



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
MINISTRY FOR EQUALITY,  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION



# Employment

## TURNING THE TABLES

Facilitated by African Media Association Malta  
Prepared by: Shaun Grech (ADITUS)

2021



**Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020**

This project is part-financed by the European Union  
Co-financing rate: 75% EU Funds 25% Beneficiary Funds

**Sustainable Management of Migration Flows**





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A circular illustration on the left side of the page features stylized profiles of four diverse individuals: a man with short brown hair, a woman with red hair in a bun, a woman with dark curly hair, and a man with short dark hair. The background within the circle is composed of warm, overlapping colors like orange, yellow, and red. The overall page background is a solid blue color.

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# Summary

**This research is aimed at supporting the empowerment of migrants to directly tackle integration related matters through the Turning the Tables initiative, a migrant-led process funded through the Learning-Exchanging-Integrating project. This project is co-financed by EU Funds under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020, and in collaboration with the Human Rights Directorate (National Funds). The content of the publications does not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or the Human Rights Directorate.**

This report summarises the key findings and outputs from the conference on employment, part of the migrant-led project, Turning the Tables project, coordinated by African Media Association Malta (AMAM). AMAM brought together relevant stakeholders, migrant communities and the general public to brainstorm and debate each of the 5 selected topics: Education; Employment; Documentation; Detention; and Political Rights. The main aim was to facilitate dialogue and learning. The aim of this conference was to reflect on and discuss issues and concerns in employment for migrants, understand key challenges and opportunity areas, and to explore possible and realistic solutions to address these challenges within the Maltese context. Feedback from the conference presented a situation whereby seriously contending with migration within the context of employment and integration is far from superfluous in Malta, given the fact that the presence of migrants within the workforce continues to grow, that migrants constitute a substantial proportion of all workers, and importantly, they are of critical importance in sustaining the growth

of the Maltese economy, alongside contributing to the socio-cultural landscape. Migrant workers are not fleeting and many are here to stay. This situation, though, meets a context that still struggles to accommodate and make adaptations to ensure fair and equitable treatment and working conditions, where rights are known, respected, monitored and enforced at all times. It was noted that while some positive changes have happened over the past years, multiple, complex and extensive barriers continue to be faced by migrants, in particular third-country nationals and asylum seekers, barriers affecting the process of seeking and maintaining employment alongside working conditions remain serious problems. This situation has become worse in recent years with the economic growth, translating into very dubious and unfair hiring and employment practices. The obstacles are multiple, ranging from a convoluted legal system; lack of comprehensive and accessible information; confusion and not understanding job market and legal requirements; dramatic costs (e.g. in obtaining work permits, medical tests etc.); discrimination and racism;

exploitative working conditions; abuse by recruiters and employers; lack of language skills and training; low levels of education; problems in recognizing formal certificates; and unsafe work practices among others. For a number of Asian workers brought over by agencies, debts are rife, and many find themselves locked in bonded labour in work they did not sign up for, earning a fraction of what they were promised. Findings from the conference illustrate a very complex and diverse map that is not easy to capture and cannot be generalised. Different migrants encounter different sets of barriers. However, the premise was that migrant workers are almost invariably discriminated against, third-country nationals and refugees in particular, caught in a spiral of erratic employment patterns, unfair working conditions, low wages, and relative poverty. A number of 'solutions'

or opportunity areas were also discussed, suggesting action has to happen on multiple fronts, including: changes in policies (including within companies); centralising information and making it accessible, easy to understand and navigate by everyone; providing training to both employees and employers; working on a system that recognises skills and not only certificates; providing tuition in language skills and literacy as soon as is possible; and providing financial assistance with obtaining work permits or accessing further training. These are only some of the 'solutions' discussed, which are only possible if there is information, strategy and resources committed to a job market that is human, fair, and open to all indiscriminately, which at the moment is not.

**This research is aimed at supporting the empowerment of migrants to directly tackle integration related matters through the Turning the Tables initiative**





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# 1. Introduction:

## The situation of migrant employment in Malta

Employment is and remains a key theme as we speak about migration, not only because it is a main component in providing the financial conditions to attend to basic needs, but also because it is a crucial component in the process of integration<sup>1</sup>. Some illustrate how employment of migrants, and the conditions under which they work, are also an indicator of integration in action<sup>2</sup>. Employment of migrants is critical for both the host community and the migrants, and this was discussed by participants at multiple points, because:

- It objectively fills gaps in the national labour market, implying that migrant labour is far from superfluous. Instead, it props up the national economy by providing the labour supply required for a range of industries, while supporting economic growth.
- It contributes to economic growth, including through the payment of taxes when work is regularised as well as generating income earning opportunities for others.
- It provides financial stability for both migrants as well as the host community.
- It allows for consumption, not only of basic needs.
- It opens opportunities for interaction, friendships and socialisation and to feel part of a community.

- It allows for learning with and through colleagues.
- It has strong psychological dimensions, including well-being, confidence and a sense of belonging.
- It opens the possibility to rebuild one's future and move forward, especially after periods of disruption, turbulence and trauma (e.g. for refugees).
- It opens possibilities to further education by providing the economic and material resources.
- Employment contributes to positive perceptions of migrants within the host community, that is contributing to social and economic and cultural development of the country and hence is a positive impetus for integration.

Participants noted on the other hand how exclusion from or peripheral presence on the labour market constitutes substantial problems for migrants, including: material deprivation and even poverty; social marginalisation; isolation and exclusion from mainstream society; loss of skills; lessening of potential contributions (not only economic) to the host country; psychological impacts, including loss of motivation, reduced well-being and increased mental health issues; and importantly impacts opportunities for integration<sup>3</sup>.

The subject of employment vis-à-vis migration has become increasingly important over the past years, in particular in light of Malta's economic growth (with now confirmed dubious sustainability) prior to the

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1 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/integration-labour-market\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/integration-labour-market_en); Dimitrov, A. and Angelov, G. (2017) Refugee Integration in the EU: Challenges and Economic Impact. Economic Alternatives, 2017, Issue 4, pp. 584-600.

