



**Refugee employment in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. An analysis of
labour-market integration policies**

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, the topic surrounding the integration of refugees into host countries has experienced a significant escalation in focus, particularly with regard to labour-market integration. To further explore this issue of how hosting communities integrate refugees into the labour markets, the following thesis focuses on the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, two regions within Spain and Italy, respectively. These regions were chosen to add to the body of literature that deals with the gap between regional policy differences (the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna) within their respective national-contexts (Spain and Italy) to further contribute to the study of refugee labour-market integration. Specifically, the objective of this thesis was to map out the major successes and challenges of the refugee labour-market integration policies in the respective regions by emphasising the factors that can either increase or hinder employability in their respective labour markets.

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews and by questioning a range of individuals which included refugees, NGO workers and policymakers from both these contexts, this study revealed, although to differing extents, that policies regarding the provision of language courses, recognition of skills, facilitating permission to work, and ensuring freedom of settlement to be the main areas within which the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna might find common ground on policies which facilitate labour-market access for refugees. Obstacles regarding the processes of accessing residency permits represented a clear policy failure in both regions. Moreover, in the Basque Country, policies regarding the recognition of previous qualifications also proved disappointing in their outcomes, whereas discriminatory attitudes were more prevalent among the refugee participants in Emilia-Romagna, suggesting that policies regarding the equality of treatment within the workplace were less effective for the Italian region. Finally, establishing social contacts emerged as the most popular method for increasing a refugee's chances of becoming employed.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the integration of refugees, specifically regarding labour-market integration into host countries, has experienced a significant escalation in focus over the last two decades. Within a European context, this is principally due to the substantial inflow of asylum seekers and refugees, a development which has become one of the most serious challenges facing Europe, particularly in light of the 2011 Arab Spring outbreak (Tanay, 2017). From 2008, the yearly number of asylum-seekers increased from around 153,000 to 1.3 million in 2015. These numbers – despite being relatively small in comparison to the total population of EU countries - have been unevenly distributed across EU member states, with Southern European countries receiving a significant proportion of this group (Argyropolous, 2018).

Despite a decline in the volume of people arriving in Europe - with around 296,000 arriving in 2019 - the number of people seeking protection is predicted to grow over the next two decades (Eurostat, 2020). This poses a greater challenge for present and future policymaking regarding the management of asylum seekers and their subsequent processes of integration. As Ager & Strang (2008) note, integration is centred around the foundation of rights and citizenship, both of which can only be achieved by accessing housing, education, health, and employment. These spheres of integration are in large part interrelated, as each tends to influence the other (e.g., good education can lead to a better job). Labour market-integration is part of a wider integration process which is often defined in binary terms; *integrated* if employed and *non-integrated* if unemployed. Such simplistic understanding, however, overlooks the complexity and multidimensionality of labour-market integration (Kalleberg, 2011). The question of how to integrate refugees into the labour market has therefore become increasingly relevant in academic literature, particularly in southern European states.

Indeed, Southern European countries have often been characterized as ‘weak’ immigration countries, largely due to their inefficient entry avenues for foreign workers, high number of irregular migrant rates and poor integration policies (Ruhs, 2013). Despite improvements in recent years regarding the general adoption of policies based on the recognition of labour demand and more efficacious management, scholars have noted that Southern European countries tend to adopt different labour migration policies despite having similar legal frameworks. Two interesting subjects are Spain and Italy. Both share several similarities, including being the most populous nations in Southern Europe and

sharing a similar history with respect to immigration. In the case of Spain, the country has experienced significant migration fluctuations over the past 25 years. Up until the 1980s it was considered an emigrating country, but gradually positioned itself as one of the main destinations for international migration, largely due to a process of successful economic development (Ruhs, 2013). As in the case of Spain and its historic backdrop of emigration, Italy gradually became a destination for migrants from the 1970s. Shifting demographics, along with a demand for foreign workers and the decline of the Soviet bloc, became push factors for migrating to wealthier nations, among them Italy (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020).

To narrow the sample of the study, the following thesis will focus on a region from each respective country, the Basque Country in Spain, and Emilia-Romagna in Italy. On the one hand, The Basque Country (in Spanish 'País Vasco', in Basque 'Euskal Herria') is an autonomous region located in north-east Spain, holding a population of 2.2 million, comprising the Southern Provinces of Álava, Gipuzkoa, and Biscay (Corcuera, 2008). On the other hand, Emilia-Romagna is an administrative region located in the northeast of Italy, encompassing the nine provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, Forli-Cesena, and Rimini. It holds a population of 4.4 million and like the Basque Country, has one of the highest GDP per capita in Italy. Therefore, the guiding question at the center of this thesis is as follows: *How have labour-market integration policies in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna shaped the employment outcomes of refugees from the perspectives of refugees, NGO volunteers, and policymakers?*

Theoretical relevance

The following study intends to add to the body of literature that deals with the gap between regional policy differences (the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna) within their respective national-contexts (Spain and Italy) to further contribute to the study of refugee labour-market integration. Indeed, providing insight into the differences and similarities of labour-market integration policies at regional level can determine why certain aspects of such policies are perhaps more adequately equipped to function in one region and not in the other, insights which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to address such policy obstacles and gaps. Indeed, studies regarding regional differences within national contexts already exist (Cerciello et al., 2019) and while important, such contributions could be further enriched by comparing regions

across different national contexts. Moreover, the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna were not only selected because they represent two regions in different countries, but rather because most of the literature surrounding labour market-integration policy is often centred around (the mostly southern) regions of both Spain and Italy (Finotelli & Arango, 2011) comprising studies which have largely ignored whether refugee labour-market integration policies in other regions have also resulted as efficient.

Societal relevance

As previously mentioned, with the migrant crisis becoming one of the most contentious and divisive issues on national agendas, refugee integration and in particular labour-market integration have become essential aspects of the broader integration process (Fasani et al., 2018). Indeed, greater consideration and more effective policies not only address the challenges that refugees face in accessing the labour market but also bring about a more inclusive and integrated society, as employment is an essential factor in social and economic inclusion for refugees (Bijl, 2008). In this regard, policies that create the conditions for employability can not only be of paramount importance for the refugee, but also useful for the hosting nations, regions, and communities. Therefore, greater consideration of labour-market integration policies may help address the challenges in more regional-oriented contexts such as the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, which in turn may have implications in other regions and subsequent wider national contexts.

Thesis outline

The following chapter provides a review of the relevant literature surrounding refugee-labour market integration, both from a European perspective and the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework by drawing in theories of labour-market integration policies' successes and failures, which then serve as the basis to examine refugee integration into the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets. Chapter three presents the research design adopted for this study. Chapter four presents the findings and analysis emerged from the research, followed by an interpretation of such observations in chapter five. Finally, the limitations and considerations for further research are outlined, and conclusions are drawn.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Having established that integration is a widely debated subject within the field of refugee research and policy, this chapter will give an overview of the literature surrounding refugee integration within a European context and provide the theoretical foundation needed to examine the research problems surrounding refugee integration in the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour-markets.

1.1 Refugee labour-market integration

Integration, according to Robinson (1998), is a chaotic concept used by many but understood differently by most, as the term has become “individualized, contested and contextual” (p.118). In a similar vein, Castles et al. (2001) state that “there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated” (p.12). Indeed, such definition is deliberately left open, as the requirements for acceptance from a receiving country vary significantly. Nevertheless, integration remains a significant policy goal and a targeted outcome for projects regarding refugees where, as Ager & Strang (2008) suggest, there are several key areas that indicate successful integration, most of which concern employment, housing, education, and health as the predominant fields. These spheres are often interrelated in the integration process and play a significant part in integrating refugees, but for the purposes of this study we place further emphasis on ‘employment’.

This term is referred to the contractual arrangement of a working relationship between an employer and an employee. The former may be a corporation, a for-profit company, a non-profit organization, a co-operative, or another individual, whilst the latter is a person who contributes labour and knowledge to an employer's or a person's company or undertaking and is typically employed to perform particular duties that are required (Acocella & Leoni, 2007). Indeed, employment is one of the most researched areas of integration (Castles et al. 2001), as it has been identified as influential in several issues, including “promoting economic independence, planning for the future, meeting members of the host society, providing opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance” (Ager & Strand, 2008, p.170).

Most of the definitions that can be found regarding labour-market integration are often in accordance with each other (Fasani et al, 2018). Indeed, by taking Bijl's (2008) definition, a refugee is seen to be integrated into the labour market when he/she finds a

job in the hosting country and does not face challenges in his/her working life due to the legal status accrued in the country. Put in a slightly different fashion by Lemaitre (2007), labour-market integration is achieved by showing the similar labour-market outcomes of the native population and obtaining long-term employment, without looking at societal integration as such. However, according to Phillimore & Goodson (2006), one of key elements to focus on refugees in the receiving country is not only whether they can secure employment, but whether becoming employed can, in turn, facilitate and speed up the integration process into society by obtaining contact with locals, becoming more confident, and seeing a potential future through work in the receiving country.

1.2 Policies of refugee labour-market integration

Despite the substantial amount of literature regarding policy outcomes on immigrant economic integration in host nations, there is a lack of similar studies in respect of refugees' economic integration (Cheung & Phillimore, 2016). Indeed, the increasing number of individuals requesting refugee status has had a significant impact on policymaking in OECD nations since World War II, as these countries have had to deal with increasing numbers from around the globe (Lemaitre, 2007). Within a European context, Penninx (2005) argues that countries are still mostly attempting to manage international migration within a framework that is predominantly based on the nation-state concept. In line with such a framework, the world is split into different nation-states, each with its own population and territory, and migration across political borders is viewed as an outlier in such a system. As a result, migration policies have tended to be defensive and control-oriented rather than proactive. Such an absence of a consistent and clear trans-European immigration policy is, therefore, a roadblock to effective labour-market integration policies. In addition, a nation's capacity to provide effective policies is context-dependent, as "the experience and policies of different countries with integration reflects their experience and policies of immigration" (Penninx, 2005, p.137). In other words, how a nation manages immigration has a subsequent effect on the policy impacts of how to handle the inclusion of refugees into its society, including labour-market integration.

One of the few examples can be found in a study by Bevelander (2020), where using Sweden as a case study, the country's model of developing integration policies consisted of a two year "introduction" programme which included language classes and teaching a refugee the general understanding of Swedish society and its labour market,

thus facilitating access to employment. Another study by Hagelund (2005) highlights the individually tailored approach to labour-market integration policies in Norway, whereby providing a refugee with an employment plan after assessing his/her needs are key factors for facilitating integration. With regard to the recognition of qualifications and skills, on the one hand Lemaitre (2007), found that officially recognising foreign qualifications and skills in Sweden was linked to increasing one's chances of employability, whereas on the other hand Correa Velez et al. (2013) argue that such recognition in fact reduce the opportunities to access employment, as a refugee with formal qualifications might seek a job that is in line with their qualifications, which in turn postpones their employment. It is clear, therefore, that differences in both national and local contexts can lead to divergence on a number of labour-market integration policies, where at least at the European level, it is much more challenging to address policies from the shared perspective a common framework.

1.3 Labour-market outcomes for refugees

As hitherto mentioned, asylum seekers and refugees tend to be less well prepared to enter the European labour market in comparison to other types of migrants, in large part because economic migrants, by definition, arrive with enhanced job prospects. (Cheung & Phillimore, 2016). Indeed, economic migrants often decide to move to another country based on the opportunities available compared to home ('pull' factors), whereas refugee migration is driven by other 'push' factors, including vulnerability to persecution, and forced relocation. Refugees are therefore more limited in their choice of a specific destination to which they might migrate, meaning that they are more likely to arrive in the host country with less human capital – such as language and job skills – in contrast to economic migrants. Consequently, refugees often start at significantly lower levels of employability and thus (lower) wages (Cheung & Phillimore, 2016).

However, the lack of human capital can only partially explain the relatively low employment outcomes of refugees in the labour market. For instance, Krause et al. (2012) argue that discrimination is one of the main factors for preventing the successful process of refugee integration into the labour market. Studies in various European nations have shown that anonymizing job applications increases the likelihood of migrants being invited for an interview, suggesting possible discrimination in labour-market administration. Other authors, such as Hansen & Lofstrom (2009), place emphasis on 'welfare traps', which is primarily created by the interaction of the tax system and social

benefits, has shown to be a negative factor to labour-market integration, particularly for low-skilled migrants. Indeed, such findings are in line with Cangiano (2012), whereby refugees are often subject to significantly poor labour-market outcomes due to their disadvantaged position in comparison to native-born residents and other groups of migrants. Other studies, however, such as by Brell et al. (2020) and Bach et al. (2017) show that, over a certain period, the employment rate of those seeking international protection rises significantly.

