

SESSION 4: Building tools for Labour INT.

GROUP 3: AT WORK. How can social partners cooperate to identify and remove barriers on the workplace?



Background note (drafted by ILO-Brussels)

1. Social dialogue as a tool to help identify barriers to a smooth integration of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection

Both the ILO and the EU promote the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment at the workplace in their legal instruments and policy recommendations. These principles are deemed essential for the smooth integration of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection at the workplace. Yet, beyond these legal obligations, embracing cultural diversity at the workplace and providing equal opportunity for all is not always an easy process. It might require overcoming prejudices and stereotypes in order to ensure that all workers, regardless of their origin, can realize their full potential and collaborate amiably with their peers. Further, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection might have specific needs to be addressed, not least in relation to the acquisition of soft and hard skills and competences. Social partners, through their structured dialogue, have a key role to play in this endeavor.

Gathering information from both refugees and local workers regarding diversity at the workplace would help identify possible barriers to their smooth integration. Trade unions and management can gather this information either separately or together. Possible topics to be covered could include:

- Statistical data on the current composition of the workforce. An ethnic profile of the workforce indicates where refugees and persons with subsidiary protection are employed in the organisation and provides a baseline against which progress can be measured.
- Staff attitude vis-à-vis refugees and persons with subsidiary protection and the existence of stereotypes and/or prejudice among both local and refugee workers
- Existence of specific religious or cultural needs of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection (dietary requirements, religious traditions, dress codes etc)
- Level of understanding of local language
- Language style used in interactions with colleagues and/or supervisors both by local workers and refugees
- On-the-job assessment of the skills and competences of the refugees or persons with subsidiary protection

Ensuring that refugees benefit from equal treatment and opportunity in recruitment and promotion is essential for their smooth integration in the labour market. Social dialogue could help to ensure that workplace policies support diversity in the workforce. Social dialogue could help in:

- eliminating testing requirements not necessary for the job
- reviewing interview practices that may be (culturally) biased
- recognizing (foreign) credentials, prior learning, and work experience,
- reviewing recruitment procedures to ensure non-discriminatory treatment,
- reviewing promotion procedures to ensure non-discriminatory treatment,

- including refugees and persons with subsidiary protection on selection boards
- reviewing training policies to ensure equal opportunities
- establishing positive discrimination mechanisms to support disadvantage groups

Facilitating validation of skills and recognition of qualifications is crucial to ensure that individuals' skills are used to their full potential. This is particularly important for refugees, who may not have necessary documentary evidence of their previous learning and qualifications, may have had their education interrupted or may not have participated in formal education. At the workplace level, initiatives aimed at improving refugees' employability could include:

- On-the-job recognition of competences and of informal skills on which to define further training needs
- Combining language and technical on-the-job training
- Developing soft skills training for refugees and persons with subsidiary protection adapted to their cultural background
- Establishing time-bound pre-employment or job preparation period
- Establishing and/or developing workplace learning centres
- Providing paid time off for workers to learn

2. Tools to be developed by social partners at the workplace to remove barriers

Based on the experiences taking place in the EU Member States, social partners could design and develop the following tools:

- **Integration plans** covering non-discrimination, smooth integration and the promotion of diversity at the workplace. These plans should include concrete deliverables, be regularly monitored and evaluated in terms of their capacity to reach their objectives. Such plan should allocate responsibilities to ensure that all managers and workers are familiar with what is expected of them. They should be supported by the top management and clearly communicated to all workers in order to foster a positive social climate at the workplace.
- **Collective bargaining instruments:** the social partners can contribute considerably to refugees' smooth integration by including in collective labour agreements common concerns and common actions to tackle them. Inclusion of specific language on antidiscrimination and promotion of equal opportunity for all has become increasingly common in industrial relations agreements across Western Europe. It is key that adequately prepared representatives of refugees participate in the collective bargaining process.
- **Campaigns** advocating for equal treatment and the elimination of stereotypes and/or prejudices have proved to be useful tools. Trade unions are commonly running campaigns to combat xenophobic behaviour in the workplace. Awareness raising activities to ensure that workers with a different cultural background are aware of their rights are often run by trade unions. In some cases these campaigns are organized at the initiative of both workers and management

- **Training** sessions for both local and refugee workers might facilitate the smooth integration workers with a different cultural background and the management of a diverse workforce. Training session should provide information on the rights and obligations of all workers, the fight against discrimination at the workplace and the benefits of a diverse workforce. Training should also aimed at eliminating negative stereotyping and discriminatory practices.
- **Redress mechanisms** are important to ensure the implementation of equal treatment and diversity management policies. Procedures to deal with allegations of discrimination or discriminatory harassment in the workplace should be put in place. The establishment of “early warning” or referral systems with counselling can help solve problems related to discrimination issues at an early stage. Whistle-blower and the introduction of disciplinary measures against racism and discrimination within the organisation are other options.

The Labour INT action that is closer to the workplace is the DGB Bildungswerk workpackage.

Outcomes of the working group

Identify 2 recommendations to prepare the workplace to include people with a refugee background	
Identify 2 priorities for national Labour INT actions and that could be developed during the national focus meetings	