

14 Stream title: 'Borders and the professions: getting in and getting on – the experience of ethnic minority and migrant workers

Bamboo Borders; The case of humanitarian migrants entering the Swiss labour market.

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to examine the current situation concerning employment of humanitarian migrants in the Swiss labour market. The paper takes into consideration the existing lack of skilled labour in the market, the perspectives from potential employers in the agriculture, hospitality, logistics and health care industries, and possible solutions to overcome the problems.

Methodology – The study employed a qualitative approach. Data collected was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 9 people from 4 different industries identified as potential employers of humanitarian refugees.

Findings – The findings were interpreted along 3 main themes; potential for integration in Swiss labour market, factors contributing to preventing employment and solutions to overcoming such problems. The terminology and laws governing the status of a refugee, asylum seeker or humanitarian migrant are complex and often too confusing leading to uncertainty on the laws governing hiring for potential employers at cantonal level.

Research limitations – Researchers subjective interpretation of the results of the interviews, no triangulation was conducted. Only 9 interviews conducted in 4 different industries limiting the validity of the data analysed.

Social implications -The study illuminated the challenges faced by the private sector when hiring humanitarian migrants to work in hospitality, health care, agriculture, and logistics industries. A need for more training programmes and a lifting of the labour market restrictions imposed by the different cantons are key.

Originality / value of paper – The present study enhanced our understanding of the findings of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM, 2014) who found that only 48% of those who received refugee status are employed after a 10-year stay in Switzerland. The paper highlights the tough challenge faced

by employers trying to navigate the laws governing the employment of humanitarian migrants at cantonal level in Switzerland, and their criticism at the lack of support from a broader range of employers.

Keywords (6) – Humanitarian migrants, integration, labour market, training,

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It was only at the end of the 19th century that Switzerland became a country of immigration (Straubhaar, 1994). According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO, 2014), 26.3 percent of the total population – 36 percent of the permanent resident population has a migration background – living in Switzerland in 2015 were foreigners. The population with a migration background as defined by the SFSO relates to foreign nationals and naturalised persons, apart from those born in Switzerland and whose parents were born in Switzerland as well as Swiss - born persons whose two parents were born abroad. According to United Nations (2014) eight Middle Eastern countries have immigrants consisting of over half of their population, rendering them the countries with the highest levels of immigrants in the world compared to their population size, for example, in the UAE 88.4 percent immigrants account for the country's population. The proportion of immigrants living in Switzerland is almost twice the European average, making it one of the countries in the area with the greatest proportion of immigrants compared to population size. Switzerland is an interesting case, as it showcases the impact of immigration on a small receiving country and how the national and local governments deal with this phenomenon (Alfonso, 2004). Alfonso argues the challenges posed by migration have

led to social schisms between the demand for cheap labour and latent xenophobia among nationals. In Switzerland, the fear of *foreignerisation* (Überfremdung), which denotes an increasing presence of foreigners perceived by locals as a danger to their own identity, has led to considerable tension between the political parties, citizens, and various institutions.

Unlike many of its European neighbours, Switzerland has never owned colonies, Swiss mercenaries took part in military operations in Africa in the 17 century, and some settled in these territories. As late as the 19 century Swiss Protestant and Catholic missions could be found in African countries. Without access to an auxiliary labour force, a structural shortage of domestic labour has meant that there was no vent to regulate an ebb and flow of demand for the migrant worker. In times of high levels of economic activity accompanied by a structural labour shortage immigration has proved to be vital relief to the national economy. The value of immigration to the country is not disputed especially now as Switzerland is undoubtedly among the most affluent countries in the world. Built on political stability, a no direct confrontation stance, the absence of war on home soil, the banking secrecy act of 1934, the absence of a patent law until 1907, have all contributed to the “Swiss miracle” (Studer, 2008).

The current era has witnessed significant changes brought about by globalization, the increasing immigration numbers have contributed to the complexity of contemporary societies, accentuating social divisions and inequalities – leading to the privileges of some social groups and communities while marginalizing others (Desivilya Syna and Raz, 2015; Geiger and Jordan, 2014). The increase in migrant workers from their homelands to places where they expect to be better off means that employers absorbing workers from abroad face huge questions concerning their moral obligation to the migrants in respect to the status of the foreign worker in the receiving country (Aviva, 1999). The employment of foreign workers presents a real dilemma between

two moral duties; the duty to improve the well-being of nationals and the duty to advance the interests of everyone, regardless of their nationality (Aviva, 1999).

