact on employability. Specifically, asylum seekers, who in most countries have to obtain certain administrative documents such as work permits and employment licences, generate an 'administrative burden' when seeking employment. This, in turn, deters some employers from hiring them (European Commission, 2016).

Regional and international legal frameworks for the labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants

The issue of the labour market integration of immigrants has been a subject of increasing concern to regional and international organisations. Large arrays of regional and global instruments have emerged to provide parameters for the promotion of labour market integration of immigrants. At regional level, the EU has its own legislation on access to the labour market for asylum seekers and refugees, which has provided legal rights for humanitarian immigrants to take part in the labour market. Art. 26 (1) of the recast Qualification Directive provides that "beneficiaries of international protection can engage in employed activities immediately after protection has been granted" (European Commission, 2015:13).

The legislation also clearly indicates the responsibility of member states to ensure access to the labour market. According to EU legislation of Article 26 of the original Qualification Directive on Access to employment, "member States are required to ensure access to the labour market for persons with refugee status and also to persons with subsidiary protection status" (European



Commission, 2016:5). The legislation requires signatory member states to facilitate the integration of refugees into society through introducing integration programmes (ibid).

Furthermore, the legislation requires member states not only to provide beneficiaries with access to the labour market (Art 26 (1)), but crucially also to facilitate such access by providing employment-related support measures under equivalent conditions as nationals (Art. 26 (2)). Article 34 also requires member states to ensure access to integration programmes that they consider to be appropriate so as to consider the specific needs of beneficiaries (European Commission, 2015:16).

With regard to recognition of qualification, Article 28 (1) provides that member states should ensure that beneficiaries of international protection receive the same treatment as nationals in the context of recognition procedures for foreign diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications. Article 28(2) subsequently requires member states to provide beneficiaries of international protection with full access to schemes specifically focused on the assessment, validation and accreditation of skills and competences when documentary evidence of qualifications cannot be provided (European Commission, 2015:28).

Globally, there are other international frameworks that promote the labour market integration of immigrants. The first global instrument is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This non-binding instrument establishes the overriding principles of equality and non-discrimination to everyone everywhere and always. The other instruments are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). These instruments protect all human beings regardless of their nationality and legal status. The rights and freedoms specified in all instruments apply equally to immigrants as to any other individual. Although they did not directly mention the rights of immigrants, migrants are generally entitled to the same rights as citizens (ILO, 2016; OSCE).

In addition to those conventions, the United Nations (UN) has other instruments that are significant in terms of protecting migrants from discrimination on grounds other than their national status. Among these instruments, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) are relevant for avoiding discrimination in the labour market. They can consolidate the provision of UN instruments concerning discrimination on the basis of nationality (ILO, 2016; OSCE).

Besides those instruments, there are other International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions that are significant for immigrants. The protection of human rights of men and women migrant workers and the promotion of their equal opportunity is embedded in the preamble to the constitution of the ILO. Apart from the adoption of specific international standards protecting the rights of immigrant workers, concern for migrants has been expressed through the insertion of specific provisions targeting migrants. For example, the Migration for Employment Convention (1949), the Equality of Treatment Convention (1962) and the Migrant Workers Convention (1975), are the first international ILO instruments providing for more comprehensive solutions to the problems facing migrant workers (ILO, 2016; OSCE).



Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, the labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants has been characterised by a slower pace. As compared to other categories of immigrants, their inclusion into the labour market has taken a longer time (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2016; Council of Europe, ND). This is due to the fact that integration is influenced by a number of factors. Although many scholars mention various reasons why it is harder for refugees to access the job market, for the purpose of this paper we focus on the following main obstacles.

Low level of skill and qualifications/limited human capital

It is widely believed that in order to access the labour market, relevant skills and competencies are essential. As explained in the theoretical framework, human capital plays a central role in the labour market integration of immigrants. However, humanitarian migrants do not have the required skills and qualifications (European Commission, 2016). This limits their employment opportunities in the labour market and serves as one main barrier for the integration process. Different studies indicate that refugees and asylum seekers do not have the necessary qualification (European Commission, 2016). This is partly due to the fact that humanitarian migrants have a lower level of education than other migrants and natives. Since they are from poor countries, they do not have skills and knowledge. This, in turn, affects them when trying to enter into the labour market (European Commission, 2016:4; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/European Union, 2014).

