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Influencing and Promoting Global Peace and Security



# Horizon Insights

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**SPECIAL ISSUE:  
MIGRATION**

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**Labour Market Integration  
Challenges of Highly Educated  
Refugees in Flanders**

**Networking to Work: Introduction  
to The New Models for Integrating  
Immigrants in Belgium and Finland**

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**Taking a Closer Look to Immigration  
Policies**

**Book Review: Factfulness - Ten  
Reasons We're Wrong about the  
World - and Why Things are  
Better than You Think**

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# Contents

Foreword	IV
Labour Market Integration Challenges of Highly Educated Refugees in Flanders	1
Networking to Work: Introduction to The New Models for Integrating Immigrants in Belgium and Finland	11
Taking a Closer Look to Immigration Policies	20
Book Review: Factfulness - Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World - and Why Things are Better than You Think	26

## Foreword

### Dear Reader,

We are happy to present a special issue dedicated to migration, the permanent challenge the EU faces to. Beyond the Horizon ISSG believes that the EU and its Member States should be more foresighted while trying to formalise the migration affairs and structure migratory flow. In this regard, the EU should find ways to tackle the root causes of migration and deal with the complex and multifaceted migration phenomenon on its own merits, rather than just focusing on reducing the number of asylum seekers.

The first article is a case study on the challenges faced by the highly educated refugees in Flanders (Belgium) through their labour market integration. A very relevant topic with increasing number of highly educated asylum seekers reaching Europe. This case study not only provides literature review and background information on labour market integration but also presents the results from the analysis of interview and survey data collected at the initial phase of All-in-one 4HER project by Beyond the Horizon ISSG.

The second article is an experimental research of the MESH transnational project on integration of immigrants through networking. It introduces the networking models developed by the projects partners and reflects the piloting results of these models in Finland and Belgium regarding challenges and experiences of immigrants for networking in their new host countries. One important finding is that due to COVID-19 pandemic, digital networking model developed by Beyond the Horizon ISSG drew considerable attention of immigrants and organisations due to the limitations of physical contact.

The third and the last article provides a more general and global outlook to migration. The author argues that there is a problematic, short-term and interest oriented interaction between policy makers and social scientists on migration policy and this relationship affects the quality of research results which in the end concludes unsuccessful migration policies.

The book review of this issue, Hans Rosling's « Factfulness » deserves a special attention in this post-truth age. The author advocates a fact-based understanding of the world against ignorance which is cherished with instincts. Rosling argues that the human being does not act exclusively rational and informed as he identifies 10 different instincts that create a gap between the perception and the reality. Last, but not least, Beyond the Horizon ISSG team wishes you a nice holiday season. May the summer comes with health, success and joy.

Sincerely yours,

Beyond the Horizon ISSG

# Labour Market Integration Challenges of Highly Educated Refugees in Flanders<sup>1,2</sup>

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Fatih Yilmaz\*, Fatih Aktas\*\*

## Abstract

Flanders has been increasingly receiving highly educated asylum seekers and refugees (HER) for the last decade. It is interesting that native-migrant employment gap is higher for highly educated refugees than for lower educated refugees in Flanders. As a part of the ESF project “All-in-one 4HER”, this research aimed to explore the underlying reasons for this fact and define the challenges faced by highly educated refugees during their integration process in the labour market. Having analysed the mixed methods data collected, three groups of key findings are explained. While the most important challenge is assessed as the language barrier, it has been found that lack of guidance and information for their education level is another factor lengthening their integration process. Difficulties in transforming their skills and qualifications into the local labour market is also instrumental in lengthening this period. As a solution, a considerable number of them follow examples around them and select shorter, more guaranteed career paths to mostly bottleneck jobs deviating from their previous studies and experiences.

**Key words:** Migration · Integration · Labour Market · Flanders · Employment · Mentoring · Refugee · Migrant.

## 1. Introduction

The arrival of asylum seekers in the EU countries has increased over the last decade and Flanders is one of the regions that has been a destination for highly educated refugees. One of the most noticeable and distinctive features of the refugees/asylum seekers who immigrated to Flanders after 2016 is that a remarkable number of them are highly educated, can speak at least one foreign language, and had a professional career in their home countries. Experiences in their countries such as human rights violations, hunger, violence, racism, suppressing their prospects, etc. force them to leave their home countries. These refugees have mostly positive perceptions of the human rights situation and democracy in Europe, and give even more weight to these than to the economic opportunities Europe has to offer (Timmerman, Clycq, Levrau, Van Praag & Vanheule 2018, 18). Although those with better qualifications but have minimal prospects in their home countries are assumed to be much more willing and ready to integrate to a new environment, the integration process can really be difficult for many of them.

This article reflects the research carried out at the initial phase of All-in-one 4 HER project “Fast-track integration of highly educated refugees into the labour market”. The societal challenge addressed by the project is the employment gap between immigrants and natives in Flanders, Belgium. This project aimed to develop a model for a faster and better labour market integration process of refugees through informing and connecting. The model developed by the project is presented in the “Handbook for integration supporters” (De Winter, Van den Berckt, Yilmaz 2021).

Despite having a developed labour market integration policy and available funding, the immigrant-native employment gap in Belgium is one of the largest in the EU (Eurostat, 2017). It is interesting that

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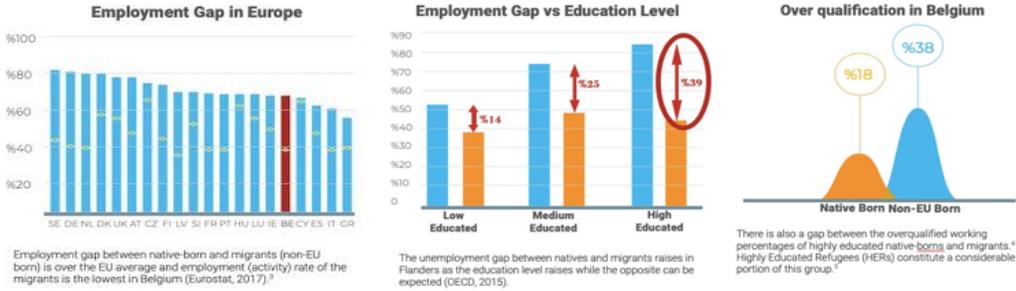
<sup>1</sup> This research is financed by European Social Funds (ESF) and Flemish Government under [ESF Vlaanderen Transnationalitetit IV](https://all-in-one4her.eu) programme in the name of the “All-in-one 4 HER” project. For more information about the project please visit <https://all-in-one4her.eu>

<sup>2</sup> A shorter Dutch version of this research is published as a Chapter of the handbook “Handboek voor integratie ondersteuners”. See the handbook at <https://all-in-one4her.eu/pdfs/handbook-versnelde-integratie.pdf>

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this gap is increasing by the level of education, while one would normally expect the opposite (OECD, 2015). Furthermore, overqualified working rates of migrants (non-EU citizens) is also far higher than Belgian natives (FOD, 2018) (See figures 1-3). While vacancy rates in Belgium are among the highest in the EU, migrants are yet to be seen as talents who can fill in the labour gaps. Although highly educated refugees constitute a considerable portion of migrants (OECD, 2019), the EU doesn't have a specific integration policy addressing this target group yet. However, there have been some individual and local initiatives in some countries including Flanders (Kennisrotunde, 2016 & European Parliament, 2016).



Figures 1-2-3. Employment gap statistics<sup>3</sup>

Increasing number of highly educated refugees can lead to rethinking the existing ideas regarding ideal integration processes and how they lead to particular outcomes (Timmerman et al., 2018). There are few studies specifically focusing on integration of Highly Educated Refugees (HER) in the labour market, exploring the reasons behind the employment gap and recommending solutions in Flanders. Based on a quick scan of recent studies and projects on labour market integration of refugees, several major findings can be considered and/or validated for highly educated refugees in Flanders. In the recent literature, it can be seen that emphasis is placed on finding a job at an appropriate level, the length of the integration period, language learning, recognition of qualifications, and gender related differences.