This paper addresses the factors affecting the integration of refugees or humanitarian migrants into the Swiss labour market. The case study focuses on four diverse industries, namely health care, agriculture, logistics and hospitality that lack the necessary seasonal and other labour force. These industries often constitute what could be referred to as “socially undesirable job categories” such as harvesting crops, washing dishes in a restaurant, looking after the sick, cleaning the streets, work in manufacturing factories. Hence, migration allows freeing up of local workers to take higher-level professional jobs requiring higher skills in better-paid industry sectors. Hence, the perspective is a balance between supply-driven immigration and the demand-driven need of workers in unskilled or semi-skilled low paid jobs. The case provides insights from the employers’ point of view and identifies the main factors that are currently preventing the employment of asylum seekers or humanitarian migrants in the country. The case provides a unique opportunity for investigating a contemporary and largely unexplored phenomenon of a complex web of power relations among diverse political institutions at the national and local level and private industry, and its implications for constraints in practices. Hence, the status of asylum seekers in Switzerland is relevant; it highlights complex legal and political practices from canton to canton within the country. The paper will not examine the case of imported professional workers, who are mainly people with a higher education or training, including academics, skilled workers, and managers who are employed in MNC subsidiaries. The selected industries namely, health care, agriculture, logistics, and hospitality do not constitute what is generally known as the “3 ds”- dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs in construction which are mainly carried out in Switzerland by migrant seasonal workers from Eastern Europe and Germany.

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO, 2014), recognises that Switzerland faces a lack of skilled labour in several industries, making it essential to monitor the development closely, as skilled and unskilled labour is essential for Switzerland's prosperity and economic growth. SECO stresses that an increasing integration favours the economic situation of Switzerland and that such an integration benefits the employed population of Switzerland (SECO, 2011, pp. 48-51). Therefore, the integration of humanitarian migrants is justified by the resulting economic potential that they bring with them. In addition, to the moral dilemma many stakeholders such as government, political parties and citizens are in favour of economic integration of humanitarian migrants for the economic benefits for the national economy and society. Migration allows economic independence coupled with social integration into the Swiss society (BFM, 2013, 2014b).

Indeed, employing foreign workers whether refugees or humanitarian migrants or other in times of a shortage of domestic workers in the receiving country should constitute less of a moral dilemma as there is no perceived risk to the domestic workers. Paradoxically, an increasing demand for foreign workers in times of strong economic demands and direct democracy has led to a complex relationship over time (Afonso, 2004). The greatest challenge the country has had to face in the last fifty years has been to handle both the high demand for foreign labour from the economy and the strong popular xenophobia expressed through direct democracy (Mahnig, 1998). The direct democratic political system has a long tradition in Switzerland dating back to the middle ages; it permits citizens an extraordinary amount of participation in the legislative process a quasi-political self-determination. For example, in a popular initiative 100,000 signatures are required to demand a change to the constitution, then all citizens decide in a referendum whether to accept or reject the initiative, only 50,000 signatures are needed to demand a minor change to the federal or cantonal constitutions with facultative powers only. Switzerland is known

for its neutrality and civil civic discourse, yet, the public and political rhetoric over non-EU/EFTA immigration, especially the asylum debate has at times been very heated (Schindall, 2009).

Not surprisingly, the high wages and standard of living in Switzerland compared to its neighbouring countries have acted as a compelling pull factor for potential migrants. The structure of the Swiss economy is dual; namely the export-orientated industries which amount to a minority of jobs, while two-thirds of the workers are employed in SME's. The latter pertains mostly to the domestic market; farmers enjoy relatively high protection, for example, high subsidies for agriculture thus, protecting the farming industry from international competition (Afonso, 2004). Such organisations have been able to pay lower wages than in the export- orientated companies due to the lower qualification requirements. Afonso argued, the Swiss immigration policy has provided the sheltered sector (so-called second economy) with cheap foreign labour thus freeing up domestic workers to take jobs in the better-paid industries.

Swiss Migration Policies

Switzerland had pursued a rather liberal immigration policy prior to 1970's when quotas were introduced that put an annual upper limit on the number of foreigners allowed to enter the country. Seasonal workers were granted the largest number of permits, allowing foreigners to be employed in a classified seasonal job for a maximum of nine months, after this period they were required to leave the country (Becker, Liegig, Souz-Poza, 2005). Thus, seasonal worker could work for a limited period in those sectors suffering a lack of workers due to the low wage level before returning to their country of origin.

Permission to stay was conditional to the terms of employment which was usually limited to a set time frame. When the permit expires migrants and seasonal workers

are required to leave the country otherwise they would be considered an illegal resident and worker. The employer is obliged to ensure the worker remains for the duration of the contract and returns home when the contract is finished. In general, migrants are more dependent upon their employers in the receiving country than domestic workers. In Switzerland, laws permitted seasonal permits to be converted to annual permits after four consecutive seasons, generally if requested by the employer and agreed on by the foreign worker. In the 1980's, since such arrangements were in the best interest of both parties, many seasonal workers applied for the conversion and were entitled to an annual permit. This was the first initial stage of permanent residence.

