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PROSPECTS



Kingdom of the Netherlands



# ► The role of employer and business membership organizations in promoting the labour market integration of refugees

Good practices from Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda

► **The role of employer  
and business membership  
organizations in promoting  
the labour market  
integration of refugees**

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## ► Abbreviations

<b>ANDI</b>	National Business Association of Colombia	<b>GCR</b>	Global Compact on Refugees
<b>BMWK</b>	Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action	<b>GSO</b>	Gaziantep Chamber of Industry
<b>BDA</b>	German Employers' Associations	<b>GSOMEN</b>	Gaziantep Chamber of Industry Vocational Training Center
<b>BDI</b>	Federation of German Industries	<b>GTO</b>	Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce
<b>CRRF</b>	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework	<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>DIHK</b>	German Chambers of Industry and Commerce	<b>TISK</b>	Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations
<b>DGB</b>	German Trade Union Confederation	<b>UHOA</b>	Uganda Hotel Owners Association
<b>EBMO</b>	Employer and business membership organizations	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>FEE</b>	Federation of Egyptian Employers	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>FUE</b>	Federation of Ugandan Employers	<b>ZDH</b>	German Confederation of Skilled Crafts

## ► Terminology

This brief is exclusively concerned with the labour market integration of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

- A refugee is defined by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as someone who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country.
- Other forcibly displaced persons are those who had to leave their country for a reason other than those listed above – a disaster or climate change for example. For the purpose of this brief, Venezuelans displaced abroad are considered to fall into this category. To facilitate the reading of this brief, the word “refugee” will be used as an umbrella term that incorporates both groups of people, that is, “refugees” and “other forcibly displaced persons.”<sup>1</sup>

To facilitate the reading of this brief, the word “refugee” will be used as an umbrella term that incorporates both groups of people, that is, “refugees” and “other forcibly displaced persons.”

<sup>1</sup> Although Colombia recognizes most Venezuelans within their borders as migrants, many Venezuelans who have left the country are likely to be refugees as defined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In addition, the vast majority of those who have been forcibly displaced from Venezuela meet the refugee definition in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which adds to the definition of refugees as “persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order”.

## ► Executive summary

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With more than 84 million forcibly displaced people globally (UNHCR 2021), there was never a more timely and opportune moment for employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) to take action to promote the labour market integration of refugees. Whether in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Venezuelan exodus or protracted and multi-layered displacement in East and Central Africa, EBMOs around the world are developing innovative approaches to integrate refugees into the labour market.

This brief highlights the role that EBMOs can play in promoting the labour market integration of refugees. It showcases detailed practices of EBMOs in Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda, and how these organizations have worked with their members, government, workers' organizations and other stakeholders to facilitate the labour market integration of refugees along six themes of good practices.

**1. Advocating for evidence-based policies.** A key role of EBMOs is to hold governments accountable for the effectiveness of their refugee policies and to lobby for regulatory frameworks that are transparent and easy to comply with, and which provide a level playing field for all businesses. Often, however, policymakers lack information and data to take informed decisions. Other times, policymakers might not have fully considered the impact of refugee policies on the business community and workers. In situations such as these, it is essential that EBMOs effectively engage with policymakers and lobby for the interests of their members.

**2. Making the business case for hiring and working with refugees.** Demonstrating a strong business case for hiring and working with refugees is one of the most important things that EBMOs can do to lay the foundation for integrating refugees into the labour market. Evidence shows, however, that employers may be initially reluctant to hire refugees because they are uncertain about the contributions that refugees can make as employees. EBMOs can make the business case for refugee labour market integration through identifying investment opportunities in refugee-hosting areas, promoting links between refugee-owned businesses and domestic companies, and illustrating the human resource potential of refugees through pilot projects, among others.

**3. Matching refugee labour with employers' needs.** To fulfil the economic potential of refugee labour market integration, the new labour supply provided by refugees needs to match employer's labour demand. As a first step, refugees' skills and qualifications must be understood. This is often a complex undertaking and may deter employers from hiring refugees. EBMOs can reduce this level of uncertainty for employers through different initiatives, ranging from developing practical approaches to assess and recognize the skills of refugees, to providing labour intermediation services.

**4. Providing employers with targeted legal and human resource support.** In many situations, refugees hold relevant skills, and employers are willing to employ them, however critical legal and organizational barriers make the process of hiring refugees cumbersome and costly. EBMOs can support employers to accelerate and expand the hiring of refugees through training and sensitization measures that clarify complex legal regimes, and also revise human resource policies to make hiring processes fairer and non-discriminatory.

**5. Publicly recognizing employers' good practices.** Public recognition is a powerful performance management approach. EBMOs can use public recognition as a tool to encourage and praise employers who take concrete and effective measures to include refugees into their workforce. Employers that have been publicly recognized by receiving an award, being included in a list or ranking, and so on, can brand themselves as ethical companies that pursue not only profit-oriented but also social goals. This in turn may inspire other employers to follow suit.

**6. Engaging in international cooperation.** In addition to working directly with their members and social partners, EBMOs are trusted partners of the international community. There are numerous examples of fruitful collaboration between EBMOs, United Nations agencies, development banks and international non-governmental organizations ranging from research and project-level activities to policy and strategy development.

# ▶ 1

## Introduction

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At the end of 2021, there were more than 84 million forcibly displaced people globally – more than at any other time in modern history (UNHCR 2021). The vast majority of forcibly displaced persons are hosted by lower- and middle-income countries, and only 17 per cent by high-income countries (UNHCR 2021). More than half of all people displaced across borders are hosted by just ten countries; Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda are among the top five and are the target hosting countries of this brief. Regardless of their level of economic development, hosting countries face major challenges when trying to integrate refugees into their economy and society. A central part of the integration process is the achievement of productive employment. Having a job and becoming part of the labour market in a host society is a significant step for the self-reliance of refugees and a pathway for successful integration. In practice, however, finding productive employment is likely to be a long-term and difficult process for most refugees.

Evidence from the 2014 European Union Labour Force Survey suggests that in the past refugees took up to 20 years to reach the same employment rates as native-born Europeans (Eva Degler 2017). This does not come as a surprise. Compared with other migrant groups, refugees tend to face greater hardships in finding employment. They usually arrive with a weak or in-existent attachment to the host country and its labour market and, owing to the forced nature of their migration, often lack proper documentation to certify their level of education and skills. In addition, along their quest for employment, refugees are likely to grapple with complex regulatory frameworks that prevent them de jure and de facto from accessing the host country's labour market. In countries such as Greece, refugees are banned from employment for six months upon arrival, while their asylum claim is being processed (European Council for Refugees and Exiles 2021). In other countries, such as Lebanon, refugees are only able to work legally in a restricted number of economic sectors or occupations, which typically only provide low-productivity jobs (Lorenza Errighi 2016). Even worse, in countries such as Kenya, refugees face severe freedom of movement restrictions and are effectively doomed to live in closed-camp environments with no or only limited economic activity (Norwegian Refugee Council and Harvard Law School 2018). With few options left, many refugees find themselves relying on humanitarian aid and social benefits or working informally in insecure and low-productivity conditions. Recently, however, there has been a reckoning among policymakers that by depressing the employment rates of refugees after their arrival, employment restrictions not only adversely affect the well-being of refugees but also impose significant costs on the host country's economy. Refugees who struggle to find employment require increased public expenditures for welfare and make lower tax contributions.