Working at level is one of the indicators of immigrants' labour market integration. Refugees are much more likely to be overqualified than other migrants in Europe (European Commission, 2016). Representation of immigrants at different level jobs can be a complimentary indicator. In the Flemish Labour market, "compared to natives, immigrants are under-represented in public sector and white-collar private sector jobs, and are over-represented in the less well-paid blue-collar jobs and temporary employment" (Pina, Corluy, Verbist 2015). It was found in Finland that one of the most important goals in the lives of well-educated refugees was to find a job according to their own education level, but this can be extremely difficult (Yija"la" and Luoma, 2019).

Concerning the length of the integration process, it takes refugees up to 20 years on average to have a similar employment rate as the native-born (European Commission, 2016). In the first 5 years after arrival, only one in four refugees is employed, which is the lowest of all migrant groups (European Commission, 2016). This number includes highly educated refugees as well. The length of this process is mostly associated with language barriers, difficulties in transmitting qualifications, and a lack of local experience. In addition to this, existence of 'refugee entry effect' is another factor explained by Baker, Dagevors and Engberssen (2017). Compared to labour and family migrants, refugees often arrive in their destination country less prepared and suffering from traumatic experiences. Moreover, they need to apply for asylum and await the decision on their residency status. A number of success factors for integration policy have been drawn up on the basis of two overview studies (European Parliament, 2016 and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016). However, these are not specific to higher educated people. The main factors are providing good qualification of experience and training, quick start of language learning tailored to the person, creation of individual integration plans, and building work experience (Kennisrotunde, 2016).

Language barriers are one of the mostly mentioned obstacles for integration of HERs. The employment

<sup>3</sup> Illustrations are available at the project website. Check "Challenges" for details at <https://all-in-one4her.eu/aboutus.php>

rate of refugees increases as their language skills improve. This counts for the refugees who have to learn the host-country language, and don't have prior knowledge of it. Knowledge of English as a common international language can be helpful to accelerate their integration process. However, there is evidence that refugees with the knowledge of local language, especially those from the northern part of Africa having French as their mother tongue, are still disadvantaged on the labour market and face major obstacles both to finding a job and to keeping it. Those obstacles seem to have little to do with their individual characteristics or skills (especially their language skills or their education). Rather, non-observable external factors, including cultural barriers and discrimination, seem to play a major role (European Commission, 2016).

Difficulties in recognition and transmission of qualifications is also instrumental in late integration. Unlike their EU-born peers, for refugees "There is an absence of returns on higher education in terms of labour market integration. More specifically, education beyond a secondary degree does not yield any additional [...] returns." (Peschner, 2017). It is generally assumed that there is a positive effect of education in one's home country on the probability of participation in the labour market. But the characteristics of a bachelor's education in the labour market are not currently specified and it matters very much whether an immigrant's education has been acquired in the origin country before migration or in the destination country (Philip, Mark and Lisa 2021). On the other hand, it is also important to consider the fact that, for refugees, "vocational capabilities are directly transmissible, whereas general academic skills are not" (Yija"la" and Luoma, 2019).

Gender based differences in integration is another field that the literature focuses on. In general terms, "bringing refugee women into employment is a particular challenge." (European Commission, 2016). This can result from "a different household composition, with widespread female inactivity and more children" (Pina, Corluy, Verbist 2015) and cultural differences. Whether this applies to highly educated women refugees is a gap that still needs to be explored.

As a result of our literature review, it can be said that although there is quite a wide range of literature on immigrants' integration in the labour market, specific labour market integration challenges of highly educated refugees in Flanders are yet to be researched more in depth. There was a need for such research before setting up a solution in the All-in-one 4HER project to properly define the societal challenge, in order to develop a model for a faster and better integration process.

To reach this end, a small-scale research was conducted to understand the challenge more deeply in the Flemish context. This research aims to define the underlying reasons for a longer integration period of highly educated refugees into the labour market and define the main challenges they face towards labour market integration.

## 2. Methodology

A mixed data collection method was used in this research. Mixed data collection was carried out through a survey (quantitative) and interviews (qualitative). Despite the fact that the data gathered by quantitative method is considered rigorous, reliable and persuasive, it does not allow the researcher(s) to explore the feelings and to observe the body-language of the subjects in depth since the contact with the subject is limited. The attitudes and feelings on 'integration' have both objective and subjective manifestations. Therefore, a mixed data gathering method was carried out through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with some of the subjects selected amongst the sample. This helped capture subjective manifestations, and supported and enriched the data gathered through the quantitative method.

As a part of the All-in-one 4HER Project, a small scale pre-structured online survey was conducted with the participation of 125 highly educated refugee adults (including asylum seekers) across Flanders, Belgium between May - December 2019 by Beyond the Horizon ISSG. The eligibility criterion used in the project was very strict: only newly arrived (within the last 5 years), high-educated refugees were allowed to participate. These HERs came from 8 different nationalities (Afghan, Eritrean,

Ethiopian, Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian, Syrian, and Turkish). A gender balance was sought among the participants. Nearly half of the participants had a bachelor’s degree, and the rest had master’s or PhD’s. This survey was supplemented with in-depth interviews which were conducted with 7 employers, 12 public sector organisation (GO, NGO) employees and 20 highly educated refugees. The participants were asked to reply to a dozen questions on their attitudes and experiences about integration of HERs into the Flemish labour market. The details of the participants are depicted in figure 4.

Newcomers 125 (survey) + 20 (interview)				Organisations 12 (int.)	Employers 7 (int.)
Gender	Education	Nationality	Status	Type	-
75 + 9 Male	56 + 5 BA	8 (Afg, Eri, Eth, Irn, Irq, Pal, Syr, Tur)	105 Refugee	5 GO	7
39 + 11 Female	50 + 12 MA		10 Asylum seeker	5 NGO	
11 No response	9 + 3 PhD		10 Other	2 Academia	

Figure 4. Survey and interview participants

### 3. Results and Key Findings

After the analysis of the quantitative survey data and supporting in-depth qualitative interview data, key findings were identified about highly educated newcomers’ attitudes toward the process of integration as well as organisations’ and employers’ role in this process. This section provides an overview and summary of these key analytical findings in three groups with some meaningful illustrations of the survey data.

#### Language

**Firstly, motivation and awareness of learning the local language is viewed as high despite the hard circumstances.** A big portion of the participants connect the learning of a new language with a number of positive words and phrases in the interviews and are aware of the importance of learning the local language. As we see in the graphic as an indicator of motivation, 50.4 percent of the participants started learning the local language within the first six months of their arrival. In the first year, this rate is totally around 70 percent. However, 25 percent of the participants started learning the local language within 1-2 years. The obligation of following a language for receiving financial support from social services also played a role in their motivation. While speaking English can demotivate some newcomers to start learning the local language, some regret starting late because of difficulties experienced in finding a job. On the other hand, the (perception of) need for attaining financial means as soon as possible can also hinder their language learning or result in postponing to later stages.

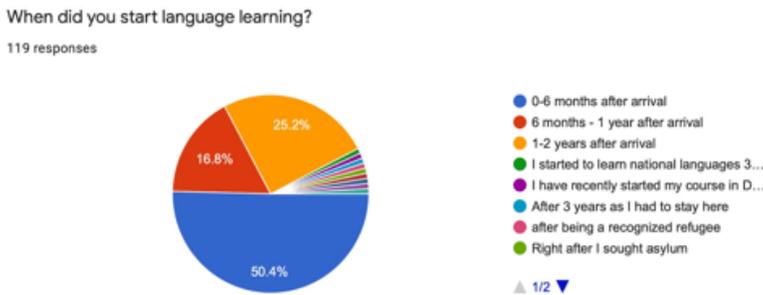


Figure 5. Starting language learning

**Secondly, the local language barrier was viewed as the most significant issue in terms of integration into the Flemish Labour Market.** Not being able to speak the local language is, even after being officially recognized, a never-ending drawback for refugees. They encounter this problem in every aspect of their life which can cause strong feelings of discrimination and isolation from the society. Moreover, the information about this issue gathered from the interviews is also supported by the survey results. Among the participants, 66% viewed the language barrier as the foremost obstacle in finding a job that matches up with their level of education. The additional obstacles to finding a job are seen as discrimination, lack of experience, lack of diploma equivalence, and lack of social network by the participants.