Swiss immigration policy changed dramatically post the 1980s mainly but not entirely due to Switzerland's intention to join the European Economic Area (EEA). Inherent in the bilateral agreements was that – many immigrants would no longer be subject to control – if they came from the EEA. Second, the economic downturn in the early 1990s resulted in an increase in unemployment coupled with a property bubble. The unemployment crisis was due to a mismatch between labour supply and demand as migration focused on low-skilled workers whereas demand shifted towards the more highly qualified sector (Straubhaar, 1991). Third, there was a dramatic increase in the number of asylum-seekers seeking protection, in contrast to the previous mentioned foreign residents; European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) citizens who came to work as either guest workers or under a bilateral agreement allowing EU/EFTA citizens to live and work in the country. In the early 1980s, tens of thousands of immigrants seeking asylum arrived from Eastern Europe mainly Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Kosovo fleeing war in the former Yugoslavia. In the 1990s Iraqi Kurds fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime and the Persian Gulf War, followed by large numbers fleeing war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo (Schindall, 2009). Between 1998 -2007, 39.4 percent of all immigrants came

to reunify with family members who were residing in Switzerland as foreign residents or Swiss nationals, 25 percent for employment and 12.4 percent for professional training (Schindall, 2009). In 2008, Switzerland had over 1.6 million foreign residents with an average of 40,000 foreigners naturalized per year compared to 2015 when there were 1.99 million legal foreign decent residents, with 42,699 annually being naturalized. At the end of 2008, there were 40,774 people in the asylum process, representing a 50 percent increase over 2007, the majority of asylum seekers were from Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq, Serbia and Sri Lanka. By comparison in 2015, 39,523 persons applied for asylum. The countries of origin were; Eritrea (25%), Afghanistan (20%), Syria (12%), Iraq (6%), Sri Lanka (5%) and Somalia (3%) (SEM, 2015). The high level of asylum applicants had not been seen in Switzerland since the war in Kosovo. In 2015, 6377 were granted asylum with 7787 asylum seekers temporarily admitted (Federal Office for Migration, 2015). In addition, native-born foreigners – also known as second generation or secondos – a local expression for immigrants– make-up 22.3 percent of the foreign resident population, 62 percent of these were EU nationals. Another wave of migrants arrived in 2015, due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, the political situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, instability in Eritrea and the continuous flow of migrants from Africa. Indeed, for many stakeholders, the asylum system reached the limits of its capacity towards the end of 2015.

An Asylum Action Plan was introduced to provide an accelerated processing system in addition to a 48-hour fast track procedure in 2012. The main difference is that the latter is applied to nationals from countries where it is more difficult to enforce removal orders and get the necessary paper for departure. Introduced to reduce the number of unjustified asylum applications, to ease housing burdens and reduce the cost of the process (SEM, 2015). Surprisingly, Switzerland has seen a 40 percent increase in asylum seekers who have abandoned their asylum procedure without

informing the Swiss authorities. Between January and November 2016, a total of 8,166 asylum seekers decided to abandon their refugee applications, fearing rejection or a wish to join other family members in EU countries, most of the applicants came from Africa with the majority coming from Eritrea, Gambia, Nigeria followed by Somalia.

The collective responsibility for integration remains primarily with the refugees and temporarily admitted persons, however, the Confederation and cantons, migration and labour market authorities, schools, companies, and society are also engaged in the process (SEM, 2015). As in any democracy, the government prioritizes the distribution of their resources; the citizens come first before foreign workers, especially illegal aliens. The Swiss authorities have the right to confiscate part of the assets of persons seeking asylum, the latter was devised to ensure they contribute to the costs concerning their stay and the processing of the asylum application. Despite a study published by the OECD on Swiss Integration which showed “that migrants in Switzerland have achieved a good level of integration in education and employment compared to migrants in other European countries” much remains to be done (Migration Report 2015, p33).

According to the UNHCR, the history of refugees goes back over thousands of years. The agency defines a refugee as someone who: *“Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”* (Flowing Across Borders”, n.d., para. 3)

Conditions force people to seek asylum in countries where they may be recognised as refugees. Since the changes to the Swiss integration policy in 2008, a person may no

longer apply for asylum directly at a Swiss embassy, the only possibility is to request a humanitarian visa, which allows one to travel to Switzerland and apply for asylum within 90 days in the country itself (Interface, 2013, p. 5). Under European rules, refugees are only permitted to enter a European country if they wish to claim asylum, they are registered at a SEM centre. Anyone not claiming asylum is refused entry and is returned to the first European country they entered (Migration Report, 2014).