All in all, the analysis of labour-market outcomes of refugees suffers from poor measurement criteria, partly explained due to the lack of knowledge regarding visa categories that allow immigrants to live in the host nation, the consequences of which pose considerable challenges from a policymaking perspective (Fasani et al, 2018). Moreover, the existing data that is presented among several country-specific research tends to be “outdated, fragmented, frequently not comparable and nationally not representative” (Martin et al, 2016, p. 14). Overall, although there is a lack of rigorous quantitative research as “there is no clear concept of the pathway for labour market integration” (Ott, 2013, p. 23) even fewer studies analyse the outcomes of specific labour-market integration outcomes for refugees at qualitative level from the perspectives of refugees (Schmitter-Heisler, 1998). Indeed, such gap in qualitative literature is even more apparent in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

1.4 Labour-market integration in the Basque Country

Although literature in the Basque Country surrounding the outcomes of labour-market integration is limited, this trend began to change slightly from 2008, partly due to the Refugee Reception Office (OAR) and its annual publishing reports entitled ‘Asylum in figures’ (Oficina de Asilo y Refugio, 2015). Most of their reports focus on the main obstacles for refugees and asylum seekers seeking employment, primarily relating to the difficulties in the process of recognition regarding educational qualifications and problems encountered in the procedure for recognizing professional skills (CEAR, 2017). Although these reports are produced on a national level for Spain, they also serve as relevant information for autonomous regions across Spain implementing labour-market policies, including the Basque Country. Indeed, this region has been subject to increasing levels of refugee migration where, particularly since 2019, it has served as a transit stop for sub-Saharan African asylum seekers and refugees before reaching France as their

destination. Many are denied access along the border between Spain and France, subsequently being stranded in the city of Irun, leading to what the Basque government described as an “extremely serious” situation, and one “in need of immediate humanitarian assistance” (Noticias de Gipuzkoa, 2021, pg.1).

Moreover, as most academic literature and news coverage tend to address the refugee crisis which is centred around the regions such as the Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla and Southern Spain, relatively little attention appears to be given to the northern side of the peninsula where, given the evidence of the high number of refugees in the Basque Country, (López, 2020), there exists a significant gap in academic research regarding the integration processes for refugees and their subsequent labour-market outcomes. Moreover, although qualitative research from the perspective of refugees exists within the Basque context, such as by Aierbe (2020) and Areizaga et al. (2020), these studies focus on societal integration, seldom addressing how programmes and policies shape their labour-market outcomes.

Within the limited amount of literature on labour-market integration in the Basque Country, Areizaga et al. (2020) note that access to employment is of fundamental importance both for people who have seen their refugee application denied and for those who have seen it accepted, since their individual and family well-being, as well as their social integration, largely depend on it. However, according to Insua (2021), it is worth stressing that said permission for labour-market access does not ensure a rapid and favourable incorporation into the workforce, particularly due to the current socioeconomic situation in the Basque Country (and Spain) as the 2008 financial crisis and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have made it more challenging still for refugees to become employed. Moreover, according to Godino & Barrientos (2019), the sudden influx of refugees from 2015 onwards exposed the Spanish reception and asylum system as inadequate for the task of managing the volume of applications received where, despite some amendments being made, deficiencies continue. Indeed, these national deficiencies surrounding the asylum and refugee system are also prevalent in the Basque Country, creating further challenges for labour-market integration.

1.5 Labour-market integration in Emilia-Romagna

Historically, literature focused on labour-market outcomes in Emilia-Romagna has been limited, but with the migrant integration portal ‘Vivere e Lavorare in Italia’ (Living and

working in Italy), information regarding integration policies and services has become more prevalent for “public actors, Ministries, Regions, local authorities and private non-profit organizations and also for migrants” (Martin et al., 2016, pg. 88). Such information also includes relevant advice for labour-market integration at regional level, including Emilia-Romagna which, particularly over the last two decades, has served as a popular destination for migrants (Saitta, 2021). Indeed, according to Marabello & Riccio (2018), recent legislative measures legalizing immigrants and providing greater opportunities for employment across central and northern Italy had driven migrants to move across borders, with Emilia-Romagna emerging as one of the most popular destinations. In a similar vein, Drigo (2019) notes that, besides employment opportunities, this region has attracted migrants due to its renowned inclusionary economic framework and social policies, which have translated into successful entry into legitimate (although sometimes precarious) labour markets. Indeed, the general adoption of policies favouring local integration is in contrast with the rest of the country’s regions where, along with Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna is the only region that has modified its regional statutes to allow migrants’ participation in local elections (Fuggiano, 2021).

Furthermore, most of the literature and news coverage tend to address the refugee crisis in Italian regions such as Sicily and the island of Lampedusa, with little attention being paid to other regions across the country (Colombo, 2018). With such limited evidence, this leaves a significant gap within academic literature regarding the integration processes for refugees and their subsequent labour-market outcomes in Emilia-Romagna. Moreover, qualitative studies regarding labour-market integration from the perspective of refugees are essentially non-existent within Emilia-Romagna.

Nevertheless, we can still identify that within the limited literature, Drigo (2019) outlines employment as a crucial element for both people’s social integration and economic self-sufficiency in Emilia-Romagna where, although refugees can access the labour-market just three months after submitting their asylum application, such access is rarely granted. Reasons for this vary, but the global financial crash in 2008, combined with the eurozone crisis of 2011 and the COVID-19 pandemic, are highlighted by Drigo (2019) as the main reasons for the rising percentage in unemployment rates for refugees in Emilia-Romagna (and across Italy). Moreover, Campomori & Ambrosini (2020) argue that since Italy did not perceive itself as an asylum-seeker hosting nation, the country was ill-prepared to host the volume of refugees that have arrived over the past decade. Indeed,

an organic law of refugees was essentially non-existent, which has also meant that regions across the nation, including Emilia-Romagna, were relatively deficient in their integration of refugees into the labour market.

To conclude, the topic surrounding labour-market integration for refugees in Europe has witnessed a significant increase in literature over the last decade. Such literature, however, often diverges in its conclusions and recommendations, with concepts surrounding integration and employment perceived and defined in different ways. Moreover, addressing the literature is becoming increasingly more complex due to the different frameworks applied at both national and local levels, particularly at the European level. In a similar vein, evaluating the employment outcomes of refugees is also challenging due to the poor measurement criteria that prevail across European nations and regions, including the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. Finally, the majority of literature which focuses on this issue consists of studies based on quantitative data with a parallel lack of research surrounding the beliefs, values, feelings or motivation from refugees in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna which could otherwise be obtained through qualitative data. This thesis hopes to achieve precisely that.

2- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section draws in theories of labour market integration policies' success and failures, which then serve as the basis to examine refugee integration into the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets. Moreover, it can be considered as the landscape to later analyse the integration of refugees into the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour market in chapter four. Firstly, the reviewed pieces of literature will highlight, on the one hand, the most significant policy areas that facilitate refugees' integration into the labour market. These include the provision of language courses/programmes, the recognition of skills and certification of foreign qualifications, facilitation of securing residency/citizenship, facilitating permission to work, providing equality of opportunity and treatment, providing housing and finally freedom of settlement. On the other hand, the reasons why certain policies do not achieve their desired outcomes will also be outlined. These include language programme failures, bureaucratic obstacles in recognizing skills and previous qualifications, legal and administrative barriers and discrimination, exploitation, and xenophobia.

2.1 Labour market integration policies

A policy is a set of principles intended to direct decisions and produce an objective outcome that is carried out by a process or protocol - often implemented by a governance body within an entity (Bacchi, 2009). Indeed, as migration is one of the most important issues in contemporary society, factors that influence the effectiveness of migration policies have gained significant political and academic attention. Migration integration policies can therefore be defined as “institutional practices adopted by state agencies to deal with the settlement of immigrants in host societies” (Schlueter, et al. 2013, p.1). Regarding integration policies, all countries adopted unique policies aimed at refugees and their descendants. Indeed, some states may seek to address and seek certain integration goals, but they may also aim to increase barriers that drive migrants away. Therefore, the following reviewed works of literature indicate which policy areas, from a European perspective, are the most significant in determining refugee integration into the labour market.

2.1.1 Provision of language courses/programmes

One of the most significant measures aimed at refugee labour-market integration are introduction programs, with particular emphasis placed on language courses. Research

shows that acquiring the host country's national or official language(s) has a positive impact on immigrants' labour income and job status (Zhang & Grenier, 2013). Language skills in the dominant language(s) of the host country promote social integration, as work and economic status are essential dimensions of social inclusion (Gazzola et al., 2019). As a result, language-education policies aimed at fostering and spreading awareness and use of the host country's language(s) can make a significant contribution to a refugee's socioeconomic integration and their subsequent incorporation into the labour market.

2.1.2 The recognition of skills and certification of foreign qualifications

Another concern that is especially important for refugees is the recognition of skills and the certification of foreign qualifications, as many of their formal and informal qualifications, including their educational level, are often not recognized in the receiving countries. Recognition processes tend to be lengthy, bureaucratic, and costly in most EU countries, and skills are often tested differently across Europe (Cerna, 2010). This represents an obstacle to labour market participation as well as a waste of human resources. Indeed, research conducted by Dimitrov (2017), has shown that adequate recognition of skills and qualifications typically leads to better labour market integration, with migrants being more likely to find suitable jobs.

2.1.3 Facilitation of securing residency/citizenship

Obtaining citizenship in the host country confers membership, privileges, and participation opportunities, as well as a sense of belonging, to foreign-born residents and their children. If migrants are granted citizenship from the country they reside in, it is widely considered to be the most advanced legal status they can achieve (Bloemraad, 2017). However, they may be eligible for a variety of alternative legal statuses linked to the grounds on which they were admitted to the state's territory, such as employment, research, family reunification, humanitarian reasons, or a residency status proving the right to permanent residence. Due to the systemic barriers that immigrants face in the labour market, residency status has the ability to alleviate some of these drawbacks as it provides a guarantee for settling in the host country and working. However, citizenship status often allows for even fewer obstacles in securing employment, as many employers prefer not to hire people with refugee status in order to avoid complex bureaucratic procedures and complications with the law (Algan et al. 2010).

2.1.4 Facilitating permission to work

Although refugees in theory have unlimited legal access to the labour market, in practice they face tough competition and legal restraints in finding jobs. Many countries that allow refugees to work tend to impose limits on their right to employment, such as restricting the sectors in which they can work (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016). Moreover, restrictions on refugees' right to freedom of movement to where economic opportunities exist, as well as restrictions on their ability to own land, start a company, or open a bank account are also prevalent. The effects of the economic crisis, low labour demand and high unemployment among resident nationals have also put pressure on governments to make it more challenging for refugees to access the labour market (Edward, 2005). Therefore, apart from the right to work per se, other relevant laws and regulations, as well as other factors that promote access to labour markets, play a significant role in labour market access. Not surprisingly, facilitating access for refugees helps them to find official jobs and become economically self-reliant.

2.1.5 Providing equality of opportunity and treatment

Governments have a responsibility in providing policies for refugees to have fair working conditions, non-discriminatory employment practices, and legal contracts. As a result, governments often collaborate with employers and employers' organizations to ensure that refugees who have the right to work are treated equally to nationals in terms of pay scales, working conditions, and job contracts (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). National governments, employers, labour unions, and civil society all play a role in combating negative discourse and misconceptions about refugees and promoting constructive public discourse about their economic contributions. Therefore, countries with national legislation and policies that adequately address discrimination, such as gender discrimination, are often associated with better economic integration among refugees (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001).

2.1.6 Housing

Generally, refugees are eligible for housing and benefits based on their low socioeconomic status but are often faced with contingent measures for receiving such support, such as taking language and integration classes or embracing the host society's founding principles and values (Bevelander et al., 2019). If refugees do not comply with such mandatory integration procedures or conditions, they can face a variety of consequences, including the loss or reduction of financial or social assistance. The overall

evidence, however, suggests that policies facilitating public investment in the construction of refugee housing and governmental social benefits directed towards independent housing are likely to improve their socioeconomic integration, both in the short and long run (Wimark et al., 2019).

2.1.7 Freedom of settlement

Finally, governmental regulation of refugee settlement in a country can have a significant effect on labour market outcomes. Such settlement policies can range from placing refugees in reception centres (the Netherlands), to dispersal policies aimed at locating asylum seekers in smaller centres (Denmark), to more open systems like Sweden, where asylum seekers are pushed into the free market as soon as they are processed into refugee status (Bevelander et al., 2019). In cases in which people end up in less populated areas, these tend to be more economically deprived, hostile environments with limited ethnic networks, and hence offer fewer work opportunities (McKay & Wright, 2008). Therefore, policies allowing refugees freedom of movement and settlement can facilitate integration and to subsequently find a job.

2.2 Labour-market integration policy failures

However, migration policies have proved challenging for many countries, with the results seldom matching the desired outcomes. Indeed, Massey (1999) argues that five basic factors influence a state's ability to implement migration policies: "the relative power and autonomy of the state bureaucracy; the relative number of people seeking to immigrate; the degree to which political rights of citizens and noncitizens are constitutionally guaranteed; the relative independence of the judiciary; and the existence and strength of an indigenous tradition of immigration" (p.315). Such factors can lead to policy failures which, in a purely theoretical context, can be defined as when a policy fails to achieve its specified goals (McConnell, 2010). For this research, the following points have been identified as the main labour-market integration barriers for refugees stemming from policy failures.

2.2.1 Language programme failures

In general, free language courses are made accessible to refugees across most European countries. However, most refugees start from zero in learning the local language(s), as they rarely have the time to practice before migrating, particularly if they are forced to

migrate (Bloch, 2008). As taking the time to learn a language in a classroom environment also entails a long period of time away from work (which is also seen as an ideal environment to ingrate and learn the local language(s)) this may instead slow down the integration process. Therefore, there is an ever-growing call that language requirements for specific jobs be re-evaluated, and that no language requirement should be demanded when deemed unnecessary. In a similar vein, the lack of quality language courses remains as another obstacle to language learning in many European countries (Crul et al., 2019). Indeed, the failure in acknowledging the heterogeneity of migrants with varying ability levels, learning capacities, and language learning is another important feature that is facing growing calls to be addressed.