This is also true in Sweden where skills and work experience are identified as key issues for refugees and asylum seekers. Many refugees and asylum seekers have skills gaps that present a challenge to their smooth integration into the labour market (European Commission, 2016). Previous studies conducted in Sweden indicate that refugees and family reunion migrants are less educated and have a low level of labour market outcome (ibid).

The issue of selectivity is important in Sweden in terms of skill and qualification. Since asylum seekers and refugees are not selected through employment-related criteria, they are more likely to lack in-demand local skills. For example, between 20-30% of immigrants who arrived in the 2000s had a primary education, indicating further that many newcomers did not arrive equipped for jobs in the local market (Bevelander and Irastorza, 2014). According to Bevelander and Irastorza (2014), this indicates that they have skills that are less likely to be in demand in the local labour market.

“The Swedish government funds the provision of ‘complementary education’ (bridging courses) for foreign lawyers, educators (teachers), medical doctors, nurses, dentists and veterinarians to receive additional training in their field in order to receive a Swedish degree (diploma) to find work in Sweden”(European Commission, 2015:27). Studies conducted in Sweden have found that among qualified third-country nationals seeking work in Sweden, those who have participated in complementary education are more likely to enter into the labour market and more likely to have a higher salary once working than those who have not participated (ibid).



Lack of recognition of qualification and skills

According to OECD/European Union (2014), the recognition of qualifications of immigrants in the host countries is vital to their successful economic integration. However, the skill and qualification of humanitarian migrants may not be perfectly transferable between countries. Although some refugees and asylum seekers possess qualifications, there is a lack of opportunities to have these qualifications recognised. This is one main barrier that affects immigrants' entry into the labour market in many countries (European Commission, 2014).

Since the qualifications from the origin countries are often different from those of the host countries, the skills, competencies and even qualifications of humanitarian immigrants may not be recognised in the country in which they have arrived (European Commission, 2016; OECD/European Union, 2014). This is also true in Sweden where humanitarian migrants often have particular difficulties with the transferability of their credentials. Although having an education may increase the chances to enter the Swedish labour market, research shows that even highly educated migrants have difficulties landing jobs within their professions. This is partly explained by immigrants with foreign diplomas facing the greatest difficulties to get recognition (Englund, 2003).

Recent empirical studies show that due to non-recognition of qualifications gained outside of Sweden, many migrants and refugees also face systemic barriers to gaining employment. Due to difficulties in getting their qualifications accredited in Sweden, the skills and credentials of refugees quickly depreciate (Nahikarilratorza and Pieter Bevelander, 2016). "In Sweden, as elsewhere, employers do not seem to accord much trust in foreign educational qualifications and work experience, although recognition of qualifications as equivalent to Swedish ones does appear to convey benefits" (OECD, 2004:2).

Beneficiaries of international protection often fail to demonstrate proof of professional qualifications and experience. They are unable to demonstrate their educational and professional qualifications due to a lack of the required documentation from their countries of origin. They also face obstacles in having their qualifications recognised. This includes too many administrative formalities and long and costly procedures. This is especially problematic for regulated professions where equivalence of foreign qualifications to national ones is commonly required (European Commission, 2015:28). Due to this fact, Sweden has provided specifically tailored measures to facilitate the recognition of qualifications of beneficiaries of international protection. It has adopted measures to recognise foreign qualifications, including when formal proof of the qualification cannot be provided for reasons beyond the beneficiaries' control (ibid).

Lack of language skill

Host country language proficiency is an important determinant of labour market outcomes. It is argued that having a good command of the language of the host country acts as a stepping stone to future employment. Immigrants with good language skills may have an opportunity to land a job and have the potential for higher earnings (European Commission, 2016). However, this is not the case for humanitarian immigrants. All humanitarian migrants do not have language skills on



arrival. According to the European Commission (2016), the language barrier faced by refugees and asylum seekers is one of the greatest challenges to labour market integration in the majority of host countries and one of the major obstacles to searching for and securing employment after arrival. Related to this, the European Commission (2016) further explains that refugees and asylum seekers can be highly disadvantaged in terms of accessing work as a result of insufficient language skills (European Commission, 2016).

