

Caritas project EU-Passworld

Background

When refugees flee their countries of origin, they often have to rely on reception programs and informal work to survive, despite their professional qualifications and skills. However, during their prolonged stay in first asylum countries, which often lack employment opportunities, they risk losing their qualifications and experience and are compelled to move elsewhere. Since they lack the necessary documents, visas, and work permits to move legally, they end up in continuous vulnerability and irregularity, which makes their journey even more challenging.

Refugees, particularly those with work skills, could avoid such situations if they were able to access legal and secure channels to reach Third Countries that align with their skills and aspirations. Work mobility could be a key factor in expediting the integration process and providing the necessary resources and capacity for refugees to return to their country of origin once the conditions that caused them to flee have improved, while also contributing to the country's development. The integration of refugees into the job market not only provides a lasting solution for them but also presents a tangible opportunity for host companies to hire motivated workers with suitable skills.

Global job opportunities for refugees remain scarce. According to the 2021 OECD-UNHCR report on legal entry routes for refugees, only 4% of the main refugee nationalities in OECD countries were granted entry visas for work purposes. This is due to various factors, including administrative complexities and practical obstacles faced by refugees seeking legal mobility. However, work permits have become increasingly important in the past decade, with the number of permits issued in 2019 more than double that of 10 years before. In 2019, work permits outnumbered study permits for the first time in a decade for the seven main refugee nationalities.

The international community, including Italy, has committed to expanding legal and safe entry routes globally, with the aim of combating human trafficking, which often affects the refugee population. The New York Declaration also encourages the private sector to contribute to the mobility of refugee workers. Italy, along with other countries, has signed the Global Compact on Refugees, which outlines a resettlement strategy as a response to the global refugee crisis and promotes the management and predictability of migration flows, including the mobility of refugee workers through the identification of beneficiaries with the necessary skills in third countries.

These paths recognize the skills, abilities, and talents of refugees, as well as their need for protection, and highlight the contributions they make to their new countries, communities, and workplaces. Moreover, these paths can provide employers with access to a new pool of talent to fill available jobs.

Caritas' Role in Promoting Legal Entry Routes and Positive Integration Paths.

Relying solely on the humanitarian channel for access forces people to demonstrate their vulnerability to gain entry. Providing alternative access options can recognize and value all aspects of a person without neglecting the need for protection and acknowledging their fragility.

Building on the success of the Humanitarian and University Corridors, which have facilitated safe and legal entry for thousands of refugees in Italy, efforts are underway to develop a similar model for Refugee Labor Pathways. Drawing inspiration from the University Corridors for refugee students (UNI.CO.RE) involving over 30 Italian universities, this initiative seeks to establish clear roles and responsibilities among the various entities involved.

Engaging the private sector is crucial in identifying labor skill requirements, which can be matched with the experiences of refugee beneficiaries in first asylum countries where the project is planned to begin. This can involve developing tailored professional and language training courses in collaboration with specialized agencies.

To open up Refugee Labor Pathways, Caritas engaged in a pilot project that should, in principle, help beneficiaries in need of international protection in first asylum countries allowing them to legally enter the Italian labor market. The pastoral role of accompaniment can play a crucial role in the host communities as well as interacting with the business world that often has different perspectives and ways of operating. This can represent a valuable contribution in practical terms for employment insertion and pedagogical terms for the communities themselves.

Beneficiary characteristics/selection criteria:

- people in need of international protection;
- people recognized as refugees by first asylum countries;
- professional qualifications suitable for the required job positions.

Entry methods:

- Providing beneficiaries with access to humanitarian corridors while ensuring adherence to national protocols' criteria and incorporating a distinct employment insertion program;
- Activating a national memorandum of understanding where companies select refugees based on their skills, qualifications, and motivation, in line with employment needs and availability at destination. Once selected, the embassies in the asylum country issue a work or internship visa. The memorandum of understanding outlines the roles and responsibilities of all the involved parties;