Nevertheless, meeting these conditions does not automatically give an asylum seeker the status of a refugee. Asylum seekers are often confused with refugees. According to the UNHCR (“Asylum-Seekers”, para. 1), the difference is that asylum seekers claim to be refugees, while a refugee is an asylum seeker whose claim to be a refugee has been evaluated and confirmed by the system they seek asylum in.

A rather complex web of various statuses constitutes the path to be recognised as an asylum seeker with undefined outcomes. For example, Recognised Refugee (RR) refers to a person that meets the condition that defines a refugee according to the UNHCR. RRs receive a residence permit B, which will be renewed after one year, given that the circumstances have not changed. After five years, it is possible to upgrade to an unlimited C permit entitling the person to live and work in the country and this C permit can be renewed after 5 years. More restrictive is a B permit which allows RRs unlimited access to the labour market within the canton issuing the permit. There are no limitations regarding industries or preferences for the native population (BFM, 2014b, p. 9). Nevertheless, a move from one canton to another is only possible if the RR is employed and not receiving social welfare while holding a B permit (Thier, 2015, para. 10).

Provisionally admitted (PA) refers to a person whose request for asylum has been rejected and if they cannot be reasonably rejected they receive a provisional

permission residence permit F. The condition associated with this permit is re-evaluated every 12 months and the permit renewed accordingly. Under certain circumstances, a B permit can be requested after five years. Since April 1st, 2006, holders of a permit F have the same access and conditions, regarding labour, as RRs (2014b, p. 10). Unlike RRs, the employer should deduct 10 % of the salary and pay it to the State Secretariat for Migration.

As mentioned the term asylum seeker refers to a person, who has applied for asylum and is waiting for the outcome of their application, the asylum seeker (AS) is allowed to temporarily stay in Switzerland for the duration of the process (“Asylum-Seeker N”, para. 1). AS receive a residence permit N which allows the bearer to work after 3 months or, in a case of rejection, which can turn their case into a hardship case, after 6 months. Such cases are only allowed to work in industries with a lack of skilled labour. Employment is only possible if no native resident has applied for the position (Thier, 2015, para. 13). As with PAs, the employer is required to deduct 10 % from the salary to contribute to the national government coffers. In this case, however, it is up to the individual cantons to decide how easily ARs can access the labour market (Stucki, 2015, para. 3). They can either facilitate this access or impede their integration. If a canton strictly follows the rule that says a position may be given to an AS only if no native or member from the EU/EFTA area can be found, it becomes more or less impossible for an AS to find employment. The fact that a canton can also limit working allowance to restricted industries is an additional obstacle in the process (Stucki, 2015, para. 4-5). The specific focus of this case is limited to the study of industries that lack skilled labour and the situation of the different cantons regarding ASs will not be discussed in further detail, although RRs and PAs have full access to the Swiss labour market when searching for a job.

To avoid further confusion between an asylum seeker who claims to be a refugee and

a recognised refugee, a general term will be used. According to Long (2013), the terms refugee and migrant blur in practice, the author argues that the term refugee prevents proper integration into society, whereas the term migrant omits the humanitarian motives but includes the intention of integration (Long, 2013, p. 21). To address all three groups together and to avoid confusion, the term humanitarian migrant will be used.

The fragmented and somewhat baffling fabric for migrations policies at national and cantonal level provide fertile ground for studying the actual experiences from some branches of industry in a lesser skilled arena. The specific setting of the case provides a relevant example of the complexity of understanding the laws governing the employment of humanitarian workers and their implementation at the cantonal level.

According to random sampling conducted by the SEM, of the total 14 164 recognised refugees and temporarily admitted persons in 2015: 20% hold a higher education qualification, 50 percent have several years of work experience and at least 70 percent were between the ages of 18 and 39 offering huge market potential. One of the biggest challenges facing the refugees and temporarily admitted persons constitutes the biggest challenge for occupational integration. A study carried out by the SEM in 2014 shows the employment rate at a low level of 20-30 percent, the employment rates rises the longer the person stays in Switzerland but remains at only 50 percent after ten years.

Contextualising the case study

The context of immigration nowadays is characterised by social, political, legal and economic complexity, resonating multi-group tensions where some groups are privileged while others are marginalized. Combining all conflicting interests is hazardous and implies a level of complexity that may be baffling. To understand the

economic perspective, it is necessary to examine the labour shortage in Switzerland pertaining to skilled and unskilled workers. Faig (2011) argued that a person can be considered as skilled labour after having successfully finished training in any profession after finishing school. Nevertheless, skilled labour is mostly perceived in a person who has had intensive training for many years at a university. According to Flaig, both cases are valuable (2011).

