



## SOME ASPECTS OF CONSTRAINTS IN THE LABOUR MARKET FOR IMMIGRANTS

Employing immigrant workforce has become an important strategy for organizations in Europe and all over the world. However, ethnic background can affect how smooth or challenging an entry to the labour market can be. Prejudice and racism barriers are complex and emotionally hard because they are beyond the individual's control.

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The European Commission, EC, (2020) expresses that migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background play a key role in the European economy and society. Employing an immigrant workforce has become an important strategy for organizations in Europe and all over the world (Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Maj 2020). The EC points out that the challenge of integration and inclusion is particularly relevant for migrants, not only newcomers but sometimes also for third-country nationals who might have naturalized. Integration and inclusion can and should be a win-win process, benefiting the whole society. The EC stresses that integration has to be a two-way process whereby migrants and EU citizens with migrant background are offered help with integration and they in turn make an active effort to become integrated.

### Entry to the labour markets

Integration occurs in individual's different spheres of life. It can be a long process for immigrants to feel deep attachment and belonging to the host country. According to Modesti and Talamo (2021), employment, in particular, is a component that influences other attributes of social integration, such

as economic self-sufficiency, a deep approach with the local culture, getting connections to new and old members of the community, a sense of self-reliance and a chance to plan the future. Employment is not just getting a job but also having an entry to the labour market and work corresponding to person's educational level and earlier work experience acquired prior to migration. Kyhä (2011) has categorized the beginning of highly educated immigrants' careers in Finland into different types: stable and stabilizing career corresponding to education, mixed career and declining career partially corresponding to education, as well as entry career and unemployment, not corresponding to education. Her respondents were usually employed temporarily and in the short-term. Additionally, careers comprised substantial periods of unemployment and education.

Entry to the labour market does not guarantee permanent participation. Labour market participation can be permanent or temporary by nature, i.e. persons may exit or enter the labour market at different times. For example, a study by Lyytinen and Toom (2019) found that the pathway of youth with a refugee background from education to the labour market has not been a linear one, but rather

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included several phases of education, work traineeships, unemployment and employment. Even a good education does not always guarantee immigrants work in a new country because an obtained degree or know-how may not be easily transferable from one country to another.

Immigrants' ethnic background can affect how smooth or challenging the entry to and staying in the labour market can be. Their success in the labour market can be looked at in terms of whether their ethnic background is evaluated in a positive or a negative way. A positive evaluation would be inspired by aspects of diversity management, i.e. that a multicultural workforce contributes both directly and indirectly to the success of a company. A negative evaluation is often evoked by ethnocentrism, i.e. the upgrading of natives' merits at the expense of foreign qualifications, which can lead to incidents of discrimination (Spence 1974; Ryding Zink 2001).

Prejudice and racism are according to Binhas and Himi (2021) barriers which are the most complex and emotionally difficult because they are beyond the individual's control. Their study of Ethiopian-Israeli women in academia showed that these women's skin colour and its prominent presence in the space as part of their identity was an issue they always confronted, i.e. from childhood, at school and as women with academic and professional status they encountered prejudice. Sometimes it was exposure to that prejudice which contributed to the development of ambition, with a desire to prove themselves. The research identified that inner strengths, optimism, high personal abilities and belief in their skills enabled them to deal with the challenges they faced. They were also role-models for others in their community to achieve goals and overcome constraints.

Among immigrants there are many, who are outside of labour force or working on part-time basis, for example housewives. Elo, Aman and Täube's (2020) research showed that female migrants without children were fully devoting themselves to work, whereas immigrant women with children had to work less due to child-care responsibilities, and in order to maintain the work-home balance with their families. They had often another responsibility, i.e. take care of the elderly in migrant families.

## Demand of labour and recruitment process

In the demand-side of the labour market, some of the main concerns are whether or not the immigrant's language qualifications are as stated in the application or insufficient for the applied job. Kristinsson and Sigurdardottir (2020) point out that human resources managers face remarkable uncertainties when hiring immigrants, which can lead to statistical discrimination. Statistical discrimination occurs when the employer is unaware or unsure of the immigrant's productivity, work experience and how to evaluate it. In addition, due to feeling uncertain about the value of foreign qualifications, many recruiters are hesitant to employ immigrants. Recruiters might be unable to see the immigrants' so-called hidden competence resources and may thus act as the big obstacle facing immigrant candidates. There are also employers' prejudices caused by fears, language problems and different customs. Instead, similarities in culture and values might become the main criteria of selection in the recruitment process (Heikkilä & Jaakkola 2000; Ryding Zink 2001; Lyytinen & Toom 2019).

According to the International Labour Organization (2010), labour market discrimination against persons of migrant origin, including second and third generations, is pronounced in Europe and North America. Young applicants of immigrant origin have to apply for four to five times as many jobs as natives with equivalent skills, education and experience to obtain positive responses. Ahmad's (2020) research findings strongly indicate the continuing salience of ethnicity in securing employment opportunities in the Finnish labour market. Employers significantly prefer Finnish applicants over ethnic candidates, and within ethnic applicants, they prefer candidates with a European name over a non-European name. According to Elo, Aman and Täube (2020), the hidden structural discrimination by Finnish employers regarding migrants is not limited only to the first generation; it continues to affect even the second-generation diaspora who have completed their education in the local educational institutions and have local language skills, but who have features that are still perceived as foreign (see Kraal et al. 2009).

## Self-realization and dignity

Employment and labour market inclusion are some of the significant dimensions where a person, whether a native or with an immigrant-background, can feel self-realization and fulfillment. It

is the realization of a person becoming what he/she is capable to be. This is also connected to the concept of feeling dignity. Hicks (2011) classifies ten essential elements of dignity which include acceptance of identity; inclusion, i.e. make others feel that they belong, whatever the relationships; safety; acknowledgement; recognition, i.e. validate others for their talents; fairness, i.e. treat people justly, with equality and without discrimination or injustice; benefit of the doubt, i.e. treat people as trustworthy; understanding; independence; and accountability. These apply also in the labour market. ■

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