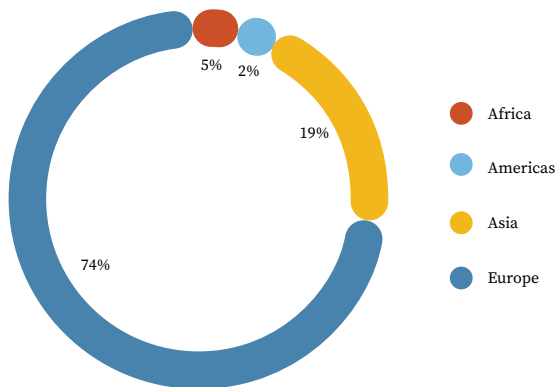
2 JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation (2016) Dari? Refugee voices on making Malta home. Malta: JRS, Aditus and Integra

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3 The impacts are widely discussed. See for example EC (2019) Labour Market Integration of Third Country Nationals in EU Member States. Brussels: EC

global pandemic. The need for migrant labour increased dramatically over the past years, but, as participants confirmed, the Maltese context still struggles with the presence of the migrant figure, for multiple reasons, including the absence of a comprehensive, nuanced and resourced integration strategy that should have been in place years ago, together with outright racism and xenophobia. Indeed, as Nimfuhr et al.<sup>4</sup> put it, migrant labour stands at the intersection of requirements for ‘integration... whilst simultaneously denying them access to mechanisms leading to integration’. However, what is clear, is that Malta’s economy has become increasingly dependent on migrant labour, in particular that provided by third-country nationals, and the situation is unlikely to change any time soon (see Figure 1 below):

**Figure 1:** Share of migrant labour in Malta. Source: JobsPlus (2019)<sup>5</sup>



- 4 Nimfuhr, S. et al. (2019) Denying, While Demanding Integration: An Analysis of the Integration Paradox in Malta and Refugees’ Coping Strategies. In S. Hinger and R. Schweitzer. *Politics of (Dis) Integration* (pp 161-181). US: Springer
- 5 JobsPlus (2019) Labour market trends in 2019. Hal Far: JobsPlus

In 2019 alone, the number of third-country nationals entering Malta to seek employment boomed, adding unprecedented pressure on the Employment Licences Unit. A total of 45,942 applications were processed during the year, marking a 32% increase over the previous one. Of these, 42,751 licenses were issued, of which 33,822 were recommended to ID Malta for single permits. The latter objected to 2,041 applications. Other applications were then withdrawn by the employer, expired or were still being processed (JobsPlus, 2019). Around 45% of employers (possibly more) have at least one foreign worker<sup>6</sup>.

An earlier report<sup>7</sup> published in the same year (2019) shows how 87.6% of work licences in 2019 were issued to third-country nationals, followed by asylum seekers (4.7%), persons with Subsidiary Protection (3.5%), Temporary Humanitarian Protection (2.3%), refugees (1%) and long-term residents (0.3%). The report goes on to note how the licenses issued to asylum seekers reflect the growing numbers of refugees with protection elsewhere (generally Italy) coming to work in Malta. While these beneficiaries of protection in other countries are not permitted to work in Malta, upon arrival, they are still able to lodge an asylum application and until they receive notification that their case is inadmissible, are permitted to work in Malta as asylum seekers. The report goes on to claim that the figure of 4.7% is a positive percentage, indicating that a high number of asylum seekers are in legal employment while their asylum claims are being processed.

- 6 Times of Malta. Malta will need another 13,000 foreign workers this year. 20th January 2019 <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/malta-will-need-another-13000-foreign-workers-this-year.699691>
- 7 UNHCR Malta (2019) Working Together: A UNHCR report on the employment of refugees and asylum seekers in Malta. Malta: UNHCR

The landscape is changing, though, also when it comes to views of Malta by migrants. For some, Malta is gradually shifting from being a transit country (e.g. for refugees) or a temporary arrangement (e.g. for some third-country nationals) to a place where they may well have to settle in. This may not be so much a choice as much as a question of being stranded here: neighbouring countries may not offer great work opportunities and may be worse off, including now with the impacts of the global pandemic<sup>8</sup>. The government, the private sector, NGOs, mainstream media and others continue to echo how migrant workers are required across levels to fill labour gaps if Malta is to remain competitive<sup>9</sup>. To emphasise, therefore, the migrant worker is neither superfluous nor marginal, he/she is a critical component in the economic wheel and accommodations are not an act of charity, but one of economic convenience.

It is also a truth that the job landscape has changed into a multicultural one, as indeed it has been in most other countries. Malta, however, has a lot of catching up to do, and has not been quick enough. There is indeed a long way to go, until opportunities and rights are levelled across the board, and indeed the starting point is acknowledging and accepting the migrant figure as one that is here to stay.

Evaluating the situation is complex and once again heterogenous, depending on which migrants we are referring to, and it would be problematic to try and generalise. However, and sustained by the overall tone of the conference, what emerges clearly is that the

situation confronting migrants, in particular third-country nationals and refugees and asylum seekers in the area of employment, is marked by hardship, including: discriminatory wages; rampant exploitation and abuse; precarity and lack of security; racism and xenophobia; and also high job mobility (compromising skill building and training)<sup>10</sup>. For a substantial number, especially asylum seekers and refugees, chronic unemployment is also a solid reality<sup>11</sup>.

Some are indeed more unequal than others, including within the migrant population. Feedback from the conference highlights how third-country nationals and refugees in particular are seen as bodies of exploitation – cheap labour. Overall, women are heavily disadvantaged when it comes to participation in the labour market, because of gender-based discrimination alongside shouldering the responsibilities of care<sup>12</sup>. While these are indeed different realities, what binds them together is that they are regularly subjected to unfair and unequal treatment in a context where laws may be unclear, are not enforced, and where the migrant worker continues to be erroneously seen as a transient stranger and hence easily replaceable.

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8 It is also noted that the costs of re-migration are high for TCNs, with the implication that they act as a factor prolonging stay in Malta. This is especially the case for unskilled workers- see Borg, I. (2019) *The Length of Stay of Foreign Workers in Malta*. Malta: Central Bank of Malta)

9 See Borg, I. (2019);

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10 See UNHCR (2019); Vella, S. (2020) *Migrants' Access to Social Protection in Malta*. In Lafleur JM., Vintila D. (eds) *Migration and Social Protection in Europe and Beyond* (Volume 1). IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham; and also Borg (2019)

11 See also Kone, Z. et al. (2019) *Refugees and the UK Labour Market*. Oxford: University of Oxford.

12 UNHCR (2019)

**The situation facing migrants, while diverse, is often rough especially for third-country nationals and asylum seekers**



## 2. Multidimensional problems: from exclusion to marginalisation

The situation facing migrants, while diverse, is often rough especially for third-country nationals and asylum seekers. These narratives, while sometimes known, often go unheard, whether out of fear or lack of support to claim one's rights. Overall, what we see is a range of problems that are multi-dimensional, cut across sectors and areas, that are personal, social, economic, legal, cultural, attitudinal, political, and institutional, among others. They are therefore tough to organise neatly or systematically. Below, I lay these out individually to illustrate their particular dimensions too.

### 2.1 Lack of knowledge and information

One key area that was raised with frequency was that of information and knowledge, to articulate in particular how many, if not most migrant workers, find themselves at a loss when trying to understand and navigate job seeking, job applications and the legal landscape<sup>13</sup>. Overall, there appear to be critical gaps in information and 'information literacy practices and related skills which enable people to access information and to critically evaluate and use information'<sup>14</sup>. Some, in particular refugees, find themselves facing a system that is at best unintelligible, and at worst disabling. There is scarce to no support upon arrival, and no one tells them how

long the process will take (e.g. of getting medical checks, application for a work permit etc.). What cuts across all migrant workers who arrive in Malta is the urgent need to start working as soon as possible to try and pull through, which means that time is of the essence.

Looking for and trying to start work is no easy or straightforward process. Many refugees may not know where to look for work or what the process of applying for a job requires (see below). For example, refugees may not know what a CV is, or have no idea of the interviewing process. Much of the confusion arises when it comes to work permits, contracts and the like. Asylum seekers are often not aware that they need a contract to start working, and sometimes neither does the employer, so they end up working illegally. There is tremendous lack of information, in particular information that is centralised, easy to find, accessible, inclusive and user friendly on a range of issues, including:

- how to apply for a job
- how to apply for residence
- how to open a bank account
- legal requirements to work
- how to apply for and obtain a work permit from JobsPlus
- obligations of the employer
- their rights as employees
- pay scales
- social benefits
- leave

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<sup>13</sup> See also EC (2016) European Employment Policy Observatory Synthesis Challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in successfully integrating into the labour market. Luxembourg: EC.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd, A. et al. (2013) Connecting with new information landscapes: information literacy practices of refugees. Journal of Documentation, 69 (1): 121 - 144

Overall, there is a general sense of confusion regarding the correct procedures in applying for a work permit, aggravated by the fact that the links between different types of statuses and their corresponding work permit are not easily understood.

Once in a job, other information is lacking or fragmented, including entitlements, and how and where to report rights violations and cases of discrimination. One participant commented how lack of clarity and partial fragmentation is augmented in the case of third-country nationals who may depend on recruiters who may be crooks, who feed a lot of misinformation along the way. Many TCNs also may not have access to WIFI or consistently enough to be able to figure out procedures accurately enough.

The consequence is that obtaining the correct information may happen too late, is arduous and comes at a cost.

## **2.2 Problematic policies and practices**

These are many and transcend macro-policies to include meso- and micro-dimensions:

### **2.2.1 EU registration laws and the growing black market in labour**

Problematic EU registration laws such as the Dublin Regulation (No 604-2013)<sup>15</sup> mean that those registered in Italy cannot have a work contract, and instead are forced to resort to working illegally. Refugees with protection in Italy or other European countries are not issued a work permit according to Malta's current policy, and thus end

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<sup>15</sup> The regulation states that the country where an asylum seeker arrives is responsible for fingerprinting and registering them, processing asylum claims, hosting them if granted protection, or deporting them if they are not.

up working without one. This leaves them susceptible to abuse and exploitation or only eligible for certain types of work.

On the other hand, employers are frustrated that despite shortage of workers, there are capable individuals whom they are unable to employ formally. It is common for employers who have already invested in such employees to then discover that they cannot be employed or cannot renew their work permit, meaning loss of investment in training as well as added costs in retraining and rehiring.

### **2.2.2 Cumbersome bureaucracy and convoluted system**

Bureaucracy is the name of the game. From legal requirements that do not quite make sense to a convoluted and long-winded system, migrant workers' lives are often impacted by administrative bottlenecks and delays. These include policies such as the requirement to constantly renew work permits (at a cost every single time), the conditions of which differ with status, long waiting times and no updates. The report by UNHCR Malta<sup>16</sup>, for example, highlights how the renewal of work permits for refugees comes at a cost, the process is cumbersome (sometimes having to apply 2 or 3 times a year), which in turn acts as an economic and administrative disincentive to employ refugees. In other instances, it may become a tool for abuse, including exploitation, or as a number of participants in the conference explained, having migrants work without permits or being pushed to pay for the permits themselves. A new application for a work permit from JobsPlus costs €58, while renewal costs €34. Those present in the conference, explained how

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<sup>16</sup> UNHCR Malta (2019)

sometimes employers are deterred from applying for the permits because of their relatively short duration and the administrative burden perceived to be associated with the application. Similarly, it is taxing for employees, notably refugees, whose employment licences are issued in their own names. The process is even more complex for applications to JobsPlus that arrive through ID Malta (the bulk – over 2500 a month), because when it comes to TCNs, labour market laws become much more complicated, as well as different work arrangements, including single permits. The process is also more costly – EUR150 non-refundable on application, and EUR80 once the license is granted. A secondary employment license carries a further charge of EUR120.

Major problems that emerged pre-COVID-19 when the demand for labour was at a peak, involved delays and bottlenecks at ID Malta to issue single licenses to TCNs. From long waiting times in processing applications to continued requests for more information, one participant commented how ID Malta was plagued by problems including high staff turnover, meaning loss of skills as well as the need to reinitiate applications from scratch when someone new started working there. The participant commented how at the height of the labour demand, ID Malta was just not coping with the applications, including renewals, resulting in stress not only for applicants but also on employers. This impacted

businesses, limiting potential for growth, and indirectly encouraged engagement of people without a permit when the application system was not functioning as it should. For employees, it meant economic as well as psychological hardship.

Finally, a problem enveloping and aggravating all this, is the presence of a convoluted government system, whereby government departments work in silos and there is no synergy between policies and directives and processes, including in the law. The result is chaos and costs for migrants in trying to figure things out. This also includes long lines and waiting times for example at ID Malta, a process which admittedly eased off a bit during COVID-19 when things moved online, but which still excluded those with little or no connectivity. There also appear to be problems in discerning differences in roles and processes between ID Malta and JobsPlus as well as different requirements, documentation, and application processes. While each institution may feel that its own process is straightforward, the reality is that for many migrants dealing with multiple issues at once within an unfamiliar context and little to no mentoring, no amount of simplification is enough in a situation of bureaucratic bewilderment. This also does not include delays for applications that are not filled correctly, including by employers, and which have to be returned. Feedback from participants in this study suggests that

**In other instances, it may become a tool for abuse, including exploitation, or as a number of participants in the conference explained, having migrants work without permits or being pushed to pay for the permits themselves**



even institutions and NGOs tasked with supporting migrants are themselves confused by the bureaucratic system, which is not only fragmented, but is also not centralized, which means that time and effort is incurred trying to figure out who does what and where and what needs to be done. Instructions are not always clear, especially for those applying for a single permit or they are not communicated well and sensitively, and even employers very often cannot understand the process. One participant highlighted how this complexity is witnessed when one person leaves a job for another, and only has a few days to have the new employer apply on his/her behalf. The process is so cumbersome and there is little time, that it may serve as a disincentive to apply for a permit, leaving the migrant worker in a very precarious situation, having left one job and thinking that he/she could start the other one seamlessly.

### 2.2.2. Issues and delays in recognizing certificates

An issue that was raised, was that of obtaining and recognizing certificates from their home country or in other countries. Certification is a major bridge to employment, especially when it comes to skilled or semi-skilled labour<sup>17</sup>. However, there does not seem to be a standard process in how certificates are recognized, appearing to be case-by-case, and some participants felt there is little to no transparency. It is a known fact that refugees may have problems in retrieving their academic qualifications, they may have left them behind when they fled, or the institution conferring the certification

may not be responsive<sup>18</sup>. Obtaining them from the country of origin is laborious and costly, and trying to have these recognised in Malta intensifies the barriers even further. From long waiting times to not recognizing certification, the hurdles are multiple. This becomes even more problematic for those requiring some or other license, for example those working in health care. For others, they quickly find out that the nursing certificate back home is not recognized in Malta, which would involve further training and costs to be certified and obtain a warrant in Malta, which is in turn a major blow. There is indeed an issue whereby foreign certificates may not be recognized, implying for many, starting from ground zero<sup>19</sup>. One participant explained how the NCFHE list of recognised universities does not seem to be regularly updated, given that even globally high-ranking universities in Africa for example are not recognised in Malta, sustaining the erroneous and ill-conceived, if not racist perception, that there could not be such high level and quality educational institutions in African countries.

The process of is also costly, for many involving also the costs of having certificates translated, alongside transportation to and from NCFHE in attempting to solve the issue.

The migrant, while waiting for the certificates to be recognised, either cannot work or must opt for any work. For many, this situation may become extended or result in entrapment in work they are overqualified for. Overqualification was a persistent theme in the conference.

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17 OECD (2018) Engaging with employers in the hiring of refugees: A 10-point multi-stakeholder action plan for employers, refugees, governments and civil society. OECD/UNHCR.

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18 See also Crea, T.M. (2016) Refugee higher education: Contextual challenges and implications for program design, delivery, and accompaniment. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 46, 12-22

19 European Commission (2016) Labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees: Malta, 2016. Brussels: EC.

### 2.2.3 Banking

Bureaucracy and problematic regulations transcend other institutions, notably banks. Opening a bank account in particular is laborious, tough and long-winded, which works as an active barrier in employment alongside risks. One presenter highlighted situations where third-country nationals in fixed jobs were being paid full-time wages and having to stockpile cash because the bank would not open an account for them. The requests for documentation and instructions are hard to understand or even non-sensical. Then, if and once they managed to open an account, they were questioned as to why they had such amounts of cash in hand when they went to deposit, a ridiculous situation by all means, given that they had no other option.

Other problems with banks include the virtual impossibility of obtaining a loan for many migrant workers, impacting issues such as opening one's own business, to simply paying for administrative procedures. This process is made even more difficult by the fact that many lack collateral against which to get a loan.

One participant commented how migrants also encounter barriers in accessing a microfinance loan because, even though they are working full time, they are bound in an exploitative part-time contract, which makes them ineligible. A number are also so poor that they cannot even afford to apply for the ID card or renew it when it expires. All these make accessing such loans an impossibility.

### 2.2.4 Unfair exit terms

As highlighted above, the process of work permits, including their renewal is not only convoluted to many but also involves commitment by the employer.

Unfortunately, as a number of participants expressed, it is not uncommon for third-country nationals to receive a letter from ID Malta telling them they are residing illegally because they have no work permit and are hence requested to leave the country in one day. It is not unusual for this letter to arrive late, causing incredible panic and worry among workers thinking they are working legally, because the employer forgot or did not apply for the permit on time or because of administrative delays. There is little time to make arrangements and to find alternative work, especially in times of COVID-19 where employment opportunities dry up and/or become erratic, and still would not allow enough time to obtain a working permit<sup>20</sup>. While they can seek legal recourse, migrants often do not know this or how to go about it, and are left exposed to stress, worry and insecurity, but also more exploitation.

## 2.3 Prohibitive costs

### 2.3.1 Starting to work and merely survive is expensive

Arriving in Malta and trying to find work is costly. Many third-country nationals do not have a regular salary, but then have to pay ID Malta for the work permit application (EUR280), pay for the vaccines and health screening (some EUR150-200), getting certificates recognised (if needed) and so on. One participant explained how he had paid in excess of EUR500 before even getting started. For those working with food, there is a food handling course to do and pay for, so the process apart from being costly, may also be long until one can start working and earning

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://lovinmalta.com/news/foreign-healthcare-workers-living-on-work-permit-in-malta-get-automatic-three-month-extension-amid-covid-19-concerns/>



## Not all migrants come with the same baggage, and indeed some come with more desperate circumstances than others

gainfully. For third-country nationals, they need legal residence, so this means payment for rent and deposit. For those with children, these costs become exorbitant, having to deal with the costs of schooling, food and so on.

The critical factor here is that upfront money is needed but is scarce, because there generally are no sources of loans (formal or informal), and savings are few (because many would have spent all they have on getting to Malta), so many just want to get working immediately to simply cover the costs. There is therefore scarce choice in practice as to what they end up doing as work, which also means that it opens the door to a long trail of exploitation in work they are merely pushed into. As one presenter in the conference stated: 'someone who moved from a context where it was not great, and before the word 'go' is crippled from the start, spending before even earning anything'.

### 2.3.2 Exorbitant rent and living costs meet low wages

The costs of living impinge on labour patterns, not least in the pressure they exert, as well as what migrant workers need to make in order to be able to simply get by. Rising prices in rent and high costs of living have garnered some attention, because they mean impoverished lives as well as homelessness, and an incessant need and

pressure to work, leaving little time for anything else<sup>21</sup>. This is especially the case in a context where wages, including the minimum wage, are too low compared to the cost of living, and for migrants, in particular third-country nationals and asylum seekers, are often exploitative (see below). Participants emphasised how unless rent prices are capped and rental contracts are regulated, the situation is unlikely to change any time soon. Homelessness, in turn, impinges on possibilities of finding work if a person does not have fixed residence. Rental arrangements themselves need to be scrutinized given there is so much abuse by landlords, cheating, including charging for utilities without ever showing tenants a bill.

### 2.4 Personal dimensions

Not all migrants come with the same baggage, and indeed some come with more desperate circumstances than others, and the Maltese context may be even more unfamiliar for some than for others. Participants in the conference articulated a number of personal dimensions impacting access to employment, but also the conditions they face:

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<sup>21</sup> See Aditus Foundation and JRS (2016) *Struggling to survive: An Investigation into the Risk of Poverty among Asylum Seekers in Malta*. Malta: Aditus and JRS.

### 2.4.1 Low skills and educational levels

Illiteracy is a reality for many for many refugees and asylum seekers and also third-country nationals, especially when the support provided is scarce or absent. This means that many migrants cannot read or write, placing them at a disadvantage not only at application stage, but also on the job, including in unskilled work which may require some basic reading level.

Illiteracy is not the only problem. Many have never been to an interview, do not know or understand the scope or process, may not speak English or Maltese (see below), so may well turn up unprepared and unfortunately cannot compete with other candidates, even when they can easily do the job.

Participants commented how many migrants, in particular asylum seekers, do not know what a contract is and looks like and that it is binding, with the result that it is not unusual for migrants to sign contracts without knowing what they contain, especially when these are in a language they do not understand.

Lack of adequate IT skills is another problem. This not only precludes certain migrants from jobs requiring some or other computing knowledge, but also disadvantages them in the job application process, for example in seeking work online through effective job searches, knowing where to find information on work permits etc.

Overall, lower skills are problematic, as substantiated by literature<sup>22</sup>, because they expose migrant workers and increase their vulnerability to exploitation.

One cannot generalise, but low levels of education too, are also often present, especially among asylum seekers, and may determine if and how people access

22 ILO (2018) Skills for Migration and Employment: Policy Brief. ILO.

education (if at all) with a view to improving employment opportunities too, how they interact and perform, for example in interviews, and importantly the jobs they will be eligible to apply for. To restate, education is often interrupted for refugees and asylum seekers in particular, who then encounter obstacles in resuming it<sup>23</sup>. This is a common reality for many.

### 2.4.2 Language barriers

One of the major problems are language barriers, well documented when it comes to employment<sup>24</sup>. These are rife, especially among refugees and asylum seekers. Language barriers, especially with little to no opportunity (including time) to learn, become a critical obstacle not only in securing employment, but also affects performance. For example, the report by UNHCR (Malta) (2019) highlights how employers stated having problems with employees who couldn't understand instructions or were not able to follow health and safety procedures. The result is that it may also put the person in danger.

Participants in the conference commented how people are often requested to speak Maltese even for jobs where this is not needed, highlighting how this is unfairly used as a measure of exclusion. Overall, lack of language skills are problematic, also because they compromise interaction, including development of friendships and contacts, within and outside work, including those who can provide assistance with seeking other opportunities. They also negatively impact upon job mobility.

23 Grech, S. (2019) Connected Learning in the Higher Education of RRefugees. Malta: Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning.

24 See Jackson and Bauder (2014) Neither Temporary, Nor Permanent: The Precarious Employment Experiences of Refugee Claimants in Canada. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 27, Issue 3, 360-381; Dimitrov and Angelov (2017)



**These problems, though, it must be clear should not be pinned on the individual as some personal deficit or that they are necessarily 'bad' workers**

### 2.4.3 Cultural differences and practices

One recruiter in the conference spoke about cultural dimensions and personal practices as an active barrier, commenting it is not unusual for some migrants to lack personal hygiene and self-care and then turn up for an interview smelling, which works against them irrespective of their skills. Another participant commented how lack of hygiene is also a cause for stress and conflict with co-workers. Apart from this, and for others, there are other active barriers bound to cultural differences. The same recruiter went on to mention lack of punctuality as a critical problem, or not turning up for an appointment such as an interview, or turning up late and dressed up badly and in flip-flops and then recoiling and not saying anything, even out of shyness or lack of preparedness. Another spoke about not understanding corporate etiquette.

These problems, though, it must be clear should not be pinned on the individual as some personal deficit or that they are necessarily 'bad' workers. Instead, they persist because there is lack of consistent support, including with cultural orientation starting right from arrival, alongside mentoring and accessible services that are tailor-made and responsive. One participant mentioned how some businesses had taken active measures, including showering facilities, policies on their use, courses in grooming and active monitoring. The reaction appeared to be that some companies will in fact invest and take measures when they do need an active workforce.

### 2.5 The problems with employers

It would be grossly unfair to pin the problems only on the system and on migrant workers themselves. Indeed,

some employers are often part and parcel and a major cause of the unnecessary problems borne by migrants, especially third-country nationals and asylum seekers, creating and maintaining a system rife for abuse and exploitation.

#### 2.5.1 Lack of employer skills and knowledge

Participants pointed out how employers may not always know how to speak English themselves, compromising even further communication and understanding of the needs and demands of migrant workers, while limiting the extent of support they can provide in practice.

Furthermore, employers do not always know how to apply for a work permit<sup>25</sup> or leave it till the last minute or may leave the issue hanging, meaning that the person ends up working illegally without a permit. They also sometimes do not process the documents and the person does not know he/she is working without the permit or has expired, until they are informed, by which time it is too late (see below).

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25 Status determines access to employment. There are different work permits that are allocated, accounting also for status and protection that is granted in the case of refugees and asylum seekers. However, and in all cases, a work permit needs to be issued by JobsPlus. UNHCR (2019) explains the process: 'The Reception of Asylum Seekers Regulations state that access to employment should be granted no later than nine months following the lodging of an asylum application. Beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to access the labour market under the same conditions as Maltese nationals, therefore as employees or self-employed. Employment licenses are issued for three months for asylum-seekers whose application has been rejected and six months for those whose application is still pending. In such cases, the employer applies on behalf of the employee, and the employee cannot use this licence to take up a different job, to change his or her working conditions or to work for a different employer. For beneficiaries of international protection, the duration of such employment licenses is 12 months and they are renewable. The employee applies for the employment licence and is granted one in his or her own name.'

### 2.5.2 No training offered

A critical problem is not that migrant workers are unwilling or cannot learn in most cases, but that the opportunities are not presented to them. More often than not, they are just thrown in at the deep end, with no preparation, and no training, reflecting as is often the case, the temporal nature of work and the high turnover of employees<sup>26</sup>. When the work, as is often the case, is not related to one's skill base or experience (e.g. construction work), there is a high margin of error and even risk of accidents. This is gross negligence by employers, especially in hard and manual labour that may be perilous. But even more basically, they fail to provide an opportunity for orientation, information and skilling, including acquiring new skills that may then open up other employment opportunities. This in itself contributes to the lack of education described above and its maintenance.

### 2.5.3 Deception, abuse and exploitation

If there were themes that emerged with regularity and substantial frustration and anger, they were the multiple incidents of abuse, exploitation and deception faced by third-country nationals and asylum seekers and refugees. I bullet some of these below for clarity and emphasis:

- Exploitative wages: participants, including third-country nationals recounted how the wages are a misery, underpayment is a regular occurrence (the rule rather than the exception) and earning minimum wage is the best one can hope for, only if absolutely lucky. The tone is that they are seen as workhorses that come in abundant supply, are easily replaceable, made to be used and abused by employers, and who

in turn have no right to complain. Few are the cases of abuse that are in fact reported and fewer are legal measures taken.

- Working full-time, but have a part-time contract so the employer does not pay tax: this is a common practice, which while accommodating the owner on tax, also saves money on benefits that would be due by law (e.g. sick leave, holiday leave etc.) to the employee.
- Overtime is often not paid: participants recounted regular patterns whereby migrant workers, notably third-country nationals and asylum seekers are requested to work extra hours by their employer with no additional payment. Fear of losing one's job and a dispensable/no obligations approach by employees, mean inability and/or fear to complain so as not to be laid off.
- Not paid when training or retraining: A chef, for example, explained how he was asked to cook different food to that he was contracted to cook and for which he had come to Malta via an agency. He was asked to retrain, but was not paid during the 15 days of training. In the meantime, the costs of living alongside the debt owed to the agency who brought him to Malta were accumulating.
- Disparity in pay levels between migrant and Maltese workers: even ones performing the same job in the same workplace.
- Many migrants are cheated on rent, work contracts etc. and they do not realise, because they do not know how things are supposed to operate and have not been provided with information, or only partially, and/or have not understood it.

The message was that because policies may be in place,

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<sup>26</sup> See Borg (2019).

it does not mean that they are known or they do protect in practice. Fear, too, is rife among a portion of migrants. The people who killed Lassana Cisse are still free and it is a reminder not only of the dangers they face, but that impunity is there too.

### **2.5.3.1 The odyssey of recruiting agencies**

A subject that was mentioned with frequency was that of recruitment agencies bringing over third-country nationals, notably Asians<sup>27</sup>. What transpires is an elaborate chain of deception, exploitation, and debt traps starting from before they leave their country – a system which caters for the growing demand in labour, but which continues to go unquestioned and unmonitored by authorities and also the press in the way it operates. One migrant worker explained how he had paid the exorbitant amount of EUR3000 to an agency plus the air tickets for him and his family to come over and work in Malta, only to find himself struggling to find a job, earning a wage much lower than the one promised by the recruiter, navigating a legal and work permit system he was not told anything about, paying for medical costs, vaccines and other costs he only got to know about once in Malta, and facing living costs that were too high. From the start, his life was marked by precarity and debt, in which he remains trapped.

Another participant explained how these recruiting agencies are doing so well on this scheme of importing cheap exploitable labour that the biggest Maltese agency has now even set up shop in India, bringing over carers and nurses from India and the Philippines. Promised

nursing jobs when they apply, they are then told they can only work as carers when they arrive in Malta. Earning a wage much lower than that promised, they then face extraordinary living costs plus the money they still owe the agency as well as family who supported with trip (including through informal loans) and money they have to pay upfront (e.g. costs of applying for a work permit). For this person, these totalled some EUR6000. The recruiting agency also seeks to make more money, offering to support in applying to the nursing council to get a nursing license, but this involves even more costs, which means that those who are qualified may be cash-strapped and in debt and end up remaining as carers. Importantly, the biggest problem overall is that most of these labourers are not paid the wages they are promised before they leave their country. One participant explained in detail how there are persons working as nurses and getting paid the wage of a carer and are ridden with debt with agencies. A number are also forced to live in lodging provided by the agency, so money is pumped back into the system while they pay what they owe the agency (for the work permit and other things), so they end up as bonded labour. This same participant also recounted how there are people also employed as nurses who are not qualified as nurses and not licensed, which means that they are thrown into work that is essentially illegal, for which they themselves would be held responsible, and not the employer, should something happen. This is apart from possibly imperilling someone's life.

Unfortunately, this system is sanctioned by the government; no one investigates, monitors and enforces, and if abuses are known, most are happy to turn a blind eye if it means having a cheaper carer or chef.

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<sup>27</sup> These are concerns now known and widespread in the EU. See <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/victims-severe-labour-exploitation/fra-opinions>

#### 2.5.4 Health and safety foregone

A major issue, which was mentioned but not addressed as it should have been, was that of health and safety, in particular the lack of absence of measures to ensure these, especially for those engaged in potentially dangerous work such as construction. One panel speaker stressed the tough situation facing migrant workers on the job because no training is provided on health and safety measures, because safety equipment is not provided or not used by the employee out of lack of enforcement and a structured protocol. This is a very serious issue not only because of potential injury and even death, but because it reinforces the image of the migrant worker as disposable, whose life is not worth protecting.

#### 2.5.5 Racism, xenophobia and discrimination

As with most other issues, the treatment of migrant workers is conditioned by and framed within a broader context of racism, xenophobia and discrimination that create the conditions for abuse in the first place<sup>28</sup>. Participants laid out a number of factors, impacting access and experience of labouring:

- Race and ethnicity: while discrimination is across the board, it was agreed that race has to do with harsher exploitation and abuse, with participants suggesting that segments of African asylum seekers face the roughest conditions and treatment.
- Discrimination is rife, including on the media: participants explained that within a hostile environment where racism is evident in person and on social media, and where migrant workers are pitched

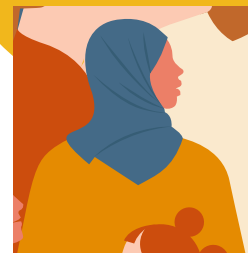
as ‘stealing the jobs of the Maltese’, discrimination is not only a consequence, but it is almost expected, for example people expect to pay a foreigner less. Discrimination occurs in multiple forms, including for example when migrants apply for jobs and are not even shortlisted because they have a foreign name, or when they meet blatantly unfair barriers and conditions during interviews. It is unfortunately a widespread problem that most workers feel they need to tolerate. Similarly, participants explained how even employers sometimes face difficulties when colleagues are not welcoming, or when customers complain when they employ refugees.

- Prejudice against migrants is intense, including extreme misinformation, for example about where they are from, their religions, their cultures and practices and even numbers. This, as participants explained, is a result of ignorance borne from physical isolation and unwillingness to learn about other cultures. For example, the biggest numbers are in fact third-country nationals, but people think they are refugees. There are also beliefs that a TCN is not as good, trained, or reliable as a Maltese worker.
- There is no meritocracy: jobs are largely based on nationality and even race and not merit, qualifications or experience. There is structural and possibly institutionalized racism in hiring practices. For third-country nationals in the conference, the feeling was that they will never reach a level or earn what they actually deserve in Malta, but simply struggle incessantly to at least earn the bare necessary to survive. Those with a higher level of education, including postgraduate level, complained that the doors are perpetually closed to certain jobs

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<sup>28</sup> See van Ballegooij, W. & Moxom, J. (2018). Equality and the fight against racism and xenophobia - Cost of Non-Europe Report, European Parliament, EPRS.

## **Race and ethnicity: while discrimination is across the board, it was agreed that race has to do with harsher exploitation and abuse, with participants suggesting that segments of African asylum seekers face the roughest conditions and treatment**



because of the way they look and where they are from, even when they are well overqualified. One person stated that even seeing an African surname on an application often means that the CV will be binned to never get an interview.

### **2.5.6 Tackling abuse and seeking redress is tough**

When abuse and discrimination are not addressed, it only breeds more abuse. Participants commented how within a broader culture of turning a blind eye to illegalities and inaction, there are also legal loopholes that allow for such exploitation to continue, suggesting that laws have been put in place to facilitate these mechanisms, to fill the needs of the job market, with little to no regard for the needs and rights of these migrant workers. Even if laws are there, politics and fear act as powerful barriers to seeking justice.

Tackling abuse and seeking redress is also not easy, because workers themselves may not know where to seek and obtain legal help, because they may be afraid, because effective pro-bono legal aid may not be easy to come by and/or because they do not understand the system. Police and JobsPlus would be the official channels to report, but the tone in the conference was that migrant workers would rather not risk and compromise their

basic livelihoods and survival and possibly end up worse off. This situation is also made tougher by the fact that migrants do not get together to resist in unison, hence there is little to no opportunity to build strength in numbers.

While unions such as the General Workers Union (GWU) can and do intervene with human resources of a company, this depends on whether the union has recognition within a company; if it does have a history, it can act as an effective mediator between the individual and the employer, especially in cases where the situation is the result of an administrative or other mistake that can be resolved with relative ease. However, this is not always the case. In cases of unfair dismissal, the union can open a case, but again this depends on availability of pro-bono lawyers working to support. There are also reservations, fearing that intervention can sometimes worsen a person's situation. More serious cases can then be reported to the Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) who can then even proceed with a criminal case, however the tone from the conference and the interviews was that this does not happen with the frequency it requires, including because migrant workers are often too scared to report and what the consequences may be.



**The emphasis appeared to be on ‘strategies and policies aimed to speed up third-country nationals’ access to the labour market**

### 3. Potential ‘solutions’

As is customary with these conferences, participants discussed a number of fluid recommendations for what they felt are needed ‘solutions’ to the problems discussed. Specifically, and in line with other literature<sup>29</sup>, the emphasis appeared to be on ‘strategies and policies aimed to speed up third-country nationals’ access to the labour market to achieve self-sufficiency and socio-economic participation and to prevent labour exploitation, social dumping and to combat discrimination’. I present these in no particular order or sequence:

- *Advocacy and policy changes*: it is critical that advocacy is sustained but also stepped up to ensure the rights of migrant workers are respected and to guarantee that these rights are equal to those of others. Pressure is needed to regularise the employment of refugees with protection in other countries but who are working in Malta in an irregular manner. These need to be afforded at the very least the same opportunities as other TCNs working in Malta. This is also important for them to pay taxes and contribute and ultimately to eliminate the underground job market, ripe for abuses. A possibility offered by one participant was for example that of offering a temporal or seasonal permit while their applications are processed and then absorbed in the job market.
- *Training administrators and other stakeholders* working in positions that interact with and impact migrants’

lives, providing them with education and training on cultural sensitivity and respect, the value of migrants and their contributions, among others, in the bid to not only change attitudes, but also enhance quality of service provided.

- *One stop-shop for information and services*: similar to the recommendation on education (see report 1), participants pushed forward the idea of a single platform where migrant workers can get all the information required about living and working in Malta as well as accessing services as opposed to trying to figure out a complex system and going from one place to another. This includes information on for example differences between ID Malta and JobsPlus and their different roles; different NGOs and who does what; how to get a work permit; process of application; employment law; pension; benefits for different types of migrants, including third-country nationals; what constitutes unfair practice; reporting unlawful practices; legal support and so on. Participants suggested that a platform such as this can be online, or even a helpline, or a desk at ID Malta. A small number even suggested a video with all the required information. In whichever format, the important factor is a centralized platform equipped to deal with all matters related to employment in Malta, and to do this in ways that are culturally and linguistically accessible and sensitive, adapted and responsive. In particular, this information needs to

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<sup>29</sup> EC (2019) Labour Market Integration of Third Country Nationals in EU Member States. p. 7

be carefully translated into all required languages. Important too, is that the information must also be available to employers, including legal terms of employment and their own legal obligations, as well as tips and suggestions on culturally sensitive practices, and incentives offered by JobsPlus for employers to hire migrants, among others.

- *Lessen bureaucracy, simplify and group procedures:* There is an urgent need for procedures and applications that are intelligible, simple to understand, and which importantly are not unnecessarily taxing on time and resources with less red tape. Suggestions like the one in the point above included a one-stop-shop for services too, all located in one place as well as simplified synergized procedures, including: one process for residence and work permit; reducing the frequency of work permit renewals; reducing the costs of application for work permits; and providing support to employers and employees with applications. It would also be effective to send the applicants (employer and employee) automatic reminders prior to the expiration of the work permit. A suggestion also included the need for a system whereby each application for a work permit is provided with a corresponding number which would allow the applicant to check its progress online, hence reducing unnecessary trips and anxiety, as well as costs (e.g. transportation). Finally, there is also a need to simplify and instil a fair and equitable process of opening a simple bank account to receive one's salary. Bank employees should also be trained in the rights of migrants, including Legal Notice 411 of 2016 which provides for this, and to change their perceptions about migrants in employment and the

contributions they make.

- *Temporary work licenses:* one participant stressed how one possibility of addressing delays in ID Malta would be the issuing of temporary licenses until a full single permit can be issued. This would ensure there is the required labour force when needed, while enabling migrant workers to be gainfully employed, pay taxes etc. and tackle illegal work.
- *Conduct literacy and language assessment upon arrival and/or before referring migrants for jobs:* This can be done by NGOs assisting with such services and which would support with referrals for jobs that are more adapted to the individual. This service should be free to migrants.
- *Quick literacy and language tuition upon arrival to be able to access work as soon as possible:* related to the above, effective assessments would initiate as quickly as possible the process of literacy and language training, hence speeding up the process of integration. A number of participants felt that learning English should be mandatory for all migrants coming to Malta and looking for a job, a process they felt can be initiated while waiting on ID Malta. Language training is critical and needs to be affordable, ideally free, and flexible when it comes to time to accommodate work patterns and time constraints of different people<sup>30</sup>. People will always prioritise basic needs, and therefore any training needs to be designed around the satisfaction of these.
- *Courses, training and information sharing through community-based modes of dissemination:* Extending from language learning, participants brainstormed a number of other options, which they insisted

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30 See also <https://www.caritas.eu/language-is-the-key-to-integration/>

**Quick literacy and language tuition upon arrival to be able to access work as soon as possible: related to the above, effective assessments would initiate as quickly as possible the process of literacy and language training, hence speeding up the process of integration**



can make use of community-based resources and locations to deliver and disseminate. These included:

- Production and circulation of booklets and/or delivery of courses containing specific technical vocabulary for work purposes. This is advised especially for health and safety issues and health-related professions.
  - Provision of courses in work practices, ethics and cultural orientation at the reception stage using accessible venues such as local councils and/or LEAP.
  - Use of schools to disseminate information on available courses and employment opportunities in order to reach parents.
  - Cultural orientation: An induction programme explaining Maltese culture and practices. This could be extended to explain some services available in the Maltese system, since not many employees are knowledgeable about them or their rights under Maltese legislation.
  - Information sessions on employment laws, rights and obligations: including how to apply for work permits, what constitutes bullying, harassment and discrimination, seeking legal support, and courses of action. It was suggested that such

information sessions could be delivered by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE).

- Information booklets or leaflets providing both employers and employees with clear and concise information. Such booklets should be translated into the main languages and distributed to employers, local councils, LEAP centres, churches, police stations and health clinics among others.
- *Information on hygiene, self-care and contextually adequate responses and behaviours:* for example, basics such as cleanliness, ensuring that one does not smell, washes hands regularly, alongside information on cultural dimensions, such as adequate resolution of conflict on the workplace.
- *Ensure childcare facilities are available:* to step up migrant women's participation in employment. This is a critical and much needed measure.
- *Employer contributions to language and other training:* It was frequently noted that employers should have some or other obligations towards their employees, not least because migrant workers spend most of their waking hours working. Participants promoted a number of ideas including:



## Reduce costs on the migrant worker and offer support: The cost of settling in and starting to work are prohibitive and often cast a person into poverty before even starting to earn a living

- Provision of language as well as literacy classes at work. This initiative could be supported by government.
  - A peer support system, including a colleague acting as mentor, assistance with translation, and orientation.
  - *Train employees, employers and others in communication and culturally responsive practice with migrant workers:* Such sensitive practices can go a long way, not least in placing the onus of adaptation and integration not only on the shoulders of migrant workers – that is a two-way process. These may include: Cultural training for all staff operating in a multicultural environment
  - Providing information and training to employers and managers, including tips on adaptation for a multicultural workplace
  - Training in communication, for example slower articulation of words
  - Ensuring that directions are clear and choosing words and language that are understandable, without too many unnecessary complications
  - Checking that the person has understood what is being said and to not take this for granted
  - Offering diversity training, also to mitigate the negative effects of discrimination and racism.
- Providing continuous on-the-job training
  - *Reduce costs on the migrant worker and offer support:* The cost of settling in and starting to work are prohibitive and often cast a person into poverty before even starting to earn a living. Participants offered a number of suggestions apart from a concrete reduction of costs (e.g. medicals, work permit, vaccines etc.), to include the possibility of these costs being subsidised by the employer (e.g. covering half) or offering a loan which would then be deducted progressively from the salary. An alternative could be to provide employees with the option to pay the work permit application fee in instalments or once employment is found. This would alleviate the tremendous burden of forking out large amounts of money upfront which many would not have in hand, and which only tightens the grip of debt and abuse. This also impacts the ability to cover basic costs of living, including rent and food, hence affecting consumption too. Another point discussed was the need to ease the cost of translating certificates, for example by providing government subsidised services for translation.
  - *Build communities of support:* the tone of the conference was indeed that there is great strength in numbers, in particular in communities that can intervene to support in times of hardship and crises,

as well as being effective sources of information, mentorship, and allies. Participants emphasised at multiple points how communities need to come together instead of having individuals hiding problems and suffering in silence. It is critical to join forces and get organised, for example to combat abusive and exploitative migrant working conditions, to act as intermediaries with trade unions, and to tackle problems, for example rights violations.

- *Expand the list of credible and accredited universities worldwide at NCFHE.*
- *Alternative forms of skills assessment, recognition and certification:* an emerging issue was that alternatives need to be found for how skills are recognised, especially for those with no certificates. Suggestions included: assessment and validation of skills on the job; promotion of vocational testing; and evaluating of performance on the job.
- *Facilitate access to vocational training:* this is especially the case for unskilled workers, in particular refugees and asylum seekers. This may include trades that traditionally pay, for example plumbing and electrical work, and importantly orienting towards needs and gaps in the job market, which can translate into eventual concrete work. Importantly, training and any education means costs, including opportunity costs for those struggling to survive and who need to be working. This training therefore needs to be flexible and worked around different times to account for work and to consider small financial incentives if learning means having to give up paid work or cut down.
- *Job placements, including internships:* allowing migrant workers to both learn new skills as well as

demonstrating what they are capable of doing.

- *Changes in work place and work culture towards a multicultural approach:* it is not enough to facilitate entry into work, but the work culture and normalised practices have to adapt and change to account for cultural, ideological and other specificities and differences while promoting diversity of the company as a strength alongside active actions at recruiting migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers. Practices can include:
  - Promote intercultural dialogue in the workplace, for example, intercultural and diversity training for staff, organising cultural events, etc.
  - Provide employees with the opportunity to learn about their colleagues and how to communicate with individuals who have limited English skills.
  - Provide spaces for intercultural communication and learning about cultural and contextual dimensions, for example learning about the importance of punctuality for meetings, while offering a genuine sharing of one's own cultural practices and habits, without problematising either side.
  - Allow and provide opportunities for expression, including complaints and feedback as to how things can be improved, through anonymous means.
  - Allow for flexibility, for example for time off during religious holidays, and/or time for prayers during Ramadan, time which can be then be made up for.
- *Take measures to prevent and act on any form of prejudice and discrimination:* including on the basis of racist or xenophobic beliefs, from recruitment through to pay



## Public educational campaigns highlighting the importance of migrant workers as well as success stories

levels, rights and entitlements on the job and so on. These can be enshrined through clear policies that are then imparted with and known by all employees, and substantiated by monitoring, effective reporting mechanisms, and enforcement when there are discriminatory practices. Measures can include here:

- Public educational campaigns highlighting the importance of migrant workers as well as success stories
  - Active inclusion measures such as quotas, i.e. numbers that need to be migrant workers
  - Incorporate issues of discrimination in career guidance support, and importantly how to tackle this
  - Job matching events
- Use the media to work on changing perceptions and educating, including on the rights of all workers
  - *Mentoring and coaching*: this could involve measures such as assigning a mentor who would be responsible for coaching especially in the initial stages, who can explain clearly and patiently issues such as those pertinent to work ethics and practices (e.g. punctuality), who can assist with language acquisition and also developing relationships and friendships at work.
  - *Sensitize and impart information on legal dimensions*: including the legal landscape, rights and legislation (e.g. unfair dismissal, injury at work etc.), legal pro-bono services available to seek redress, the legal options there are and so on.



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