In 2014, SECO developed an indicator system to evaluate the lack of skilled labour in different industries. Extrapolating the insights from the system, a shortage of skilled labour can be found if demand for workers with a specific qualification exceeds the supply of existing working conditions (SECO, 2014, p. 1). To identify the industries that lack skilled labour, four indicators have been determined. *Coverage* signifies that if no person can be found with exactly the right skills for the position, either a person with lower skills or a person with a completely different set of skills will occupy the position (2014, p. 6). *Immigration*, meaning no one can be found within the economy to occupy the position and so people from abroad are recruited to fill the position. *Unemployment rate* looks at how many people are unemployed in a certain industry, a low rate indicating a lack of skilled labour. And lastly *rate of open positions*, looking at how many open positions there are in an industry, a high rate indicating a lack of skilled labour (pp. 7-13).

The following industries have been identified to fit the criteria: agriculture, the industrial production involving metal and wood, construction, logistics, hospitality, cleaning and public health care. Most of these industries coincide with industries that refugees can find employment. A report published by the SEM (BFM, 2007, p. 15), identified industries such as construction, hospitality, agriculture, logistics, health care and cleaning to be the ones that employ refugees.

In 2011, an initiative proposed to foster integration to strengthen the Swiss economy this initiative argued in favour of immigration, especially in industries facing a shortage on the skilled labour market, it contributes to a strong economy and has a positive effect on the Swiss economy (SECO, 2011, pp. 48-51). Despite, the recognition of the positive effect of migration on the economy by various political parties, as well as by private companies the political support mechanism to help integrate the migrants into society has been neglected.

Liebig, Kohls, and Krause (2012, p. 24) identified the lack of a standardised integration programme as a reason for the poor integration of refugees within the Swiss labour market. This assumption is supported by a study by the BFM (2014b, p. 2), where the complexity and ambiguity of the Swiss integration frameworks are blamed for the modest progress in Switzerland's immigration policies. Entering the Swiss labour market is difficult, and factors preventing refugees from finding employment are diverse, ranging from the refugees personal story, to the effects of trauma, but also to an insufficient knowledge of the national language (BFM, 2007, p. 11).

Extant policies on granting asylum not only apply to supplying shelter and food but also employ the integration or socialization of the asylum seekers into their new environment. Asylum seekers are required to not only learn the language and culture but also observe practices of behaviour in society and in the work place. Especially in a country like Switzerland, social standing is often defined through work position or job title (Strahm, 2015). Amongst others, the language barrier remains a hindrance to communication between employer and employee especially requiring time to reach a language competence level that facilitates ease of communication. Despite the language barrier, other factors such as having a required and recognised skill contribute to barriers in finding employment in Switzerland.

The integration of humanitarian migrants is not only the responsibility of the state, a close relationship between the state, NGO's and the private industry is necessary to successfully integrate RRs, Pas, and ASs. It is important that all three sectors work together to foster a strong network (BFM, 2007, 2010). Nevertheless, studies show after three years in the country only 20 percent of the above groups are employed (BFM, 2014b, p. 20). According the SEM, it is not only the lack of language or recognized skills and educational level that puts employers off employing ASs. Factors are more far reaching, for many employers the uncertainty about a person's possible length of employment – how long they can stay in the country - is a risk that they cannot or do not want to deal with (2014b, p. 21). Moreover, employers should be properly informed of the employment conditions when considering employing RRs, Pas, and ASs (BFM, 2007, p. 23). Many employers are often not even aware that they can employ humanitarian migrants, which correlates to a lack of vacancies for humanitarian migrants.

Other contributing factors include a general level of uncertainty leading to mistrust towards the educational qualifications and work experience of humanitarian migrants. In certain circumstances, they are presumed not to be on par with Swiss education standards (SEM, 2014). Although the discussion on education standards is ongoing and the opinions on educational standards are conflicting, it is rather unusual to find a doctor among Syrian refugees (Eisenring, 2015), others believe that some of the refugees coming from Syria have an education at least equal to the German Abitur (Benz, 2016).

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative method using interpretative approach. The latter attempts to understand potential employers experience working together with humanitarian migrants and conceptualize main obstacles by means of empirical data.

No quantitative data to support the paper could be found in a preliminary literature search. According to Flick (2006), qualitative data "...is concerned rather with giving a description of circumstances at the time of the research." (p. 142). The interpretivist approach was used for this study since its primary aim was to identify and map the main obstacles humanitarian migrants face as well as possible solutions in overcoming such barriers (Ricoeur, 1981; Van Manen, 1990; Walsham, 1993).