2.2.2 Bureaucratic obstacles in recognizing skills and previous qualifications

Another policy failure is the lack of recognition of skills and previous qualifications from refugees. Firstly, the processes by which qualifications can be certified often lack a functioning system, where in some countries (such as Denmark) formal processes and systems of recognition are essentially non-existent. While policymakers in many European countries emphasize that the skills that migrants bring with them will greatly benefit the host society's economy, in practice these skills are often unutilized or underutilized (Cerna, 2010). In fact, reports note across the UK and Switzerland that many migrants change their working domain and often start in a completely new field in the receiving country, leading to considerable frustration among refugees as it leads to brain waste. Moreover, converting international qualifications into host country qualifications is challenging, costly, and complicated in many European countries (Sirius et al., 2019). In general, the acknowledgment of prior skills and qualifications defectively integrated into asylum applications, with integration services skewed in favour of undervaluing skills and pushing qualified refugees into lower-wage employment.

2.2.3 Legal and administrative barriers

Labour market integration is often hampered by legal and administrative obstacles. In most countries, difficult-to-understand, inefficient, and lengthy administrative processes, such as asylum application and work permit processing, are identified as major obstacles to refugees' integration. In countries such as the UK, these processes appear to have been made intentionally difficult for refugees (Sirius et al., 2019). Moreover, administrative barriers and immigration processes that limit a refugee's presence in the host country or

restrict his or her ability to function are clearly at odds with integration programmes, which contradicts the widely held belief that such processes should be accelerated. Indeed, slow administrative practices can drive refugees into informal jobs, and if they are unable to work lawfully, they can be forced to work under the table which can lead to legal problems. Moreover, administrative obstacles are often linked to a lack of institutional cooperation amongst various integration policy implementers, subsequently leading to poor labour-market integration practices (Bucken-Knapp et al. 2019).

2.2.4 Discrimination, exploitation, and xenophobia

Discrimination and misuse of labour rights act as an obstacle to labour-market integration due to the different types of labour markets present in each nation. On the one hand, migrants can easily find informal sector employment in countries with a strong informal sector, such as Italy, Greece, Czech Republic, but these jobs are often insecure and exploitative due to a lack of policies regarding labour safety (Sirius et al., 2019). On the other hand, more formal sector work opportunities are available in countries with smaller informal sectors, such as Finland, Denmark and Switzerland, but these tend to be more controlled, making refugee access to employment difficult to come by (Miller, 2018). Moreover, besides a sense of climate of xenophobia from certain public domains, such negative attitudes have also been associated in policy discourse and encounters with public officials, identified as an obstacle to economic integration.

Overall, the purpose of this section was to map out the specific issues addressed in the theoretical discussions that frame studies of labour-market integration and, specifically, how they shape the successes and failures of refugee labour-market integration policies. Moreover, the literature maps the major successes and challenges of the labour-market integration policies, which will be applied to the analysis section for the Basque and Emilia-Romagna policies through a qualitative approach and by applying semi-structured interviews. Indeed, as such an approach allows participants to further express themselves on a particular issue, qualitative research is arguably the most adequate technique for contextualizing and obtaining in-depth understanding of certain phenomena (Babbie, 2014). This will be discussed in the following chapter.

3- RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the main research question followed by the analytical formulation of the sub-questions. Subsequently, it outlines the case selection, the research method and the process of data collection, followed by the sampling procedure, the sample of the study, operationalization, how such data will be analysed, and ethical considerations taken into account.

3.1 Research question

Based on prior literature and theories examining refugee labour-market integration policies and policy failures, the following research question was developed:

- *How have labour-market integration policies in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna shaped the employment outcomes of refugees from the perspectives of refugees, NGO volunteers, and policymakers?*

In order to answer the research question, the following sub-question was developed to gain a general understanding of how refugees experience labour-market integration:

- *Sub-question 1: How do refugees experience the process of searching for employment?*

The following step is to formulate further sub-questions building on the potential answers from the sub-question above. If the refugee participants regard the experiences of accessing the labour-market as unproblematic or challenging, the following sub-question will address this:

- *Sub-question 2: What are the main facilitators and barriers to employment identified by refugees?*

The following step relates to NGO participants by examining their experiences working with refugees and their perspectives regarding facilitators and barriers to employment. Analytically, this allows to contextualize the experiences of the individual refugees being interviewed and to examine whether their experiences reflect those commonly witnessed by NGO volunteers.

- *Sub-question 3: What are the daily experiences of NGO volunteers related to refugee employment? Based on their experience, what are the most commonly voiced facilitators and barriers?*

Moving on to the final participants, the following sub-question aims to analyse refugee labour-market integration through the lens of policymakers. This allows to examine to what extent policies address the issues experienced on the ground and whether there are significant disparities between the perceptions of the different actors.

- *Sub-question 4: What are the views and experiences of policymakers regarding labour-market integration policies for refugees?*

Finally, based on the answers from the participants, analysing the similarities and differences and identifying which policy gaps can be filled in each respective region, the following sub-question was developed:

- *Sub-question 5: What are the similarities and/or differences in labour-market integration policies and their employment outcomes for refugees between the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna?*

3.2 Case selection

As mentioned, the regions of the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna were selected to add to the body of literature the gap between regional policy differences within their respective national-contexts to further contribute to the study of refugee labour-market integration. Indeed, a further reason for selecting the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna is not only due to their similarities in being one of the wealthiest regions in GDP in their respective national contexts (Corcuera, 2008; Mandrioli et al., 2014) but because, as is the case in the across the wider contexts of Spain and Italy, both regions have been subject to similar trends regarding labour-market integration policies for refugees, particularly since the 2008 global financial crash (Ruhs, 2013). The following section will, therefore, outline the regional powers of the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna which serve as a basis in analysing the migration policy competencies of each region.

3.2.1 The Basque Country

The Basque Country is an autonomous region located in north-east Spain, holding a population of 2.2 million and comprising the Southern Provinces of Álava, Gipuzkoa, and Biscay (Karlsen & Larrea, 2012). This autonomous community has one of the highest GDP per capita in Spain and where, unlike most other regional governments in Spain (and

Europe), enjoys full fiscal autonomy by having its own regional government (Corcuera, 2008). However, as the State has exclusive competence in matters of asylum following Article 149.1.2 of the European Commission (European Parliament, 2016), no role is given to the Basque government in this area.

On the other hand, autonomous communities can assume powers that affect the reception of refugees, where the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, as a basic institutional norm, establishes certain policy decisions across the Basque region (ACNUR, 2016). Among these competency roles, the reception of refugees in Basque municipalities establishes its competence for the management of social integration policies, which is in line with the legislation on immigration matters and in cooperation with regional institutions. Therefore, there is a commitment on the part of the Spanish Government for the transfer of certain competencies, whereby the “Autonomous Communities, in accordance with their respective competences in the health, educational and social spheres, will manage the services and programs specifically intended for asylum seekers, in coordination and cooperation with the General State Administration” (La Spina et al., 2018, pg. 130). The exercise of such competencies is significant, as refugees land in a certain municipality and their first meeting point with the Basque public administrations occur at the local level, whereby the subsequent and effective process of such is crucial to labour-market integration.

3.2.2 Emilia-Romagna

Emilia-Romagna is an administrative region located in the northeast of Italy, encompassing the nine provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, Forli-Cesena, and Rimini. It holds a population of 4.4 million and like the Basque Country, has one of the highest GDP per capita in Italy (Mandrioli et al., 2014). The Regional government has its own functions, whereby the government’s powers are legislative, where it can prepare regional bills to be presented to the Regional Council for approval, and executive, which concerns the laws and the deliberations of the Regional Council (European Commission, n.d.).

At the national level, both immigration quotas and integration strategies are managed by the General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policies (under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies), while The Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration is responsible for civil rights protection issues such as immigration, asylum, citizenship, and religious freedom (Emilia-Romagna, 2017). At the regional level, the

‘Consigli territoriali per l’immigrazione’ (Territorial Councils for Immigration) monitor immigrant presence and support integration efforts across Emilia-Romagna, where local government officials, organizations that help migrants locally, workers’ organizations, employers’ organizations, and non-EU workers’ organizations are among their members (Emilia-Romagna, 2017). Such local representatives engage with the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, exchanging information to guide social integration strategies -among which include labour-market integration- across the region.

3.3 Comparative case study

Comparative analysis is a research method that is widely used in most fields of scientific inquiry, as it plays a significant part in most branches of social sciences and the humanities alike. Indeed, comparative research can be applied across various disciplines, ranging from “working conditions across nations, to the analysis of the differences of life values within a single societal context, to the examination of the contrasts of face-work in various cultures, to the study of the varieties of written documents in different countries” (Azarian, 2011, p. 113). Indeed, this research methodology is used to make comparisons across different countries and cultures, and thus involve the analysis regarding similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases.

This study will involve a comparative case study analysis by interviewing refugees, NGO volunteers and policymakers from the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. More specifically, its purpose is to examine how labour-market integration policies affect employment outcomes for refugees in both regional contexts and to demonstrate similarities and/or differences between the two regions regarding labour-market integration. Indeed, rather than analyse such policies on a national scale, the following thesis aims to highlight how two regions with similar labour market integration frameworks within different national contexts vary in the employment outcomes for refugees.

3.4- Data collection

3.4.1 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Qualitative research is an organized and systematic process which aims to explore and scrutinize meaning (Newcomer et al., 2015). This suggests that it is not a random process, but instead a method that requires the preparation and development of rules and

foundations to reach the objective of the researcher. Therefore, in order to enable the investigation of experiences of phenomena under study and to understand the context within which people interpret their own experiences regarding the topic of labour-market integration in both the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna (Jamshed, 2014), semi-structured interviews (SSI's) were used. Such an approach offers several advantages. Firstly, SSIs ensure flexibility and provides participants with more control regarding their answers. In contrast with structured research methods, including survey data collection, in which the questions are often more 'fixed', SSIs allow more freedom and flexibility during the discussion based on a participant's answers (Schuh, 2009). As Esterberg notes, this is done "to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (2002, p. 87). This provides the opportunity for the participants to answer in a more sincere and open-minded manner stemming from personal experiences, in contrast to quantitative studies which tend to not grasp the opinions and feelings of people as data provided tends to be more statistical.

However, qualitative interviews rely on respondents providing accurate and truthful information about their lives, beliefs, opinions, circumstances, or behaviours (Esterberg, 2002). As a researcher in this sort of study, determining whether the participants could deliver completely truthful responses during the interviews resulted challenging where, given the sensitive nature of interviewing refugees, some of participants were unwilling to disclose certain information. Moreover, preparing an interview guide, identifying the sample, and performing the interviews was considerably time-consuming (Berg, 2004). The transcription of the interviews, as well as the translation of the various languages into English, was also a labour-intensive process. In a similar vein, due to the participants' multilingual backgrounds, the interviews were conducted in five languages; Basque, Spanish, and French were spoken during the interviews the Basque Country, with Italian and English being used in Emilia-Romagna. However, the issue was not the challenge of conducting the interviews in multiple languages per se, but rather translating the vast content from different languages and recognising colloquial words and phrases with which the researcher was not fully acquainted.

3.4.2 Secondary data

It's important to highlight that secondary data sources identify relevant information that are central to the research questions. According to Johnston (2017), secondary data

analysis consists of the data collected and subsequently used for another primary purpose. Existing data provides a practical option for researchers with limited time and resources at their disposal to search for relevant documents. Documents may refer to, according to Baskarada (2014), agendas, administrative documents, memoranda, journal articles, newspaper articles, draft reports, press releases, and any document that is relevant to the study. Therefore, aside from the main policy documents that will be outlined in the next chapter, other sources including academic articles, position papers, press releases, public statements, newsletters, official reports, and other relevant websites were used.

3.4.3 Snowball sampling

To gain access to respondents, a snowball sampling strategy was used. This method is one of the most popular sampling methods within qualitative research, whose central characteristics are networking and referrals. Researchers often begin with a small number of initial contacts (seeds) who fit the research criteria and who are invited to participate in the study. The participants are then “asked to recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria and who potentially might also be willing participants, who then in turn recommend other potential participants, and so on” (Parker et al, 2019, p.3). Therefore, researchers use their social networks to initiate links by creating an increasing chain of participants. Such a process was initiated by contacting refugees and practitioners working in the field of migration across the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. For the purposes of this study, only refugees who have been employed and lived through the process of labour-market integration were targeted. Regarding the policymakers and NGO volunteers, these target groups were contacted with the expectation they had sufficient degree of experience and encounters with the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets that will be of relevance to the study. Therefore, the following subsection will outline the characteristics of each participant in their respective regions.

