



I-WELCOME - Reinforcing migrant women's
integration in society and the labour
market

NATIONAL REPORT

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INFORMATION ABOUT OUTPUT

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Activity:	IO2-A1: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FOR MAPPING EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVES IN SUPPORTING LABOUR INTEGRATION OF TCN WOMEN

PROJECT INFORMATION

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1. General Introduction of the labour market in the country

Bulgarian labour market is not augmented by a large migrant population, as despite membership of the EU easing the immigration process, firms face difficulties attracting foreign workers to Bulgaria. In addition, in the country there is a poor female participation in the labour force.¹

Since the 2015 migration crisis Bulgaria has been transformed into an important migrant transit country.² However, the vast majority of asylum seekers have no intention of remaining in Bulgaria. Many people simply leave without applying for asylum, others who do apply most often continue their journey before their application is processed.³

Part of reason is because there are many obstacles to finding employment in Bulgaria for any migrant, such as language barrier, lack of formal qualifications, no previous working experience⁴ and general distrust among the Bulgarian population.

Bulgaria is the second most highly urbanized country in South East Europe, with 69.5% of Bulgarians living in cities and urban areas. The urbanized composition of labour force reflects the fact that employment is mostly provided by manufacturing, services and the public sector. Of these, the manufacturing industry provides 22.2% of the total employment, followed by retail and repair of motor vehicles with 17.2%. The need for moderate-to-high skilled workers in those sectors leads to increased demand for skilled specialists, but unfortunately the country cannot tap into the migrants' potential because of already mentioned issues.

¹ Government of Canada. (2018). The Labour Market in Bulgaria. Retrieved June 2021 from <https://www.mipex.eu/bulgaria> <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/romania-roumanie/market-facts-faits-sur-le-marche/0002297.aspx?lang=eng>

² Caritas Sofia. (2019). Refugee Women and the labour market in Bulgaria. Retrieved June 2021 from <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/refugee-women-and-the-labour-market-in-bulgaria>

³ *ibidem*

⁴ *ibidem*

2. Employers' Perspectives in Supporting Labour Integration of TCN women - Bulgaria

The Employers' Perspectives in Supporting Labour Integration of TCN women in Bulgaria was recorded in two parts. First, an online questionnaire was shared with employers, managers, business owners etc. The last question of the survey asked the stakeholder if they would like to participate in a focus group on labour integration of migrant women with other employers and business owners and invited those interested to leave contact information. 2 stakeholders expressed interested in taking part in the focus group. Following the questionnaire, we contacted them and organized an online meeting in order to collect the employers' view on the labour market integration of TCN women and to exchange good practices. Below detailed analysis of the results can be found.

2.1. Survey on employer's perspective

Eleven participants took part in the questionnaire in Bulgaria, and they represent business owners (27,3%), employers (27,3%), entrepreneurs (18,2%), and other (27,3%).

72.7% of the participants stated that they don't have any previous experience in hiring immigrant women, while 27.3% (3 participants) answered positively. The 3 participants described that they have experience hiring both immigrants and TCN women, as well as personnel from Latin America.

Question nr. 4 asked the stakeholders about the challenges they think migrant women face at the job market in Bulgaria. It was an open question and some very interesting answers were given, such as:

- "Language barrier and social integration".
- "The language".
- "Discrimination".
- "Language and culture barrier".
- "Lack of understanding between the two parties – migrant women and employers, due to language and culture barriers".
- The fact that in Bulgaria "refugees find it difficult to obtain status. And women from third countries come through intermediaries and are usually taken a lot of money to be able to come, and have to wait 4-5 months for a permit".



- “Discrimination and racism”.
- “Health insurance, kindergartens and schools”.
- “Language barrier”.
- “Cultural differences or prejudices and language barrier”.

The replies indicate that they employers are aware of some of the disadvantages and barriers that migrant women face in Bulgaria. The responses emphasise the lack of knowledge of the local language, discrimination and the culture barrier as the main elements of inequality. However, two of the given replies also indicate problem on an administrative and national level – namely the long waiting period for obtaining a work permit and residence status and the lack of health insurance, kindergartens and schools for families and immigrant mothers.