According to the European Commission (2016), the lack of language skills is cited as a barrier to labour market integration in many European countries and as such, the lack of language proficiency is one main barrier in Sweden. It is one of the main hurdles that immigrants face in their integration into the labour market. In Sweden, many jobs require a considerable level of proficiency, which humanitarian arrivals are unlikely to have (Bevelander and Irastorza, 2014). This places humanitarian immigrants at a disadvantage (Liebi, 2015), and thus, they cannot easily integrate into the labour market. Recognising this, the country has developed courses that target all legally-resident third world country nationals with language-learning needs (European Commission, 2016). Although it makes language training available to beneficiaries, the extent to which this is accessible to and suitable for all beneficiaries of international protection is questionable.

Lack of social capital and networks

Different studies indicate that immigrants found their first job in host countries through social networks such as family members, friends, or acquaintances. As Selvi (2006) states, these networks and structures are a determinant for the economic integration of immigrants. However, in the case of humanitarian immigrants, the situation is different. Since their reason for migration is different, they are less likely to have good social capital. As compared to other categories of migrants, they have limited networks that provide access to informal opportunities to gain employment. This lack of social networks creates a barrier for refugees and asylum seekers in finding a job (European Commission, 2016).

In Sweden, different sources indicate that the lack of a network is one of the factors hindering the inclusion of newly arrived immigrants in the labour market. Englund (2003) states that social competencies are other important factors that affect the chances of landing a job. For example, in Scandinavian countries, including Sweden, informal recruitment methods are estimated to account for up to 50% of employment. Hence, access to and use of social capital and networks is important for labour market opportunities and outcomes (Cathrine Hansen, 2008). However, the situation in Sweden indicates that humanitarian immigrants lack that capital. This is an important reason behind migrants' deteriorated labour market situation in the country. In recent years, network recruitment has become a more common strategy to hire. But migrants do not have social networks and thus, they are excluded from the labour market (Englund, 2003).



Discrimination

According to the European Commission (2016), discrimination⁵ against refugees and asylum seekers is one of the most frequently reported obstacles to labour market integration. This is the main barrier that still persists in the labour market of European countries. According to Englund (2003), the likelihood of landing a job depend, to a large extent, on a person's origin, nationality and religion. As reports indicate, some employers prefer to give jobs to people on according to their origins rather than competence or high qualification (Kabuya, 2008; European Commission, 2016). Similarly, this problem exists in the Swedish labour market.

Behtoui (2004 cited in Gayibor, 2015) explains that discrimination is one reason for the low level of employment of immigrants in Sweden. Since immigrants face discrimination from employers and people in workplace, their inclusion in the Swedish labour market is not effective (Gayibor, 2015). This is due to the fact that the Swedish labour market is, to a large extent, segregated between natives and the foreign-born. There are even noticeable tendencies towards segregation between different ethnic groups (Englund, 2003).

Research has acknowledged that there is evidence of racism, xenophobia and discrimination against ethnic minorities in various spheres of society in Sweden, including in the labour market. It has also been acknowledged that discrimination, as a result, constitutes an obstacle to 'social integration' if measured as the interaction between native-born Swedes and immigrant groups (Schwarz, Susanne-Verena, ND).

Most of the time, employers are more willing to hire people from countries that they are familiar with (Englund, 2003). These attitudes of some employers drive refugees and asylum seekers into a low economic status. For example:

“The African-born and Asian-born migrants are the groups most likely subjected to discrimination in the Swedish labour market. This may depend on several reasons. First, employers may perceive African- and Asian-born as more different than the European-born migrants. Second, these migrants have fairly recently arrived in Sweden. Thus, they may have more difficulties than other groups. These factors as well as others lead to the migrants' exclusion from the Swedish labour market” (Englund, 2003:3).

This obstacle that humanitarian immigrants face can be exacerbated by certain features of the Swedish labour market such as a high minimum wage and stringent employment protection for permanent work (Bevelander and Irastorza, 2014:1). Recognising this problem, the Swedish government has employed different measures to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination in the labour market by both authorities and other organisations working in the labour market field

5 As Kabuya (2008:16) explains, “Discrimination in employment can be said to occur when migrants are accorded inferior treatment in the labour market or in the workplace relative to nationals or whites, despite being comparably qualified in terms of education, experience or other relevant criteria.”



(Englund, 2003:4). Ensuring that there are effective measures in place against discrimination is one of the officially stated policy priorities of the Swedish government in relation to integration of immigrants and refugees (Schwarz, Susanne-Verena, ND).