3.5 Sample

The names of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities. In total, three refugees, two policymakers and one NGO volunteer took part in the interviews from the Basque Country. In Emilia-Romagna, three refugees, two policymakers and one NGO volunteer took part in the interviews. The information of the refugee participants are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2, with the information of the

NGO volunteers displayed in Table 3 and Table 4, with the policymakers in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 1. Refugee respondents from the Basque Country

Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Previous qualification(s)	Previous job(s)	Arrived in the Basque Country	Job(s) held in the Basque Country
Samuel	Male	32	Ghana	Bachelor's in accounting	Bank	2017	Currently works in a bar
Moses	Male	29	Cameroon	None	Local oil palm estate	2017	Mechanic and currently works at a newsprint producer
Sadio	Male	25	Senegal	Humanitarian law	Local supermarket	2018	Currently works as a mechanic

Table 2. Refugee respondents from Emilia-Romagna

Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Previous qualification(s)	Previous job(s)	Arrived in	Job(s) held in
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						Emilia-Romagna	Emilia-Romagna
Moussa	Male	25	Gambia	None	None	2013	Mechanic and currently works at a couch-factory
Omar	Male	24	Gambia	None	Local supermarket	2017	Street sweeper and currently works as a mechanic
Obi	Male	26	Nigeria	None	Worked fixing televisions and computers	2018	Currently works at a foam-producing factory

Table 3. NGO respondent from the Basque Country

Name	Gender	Age	Position(s) held in the Basque Country
Amaia	Female	36	Currently volunteers at the Red Cross by assisting refugees with integration activities and programmes across the province of Gipuzkoa

Table 4. NGO respondent from Emilia-Romagna

Name	Gender	Age	Position(s) held in the Basque Country
Erika	Female	29	Volunteers for the organisation Forli Città Aperta (Forli Open City) by providing refugees with housing and residency support.

Table 5. Policymaker respondents from the Basque Country

Name	Gender	Age	Job(s) held in the Basque Country
Markel	Male	48	Ex-policymaker for the department of Equality, Justice and Social Policies for the Basque Government. Currently works as an investigator for the Basque Immigration Observatory in Bilbao
Joseba	Male	41	Ex-policymaker for the department of Equality, Justice and Social Policies for the Basque Government. Currently the new director of Migration and Asylum of the Basque Government

Table 6. Policymaker respondents from Emilia-Romagna

Name	Gender	Age	Job(s) held in the Basque Country
Luca	Male	67	Worked as a policymaker for the Policy Service for Social Integration, Combating Poverty, and the Third Sector for the Emilia-Romagna government. Currently works for Forli Città Aperta by helping refugees in obtaining legal documentation.
Giovanni	Male	43	Works as a researcher for the Policy Service for Social Integration, Combating Poverty, and the Third Sector for the Emilia-Romagna government.

3.6 Operationalization

The following section outlines the operationalisation of the concepts of interest. First, the participants of the study are operationalised, followed by the concepts of labour-market integration policies and labour-market integration policy failures.

3.6.1 Participants

Having provided the sample of the participants in the study, Table 7 provides an overview of how the participants are defined for purposes of this study and the indicators that led to the selection of such actors.

Table 7. Operationalisation of the participants

Concept	Definition	Indicators for selection
1. Refugee	Recognized individuals who hold either temporary or permanent residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for arrival in receiving country • Held status in receiving country • Amount of time spent with such status
2. Policymaker	Professional individual responsible and involved in formulating policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title of occupation • Time spent working in the migration sector and with migration policies
3. NGO volunteer	A regular volunteer who spends time working with refugees for NGO(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title of occupation • Time spent volunteering with refugees

3.6.2 Labour-market integration policies

Given that this study examines integration policies for refugees in the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets market from a socioeconomic/employability standpoint, we define labour-market integration policies as the outcome of refugees in achieving the same range of labour-market participation as nationals. As outlined in the theoretical framework, there are various policy areas to labour-market integration that determine the outcome of refugees' integration into the labour market, which are operationalised as followed in Table 8.

Table 8. Operationalisation of aspects of labour-market integration policies

Concept	Definition	Refugee, NGO volunteer and policymaker indicators measuring policy impact	Method	Sources
Language education policies	Provision of language courses/programmes aimed at fostering and spreading awareness of the host country/community language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees' level of the local language(s) prior to arrival in the receiving community • Amount of time spent attending language courses/programmes. • Level of language(s) acquisition • Improvement of local language(s) leading to increasing employment outcomes 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna
Foreign skills and qualifications recognition policies	The recognition of skills and formal certification of foreign qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attained skills prior to arrival in receiving community • Highest level of education attained prior to arrival in receiving community 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees being matched to appropriate jobs as a result of the recognition of skills and foreign qualifications 		
Residency policies	Facilitation in securing legal status through obtainment of residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees being informed on the process of obtaining legal status. Refugees being assisted in obtaining the residency permit. Amount of time in obtaining such legal status. Obtaining legal status, subsequently permitting, and easing refugees' access to legal employment 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna
Work permit policies	Laws and regulations that facilitate permission to work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating the process of accessing work, subsequently increasing labour-market opportunities 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna
Equality of opportunity and treatment policies	Providing equality of opportunity and treatment through fair working conditions, non-discriminatory employment practices, and legal contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees being informed about their rights to accessing employment and receiving non-discriminatory practices in the workplace. 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved economic integration stemming from non-discriminatory practices 		
Housing policies	Facilitating public investment in the construction of refugee housing and governmental social benefits directed towards independent housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees' amount of time spent in asylum centres. • Assistance in finding independent housing. • Number of governmental benefits towards financing independent housing • Improved economic integration due to housing stability 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna
Freedom of settlement and movement policies	Allowing refugees' freedom of movement and settlement in a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees' ability of choosing which community to live in • Establishing social networks, which lead to learning about labour-market opportunities. 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna

3.6.3 Labour-market integration policy failures

As mentioned, migration policies in many countries do not match their desired outcomes. Therefore, for purposes of this study, we define policy failures as when a policy fails to achieve its specified goal regarding refugee labour-market integration. Again, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are various policy areas that fail in their labour-market integration for refugees, which are operationalised as followed in Table 9.

Table 9. Operationalisation of aspects of labour-market integration policy failures.

Concept	Definition	Refugee, NGO volunteer and policymaker indicators measuring policy failures	Method	Sources
Language education policy failures	Failure in providing adequate language courses/programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient availability of language courses/programmes • Lack of teachers/teaching time • Insufficient teaching material • Refugees not acquiring basic language skills, subsequently decreasing refugees' employment opportunities 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna
Foreign skills and qualifications recognition policy failures	Failure of formally recognizing previous attained skills and foreign qualifications in the receiving community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long processes of formally recognizing skills and foreign qualifications • High costs in formally recognizing foreign qualifications • Undervaluing skills and foreign 	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna

		<p>qualifications, subsequently pushing qualified refugees into lower-wage employment.</p>		
<p>Legal and administrative policy failures</p>	<p>Inefficient administrative processes in obtaining legal documentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of assistance in obtaining legal documentation • Prolong the process of receiving formal requirement to work, subsequently decreasing employment opportunities for refugees 	<p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna</p>
<p>Equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policy failures</p>	<p>Failing to address equal access to employment and misuse of labour rights in the workplace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees not being granted fair access to employment as a result of their background • Refugees being exploited in the workplace • Refugees being discriminated in the workplace 	<p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Interviews conducted with selected sources in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna</p>

3.7- Data Analysis

3.7.1 Transcribing data

Transcribing is the process of converting digitally recorded audio interviews to written data for subsequent analysis and interpretation of its content (McLellan et al., 2003). Its main aim is to eliminate and dismantle any complex meanings relevant to the studied phenomena, which might include feelings, experiences, attitudes, or private opinions. Put by Widodo (2014) “transcription is seen as the act of data representation, analysis, and interpretation. Indeed, it is a “social activity that involves a sound methodological orientation in as much as the centrality of transcripts methodologically forms the basis for what research questions are being addressed” (p.102). Transcription, therefore, serves as a key tool for representing spoken data. Regarding the study, each of the interviews were transcribed, where small details such as laughs, pauses, non-verbal gestures and notes from the debrief were incorporated. Seidman (2006) states that “transcribing interview tapes is time-consuming and potentially costly work” (pg. 115). For this reason, the computer-based word-processing programme ‘Transcribe’ was used in order to speed up the process and simultaneously extract the conversations.

3.7.2 Thematic analysis

As data was to be qualitatively collected through semi-structured interviews, a thematic analysis strategy was applied. This qualitative research method is often used across various epistemologies and research questions, described by Nowell (2017) as a method for “identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (pg. 2), allowing complex, rich and detailed descriptions of data. Indeed, through its theoretical freedom, it provides a more flexible approach as it can be modified to the needs of many studies. Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest that thematic analysis allows the examination of various perspectives from the participants by highlighting similarities, differences, and unforeseen insights. Finally, when dealing with large data sets, this forces the researcher to take a structured approach to handling the data, allowing for useful summarizing of relevant features, consequently helping produce an organized report. In the course of the latter stages of the analysis, open coding was performed to highlight key themes that emerged from the participants.

3.8- Ethical considerations

Information and consent forms regarding the study were provided by the researcher prior to the interviews. Furthermore, the consent forms addressed their rights to confidentiality, safety, and withdrawal from the study. Transcripts, notes, and recordings concerning the participants were maintained on a password-protected hard drive to conform to data protection (Custers et al., 2019) where participants' identities were substituted with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Moreover, although the study did involve sensitive inquiries concerning the interviewees' lives (particularly for the refugees) the researcher tried to approach these themes with the upmost caution and respect. Therefore, as the interviews were carried out online, the interviewer and interviewee were the only people present.

4- RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the study's findings related to the successes and challenges of the refugee labour-market integration policies from the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. The guiding questions from the interviews thus aim to explore and illustrate an analysis of how integration policies promote refugees' employability and the obstacles they may face in the process. The following section will begin by outlining, on the one hand, the Basque Integration policy 'Plan de actuación en el ámbito de la Ciudadanía, Interculturalidad e Inmigración 2018-2020' (Action Plan in the field of Citizenship, Interculturality and Immigration 2018-2020), and on the other, the Emilia Romagna's 'Piano Integrato degli Interventi in Materia di Inserimento Lavorativo e di Integraziones Sociale dei Migranti 2014-2020' (Integrated Plan of Interventions in the Field of Working and Social Integration of Migrants 2014-2020). The presentation of these policies is central to understanding how refugees integrate not only economically, but also socially, culturally, and politically into the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets. This will be followed by analysis and the findings from both primary and secondary sources from the Basque and the Emilia-Romagna participants, where these will be divided into themes based on the participant responses to the interviews. The analysis of each region will be conducted, followed by a comparison at the end of each of the themes.

4.1 The Basque Integration Policy

As part of the recent socio-economic context, it is necessary to remember the global economic crisis in 2008 and the recent COVID pandemic as a further obstacle for refugees to access a job where, due to the inherent difficulties of their situation, already face considerable problems when attempting to secure employment. Indeed, since 2008 and as a response to these challenges, various policies have been enacted by the Basque Government and in coordination with 'Lanbide' (Basque Employment Service) to facilitate labour-market integration for foreign workers and refugees. In the quest to achieve this objective, the 'Plan de Actuación en el Ámbito de la Ciudadanía, Interculturalidad e Inmigración' (Action Plan in the field of Citizenship, Interculturality and Immigration 2018-2020) was implemented by the Basque Government, in which key areas were identified including:

- a) Promotion of language learning.

- b) The improvement of the processes for the homologation of degrees of studies abroad.
- c) Carrying out an informative campaign on the certificates of professionalism and recognition of professional experience.
- d) Facilitating access to employment to people of foreign descent.
- e) In favour of equal treatment in access to rights and services for all people.
- f) Allowing equal access to housing by all the groups that make up Basque society.
- g) Facilitation in accessing requirements for work and residence permits.
- h) Facilitation of family reunification and settlement.

4.2 The Emilia-Romagna Integration Policy

In a similar vein, Emilia Romagna has also experienced a significant increase in the unemployment rate, particularly in light of the global economic crisis in 2008 and the recent pandemic, making it a further challenge for refugees to access a job in this region. As in the Basque Country, there have been multiple policies since 2008 whose intention was to facilitate labour-market integration for foreign workers and refugees. Indeed, The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Directorate General for Immigration and Policies of Integration signed in 2014 a system of interventions and integrated programming regarding migration policies, spanning the period 2014-2020, called the ‘Piano Integrato degli Interventi in Materia di Inserimento Lavorativo e di Integrazione Sociale dei Migranti’ (Integrated Plan of Interventions in the Matter of Working and Social Integration of Migrants). The programme’s general objective was the consolidation of a multilevel governance in the field of migration policies, through the introduction of an integrated programming of social integration measures and labour policies. In order to achieve the general objective, the planned interventions set out several guidelines:

- a) Promoting and facilitating the attendance of Italian language courses.
- b) The implementation of interventions aimed at recognizing foreign qualifications and skills.
- c) Promoting socio-work integration programs aimed at the immigrant population.
- d) Offering services in reference to people at risk of exclusion in the workplace.
- e) Access to work through local employment initiatives to marginalised immigrants.
- f) Actions to promote and facilitate settlement.

To conclude, when observing in detail both documents, Emilia Romagna's policy objectives are more broadly defined in contrast to the Basque policies, which seem to offer a more clear and detailed proposal. Moreover, both policy objectives outlined in the respective documents are closely in line with the policy areas delineated in the theoretical framework, which include language training, recognition of skills and qualifications, permission to work, equality of opportunity, and freedom of settlement. However, access to housing is outlined as an important policy in the Basque context, whereas such an objective is non-existent in Emilia-Romagna. Overall, as these policies are expected to emerge as prominent themes over the course of the interviews, particular emphasis will be placed on them.