Focusing on the potential employers' perspective allows the identification of current problems they face at the time of research. According to Davies (2007), qualitative research can be used to explore people's experience. It allows people to tell their stories and the researcher to explore them, based on an open-minded environment. Moreover, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to achieve a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (Silverman, 2000,). In this case, possible obstacles have already been identified in the literature search. Nevertheless, the aim is to explore the present first-hand experience. The approach of qualitative research assists in recognizing the relevance of these barriers at the time of research. Furthermore, it aims at finding possible solutions to overcome such barriers.

Data collected was based using focused interviews from nine participants from four diverse industries namely; hospitality, health care, agriculture, and logistics. “Focused interviews ensure that you retain a high degree of control over the topic while granting interviewees full scope to determine the nature of their responses.” (Davies, 2007). To facilitate the collection of the data a top-down approach was chosen. Davies (2007) refers to this as “the philosophical idea that underpins the style of research in which the investigator begins from a theoretical position and sets out to test it by gathering and analysing data” (p. 235). The aim was to bring the interviews in line with the theoretical background, to examine the barriers humanitarian migrants face. This approach facilitated the development of sub-topics in the interview phase.

The interview guide consisted of asking the different participants questions about their expertise employing humanitarian refugees, their recruiting process, typical problems encountered connected to the background, the various measures used to integrate them in the workplace. The interviews were conducted in German and Swiss German and translated into English and lasted about 40 minutes to an hour.

The data was analysed by identifying solutions towards the elimination of barriers, a bottom-up approach was used. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), data analysis is “the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports” (p. 201). Mayring (2000) argues that “...it would be of central interest to develop the aspects of interpretation, the categories, as near as possible to the material, to formulate them in terms of the material” (para. 10). After collecting the data through focused interviews, categories were developed from the material collected and revised in a feedback loop the categories were checked for reliability. The purpose of the study was explained to each interviewee at the beginning in line with ethical guidelines, anonymity was ensured by not disclosing the interviewees’ names or work place.

Findings

Analysis of the findings accord with research aims to examine the potential for the integration of humanitarian migrants into those parts of the Swiss economy that lack skilled labour, employers experience regarding factors currently preventing humanitarian migrants from taking up employment and possible solutions in overcoming such obstacles. The findings are presented in line with the three themes which emerged from the data collected.

Potential for Integration

Analysis of the interviews revealed seasonal workers are of different nationalities. Even though some Swiss nationalities can be found in the cleaning industry, employers are mainly dependent on seasonal foreign workers, yet, workers from within the EU/EFTA countries can be found to fill many vacant positions, as clarified in the following statement;

“No Swiss person can be found to carry out the work they do, nor is it possible to find a Portuguese national or people from the Balkans to do this work either.”

This concurs with the historical background of migrant workers in Switzerland, according to Liebig, Kohls, and Krause (2012), workers from the former Yugoslavia were successfully integrated into the Swiss labour market along with migrant workers from neighbouring countries. A similar view is expressed by another interviewee, “You can also look at history, the Italians built the Gotthard tunnel; today they are integrated into the Swiss society.”

In conclusion, regarding the lack of skilled labour in the investigated professions

including agriculture, cleaning, hospitality, logistics, and construction, there is evidence to suggest there are possibilities for refugees to be integrated into the Swiss labour market, as there is a need for foreign workers in these industries. Yet, most interviewees are of the opinion they have no problem in finding employees, as there are many people without a humanitarian migration background looking to improve their economic perspective in Switzerland as manifested by the statement, “There are many people, who come to Switzerland to look for employment to gain a foothold.” Thus, the findings reflect the lack of skilled labour in the Swiss labour market could offers humanitarian migrants an opportunity, on the other hand they face strong competition on the Swiss labour market from other foreign and local workers. To strengthen their chances, it is important to better understand the factors that currently prevent humanitarian migrants from being employed.

Factors contributing to preventing employment

Several impeding factors were identified concerning the employment of humanitarian migrants, such as language, culture differences, psychological trauma, the validity of working papers, uncertainty concerning the length of stay, non-awareness of employers and the lack of a standardized integration programme. Only factors considered by potential employers as relevant will be considered and discussed.

Language and cultural differences were mentioned by all interviewees who agree on the importance of speaking the language to obtaining a job. Counter to expectations the lack of language does not appear to be a factor preventing employers from hiring as most provide language courses. Moreover, these courses are offered to all foreign employees, “What we did for example with our Portuguese housekeeping team, we sent them to a language course.” Despite the importance of language, it is a barrier that all migrant workers face and does not crucially reduce the integration process of

humanitarian migrants.

