

EARLY COMPETENCE MAPPING OF REFUGEES AS PART OF LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION IN SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

РАННЄ ДІАГНОСТУВАННЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЙ БІЖЕНЦІВ ЯК СКЛАДНИК ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ В РИНОК ПРАЦІ В СКАНДИНАВСЬКИХ КРАЇНАХ

The article aims to summarize studies on the policies and measures undertaken in the Nordic countries for achieving swifter labor market integration of refugees arriving in 2015 from Syria and Afghanistan. It examines early competence mapping practices in place in each country and their results so far as an integral part of labor market integration process. It also outlines the steps towards the progress in establishing the background for effective labor market integration in the Nordic region.

Key words: labor market integration, competence mapping, employment of refugees, validation of skills and qualifications.

Стаття має на меті узагальнити результати досліджень внутрішньої політики та заходів, імplementованих у країнах Північної Європи для досягнення більш швидкої інтеграції ринку праці біженцями, які прибувають із 2015 р. із Сирії та Афганістану. Стаття аналізує ранню практику діагностування компетенцій, яка застосовується в кожній країні, і її результати в межах процесу інтеграції ринку праці. Також у статті окреслено

кроки, спрямовані на досягнення прогресу в створенні передумов для ефективної інтеграції ринку праці в Північному регіоні.

Ключові слова: інтеграція в ринок праці, діагностування компетенцій, зайнятість біженців, перевірка навичок і кваліфікацій.

Целью статьи является обобщение исследованной проводимой политики и мер, принятых в странах Северной Европы для обеспечения более быстрой интеграции рынка труда беженцев, прибывающих с 2015 г. из Сирии и Афганистана. В статье рассматривается практика раннего диагностирования компетенций в каждой стране и ее результаты, которые являются неотъемлемой частью процесса интеграции на рынке труда. Также в статье излагаются шаги по достижению прогресса в создании основы для эффективной интеграции рынка труда в Северном регионе.

Ключевые слова: интеграция в рынок труда, диагностирование компетенций, трудоустройство беженцев, проверка навыков и квалификации.

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Grynyuk S.P.,
PhD, Associate Professor
Foreign Philology Department
National Aviation University

Problem statement. Evidence shows that in recent years the integration of disadvantaged groups (those who have been granted residence as refugees, quota refugees and families in need of protection) into the labor market is of supreme interest in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

Numerous studies and evaluations (2016, 2017) have been conducted in the attempt to determine the effectiveness of the new measures – on making better use of the human capital and ensuring that integration pathways meet their individual needs both at the regional and municipal level – which have been used to close the employment gap in the coming years.

Thus, the overall task for Scandinavian researchers aims in finding the right balance between fast and sustainable integration; the integration plans should be realistic: low-skilled jobs may come first, career paths should be offered for more sustainable integration.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The analysis of recent research and publications has shown that the most advanced integration instruments for refugees in Europe have been developed in Scandinavian countries. This typically consists of structured labor market training and support within programs that generally last between two and three years [1; 2; 5].

There are many factors that influence refugees' prospects of finding work in the Nordic region. But, numerous reports and studies have prioritized four aspects that have received greater attention. They are the following:

- practices of the early mapping of competences in each country and their results so far;
- validation of skills, qualifications and experience;
- language-learning as part of effective long-term and faster labor market integration;
- the role of civil society and informal networks in the integration process.

It should be mentioned that Denmark, Finland and Sweden are among the few OECD countries that have incorporated employment-related elements into their dispersal schemes for refugees. Although in Sweden, the so-called EBO law stipulates that refugees and asylum seekers can live wherever they like if they can arrange housing for themselves. Somehow, this makes planning much more difficult for Swedish authorities.

Also, Nordic countries have also adopted the special RPL procedures (recognition of prior learning) on swift and effective assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications and skills for refugees with no documentary proof of their qualifications [5; 2].

The purpose of the article. The aim of this article is to summarize research and knowledge on the policies and measures undertaken in the Nordic region for achieving swifter labor market integration of refugees arriving in 2015, primarily from Syria and Afghanistan. It examines one of four basic aspects that have been emphasized by the academic scholars and scientists in recent years – early competence mapping which is seen as a good prospect for staying in the host coun-

try. It also outlines the steps towards the progress in establishing the background for effective labor market integration of refugees in the Nordic countries [1; 2].

The main material of the study. Early competence mapping is now occurring at the asylum stage in all the Nordic countries being determined as a good prospect of staying in the host country and making the labor market access easier for disadvantaged groups. This mapping primarily focuses on language and other relevant skills or experience that can be applied to labor practices and activities. The practices of the early competence mapping in each country follow different directions and procedures.

Denmark

The mapping of competences in Denmark is carried out in interviews with individuals and their families. It usually starts at the asylum centers and a range of licensed asylum operators from the immigration authorities. It means, in fact, the validation of education or informal competences aiming at identifying relevant municipalities for housing the refugees according to the labor market demand for the competences.

There was also established Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education in January 2017. One of its tasks is to operate a hotline that can advise those assessing refugees and asylum seekers on their educational merits and competences. This process is quick and the management of each case takes a couple of working days. The asylum centers have an obligation to offer assistance from the Agency but are not responsible for doing so. The mapping of competences in the asylum centers is therefore only the beginning of a later validation of applicable skills.

To eradicate the gap between the mapped competences in the asylum centers and the process within the municipalities, a document called a "transfer scheme" is applied. The "transfer scheme" is digital and part of the asylum centers' IT system known as LetAsyl. The municipalities apply it as the quickest possible access to relevant information on the individual refugees' prior education and competences. It thereby gives the municipalities a stronger basis for mobilizing an early and goal-oriented integration effort [4; 6].