Additionally, most of the participants speak more than one language. Despite the fact that they learn local languages (French and/or Dutch) at a considerably good level, they are compelled to continuously improve their language since employers demand a nearly perfect level.

If no, what is the most important reason for your unemployment?

85 responses

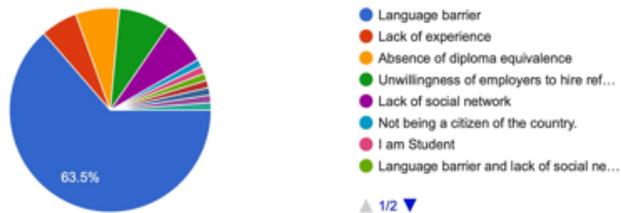


Figure 6. Most important reasons for unemployment

**Thirdly, learning the local language is not an urgent issue for a considerable portion of participants who speak English.** The survey results show that the participants with a good level of English do not perceive the significance of learning the local language and do not feel a need to take immediate action upon their arrival to learn and use it in their daily life. Lack of feeling urgency about learning the local language is demonstrated by 31 out of the 125 participants. The figures indicate that 38.75 percent of the participants who can speak English have the same or lower local language level than non-English speaking participants. During the interviews, it became apparent that English speaking refugees postponed learning the local language and tried to find English speaking jobs first. There are a number of HERs who found jobs with only English, however this is rare when compared to all.

What is your level of Dutch?

120 responses

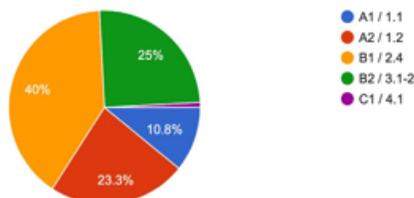


Figure 7. Level of local language

**Moreover, gender affects the language learning process and integration into the Flemish Labour Market.** According to the survey results, female participants started to learn and improve on the local language later than men. Specific reasons for female HER's later language learning and later integration are related to house care and babysitting. Babysitting was seen as one of the most important obsta-

cles in terms of learning local language in interviews. Beyond the babysitting consuming most of the mother's daily time, it also restricted the mother's socialisation. Additionally, traumatic experiences before their arrival may also play a role in being late to start taking active steps to learn the language and integrate into the labour market.

### Lack of Information and Guidance

**Another problem is indecisiveness and guidance. Indecisiveness led by lack of information and guidance plays an important role in delayed integration into the labour market.** The survey and interviews determined that lack of information about the labour market and a lack of guidance made career decisions difficult for HERs. Most of the interviewees said that they couldn't find information in a known language and they didn't know where to look for information. Those staying in reception centres after their arrival also said that they had limited access to the internet.

Most of the participants think that they didn't get enough guidance at their education level, which led to difficult decision making and time wasted. A considerable portion of the participants got information from their friends rather than professionals. 19.5 percent of the participants state that they have heard from their friends that there is a language course for newcomers. Moreover, 43.7 percent of the participants stated that they learned about diploma equivalency from their friends. 43.1 percent of the participants answered the question "Have you heard, been invited to or informed about various activities guiding refugees for finding a job in Flanders?", as "I have not heard and not been invited." Furthermore, only 27.2 percent of respondents believe that government organisations can guide them in finding jobs at their level. 67.5 percent of participants state that they do not have enough guidance according to their education level. The interviews highlighted that the lack of guidance and information may lead HERs to follow the examples around them. While good examples can make nice role models for HERs, bad examples may cause wrong decisions, time wasted and increased frustration.

### Transfer of qualifications and skills to the Labour Market

**On the other hand, a considerable portion of HERs possess little awareness of diploma equivalence and how to use their qualifications in the labour market.** Although 46.3 percent of participants had been granted diploma equivalence and 16 percent of participants were in their diploma equivalency process, 35.8 percent participants responded that they had not yet applied. 66 percent of those who answered this question believe that diploma equivalence is inessential. This was further investigated in interviews which showed that many HER's don't actually know why equivalence is necessary. Many did not know how to showcase their skills in the labour market of the host country.

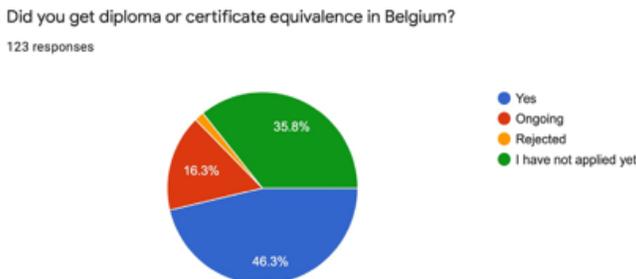


Figure 8. Recognition of qualifications

**A big portion of HERs had superficial knowledge about the Flemish labour market culture and a lack of knowledge on showcasing their competencies in the Flemish labour market.** In terms of the number of applications for a job, HERs can generally be described as active. 39.1 percent applied to a range of 1-10 jobs, 26.4 percent applied to a range of 10-100 jobs, and 14.5 percent applied to a range of 100-200 jobs. But survey results show that 43.7 percent of job applicants did not receive any job in-

interview invitations even though they applied to a lot of jobs. According to some interviewees, this was attributed to a lack of knowledge about the labour market. They didn't know how to write a good CV in Flanders or how to behave and respond during interviews. They learned this through experience and asking more experienced friends, which took a long time for them.

It was seen in the interviews that a big portion of HERs did not have sufficient knowledge and experience in the Flemish labour market culture, about recruitment processes and job application procedures. There is a necessity for guidance on topics such as professional CV writing, attitudes and behaviours in job interviews.

Some working interviewees mentioned also that they had difficulties adapting to the working environment and culture, specifically concerning relations with their colleagues and supervisors.

Another perceived significant barrier to integration into the Flemish Labour Market: Discrimination According to the survey results, second most significant perceived barrier for finding a job among HERs is unwillingness of employers to hire; in other words, discrimination. Many HERs mentioned this during the interviews that they had faced discriminatory experiences during their training, internship and job application process. Some female participants think that "Muslim women wearing scarves are not welcomed positively" by the Flemish employers. Furthermore, racial differences make it difficult for HERs to be accepted in the Flemish labour market.

Survey results show that 43.7 percent of job applicants did not receive any job interview invitations although they made many applications. This was supported during the interviews by several HERs. A university professor mentioned that he applied for more than a hundred jobs over a 5 years period without being invited to an interview once. He felt that it was because of his origin and name, which was incredibly frustrating and hurtful, and he ended up starting a low-level job. In line with this, 53 percent of employed survey respondents were working below their level of their education.

A recruiter of a big company said that there is still a considerable amount of unconscious bias against immigrants among the recruiters, although some preventive measures are being taken in big companies. On the other hand, several relatively small employers mentioned lack of knowledge about hiring refugees, the validity of their competencies and necessary paperwork, which led them to doubt whether to employ refugees.

Lastly, a big portion of HERs don't believe that they will be able to find a job in Flanders according to their background (study, experience). As a solution, many of them are focusing on bottleneck jobs (ICT, Nursery, etc). 39.1 percent of the survey respondents didn't believe that they would be able to find a job for which they have experience and education in from their home country. In the interviews, some reflected their hopelessness because their academic or vocational skills were not transferable to the Flemish labour market, although they had very high positions in their home country such as professor, judge, pilot, doctor, etc. In line with this, many interviewees responded that being experienced and well-educated does not help in finding a job.