The administrative obstacles in Bulgaria make it even more difficult for migrant and TCN women to enter the labour market in Bulgaria, as in order to be solved, one must be fluent in the local language or seek help from mediator since often time the administration doesn’t provide services in English.

Regarding question nr. 5 “Do you think cultural difference could be an obstacle for migrant women accessing the job market at your country?”, 63,6% of the respondents answered positively, while 27,3% said that it is possible it has an impact on accessing the labour market. Actually, in the some of the answers that were given to the previous question, we see that’s some LMS believe that culture barriers are an obstacle to accessing the job market in Bulgaria.

Concerning the next question “Which of the following skills do you think a migrant woman has to have in order to be considered as an eligible candidate for a position at your company?” we see that employers value the most:

- being motivated and taking initiatives (81,8%).
- and show desire for learning and improving (81,8%).

Being able to work full-time in mixed-gender teams (63,6%) is also important and corresponds to some of the obstacles we found TCN women experience in Bulgaria as culture shock. Particularly because refugee women seeking employment may have expectations which make finding a job more difficult, such as working in a female only environment or having a part time job.⁵

In addition, having some knowledge of the local language is also strongly desired skill (63,6%).

⁵ *ibidem*

Regarding the question “Does your company have a Gender Equality Policy?” 72,7% (8 participants) confirm that their company has an equality plan, as opposed to 27,3% (3 participants) who say they do not.

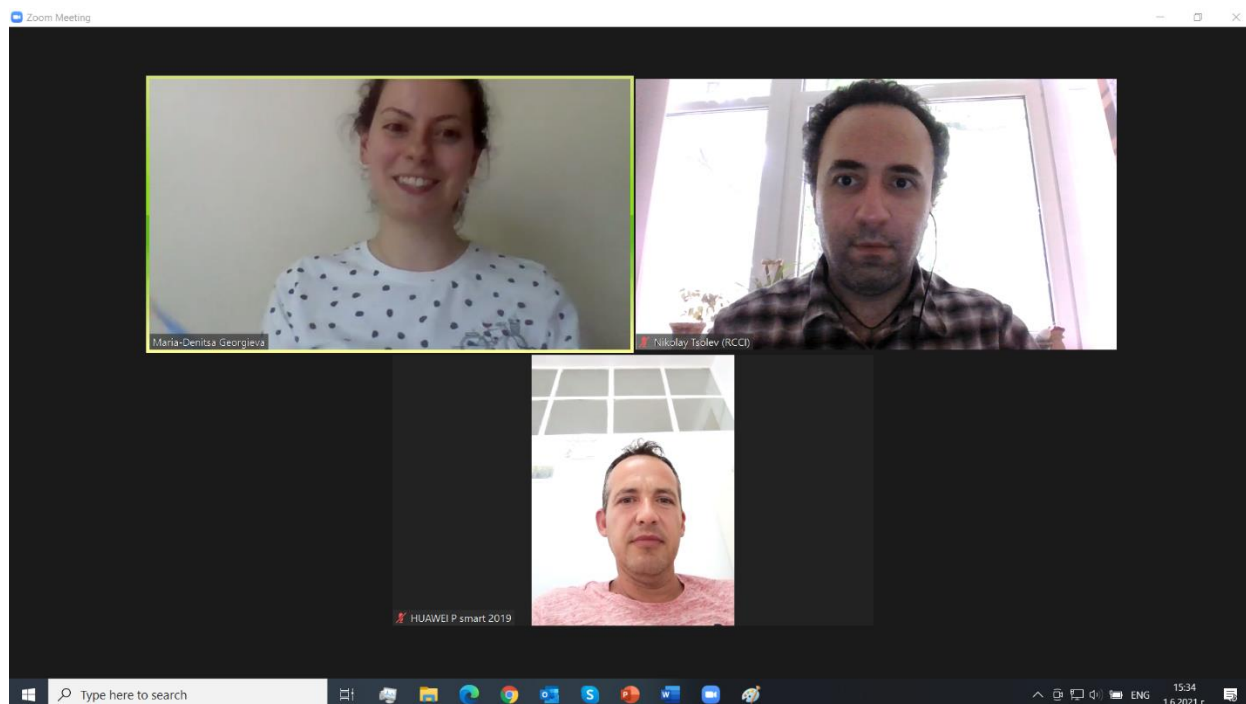
Concerning their involvement in i-Welcome project activities, 72,7% of the respondents stated that they may be interested in offering assistance or a job shadowing program to migrant women in their company and 27,3% gave a positive answer.

