ENGAGE

'Development of inclusivE iNteGration pAths 4 miGrant womEn'

WP2: Up-Skilling Workshops for Labour Market Stakeholders (LMS) and Third-Country National (TCN) women

National Report by

Emphasys Centre & Cyprus Refugee Council
Cyprus

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CYPRUS REFUGEE COUNCIL

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AMIF ENGAGE: Aims & Purposes

The project *Development of* ***inclusivE iNteGration pAths 4 miGrant women* / ENGAGE** aims to increase TCN women's capability for entering the labour market and social life of the host society. The above will be achieved via the organization of Up-Skilling workshops, Job Shadowing Programme and Cross-cultural activities. The direct and indirect target groups are TCN women, LMS, TCNs and local citizens (women and men), professionals, policy makers, NGOs and the general public.

TCN women, which represent the 45% of refugees in the EU, have lower activity and employment rates, a higher risk of poverty and are more likely to be in lower skilled occupations. Most of them face particular integration challenges associated with lower education and labour market outcomes compared to refugee men. The main reason is that they originate from countries with high gender inequality and low employment rates for women. Therefore, an effective integration process for these women in the new social environment, can contribute to their social and economic inclusion.
Although the integration issue is at the heart of the political discussion in Europe, many countries face difficulties in absorbing a greater number of migrants, as well as in the latter's willingness to integrate. Much has been said and written on migration and integration, but very little attention, has been given to women. While TCN women are highly qualified, most of them are directed to jobs and training mostly for housekeeping, the care sector, secretarial, and back-office services, which are unsuitable to their qualifications. Across the EU and specifically in Southern Europe, over 30% of TCN women work in low-skilled jobs, although they have tertiary degrees.
As a direct response to these facts, the project aims to organise targeted workshops for TCN women and Labour Market Representatives and serves a dual aim:
1. to support TCN women's first steps in the host community's labour market through the acquisition of employability skills.
2. to increase Labour Market Stakeholders' awareness on TCN women's specific needs and gender issues.
3. to introduce Job Shadowing as an efficient integration measure.

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National Report: Investigating practices, gaps & needs

The aim of this report is to investigate the current scene in partner countries in relation to the integration practices and to identify good practices and gaps for the development of new innovative ways to attract TCN women. Though there is evidence in existing practices and policies for TCN women's integration, the project consortium has organised 2 focus groups from each partner country with local key players such as representatives from NGOs, labour market, local authorities and the target group, TCN women, in order to collect valuable information about attitudes and perceptions. The data collected, which will indicate the vulnerability of TCN women in specific topics, will be highly useful for the development of the consortium's targeted approach towards TCN women. Mapping and analysis of needs, gaps, good practices and policies in partner countries, is of great importance, as they will be used as the basis for the design of complementary and tailored integration tools. The proposed activities, aim to provide useful information for the hosting country, such as an introduction to social and cultural aspects, labour market policies and the delivery of an Employability Skills targeted training.

The report will reflect the state-of-the-art practices and the profile of TCN women in terms of needs and gaps in regards to accessing employment, by focusing on the particular situation faced by International Protection holders and asylum seekers (women). Cyprus Refugee Council and Emphasys Center will utilize their extensive network within refugees' communities and related stakeholders in Cyprus, in order to identify and address obstacles, gaps and ways forward in regards to effectively accessing employment.

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Policies, legislation & practices aimed at supporting TCN women

Policies, legislation and practices in place

TCNs in Cyprus include persons residing in various residence permits. Most notably, *International Protection Holders* and *asylum seekers*. The report will address the realities of TCN women in Cyprus in regards to accessing employment, by focusing on the particular situation faced by International Protection holders and asylum seekers (women).
In Cyprus, there are two types of International Protection statuses:

- Recognized Refugee
- Subsidiary Protection

Persons holding one of these two statuses have full access to the labour market, exactly as Cypriot citizens do. Asylum seekers according to the refugee law and the latest ministerial decision 308/2018, are allowed to engage in employment one month after the submission of their asylum application, however, only in limited economic sectors In 2019, even if the Minister of Labour issued a decree on 20/06/19 to expand these sectors[1] , they are still very limited.