The main factor identified preventing humanitarian migrants from being employed is work experience. Accordingly, an analysis of the interviews revealed potential employees go through the same recruiting process as other job seekers, as disclosed by a person in the catering industry; “People with a humanitarian migration background apply for positions through the regular recruiting process.” Despite the acceptance and controversy surrounding the validity of work certificates of foreign workers, there are also the labour market restrictions imposed by the different cantons (Benz, 2016). Most of the respondents stated that migrants “...have none or very little general education and lack evidence of vocational training, or vocational training, occupation or qualification in the country of origin is not recognised in Switzerland.” Benz (2016), argued humanitarian migrants usually have to be retrained, a fact that greatly influences the potential to be hired in the first place. The findings revealed that employers name work experience as the main reason to hire, as manifested below;

“In Switzerland, a work references is very important, when one doesn’t have a recognized educational qualification certificate, it is difficult to employ someone. No one gets hired without showing a reference from previous employer(s) without such a document it is difficult to know what this person is capable of.”

In other words, the lack of a work reference can diminish the chances of a humanitarian migrant being employed in the first place. As many humanitarian migrants flee their homeland, bringing in some cases only the clothes on their back, they cannot produce the necessary evidence of work experience. It is worth noting the importance placed on a letter of reference in Switzerland. With no work experience in Switzerland or in a comparable economic area, thus a lack of work experience or work reference can be construed as lacking an understanding of the Swiss labour market culture, values and standards. This psychological hurdle for the Swiss employer means they have to make allowances for employees that normally they do not do, in a

standardized process all are equal and need to be treated as such.

Nevertheless, six of the nine interviewees offer special programmes for humanitarian migrants. Together with the SEM and the respective cantonal authorities, the employers have developed internship programmes where humanitarian migrants can be trained in various fields. Concerning the internships, once again the employers point to their close relationship with the government and other non-profit organisations. This confirms the importance of a strong network between the private industry, the state and NGO's (BFM, 2007, 2010) as demonstrated by the following quote; "The costs for training and the evaluation of suitability are carried by the state, while we (private industry) offer the internship positions." Despite the conflicting opinions on the validity and value of foreign education systems (BFM, 2014b; Eisenring, 2105; Benz, 1016), it was mentioned only by one of the interviewees. The fact that most interviewees offer special programmes allowing humanitarian migrants the opportunity to gain experience in their respective fields, is a result of the debate on the validity of previous work experience and educational qualifications.

Conclusively, the results highlight employers are confronted by a lack of language skills and work experience in hiring migrants. In reality, many of the employers are actively engaged in organizing internship programmes shows that employers are aware of the issues humanitarian migrants encounter and are willing to participate in the process of creating solutions to overcome such obstacles.

Solutions to overcoming obstacles

The analysis of the interviews shows the complex reality of finding migrants with the appropriate job skills and knowledge of the local language and culture, hence, the creation of internship programmes offers a holistic approach to tackling the different obstacles faced by humanitarian migrants. Such programmes offer an opportunity to

gain experience; moreover, the employers provide language courses tailored to the needs of a specific industry. One health care worker contends: “He (migrant) goes to school two days a week, where he learns German and the course is set up in such a way that he is also trained in technical language.” Additionally, employers work closely with the state and other partners allowing a quick response time when confronted with issues they cannot handle alone such when a worker suffers a traumatic attack. Not trained to deal with such issues, the interviewees expressed reliance on the authorities to support them, as manifested by following quote:

“After she (migrant) suffered what seems like a nervous breakdown, I sat together with her supervisor, then she was then taken out for a break and received some psychological treatment in the form of counselling.”

Despite the support the various employers receive from various stakeholders and appreciate the close working relationship between state and social partners, there was some criticism of the various rules and regulations that apply at the different cantonal levels. This corresponds to Liebig, Kohls, and Krause’s (2012) pertaining to the lack of a standardised programme which impedes the integration of humanitarian migrants.

The findings reflect distinct issues with respect to awareness and sensitivities to the differences in religion and cultural differences among the various humanitarian migrant workers and between the workers and employees. Some did indicate a variety of attitudes ranging from frustration to the issues which result in total insensitivity, to heightened awareness faced by the potential employers when confronted with cultural issues. More than one stated a commonly held belief;

“Because these people come from completely different parts of the world, from different cultures, and have no idea of the work culture in Switzerland. Indeed, do not understand the differences in hierarchies, the position of woman as co-workers and especially as bosses.”

Similarly, another interviewee mentioned the Islamic practice of fasting “Because of Ramadan, one (migrant) said will not come to work, he did not want or would not agree to only working half a day.” Once again, the findings seem to reflect other cultural and religious related practices that are manifested in the traditional Swiss work practices and do not take into consideration other religious practices and beliefs.