Regarding their participation in a focus group with other entrepreneurs on the labour inclusion of migrant women, 81,8% (9 participants) have stated that they are not interested in taking part in the focus group, while 18,2% (2 participants) have answered positively and gave their contact details.



2.2. Focus group

The 2 respondents that provided their contact details in the survey, were invited to attend to the focus group. The focus group was organized virtually via Zoom on 1st June 2021. However, due to unforeseen issue with one of the participants, the focus group was conducted with only one of the participants, Mr. Slavi Slavov from Prolet Ltd.



Initially, a short presentation of the project aims and objectives was delivered, followed by a discussion on key themes such as:

- Recruiting third country nationality women;
- Offering job shadowing programs (giving the opportunity to a migrant woman to shadow another employee who is already doing the job and learn how to work this way);
- Challenges that prevent TCN women's integration on the job market.

On recruiting TCN women Mr. Slavov shared that they not only hire personnel, but they also provided Bulgarian language classes and housing for a family of seven. The company has a learning centre, where they teach and train women on skills needed for the profession (Prolet Ltd. is a sewing company). When asked to elaborate a bit more, Mr. Slavov said that due to the chances in the educational system in Bulgaria, sewing is not very much desired choice of studies,



therefore many companies have to have their own learning centres and to be able to offer training on the spot, like in the case of Prolet Ltd.

However, a serious obstacle for entering the labour market are the administrative difficulties regarding obtaining a residence status and work permit. The administrative difficulties in Bulgaria create difficulties for both migrants and refugees who want to enter the labour market and for employers that are willing to hire TCN personnel.

The state-level obstacles regarding hiring a TCN personnel make it unattractive for employers. In the case of Bulgaria, TCN people have to take days off work every 3 months, look for a translator that can accompany them and spend hours (and sometimes days) on bureaucracy. There are cases of people from TCN countries that have been living and working in Bulgaria for 6 years, speaking well Bulgarian and still not having obtained a status or being allowed to apply for a citizenship.

Even when TCN people want to, for example, obtain a driving licence, they can sign for the driving course, pass the test, but cannot obtain the licence itself since they haven't received a residence status. For job positions where driving is part of them, the lack of a driving licence is yet another obstacle to entering the job market.

It happens so, that sometimes manager and employer accompany refugees and migrants when they have appointments to reapply for a status and guarantee for the, however, a residence status is still not given.

Mr. Slavov told us that refugees and migrants are very positive people, despite the obstacles they have face and are still facing. He expressed his regrets that there weren't any other employers joining us on the focus group, because he believed that sharing Prolet Ltd.'s experience with hiring TCN personnel can inspire others to do so too.

In conclusion he suggested that bilateral partner contacts between the states of origin and the host states are signed, so that the recognition of studies, previous work experience and obtaining a status is easier.

Following the focus group, we contacted Mr. Slavi Slavov via email with one more question, asking him if when the company first decided to hire migrants, there were employees who were against working with migrants? And if so, how did the company solved this problem? To which he replied that a lot of communication and explanation was needed in order to inform the people about why refugees are needed and how they will contribute to their and the company's well-being.

3. Existing Job shadowing opportunities

There are very limited options for job shadowing in Bulgaria on national level, and most companies, who are willing to develop such activities are usually developing their own plans and courses. The most recognized option available is the Erasmus+ KA1 action, but it's mainly aimed at students in universities and schools, and is overall not extremely popular.