Policies of labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants

Sweden has designed a number of policies⁶ recognising the barriers that humanitarian immigrants face. Since the early 1970s, Sweden has implemented an active labour market policy with the aim of increasing employment levels for immigrants (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2017; Englund, 2003). In 1974, for example, new multicultural principles that relied upon concepts such as equality, freedom of choice and partnership were introduced by the Swedish state. Due to this policy, immigrants were given equal rights, possibilities and obligations as native Swedes (Selvi, 2006:35).

In 1991, the government launched a new law intended for quicker inclusion of refugees to the labour market via work training and labour market orientation. Then in 1997, the Swedish parliament decided on a new policy regarding migrants. The new law gave equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background (Englund, 2003:9). After the experiment of different integration policies in the 20th century, Sweden introduced another policy in 2010. The law is intended to facilitate the integration of refugees into the Swedish job market. The reform introduced two new designed instruments, such as new economic compensation and the support of introduction guides. The objective of this new policy is to facilitating the labour market access of immigrants, including humanitarian migrants (Irastorza and Bevelander, 2016). According to (Bevelander, 2016:3), following the new law “refugees are offered two years of introduction assistance, which includes language courses, general knowledge about Swedish society and the labour market, as well as evaluation and accreditation of earlier skills”. Since December 2010, the country has been implementing the policy called ‘fast tracks to employment for newly arrived immigrants’. These fast tracks aim to transfer refugees with relevant skills and experiences to occupations where employers face difficulties in finding the right competence (Åslund, Forslund, and Liljeberg (2016:13)).

However, as Irastorza and Bevelander (2017:1) state, “There is no significant improvement in the short-term overall labour market integration for the group as a whole was observed in connection to this change”. As mentioned above, Sweden has developed a number of integration policies aimed at refugees. Although the country has implemented those policies, the labour market outcome of humanitarian immigrants has not yet improved. According to Liebig (2015), there is a lower employment rate of humanitarian migrants and family reunion migrants who moved to Sweden after 1997. They are more than 20 percentage points lower than those of

6 In order to facilitate a higher degree of labour market integration of immigrants and refugees in particular, the country has framed different policies in different periods (Åslund, Forslund and Liljeberg, 2016; Rastorza and Bevelander, 2017).



labour migrants and about 35 percentage points lower than natives (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2017:1). The European Parliament report also indicates that the employment rates of refugees in Sweden 10 years after arrival were nine percentage points lower than in Germany (Irastorza, and Bevelander, 2017:1).

Conclusion and recommendation

In the last few decades, Sweden has experienced an unprecedented inflow of humanitarian immigrants. Due to this fact, the labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants has become a key policy objective. Although the country has for a long time had policies concerning their labour market integration, the integration process has been characterised as having a slower pace. The finding of this paper shows that refugees, as one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of labour market integration, have faced different barriers. The first barrier is limited human capital. Many refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden have skills gaps that present a challenge to their smooth integration into the labour market. The finding also indicates that refugees and family reunion migrants are less educated and have a low level of labour market outcome.

The second barrier is a lack of recognition of qualification and skills. In Sweden, humanitarian migrants often have particular difficulties with the transferability of their credentials. Even highly educated migrants have difficulty landing jobs within their professions. Due to non-recognition of qualifications gained outside Sweden, many migrants and refugees also face systemic barriers to gaining employment. The third barrier is lack of language proficiency. It is one of the main hurdles that immigrants face in their integration into the labour market. In Sweden, many jobs require a considerable level of proficiency that humanitarian immigrants are unlikely to have.

The fourth barrier is a lack of social capital and networks. The situation in Sweden indicates that humanitarian immigrants lack this capital. This is the other important reason behind migrants' deteriorated labour market situation in the country. The last but not least barrier is discrimination. The finding of this paper further shows that the Swedish labour market does, to a large extent, segregate between natives and the foreign-born. There are even noticeable tendencies towards segregation between different ethnic groups.

To avoid these barriers and improve the labour market integration of humanitarian immigrants, the Swedish government has implemented an active labour market policy. However, as the finding of this study further shows, there is no significant improvement in the overall labour market integration for humanitarian immigrants.

Based on the finding, the paper recommends that the Swedish government should:

- Take different measures to combat discrimination in the labour market
- Give much trust to foreign educational qualifications and ease the process of the transferability of refugees' qualifications
- Assist immigrants to obtain recognition of professional qualifications and give employment counselling



- Give short-term specific work-related training. This might help them to acquire a specific skill. This, in turn, could facilitate their labour market integration
- Offer language courses in a systematic way and link language learning to the job market
- Provide different institutional supports (in the form of integration program) that might facilitate labour market integration for humanitarian immigrants eligible to enter the labour market
- Build social networks and peer-to-peer support that are highly valuable to integration, both into society and into the labour market

References

- Åslund, O., Forslund, A. and Liljeberg, L. (2016). *Labour Market Entry of Refugees – Swedish Evidence*. Uppsala, Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy.
- Bevelander, P. (2016). *Integrating Refugees into Labour Markets*. IZA World of Labour.
- Bevelander, P. and Irastorza, N. (2014). *Catching up: The Labour Market Integration of New Immigrants in Sweden*. Migration Policy Institute and the International Labour Organization.
- Bevelander, P. and Pendakur, R. (2012). *The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants: A Comparison of Outcomes in Canada and Sweden*. IZA Discussion Paper Series No. 6924, Institute for the Study of Labour.
- Hansen Helle, K. (2008). *Mechanisms in Non-western Immigrants' Labour Market Integration: A Comparative Study of Somalis and Tamils in Norway*. Master thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, Oslo University College, Sweden.
- Kadio Iu, A. G., Fischer, J., Bonino, E., Garton Ash, T., Hirsch, M., Mortimer, E., ... & Solana, J. (2011). *Living together: Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- Englund, C. (2003). *Migrants, Minorities and Employment in Sweden: Exclusion, Discrimination and Anti-discrimination*. RAXEN 3 Report to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia RAXEN Focal Point for Sweden Expo Foundation, Sweden.
- European Commission. (2016). *Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, Arora, EEPO et al. (eds.) *Synthesis on Challenges Faced by Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Successfully Integrating into the Labour Market*, European Employment Policy Observatory Synthesis, European Union, Luxembourg.
- European Commission. (2016). *European Employment Policy Observatory Synthesis – Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees*. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO), EEPO Network Services. European Union, United Kingdom.
- European Commission. (2015). *Integration of Beneficiaries of International/Humanitarian Protection into the Labour Market: Policies and Good Practices*. Synthesis Report for the EMN Focused Study.
- Gayibor, A. (2015). *Integration of Immigrants into the Swedish Labour Market: An Intersectional Perspective*. Master Thesis, Gender Studies, Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University.
- Irastorza, N. and Bevelander, P. (2017). *The Labour Market Participation of Humanitarian Migrants in Sweden: An Overview*. Malmö. Leibniz Information Centre for Economics.
- Irastorza, N. and Bevelander, P. (2016). *Taking on the Challenge of Getting Refugees into the Job Market in Sweden*. The Conversation. Malmö. Department of Global Political Studies.
- Kabuya, K. (2008). *Social Integration of Congolese Refugees in a Town in Southern Norway*. Master's thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø.
- Kim, H., Sefcik, J. S., & Bradway, C. (2017). *Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review*. *Research in nursing & health*, 40(1), 23-42.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners*. Third edition, London: SAGE Publications Inc.



- Liebig, T. (2015). Integration of Immigrants into the Labour Market in EU and OECD Countries: An Overview. International Migration Division Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD.
- OECD/European Union. (2014). Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2004). The Integration of Immigrants in to the Labour Market: The Case of Sweden. Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Employment, Labour and Social Committee.
- OSCE. (2006). International Legal Framework for the Protection of Migrant Workers. Accessed at www.osce.org. 05/08/2020
- Sanchez, Juan (2014). Barriers to the Labour Market Integration of Refugees: the UK and France in Focus. Master's Thesis, Department of Politics, University of York.
- Schwarz, S.V. (ND). The Current Situation of Refugees in Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey and Germany – Comparative Analysis". Intellectual Output 1, Inclusive Adult Education for Refugees, European Commission.
- Selvi, M. (2006). Economic Integration: A Comparative Study on the Somali and the Former Yugoslavian Immigrants' Labour Market Attachment in Sweden and in the Netherlands. Master thesis, Malmö University, Sweden.
- Sinnya, U. and Parajuli, N. (2012). Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Why Immigrants Choose to become Self-employed. A Qualitative Study of South and Southeast Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Umea City. Master thesis, University of Umea, Sweden.
- Thomas, D.R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp.237-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>.