While some of the interviewees reflect a prevailing belief that it is the responsibility of the government to prepare people socially and culturally to work in Switzerland, not merely in terms of language, other employers address this issue directly by providing cultural training as a fixed part of the training. A logistics manager disclosed:

“The internship training lasts six months and includes intercultural training as part of the programme. Participants are introduced to Swiss work ethics, such things as, what do I have to watch out for at work, punctuality, reporting absence when ill, things like that, but also more general things like, how does a team work in Switzerland and what is team work in Switzerland. These things are very important.”

In sum, the findings demonstrate the sensitivity of the employers to cater to the cultural needs to avoid potential conflicts at the place of work and in society as all migrants need to function not only in terms work but in the social fabric of society.

Discussion

The research attempted to understand the complexities encountered by four industries when working with humanitarian migrants, as little prior research exists, the study examined how these industries deal with the complexities of hiring and training migrant workers for a definite period, considering the power dynamics contributing to

integration, the factors contributing to preventing employment and possible solutions to overcoming these obstacles.

The main questions addressed the industry perception of their desire to employ humanitarian migrants with the intricate political, economic and social setting; integration to these environments brings positive aspects of inclusion while promoting constructive attempts to overcome challenges while mitigating the factors preventing a smooth path to employment. Although the potential could be identified, six of the interview partners offer training courses to overcome the obstacles preventing humanitarian migrants from taking up employment. They also expressed concern about the awareness of other employers and their lack of motivation to participate in the training programmes. They are cognizant of the necessity to get everyone on board as expressed by hospitality employee; “Only a few businesses participate and we hope that through such programmes other businesses will also jump on this bandwagon.” The tension between the desire to enable humanitarian workers to work and the desire to bring more industry partners on-board leads to a sense of frustration that a clear set of guidelines are not in place.

Apart from the political discussion, there are other obstacles humanitarian migrants’ faces when trying to enter the labour market. According to the SEM, only 48% of those that received a recognised refugee status are employed after staying in Switzerland for 10 years (2014b, p. 22). Some of the obstacles have already been mentioned, like insufficient language skills or psychological trauma. Others are less evident, like the lack of vacancies on the Swiss labour market all year round (BFM, 2007, p. 11). Inherent in the process, many employers are not even aware that they are permitted to legally employ refugees and asylum seekers. Often, they lack information on the procedure and are put off by the misleading names of the different statuses asylum seekers receive (BFM, 2007, p. 23). In addition, there are other

administrative hurdles that make access to the labour market difficult such as work permits.

Conclusion

The current era of mass migration across Europe poses considerable challenges for governments, local communities, and especially small-medium sizes industries that show a willingness to take on these migrants, mainly driven by a shortage of labour on the market but also in response to humanitarian urges.

The research findings concur with Liebig, Kohls, and Krause (2012); the lack of a standardised integration programme is one of the main reasons for the poor integration of humanitarian migrants within the Swiss labour market. This study also mentions the different rules and regulations each canton must comply with regarding the integration process. The analysis shows that the latter is strongly criticized by the potential employers. The study also carries policy implications at cantonal as well as the national level, and specifically for the industries suffering from a labour shortage, as well as other stakeholders. Creating a database with the necessary information would not only support potential employers with the process of integration for the migrants but also facilitate further research into the subject of this study. Due to the limitations of this paper, no such overview could be created. The next step would be an open discussion amongst all the involved stakeholders from national and local government, private industries, educational and health institutions as well as the families concerned. Through dialogue and debate, the diverse parties can further develop a way forward.

Indeed, a discussion at local level could glean support amongst community leaders to help speed up integration by improving networks as well as organising language and cultural exchange programmes. These discussions can be held in parallel with the

various bodies such as the national government to facilitate a smooth process to integration. The better integrated the migrants become the better chance they have of becoming valuable members of society. This dual approach from the top down and bottom up is imperative to increasing the chances for a better integration into the labour market, unfortunately, as it stands, the analysis shows that the potential for humanitarian migrants to integrate well into those parts of the Swiss labour market that face a lack of skilled labour is relatively small.

The provision of internship programmes has been identified as a solid solution to overcome obstacles that keep humanitarian refugees from integration. Current employers are themselves very interested in motivating other possible employers to provide such internships. The study revolved around a limited case of four industries, however, to extend understanding of the complex issue a further investigation into the reasons why possible employers do not provide such programmes as mentioned by a limited number of employers, future research could be conducted to find out how the potential for integration can be increased.

Admittedly, the point of view of humanitarian migrants themselves has been completely neglected within this study, due to its limitations. Therefore, future research may also examine the challenges faced by humanitarian migrants in integrating into the Swiss labour market.

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