Job shadowing for non-Bulgarian workers, especially women from third countries, is practically non-existent on institutional or non-governmental level. There are limited number of companies, which are offering such activities, but they are rarely supported by the institutions, and most of the time are actively hindered when trying to employ third-country workers (as noted by our focus group participants).

There is one NGO in particular, which is also recognized on national level, that deals with the issues of the migrant women in the country – the Council of refugee women in Bulgaria. However, they are focusing on social and humanitarian issues, documentation and legal status of the migrants, and rarely engage in activities concerning the labour market or job opportunities.

Another organisation, that is concerned with migrants' issues, is Caritas – an international group for charity and social service, that occasionally deals with labour opportunities for migrants. However, most of their Bulgarian activities are concentrated in the capital Sofia, and can rarely influence the labour market outside the big cities, where the unemployment is already high.

4. Support measures for TCN women's employability

There are several support measures aimed at enhancing TCN women's integration in the Bulgarian labour market.

Support measure 1	
Name	The Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria
Description (100 words)	The Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria is an association founded in 2003 in Sofia by nine women who came from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Linda Awanis is the current Chair of the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria. The association helps all refugees and asylum seekers in the process of their integration in Bulgarian society.

Key Stakeholders/ Provider	The Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria
Level (Organisational, Regional, Local, National)	National / regional level
Type (Digital Skills, Professional Skills etc.)	Humanitarian aid; professional and social skills
Link/ Website	https://crw-bg.org/en

Support measure 2

Name	Caritas Sofia's Migration and Integration Department
Description (100 words)	Caritas Sofia provides comprehensive services to aid effective adaptation and integration of asylum-seeking people refugees, and third country nationals.
Key Stakeholders/ Provider	Caritas Sofia
Level (Organisational, Regional, Local, National)	National / regional level
Type (Digital Skills, Professional Skills etc.)	Professional and social skills; access social and health services, education and employment
Link/ Website	https://www.caritas-sofia.org/en/groups/refugees-and-asylum-seekers

Support measure 3

Name	Bulgarian council on refugees and migrants
Description (100 words)	An association of organisations acting in the field of asylum and migration in Bulgaria
Key Stakeholders/ Provider	Bulgarian council on refugees and migrants
Level (Organisational, Regional, Local, National)	National level
Type (Digital Skills, Professional Skills etc.)	Professional and social skills
Link/ Website	https://bcm-bg.org/en/

Support measure 4

Name	St Anna Integration Centre for Refugees and Migrants in Sofia
Description (100 words)	Civil society organization acting in the field of asylum and migration in Bulgaria
Key Stakeholders/ Provider	Caritas Sofia
Level (Organisational, Regional, Local, National)	Regional level
Type (Digital Skills, Professional Skills etc.)	Professional and social skills; humanitarian aid; counselling; translation and consultation; Bulgarian language trainings
Link/ Website	https://migrantlife.bg/st-anna-center-for-refugee-and-migrant-integration-cc

5. Conclusion/Summary

There are several NGOs working in the field of integration in Bulgaria and there are employers who are willing to help and support they employees through the administrative procedures involved in obtaining a residence status. However, despite the efforts by non-governmental organizations and the private sector regarding migrant integration and inclusion there are many issues to be solved, including stronger involvement of the state.

A serious obstacle for entering the labour market are the administrative difficulties regarding obtaining a residence status and work permit. The administrative difficulties in Bulgaria create difficulties for both migrants and refugees who want to enter the labour market and for employers that are willing to hire TCN personnel.

When it comes to achieving social and labour inclusion of migrant women, we see that besides the administrative difficulties, they face other obstacles such as language and culture barriers, discrimination and prejudices.

6. Glossary of terms

LMS – Labour Market Stakeholder

TCN – Third Country National

Job Shadowing - a type of job training in which a new employee, or an employee desiring to become familiar with a different job, follows and observes a trained and experienced employee.

7. References

1. Caritas Sofia, Refugee Women and the labour market in Bulgaria
<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/refugee-women-and-the-labour-market-in-bulgaria>
2. Government of Canada, The Labour Market in Bulgaria
<https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/romania-roumanie/market-facts-faits-sur-le-marche/0002297.aspx?lang=eng>

