



# INTEGRATION OF APPLICANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

## EMN FLASH #2 - 2023

### Background



Between 2017 and 2022, there were a total of 3 161 600 applicants for international protection in EU Member States, of which 89% were first-time applicants. Most first-time applications were lodged in 2022 (26%), with a significant dip in first-time applications in 2020, likely due to the movement restrictions and border closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The large majority of first-time applicants were male (71%) and of working age (18-64) (90%).

To what extent are applicants for international protection specifically addressed in national labour market integration policies in EMN Member Countries? How is access to employment and self-employment regulated and ensured

in practice for applicants for international protection in the EMN Member Countries?

This EMN study documents the labour market access of applicants for international protection between 2017 to 2022, complementing an earlier (2019) EMN study on labour market integration of third-country nationals excluding asylum seekers. This involves an up-to-date and in-depth analysis of legislation, policies and practices in EMN Member Countries on integration of applicants for international protection into the labour market, and the key actors involved in that implementation. It also provides examples of challenges and good practices.

The main research findings are briefly outlined below.

### Key trends and findings



- 1. Data indicated that the majority of applicants for international protection in the EU were first-time applicants of working age. This suggests that they have the potential to contribute to the labour market.**

From 2017 to 2022, more than three million applications for international protection were lodged, with the highest number in 2022. Most applicants were of working age, indicating a potential workforce for the labour markets of EMN Member Countries. As yet, however, there are only limited data available on their employment and self-employment statuses.

- 2. EMN Member Countries collect statistics and/or monitor the employment situation of applicants for international protection to varying degrees. This makes it difficult to measure the extent to which applicants for international protection enter the labour market once they are allowed to work.**

Only some EMN Member Countries collect data on the employment situation of applicants for international

protection. While some collect data on employment status, others collect data on the numbers of applications to access the labour market that are submitted, granted, and refused. These limited data make it challenging to evaluate the situation of applicants for international protection on EMN Member Countries' labour markets.

- 3. Public debates on the integration of applicants for international protection in the labour market have focused on fostering access to the labour market, but also on concerns for potential abuse or discrimination.**

Debates also addressed restrictions on access, such as authorisations, labour market tests, and restrictions on certain sectors. Some countries aimed to promote effective access through language courses and integration into various sectors of the economy. Concerns were raised about abuse of the asylum system and the potential for precarious work conditions and discrimination against applicants for international protection in the workplace.

**4. Most EMN Member Countries have a shorter waiting period to enter the labour market than that stipulated by the recast Reception Conditions Directive.**

This is primarily to allow applicants for international protection to become self-sufficient and integrated more quickly if and when they are granted international protection. This is in line with the shorter waiting period outlined in the proposal for the recast Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU).

**5. Most EMN Member Countries require applicants for international protection to obtain a work permit or other form of authorisation in order to access the labour market, and some apply a labour market test.**

Some EMN Member Countries apply labour market tests and employment access may be subject to various conditions and restrictions, such as limitations on employment type, duration, and compliance with employment laws. Additionally, some restrict the category of applicants for international protection who can apply. The documentation required differs considerably between countries. Most EMN Member Countries allow self-employment, which in most cases follows the same conditions and procedures as regular employment. However, applicants may be required to provide proof of qualifications and register their trade, which is standard practice for any individual setting up a business or seeking independent status, regardless of their nationality or residence status.

**6. Very few EMN Member Countries focus specifically on applicants for international protection in their labour market integration policies.**

Most EMN Member Countries have a wider policy or strategy addressing integration, and almost half have specific strategies or policies in place for the labour market integration of third-country nationals. Very few include applicants for international protection in their integration strategies, while others follow a mainstreaming approach, including labour market integration within broader integration and employment policies.

**7. New or revised policies adopted between 2017 and 2022 chiefly focused on support for the labour market integration of third-country nationals in general. Those policies that focused on applicants for international protection showed a trend towards fostering their access to the labour market.**

Policies often have a wider aim to facilitate integration of third-country nationals and only indirectly support access to employment for applicants for international

protection already on the territory. Changes to labour market access specifically addressed applicants for international protection, such as reducing waiting times for access to the labour market and revoking decrees that restricted their access to certain types of work. These policy changes show a trend towards more inclusive and supportive measures for third-country nationals seeking employment in EMN Member Countries.

**8. There are limited governance structures in place directly supporting the labour market integration of applicants for international protection, with most structures encompassing all third-country nationals.**

Competence for labour market integration of third-country nationals is generally shared between national, regional and local level, and there is cooperation with various stakeholders such as PES, trade unions, employers' associations, police and border guards, and NGOs. The key stakeholders driving labour market integration processes are primarily the ministries and agencies responsible for integration. Social partners, such as employers' associations and sector associations, as well as reception centres and NGOs, also play important roles in some EMN Member Countries.

**9. Support measures proposed by EMN Member Countries primarily addressed all third-country nationals. Where applicants for international protection were addressed directly, these measures mainly focused on VET, language training and skills assessment.**

Other measures include the provision of information and counselling, incentives for employers, and support for self-employment. Good practices include complementary language courses in reception centres, training in skilled crafts, or skills assessment in cooperation with employers.

**10. Key challenges in labour market access for applicants for international protection are of practical nature, with limited legislative issues**

The main practical barriers reported related to language, recognition of qualifications, discrimination, risk of exploitation, and costs associated with accessing the labour market. Complexity, uncertainty, and/or ineffectiveness of some aspects of the administrative procedure to obtain access to the labour market also presented significant practical challenges. There are only limited legislative challenges, including a lack of clarity on additional documentation requested by employers and misunderstandings about the waiting period to access the labour market.

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