4.3 Findings and analysis

4.3.1 Language courses and proficiency

Basque Country

One of the core themes that emerged as a positive contributory factor to labour market integration for refugees is proficiency in the local language(s). Basque is one of the official languages in the Basque region, and although all the refugee participants have acquired (albeit to a limited extent) some basic Basque words and phrases, learning Spanish was considered by all the participants to be the most important language to learn for integration and subsequent employment opportunities. Moreover, a number of non-governmental NGO's and charity organizations offer refugees the possibility of learning both Spanish and Basque, but the interviewees placed particular emphasis on the centres offering language courses titled 'Educación de Personas Adultas' (EPA) (education for adults). However, such centres have also received certain criticism, particularly as there are calls for the enrolment in adult schools to be adapted to when the refugees arrive in the host communities. Indeed, research conducted by Areizaga et al. (2020) shows that by only having the enrolment periods in June and September, refugees face limitations in accessing such programmes after arriving in the Basque region, thus prolonging the integration process. This is in line with what Amaia argues:

“You have to adapt such courses to the arrival times of these people, which often commence at the start of the academic year. They need to be more flexible” (Amaia).

Nevertheless, these centres and the language courses that are offered have been described as important from the refugee interviewees. This corresponds to what Sadio reports:

“Since I speak French, it didn’t take long for me to learn Spanish, but if you don’t speak good Spanish, it’s almost impossible to find a job, even for work where you don’t need to talk much. So yes, I guess EPA helped me learn quicker” (Sadio).

Moreover, Bucken-Knapp et al. (2019) found that the standard of language training has a significant effect on refugee integration into the labour market. Indeed, studies across the Basque Country highlight the lack of learning material and qualified teachers as a growing problem for good quality teaching (La Spina et al., 2018). Moreover, as it is often necessary to resort to volunteers for teaching due to the limited number of professional teachers in this area, this can make it challenging to accredit the knowledge of the language acquired by refugees, as these are not considered to be official courses (La Spina et al., 2018). Recognizing such courses could make a significant contribution for employers during the recruitment process:

“I think if they gave us some sort of qualification that shows that we went to these schools, it would definitely help to find a job, because sometimes it’s difficult to prove your level” (Moses).

Emilia Romagna

Mastering the local language emerged as a major factor to labour-market integration for refugees from the participants. Although the language of Emilian-Romagnol is spoken across the region (Barni, 2008) it has not been officially ratified by Italy and is not officially recognized. Therefore, learning Italian was unquestionably the most important language from the participants’ responses, with Italian language training for foreigners provided in Provincial Centres for Adult Education across Italy (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020). These are educational institutes that provide educational and functional literacy services and activities to foreigners (and refugees) over the age of sixteen. After completing the course and passing a final exam, a certificate is granted that can be used for various purposes, such as applying for a residency permit or applying for a job. Regarding language abilities, most research across Emilia-Romagna suggests that language learning should be improved even further (Drigo, 2019). Such

recommendations, according to Luca, include training schemes being made more available and adaptable:

“Yes, there’s definitely link. Without knowing Italian anyone will find it hard to get a job here... The courses here have become better structured over the years, but we need to make these courses more available and tailor them to the needs of refugees and their profiles” (Luca).

Further recommendations include that attendance in language classes held in centres be made mandatory from the first reception (with all essential measures taken to improve and simplify participation), and that participation in language courses offered at adult training centres or through third-party organizations be encouraged (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020). Indeed, there has been a call for the improvement of the quality of the training, with higher skilled teachers to be included in such courses (Drigo, 2019). Although the refugee participants noted that the language courses were helpful, they also highlighted socializing with local people to be a significant factor in learning the Italian language:

“I definitely learned a lot at the school. So, yea, I’m sure it helped me find a job because without knowing Italian you’re not going anywhere” (Obi).

“I learnt a lot at the schools, but I learnt a lot hanging out with Italians. You talk about things that interest you more, so I learnt quicker this way... Yes, it helped with find a job because without basic Italian no one will hire you” (Moussa).

Similarities and differences

It became clear that all participants considered language courses and knowing the basic command of the local language to be a fundamental factor in labour-market integration. Although Basque in the Basque Country and Emilian-Romagnol in Emilia-Romagna are spoken throughout these regions, Spanish and Italian were outlined to be the most important languages to learn for greater employment opportunities. Both regions’ practitioners also called for the quality of language schools to improve with better teaching material and the incorporation of more qualified teachers. In the Basque context, easing the enrolment period could also facilitate accessing such courses, whereas in the Emilia-Romagna context, making these programmes more visible and encouraging

refugees to take part were emphasised. From the refugees' perspectives, language schools did indeed improve their Spanish and Italian language skills. However, the Basque participants insisted that the lack of proof in the form of a qualification for attending such courses was discouraging, as some way of formal acknowledgment could be useful when applying for jobs. Moreover, participants from both sides identified socialising with local people as an alternative method to learning the language(s).

4.3.2 The recognition of skills, certification of foreign qualifications and obtaining local qualifications

Basque Country

Having skills recognized and foreign qualifications homologised/standardised emerged as a key theme from the respondents, particularly from the refugees. Regarding skills, these refer to both soft and technical skills and educational qualifications that the refugee may possess. However, as such abilities and attributes differ among refugees, assessing their skills promptly and providing necessary training tailored to their individual abilities has been highlighted as an essential procedure to accelerate the transition into work (Legrain, 2017). Indeed, this corresponds with Markel's argument:

“Ensuring that refugees get into work quickly, we need to assess their language proficiency and skills as soon as possible. Such assistance should not be costly, and if we can speed up the process into work then it will be much easier for both refugees and the institutions supporting them” (Markel).

Indeed, a person with qualifications from other countries typically finds it challenging to obtain work as they possess foreign qualifications which are often non-transferable between nations (Cerna, 2010). Furthermore, the lengthy, costly, and bureaucratic processes of having such skills and qualifications recognised in the Basque Country is another obstacle that refugees often face, subsequently making it harder to enter the labour force (Areizaga et al., 2020). This corresponds to what most of the respondents argue – namely that carrying out an informative campaign on the recognition of skills and the homologation and validation of foreign qualifications is essential to enter the Basque labour market. As Sadio indicates:

“Because universities in Senegal and around Africa are considered a level below, I haven't had my qualifications acknowledged. Next year I hope to start studying

at the University of the Basque Country to continue my career in humanitarian law... Even though I'm starting from square one, I know that getting a local degree will increase my employment chances" (Sadio).

The final sentence above also corresponds to research conducted by Phalet & Swyngedouw (2003), whose findings show that qualifications obtained in the host community often increases a person's chances of becoming employed. Indeed, this can become a frustrating reality for many people, as jobs that refugees hold in the receiving country are often not in line with their skills and previous education attainments. Obtaining local qualifications issued in the Basque Country, therefore, is another strong factor in enabling access to the labour market and in finding better-paid jobs. There are mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, Samuel notes:

"I hold a degree in political science, but I've been working in a bar for over a year now. Of course, I thank God for having a job, but I would like to find a job that is more related to what I studied... I know it's difficult without a degree from here, but I hope this will change" (Samuel).

On the other hand, as Moses does not hold any previous higher education qualifications, he feels content with his job:

"I never went to university so I'm happy with my job. Maybe one day I will study more and get a better job, but if I'm earning a salary and can put food on the table, I'm fine with that" (Moses).

Emilia-Romagna

One of the themes that emerged in the discourse was the recognition of skills. The Emilia-Romagna government conducted an inquiry on non-EU nationals called the "Citizen Training Booklet," (Libretto formativo del cittadino) a pilot scheme established in 2014 which aims to document, synthesize, and authenticate the refugees' learning experience as well as his or her gained competencies in formal and informal settings (Desiderio & Urso, 2014). Its main goal was to help young migrants integrate into the labour market by promptly assessing their capabilities and offering appropriate training customized to their specific capacities for accelerating transition into work:

“The sooner you assess a person’s skills and previous attainments, the sooner they’ll be able to enter the labour market. But everything is done slower here, unfortunately” (Giovanni).

Such a scheme appears to have played a particularly effective role in the refugee participants, as none of them possessed any qualifications prior to their arrival to Italy. This corresponds with Moussa and Obi’s statements, where they were able to have their skills recognised and matched to appropriate jobs:

“I was always quite a handyman, so they saw this and were able to get me a job as a mechanic. It was ok, but now I’m much happier working at X¹” (Moussa).

“I love cars and motorbikes, I always watch YouTube videos. So yea, I knew a bit of how the parts and engines work, so I think this helped me get that job as a mechanic because they saw I was very motivated to learn” (Obi).

Similarities and differences

From the practitioners’ perspectives, both regions agreed that the sooner refugees’ qualifications and skills are recognised, the sooner they’ll be able to access the labour market. Regarding qualifications, homologising/standardising qualifications, recognising universities from more developing countries, and making such processes cheaper can facilitate entry into the labour market. Similarly with skills, the sooner a refugees’ previous experiences and abilities are recognised, the sooner they’ll be able to be matched to suitable jobs. The most evident difference was that two of the refugee participants from the Basque Country had been educated at university level, whereas from Emilia-Romagna, none of the refugees possessed any qualifications from their home country. Therefore, such comparison cannot be made, but conclusions can still be drawn from the Basque context, as the lack of university qualifications led to jobs that were not in line with their career profession. Moreover, obtaining local qualifications, particularly a university degree, was identified as a further factor in increasing the chances of finding a job. Regarding skills, the Basque participants therefore found that their previous experiences were not useful for obtaining a job due to the different career paths they undertook in the receiving country. This was different for the Emilia-Romagna refugees,

¹ Privacy

as they were able to have their skills recognised and matched to appropriate jobs. The contrast is clear.

4.3.3 Securing residency/citizenship, and access to work

Basque Country

Obtaining legal status in the host country emerged as another key theme from the participants. Its importance cannot be understated, as it may allow membership, privileges, and subsequent participation opportunities to access the labour market in the Basque Country (Santos, 2018). As Markel argues:

“Without securing the temporary residency permit asylum seekers can find themselves in an unstable situation, so it’s important to not complicate the process” (Markel).

Despite citizenship being regarded as one of the most advanced forms of legal status a refugee can achieve, none of the refugee participants held Spanish citizenship at the time of interviewing, as the legal requirement to obtain such a status requires the applicant to have lived in Spanish territory for at least 5 years (Portal de Inmigración, 2016). Indeed, after 5 years of legal residence and subject to compliance with a series of conditions related to language, civic knowledge, financial independence, and good conduct, they can apply for permanent residency. Therefore, the residence permit issued to resettled refugees is temporary, where all the refugee participants held this legal status. Achieving residency was described by the refugees as extremely important to them both symbolically, as it gave them a sense of belonging, and literally because it gave them legal permission to reside and work in Spain. However, the process of obtaining such a permit was described as challenging from the refugees’ perspectives.

“It was a long process, and I needed a lot of help from my friends here because my Spanish wasn’t very good” (Samuel).

*“It was long and complicated, but when I got the permit, it was a relief”
(Moses).*

Obtaining legal access to employment was described as an even greater obstacle to overcome by the participants. According to international law, states hosting refugees must do everything possible to guarantee their access to employment (Fasani et al., 2018). Indeed, according to reception standards, a country must facilitate access to refugees in

the labour market, as their early incorporation into employment facilitates the integration process and increases the likelihood of their positive contribution to the host society and of them fostering their autonomy (CEAR, 2018). Such standards are no different in the Basque Country, as refugees must be able to access the labour market on equal terms at least 6 months after their application for international protection was admitted for processing (Portal de Inmigración, 2016). The reality of this, however, is rarely reflected in practice, as refugees are subject to longer waiting periods to access the labour market. Such access is fraught with difficulties due to language, existing prejudices, lack of knowledge of the market and, above all, uncertainty about the duration of said work permit (CEAR, 2018). As Joseba notes:

“National legislation states that refugees should be able to access the labour market 6 months after having their application processed, but this rarely happens. The system should be changed to make the terms more flexible according to the development of autonomy of the refugees” (Joseba).

This is in line with the refugee participants’ views, all of them having revealed that it took over a year for them to become legally employed. Moreover, as part of the recent socio-economic context stemming from the 2008 financial crisis and the more recent pandemic, it has been more challenging still for refugees (also across Europe) to access a job (Barker et al, 2020). However, as one participant noted, being legally entitled to work is a privilege in the long term, as working illegally can lead to exploitation and the violation of labour rights. Anti-discriminatory practices will be discussed in the next section, but regarding accessing work, Moses argues:

“I had to be patient, I waited over a year to start my job at X² as I would rather work legally and know that I won’t be deported or something. I have friends near Málaga that are still working illegally. I consider them the unlucky ones” (Moses).

Emilia Romagna

The respondents emphasised the obtaining of residency as a central factor in integration, as it allows membership and privileges which increases subsequent employment opportunities. New regulations, including a decree enacted in October 2020 (Rossi &

² Privacy

Vitali, 2020) opened the country's reception system to asylum seekers awaiting a decision – a system previously restricted to recognized refugees and unaccompanied minors. It also assures that asylum seekers have the right to register with their local city hall, since denial of this right makes it challenging for asylum seekers to obtain the services to which they are entitled (Sunderland, 2020). Indeed, several independent observers (NGOs, human rights attorneys, and labour unions) had protested about the previous legislation's detrimental repercussions regarding irregular immigration (De Sario, 2020). This correlates with Erika's claim:

“There are a lot of bureaucratic problems, and the authorities are frequently not available to assist them. Last year they brought in a new decree to facilitate the residency permit so refugees could access work. It was, and still is, a complete chaos” (Erika).