Concerning the job matching there is no official national screening tool used by the state to connect refugees to the employers. The referrals made by the labour office to open job vacancies do not match skills and qualifications of the refugee population in Cyprus which is a source of frustration for the latter.

Moreover, the administrative procedure to hire an asylum seeker is too complicate and a very timely process. Consequently, this is a deterrent factor for employers interested to hire asylum seekers.

Internships are not a widespread concept in Cyprus and for unemployed refugees the concept is not very popular as they prefer to find a paid job to secure their basic needs. Asylum seekers technically, are allowed to have an internship only in sectors in which they are permitted to work (mostly manual jobs).
As these sectors include only low skilled jobs, internship opportunities are very limited.

Requirements for TCN women who want to enter the labour market

There are no language or educational prerequisites for entering the labour market in Cyprus. Asylum seekers can work legally one month after their submission of the application for International Protection, but, in limited economic sectors and after the submission of a work contract at the labour office which has to be approved by a committee. Recognized Refugees and Subsidiary Protection holders have full access to the labour market.

However, in regards to the public sector and its initiatives to support TCN women's skills development, the situation is not ideal. Unfortunately, the Labour office which is

[1] New sectors added by MOL: https://www.helprefugeeswork.org/en/content/new-employment-sectors-asylum-seekers

the responsible department for matching people's qualifications with the needs of the labour market does not have a screening tool. Therefore, people are referred to jobs that do not meet their skills and gender is not considered as a factor to take into consideration when referring for jobs. Due to restrictions that asylum seekers have concerning the job sectors,

What is actually offered by the government for the personal and professional development of these people are Greek classes. However, they do not correspond to the very high demand. Since most of the courses, are part of time-limited projects, no comprehensive language courses are offered to TCNs. In regards to further education, people with International Protection (IP), have access to a variety of courses, however a very good knowledge of the Greek Language (which is the official language in Cyprus) is required, resulting to TCNs' limited participation.

Moreover, the government does not provide childcare services for supporting TCN women. In conjunction with the lack of social networks in the host country (TCN women have limited time and resources to create social networks), asylum seekers and International Protection Holders women have very restricted schedule for finding a job.

Commented [CY1]: Meaning? Restricted because of family obligation?,

Support offered for increasing TCNs (women and men) participation in the local labour market (training, internships, networking etc)

A great example of promoting the participation of International Protection Holders and asylum seekers in the local labour market is provided by the UNHCR Cyprus in collaboration with the Cyprus Refugee Council. Help Refugees Work is an online free web platform which aims at facilitating the interconnection and process of job searching for International Protection Holders in Cyprus as well as educational and training institutions in Cyprus, creating a chain of collaboration between state and non-state actors and the refugee population.

Labour office provides referrals for trainings through ANAD, the national agency for the human resource development where only International Protection Holders can participate. As already mentioned, asylum seekers can only participate in internships that fall under the sectors they are allowed to work, which are not available as they are low skilled jobs.

At the same time many trainings for TCNs take place through EU funded projects which although they support refugee integration, they do not have continuity, ending up without substantial impact. Moreover, job shadowing schemes are not offered as a way of supporting TCNs (women and men) participation in the local labour market since these schemes are not a widespread concept in Cyprus, especially for women.
In regards to specific support services offered to TCN women, it was widely commented during both the focus group sessions. First of all, the issue of childcare was highlighted. Private childcare is very expensive, making it impossible for TCN women to afford to cover the cost. Some initiatives have tried to tackle this issue, such as the Municipal Multipurpose Centre, and many others who are trying to include childcare into their EU-funded programmes. However, it still remains a major issue in Cyprus.

Secondly, support is given to TCN women by providing counselling services, since the opportunities provided are numerous. There are organisations (public and private) offering psychological services to help them heal from any traumatic experiences they have.. For example, the European University of Cyprus offers free occupational therapy sessions to refugee population. In addition to psychological services, other organizations (mostly NGOs) provide job counselling, cv interview skills building workshops.

Specific programmes offered for enhancing TCN women participation in the community and interaction with locals

The programmes encouraging only TCN women participation in the community and the interaction with locals are very limited. For example, Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC) implements weekly women empowerment workshops where TCN women have the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues that concerns them, such us labour rights, access to education etc. Another example is the project Coalesce running by Migs (Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies and Cyprus Refugee Council) which aims to support female TCNs, especially victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. It started in December 2020, and it will continue for two years (to add link). Other similar initiatives are:

- The Programme "New Channels for Integration", which has been active since 2012, promotes the integration of TCNs in the local community. Its main aim is to create opportunities for participation, acquaintance, and interaction among local citizens and TCNs and promote the adaptation of local communities and TCNs to the new, multicultural society. Moreover, it offers programmes targeted to specific groups of people such as children of different origins (Arab, Chinese) and TCN adults.
- First Step project: it is a project co-funded by AMIF (90%) and the Cyprus government (10%) and it started running in 2019. It aims to help TCN integrate into society through employment and language skills.
- miHUB – Migrant Information Center: another project that is co-funded by the European Commission and the Cypriot government. It aims to help vulnerable migrants across Cyprus feel protected and supported. It has 4 centres in different cities, making it accessible to almost everywhere around the island. The services that being offered are numerous, from social and psychological support to job finding assistance and advocacy.
- Project Phoenix: a European NGO and social enterprise dedicated to change and social inclusion. They are currently in Cyprus due to the fact that it has the highest rate of asylum-seekers per capita in the EU. It aims is to motivate refugees to become successful professionals and entrepreneurs.

TCN focus group findings

Introduction of the participants

The first focus group to be conducted was with TCN women. The women who participated in this focus group session have different backgrounds and profiles. In the list below, a general presentation for each participant is provided:

- A 23-year-old refugee spouse from Cameroon, currently studying Business Administration at the University of Nicosia. She is a motivational speaker in the African Refugee Community and has launched her own business one year ago. In addition to her native language (French), she can also speak very good English and a little bit of Greek that she learnt due to her previous 6-month job.
- A 27-year-old single mother from Cameroon that studied tourism and hospitality back at home. She speaks fluently English and has no job experience. Right now, she is not working, she is a full-time mum.
- A 21-year-old single woman from Congo that is currently working in as a cleaner in a hotel in Cyprus. She speaks French, but her English is not that good. She finished school but didn't have the opportunity to study.
- A 39-year-old mother from Iran who studied accounting but now makes handmade jewellery. She uses social media (Facebook) frequently for her job. She started on her own and she lives with her husband and one child in one of the coastal cities of Cyprus. Although she has been living in Cyprus for 7 years now, she speaks Farsi but a little bit of Greek.
- A 25-year-old single woman from Syria, who studied Business Administration and is currently working at a Forex company. She can speak Arabic, English and Greek.
- A 36-year-old full-time single mother from Syria. She studied journalism and had a job in a media company back in Syria. Since she has been to Cyprus, she couldn't find a job, because she can't afford to pay for childcare services.
- A 25-year-old woman from Palestine who studied at the University of Cyprus Political Science and is currently doing her master's degree on International Relations. She has work experience as integration assistant and speaks fluently English, Greek, Arabic and basic Turkish.

A common element amongst almost all the women who participated in the focus group is their low Greek language skills. This comes to be reapproved by the fact that roughly 10% of migrants in Cyprus rate their language skills to be at a proficient level. (European Commission, 2019)[2].
In regards to their nationalities, the majority of asylum seekers that came to Cyprus in 2019-20, were from Syria, the country of origin of the 3 out of 7 participants of this focus group. However, the economic activity rate of Syrian women stands at less than 15% in their country of origin (Angeli, 2020)[3], making it even more challenging to find a job in Cyprus due to the lack of job experience or skills even before coming to the island.

[2] European Migration Network (2019). Labour market integration of third-country nationals' in EU Member States – Synthesis Report. Brussels: European Migration Network. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/00_eu_labour_market_integration_final_en.pdf
[3] Angeli M. (2020) 'Integration into the Labour Market and Skills Training of Migrants in Cyprus'. Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies. Retrieved from: https://medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WP5-Report-Cyprus-Labour-Market.pdf

Experiences of the focus group

When the participants were asked if they have already had previous experience with specific training/programmes that helped them for personal and/or professional development, one of the women shared her experience that she had followed a training that helped her in improving her skills. It was a course offered by her university during her studies, which was not targeted only to women. More specifically, the topic of the course was the improvement of the employability skills in order to have a successful interview. In fact, this training was a successful choice for her, because she was the selected candidate for a job she applied, even if she did not meet all the requirements of the job. More specifically, one of the prerequisites was the knowledge of the Greek language, however, they hired her because they were impressed by her employability and interview skills. In addition, learning Greek was presented as a condition to her in order to continue working at that job position.
The majority of the rest of the participants have received training and some of them managed to secure a job position due to the training. However, no more detail was given because the participants of the focus group continued their discussion on a different topic.

In regards to the focus group's familiarity with policies, laws and practices already in place, all participants were aware of their rights as employees. However, they lack knowledge on initiatives and practices from different organisations and trade unions that can help them with their own dreams and goals. During the discussion, they frequently asked the moderator of the focus group session to explain what trade unions are and how they can benefit from them. After explaining to them what they are, the opinions were divided as some of them showed interest and asked questions in regards to further information and the rest of them showed mistrust since they believe that nothing would change.

Challenges, barriers and needs towards labour market and social inclusion

TCN women shared many challenges that they have faced in the process of accessing the labour market and being socially integrated:

- The lack of childcare. Mothers who are currently unemployed shared that is very difficult for them to even search for a job as they need to take care of their children.
- The lack of Greek linguistic competences. All participants shared their view on the fact that basic/good knowledge ofGreek language is the most important skill that they need to have, in order to find a job and be socially integrated.
- The lack of experience. Some companies do not want to train TCNs if they do not have experience and prefer to hire someone who has experience.
- The issue of racism and prejudices. Almost all women that participated in the focus group feel that they are victims of racism due to physical appearance (skin colour, dress code – hijab), especially when trying to find a job. Especially women wearing hijab, stressed that when going to an interview they were always rejected due to it and felt a change in the behaviour of the employer. The same applies for TCN women with a different skin colour from natives.

- The lack of social connections/network: The social networks are really important since knowing someone in the neighbourhood can make refugees feel safe, secure, and help them find a job, a training opportunity more easily.
- The issue of childcare: As it was mentioned before, this is a common challenge even before finding a job. However, the ones that manage to do both, find it really difficult to combine both of them.
- The issue of transportation: Participants find the public transportation in Cyprus not well structured and with no frequent itineraries making it very difficult to travel for work. It becomes even more difficult when women have to also pick their kids from school, and transportation is really time-consuming. This is also an issue for the employers who are not flexible enough to offer longer breaks.

Identification of skills and trainings that can help them integrate into the labour market

The women that participated in this focus group session have identified many skills that could help them find a job more easily:

- The Greek language. All women who participated believed that by improving their skills in Greek, they would find job more easily and approach the Cypriot society faster. However, only two of the participants have attended Greek language lessons in the past.
- Customer service. One of them mentioned that more training and experience is needed in customer service (kitchen, restaurant), in which many times previous experience in Cyprus is a common requirement.
- Marketing, graphic design and entrepreneurial trainings. Another participant mentioned that courses related to these topics would be a good idea. This comes in liaison with the experience of another participant who did not find help from anyone and managed to create her own company with handmade jewellery.
- Digital skills. They also believe that digital skills are important for finding a job, however they believe that their competences are at a sufficient level and they do not need any improvement.

Possible solutions, conclusions

These women shared their satisfaction to NGOs and other organisations thatare trying to support them. During the final remarks and conclusions of the discussion, they gave different solutions for improving their quality of life, social and labour inclusion. They focused mainly on social inclusion when proposing possible solutions:

- Organisation of intercultural festivals in order to better integrate different communities into the hosting society. This kind of festivals can raise awareness of locals regarding the obstacles that TCNs are facing in the host country but also on the advantages to invest in their integration for the socioeconomic benefits.
- Social media interaction between refugees and local citizens.
- Creation of a platform for connecting asylum seekers and less privilege to specialised jobs and trainings (mechanical engineering, electrical installation.)
- Reintroduction of refugees into the society by the government and the media. The government should explain the reasons why a person would decide to leave their country, who is defined as a refugee and what their rights are in the host country.

Organizations focus group findings

Introduction of the participants

The participants of this focus group come from different organisations situated in other cities of Cyprus. Most organisations are located in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, however, one participant is located in Paphos, another city of the island and many organisations are present in our cities of the island.
The organizer of the focus group was the Cyprus Refugees Council, an independent, non- profit organization, that strives to safeguard, support and advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups in Cyprus, promoting their effective integration into the host society. CyRC focus on refugees, asylum seekers, detainees, trafficking victims and survivors of torture and its members are working in many cities of the island.
Two participants work at CSI, the Centre for Social Innovation, an organisation that focuses on tackling social, education, and economic problems by various EU-funded projects and initiatives. They have also experience working with migrant women and promoting and assisting their social inclusion in Cyprus.
One participant works at Caritas Cyprus, an organisation that has its mission to provide a better world for those living in poverty, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. They also offer the possibility to volunteers to help with their activities whenever they can and like and the organisation is also present in Larnaca and Paphos.
One participant works at Μαζί/Together/ معاً, which is an organisation that started in 2018 independently. It offers a variety of services to TCNs such as English and Greek lessons, psychological support and organization of discussions etc. They offer also many services to children.
Lastly, three other participants (facilitators) were from Emphasys Centre (partner in ENGAGE project) an ICT Training and Research Centre approved by the Ministry of Education in CY with 22yrs experience in the provision of training in various IT fields (STEAM, Robotics, Digital Creation, Marketing, Graphic etc.). Emphasys has expertises in the design of tools, platforms and educational e-learning material. It runs the ONE STOP SUPPORT CENTRE FOR TCNs which offerstargeted workshops and trainings for TCNs to improve their entrepreneurial, soft and digital skills and become active citizens of society.
Different kinds of services are offered to TCNs, however, all of them have the same purpose; to help them integrate as smoothly and easy as possible into society. First of all, these organisations assist in regards to job-seeking (communication and negotiation with employers, guidance in job opportunities etc.). They also organise various workshops to help TCNs improve their employability and soft skills and prepare them for an interview (create or improve their CVs and LinkedIn accounts). Some of the professionals working in this field also have a mentoring role to identify the people's skills and interests so they can be matched then with online classes, LinkedIn profiles etc.
In regards to their linguistic skills, TCNs are mainly offered language lessons to the main languages of communication of the country (Greek and English). Moreover, TCN women are supported psychologically by the provision of psychologist professionals, yoga and meditation classes with the aim to help them tackle the trauma and the violation of human rights that they may have witnessed.
Throughout the discussion, more specific examples of these initiatives were described such as:

- The project "MAZI" is a project targeted to Arab women and their families as well as other projects targeted to women from Africa (especially Cameroon).

- The One Stop Support Centre which is not currently working due to COVID-19. It is an initiative that started one year ago with the aim to help TCNs to develop employability, social, digital, and interview skills.
- The Migrant Centre in which TCNs can go and ask for help for any kind of problem or issues (humanitarian support), liaison with the labour office, for advocacy purposes, health and support, making appointments, providing transport when the meet point is not accessible, check the conditions and the place of employment.

Experiences of the focus group

Based on their experience, participants shared their opinion on when it is important for TCNs to start a training. According to them, people coming to Cyprus need time to adjust and accept what they have gone through, switch over and start a new reality. However, time should not be too long (not more than 6-8 months) because then, the negative side of the truth can discourage them from moving on. In addition, they explained that it is better to participate in different programmes or find a job when they arrive because they have this drive to do something and take their minds off of what they have been through. In this question, emphasis was given to the psychological aspect and how important mental support is because there is not so much participation if people are traumatized or stressed.
The focus group's participant talked a lot about their personal and professional experiences, showing how many women have found help through their actions. However, acceptance by society and the labour market is still a vivid issue. Therefore, the level of satisfaction is generally divided. Not all of them are satisfied because of the barriers they find in front of them. It is actually the opposite of what they expected; however, this is not just an issue located in Cyprus. Professionals talked about the false vision that refugees have about Europe in general, that they do not find the Europe that they expected, the one with many opportunities for them.

Challenges, barriers and needs towards labour market and social inclusion

Many are the key problems in providing services for TCNs:
- Lack of Greek language skills. Many are the employers that consider the Greek language as a prerequisite for hiring someone.
- Lack of social network. Even if they are qualified, they do not have any contact, relations and connection in the labour market therefore, it is more difficult for them to apply and find a job.
- Lack of recognition of qualification. Even if they are qualified enough, their skills are completely neglected by employers. Complicated and time consuming procedures for recognizing their qualifications
- Limited access/approval by closed ones. For example, it is very difficult to place Arabic women in employment because of their cultural views. Some husbands believe that they should be the provider of the house, not their women; therefore, they do not let them to work even if they want to.
- Lack of motivation. Some people are not psychologically and emotionally ready to accept any services offered to them due to the drama that they have experienced in the past.
- Restricted access to the labour market. The hiring process is much more complicated for an asylum seeker than for a European citizen.

- Lack of childcare for TCN women. An important factor for TCN women is that they cannot work without childcare, no matter their skills. The same phenomenon is present in the case of training as women who have a family do not have the time to go to training, especially if they are targeted to labour market integration.
- Lack of cultural acceptance. It is essential to consider the cultural aspect when working with TCNs and, in particular with TCN women. These women may face difficulties in blending into society due to personal appearance (skin colour or dress code - hijab). On the other hand, employers should respect different cultures and appearances when hiring employees. More specifically, wearing a hijab should be acceptable as long as it does not prevent them from working or it is not dangerous. In other words, wearing a hijab when working as a translator should be acceptable, however, not when working in a kitchen (for their own safety).
- Lack of motivation by employers or lack of labour rights awareness. It is more complicated to recruit TCN women due to, firstly, the paperwork that needs to be completed, to the cultural differences (language, appearance etc.) as well as the childcare. In addition, many employers are not aware of the procedures in place for employing asylum seekers or that International Protection holders can be employed as Cypriots.

Identification of skills and trainings that can help them integrate into the labour market

The needs and the skills of TCN women are identified through experience and private discussions with them. Based on their needs and gaps, different training sessions are tailored towards them to help them as much as possible. In other words, the topic of the different training is generated by the needs of the different groups. Many organisations, such as Caritas, have explained during the focus group discussion that they provide help to TCNs in many ways in order to access the labour market.
As it was previously mentioned, TCNs are supported by services such as:

- Preparation for a job interview
- Creation of CVs and LinkedIn accounts
- Pre-check of the working environment and conditions
- Discussion with possible employers
- Propositions for adequate job positions
- Legal rights awareness (employers and refugees)
- Counselling

Moreover, the participants of the focus group have shared their opinion in regards to services that would help TCN women enter the labour market and that right now are not available. One participant shared the need of to have open discussion sessions, not only between TCNs in a form of “open libraries” in order to exchange life stories but also between TCNs who seek jobs and trade unions who represent employers. This will facilitate the TCNs’ understanding of employers’ needs and requirements for hiring a new employee and at the same time, help the representatives of employers understand the current situation, difficulties and particularities that TCN women may have or face.
In conclusion, such trainings can offer many benefits to TCN women. First of all, training can provide knowledge, development and improvement for their skills in different sectors. This can make them more qualified for a job, and then, they can

become a financial contributor to their family more easily. However, the financial aspect is not the only positive impact since it can also motivate their further improvement at a personal level. In other words, training can help them step into society and integrate more easily. Some of the focus group's participants mentioned examples of testimonials from women who participated in training or found a job and that shared their satisfaction of not being stuck in the house all day, taking care of their children or the household.

Possible solutions, conclusions

In regards to the employer aspect, many employers have a negative perception when recruiting TCN, especially women. Therefore, it is important to change this perception and promote their recruitment as it will benefit not only the refugee women but also them and their companies. What employers need to develop is understanding. More specifically, they need to respect and accept the particularities of TCN women's appearance or cultural values, meaning accepting the colour of their skin, their desire, and not the obligation to wear a hijab etc. In addition, they should understand better the process by which a TCN is employed, the paperwork and the legal rights that they have. On the other hand, TCN women face another challenge since they are the ones that need to take care of their children. Therefore, it may be better for employers to be more flexible regarding childcare and longer lunch breaks to pick up children from school.

Conclusion

Experiences that facilitated the process of labour integration

Many are the experiences that facilitated the process of labour integration:

- The social connections and network. Knowing locals or seeking help from professionals who have contact with employers can facilitate labour integration.
- The completion of training. The example of the one woman that found a job after receiving training in interview skills shows that training can be helpful at any point in life.
- Cultural acceptance. It is important to be open enough and compromise, if possible, to find a job and survive. In addition, employers should accept the cultural differences that TCNs have.
- The alternative solution. Once again, an example from the focus group with the TCN women about the woman from Iran who decided to work on her own and make her handmade jewellery because she did not receive any help from anyone.

Existing gaps

Unfortunately, the existing gaps are various since each person has a different story, needs, gaps, and expectations. During both focus group sessions, it was evident that it is complicated to improve the current situation and many were the gaps mentioned:

- The most prominent challenge is the lack of knowledge of the host country language. All the participants, refugee women and organizations stressed the importance of knowing the host country language which is connected to every component of integration. Language is vital for finding a job, finding a house, for developing social networks as well as for the development of qualifications through formal or informal education.
- Lack of childcare services. Childcare services in Cyprus are very expensive and refugee women stated that they cannot afford to pay for. Therefore, they do not have the luxury of leaving their children in a safe place while they are working.
- Lack of understanding of the legal framework. Most of the employers do not know the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in regards to employment. Therefore, employers are often unwilling to engage with the employment of refugees. At the same time refugees do not know their labour rights. Most of them were not familiar with the official complaint mechanisms completely unaware of the role of trade unions.
- The importance of social networks when looking for job especially in Cyprus which is a small country. Developing networks with the local society and refugee community is considered vital to find a job position given the overall unwelcome labour environment for the population in consideration.
- Discrimination based on appearance (skin colour, or religious symbols) while looking for job in Cyprus was a recurrent theme in both focus groups. Various examples were used to support this stance.
- Lack of a well-organized transportation system. Public transportation in Cyprus has its limits and traveling for work is very difficult. Ownership of private transportation means is very scarce within the refugee population, especially women.

Solutions to make the labour market more accessible

Many are the changes that need to be done in order to make the labour market accessible:

- Society needs to be more open. Cypriot society should understand better the definition of a refugee, their struggles and needs, their differences, whether it is a physical, a cultural, a linguistic, or a religious one.
- Employers should be more motivated to hire TCNs. We consider labour integration as a win –win process where employers are benefited as much as the refugees.
- TCNs should also be more open. Cultural acceptance is a two-way street. Therefore, since employers should be more open, TCNs should be too. As mentioned before, improving skills or taking the hijab off (when necessary for personal safety) is something that they need to accept for having a successful compromise from both ends.
- End of institutional racism. The government should accept the reality and try to integrate refugees into society more easily by changing the current procedures. Right now, there is a wall in the system, not only in Cyprus but in the whole European Union.
- More public recognition of the refugees by the media. The media should help society to understand better the refugee issue that affected Cyprus and Europe. The TCN women that participated in the focus group session believe that media are an important medium that needs to be used for the reintroduction of refugees into the Cypriot society.