In the wake of the global refugee crisis, there has been growing interest in promoting the labour market integration of refugees. This interest is grounded in the moral imperative set out in international law, which obliges states to protect refugees, including their economic and social rights (Foster 2009), as well as in practical considerations with regard to the socio-economic costs of hosting a large number of individuals who are underemployed or economically inactive. At the international level, global policy frameworks such as the ILO's Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) underscore the importance of granting refugees early and full access to the labour markets as a means of enabling refugees to build skills, become self-reliant and contribute to the economic development of the communities that host them (United Nations General Assembly 2018). At the national level, some countries are adopting progressive policies and open their labour markets fully or partially to refugees, including the four target countries of this brief. In 2021 Colombia granted a ten-year temporary protection status, including unrestricted labour market access to more than 2 million Venezuelan refugees. In response to the so-called "European refugee crisis" Germany undertook comprehensive policy reforms to integrate refugees into training and work faster and better. Türkiye provided 4 million Syrian refugees with a temporary protection status and the opportunity to obtain employer-specific work permits, while Uganda, which is considered "the most refugee-friendly country in the world" has hosted and provided land to some 1.6 million refugees from 13 countries for the past decades (Titz 2017).

While it is the responsibility of the state to create the appropriate legal framework, the integration of refugees into a host country's labour market requires a lasting societal effort and can only be achieved through joint efforts of all relevant actors, that is, government and relevant line ministries, employers, workers and their respective representatives, civil society organizations, academia, and refugees themselves. Governments can introduce policies that ease the access of refugees to the labour market, employers can provide opportunities to refugees through apprenticeships, on-the-job training and, ultimately employment; employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) can mobilize their membership and help navigate the legal framework; workers' organizations, together with employers, can work towards creating a welcoming environment for refugees in the workplace and ensuring that their rights and obligations as employees are clearly articulated and respected. Civil society can provide additional support services, and academia can document what works and what does not.

This brief highlights the role that EBMOs can play in promoting the labour market integration of refugees. It showcases good practices of EBMOs from around the world, and how these organizations have worked with their members, government, workers' organizations and other stakeholders to facilitate the labour market integration of refugees. The content of the brief was developed through a two-fold approach: first, a global stocktaking exercise of relevant EBMOs' experiences was undertaken, covering Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Türkiye and Uganda. Second, based on the depth of information available and the diversity of displacement crises, four countries were selected – Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda – to develop country-specific case studies.

The brief features four country case studies that provide an overview of the displacement context and the displacement response of EBMOs, and a conclusion that summarizes the good practices of EBMOs from around the world. These are organized into six themes: (1) advocating for evidence-based policies; (2) making the business case for hiring and working with refugees; (3) matching refugee labour with employers' needs; (4) providing employers with legal and human resource support; (5) publicly recognizing employers' good practices; and (6) engaging with development cooperation partners.

The information contained in this brief was obtained through a desk review of policy and academic literature and through 15 key interviews with global and national EBMO representatives, which were held virtually between June 2021 and July 2022.

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## Country case studies

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Colombia, Türkiye and Uganda were chosen as target countries for this brief given that (1) all of them share one or more borders with major refugee-sending countries; (2) as a result of this geographic proximity, the three countries host a sizeable proportion of refugees in their own territories; and (3) in response to the large influx of foreigners into their countries, they have all taken decisive steps to create a regulatory framework that is conducive to the labour market integration of refugees. Germany was added to provide complementary perspectives from a European country that, despite not sharing a border with a refugee-sending country, experienced a considerable influx of refugees as a result of the Syrian civil war.

Any state-led efforts to integrate refugees into the labour market will fall short without the strong engagement of employers. Not only do they create economic growth and employment, but they also provide space and opportunity for refugees to socialize with co-workers, learn new skills and take part in society. The motivation of employers to integrate refugees is typically a result of their ambition to demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a genuine economic interest in harnessing the refugee talent pool to increase productivity and output. However, hiring refugees can turn out to be a complex undertaking. Employers frequently mention that a key challenge is the uncertainty about different work statuses and skills recognition frameworks. In addition, some employers are inexperienced in integrating foreigners into their workforce and require practical support to prepare their staff and line managers on topics such as diversity management and intercultural communication, among others (UNHCR and OECD, 2018).

As representatives of the collective view of employers, EBMOs play a critical role in articulating how employers can contribute to the labour integration of refugees, as well as in promoting an enabling environment which allows employers to maximize the potential of their contributions. Whether in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Venezuelan exodus or protracted and multi-layered displacement in East and Central Africa, EBMOs around the world are developing innovative approaches to promote the labour market integration of refugees.

### Displacement context

Colombia is an upper middle income country with an estimated population of 51.8 million in 2022. It shares borders with five countries, including Venezuela, which is one of the top refugee-sending countries in South America and worldwide. Forced displacement in Colombia is protracted and increasingly complex. In early 2022, Colombia is a country of origin, destination and transit for refugees and irregular migrants as a result of (1) an ongoing asymmetric armed conflict as well as political and criminal violence which have displaced approximately 7.7 million people internally; (2) the Venezuela crisis and the mass influx of more than 2 million refugees; and (3) irregular migration flows from Colombia to Northern America through the Darien Gap, including migrants from Cuba, Bangladesh, Haiti, India and Venezuela, among others. Owing to the limited scope of this brief, the subsequent analysis focuses exclusively on the labour market integration of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia. As a result of the continued Venezuelan exodus, Colombia is expected to host 2.4 million refugees from Venezuela by the end of 2022, amounting to more than 4 per cent of its population.

Since the onset of the Venezuela crisis in 2014, the Government in Colombia has cautiously introduced a variety of legal pathways to facilitate the regularization of Venezuelans. In July 2017, the government introduced a temporary stay permit (PEP) for Venezuelans that granted the right to work as well as access to education, financial services and essential government services. The PEP was available to those who had entered the country through formal channels before July 2017 and authorized them to stay in Colombia for up to two years. Between 2017 and 2020, the Government initiated six additional rounds of the PEP and renewed the two-year validity of those who had already received it. By mid-2020, almost 690,000 PEPs had been issued. In addition, some 100,000 Venezuelans had other forms of legal residence, some of which also grant them the right to work (J. G. Graham 2020). These include, among others, the special residency permit for promoting formalization (PEPFF), which gave employers the opportunity to formally hire Venezuelans who were in Colombia irregularly and thereby to regularize their status, and the PECP (complementary temporary residence permit) which was available for Venezuelans who sought refugee status in Colombia but had their application rejected. Although these legal pathways represented important and laudable steps towards regularization and integration, their reach and impact were limited. Half of all Venezuelans in Colombia retained irregular status and lacked access to the labour market and essential services (Prada 2019). Frequently cited reasons among refugees included unawareness of the application procedures, a lack of legal documentation, and the inability to verify educational credentials, as well as long and inefficient administrative procedures on the part of the Colombian authorities (J. a. Graham 2020).

In an attempt to establish a unified legal regime and to formalize all Venezuelans in Colombia, on 1 March 2021 the President of Colombia created by decree 216 a single registry of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia (UNHCR 2022). After registration and the completion of a socio-economic profile, all Venezuelans who were already within Colombia, whether regularly or irregularly, and those Venezuelans who will enter Colombia through regular channels until 28 May 2023, are eligible to obtain a temporary protection permit (PPT) which is valid for ten years. The PPT grants full access to the labour market, education, financial services and other essential government services and was internationally recognized as a “bold humanitarian gesture that serves as an example for the region and the rest of the world” (UNHCR 2021). By November 2021, more than 1.6 million Venezuelan refugees had completed the pre-registration process, 750,000 had provided their biometric data and 12,000 PPT identity cards had been issued (UNHCR 2021).

At regional level, Colombia is a member of the Quito process where it co-develops strategies and action plans to address the impacts of the Venezuelan exodus across Latin America (IOM 2022). In addition, Colombia is a pilot country for the implementation of the regional socio-economic integration strategy that the ILO and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed in response to the Venezuela crisis (ILO 2021).

## The displacement response of EBMOs in Colombia

The EBMO considered for the purpose of this brief is the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI), which represents the voice of Colombian employers on social and economic issues at national, regional and international levels.

The ANDI has a long-standing history of promoting the labour market integration of vulnerable groups, in particular through the ANDI Foundation. Since the beginning of the Venezuelan exodus, the ANDI has advocated for and practically supported the labour market integration of Venezuelan refugees through a number of activities.

The ANDI's efforts to generate evidence and information about the labour market integration of Venezuelans in Colombia are particularly noteworthy. In February 2020, ANDI launched in collaboration with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and ACIDI/VOCA,<sup>2</sup> the first edition of the National Inclusive Employment Report, which provides a detailed analysis of the labour market outcomes for vulnerable populations in Colombia.<sup>3</sup> The report features a dedicated labour market profile of Venezuelans in Colombia and identifies critical challenges and opportunities to foster their integration (ANDI 2020). In connection with this report, in June 2020 the ANDI published an additional report with the same partners, entitled "Inclusion of migrants in the labour market, a commitment of the private sector" (ANDI 2020, author's translation from Spanish). The report provides an argument in favour of the labour market integration of Venezuelans that is based on international evidence and highlights good practices from Colombian enterprises, including Claro Colombia (a Colombian telecommunications operator) and Sierra Nevada (a Colombia hamburger restaurant chain), that have taken concrete steps to foster integration in the workplace. Overall, the report argues that "inclusion is a strategy that promotes the competitiveness of the country and of companies" and that refugees and migrants "play a key role in the diffusion of knowledge [...], contribute to productivity growth and bring new skills and capacities" (ANDI 2020, author's translation from Spanish). Most importantly, the report articulates the role that the ANDI foresees for employers in facilitating the labour market integration of Venezuelans: "The role of employers is fundamental to reduce the existing gaps and to promote actions that generate equitable access to employment of vulnerable populations" and therefore "[it] is important that companies strengthen their human talent management and incorporate practices that enhance selection, recruitment and retention processes [...]. If this is done properly, eliminating prejudices, selection biases and basing human talent processes on competencies, [it] will allow for more inclusive work environments and will bring about effects on equity and productivity, moving from a traditional focus on social responsibility to an approach based on competitiveness" (ANDI 2020, author's translation from Spanish).

To make this vision a reality, the ANDI is inspiring, supporting and recognizing enterprises for their integration efforts through different initiatives. For example, the ANDI provides its enterprise members with training and advisory services on human resource policies and contractual procedures to hire refugees, in order to demonstrate that the process is not as complicated as some employers may fear. In addition, the ANDI has initiated the "Inclusive enterprises movement" which consists of a three-step process to inspire members to commit to inclusive workplace practices. First, interested companies sign the Pact for Inclusive Competitiveness, a symbolic commitment to assuming a leading role in including vulnerable populations in business practices. Second, registered companies can apply to be included in the List of Inspiring Companies, which highlights best cases of companies that have addressed social challenges as an integral part of their business strategies. Third, the best social inclusion projects submitted to the list will receive an invitation from the ANDI to apply for the Inclusive Company Seal, a unique distinction in Colombia awarded to companies that have successfully implemented concrete, sustainable and relevant actions to include vulnerable populations, including Venezuelan migrants, in their value chain. In 2021, Claro Colombia, among others, was awarded the seal for the development of a Social and Labour Roadmap, as well as the training and hiring of 318 people who were conflict-affected or Venezuelan migrants (ANDI 2021).

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2 ACIDI/VOCA is an international development non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., United States, that fosters broad-based economic growth, increased living standards, and community development.

3 These are conflict-affected groups, ethnic groups, former combatants who are in the process of reintegration, LGBTIQ people, migrants, people with disabilities, women and youth.

Furthermore, the ANDI encourages its enterprise members and the wider public to procure goods and services from enterprises that are owned by groups in vulnerable situations. Since 2015, the ANDI publishes the annual “We have it on offer” directory, a catalogue that features selected business owners and entrepreneurs that match the ANDI’s vulnerability criteria. In 2020, the directory was entitled “We have it on offer: Migrants and Refugees” and showcased 220 entrepreneurs from across seven departments and four sectors – apparel, corporate gifts, food and handicrafts (ANDI 2020, author’s translation from Spanish). As a representative of the ANDI explained: “This initiative was meant to demonstrate to members and the public that refugees can produce high-quality products. At the same time, we were able to link the refugee-owned enterprises to the supply chain of our members which can result in lasting commercial relations and act as an incentive for refugees to formalize their businesses.”<sup>4</sup>

The ANDI also supports efforts of the United Nations to address the Venezuela crisis. In March 2021, the ILO and UNDP launched a “Regional Strategy for Socioeconomic Integration” of Venezuelan refugees, for whom Colombia acts as a pilot country. The ANDI contributed to the development of the strategy and represented the voice of Colombian employers during the strategy launch event (ILO 2021).

Finally, the ANDI engages in policy dialogue with the Colombian authorities. Together with workers’ organizations, the ANDI expanded the national tripartite dialogue to focus on refugees from Venezuela. A key objective of the ANDI’s advocacy efforts is to reduce red tape and labour costs to make it easier for employers to hire refugees. Other topics include the regularization of the digital economy, which provides, in particular, employment opportunities for Venezuelans through delivery applications such as RAPPi and UBER, for example. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ANDI, together with other social partners, successfully advocated for the recognition of skills of medical professions from Venezuela.

## Key takeaways

Colombia’s decision to regularize 1.6 million Venezuelan refugees is an innovative, pragmatic and inspiring solution for countries in Latin America and beyond. However, integrating a refugee flow of more than 4 per cent of the national population will remain a critical challenge for Colombia’s policymakers, business community and wider society. The October 2020 Gallup poll showed that 69 per cent of Colombians held a negative view of Venezuelan refugees and that, despite massive evidence to the contrary, many Colombians blame Venezuelans for increased crime (La Silla Vacía 2020). Despite such perceptions and social challenges, the medium- to long-term benefits of Venezuelan migration to Colombia appear to far outweigh the costs. From 2015 to 2019, Colombia experienced its fastest economic growth in years – significantly faster than that of neighbouring countries. Observers suggest that this acceleration was in part caused by the influx of Venezuelan refugees (Jaramillo 2019). The International Monetary Fund estimated that Venezuelans’ contributions increased economic growth by 0.25 per cent in 2019. Venezuelans’ contributions to Colombia’s economy occur through different channels. For one, their participation in the economy has led to an increase in consumption and investment. It has also helped resolve labour shortages in certain industries – particularly agribusiness, for which Venezuelans often fill positions that Colombians do not want (World Bank 2020). Early on, the ANDI and its partners recognized the economic potential of Venezuelan migration and the critical role that the business community can play to enable the labour market integration of Venezuelans. Through providing evidence, compiling best practices and above all, inspiring their membership to champion workplace inclusivity, the ANDI has demonstrated that refugee integration can become a driving force to increase productivity and competitiveness.

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4 Anonymous informant #6, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 12 October 2021. Author’s translation from Spanish.

### Displacement context

Germany is a high-income country, with an estimated population of 84.4 million in 2022. Located in Central Europe, Germany shares borders with nine European countries – more than any other country in the European Union.

Germany hosts the second highest number of international migrants worldwide, and more than 25 per cent of its population do not hold a German passport or are direct descendants of immigrants (UNDESA n.d.). Since 2015, almost 2 million applications for asylum have been filed in Germany with 74 per cent of all claimants coming from only four countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Türkiye and Iraq (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2022).

For the first years of the 21st century, Germany had effectively been “shielded” from any major refugee influx, given its geographical location in the heart of Europe and the adoption of the Dublin Convention in 1997, stipulating that the first EU Member State where fingerprints are stored, or where an asylum claim is lodged, is responsible for a person’s asylum claim. However, in 2015, at the height of the so-called European refugee crisis, Chancellor Merkel famously proclaimed “*Wir schaffen das*” (We can do this) and decided to make use of the Convention’s sovereignty clause to process Syrian asylum applications for which Germany would ordinarily not be responsible. Over the following months, Germany witnessed an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers. In 2016 alone, 745,545 asylum claims were filed in Germany, compared with 9,071 in 2006. Ever since, Germany has become a key refugee hosting country within Europe and continues to receive more than 100,000 asylum claims per year.

The asylum process in Germany is regulated by the German Asylum Act. Registered asylum seekers are subject to mobility restrictions for the first three months of their stay, after which they can apply for an employer-specific work permit unless they have prevented deportation through lack of cooperation or are from a safe country of origin. Any person that has been recognized as a refugee has unrestricted access to national systems such as health, education and social services, as well as to the labour market. Foreign qualifications can be recognized by different bodies at federal and national levels. Between May and July 2022, the employment rate for asylum seekers grew by 2.4 per cent, to 41.7 per cent (IAB 2022).

Germany signed the Geneva Refugee Convention as early as 19 November 1951 and is still a party to the agreement. Today, the country engages on displacement issues worldwide. At the European level, Germany played a decisive role in orchestrating the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal (see the Türkiye country report of this brief). In 2018, Germany joined the Global Compact on Refugees. In addition, it is the second largest donor to UNHCR, as well as one of the largest donor countries for the region affected by the war in Syria, having provided and committed more than 3.7 billion euros in humanitarian and development aid (The Federal Government 2021).

### The displacement response of EBMOs in Germany

The three EBMOs considered for the purpose of this brief are the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH).

The BDA is the recognized umbrella organization of German employers at national and international levels. Since the onset of the European refugee crisis, the BDA has been actively involved in crafting Germany's refugee integration response. Together with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), the BDA is a board member of the Federal Employment Agency, where they act as a watchdog and strategic advisor to the German government on issues related to refugee labour market integration, among others. A central demand of the BDA is the recognition that “Many of the people who we grant humanitarian protection

to [...] will remain in Germany for a long time or forever. A job with secure income is the central starting point for integration. It is therefore important to start quickly with integration into the labour market and thus avoid the mistakes of the past. However, expectations should also be realistic: The labour market integration of refugees takes time." (BDA 2022) In its capacity as the umbrella organization for German employers' associations, the BDA regularly publishes public statements to represent the interests of its membership and to influence public discourse and decision-making. In January 2016, the presidents of the BDA, BDI and ZDH published a joint declaration to support the German government's commitment to a coordinated approach and a fair distribution of the burden of receiving and integrating refugees among the EU Member States. The declaration also contained proposals for quick and consistent integration into training and work, such as the provision of integration courses for asylum seekers with prospects of staying, and also for tolerated persons, as well as the establishment of a nationwide secure vocational stay, and access to all vocational training support services. As a result of the policy engagement of the BDA and its partners, the German government adopted in 2016 the Integration Act, which provided asylum seekers with prospects of staying and gave tolerated persons the possibility of obtaining an employer-specific work permit within three months of arrival. It also introduced "training toleration" (commonly referred to as the "3+2 regulation") which stipulates that even rejected asylum seekers and tolerated persons may obtain a three-year residence permit to complete a vocational training programme, after which they are eligible for either another two-year residence permit (provided that they obtained employment related to their vocational qualification) or a six-month residence permit to search for employment (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2016). With this law, a central concern of the BDA and its partners was addressed – namely, providing planning security for refugees who would like to build their future in Germany and employers who are investing in refugees' vocational education and eagerly looking for ways to overcome the country's notorious skills shortages.

In addition to advocating for policy reform, the BDA, BDI and ZDH have produced numerous guidelines and resources to provide employers with tangible support to train and hire refugees. The most well-known example is the online best practice platform *Erfolgreich Integrieren* (Integrate successfully), which the three associations created in collaboration with the Federal Employment Agency. The platform provides employers with a comprehensive and user-friendly repository of information related to relevant labour market regulations and statistics, work-related language support, apprenticeships, vocational training, employment and recognition of foreign qualifications, in addition to case studies, publications and contacts of support organizations. A similar online platform called *Netzwerk – Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge* (Network – Enterprises integrate refugees) was initiated in 2016 by the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). The platform invites small and medium enterprises to join the network and offers free guidance and resources to facilitate the integration of refugees at the workplace through monthly webinars, newsletters and publications, as well as email and telephone advisory services. As of November 2022, 3355 enterprises have joined the network.

The aforementioned online platforms are complemented by the *Willkommenslotsen* (Welcome Tutors) initiative which was also established in 2016. It offers small and large companies a one stop shop for all questions concerning the integration of refugees in training, internships or employment. During company visits, the tutors provide business owners and HR professionals with advice on the German work permit regulations and the regional and national funding and support offers that companies can tap into when training or hiring refugees. The aim of the initiative is to sensitize as many entrepreneurs as possible to refugee integration and to convince them that refugees as trainees or (future) skilled workers can be an enrichment for every company. In 2021, the tutors succeeded in filling approximately 225 internships, 920 vocational training placements and 210 vacancies with refugees (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action 2022). In early 2022, the initiative was scaled up to provide additional capacities to integrate Ukrainian refugees in German companies (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action 2022). The ZDH is implementing the Welcome Tutors initiative in collaboration with 60 local chambers of crafts, commerce and industry and other private sector organizations nationwide. The yearly costs amount to 5.4 million euros, of which 57 per cent are funded by BMWK and the remaining 43 per cent by the private sector.

## Key takeaways

The progressive labour market policy reform of the German government, combined with the timely provision of workplace integration support services provided by Germany's leading EBMOs, has arguably contributed to the successful labour market integration of many refugees in Germany. Between 2017 and 2020, almost a quarter of all companies stated they had qualified and employed refugees. At the same time, the Federal Employment Agency recorded consistent increases in the employment rate of asylum seekers during the same period (KOFA 2020). Despite the many economic, social and political challenges that remain, Germany has demonstrated that refugee labour market integration can be successful, provided that (1) the private sector welcomes refugees as an opportunity to address skills shortages, (2) employers are receiving timely support services, and (3) that government is willing and able to implement meaningful and progressive labour market reforms. Above all, the German experience demonstrates that when policy reforms such as the Integration Act and its 3+2 regulation go hand in hand with relevant and easily accessible employer support services such as the *Erfolgreich Integrieren*, the *Netzwerk – Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge* platforms and the Welcome Tutors initiative, refugee integration is not just a combination of short-term and ad hoc activities, but leaves systems in place that are still operational six years after the height of the European refugee crisis and that can be adapted and upscaled to respond to other displacement crises, such as the influx of an estimated 300,000 Ukrainian refugees in 2022 (DW 2022).

## ► Türkiye

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### Displacement context

Türkiye is an upper-middle income country, with an estimated population of 85.4 million in 2022. It is located at the intersection between Europe and Asia and shares borders with eight countries, including Syria.

Türkiye is currently hosting over 4 million refugees, which represent more than 4 per cent of its population and make it the largest refugee hosting country in the world (UNHCR 2022). The vast majority of these refugees are Syrian – since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Türkiye has hosted 54 per cent of the total number of Syrian refugees – and some others from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran. Most refugees in Türkiye are living in urban centres, dispersed throughout the country.

Türkiye retains a geographic limitation to its ratification of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention), which means that only those fleeing "events occurring in Europe" can be given refugee status. Others, including refugees from Syria, are only given temporary protection status (Robinson 2019). However, even under temporary protection regulations, refugees are granted access to national systems such as health, education and social services, as well as to the labour market.

The 2016 Regulation on Work Permits of Refugees under Temporary Protection grants all beneficiaries of temporary protection the right to apply for a work permit<sup>5</sup> and access to formal employment (Refworld 2016). The work permit application is submitted by the employer through a simple online system, and benefits from a reduced fee.<sup>6</sup> After six months of residence in Türkiye, Syrians under temporary protection can also benefit from services provided by the Turkish Public Employment Agency, including counselling, job matching, skills training, entrepreneurship support, on-the-job training, and job placement support. Syrians also can enrol in technical and vocational education training and in apprenticeship schemes offered by the Ministry of National Education (UNDP 2020). Finally, Syrians under temporary protection

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5 Syrians who work in agriculture are exempted from work permits.

6 In 2022, an annual work permit for a Syrian refugee cost 44 euros, compared with 119 euros for the annual work permit issued to other foreigners. See: <https://visaguide.world/europe/turkey-visa/fees/>.



are allowed to start and develop their own businesses. According to a study by the Brookings Institution, in July 2020, there were 9,041 firms with Syrian owners in Türkiye, and in 2019, 15,159 firms with at least one Syrian partner. These enterprises are mostly small, yet combined they still employ some 250,000 people of whom 40 per cent are estimated to be Turkish nationals (Karasapan 2021).

In 2016, the European Union (EU) and Türkiye signed a joint statement, also known as the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal, which essentially curbed irregular migration from Türkiye to the Greek islands in return for a resettlement scheme between the EU and Türkiye, 6 billion euros of aid through the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye,<sup>7</sup> and the publicly declared reinvigoration of Türkiye's EU accession process. As a result, the number of irregular migrants who tried to seek asylum in the EU by crossing the Aegean Sea dropped from nearly 1 million in 2015 to 42,305 in 2017 and transformed Türkiye overnight from a transit country of migration to a destination country (University of Aegean 2018).<sup>8</sup>

Together with Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, Türkiye joined the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in 2015, an initiative facilitated by the United Nations to coordinate national and international humanitarian and development assistance targeted at Syrian refugees and host communities in the five countries. The livelihoods component of the 2022 3RP's Türkiye chapter features, among others, the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation, the Turkish Industry and Business Association, and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye as implementation partners.

## The displacement response of EBMOs in Türkiye

The three EBMOs considered for the purpose of this brief are the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TISK), the Gaziantep Chamber of Industry (GSO) and the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce (GTO).

The TISK is the recognized umbrella organization of Turkish employers at national and international levels. Among other activities, the TISK stands out for advocating for an evidence-based approach to refugee policy in Türkiye. In 2015, the TISK, in cooperation with Hacettepe University, produced a study entitled "Perspective, Expectations and Suggestions of the Turkish Business Sector on Syrians in Türkiye", to anticipate what a protracted displacement of Syrians in Türkiye may entail for the development trajectory of the country, and in particular for its business community (TISK 2015). In hindsight, the study was published at a critical moment in time – just a few months before the conclusion of the EU-Turkey refugee deal. Above all, the study advocates for a realistic and pragmatic stance on Syrians in Türkiye and criticizes that "the issue of Syrians in Türkiye is now beyond the context of 'temporariness' and the method of 'emergency management policies'. The end of a four-year long crisis has completely erased all the expectations – regardless of the choices – in connection to Syrians returning to their country. In this context, the necessity and essentiality of social, economic, and political integration policies should be remarked." (TISK 2015) The study argues that a revision of the temporary protection status of Syrians was needed to facilitate access to the labour market. In the following year, Turkish policymakers passed the 2016 Regulation on Work Permits of Refugees under Temporary Protection, which was presumably informed by the TISK study. It is worth mentioning that the TISK study foresaw the adverse impacts of the EU-Turkey refugee deal (which was in preparation at the time) and warned that it "could be potentially detrimental to EU values, Türkiye-EU relations and the refugees themselves. And that accession negotiations as an instrument to achieve its pragmatic ends in light of realpolitik considerations will cause harm to the normative notion of Europe" (TISK 2015) – which proved to be an accurate prediction.

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7 The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey provides a joint coordination mechanism to address the needs of refugees and host communities with the focus on humanitarian assistance, education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support. See: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/negotiations-status/turkey/eu-facility-refugees-turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/negotiations-status/turkey/eu-facility-refugees-turkey_en)

8 The impact and legal conformity of the EU-Turkey Refugee deal remain disputed. See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/eu-anniversary-of-turkey-deal-offers-warning-against-further-dangerous-migration-deals/>



Owner of a garment factory in Istanbul, Türkiye. © Fatma Cankara / ILO

Since then, the TISK has held the Turkish government accountable for its policies and highlighted in the media that, for example, the Work Permit Regulation was ineffective. It warned that “companies using Syrians as cheap labor have an unfair advantage over other businesses” (Al-Monitor 2016), and that child labour, which had been eradicated in Türkiye, was resurging among refugee communities (Reliefweb 2016). The TISK’s latest publication is the 2020 report on the Integration of Migrants into the Turkish Labor Force, which was produced with the support of the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI). The report provides updated figures on the labour market outcomes of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, as well as on employers’ relations with Syrian employees and their perceptions of them. Overall, the report underscores the importance of refugees’ labour market integration but warns that the competition for economic resources between Syrians and Turks has a detrimental effect on social cohesion: “48 per cent of the general population in Türkiye define the relationship between Turks and Syrians as a very hostile relationship, 55 per cent do not wish their child to have a refugee friend” (TISK 2020).

The GSO and GTO represent the business community in Gaziantep – a medium-sized city in Southern Türkiye that has been one of the main destinations chosen by families fleeing the civil war in Syria. Since 2012, Gaziantep has absorbed more than 500,000 Syrian refugees and has seen its population grow by 30 per cent. Gaziantep has traditionally been a trade and manufacturing hub which provided a conducive environment to foster labour market integration of Syrian refugees. Many refugees have found employment opportunities in Gaziantep’s food and textile sectors. Others have opened businesses, resulting in a fourfold increase of trade between Gaziantep and Syria during the civil war, from US\$100 million in 2011 to US\$400 million in 2015 (Tokmajyan 2021).

Being among the driving forces of Gaziantep’s economic development, the GSO and GTO have both played a key role in providing services and opportunities to Syrian jobseekers and entrepreneurs.

In 2017 the GSO inaugurated the GSO Industry Vocational Training Center (GSOMEN) to fill demand for qualified labour by member companies in the manufacturing sector and to support Turkish and Syrian jobseekers in obtaining formal employment. The GSOMEN offers training in 180 occupations that are aligned to the national occupational standards of the Turkish Vocational Qualifications Institute. In an effort to contribute to social cohesion between host and refugee communities, the GSOMEN organizes

mixed training programmes that bring Turkish and Syrian trainees into the same classroom. In addition, the GSOMEN organizes social and recreational activities for both groups that are accompanied by a counsellor. Before commencing the training programme, Syrian trainees are provided with Turkish language training to enable them to communicate at the workplace and to foster their long-term integration into Turkish society. Subsequently, the Turkish and Syrian trainees take part in the same training programme that combines technical and vocational training with life skills training, including subjects such as work ethics, cross-cultural communication, occupational safety and health, among others. In addition, the GSOMEN organizes exposure visits to enable trainees to meet potential employers and to obtain a first-hand impression of the working conditions in Gaziantep's manufacturing industry. Upon conclusion of the training programme, the trainees undergo exams to obtain a certification that is recognized by the Turkish Vocational Qualifications Institute. The graduates are then supported by the GSOMEN's job placement unit which matches graduates with vacancies offered by GSO members or refers them to the Turkish Employment Agency. For Syrians specifically, the job placement unit provides support during the work-permit application process. Since 2017, more than 12,000 people have received training by the GSOMEN. Out of these, 4,000 were refugees, for whom 3,000 work permit applications were filled, with a success rate of over 50 per cent. The GSOMEN is partnering with the ILO and other international partners such as the FAO, UNDP, GIZ SPARK and the IOM to continue and expand their support to Turkish and Syrian jobseekers. Support measures include funding to provide the trainees with lunch, transport and educational insurance and/or to develop training material and purchase new training machinery.

Since 2016, the GTO has been promoting the labour market integration of Syrian refugees through numerous activities and services. A key activity of the GTO is the provision of business services to Syrian entrepreneurs in Gaziantep. In 2016, the GTO noticed that one of its fastest growing membership segments were Syrian companies. In response, the GTO established the "Syrian Desk" – a dedicated service for Syrian members to provide tailor-made guidance on trade and investment laws in Türkiye.<sup>9</sup> As part of this service, the GTO produced brochures and booklets in Arabic on Turkish business laws and organized a trip for Syrian members to an Istanbul trade fair. In 2019, the GTO won the World Chambers Competition in the category "Best Unconventional Project" and received global recognition for the success and innovation potential of the Syrian Desk (International Chamber of Commerce 2019).<sup>10</sup> This not only raised the international reputation of the GTO but also significantly strengthened its membership base. Before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011, the GTO counted 11 Syrian companies among its members. Ten years later, this figure has risen to 2,500 companies, representing 10 per cent of its membership.<sup>11</sup>

## Key takeaways

Türkiye has arguably done more to host Syrian refugees than any other country. Despite the limited ratification of the Refugee Convention, its regulatory framework stands out as conducive to promoting the labour market integration of refugees. However, integration policies should be examined and evaluated against their effectiveness. The continuous advocacy efforts and research undertaken by the TISK illustrate how EBMOs can hold government officials accountable and can confront them and the wider public with truths about the medium- and long-term socio-economic impact of the Syrian refugee crisis. At the same time, the case of Türkiye also demonstrates the business case for refugee integration: if provided with a conducive regulatory environment and relevant services from dedicated EBMOs such as the GSO and the GTO, refugees can make significant investments in their host communities and even become creators of employment opportunities. However, overall, Türkiye's experience also illustrates the socio-political complexities of refugee integration. Becoming the world's largest refugee hosting country is expensive from both an economic and a social point of view. Mostly left alone to deal with the influx of Syrian refugees, and faced with a souring economy, Türkiye has declared to have spent more than US\$30 billion between 2011 and 2017, to which the public perception in Türkiye is increasingly negative (TEPAV 2018).

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9 Anonymous informants #4 and #5, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 20 June 2021.

10 The World Chambers Competition is a biennial event organized under the auspices of the International Chamber of Commerce and the World Chamber Federation to highlight innovative projects by chambers from around the world "that benefit not only business, but society as a whole".

11 Anonymous informants #4 and #5, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 20 June 2021.

### Displacement context

Uganda is a lower middle-income country with an estimated population of 48.2 million in 2022 – one of the youngest and most rapidly growing populations in the world. Located in the heart of East Africa, Uganda is a landlocked country that shares borders with five countries, including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, which are among the top refugee-sending countries in Africa and worldwide. Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, with nearly 1.6 million refugees from over 30 countries, which represent more than 3 per cent of its total population (UNHCR 2022). Most of the refugees in Uganda are from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, with a few others from as far away as Asia and Syria.

Despite its own national development challenges, Uganda has had an open approach towards refugees historically and has consistently provided refugees with asylum and access to basic rights. Internationally, Uganda is considered to be “the most refugee-friendly country in the world” (Titz 2017), and “refugees tend to be employed in whatever sector that is providing opportunities” as mentioned by an EBMO representative (ILO 2022). For the past two decades, Uganda has been pursuing a development response to forced displacement and has integrated refugee matters into national and sub-national development plans, with a view to promoting refugees’ self-reliance and integration. The 2006 Refugees Act (Refworld 2006) and the 2010 Refugee Regulations (Refworld 2010) stipulate that refugees shall be admitted, allocated land for settlement and provided with documents. In addition, refugees are granted the right to work and are exempt from any requirement to pay fees to obtain a work permit prior to taking up any offer of work or continuing in their employment. Refugees are also allowed to register and develop a business. In practice, however, most refugee-owned enterprises operate informally, without business registration, as is the case in the Ugandan economy generally. In September 2017, Uganda became eligible for the World Bank’s 18th International Development Association (IDA 18) Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities, which provides funds on favourable terms to low- and middle-income countries that are committed to refugees’ social and economic inclusion and that have developed an action plan with concrete steps (UNHCR 2020).

At regional and international levels, Uganda actively promotes the labour market integration of refugees and engages in numerous forums and initiatives. In 2016, Uganda participated in the Global Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, at which it committed to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), as proposed by the 2016 New York Declaration. Uganda also supported the development of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018 as well as the Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD region in March 2019.

### The displacement response of EBMOs in Uganda

The two EBMOs considered for the purpose of this study are the Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE) and the Uganda Hotel Owners Association (UHOA).

The FUE is the apex of EBMOs in Uganda and represents the voice of employers on social and economic issues at national, regional and international levels. Over the past five years, the FUE has increased its focus on refugees’ labour market integration. In 2020, the FUE and the National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU), in conjunction with and supported by the ILO, undertook two assessments to analyse opportunities to expand their activities into the refugee-hosting districts of Arua and Isingiro. The overall purpose of the assessments was to identify priority interventions to facilitate refugee integration from the perspective of employers and workers. The FUE presented the results of the employers-led assessment in late 2021 at round tables with private sector representatives to raise awareness about investment opportunities in the refugee-hosting districts.

This initiative appears to be fruitful, as a representative of a business membership organization confirmed: “There is a very vibrant economic system in refugee settlement areas. Several refugees are also coming on board as agents and runners of retail outlets – these are channels for distribution of manufacturing products and provide opportunities to push down to the last mile.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, the FUE seeks to increase the footprint of employers’ organizations in Arua and Isingiro to encourage refugee-owned businesses to join business associations. This will in turn “create more opportunities for collaboration with the private sector in refugee-hosting districts, such as provision of training, skills development, enterprise creation schemes and wider policy cohesion to enhance the engagement with the State authorities.”<sup>13</sup>

Being acutely aware of the gap between Uganda’s education system and employers’ demand for skills, the FUE is also looking at refugees as means to bridge skills shortages in Uganda. Employers appreciate refugees not only for the technical skills they bring but also for their attitude and work ethics. An employers’ representative highlighted that “Uganda is home to a big number of refugees but there is not much stigma. We will even forget that they are not from the same community – I am impressed by their attitude, determination and ambition.” (ILO, 2022) In cooperation with national authorities, the FUE is supporting efforts to create a job portal to match refugees and returnees in Uganda with appropriate job opportunities offered by its members. In addition, the FUE and the UHOA, with the support of the ILO, are implementing an apprenticeship pilot programme to illustrate the benefits of labour market integration for both refugees and employers. As part of the pilot, a team of 95 refugee and host community youth were enrolled in the Uganda Hotel and Tourism Training Institute in January 2022. After completing the first phase of college-based training, these apprentices will depart for their first on-the-job training experience in 40 different hotels across the country and will learn hands-on skills in food production, front office, food and beverages services, housekeeping and laundry. The FUE encourages its members to follow the examples that they are helping to create in the hotel and tourism sectors and to promote refugee-inclusive workplaces in their own companies. In 2021, the FUE introduced a new category in their annual Employer of the Year Awards to recognize employers who provide employment opportunities to refugees.

#### ► Recognizing refugee’s skills and enhancing language proficiency

The recognition of skills and language proficiency is a key challenge to the hiring of refugees. One employers’ representative explained that “many immigrants are refugees who had to leave their countries in a big hurry and were unable to carry proof of skills”. Upon arrival in Uganda, it is therefore extremely difficult to determine the level of skills and qualifications that these workers hold. A further complicating factor is the heterogeneity of official and tribal languages in Uganda and within its neighbouring countries: “Uganda alone has 48 languages, now add to that the languages from the areas around us, the low levels of literacy, and low levels of homogeneity of national languages, this makes it difficult to communicate, even if the right skills have been found. For example, you get somebody from DRC who speaks Swahili and French – how do you communicate with these workers? They need English and local languages in manufacturing to understand clearly the instructions for occupational safety and health and producing. Otherwise, that comes back to bite you as an employer.” In the absence of targeted language and integration services, refugees are often unable to integrate into the labour market quickly: “The first years are typically spent to acclimatize and learn languages, along the way, the skills are hampered or become forgotten.”

**Source:** ILO, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous informant #8, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 12 January 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous informant #3, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 15 June 2021.

Finally, the FUE actively engages in policy dialogue and advocacy with the relevant line ministries. In line with Uganda's broader approach to include refugees into the society and economy, the FUE seeks to "mainstream" refugee integration into national policies. This marks a strategic shift away from stand-alone policies with specific focus on refugees towards ensuring that labour market policy accommodates all workers, including refugees.<sup>14</sup>

## Key takeaways

Despite having its own national development challenges, Uganda has been remarkably welcoming to refugees for the past two decades, and indeed has set an example for countries to follow. A key feature of Uganda's refugee policy is the expectation that refugees become productive members of their hosting communities. For this reason, refugees are granted freedom of movement, access to services and the labour market, and even given a plot of land if they choose to live in a settlement. This overall positive view is reflected by EBMOs in Uganda who regard refugees as potential employees, consumers, business partners and business association members. However, despite Uganda's progressive policies, the labour market integration of refugees remains a momentous task and requires concentrated action by government, the social partners and the international community. From an employers' perspective, promoting the labour market integration of refugees in Uganda thus requires less attention to policy reform and advocacy, and much more effort to provide specialized services and identify opportunities to create jobs and economic growth for refugees and their hosting communities.

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14 Anonymous informant #3, interviewed by Julian Schweitzer, 15 June 2021.

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## Conclusion

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The four target countries of this brief stand out for both the sheer number of refugees that they host and the progressive refugee integration policies that they have adopted. Although the forced displacement experiences of Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda are arguably very distinct, the four countries have one thing in common – policymakers who take a realistic, pragmatic and opportunity-driven stance on refugee integration. Instead of confining refugees to closed camps, Colombia, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda have established regulatory frameworks that are conducive to refugee integration and allow freedom of movement as well as access to the labour market, education, finance and social services. Such progressive policies are aligned with global refugee integration frameworks outlined by the GCR and the CRRF and reflect research that confirms that refugees and migrants, if provided with a conducive regulatory framework, can support the host country's economic growth by bringing new skills to the labour force, innovating, complementing other workers by specializing in different tasks, spending money at local businesses, and investing in new businesses (Clemens 2018). However, to harness the economic potential of refugees, employers of the host country must take centre stage. After all, it is their willingness to hire refugees and to include refugee-owned business into their value chain that determines whether refugees have the capacity to become fully autonomous.

Against this backdrop, the critical role that EBMOs can play to promote the labour market integration of refugees becomes evident. EBMOs can inspire, support and recognize the refugee-integration efforts of their members and advocate with governments to create refugee-inclusive regulatory frameworks. Given the increasingly protracted nature of displacement situations and the increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons in 2022, the labour market integration of refugees will remain an important topic in the foreseeable future for policymakers, the business community and the wider public. Engaging EBMOs in forced displacement response will thus become even more critical. The innovative and good practices of the ANDI, BDA, BDI, DIHK, FUE, GSO, GTO, TISK, UHAO and ZDH can serve peer-EBMOs that are confronted with similar displacement situations as powerful examples and inform their service offer and advocacy strategies.

By way of conclusion, this brief identifies six broad themes of good practices that EBMOs can engage in to promote the labour market integration of refugees.

## 1. Advocating for evidence-based policies

A key role of EBMOs is to hold governments accountable for the effectiveness of their refugee policies and to lobby for regulatory frameworks that are transparent, easy to comply with and that provide a level playing field for all businesses. Often, however, policymakers lack information and data to take informed decisions. Other times, policymakers might not have fully considered the impact of refugee policies on the business community and workers. In situations such as these, it is essential that EBMOs can effectively engage with policymakers and lobby for the interests of their members.

In Türkiye, the TISK took a leading role in pushing the refugee-related policy dialogue from a short-term, humanitarian perspective towards a medium-term, integration-focused perspective. Through the “Perspectives, Expectations and Suggestions of the Turkish Business Sector on Syrians in Türkiye” study, the TISK was able to underpin its advocacy for a revision of the temporary protection status of refugees with evidence and original data. In Colombia, the ANDI published the report on the “Inclusion of migrants in the labour market, a commitment of the private sector” [author’s translation from Spanish] to inform ongoing policy dialogues about the regularization of Venezuelans with international evidence and experiences. In Germany, the BDA and its partners published a joint declaration to advocate for a quicker and less bureaucratic integration into training and work. The experiences of the ANDI, BDA and TISK illustrate the added value of including social partners into policy dialogue: where government officials are often driven by short term considerations and their popularity among the electorate, EBMOs can provide complementary perspectives and evidence that is more likely to paint a realistic picture of the challenges and benefits that the labour market integration of refugees entails.

## 2. Making the business case for hiring and working with refugees

Demonstrating a strong business case for hiring and working with refugees is one of the most important things that EBMOs can do to lay the foundation for integrating refugees into the labour market.

Evidence shows that many employers are initially reluctant to hire refugees because they are uncertain about the contributions that they can make as employees. A 2017 survey implemented by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), together with the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, found that almost 80 per cent of employers hired refugees to demonstrate CSR (Liebig, 2017). However, hiring refugees solely based on branding objectives or out of altruism is insufficient to integrate refugees into the labour market sustainably: as soon as finances become more restricted, CSR spending is likely to be cut. Ultimately, employers need to see in refugees an opportunity to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of their businesses.

As this brief has shown, EBMOs can make the business case for hiring and working with refugees in different ways. In Colombia, the ANDI launched the “We have it on offer: Migrants and Refugees” registry to showcase and link refugee-entrepreneurs to the supply chain of their members. Similarly, the FUE in Uganda undertook an assessment to identify business opportunities in refugee-hosting communities and disseminated the findings at investor round tables. In addition, the FUE is demonstrating the human resource potential of refugees through a pilot apprenticeship project in the tourism and hospitality sector. Finally, there is also a business case that EBMOs can make for themselves. The experience of the GTO in Türkiye demonstrates that refugee-(co)owned businesses can (1) become an important new membership segment, and (2) make significant investments into their host communities and even become creators of employment opportunities.



### 3. Matching refugee labour with employers' needs

To fulfil the economic potential of refugee labour market integration, the new labour supply provided by refugees needs to match employers' labour demand. As a first step, refugees' skills and qualifications must be understood. This is often a complex undertaking. Refugees have diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Some are highly educated and worked as engineers, medical doctors or researchers before fleeing their home country. Some have managerial or entrepreneurial skills, while others were employed in professional occupations or skilled trade jobs. Others have not yet completed their education or have only a few years of schooling, if any. Another complicating factor is that owing to the forced nature of their migration, refugees often lack proper documentation to certify their level of education and skills. And even when proper documentation is available, the skills certification framework between a refugee's country of origin and the hosting country may be different and skills recognition may not be possible after all.

This complexity can generate uncertainty about the professional abilities of refugee jobseekers, and employers may underestimate their skills and qualifications. Indeed, data from the 2014 European Labour Force Survey shows that tertiary-educated refugees in employment in Europe were three times more likely to be in jobs below their formal qualification level than the native-born (60 per cent versus 21 per cent) and twice more likely than other migrants (30 per cent) (OECD and European Union 2016).

EBMOs try to reduce this level of uncertainty for employers through different initiatives, ranging from developing practical approaches to assess and recognize refugees' skills to providing labour intermediation services. The FUE-PROSPECTS labour intermediation project in Uganda and the Welcome Tutors initiative in Germany are inspiring examples of how EBMOs can support employers to identify and hire refugees with the appropriate skills and qualifications.

### 4. Providing employers with legal and human resource support

In certain situations, refugees hold relevant skills and employers are willing to employ them; however, critical legal and organizational barriers may make the hiring process of refugees too cumbersome and costly.

Employers are often unaware of refugees' different work statuses and their length of stay in the host country. While refugees normally have a secure legal status, in some countries this status may be subject to renewal after several years (as was for example the case in Colombia prior to the introduction of the PPT). Moreover, policy changes in the host country, which are beyond the control of employers, may alter the conditions under which refugees will be able to stay and thus work. Unclear and changing regulatory frameworks pose inherent challenges for employers and may deter them from hiring refugees, especially when considering investing in their upskilling and training. In addition, employers and human resources departments are often inexperienced with integrating foreigners into their workforce and lack policies and knowledge on topics such as diversity management and intercultural communication, among others (UNHCR and OECD, 2018). As a result, employers may overestimate the restrictions and obstacles related to the hiring of refugees, and simply disregard their applications.

EBMOs can help enterprises to accelerate and expand the hiring of refugees through training and sensitization measures that clarify complex legal regimes and that make hiring processes fairer and non-discriminatory. In Colombia, the ANDI provides its members with training and advisory services on human resource policy and contractual procedures to demonstrate that the hiring process of refugees is not as complicated as some employers may fear. In Germany, the *Erfolgreich Integrieren* and *Netzwerk – Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge* platforms are a good example of how EBMOs can develop relevant and user-friendly digital support services for their members. Similarly, refugee entrepreneurs who are setting up their own business in the host country will need in-depth legal and technical support to manoeuvre the regulatory framework. The GTO, through the Syria Desk, supports Syrian business owners with targeted legal advice in Arabic. Overall, the clearer host employers and refugee-entrepreneurs are about the regulatory framework, the greater are the chances of avoiding an expansion of informal employment and economic activities as a result of the integration process.

## 5. Publicly recognizing employers' good practices

Public recognition is a powerful performance management approach. EBMOs can use public recognition as a tool to encourage and praise employers who take concrete and effective measures to include refugees into their workforce. Employers that have been publicly recognized through receiving an award, being included in a list or ranking, and so forth, can brand themselves as ethical companies that do not only pursue profit-oriented but also social goals. This in turn may inspire other employers to follow suit.

In Colombia, the ANDI has initiated the “inclusive enterprise movement” and provides outstanding enterprises with the “Inclusive Company Seal”. Similarly, the FUE in Uganda has introduced a new category in their annual Employer of the Year awards to recognize employers who provide employment opportunities to refugees. In some cases, even EBMOs can receive recognition for their efforts to promote the labour market integration of refugees. The GTO, for example, received the “Best Unconventional Project” award during the 2019 World Chambers Competition for the services it provides to refugee-owned business in Gaziantep through the Syria Desk.

## 6. Engaging with development cooperation partners

In addition to working directly with their members, EBMOs are trusted partners of the international community. There are numerous examples of fruitful collaboration between EBMOs, UN agencies, development banks and INGOs ranging from research and project-level activities to policy and strategy development. Some of these have been outlined in this brief, such as the collaboration in Colombia between the ANDI, USAID and ACDI/VOCA on the National Inclusive Employment Report and the “Inclusion of migrants in the labour market, a commitment of the private sector” report and the FUE-PROSPECTS apprenticeship project in Uganda.

Regardless of geographical location and the type of displacement crisis, these good practices offer lessons learnt for peer EBMOs beyond the four target countries of this brief and bring hope to inspire advocacy efforts and tangible support services for creating economic opportunities for both refugees and employers.

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