Obtaining residency, or ‘identity card’ as many of the refugees described, was the *sine qua non* in the quest for possible employment. At the time of interviewing, all the refugee participants held a temporary resident permit, despite one of the participants having lived over 5 years in Italy, which is the minimum amount of time required for applying for permanent residency (De Sario, 2020). However, obtaining such a permit was described as an extremely stressful process and fraught with multiple difficulties. Indeed, as Omar notes, the people working to assist refugees regarding applications seemed unhelpful and uninterested in their profession:

“It's not easy. I found the process complicated and the people working there were idiots... They didn't want to help us” (Omar).

Obtaining citizenship was also described as a complex process. As mentioned, refugees who have been lawfully residing in Italy for at least 5 years may be given Italian citizenship, whereas beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are subject to the standard norm that applies to third-country nationals: after 10 years of lawful residence, they can seek naturalization (De Sario, 2020). In both circumstances, the beneficiary's registration at the registry office cannot be interrupted, which is particularly challenging for refugees as the law does not guarantee them housing after they are granted protection status. A

2018 reform also included a need for solid understanding of the Italian language at B1 level³ and proven social inclusion. (Marchetti, 2020).

“In theory I can apply for permanent residency, but it’s complicated. I need to do some tests, and it’s difficult to prove how long I have been here legally. But we’ll see in the future” (Moussa).

However, there were conflicting views regarding obtaining access to employment. Italy is obliged under law to guarantee refugees’ access to employment 3 months after their application for international protection is admitted for processing, in comparison to other countries such as Spain, which is 6 months (De Sario, 2020). Indeed, studies show that refugees in Italy are subject to much longer waiting periods to access the labour market. On the one hand, Erika notes:

“The problem in Italy is that whatever the law states regarding immigration practices, it’s almost always the case that refugees have to wait for a longer period before they can work” (Erika).

On the other hand, gaining access to employment was described as a relatively smooth process by the refugee participants:

“It took me just over a year to start working. So yes, I found it quite easy because they needed workers, and I knew Italian by this point which was important. Once I stopped working as a mechanic it didn’t take me long to find another job” (Moussa).

“It was a bit harder to get my job as mechanic because I needed to do a lot of training, so it takes time. But it was worth it because I prefer it to sweeping streets” (Omar).

“To be honest I thought it would be harder, but they needed people, so I was quite lucky” (Obi).

Similarities and differences

As refugees cannot access the labour market without recognised legal status, practitioners from both regional contexts highlighted the obtaining of a residency permit as a fundamental step to becoming employed. Although both sides argued that facilitating the process of achieving residency can speed up the integration process and thus increase

³ The third level of English in the Common European Framework of Reference

employment chances, the overall discourse from the Emilia-Romagna interviewees showed a more critical and negative stance regarding the process and general bureaucracy of issuing such permits. Being a legal resident was therefore linked to access to work. Indeed, the Basque practitioners regard the flexibility of accessing work to be in accordance with the development of a refugee's integration process, which is in line with the views of the Emilia-Romagna practitioners. However, it was emphasised in the Emilia-Romagna context that allowing a refugee premature access work could be a precipitation move that subsequently hinders the refugee's integration process. Regarding the acquisition of residency status, refugees from both regions highlighted similar difficulties in accessing such permits, including language barriers, long processes, and bureaucratic problems. However, there were more conflicting views regarding accessing work. On the one hand, the Basque refugees found the search of finding a job as a long and difficult process, whereas the Emilia-Romagna participants found it relatively easy due to the wider number of opportunities available.

4.3.4 Equality of opportunity and treatment

The Basque Country

As is the case across Spain, evidence shows that discriminatory practices in the workplace, along with negative rumours, stereotypes, and prejudices towards foreigners living in the Basque region may hinder their integration, cause discrimination, and obstruct entry into the labour market (Guimón, 2016). The Basque government has promoted various networks, including 'Eraberean', a network for equal treatment and non-discrimination, and 'Aholku Sarea', which provides legal advice on immigration-related matters, to ensure fair access to services for refugees, including employment (Areizaga et al., 2020). As Amaia argues:

“It's important to let refugees know from when they arrive that they have rights and that they are entitled to receive equal access to employment just like everyone else... We're better equipped to deal with such scenarios in comparison to the south” (Amaia).

Moreover, to counter negative stereotypes towards foreigners, the 'anti-RUMORES-Zurrumurruen Aurkako Sarea' was implemented, which consists of a network of social and institutional agents that carry out a strategy of social transformation from the perspective of human rights, interculturality and anti-racism. The work of anti-

RUMORES translates into the development of teaching materials and the organization of seminars, conferences, workshops, and awareness campaigns, among others (Areizaga et al., 2020). From the refugees' perspectives, however, such discriminatory rhetoric has not been prevalent during their stay in the Basque Country. As Sadio explains:

“I’ve always felt welcomed in Euskadi. Sometimes you get people staring at you as if you’re different, but it doesn’t bother me. The Basques are generally welcoming and have helped me a lot” (Sadio).

Moreover, Moses describes his working conditions and environment as a positive experience:

“Back in Cameroon I would be earning 2000 CFA ⁴a day, with almost no rest and for over 10 hours. Here, I earn enough for a living and the working conditions are much better” (Moses).

Emilia Romagna

Emilia-Romagna, with attempts at being a pioneer in the struggle against socioeconomic inequality, is also at the forefront of the struggle against racial discrimination and foreign exploitation (Minni, 2019.) Indeed, discrimination against refugees is present in various areas, which can make integration harder and complicate entry into the labour market. The Emilia-Romagna government created the ‘Centro contro le discriminazioni (The Centre against Prejudice) in 2007, which is responsible for the prevention of discrimination (through actions of awareness raising and promotion and support of projects and practices) and the removal of the conditions that lead to such discriminatory acts (through extra-judicial actions and conflict mediation) (Drigo, 2019). In this context, it leads a project called ReAct Emilia-Romagna, funded with FAMI 2014-2020 funds (Fund for Asylum, Migration, and Integration) with the objective of preventing and removing any institutional discrimination which deprives citizens of third countries of their rights and access to goods and services provided by municipalities.

“Laws and regulations that are meant to support and protect refugees are ignored a lot of the times. It might be worse in places like Sicily, but it’s still a problem here too” (Luca)

⁴ Around 3 euros

Particularly in the south, refugees are exploited on a regular basis. Of course, this also happens in Emilia-Romagna, because the laws that are supposed to protect migrants are often just ignored” (Giovanni).

Indeed, discriminatory experiences in the workplace are prevalent across Italy, which according to Dixon et al. (2018) is largely due to the increasing levels of racism in the country and the growing opposition to migrants across the political spectrum. Such discriminatory acts have been prevalent in the workplace according to the refugee participants:

“In my first job, there was a guy from Napoli who treated me and other Africans like shit. If we went to the toilet, he would time us, he underpaid us, said bad things. He was an idiot” (Moussa).

“Now it’s a bit better, but we blacks do have bad experiences at work. I have had some bad experiences in the street and sometimes at work, but you get used to it. I have friends who went through much worse things” (Omar).

Similarities and differences

Fair and equal access to work was also considered a fundamental aspect to labour market integration from the practitioners. Curiously, both sides called attention to the fact that despite discrimination in the workplace being a common theme across both the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, these regions were nevertheless better equipped to deal with such issues in comparison to the southern regions of Spain and Italy. The refugee participants expressed conflicting views regarding such discriminatory experiences. In the Basque context, although it took the refugees longer to access employment, the conditions and working environment were described as relatively positive, whereas in the Emilia-Romagna context, cases of mistreatment and racism were much more prevalent.

4.3.5 Housing

Basque Country

All participants claimed during the interviews that there is a real problem in providing accommodation for refugees, with even further difficulties in accessing independent housing. In the Basque Country, refugees are entitled to economic benefits that are also available for the rest of the citizenry. Among these benefits, there is the supplementary housing benefit, aimed at supporting the costs of accommodation (La Spina et al., 2018).

These services are managed by Lanbide, the autonomous body belonging to the Department of Employment and Social Policies of the Basque Government. Normally, this benefit is aimed at people with insufficient resources, and is guided by the principle of minimum income, which considers that all people must have minimum resources for their subsistence. Housing instability, therefore, was also linked to difficulties in finding employment. As Amaia argues:

“Housing stability can help with integration and settlement, so this eases refugees into finding employment in a more structured manner. But providing housing is a huge task. If it’s hard to find accommodation for nationals, imagine how difficult it is for an asylum seeker” (Amaia).

There are various factors to consider in understanding the difficulties of access to independent housing for refugees, which may include the language obstacle, the lack of economic resources, the existing prejudices towards this sector and the characteristics of the real estate market. Indeed, CEAR, in its 2018 report, pointed out that "housing is lacking, too expensive, and the requirements are impossible for these people to meet." (CEAR, 2018, p. 89). According to what was stated by the interviewees, these problems of access to housing are intensified in the Basque Country where, given the price of housing in some cities such as San Sebastián, which is the most expensive in Spain, (The Local, 2021), renting a home is rarely an option for refugees. Indeed, Joseba notes:

“To improve the housing problem, there needs to be less of a discriminatory approach, and better coordination is required from the Basque Government, councils, town halls and entities. This scenario is unsustainable in the short and long-run.” (Joseba).

Such sentiments are echoed by Sadio:

“If they ⁵hear a different accent like mine, sometimes they’ll just hang up the phone. They think we don’t pay the rent” (Sadio).

Therefore, from the refugees’ perspective, living in reception centres was described as essential for providing accommodation for the refugees.

⁵ Landlors

“I spent the first few weeks sleeping on the streets, when one night a couple guys from the Red Ciudadana de Acogida⁶ took me to Txantxarreka⁷. It was very helpful staying there because a couple of months later I moved in with a family from Donosti” (Samuel).

Providing housing was therefore described as a factor for finding employment:

“If you live on the streets, it’s harder to find a job. When you have some sort of accommodation, at least you have some dignity, and you meet people that want to help you and maybe find a job.” (Moses).

Emilia-Romagna

Flats (83.3 % of total facilities), small reception centres (10.3%), and communal houses (6.6%) are the most common structures available to house asylum seekers and refugees across Emilia-Romagna. Indeed, providing accommodation for refugees is a problem that is widespread across Italy, with even further difficulties in accessing independent housing (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021).

“When they get out of the reception systems, they don’t receive any help paying for accommodation.... Finding an apartment in the first place is a huge problem too, because a lot of times refugees are caught between choosing between finding a job in a bigger city but risk moving out of the reception centres and being homeless... It’s very unstable” (Erika).

Indeed, various factors play a role in making access to housing for refugees difficult in Emilia-Romagna, including language obstacles, lack of economic resources, existing prejudices towards refugees and the characteristics of the real estate market (Minni, 2019). In terms of housing, the Emilia-Romagna Regional Authority has been allocating increasing amounts of funding to Provincial Authorities and principal towns to execute activities targeted at addressing housing issues and aiding low-income households through subsidised rentals since 2011. As a result, state institutions, the private sector, owners, and renters' organisations have signed Provincial Protocols, with regional activities and subsidies provided to both Italian residents and foreign residents (Nante et al., 2016). However, such initiatives seem to have borne little effect on facilitating access

⁶ Volunteering organisation

⁷ Local Youth club

to housing. Moreover, the refugee participants described incidences of mistrust from landlords renting out apartments.

“It’s difficult man. They don’t want to rent out houses to us because you need to prove you have a job or that you have permanent residency. I only recently managed to get an apartment” (Omar).

“It’s expensive because I don’t earn a lot, and landlords don’t want us because we have to prove we’re legal” (Moussa).

Furthermore, securing housing as a factor to finding employment was also described as a factor to employment:

“I got my first job when I was living in the reception centre, so I guess it was easier because if you’re homeless you don’t have any contact or help” (Omar).

Similarities and differences

Practitioners from both regions acknowledged the challenges in providing accommodation for refugees when they first arrive in the country, with even further difficulties in accessing independent housing. The means to pay for independent housing seemed to be even more challenging in Emilia-Romagna, as most refugees are not entitled to receive any supplementary housing benefit to help cover accommodation costs, whereas refugees in the in the Basque Country are. Having some form of accommodation was therefore linked to stability which may ease the process of finding a job. Indeed, similar themes emerged from the refugee respondents, as having some form of accommodation was linked to having more stability, which in turn increases the chances of becoming employed. Furthermore, accessing independent housing was also described as challenging due to the expensive costs that are related to renting out accommodation. In Emilia-Romagna, such difficulties seemed to have been exacerbated due to the unwillingness of some landlords in renting out accommodation to refugees.

4.3.6 Freedom of settlement and social networks

The Basque Country

Despite Spain not having dispersal policies set in law, there has been an ever-growing call for regions across Spain to encourage less restriction on movement (Bazurli, 2019). According to La Spina et al. (2018), this can be achieved by providing certain refugees

with assistance and allowing more flexible rules for resettlement, as the presence of family and similar ethno-cultural communities is a criterion for the selection of resettlement. Therefore, the Basque Government's intention has been to increase the freedom of movement and settlement to subsequently facilitate integration:

“Although it is almost inevitable that asylum seekers and refugees often end up in similar ethnic communities, it is important to not marginalise them. We have found that blended societies are a healthy mix and crucial for integration”
(Markel).