And, it also should be stated that Denmark as well as Finland are the only countries where asylum seekers can already start training practices in local companies with certain pre-conditions [2; 3].

Norway

In Norway there is some variation in competence mapping for:

a) quota refugee: refugees' language skills, education and work experience are mapped both through the UNHCR form and the IMDIs interview form;

b) asylum seekers: is done by the UDI (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration) where the focus is on relevance for settlement through a system called

Sesam where language, education, professional experience, the desire for a future profession and other skills are listed. On receipt of a resident permit, the information gathered is reviewed and the sequel is dependent on the range of receipts [1; 6].

Among other measures undertaken in this domain was the creation of a digital self-registering mapping instrument for better labor market integration (new digital platforms allowing refugees to undertake skills self-assessment when registering): a mapping instrument customized for minority languages and different live situations. The self-registering mapping is followed up with carrier guidance provided through one of the 38 Carrier centers located across Norway. They provide career recommendations for individuals from the age of nineteen. The development of the self-registering mapping instrument has been delayed and therefore the Educational Directorate has not been able to prioritize the cooperation needed for the project. The plan was to launch the tool in the summer of 2017. However, it seems not to be ready and both the function and effects of this early mapping tool remain to be seen.

What is done so far in other directions correlating with the problem? Every year, from 8 to 13 thousand of refugees register in Norwegian Introductory Program (NIP).

The program has the explicit aim of influencing the action of immigrants and is designed to increase the transition to work. The municipalities have come up with an array of courses in addition to the central components, language training, social studies and work-oriented activities, to make the program full-time based on individual plans. The introduction of the NIP represented a marked shift in Norwegian integration policy. The shift was from low-intensity language training towards a compulsory full-day, year-round activation program. A two-year introductory program with economic self-sufficiency is its main objective. In Norway, the program is meant to be on an individual level, but is often dependent on local offerings. The municipalities are flexible in adapting to local conditions and this results in minimalist solutions and the indulgence of individual skills and needs [4; 5; 6].

Sweden

In Sweden since 2010, Sweden's Public Employment Agency (AF) has been responsible for the competence mapping of all refugees seeking asylum status. Since 2016, it maps the competences and skills of asylum seekers using an online tool in the main refugee languages.

The positive aspect of the official labor market integration program is that one hundred people have been employed at AF to reach out to asylum seekers. The negative aspect of this program is:

- not offering one-on-one coaching;
- the system is yet to be synced with the main job-searching tools that are provided by AF;

– too bureaucratic. Staff prioritizes too much the reporting hours and activities instead of focusing on their clients' individual needs and aspirations, based on the comprehensive mapping of competences, offering truly relevant courses and matching them with relevant employers. Clients get involved, but not in the most effective ways to find suitable jobs;

– women get less individual support. Many participate part-time and are offered less valuable or less effective courses.

Additionally, in October 2017 the Swedish Employment Agency was commissioned by the government to improve labor market matching. It was also proposed, among other things, to tailor the program to the labor market's needs. As it has been revealed, the evaluation of the current labor market integration process demonstrates a slightly stronger labor market affiliation and higher incomes for refugees who had completed the program, compared to refugees who had completed previous local integration programs run by municipalities before 2011.

In Sweden various local pilot projects for quick integration are funded and evaluated by Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and they provide evidence as to the value of the early mapping of competences and local matching to employers' needs. When collaboration works locally, between AF, the municipality providing SFI (Swedish for immigrants) and adult education, local businesses and branch organizations, by someone dedicated to coordinating the mapping and match-making. As a result, many refugees end up finding employment locally [8].

Finland

In Finland, the competence-mapping process is under reform and will be systematically implemented in 2018.

Historically, mandatory individualized integration plan came into force in 1999 as part of the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers. It includes language courses and other courses specifically designed for immigrants like training in civic and working life skills, vocational training, subsidized job placements, rehabilitation and so forth.

A recent shift in approach to early competence mapping is evident, though. Finland has not implemented systematic, national solutions for mapping competences at an early stage in the asylum phase. Rather, it has private agents who screen refugees' competences [1]. So far, private agents have adopted an action plan for assessing the competences of asylum seekers at reception centers while they are awaiting their asylum decisions. The assessment outcomes are considered when settlement regions are chosen to match education and business opportunities with their competences. After asylum seekers have been granted residence, their competences are

more comprehensively assessed. In cases of delays or extended time for moving former asylum seekers from reception facilities to settlement locations, part of the comprehensive competence assessment can be carried out at the reception centers [3; 4].

What is more, by 2018 newly-planned measures for labor market integration of refugees and asylum seekers are to be implemented. They are the following:

1. Start-up refugees: mapping asylum seekers' language and other skills and connecting to jobseekers and employers. It will help to connect job-seeking asylum seekers with potential employers.

2. On-the-job learning agreement: will mean attainment of on-the-job learning with a vocational qualification. The targets groups here are refugees and immigrants. This measure would make possible unpaid on-the-job learning which is not existing at present but is part of the education reform's second cycle, one of the 26 key projects of the Finnish government [1; 3; 4].

Conclusions and prospects for further researches. To sum everything up, the effective integration of refugees into the labor market in the Nordic region is a cross-cutting issue which involves many factors that influence refugees' prospects of finding work. This article investigates only one aspect of the overall issue – the procedure of the early competence mapping in each Nordic country, revealing a common understanding of important elements for sound integration.

Obviously, there is an evident necessity to investigate the other integrals – validation of work experience and qualifications of refugees; language education combined with vocational training for faster integration into the labor market; and the role of civil society and informal networks in the integration process: current status and untapped potential – in order to have a complete picture of the problem and the ways to cope with the stated question.

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