In this context, many HERs are searching for new career options and paths which are shorter, faster and have a stronger job guarantee. The bottleneck jobs help most of them at this point, and it is seen among the interviewees that the direction towards these jobs is gradually increasing. ICT jobs, nursery and accountancy are recently popular ones.

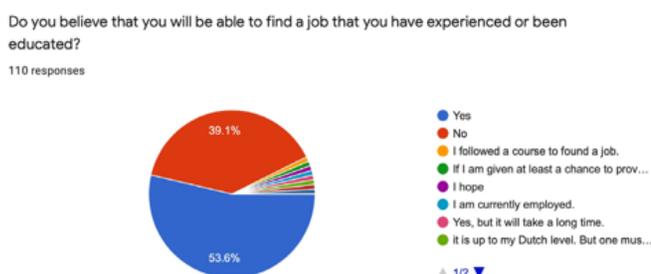


Figure 9. Expectation to find a job in line with education and experience

#### 4. Conclusions

This article aimed to define the underlying reasons for a longer integration period of highly educated refugees into the labour market and to define the main challenges they face in Flanders, Belgium. The results and key findings of the research are mostly in line with the selected general findings from the literature review. These are validated specifically for Flanders in this research. There are also some interesting results reflecting the experiences and attitudes of refugees regarding their integration processes.

The findings of the research are grouped and explained in three parts. Initially, they face challenges concerning language. It is interesting to find out that highly educated refugees' motivation and awareness of learning the local language is quite high despite the hard circumstances they are facing. Most of the refugees view the local language barrier as the most significant reason for their unemployment due to lack of communication and difficulties in accessing information and networks. On the other hand, it is not an urgent issue for a considerable portion of English-speaking participants who try to find jobs before learning the local language. Nevertheless, most HERs have significant difficulty in finding a job without learning the local language. It is also interesting that those who learn local languages at a considerably good level still feel compelled to improve their language since employers demand a nearly perfect level.

Most highly educated refugees felt that they had a lack of information and guidance tailored to their education level. Indecisiveness led by lack of information and guidance plays an important role in delaying integration into the labour market. They spent more time than expected trying to find a suitable path towards a job. The lack of guidance and information may lead HERs to simply follow the examples around them. While good examples can be strong role models for HERs, bad examples may cause wrong decisions, time wasted and increased frustration.

Lack of awareness and knowledge on transferring qualifications and skills to the Flemish labour market is another significant challenge. A considerable portion of HERs possessed little awareness of diploma equivalence and how to use their qualifications in the labour market. Also, a big portion of HERs had superficial knowledge about the Flemish labour market culture, which impacts their adaptation to the workplace after starting a job. Lack of information, discrimination and unconscious bias among employers are also significant factors that lengthen their integration process. A large portion of HERs don't believe that they will be able to find a job in Flanders according to their background (study, experience). As a solution, many of them are focusing on bottleneck jobs which can have easier and shorter paths to employment.

From a gendered perspective, highly educated female refugees tended to have a longer period of language learning and integration than men because of several reasons including spending more time doing domestic labour, babysitting, and dealing with traumas from their previous life.

Although this article is based on a small-scale research in Flanders, it makes a complementary contribution to the growing literature on labour market integration of immigrants based on their education level. This study can be carried out on a larger scale and adapted to other EU countries. Extending the research to include all immigrants is also possible. The findings of this research are likely to have considerable exterior validity due to many regions across the EU facing a similar influx of highly-educated refugees. If the research can be repeated in the other EU countries, a logical comparison of outputs between countries can be made.

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## Networking To Work: Introduction to The New Models for Integrating Immigrants in Belgium and Finland<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Social networks play a vital role as a source of information for the immigrated people and affect many aspects of their lives. They provide access to information, for example about jobs and conditions in the host country. This article intends to highlight the experiences of the MESH project regarding the importance and challenges of social networks for immigrants in Finland and Belgium. The findings of the article are based on the piloting experiences of the network models developed by the MESH partners. This is a case study in which various methods of qualitative research have been used. The paper finds that cultural gaps and language problems are the major impediments to building social networks and they can be faced and diminished by systematic and patient networking practices.

**Key words:** Immigrants, integration, employment, social networking, networking model.

### 1. Introduction

Immigrants face various challenges to start a new life in a different society. Building a network and finding useful information about the labour market are the main challenges. Nowadays most of the jobs, especially in the private sector, are not well circulated or advertised. An effective way to know about jobs is through networking and connecting with the people. Therefore, it is important to develop networks with the people of the host country. Networking is a useful tool for empowering and integrating immigrants through getting information, making friends, and learning about new cultures. And all these promote the process of a better functioning society and sustainable development.

Social networking is identified as a key to immigrants' economic and social success in destination countries. Social networking also helps accelerate their integration process and assists to utilize their expertise effectively. It is obvious that social networking is not only concerned with employment or career, it also helps one find new social circles or companions, shows one's own expertise or interests to the people, and acquaints them with the cultural rules and social norms of a host country.

Highlighting the importance of networks, the MESH international project<sup>2</sup>, "Employing immigrants via networks and mentoring", has been working to empower immigrants and jobseekers through networking and mentoring since January 2019. The goal of the project is to develop, experiment and distribute models and practices of mentoring and networking. The duration of the project funded by

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<sup>2</sup> More information on MESH project is available at <https://mesh.turkuamk.fi/in-english/>.

European Social Fund is between 1/2019 – 12/2021.

The partner organizations of the MESH project from Finland are Turku University of Applied Sciences, LAB University of Applied Sciences and Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The Belgian partners are HIVA KU Leuven, Economic House of Ostend and Beyond the Horizon ISSG.

One of the main aims of the MESH project is to develop networking models to empower immigrants. During the last 2,5 years, the partner organizations of this project developed three models of networking:

- Networking steps model by Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- Model for organizing mentoring initiatives by the Economic House of Ostend, Belgium
- “All-in-one 4 HER” digital networking model by Beyond the Horizon ISSG, Belgium

This article intends to introduce the mentioned networking programmes of the MESH project and summarise the findings of their pilots in Belgium and Finland. It also shortly explains the importance of social networks for jobseeker immigrants.

## **2. Networking and Its Importance in Employment**

Networking is considered to be one of the key skills for successful job search and career building. For many immigrants, however, finding professional networks in a new home country can be very challenging. Language is a strong barrier for them to build a network and get into the labour market. Cultural communication styles can vary, even if there is a common language to converse with.

Networking as a concept has been used since the early 20th century to describe complex sets of relationships between people as well as organisations. Castells (2004, 3) named our society as a ‘networking society’ whose social structure is made up of networks powered by communication technologies. While social networks have always existed, networks today are more diverse and are extremely strengthened by social media and the internet.

Networks have been defined as a group of units connected with ties. Units can be people, organizations or states (Castells, 2000). Network concept is versatile and can also refer to a certain organizational form between independent organizations. Thus, networks can be interpersonal or interorganizational. In this article we concentrate on interpersonal networks.

Social networks are seen as social capital (compared with human capital, educational capital, cultural capital, economic capital) (Coleman, 1988). Social capital refers to norms of reciprocity and trust. Some scholars see social capital more as an individual property, others more as a community property. For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 119) social capital is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. They consider social capital as a personal asset in the competition among individuals aiming to improve their own position vis-à-vis others.

Social networking and social capital have become more important in working life due to fragmented and flexible working life structures. Collaboration and project-based working has been increased. Precarious work, fixed term contracts and “limitless careers” are more prevalent. Many job opportunities are not even published officially, but either internally, via social networks or social media. In today’s job market, more than half of the job vacancies are not made public. It is estimated that 75% of posts for jobs are generally filled through the hidden job market (CareerLink, 2015). Networking is considered as one of the most effective tools to get access to the hidden part, which makes developing networks especially important and necessary for immigrants.

## **3. Methodology**

The study adopts qualitative methods with the combination of an explanatory and descriptive case study, interviews, and participant observation to accomplish it. Case study is a preferred method because it allows for the simultaneous investigation of how, what, and why questions in a real-life con-

text, where the researchers have limited control over events (Yan, 1994). Thus, the case study method helps develop a holistic understanding of immigrants' networking.

The primary data has been collected from different stakeholders and the target group such as immigrants (male & female), project workers and officials working in this field during and after the piloting of the models. The field data has been analysed in a descriptive manner.

#### 4. Networking Steps Model (Finland)

As one of the partners of the MESH international project, the team of Tampere University of Applied Sciences has developed the "Networking Steps Model". The model recommends seven steps to create or develop a successful network. The steps are: 1) Mindset; 2) Goal setting; 3) Networking action plan (NAP); 4) Building a human connection; 5) Super connecting; 6) Follow-up and maintenance of relationships; and 7) Never give up and be positive.

The steps are interrelated and interdependent, but each step is guided by its own tools, activities, tips, and links which contribute to creating a successful network (see Figure 1). The tools and activities of each step are easy to understand and follow.

- The first step "Mindset" helps in creating a productive mindset through various tools and activities. According to Baker (2000), social capital is created as the resources are available to an individual because of his or her personal relationships. Strong self-motivation, willingness and self-confidence are essential for a mindset in network building.
- "Goal setting" is considered the second step, which clarifies a person's aims and provides a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the process. It motivates one to work and creates intentional focus. Goal setting is based on personal importance and self-efficacy (Locke & Latham 2002; Latham and Locke 2006; Schöttle & Tillmann 2018).
- The third step, "networking action plan", starts when the goals are known and defined. The plans must be realistic and achievable. With a timeline or milestones, you can track progress when different goals need to be achieved (Garcia, 2016).
- The fourth step deals with the "human connection", either face to face or virtually, depending on the goals and action plan. Building relationships with others leads to a broader network, which can strengthen social support as well as provide useful ideas and advice (de Janasz & Forret 2008).
- The fifth step, "super-connecting", consists of tools and tips that help in finding the people with strong connections. However, weak connections may also help in finding strong connections.
- The sixth step is about "following up and maintaining the relationship". It's difficult to develop a network without regular and continuous follow-up, which helps with building trust and confidence among the stakeholders.
- The final step, "never give-up and stay positive", motivates one to keep going, even though one might face some adversity during the process. After completing the exercises, networks likely become stronger. They might help immigrants find a job or better connect with a new society.
- More details about the steps model are available here: <https://networking2work.weebly.com/steps.html>

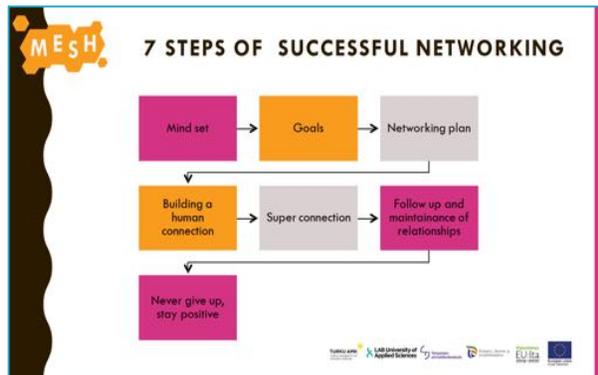


Figure 1. Networking Steps Model (Developed by MESH, 2020)

The MESH project team of Tampere University of Applied Sciences piloted the steps model online during autumn 2020 and spring 2021. The multicultural piloting groups were developing their networks in order to get acquainted with the Finnish society and job market. According to collected feedback, the workshops opened participants' eyes for possibilities of effective networking and finding information about hidden jobs.

Most of the participants expressed that the content of the programme had met their expectations, even though face to face workshops might have been more fruitful ways to develop networks. Overall, the participants were happy with the discussions during the sessions, and they found the provided materials useful. Nevertheless, challenges during the pilot had to be met, while the world was dealing with pandemic and strict assembly restrictions. Availability and intention of participants varied especially during the second pilot in spring 2021.

In Spring 2021, the networking step model was piloted in the Turku region too. The pilot was divided into four workshops based on different networking phases: mindset & goal setting, action plan, creation of relationships, and maintenance of relationships. Participants were highly educated people with immigrant backgrounds. A common target for the participants was to find their way to the Finnish job market.

Based on the collected feedback, participants were satisfied with the content, process, way to work, and the group in general. The workshops met expectations and offered support and tools for networking. The overall grade for the networking pilot was 8,5/10.

Finnish MESH project has also carried out several career mentoring programmes for international talents. The aim of the programmes is to support international talents, known as mentees, towards Finnish labour markets. Mentoring can support them in recognizing their career opportunities, skills and development areas, as well as understanding networking and working life in Finland with the help of experienced mentors. Mentors and mentees who participated have been interviewed and below are the major findings about how they see networking in Finland.

During the group discussions at the workshops, participants learned a lot from each other, and peer support encouraged them to develop their networks and networking skills. One of the participants said "I am not alone in not knowing how to network. I am more willing to look into networking." After the workshops, participants felt more confident doing networking activities and they felt more relaxed with networking in general. They felt that networking was not as complicated as they used to think because now they have better understanding about methods and tools to widen their networks.

Participants wished to learn more about cultural aspects and differences in networking. Different personalities were an interesting topic in discussion and participants wished to have more content related to that.

## 5. Model for Organising Networking Initiatives (Belgium)

This model is developed by the Economic House Ostend, a city organization where jobseekers get support in their job search. The target groups of the Economic House are adult jobseekers with a migration background and NEET youth (youth not in employment, education or training). Some of the strengths of Economic house are the multi-disciplinary team and their hands-on flexible approach.

The modules created by Economic House enhance learning in the context of job application skills and orientation to the labour market through guided job applications during an open learning centre, individual coaching, and a driver's license programme. The House also organises different networking initiatives such as a job application afternoon session with temporary employment agencies and information sessions for people who are distant from the labour market. The House has taken some additional initiatives in building trust among the jobseekers with migrant backgrounds, such as accessibility of counsellors, an open door policy and a solution-oriented attitude. They aim to look for additional initiatives to increase the confidence of the clients.

The Economic House of Ostend is developing a professional network model and practical guide. Both instruments are being developed through a combination of theoretical starting points and practical experiences of the Economic House. The model outlines a gradual and phased process that will help service organisations with the same mission as Economic House in order to stimulate, broaden and finally activate a professional network of jobseekers with migrant backgrounds. The intended result is to create employment opportunities.

The theoretical starting point for developing a model for organising networking initiatives was 'The quadruple Helix model'. It's been assumed that the gradual process can be qualitative if service organisations collaborate closely with each other. In practices of the model, the policy and educational staff visualize their (potential) partners. The needs of the clients are central in every activity. This holistic model is based on the collaboration of four actors such as government, academia, business & community. Due to a collaboration between the four various actors, a synergy effect is created (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, a criteria checklist is developed for organising the networking initiatives which includes the following factors: communication, accessibility, trust, focus on bridging, equality and added value.

Read more about the model here: <https://networking2work.weebly.com/for-organizations.html>

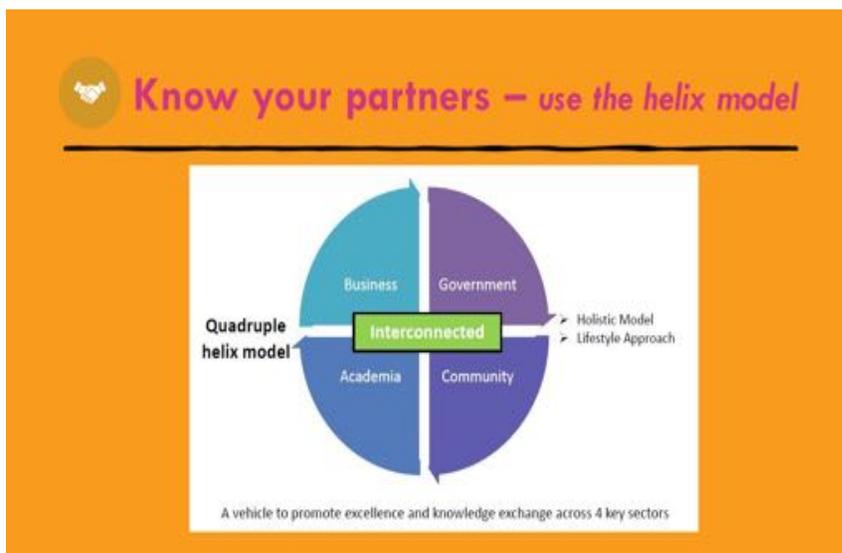


Figure 2. (Quadruple Helix) Model for organising networking initiatives (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009).

Economic House Ostend, Belgium has arranged different types of networking activities with individuals from migrant backgrounds. At the end of March 2021, the total number of participants who finished coaching to work was 874, and the number of participants in active coaching was 147. Success rate of the completed job coaching was 73 percent.

In general, job coaches of the Economic House also face some obstacles, such as lack of vacancies in the region and a large number of temporary job contracts. In most cases, job seekers with low skills received a temporary job contact, especially during the COVID-pandemic. Quite often a temporary job contract lowers motivation of the client. The professional network of people with a migrant background is often small and they do not always see the benefits of professional networking.

When a job seeker has no intrinsic motivation to find a long-term job or is struggling with social problems (e.g., homelessness), he or she does not come to appointments. In such situations, it is difficult to help the job seeker. Nevertheless, there are also many success stories<sup>3</sup>.

## 6. Digital Networking Model on a Platform (Belgium)

Beyond the Horizon ISSG has developed a digital platform<sup>4</sup> and an application<sup>5</sup> as a part of the ESF project “All-in-one 4 HER – Fast-track integration of highly educated migrants into the labour market” in Flanders, Belgium. The platform aims, among others, to connect migrants to the other regional actors of integration in order to support their networking in their new host country. Platform’s networking model has been developed with the inputs of transnational partners and tested in several provinces of the Flemish region in Belgium.

The digital platform is also mainly based on the quadruple Helix model, which focuses on the actors from academia, government, industry, and civil society to define its users. Four main users of the platform are defined as talent (refugee, migrant), mentor, employer (industry), organisation (academia, government, civil society). The platform gives a central role to migrant users and provides a space for networking and connecting with other users. The platform is built in different languages to mitigate the language barrier for migrants.

The digital platform uses four different main functions to allow networking among the users, namely POST, MATCH, MEET and MESSAGE. The users can share different types of posts on the platform with the other users. These are named as S-V-E-P-T posts, including the initial letters of the post types: Study, Vacancy, Event, Project, Tool. This function aims to provide users an open space where they can freely interact, share useful posts, promote their activities and tools or reach out to their target groups. The match function is managed by the platform admin for matching a migrant with a mentor or organisation user. It allows the users to see each other’s profile and to use the other two functions, meet and message among each other. Matched users can send messages to each other and also plan their meetings and activities on the platform, which actually makes up a log of their activities. See Figure 3 for the digital networking model.

Find more details about the digital networking model and the digital platform on this link: <https://networking2work.weebly.com/platforms.html>

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<sup>3</sup> Such as this one on the video: <https://www.facebook.com/514048215317462/videos/623206201915716>

<sup>4</sup> The platform can be reached by this link: <https://all-in-one4her.eu>

<sup>5</sup> HER Welcome Application can be reached at: [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=eu.allinone4her.her&hl=en\\_US&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=eu.allinone4her.her&hl=en_US&gl=US) and <https://apps.apple.com/th/app/her-welcome-app/id1570396001?platform=iphone>

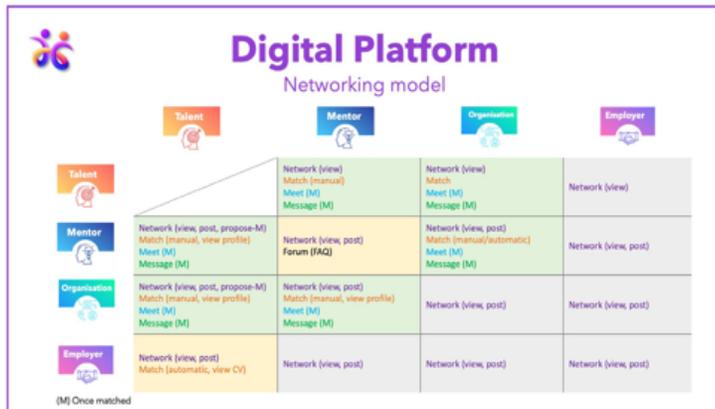


Figure 3. Digital platform networking model (Developed by Beyond the Horizon ISSG, 2020)

The piloting outcomes can be summarized in a nutshell as follows. The Covid situation increased the attention of immigrants and other users to the digital platform due to the limitations of physical contact. There was more necessity in the use of digital tools and meetings, which also shows the increasing need for digital networking. At this point we need to consider the digitalisation of the integration processes. It's been experienced that a digital platform can be a good complementary tool for mentoring support in networking and professional networking itself, but it is certainly not a sole tool for networking. On the other hand, it has its own challenges such as data sensitivity and competition in the digital market. Processing sensitive personal data of users, particularly immigrants, is limited by the GDPR. It also limits the networking functions of the platform. Competition in the digital market increases the standards for a digital networking platform and attracting users is difficult in this respect.

## 7. Key Findings of Networking Programmes in Finland and Belgium

Based on the pilots of networking programmes in Finland and Belgium, some key findings are outlined in this section in terms of common challenges faced by immigrants developing networks in their host society.

Creating or developing networks in a new location is difficult for immigrants for many reasons, especially because of language barriers. It takes time to get familiar with the language. Accessibility and social engagement might be limited when immigrants are not able to communicate with the same language to build or develop a network.

A lack of language proficiency is also a barrier to finding out about resources and events provided by different stakeholders for people coming from different parts of the world to a new society. Immigrants hesitate to communicate with a member in the host society because they are unable to understand their language.

Some cultural barriers have been faced, too. People coming from different cultures may not find comfort in communicating or coordinating easily with one another. When people from different countries come together, their way of thinking varies. Some might be shy while others are outgoing. Because of cultural differences, immigrants often hesitate to develop networks with people in the host countries. Networking is a two-way process, and it will be effective only when each person can understand the other side. Thus, it's obvious that it is difficult for networking to take place in the presence of any kind of barriers that hinder interaction between the communicators. Cultural barriers reduce effective communication at both personal and professional levels.

The behaviour of people in a host country can be considered as a barrier to effective networking. Culture influences one's personality and the persona in turn impacts the way one thinks, behaves, and

communicates. For example in Finland, quite many Finns do not feel comfortable using English or other second languages. That may keep themselves away from communicating or networking with people coming from different countries.

Lately, because of the pandemic, networking has been mostly virtual. One of the common challenges of virtual networks is that it is too formal. In many cases effective networking happens during informal situations. In face-to-face events, people can see, hear and feel the connection of a person and thereby can more easily sense whether they're really interested in networking or not. In virtual situations this can be difficult.

The pandemic has accelerated the necessity for digitalisation of the integration processes including networking programmes. The digital networking model and the digital platform are timely in this respect, but they have their own challenges including data sensitivity and competition in the digital market. GDPR limits the networking functions of the platform, and users might be hesitant to use new digital platforms. Competition in the digital market increases the standards for a digital networking platform and attracting users is also difficult in this respect. But the piloting showed that a digital platform including an application can be a good complementary tool for professional networking and mentor support in networking for immigrants.

Despite limitations, networking programs help immigrants find new opportunities and integrate in a new society through building professional networks and finding jobs. The networking programmes support describing your current network and expertise, growing your network, and setting your personal goals. They share information about informal and formal local habits. Most importantly, they might create new possibilities and relationships that the international talent did not plan or see coming.

Networking is like planting seeds. With some preparation, care and time, it has the potential to grow into something fruitful. Networking is a practice that immigrants are encouraged to adopt so that they can find a good job and expand their circle of acquaintances. Stimulating, broadening and activating the professional network of jobseekers with a migration background creates awareness, job opportunities and sustainable employment.

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## Taking a Closer Look to Immigration Policies

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Cihan Aydiner\*

### Abstract

This article is an examination of the immigration policy formation issues in the literature. The immigration policies continue to fail today. This research provides a bird view on immigration policy issues by presenting the problematic assumptions and reasons for failures. The changing policies based on context, micro and macro-level trends, and the political goals of the governments demonstrate a consistent failure in policy formation and implementation. Also, this short article explores the role of the relationship between policymakers and social scientists in this process.

**Key words:** Immigrants, social policy, immigration policy, policymakers, integration.

### Introduction

Policymakers and social scientists affect each other in migration-related social actions by creating laws and providing the science concerning causes of issues and overall policy implications. However, we need to look closer at this relationship since it is currently not working correctly. Cornelius and Rosenblum argued that policymakers use social science for political interests (2005). They drive and fund social sciences and create “research questions, methods, and even findings” to solve urgent problems such as the recent substantial flow of migrants to host countries (Castles, 2010, p. 1571). They are primarily interested in easy short-term answers to historically multi-dimensional issues (Castles, 2003). Also, interest groups and capital have roles in the policy process, promoting politicians’ positions (Castles, 2004; Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005). This benefit approach especially shows itself in the labor market and the legacy problem of some immigrants. So, capitals may use irregular immigrants for the market’s interests. The policymakers enjoy having controllable immigrant labels such as good-bad illegals, wanted-unwanted, or deserving-undeserving undocumented people (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2012; Cornelius, 2005; Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). However, sometimes playing with the labels could be difficult for policymakers because while general policies support skilled or educated immigrants, host country people could be prejudiced against their success. So, the politicians need new strategies to prevent group conflicts (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). Though there are certain controlling or limiting factors in governments’ migration policy formation process (such as international organizations), it is difficult to say if these organizations have the potential to change the interested relationship that exists in developed countries (Beckfield, 2003; Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005). However, some social movements and non-governmental organizations can obtain benefits for their groups. Policy-driven studies tend to produce little and generally low research. Misinformed research and scholarly actions may actually cause problems, such as one-sided policy perspectives, economic or bureaucratic errors (Castles, 2004), and negative impacts on immigrants’ public opinion (Berg, 2010). The responses to migration issues such as unwanted flow mostly cause reactive approaches and a reworking of old methods instead of understanding the problem in its dynamic and specialized context (Castles, 2007). Although the immigration theorists have relinquished the simple dichotomies, the policy approach still relies on the cost-benefit dichotomy<sup>1</sup>. Some ‘scientific’ studies also find diversity dangerous for the harmony of receiving states (Castles, 2010). This kind of ‘science’ may have a danger to justify non-functional policies in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Webber claims that the European Union countries breach human rights for the sake of their interests in stopping migration flows by using undemocratic countries with sticks and bones (2017).

### **Assumption of “Us” versus “Them,” Examples of Migration Policies, and Reasons for their Failure**

In Western immigration policy literature, the primary assumption that underscores many migration policies is the protection of “us” at the expense of “them” (Adamson, Triandafilopoulos, & Zolberg, 2011; Anderson, 2017; Castles, 2003). Some studies show the importance of ‘other’ to create or develop ‘us’ (Triandafyllidou, 1998). However, definitions of “us” and “them” are unclear and socially constructed. While some groups have in the past been excluded (i.e., Asians in the US), especially in times of crisis (Freeman, 1995), they may be normalized today; the inverse may also be true (i.e., Muslims in the US after 9/11) (Bloemraad, 2006). There is no consensus about what comprises “us,” and the concept is not homogeneous. Some studies have attempted to show the importance of the other in creating or developing a notion of “us” (Triandafyllidou, 1998). State policies may be organized differently and practiced according to context, time, and immigrants population size (Soysal, 2012). Even historical immigrant-receiving countries of Europe such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom do not understand policy practices in the same way<sup>2</sup> (Koopmans, 2013). Some regional/territorial implementations of migration policies may differ from countries’ rules and against civil rights (Gilbert, 2009; Varsanyi, 2011). The role of the Chicago School in the 1920s was substantial in terms of sociological immigration policies. Because sociological studies have been affected by the functionalist approach and inter-group relations of the Chicago School, assimilation theory is also influenced (Castles, 2003). In this approach, strangers are dangerous and do not belong. They should be assimilated.

However, the dichotomic classification of “us” and “others” is a limited approach. These categories are far more diverse than they appear. They are evaluated differently in cities and countries (Ariely, 2012), and the definitions change in the context of historical migration and colonized countries and new immigrants to receiving countries of the same continent, such as Europe (Bail, 2008). Moreover, there is the question of when “others” or “strangers” begin to matter to a receiving country. The size and capital of the immigration flow can widely change the perception. The most important question is: Do “they” have the potential to change “us”? When we look at the populations of immigrants in receiving countries, this begins to make sense. For example, Islam has a prominent place in European migration policy discussions, while the Spanish language is a concern in the US (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Immigrants’ social capital also matters to receiving countries’ politics (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). While highly educated and skilled migrants tend to be welcome in developed countries, non-elite immigrants and asylum seekers are seen as a problem and potential burden, mostly by right-wing politicians.

Above, I have presented the problematic assumptions that lie beneath migration policies. Now, I will summarize the most well-known failed migration policies. First, we must ask: what is policy failure in terms of immigration policy? Currently, it is a policy gap between the goal and the outcome. Table 1 shows the most prominent immigration policy failures as described in the literature.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, while German Chancellor Merkel describes Multiculturalism as “Multikulti.” She refers to the “attitude of celebrating diversity”, French President Sarkozy refers to “something alien” to his country, and British Prime Minister Cameron sees the term as “state multiculturalism” (Koopmans, 2013, p. 147).

Country	Time	Policy Goal	Outcome	Literature
Australia	Postwar	Keep the country White and British	One of the world's most diverse societies, with immigrants from over 100 countries	Castles et al., 1988; Castles, 2003, p. 25
Germany	1955-1973	Guest worker recruitment to provide for the temporary needs of the labor market; then return to home country	With the economic downturn of 1973, family reunions increased, ethnic communities developed, and Germany became multicultural	Castles et al., 1984; Castles, 2003, p. 25
France, The Netherlands and Britain	Post-imperialism	Migration and citizenship policies designed to maintain political and economic spheres	Large-scale migration and ethnic diversity	Castles, 2004, p. 205
Europe	Recent	Immigration restriction	Profitable international business for human smugglers	Castles, 2004, p. 207
Western Europe	The 1990s	National and regional measures to reduce immigration and the entry of asylum seekers	The rapid growth of a transnational migration industry; rather than stopping immigration, the measures created business opportunities for new multinational enterprises, both legal and illegal	Portes, 1997, p. 818
USA	1986	US Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) designed to curtail illegal migration and reduce entries	The upsurge in immigration, both legal and illicit; approximately 2.7 million aliens obtained the legal immigrant status	Portes, 1997, p. 818; Castles, 2004, p. 205
USA	1940-1964	Stop illegal entry and employment of migrant workers; Mexican workers officially recruited for agriculture and other sectors	This program was terminated in 1964, but labor demand remained high, and large-scale illegal entry continued	Castles, 2004, p. 205
USA	1994	In response to the failure of the IRCA, the Clinton administration announced "Operation Gatekeeper;" US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) introduced double steel fences, helicopters, searchlights, and high-tech equipment along the US-Mexico border	The number of agents patrolling the border doubled; the INS budget tripled from 1994 to 2000, reaching \$5.5 billion; no decline in illegal border crossings and California agriculture experienced no shortage of migrant labor; the number of people dying as they attempted to cross the border increased from 23 in 1994 to 499 in 2000; the average cost of hiring "coyotes" (human smugglers) rose from \$143 to \$1,500 in six years	Cornelius, 2001, 2005

Table 1 Immigration Policy Failures in Developed Countries

So, why do migration policies regularly fail? In addition to problematic, short term, interest-oriented relationships between policymakers and social scientists, there are additional explanations outlined in the literature. Portes described policy failures as the unwanted outcomes of social practice (1997). According to Anderson, “migration policies fail because they are about migration” (2017, p. 1528). Policymakers believe that migration can be stopped through legal means, so they often ignore migration's social dynamics and their links to broader social topics such as social transformation and inequality (Castles, 2003). Also, they tend to take economic considerations into account while creating migration policies. Even Australia and Canada, which historically human capital oriented countries, follow this trend by changing their selection policies following the job market needs (Akbari & MacDonald, 2014). Although host countries tend to be powerful, their short-term policies do not consider the inherent characteristics of migration and the entire process from the determination to move from the homeland to post-migration generations' experiences. Therefore, likely failures can sometimes be invisible in the short term (Castles, 2004).

Policymakers and scholars concerned with migration often see it as abnormal and inherently problematic and seek strategies to reduce movements. By contrast, my starting point is the assumption that human mobility is a normal part of social life. At times of rapid change, such as the current epoch of accelerated globalization, international migration tends to grow in volume and to become increasingly important as a factor helping to reshape societies. Therefore, migration should be seen not just as a result of change nor a cause of change but as an *integral part of social transformation processes*.

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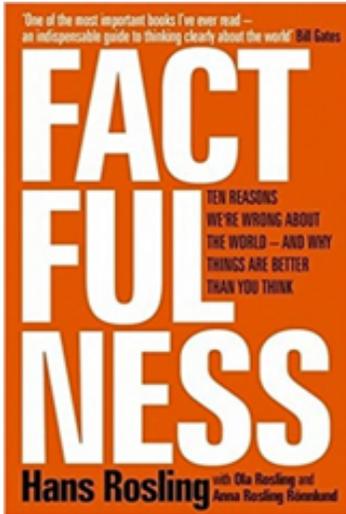
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# Book Review: Factfulness – Ten Reasons We’re Wrong about the World – and Why Things are Better than You Think

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Samet Coban<sup>1</sup>



This book is about “**getting the big picture right**”. Hans Rosling, the author of the book, advocates a fact-based worldview and struggles with ignorance. Rosling was a medical doctor, professor of international health, and public educator. He was an adviser to the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, and he co-founded Médecins Sans Frontières in Sweden and the Gapminder Foundation. And working at the global governance institutions indeed necessitates a holistic perspective, focusing on patterns and general rules, but not at the expense of facts.

While trying to understand widespread ignorance observed in almost all society clusters, the author focuses on our instincts. An Overdramatic worldview which tends to draw a pessimistic picture that describes the outer world no matter what the facts tell is a product of our brain and an obvious misconception. When we check reality with facts rather than instincts and emotions, we see a different picture. So the data, or some brand-new big data processing techniques and applications are not enough to cure

the ignorance. A conscious change of approach is necessary. We need to overcome our instincts and observe the outer world with a factful approach. We think we know the world. But we need to ask how the world really is. Obviously, this is not easy. You need to leave your comfort zone. You need to improve your critical thinking skills. You need to convince yourself that even you can be wrong.

Rosling examines ten different instincts that create a gap between the perception and the reality.

The **gap instinct** divides the whole world into two distinct and often conflicting groups, with an imagined gap in between. Rich versus poor, West versus the rest and so on which does not exist in reality at least in the terms that exist in our minds as the author advocates. Without diving into the tiny details about how the data is being collected and how could it be manipulated while being explained (since these are more about disinformation than about cognitive processes of the mind) the author draws slightly oversimplified picture of the situation. The gap between the fact and the perception, according to the author, is stemming from outdated data that we were fed up with. To control the gap instinct, **looking for the majority** rather than extremes might work.

The **negativity instinct** is our tendency to notice the bad more than the good. But statistics prove the opposite. The author gives examples from the basic UN/World Bank administered data showing that almost all aspects of human life are improving as time passes. Misremembering the past, selective reporting and expressing feelings rather than saying what we “think” are among the causes of this negativity instinct. And bad news are more likely to get reported by the media.

The **straight line instinct** is the false idea that the world population is just increasing. The misperception about the population trends in the world is again emanating from a lack of knowledge on more recent data showing that the number of children ceased to increase. The relationship between variables in nature is seldom **linear**.

Various things trigger the **fear instinct**. It distorts what we see of the world. However, it might not be as “true” as it is served to us. In almost all cases the author examined, facts are inconsistent with the factors that create fear. In other words, our fears are not always directed to the riskiest things. To

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control the fear instinct, it is advised to calculate the risks.

People tend to misjudge the **size** of things. They also tend to underrate the importance of a single instance in some cases. These two anomalies make us underestimate the progress. To minimise the size effect, the author advises keeping things “comparable”. And when comparing, keep in mind that rates are more meaningful than amounts. The Pareto Principle (80/20 rule) is also applicable when prioritising things.

The **generalisation instinct** is about categorisation. But sometimes, people mistakenly group things that are actually different, which leads to miscalculations and a biased worldview. In order to overcome it, look for differences within and similarities across groups; beware of “the majority”; beware of exceptional examples; assume you are not “normal”; beware of generalising from one group to another.

The **destiny instinct** is the idea that unalterable features determine our destiny (also known as historical determinism). However, our observations prove that everything is in constant change in the universe, including cultures, nations, religions and people. What confuses us is that sometimes the pace of change might be small. Gradual improvements, 1% a year might have a devastating effect in a more extended period of time.

Simple ideas are attractive since they oversimplify the reality that surrounds us. The **single perspective instinct** provides a single solution for problems that are emanating from a single cause which is not the case in real world, like ideologies. Numbers may also serve to simplify a fact in order to make it more understandable. However, some terms are difficult to capture with numbers, such as freedom, happiness, culture etc.

The **blame instinct** is finding a simple reason or someone responsible for something terrible that has happened. It refrains us from constructing a fact-based understanding of our surrounding. To control this instinct, the author recommends resisting finding a scapegoat.

The **urgency instinct** necessitates that we need to act now because there is a danger or an opportunity awaits us, but for a limited time (window of opportunity). This instinct raises our stress level and paralyses our analytical thinking skills, which leads to poor decisions. To control the urgency instinct, taking small steps is advised.

Using simple mathematics and statistics together with historical data collected in the last century proves that lots of myths are just the consequence of our instincts and have nothing to do with the facts. Global data may help us to grasp trends that are present today and are already shaping our tomorrow. Acting solely on data, not on instinct or fear will lead to a fact-based worldview, and this would be the main takeaway from the book.

Hans Rosling passed away in 2017, having devoted the last years of his life to writing this book. One can feel the passion that he had to formulise an approach to tell the fact-based truth. This easy to read book is a kind of fact-based thinking manual and gives ten rules of thumb for a better data literacy competency.

Pandemic, one of the five global risks that the author warned us to worry about, has already happened (others are financial collapse, World War III, Climate Change and Extreme Poverty). Let's hope that the author mispredicted the rest, or at least we can act in order to fizzle out the author's forecast.



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