Although 2 of the refugee respondents found that living in similar ethno-cultural communities brought them a sense of belonging and comfort, mixing with local people was also considered a significant factor for integration:

“I mean yea, my flatmates and most of my other friends are Africans here in Intxaurreondo⁸, but if you just hang out with them you don't learn much. I learnt a lot of the language and the culture because of my local friends here, so I guess it's important to have a bit of everything” (Samuel).

In line with the quote above, policies that allow freedom of settlement have a consequential effect on social networks, which received a significant amount of attention from the respondents. Such networks can assist refugees in navigating the labour market by allowing them to connect with other refugees or natives. For this study, social networks are defined as the family, community, and friends who assist refugees in integrating into the hosting community (Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018). There have been various programmes to promote connections, but the one that stood out from the interviews was the programme 'Auzolan', which was created to establish connections between the entity responsible for the social reception, the city council, the volunteer groups present in said municipality and, of course, the refugee (Santos, 2018). Indeed, emphasis was placed on establishing early social contacts with the participants:

“Establishing contacts from early on can speed up the integration process. So, with regard to your question, yes, this is crucial for refugees' job prospects because a lot of the times they hear of job offers through friends and local connections” (Amaia)

⁸ Suburban neighbourhood in San Sebastián

Such a statement was echoed by all the refugee participants:

“The reason I’m working at (X⁹) is because the local family I was living with in Erreterria knew people that needed part-time workers”. (Moses)

“Yea, one of my friends said they needed some help at the bar. After a while they offered me to stay on full-time” (Samuel)

“X¹⁰ came to me to ask if I could help out at the garage with some stuff, and here I still am after a year” (Mane).

Emilia-Romagna

The Italian Dispersal Policy, implemented in 2014, was an approach whose goal was the sharing of the ‘weight’ of refugee intake, increasing local community perceptions of justice, accelerating asylum seeker integration, and avoiding native public unrest (Campo et al., 2020). However, where migrants eventually end up living is frequently determined by the availability of suitable accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers, which is the case in Emilia-Romagna. This is a concern, since low-cost housing is accessible in regions where housing demand is low, which are often in economically disadvantaged communities that are suffering from depopulation and which consequently offer fewer work opportunities (Minni, 2019).

“Across Italy you see clusters of similar communities living together in more marginalised neighbourhoods. There are pros and cons to this sort of policy approach, but not allowing freedom of settlement can be intrusive on their integration” (Giovanni).

Despite the refugee participants not being directly affected by any dispersal system, they did acknowledge living in similar ethno-cultural households and communities. On the one hand, this was seen as comforting from the refugee participants as they felt more secure living with people from similar backgrounds, but emphasis was also placed on the importance of integrating with the native population:

⁹ Privacy

¹⁰ Privacy

“I have loads of friends, from Africa and from the middle-east in my neighbourhood. It was similar when I lived in Cesenatico ¹¹. You feel more at home, but you need to know Italians too, if not you won't survive” (Omar).

Moreover, such dispersal policies have far-reaching effects on social networks, which was highlighted by respondents as significantly influential in finding jobs, assisting the refugees by allowing them to connect with other refugees or natives in finding out about job opportunities.

“In the reception centres I worked at, most jobs refugees found were through friends. Very rarely did they find it via the internet, but that may have changed a bit these past years” (Erika).

Such statement is similar to what the refugee participants expressed:

“You meet people and those people know people that need workers, you know? That's how X ¹² helped me find a job at X ¹³, because he has contact with the manager” (Obi).

“For both my jobs X ¹⁴ helped me find them, because after I stopped working as a mechanic it took X only a few weeks before he found me a new job” (Moussa).

“X ¹⁵ helped me get my first job because the boss liked to employ migrants.

Similarities and differences

Finally, freedom of movement and settlement emerged as a key theme in labour market integration from the perspective of the practitioners. Although the interviewees recognised that refugees often end up living in similar ethnic configurations/backgrounds, it was highlighted to avoid marginalising such groups in order to help their integration process. Moreover, policies that allow freedom of movement have consequential effects in making social contacts, which would appear to be crucial for accessing information (through official and non-official channels) regarding job vacancies. Despite none of the refugees being subject to any form of dispersal system, they did acknowledge living in communities with people from similar ethnic backgrounds. Although most of them found

¹¹City on the coast of Emilia-Romagna

¹²Privacy

¹³Privacy

¹⁴Privacy

¹⁵Privacy

this comforting, participants from both regions shared the view that mixing with the native population was also an important step towards integration. Moreover, almost all participants from both sides agreed that establishing social contacts early on was a fundamental step towards accessing job opportunities.

To conclude, policies regarding the provision of language courses, recognition of skills, facilitating permission to work, and ensuring freedom of settlement (although to differing extents) were the main policy areas within which the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna found common ground, whereas obstacles regarding the processes of accessing residency permits represented a clear policy failure in both regions. Moreover, in the Basque Country, policies relating to the recognition of previous qualifications also emerged as insufficient in their outcomes, as few refugees were able to find employment in line with their profession and qualification levels. Moreover, as discriminatory attitudes were clearly more prevalent among the refugee participants in Emilia-Romagna, this indicates that policies regarding the equality of treatment within the workplace were more effective in the Basque region.

5 - DISCUSSION

This study has attempted to highlight the successes and challenges of labour-market integration policies for refugees in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews and by selecting a range of actors from both these regional contexts as the sample, the guiding questions regarding how such policies affect refugees' employability and the barriers that originate from these were central to this study. Following the Basque integration policy 'Plan de actuación en el ámbito de la Ciudadanía, Interculturalidad e Inmigración 2018-2020' and Emilia Romagna's 'Piano Integrato degli Interventi in Materia di Inserimento Lavorativo e di Integraziones Sociale dei Migranti 2014-2020', the study found that despite certain policy objectives being met, refugees still face significant obstacles regarding integration in their respective labour markets. However, despite the challenges reported, all refugee participants were able to find employment. Therefore, in light of the findings, the following paragraphs explore the outcomes with reference to the labour-market policy areas described in the theoretical framework and the policies outlined by the respective labour-market documents in each regional context.

5.1 Language courses and proficiency

Firstly, the study found that there is a significant link between learning the Spanish and Italian languages and subsequent labour-market integration. Whilst the fact in itself is not surprising, the provision of language courses and acquisition of basic language skills, outlined as top priorities in both policy documents in the respective regions, were also highlighted by all participants as significantly important in order to increase the chances of entry into the labour market. Moreover, despite not being a specified policy area, a significant amount of refugee participants emphasised the fact that socialising with the local population also serves as a means of improving the language. These points relate to the literature surrounding the provision of language courses by Zhang & Grenier (2013) and Gazzola et al. (2019), whereby acquiring the host country's national or official language(s) has a positive impact on immigrants' labour income and job status. Indeed, language-education policies aimed at improving the use of the host country's language(s) can potentially make a significant contribution to a refugee's socioeconomic integration and their subsequent incorporation into the labour market. Another study by Esser (2006) concluded that language is crucial to social integration since it is the medium for

communication in the labour market – further supporting the view of language as a resource *sine que non* for labour-market integration.

Overall, it can be concluded that from the participants' perspectives, acquiring basic language Spanish and Italian skills is essential for subsequent employment opportunities. Not knowing the language is clearly a significant barrier to refugee integration, so that the difficulties in accessing such programmes hitherto discussed, including shortage of personnel and flexibility in joining these courses, are issues which can be addressed and improved.

5.2 The recognition of skills, certification of foreign qualifications and obtaining local qualifications

The study further uncovered the fact that although the recognition of skills, plus the homologation of foreign qualifications and obtaining local qualifications in the Basque Country, serve as an important factor in obtaining employment, the reality was reported with mixed responses from the refugee side. In the Basque Country, despite two of the refugee participants being educated at university level and having worked in their origin countries, such qualifications and experiences did not match job expectations or opportunities in the receiving country. Emphasis was therefore placed on the fact that obtaining further local qualifications can enhance employability. There were, nevertheless, refugees with limited work experience who did seem to find jobs that corresponded to their skills. Such findings are not supported by the literature that identifies the recognition of skills and qualifications as a facilitator for labour-market integration (Dimitrov, 2017). Moreover, despite the refugee participants eventually becoming employed, policy failures including lengthy bureaucratic processes and the non-recognition of home-based qualifications and skills serve as an obstacle to labour-market participation, which corresponds to the findings by Cerna (2010). Indeed, with employers unsure as to the content and quality of foreign qualifications, this can significantly hinder a refugee's chance of becoming employed or increase the likelihood of working in jobs incompatible with, and inferior to, the skills of their profession. This would also seem to be disadvantageous to the host country, potentially wasting skilled additions to the workforce.

Although it is not feasible to generalize such findings to a wider audience given the study's limited sample, it could be argued that the policy objectives regarding the

recognition of qualifications were not fully met for the participants in the Basque Country, as most job expectations from the refugees with qualifications were not matched satisfactorily. However, policies recognising the (often limited) skills of refugees do appear to have been more successfully implemented. This seems to be further evident in Emilia-Romagna, as the participants were able find jobs with which they felt content. Further policy practices regarding the recognition of qualifications and the facilitation of such processes are therefore areas that could be addressed and improved.

5.3 Securing residency/citizenship, and access to work.

Obtaining residency status in the host country emerged as one of the most important factors for accessing the labour market, since the absence of a permit is a major hinderance in finding legal work. In this regard, based on the findings presented, there was a clear link between legal entitlement to work and subsequent labour-market integration. However, the overall discourse of obtaining residency status was described as fraught with multiple difficulties, ranging from language barriers in the Basque Country to discriminatory attitudes from the municipal officers in Emilia-Romagna. Moreover, despite the overall discourse regarding refugees taking longer to become employed, the refugees in Emilia-Romagna found it relatively easy to become employed in contrast to the refugees in the Basque Country.

The findings above correspond to the literature by Bloemraad (2017) and Algan et al. (2010), whereby legal status can confer membership, privileges, and participation opportunities, as well as a sense of belonging, to foreign-born residents and their children, which was the case in both regions. Moreover, partly in line with Zetter & Ruaudel's (2016) findings, refugees who face tough competition and legal restraints in finding jobs were factors more prevalent in the Basque Country. Moreover, due to the multiple difficulties encountered in the findings, the objectives set out in the Basque and Emilia-Romagna policies to ease the residency process were not met satisfactorily from the viewpoint of the refugee participants. However, policies regarding the facilitation of accessing work were met as all refugees were legally employed, although this was achieved with relatively greater ease in Emilia-Romagna. Nevertheless, it must be noted that one of the main reasons as to why refugees found it easier to become employed in Emilia-Romagna was not necessarily due to successful policy implementation, but more likely related to the wider number of vacancies available in the region. Hence, in the absence of policies that address the easing of residency processes, refugees will continue

to face multiple obstacles that can hinder their integration and subsequently decrease their chances of gaining employment.

5.4 Equality of opportunity and treatment

Receiving fair access to jobs and being subject to non-discriminatory employment practices were found to be important factors in this study. Discriminatory practices in the workplace are common themes across Spain and Italy (Godino & Barrientos, 2019), where the overall discourse from the interviews suggested that these issues were indeed a present feature. Nonetheless, it must be highlighted that the refugee participants in the Basque Country, despite taking longer to become employed, had a significantly better experience regarding the subsequent working environment and conditions in contrast to the Emilia-Romagna participants, who had been subject to incidences of racism and mistreatment in the workplace. Indeed, governments, both national and regional, have a duty to ensure fair working conditions, non-discriminatory employment practices, legal contracts, and to play a role in combating negative discourse and misconceptions about refugees (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). Furthermore, such findings are partly in line with Pittaway & Bartolomei (2001), whereby countries with national legislation and policies that address such discriminatory practices are often associated with better economic integration among refugees.

To what extent negative political and public rhetoric in both Spain and Italy contribute to such discriminatory practices in the workplace is also subject to debate, as this has seen an incremental increase since the start of the refugee crisis (Krzyżanowski & Triandafyllidou, 2018). Therefore, despite policies set out in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna to counter such discriminatory practices, the findings would suggest that such schemes were more successful for the refugee participants in the former region, as the latter was subject to more notable cases of mistreatment and racism. Policies that combat negative stereotypes and that ensure refugees hold the same rights in the workplace as the native population are therefore issues that should be addressed, particularly in Emilia-Romagna.

5.5 Housing

Providing accommodation and accessing independent housing emerged as a further component to successful labour-market integration, with access to some form of accommodation being linked to stability - which in turn eases the process of finding a job.

However, the lack of accommodation for when the refugees first arrive in the country, along with the legal difficulties and high costs of accessing independent housing, were highlighted as major barriers in both regions. Moreover, despite the difficulties of accessing independent housing in the Basque Country, the supplementary housing benefit meant that refugees received support from the government to cover accommodation costs. Such a scheme is non-existent in Emilia-Romagna, where discriminatory attitudes from landlords appear to further complicate access to housing.

Such findings are in line with the literature by Wimark et al., (2019), whereby policies that facilitate public investment in the construction of refugee housing and governmental social benefits directed towards independent housing are likely to improve socioeconomic integration. Similar policies existed, to some extent, in the Basque context, but even these were described as insufficient by the refugee participants, particularly regarding the governmental benefits of covering accommodation costs. Such issues could be improved, therefore, by providing easier access to accommodation and higher governmental benefits to cover the costs of independent housing. Given the sheer absence of such approaches in Emilia-Romagna, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that there is a significant policy gap to be filled in this area.

5.6 Freedom of settlement and social networks

Finally, freedom of settlement emerged as arguably the most important factor in labour-market integration, particularly as it allows refugees to establish social contacts which subsequently enable access to a greater range of information regarding job opportunities. Therefore, although living with groups from similar ethnic backgrounds was an apparent theme, socialising with the local population also emerged as significantly important for learning about potential job vacancies. These findings are closely related to the study by McKay & Wright (2008), whereby regional and neighbourhood environments affect refugees' employment opportunities and integration into the labour market, as densely populated areas have higher chances of establishing social networks and offer higher chances of obtaining employment in comparison to low-density regions. It is clear, therefore, that the use of social networks became a significantly more efficient *modus operandi* among refugees in both regions for finding jobs, rather than the traditional and formal use of the public employment services.

Although promoting social networks was not explicitly stated in the Basque and Emilia-Romagna policy documents, policies regarding freedom of settlement subsequently allowed refugees to establish such contacts, which in turn aided the refugee participants in finding employment. Therefore, given the importance of establishing social contacts for learning about job vacancies, connecting refugees with other people (whether with other refugees or with people from the local community) is an additional policy area that could be included in both regions.

6- STUDY LIMITATIONS FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Study limitations

During the recruitment process, snowball sampling was applied as the only feasible strategy, given the difficulties in identifying respondents. However, one of the main limitations of the research study was that, given the narrow sample of participants, the observations and the conclusions drawn are insufficient for satisfactory generalization. Indeed, a more gender-balanced sample with more female refugee respondents, along with a wider range and higher number of policymakers, could have further enriched and contributed to the findings of this study. Although it was challenging to access the participants given the limited number of responses and the difficulties of establishing connections during the COVID-19 pandemic, an alternative and more rounded sampling procedure might have addressed the issue of the limited number of participants. Moreover, as all the refugee participants were from African countries and of a broadly similar socio-economic profiles, other findings might have emerged had the study included refugees from other parts of the world. Indeed, given the high number of asylum seekers and refugees in the Basque Country that have migrated from South America (Makazaga, 2018) and from the Middle East in Emilia-Romagna (Drigo, 2019), having representatives in the sample from these parts of the world might have led to a wider range of results.

6.2 Future research

Overall, this study set out to fill the literature gap between different regional policies within their respective national-contexts and to further contribute to the study of refugee labour-market integration. Indeed, by providing insight into the differences and similarities regarding labour-market integration policies at regional level, we can appreciate and determine why certain aspects of such policies are perhaps more adequately equipped to function in one region than in the other. Therefore, further research regarding regional differences within different national contexts can potentially broaden the scope of identifying policy obstacles and how to address them. Indeed, as most literature surrounding labour-market integration is often centred around (particularly southern) regions of Spain and Italy, further studies in other regions that lack academic research at a qualitative level, can provide a more diverse and authentic perspective of the situation in these regions.

Concerning the knowledge generated by this study, the importance of social networks in the integration of refugees into the labour market became one of the core themes that emerged from the analysis. Indeed, as social networks in the Basque and Emilia-Romagna labour markets had a significant impact on refugee employability, future research regarding how refugees form and sustain social networks, as well as how these networks affect their presence on the labour market, its structure, and diversity in general, could be of great relevance. Future research might also include following refugees' social networking at every stage of their asylum search, from choosing a place of destination while still in their home country, to transiting through the country of destination to finally obtaining a job. Such findings could be useful for policymakers, as refugees do not entirely rely on the formal procedures for finding work provided by the employment services in Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna. Indeed, as refugees reported the importance of informal networks for finding jobs, introducing policies that create room for them to further enhance these cohesive networks can become an alternative but effective way for them to find formal employment.

7- CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to highlight how labour-market integration policies affect the employment outcomes for refugees in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna by answering the question: *How have labour-market integration policies in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna shaped the employment outcomes of refugees from the perspectives of refugees, NGO volunteers, and policymakers?* Indeed, through qualitative semi-structured interviews and by selecting a range of individuals consisting of policymakers, NGO volunteers and refugees from both the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, this thesis has attempted to map out the major successes and challenges of the refugee labour-market integration policies in the respective regions by emphasising the factors that can either increase or hinder employability in their respective labour markets.

This thesis has found, although to differing extents, that policies regarding the provision of language courses, recognition of skills, facilitating permission to work, and ensuring freedom of settlement to be the main areas within which the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna might find common ground on policies which facilitate labour-market access for refugees. Challenges in the processes of accessing residency permits represented a clear policy failure in both regions. Moreover, in the Basque Country, policies regarding the recognition of previous qualifications also proved disappointing in their outcomes, as few refugees were able to find employment in line with their profession and qualification levels. Moreover, as discriminatory attitudes were more prevalent among the refugee participants in Emilia-Romagna, this suggests that policies regarding the equality of treatment within the workplace were less effective for the Italian region. Finally, establishing social contacts emerged as the most popular method for increasing a refugee's chances of becoming employed, despite not being a formally established policy in either region. As a result, social ties developed by refugees among other refugees and locals have a significant influence in their career prospects in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna, a factor absent in the formal policy recommendations extant in both regions.

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ANNEX 1- QUESTIONNAIRE

Refugees

Background information

1. Which city do you reside in?
2. What is your age?
3. Which country were you born/brought up in?
4. What is your nationality?
5. What was your occupation (if you had one) in your country of origin?

Refugee Status

1. What led you to come here?
2. When did you arrive in the BC/ER?
2. When where you granted refugee status/residency in the BC/ER?

Employment status

1. What is your current job/what was the last job you had?
2. How long did it take you to become employed?
3. Are you happy with your current job? Would you describe your experiences of paid work in this country as positive /negative?

Language courses/programmes

1. Have you attended any language courses/programmes? If so, have they helped you improve the local language(s)?
2. (*If replied yes*) In your view, how would you rate the quality of language courses?
3. What was your language level (of the local language(s)) before you arrived in the BC/ER? How fluent are you in the local language(s) now?
4. Has the acquisition of the local language(s) improved your employment outcomes?

The recognition of skills and certification of foreign qualifications

1. Do you have any previous qualifications from your country of origin? If so, what is your level of education and in which country did you obtain this/these titles?
2. Do you have any skills that were recognized in the BQ/ER?
3. Have you had your previous qualifications/skills recognized in the BQ/ER?
4. Have you been able to use your previous qualifications and skills in your job(s) in the BQ/ER?
5. (*If replied yes*) Have you been matched to jobs of your profile?

Securing residency/citizenship

1. When were you granted residency/citizenship/any other type of legal status? How long did the process take?
2. How would you describe the process in obtaining this status?
3. Did you receive any assistance in obtaining such status?
4. Once you were granted this status, has it helped you in finding a job?

Permission and access to work

1. How would you describe the process of obtaining (legal) permission to work in the BQ/ER?
2. Did you find this process as an obstacle or as a facilitation to obtaining employment?
3. Did you receive any assistance in obtaining legal permission to work?

Equality of opportunity and treatment

1. Were you informed about your rights in accessing employment and receiving non-discriminatory practices in the workplace?
2. In your view, have you received adequate treatment regarding accessing employment?
3. Have you ever felt discriminated against in your workplace or in any other environment?

Housing

1. When you arrived in the BQ/ER, did you live in an asylum centre? If so, for how long?

2. Did you receive any help in finding independent accommodation?
3. Did you receive any governmental benefit in funding your accommodation?

Freedom of movement and settlement

1. When you arrived in the BQ/ER, did you choose where to live or were placed in a location by the local authorities?
2. Did you receive any help in finding independent accommodation?
3. Did you receive any governmental benefit in funding your accommodation?

NGO volunteers

Participant information

1. Which city do you live in?
2. What is your gender?
3. How old are you?

Work

1. What is the title of your volunteering occupation?
2. What do you like most about working in this sector?
3. What is the most challenging?
4. What led you to work in this sector?

Language courses

1. In your opinion, have you noticed an improvement in the provision of language courses for refugees?
2. Do you think that improving in the local language increases employment opportunities for refugees?
3. Is there sufficient funding and are there enough teachers in this sector?
4. Would you change anything about these courses? If so, what would you change?

The recognition of skills and certification of foreign qualifications

1. Do you consider that measures addressing the homologation / recognition of previous competences and foreign qualifications for refugees as adequate?
2. Do you think that the recognition of such foreign skills and qualifications increases the chances of refugees obtaining employment?
3. Do you think such processes are long, expensive, or too bureaucratic?
3. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Obtain residency / citizenship permit

1. How would you describe the process for a refugee to obtain residency / citizenship status?
2. Is there enough assistance provided to refugees regarding this area?
3. Does having a residency / citizenship status increase the chances of employability for refugees?
4. Do you think such processes are long and complicated?
5. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Access to work

1. How would you describe the processes meant to facilitate refugees' legal ability to access work?
2. Is there enough assistance provided to refugees regarding this area?
3. Does facilitating such process increase the chances of employability for refugees?
4. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Equal opportunities and treatment

1. From your personal experience, do refugees receive fair access to employment and non-discrimination in the workplace?
2. Would you say that refugees are aware of their rights in accessing employment and in the workplace?

3. Is there a link between equal treatment and opportunity and the chances of employability for refugees?

4. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

Housing

1. How would you describe the housing situation for refugees?

2. Is there enough assistance provided to refugees regarding this area?

3. Are there sufficient benefits to help refugees fund their own accommodation?

4. Does facilitating housing access increase economic integration for refugees?

3. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

Freedom of movement and settlement

1. Would you say that refugees have the option of choosing where to live in the BC/ER?

2. Does the facilitation of such increase the chances of a refugee becoming employed? For example, because they allow refugees to establish social contacts?

3. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

Policymakers

Participant information

1. Which city do you live in?

2. What is your gender?

3. How old are you?

Work

1. What is the title of your occupation?

2. What do you like most about working in this sector?

3. What is the most challenging?

4. What led you to work in this sector?

Language courses

1. In your opinion, have policies addressing language programmes in the BC/ER improved refugees' language proficiency?
2. Do you think that improving the local language increases employment opportunities for refugees?
3. Would you change anything about these courses? If so, what would you change?

The recognition of skills and certification of foreign qualifications

1. Do you consider that policies addressing the processes of homologation / recognition of previous competences and foreign qualifications for refugees are adequate?
2. Do you think that the recognition of such foreign skills and qualifications increases the chances of refugees obtaining employment?
3. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Obtain residency / citizenship permit

1. How would you describe policies that address for refugees' ability to obtain residency / citizenship status?
2. Does having a residency / citizenship status increase the chances of employability for refugees?
3. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Access to work

1. How would you describe the laws and regulations that are meant to facilitate refugees' legal ability to access work?
2. Does facilitating such process increase the chances of employability for refugees?
3. Would you change anything about the process? If so, what would you change?

Equal opportunities and treatment

1. Are the policies in place sufficient to guarantee fair access to employment and non-discrimination for refugees?

2. Would you say that policies that address informing refugees of their rights to employment and receiving non-discriminatory practices in the workplace as adequate?
3. Is there a link between equal treatment and opportunity and the chances of employability for refugees?
4. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

Housing

1. Are the policies that ensure housing/accommodation for refugees adequate?
2. Are there sufficient governmental benefits that help refugees fund their own accommodation?
3. Does facilitating housing access increase economic integration for refugees?
3. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

Freedom of movement and settlement

1. Are policies that address the freedom of movement and settlement in the BC/ER efficient?
2. Do such policies increase the chances of becoming employed? For example, because they allow refugees to establish social contacts?
3. Would you change any of these measures? If so, what would you change?

ANNEX 2- CONSENT FORM

Information sheet and consent form

With this form the researcher would like to invite you to participate in the master thesis study “Refugee employment in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna”, by conducting a semi-structured interview. I, Harry Ball-Lindsay, conducts this research as part of his Master of Science International Public Management and Policy at the Erasmus University Rotterdam – Erasmus School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how labour-market integration policies affect the employment outcome of refugees.

The collected data will be used for the analysis and no confidential information or personal data will be included in the research outcome. The data is stored in a secure location and will be kept for 2 years. The data collected will only be shared with my thesis supervisor Asya Pisarevskaya (pisarevskaya@essb.eur.nl) for the purpose of researching and writing my master thesis at the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Erasmus University.

The reporting of the interview results in this study will be anonymous and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time. When you participate in the research, you have the rights to request more information about the data collection, analysis or withdraw the consent and ask data erasure before the dataset is anonymized or manuscript submitted for publishing. You can exercise your rights by contacting the researcher, and if you have any questions or complaints regarding the processing of personal data in this research, please contact Harry Ball-Lindsay (harryballlindsay@gmail.com).

Upon signing of this consent form, I confirm that:

- I’ve been informed about the purpose of the research, data collection and storage as explained in the information sheet;
- I’ve read the information sheet, or it has been read to me;
- I’ve had an opportunity to ask questions about the study; the questions have been answered sufficiently;
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research;

- I understand that the information will be treated confidentially;
- I understand that I can stop participation any time or refuse to answer any questions without any consequences;
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent before the dataset is submitted for approval.

Additionally, I give permission to:

	Yes	No
I give permission to audio record the interview		
I give permission to use anonymized quotes from my interview		

Name of research participant:

Date:

By checking this box and typing my name below, I am electronically signing this consent form:

Name of Researcher:

Signature: