



Analysis of the
stakeholders' feedback
to the Situational
Mapping Analysis
and Best Practices Report
in **Croatia**, the **Czech Republic**,
Hungary and **Slovakia**

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LABOUR MARKET
INTEGRATION OF
THIRD-COUNTRY
NATIONALS
IN CROATIA, THE
CZECH REPUBLIC,
HUNGARY AND
SLOVAKIA

Introduction

This document represents the overview of national analysis of stakeholders' feedback in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia in relation to the previous outputs of the Career Path project:

Labour market integration of third-country nationals in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia - synthesis report that provides an overview of existing national legal frameworks and labour integration policies in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia targeting third-country nationals, and offers a perspective of integration policies with the focus on labour market integration policies, state approaches and measures, and measures conducted by the private sector.

Best Practices Report: Labour market integration of third-country nationals in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia - synthesis report that consists of a series of 13 best practices successfully implemented in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia that offer professional opportunities and career guidance provided to third-country nationals.

The overview delivers feedback from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers and employers, as well as feedback from third-country nationals. The feedback of these stakeholders was obtained through qualitative questionnaires, interviews and focus groups implemented by the project partners: Centre for Peace Studies in Croatia, InBáze in the Czech Republic, Menedék in Hungary and Mareena in Slovakia.

Additionally, this document offers an overview of stakeholders' recommendations and comments related to national contexts that will be used for the following steps of the Career Path project implementation.

Stakeholders' feedback in Croatia

The Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) collected 12 feedbacks in total by sending out the Google forms together with produced materials. Feedbacks were collected from the diverse set of respondents that included representatives of civil society organisations, governmental institutions, local institutions, unions and third-country nationals. This diversity allowed the CPS to get a better insight into different perspectives and learn what are the strengths and weaknesses of the materials we have produced so far within the project.

Feedback from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers, and employers

The above-mentioned diverse set of respondents consisted of the following stakeholders:

A representative of the Jesuit Refugee Service, a civil society organisation actively working on the topic of the labour market integration of TCNs, currently organising Croatian language courses and implementing vocational training.

A representative of the Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma, a civil society organisation focused on improving integration capacities through supporting TCNs to overcome obstacles resulting from traumatic experiences - psychological counselling, holistic psycho-social support; improving integration capacities through building relevant competencies: knowledge, skills and attitudes and practical support.

A representative of the Civil Rights Project Sisak, a civil society organisation focused on improving the socialisation and integration of TCNs into the local society. Their span of activities includes guidance through the process of applying and obtaining a job.

A representative of the *Inicijativa.biz*, an organisation working with TCNs on increasing their employability and competitiveness in the

labour market by providing Croatian and English language courses for them as well as job search mentoring and intercultural workshops.

A representative of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, offering legislative and public policy consultations and cooperation with authorities, particularly interested in organising workers in their workplace, including migrant workers.

A representative of URIHO, Institution for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities interested in employing TCNs.

Two representatives of the city of Varaždin in the role of the local integration officers whose role is to coordinate the efforts of institutions and civil society organisations within the labour market integration of TCNs.

A representative of the city of Zagreb who currently doesn't have an active role in labour market integration of TCNs but identifies this matter as one that will be important in the near future, specifically through the prism of human rights.

A representative of the Croatian Employment Centre (CEC) actively working with unemployed job seekers of different backgrounds, persons granted international protection among others, as well as with national employers looking for workers. Since 1st of January 2021, CEC has become a part of the process of granting work permits for TCNs (except for categories stipulated in the Law on Foreigners), conducting the labour market test and providing an opinion on issuing work permit for TCNs upon request of the Ministry of the Interior. Labour market test needs to take place in order to check the availability of workers from the national labour market (nationals of Croatia or other EEA countries, but also TCNs already on the national labour market, granted a permanent stay or a temporary stay for the purpose of family reunification, humanitarian reasons, international protection, etc.). An opinion is being issued depending on the requirements the employer needs to meet (e.g. no criminal convictions on the grounds related to

employment, do debt for income tax or social security contributions, the number of employees with EU citizenship, etc.).

A representative of the Government's Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, an institution responsible for coordinating all ministries, civil society organisations, and other bodies directly involved in the integration process of refugees and persons under subsidiary protection. The Office doesn't have an active role in the labour market integration process, it is rather a mediator between different actors aiming at coordinating their activities.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

70% of Centre for Peace Studies' respondents found new information within the *Situational Mapping Analysis*. The majority of them emphasised how the Analysis perfectly summarised all aspects and obstacles TCNs are facing when entering the labour market. Additionally, the respondents found it valuable that the *Analysis* gives them an insight into practices and procedures implemented in other countries, which allowed them to re-value the Croatian system of labour market integration and look at it through a different lens. According to the feedback given by our respondents, the *Analysis* did not only shed light on obstacles TCNs face during the labour market integration but also shed light on bureaucratic obstacles that the employers themselves need to surpass if they wish to employ TCNs. As envisioned, the respondents within the *Analysis* managed to not only introduce themselves with the legal framework of other countries but also map good practices that could be implemented within our national context. One respondent touched upon the Czech practice where employment centres not only coordinate the process of finding employment but simultaneously cooperate with civil society organisations that implement Czech language workshops. Moreover, according to respondents whose role is to actively participate in labour market integration of TCNs and who have not previously acquired knowledge and

experience, this *Analysis* gives them a substantive overview of the relevant legal framework and allows them to have insight into the difficulties TCNs face during the labour market integration.

When asked what the *Situational Mapping Analysis* was missing, 60% of CPS' respondents shared the opinion that the *Situational Mapping Analysis* missed out on some of the issues TCNs are facing while entering the labour market. One respondent emphasized the importance of understanding the responsibility of TCNs during the labour market integration process. It seems that the *Analysis* portrays a picture in which all TCNs are generally highly motivated to reside and integrate into the host society, while the society itself is hostile, with the exception of NGOs. The respondent stated that the *Analysis* should consider that the obstacles TCNs are facing are very similar or even the same as the ones that the nationals are facing. The most important skills that nationals have and TCNs often lack is local language skills, understanding of the society in a broader sense and a stronger social network (family and friends). Lack of language skills or having a broader understanding of society are not obstacles that highly motivated TCNs could not overcome, but the third element needs time. The *Analysis* should mention the intrinsic motivation of TCNs that, according to CPS' respondent, plays a significant role but is rarely mentioned. The Croatian labour market in itself is not highly appealing nor competitive, compared to labour markets of other Member States of the EU. This is why even Croatian nationals, who do not struggle with the above-mentioned skills choose to leave Croatia.

Another respondent stated that the Croatian part within the *Analysis* should have covered more in-depth the struggles of TCNs who were not granted international or subsidiary protection. Given the fact there is a rise in TCNs coming to Croatia for work, it would be beneficial if the *Analysis* gave an overview of their process of obtaining work and necessary permit prior to coming to Croatia, conditions they live in and their satisfaction with working conditions. According to our respondent, asylum seekers and persons who were granted international or

subsidiary protection take a small percentage of the overall number of TCNs that are currently residing in Croatia, and they might have a different experience than TCNs who come to Croatia for their work arrangements.

Additionally, according to CPS' respondents, the *Analysis* should have more prominently discussed the problem of discrimination against TCNs, since it is identified as a significant issue TCNs face during the labour market integration process. Together with discrimination, according to the respondents, more emphasis should have been placed on the language barriers and religious beliefs that can have an impact on the overall process of labour market integration. Furthermore, the respondents would appreciate a more thorough approach to the process of claiming the worker's rights of TCNs, as well as the steps that should be taken for ensuring their social mobility throughout their life. Lastly, the respondents stated that the *Analysis* should have tackled the issue of the lack of/or non-existence of formally and informally acquired skills in more depth.

In regards to the **feedback on the recommendations given within the *Situational Mapping Analysis***, 90% of CPS' respondents believe that the recommendations given within the *Analysis* successfully answer the challenges identified by different stakeholders (third-country nationals, representatives of institutions and non-governmental organisations, and HR managers). However, some respondents stated that listed recommendations only partly answer the challenges TCNs face. They stated that some of the recommendations have already taken place in Croatia but, for some, it is not clear how they should be implemented. They seem rather broad, general or even a wish list without a deeper understanding of the problem. However, the majority of the recommendations were characterised as feasible. While recommendations were overall characterised as good enough, respondents emphasised that these recommendations will have no impact if the governments of analysed countries do not decide to allocate sufficient resources and take

into consideration policy changes proposed within the recommendations. Otherwise, the challenges identified within the *Analysis* will remain, in the word of one respondent, *“a constant battle in their work with a little success and barely any change in national policies”*. Some respondents found these recommendations quite basic and were disappointed by the fact that not even some basic needs and norms are assured by the current system and national policies.

In regards to the possibility of **translating recommendations into practice** within stakeholders' institutions or organisations, 70% of CPS respondents believe that they could translate recommendations given within our *Analysis* into practice through their daily work in different organisations and institutions. The respondent from the Jesuit Refugee Service stated that they are closely collaborating with the Croatian Employers Association and they wish to implement the mentoring program for employees in companies that have the history of employing asylum seekers, persons who were granted asylum or subsidiary protection. Overall respondents from civil society organisations wish to commit to establishing long-standing and quality partnerships with the business sector. Representative from the Croatian Employment Service believes that given recommendations can be partially implemented due to COVID-19 related priorities (jobs preservation) and measures taking place (limited possibilities for in-person counselling), as well as the uncertain situation in the labour market. Thus, it is hard to predict when and how improvements could take place. Although the majority of respondents believe that the majority of suggested recommendations are not in their hands, they find that *“even the smallest efforts can change a little bit of the system, so they hope that with their actions they are implementing some of the recommendations on a daily basis”*. However, there is a reason for optimism. Respondents representing the city of Varaždin and Zagreb believe that in the near future some steps will be made towards more successful labour market

integration of TCNs and they wish to closely participate in this process.

In regards to the **barriers that are preventing the respondents from implementing these recommendations**, there are two main barriers that respondents refer to. The first one is the COVID-19 pandemic that makes it difficult for organisations and institutions to work directly with TCNs. The second barrier is the lack of political will to build, evaluate and improve effective and successful integration policies and practices in Croatia. This lack of political will closes down an already limited space for communication between actors involved in the labour market integration process, primarily civil society organisations and institutions.

Feedback on the Best Practices Report (IO2)

90% of CPS' respondents found new innovative ways of including TCNs into the labour market through our *Best Practices Report*. They characterised the *Best Practices Report* as a good go-to tool for developing project ideas and future activities, with the possibility to check what went well and what didn't, modify and apply in the national context, without reinventing the wheel. The *Report* offered an insight into different perspectives and ideas that have the potential to be implemented within the national context. Respondents found the following practices the most interesting:

- The project BEST focused on boosting the entrepreneurial skills of TCNs. The ability for TCNs to open their own business could help them overpass the difficulties they are facing during the labour market integration process.
- IOM Migration Information Centre (MIC) counselling centre of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Slovakia, whose main objective is to provide services to foreigners and employers in order to aid their integration in Slovakia (Free Advice and Services for Foreigners from Outside the EU).
- COMIN project aiming at overcoming barriers between citizens and migrants

and reducing xenophobia in the community.

- LUSH employment policy that promotes diversity and inclusion of TCNs in the workforce.
- Projektový začátek focused on integrating women and establishing a self-help group within the project is characterised as a brilliant idea by our respondents.

While most of our respondents found these practices and initiatives rather innovative, some of them emphasised that they found these projects and initiatives basic in a sense that all of them should be in some way implemented in order to build an inclusive society and labour market.

In regards to the **likelihood of examples mentioned within the *Best Practices Report* to be implemented in our national context**, the respondents noted that some of the practices mapped within the *Report* are already being implemented, but for some of the recommendations to be implemented, the whole system should be set up (e.g. recognition of skills for persons without school certificates and diplomas). Such a system would benefit Croatian nationals as well but for the time being there is no such system in place and respondents don't perceive the construction of such a system to be a priority. Some of the respondents noted that in order for the examples mentioned to be implemented stronger institutionalised support is needed. However, the respondents were optimistic stating that they expect these practices to be implemented in Croatia in the near future since all of them are applicable to the Croatian context.

Feedback from third-country nationals

The Centre for Peace Studies collected only 1 feedback from 1 TCN who did not partake in the initial research. CPS tried to reach out to all TCNs who did take part in the first stage of the research, however, none of them had time to look into produced materials and share their feedback with us.

TCN who gave us her feedback believed that produced materials are well written and composed, and that practices mentioned in the *Best Practices Report* are full of potential. However, she believes that, since she is not a person who was granted international protection and talking from her own personal experience, most of the proposed measures and practices wouldn't apply to her, because the society doesn't recognise her as the vulnerable group that might be in risk of discrimination or safeguarded by some set of policies.

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Stakeholders' feedback in the Czech Republic

InBáze collected a total of 10 feedbacks by sending out the Google forms together with produced materials and conducting telephone interviews. There were 5 stakeholders from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers and employers, and 5 TCN stakeholders.

Feedback from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers, and employers

In terms of the structure and composition of the respondents, the selected group included representatives of public administration institutions (representatives of local and municipal authorities), HR managers of large multinational companies, state educational institutions, as well as other organisations involved in supporting migrants and third-country nationals.

Respondents involved in international projects addressing similar issues, i.e. integrating migrants and in particular third-country nationals, also shared their views through the questionnaire.

The above-mentioned diverse set of respondents consisted of the following stakeholders:

A representative of the Division of National Minorities and Foreigners, which is a part of the Office of the Chief Executive of the Prague City Hall department. This division coordinates the implementation of activities and measures related to the integration of foreigners as defined by the Policy of the City of Prague for Integration of Foreign Nationals. It cooperates with individual departments of the Prague City Hall, ensures communication and cooperation with institutions, city districts, NGOs, and other relevant organisations.

A representative of one of the Prague municipalities. Municipalities play an important

role in providing central bodies of the state administration with feedback on how the integration policy is working, on the situation and the position of foreign nationals in a given territory, and on the problems that need to be addressed in the process of the integration of foreign nationals.

A representative of the Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology. She is a member of the Sirius project team. The Sirius Project is an H2020 funded project, aiming at advancing the integration of migrants, refugees, and asylum applicants in European Labour Markets. The project builds on a multi-dimensional conceptual framework, which states that the political-institutional, societal, and individual-related conditions can function either as enablers for the labour market integration of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers or as a barrier to this integration.

A representative of an NGO working with migrants. She is involved in different projects, focused on social, cultural, and community development. She has a migrant background, with a history of voluntary work for different organisations and her own involvement in training programmes.

A representative of employers from the HR department of a big international company operating in the Czech Republic.

In their replies, the representatives of public institutions cited a rather supportive role in the integration of TNCs into the labour market. Their role is linked to social integration and the integration of TCNs into everyday life. They see their role as indirect, as far as the labour market is concerned.

The employers, represented by HR managers, also see their role in the integration of TNCs into the labour market as supportive. This opinion was presented by a company that employs specialists from third countries. These specialists are employed in positions that require language skills from TCNs' countries of origin.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

In the opinion of a number of respondents, the *Analysis* correctly summarizes the main views of the key stakeholders. The prevailing view is that the analysis summarizes the most important barriers in the area of TCNs integration into the labour market, with the provision that the description of the factors does not go very far. Some representatives of the public administration (especially self-government) stated that the analysis implies that the public administration is not fully involved in the integration of foreigners into the labour market. This, they felt, was questionable.

The opinion of the other respondents was that in the integration of TCNs and in the evaluation of the activities of public administration stakeholders, there is quite a considerable imbalance in the engagement of self-government in the Czech Republic. This is especially true in Prague, where selected active offices of the city and districts cannot replace the general and systemic policy in this area. From the point of view of employers' representatives, HR managers agree that the analysis comprehensively describes all major obstacles.

The respondents expressed opinions confirming the results of the analysis. The consistency and similarity of the conclusions and approaches of the different actors is considered an important factor, which can contribute to a faster improvement of the situation through the synergy of these actors.

In regards to what stakeholders consider to be **missing from the *Analysis*** and what they would add, the responses were as follows. In the opinion of one respondent, an effective chain connecting key actors, i.e. employer, the concerned region/municipality, NGOs, and state institutions, is missing and not clearly highlighted. The same is true for the information factor.

In terms of the integration intentions of municipalities and regions, it is crucial to ensure information and cooperation between local businesses, local government (regional and most affected municipalities and towns), local non-

profit organisations and responsible state institutions. Municipalities and regions often have no knowledge of the arrival of foreign workers, so it is not possible to systematically establish cooperation with the employer and facilitate the offer of support for new arrivals. Important stakeholders, such as NGOs, regional support services, and local governments should play an active role in providing this support. This lack of consistency and awareness makes the integration policy less effective at the local level. It also further hampers a coordinated approach and effort for targeted support coming from self-government and other actors.

In this sense, recommendations should also be directed to this area. At a minimum, information on the most significant transfers of foreign workers would allow the local stakeholders to prepare themselves for the implementation of integration activities. It would also allow them to prepare a possible response to problems related subsequently, i.e. the closure and transfer of the relevant business elsewhere. It follows that the state should primarily strive to ensure that its migration policy and its implementation within the framework of labour migration to the Czech Republic is also clear for local stakeholders in the area where TCN workers arrive. This ensures functioning mechanisms for informing both the concerned regions and municipalities of employers who operate there and of the number of workers coming to the locality.

Respondents also expressed the opinion that, in addition to the basic obstacles such as the large bureaucracy on the part of the authorities, the lack of knowledge of the local language by migrants, and the specific problem of the Czech Republic represented by the Employment Agency – work, it would be useful to highlight the key role of the Ministry of the Interior. This Ministry is the other important actor, besides the previously mentioned Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, because it is the Ministry of the Interior that sets the legislative framework and conditions for work as well as for the integration process in the Czech Republic.

In regards to the **recommendations given within the *Analysis***, all respondents considered them to be appropriate and convincing. Nevertheless, a call was made for more in-depth development of the recommendations. Respondents also emphasised the importance of promoting and kick-starting partnership communication between the state, public administration, local governments, NGOs, corporate sector, and third-country nationals in favour of their comprehensive integration. From this perspective, the labour market is seen only as one part of a more complex integration process.

At the same time, an emphasis was expressed on promoting the employment of third-country nationals in higher-skilled fields and positions, including improving the conditions for recognition of qualifications, improving the availability of language courses with different professional specialisations, including the obligation of large employers to provide these courses, and addressing the issue of health insurance for third-country nationals in the Czech Republic.

In regards to **additional recommendations**, the stakeholders from public administration institutions, state educational institutions, and NGOs, as well as HR managers of large multinational companies, proposed the following. The respondents see the lack of a strategy for employing foreigners from third countries and the fragmentation of competencies between institutions as fundamental obstacles to the implementation of the recommendations. As main issues in that regard, the stakeholders highlighted the lack of information, together with lack of political will, and the lack of coordination between the state, employers, regions and municipalities, and non-profit organisations.

Feedback on the Best Practices Report (IO2)

In the opinion of the respondents, the *Best Practices Report* offers information and basic orientation on best practices and positive practices in the field of successful integration of third-country nationals into the labour market.

Some respondents appreciated the examples of good practice as an inspiration and, at the same time, some respondents called for a deeper description of these practices.

In regards to the **likelihood of implementing best practices within the Czech national context**, the respondents agree that the solutions are relatively plausible but the implementation will only be possible in the long term, when other factors will be able to significantly influence the success. At the same time, however, some respondents say that the employment of migrants and third-country nationals is not perceived as a fundamental problem in the context of the current situation in the Czech labour market. In this sense, the good practices are seen as an appropriate inspiration, but it cannot be fully assumed that a direct implementation and transfer of good practices in any given area will be more systematically accented.

Political will in particular is seen as a fundamental obstacle, with the topic currently not being relevant to any political party. Furthermore, the Law on the Residence of Foreigners is quite chaotic and short-term migration is preferred by the state. In this sense, greater participation of TCNs in local elections and the strengthening of migrant organisations can be seen as effective long-term solutions.

Feedback from third-country nationals

In terms of the structure and composition of the respondents, the feedback was received through 5 interviews with TCNs from Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Georgia. The interviews were conducted through an online questionnaire followed by a phone interview.

Most of the respondents joined the labour market in the Czech Republic in low-qualified positions. They have a long history of both unemployment and employment, as well as experiences with the services provided by NGOs and the public sector. Some of them currently work as informal assistants for other TCNs and provide

psychological or social support. Some of them work in helping professions or as counsellors. Their personal experiences and career paths led them to these professions.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

All respondents found that the summary of the *Analysis* sufficiently described the main difficulties that they, as TCNs, were facing during the process of integration into the labour market in the Czech Republic. Respondents especially appreciate the fact that the analysis includes the overview of all involved actors. It turns out that TCNs often face similar problems, but they look at them from a different perspective – for example, excessive bureaucracy, lack of relevant information, complex legislation, etc.

There are two more aspects, which all respondents emphasized. The first one is the *cultural aspect* of integration. Even if there are institutions offering help to third-country nationals, these institutions do not necessarily inspire trust. For many TCNs, institutions have bad connotation, and in some cases, the suspicion towards them is very strong. The family and/or the community are the places where problems are taken care of, although the term counselling is not specifically used. Integration, especially its social aspect, is mostly seen as a personal matter of each person, that cannot be solved by a public institution.

The second issue is the *language aspect* of integration. Institutions involved in the integration process provide information only in the Czech language and the authorities do not have staff who speak English. This is most evident at employment offices, where they strictly insist on the use of the Czech language and the presence of an interpreter if the applicant does not speak Czech. Another significant obstacle for the integration of third-country nationals into the labour market is the lack of available opportunities for learning the Czech language.

When asked what the *Situational Mapping Analysis was missing*, some respondents suggested including research outputs in

multicultural relations. There is a need for a better understanding of different cultures and how to communicate across them. Language is not the only cultural difference. There are many others, the way we greet and look at each other, our concept of work and leisure time, punctuality, friendship, physical contact, gender and age roles, and many more. Therefore, respondents repeatedly emphasised mutual understanding, because cultural differences can cause misunderstanding between TCN and employers and other institutions. These communication misunderstandings can also contribute to distrust in institutions and reduce TCNs' self-confidence, as well as the possibility of their participation in the labour market as qualified workers.

The respondents also stated the fact that the conditions for changing jobs are set in such a way that they make third-country nationals largely dependent on the employers. The employment permit is based on a contract with a particular employer. Foreign workers find themselves in a dependent position, and quite often the employers are the only source of information for them.

The process of finding an independent, skilled job position is very difficult. Even if the integration strategy includes economic integration, it does not enhance the quality. The Czech labour market is overly segmented along national lines, and third-country nationals are often disproportionately employed in low-skilled and low-paid professions.

In regards to the **recommendations provided within our *Analysis***, all third-country nationals respondents found the recommendations to be appropriate.

In the Czech Republic, the problem is not that third-country nationals do not have a job but that it is difficult to get out of the circle of low-paid precarious jobs. The employers recruit foreign workers and have no responsibility for their integration. There is a clear need for NGOs to cooperate directly with employees in order to prepare foreign workers for the Czech labour market – they can offer, for instance, a wider

range of language courses, be it advanced or specialized for certain types of employment (technical Czech, medical). They can be trained also in intercultural mediation, work legislation, etc.

For third-country nationals to find better jobs, they need to have better preparation. It is essential to know what to check when they want to change jobs, where they can find relevant information and support. It would be helpful if they had the necessary information about services offered timely in one place. Third-country nationals often do not know about these services or find out about them too late.

Some institutions involved in the integration process provide information only in the Czech language and the authorities do not have staff who speak English. This is most evident at employment offices, where they strictly insist on the use of the Czech language and the presence of an interpreter if the applicant does not speak Czech.

Last but not least - if discrimination practices are to be eliminated, effective laws are not enough, even more important are the attitudes and behaviour of Czech citizens that will have to change.

Feedback on the Best Practices Report (IO2)

InBáze's respondents agree that the examples of good practice from our *Report* do a good job at documenting the help they have received while integrating into the labour market. Such practices turned out to be invaluable for the successful management of the integration process.

The TCN respondents faced many issues while adjusting to a new country. Even if they made considerable efforts themselves, they would not be able to achieve significant changes without the support provided by institutions, NGOs, and other professionals. What they especially value differs in each stage of integration. It involves a whole range of activities, such as providing very specific material needs, information, training, but also long-term, holistic support, including counselling, cultural and social integration.

Most of the TCN respondents were involved in some of the Czech services or activities listed in the examples of good practice. Long-term comprehensive support (New Beginning - Improvement of Female Migrants - InBáze) helped them to get from a low-skilled position to a skilled job position - it helped them to orientate themselves in educational and other developmental possibilities. The possibility to complete a retraining course or obtain a driver's license was also great support. Counselling helped TCN respondents to find an alternative career plan, or a new qualification if it was not possible to use the existing one. The use of mentoring helped them to find a specific person who facilitated their entry into the new field. At the workshops, they had the opportunity to understand the differences in communication with employers, as well as differences in the requirements for the necessary documentation (CV, cover letter). The offer of cultural and social activities enabled them to establish relationships with local members of the society and to better orient themselves in the new environment.

Stakeholders' feedback in Hungary

Menedék received 12 filled Google Forms, out of which 3 were from respondents working in the civil sector, 4 were from representatives of small or medium-size companies, and 5 from TCNs.

Feedback from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers, and employers

Menedék received 7 feedbacks, out of which 3 respondents work in the civil sector and 4 were representatives of small or medium-size companies.

Among the stakeholders who provided their feedback, these are the representatives of the civil sector:

Two stakeholders are social workers at Menedék - Association for Migrants. They provide guidance and facilitate the integration of third-country nationals to the labour market (by helping in job-seeking, drafting CVs, etc.). In addition, with the help of Menedék's intercultural mediators, social workers also provide help in the employment relations: they facilitate the communication between the employer and the TCN workers.

The third respondent is a legal adviser of Menedék, and she assists third-country nationals by providing information on the legal environment, provides assistance in the application process, and helps in interpreting work contracts. As a legal adviser, she advises individual third-country nationals: informs them about the legislative conditions, guides them through the application process, helps them understand the work contracts or other communication from the employer. In addition, she also assists (potential) employers by providing information about their tasks in the process of application for a work residence permit. She also contributes to Menedék's advocacy by collecting information and drafting letters to the authorities and decision-makers

highlighting the problems and proposing changes.

Moreover, Menedék provides training to employers and third-country nationals, state officials, etc. and is also actively advocating for integration and inclusion of TCNs, including integration into the labour market - Menedék expresses opinions on draft legislation, proposes changes to legislation or practice or highlights areas that need to be improved.

The representatives of the business sector were two respondents representing companies that are employing third-country nationals.

Their responsibility is to create a balanced working environment, where third-country employees get the same opportunities to develop and learn as Hungarians. They informally help them with many non-work-related issues too. One of the respondents leads the HR department, her role is to create a successful integration strategy and working environment. Her job is to create a competitive but also motivating environment, *"where all employees get the same chances to develop themselves"*. An important fact about the integration strategy in her opinion is that it should not represent an additional task or responsibility to all employees. Her role is to initiate a discussion with all employees on integration, cultural differences, and the challenges of a multicultural environment, where they get the chance to name and label their fears and uncertainty. Her role is to cultivate empathy and to take over the responsibility of integration success. As she stated *"as soon as Hungarian employees get the feeling of being responsible for the integration process and the feeling of pressure (= I need to change, I am not ok, Why do foreigners get more attention than I ever did, etc.), those stressors will lead to "group thinking" within the Hungarian community and conflicts with the third-country employee(s)"*.

The other two respondents represent relocation companies that help TCNs at arranging resident permits and also support companies and TCN's

to obtain necessary official documents, keeping contact with authorities, etc.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

The majority of the respondents found the analysis detailed, thorough and careful. One of the respondents stressed that *“the analysis perfectly describes the multi-layered problems faced by third-country nationals”*. However, she also stressed that there are cultural, institutional, political, and religious problems like stereotyping, bureaucracy, lack of foreign language skills. Another respondent mentioned, *“I didn't know what the situations are in the other countries. Thank you for that!”*. New information for another respondent was that she wasn't aware that speaking Hungarian is this important. In regards to what respondents would add to the Analysis, only two respondents added content, the others were satisfied with the Analysis as it is. The first respondent added that she thinks that different religious thoughts are also a problem that is leading to stereotyping and conflicts: *“For most Hungarian people (especially lower-class) Islam is still associated with terrorism”*. The main problem in her opinion is that the fear of “foreigners” is nourished by political communication and the lack of multicultural exposure. The second respondent mentioned that the role of head-hunters was mentioned, but some additional details about their roles would be interesting.

In regards to the **feedback on the recommendations given within the *Situational Mapping Analysis***, all respondents claimed that the recommendations given within the *Analysis* seemed sufficient.

One of the respondents stated that one of the most crucial recommendations is to make the application process for a work residence permit easier and faster: *“This is crucial because unemployment and frustration due to exclusion, bureaucracy, and hopelessness can lead to increased criminality”*. Another respondent mentioned that she agrees that a more

structured approach for integration should be possible within the EU states.

They shared some new ideas for the recommendations. One respondent mentioned that she would like to highlight the importance of a comprehensive integration strategy that, of course, also encompasses integration into the labour market. Other respondents stated that the analysis offers great insights into the core issues concerning integration policy in Hungary. However, she would add a new idea - creating strong communities for third-country nationals. If TCNs are brought together, the group dynamic can lead to positive outcomes like lower loss of self-identity, coping with trauma, cooperation between community members, joint entrepreneurship.

In regards to the **likelihood of implementation of the recommendations**, one respondent mentioned that the lack of political will and lack of communication and cooperation among state and civil sector stakeholders poses a significant risk to the successful implementation of the recommendations. Another respondent mentioned that it is difficult to answer: *“generally, I think the business side is not easy to approach in any other socially relevant issues”*.

A representative of a medium-size company stated that their company is pretty flexible with 30 employees: *“I think there is quite nothing that can prevent us from implementing those recommendations. The only obstacles might be: lack of time to train the ppl, lack of consistency”*. Another representative of a smaller organisation mentioned the lack of capacity as an obstacle, where helping each other and spending some free time together is already part of the organisational culture.

Feedback on the Best Practices Report (IO2)

One respondent mentioned that although the best practices in Hungary were familiar for her, the ones in other EU states were interesting, especially the ones that aimed at facilitating contacts with municipalities, the one involving the local branch of an international company and the one boosting entrepreneurial skills.

Another respondent stated that the Best Practice Report contains “*new and interesting ways of including third-country nationals into the labour market*”. However, she was wondering how programs like those can exist or even increase in Hungary as they require a lot of funds.

A third respondent mentioned that she would give more publicity to the MIraGe program and its handbook: “*I would be very interested to see how the Immigration Offices operate in the neighbouring countries and EU, where are the differences, i.e. timeline of a work permit and also transparency of the companies*”.

In regards to the **likelihood of examples mentioned within the *Best Practices Report* to be implemented in our national context**, one respondent said that he thinks these countries are facing almost the same problems in integration. Because of this, using a best practice from these countries would be much easier, than using practice from a Western-European country. Another one said that “*hopefully the recommendations will be implemented in Hungary*”.

A third respondent raised a concern: “*The level of isolation that Hungary is exposed to is enormously harmful for both society and economy. Hungary has a lot of highly-skilled, top-notch and dedicated people, who want to work on issues like integration, etc. but they'd also need a financial background.*”

An HR director mentioned that using those tools in an effective way not only demands communication skills but demands someone who stands up for social help and fairness. Another HR respondent mentioned that she thought they could organize more training and events to help with integration.

Feedback from third-country nationals

Menedék received feedback from 5 TCN respondents. Among the respondents 4 of them have experience with the process of integration into the labour market (they work in Hungary), 1 does not at the moment.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

One of the TCN respondents mentioned that he liked that the Analysis describes the main challenges in a simple yet powerful way, “*especially by the fact that it uses quotes*”, so anyone who reads it can understand the message. Another of them stressed that it was interesting to see some differences between countries and also some similarities. She thinks it can help people to decide whether to move to a country or not. A third respondent stressed that she liked that it encompasses all the kinds of struggles that TCNs have. For instance, the distrust of their documents or experience, or how excruciating it is to deal with the local authorities. A fourth respondent stated that the report captures and describes the situation well and it resonates with his experiences and the challenges shared with him and his colleagues. When asked what the Situational Mapping Analysis was missing, one of the respondents stressed that she would like to see more highlighted the interplay between the following factors: lack of capacity at the immigration office and the lack of priority on the government's agenda for TCNs. For example, “*is employment at the Immigration Office (IO) not seen as a desirable or prized job for HU nationals? Is there prejudice, and if yes, how can we measure it?*” She also mentioned that seen from the reverse angle, the answer may be more simplistic - lack of priority leads to lack of well-staffed desks at the Immigration Office. “*How can we measure this negligence in prioritizing to mean higher success rates of employment for HU nationals? Is there a correlation? If yes, or no, what are the multiple causes behind this negligence? Of course, it's coming from a hypothesis that whatever the causes may be, the solution is definitely not to de-prioritize TCNs.*”

Another respondent mentioned that she would stress more the importance of language barriers.

In regards to the **feedback on the recommendations given within the *Situational Mapping Analysis***, all TCN respondents liked the

recommendations and they had no other ideas to add.

Feedback on the Best Practices Report (IO2)

Generally, readers of the Best Practice Report were very satisfied. They mentioned that it was a very interesting report and that it contained information they did not know before.

One of the respondents mentioned that if all employers in Hungary who have TCN employees would receive this document, they might still not implement these changes, because these issues are deeply rooted in the *“lack of welcoming culture in Hungary and the labour market”*. She mentioned that if the employers are unwilling to change, then these good practices may not be helpful, even if they do set a good example.

There was a strong yes from another participant, because as he said *“there needs to be documentation and analysis of the best practices available and which could be built in the future if the current circumstances are to be improved”*. He also mentioned that networks of support and accurate information distribution are quintessential for TCNs, refugees, and beneficiaries of international protection, and the *“reasons are already outlined in the report (foreign language, foreign community, etc.)”*. He stressed that the efforts aimed at mentoring, counselling, and partnership with potential future employers to fill the gaps, if isolated, fall short of achieving.

Stakeholders' feedback in Slovakia

Mareena received 13 feedbacks in total through focus groups and by sending out the Google forms: eight feedbacks from the stakeholders from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers, and employers, and five feedbacks from third-country nationals.

Feedback from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers, and employers

Mareena received feedback from eight stakeholders. Mareena tried to recruit organisations from various sectors, all of whom work with economic migrants, as well as with individuals granted asylum or other forms of international protection. Specifically, Mareena focused on civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), intergovernmental institutions, as well as representatives from employers, largely from human resources (HR). For each focus group, they sought to recruit as diverse a set of respondents as possible.

Mareena selected two to four representatives from each group whom they invited by email or phone call to participate in the focus group. After getting their consent to participate in the project, they emailed participants the *Summary of the situational mapping analysis and the Slovak context (Analysis)* and *Best Practices Report* to review before the focus group. Mareena also included a list of topics to be discussed during the focus group. During the focus groups, they followed a pre-prepared questionnaire. They focused specifically on the topic of professional growth, and career development opportunities. To ensure a baseline level of knowledge, Mareena presented a summary of the findings from the *Analysis* at the beginning of each group. Most participants had read the *Analysis*, though some were not able to read the *Best Practices Report* in

detail due to its length and the fact that it was written in English. On average, a focus group lasted 1.5 hours. Only one of the eight participants was interviewed in the research phase of IO1.

In all, Mareena obtained feedback from the following respondents:

A representative of the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) Migration Information Centre. The Centre provides various counselling and educational services for third-country nationals (TCNs), assisting with their integration in Slovakia. This includes assistance with permanent or temporary residence, language courses, sociocultural orientations, job retraining, as well as individual and group counselling.

A representative of the *Rifugio - Refugees Integration* project implemented by Slovak Humanitarian Council (a civic organisation). The project aids the integration of individuals granted asylum and subsidiary protection in Slovakia. It provides professional assistance in several areas including economic integration, access to social services, healthcare and education.

A representative from the Community Centre for Work and Educational Mobility in Nitra, which is operated by the Nitra Community Foundation and the City of Nitra. This community centre, operated by the Nitra Community Foundation and the City of Nitra, provides several types of services - e.g. counselling services, free Slovak and sociocultural orientation courses, leisure and volunteer activities - to foreigners residing in the municipality.

Two representatives from the Migration Office of the Slovak Republic, which is a professional unit of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic specializing in the field of international protection (asylum and subsidiary protection). The Migration Office is also responsible for the integration of persons granted international protection in Slovakia.

A representative of the Association for Adult Education, which strives to increase the quality of adult education in Slovakia, unites institutions

dealing with adult education, organises various workshops, professional seminars, and conferences in adult education, and seeks to network relevant partners in Slovakia. The Association is an active member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN). The Association also cooperates with state authorities in the preparation and implementation of legislative measures in this area. In the last five years, the Association has also been focusing more on the needs of foreigners living in Slovakia;

A representative of the personnel agency, Personality SK / CZ Head-hunters & Recruiters Nitra. He is directly in charge of employing employees for various companies mainly in production positions (low-skilled workforce).

One stakeholder filled out the questionnaire via Google form as she could not attend any of the focus group:

A representative from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. She works with EU citizens and TCNs communicates on a daily basis with employers, foreigners, the Foreign Police of the Slovak Republic, and other institutions in connection with the employment of EU citizens and TCNs in Slovakia. Her office provides information on job vacancies, issues and cancels certificates of job vacancy, and manages employment permits and other administrative records concerning the employment of foreigners.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

Respondents largely agreed with Mareena's assessments regarding the barriers and complications related to the integration of TCNs in the Slovak labour market. They noted that many of the identified issues -- e.g. language barriers; the lack of a unified vision and functional, systematic, and coordinated integration policy of the state; lengthy and complicated bureaucratic processes; and a lack of a unified and centralized source of information and procedures -- were problems that they also identified in their own work with foreigners.

On the other hand, the representative from the labour office stated that in her practice she does not encounter discrimination due to skin colour or country of origin, contrasting our findings from interviews with TCNs from the Middle East (however, the representative works in a smaller Slovak town with a low percentage of TCNs from the mentioned countries, so this explain the discrepancy). The president of the Association of Adult Education stated that while, compared to other respondents, his work is only tangentially related to the economic integration of TCNs, the findings do not surprise him. Through his work with employers' organisations and career development organisations, he had received similar information about the problems and barriers associated with economic integration. However, he pointed out that one of the biggest problems is the lack of systematic problem-solving at the national policy level. Instead, he noted that the government relies on partial, short-term solutions through temporary projects (e.g. K2 Erasmus+).

In addition to identified problems, many stakeholders pointed to other problematic aspects related to the employment of TCNs in the Slovak labour market. For example, respondents identified the method of approving and granting residence permits for work purposes as a major problem area. First, the process is not standardized across different Slovak cities and regions, and it is notoriously slow. Some respondents even went as far as calling the process "torture" and stated that many TCNs go through a months-long process to get a negative decision. Moreover, many localities do not update their register of occupational sectors with labour shortages and struggle to fill seasonal labour jobs. Respondent suggestions included making work permit decisions predictable and transparent. The Labour Office Representative remarked that the entire process should be housed under one institution, guaranteeing some semblance of efficacy. Yet, she also noted that the Labour Office itself does not have the legal authority to undertake such a reform. Such systemic changes would need to be managed at

the level of the supervisory body, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

A **key issue not mentioned in the *Analysis*** is the recognition of certificates of education and professional qualifications from abroad (especially from countries outside the European Union). According to several stakeholders, this is a problem that deserves a more in-depth analysis and research for solutions. The topic of recognition of qualifications and education in connection with asylum seekers and people who were granted asylum or subsidiary protection was specifically broached in the focus groups. Responsibility for the recognition of documents belongs to the Centre for Recognition of Diplomas (CRD) which is under the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. Act no. 422/2015 Coll. on the recognition of diplomas and on the recognition of professional qualifications specifies a concrete procedure for the recognition of qualifications: As it is not possible to contact the country of origin in which the asylum seeker obtained the qualification, verification of the qualification in question is carried out in the form of an examination (written, oral, or practical). Through the examination, an applicant with international protection demonstrates that they have knowledge and skills comparable to the knowledge and skills acquired by completing comparable qualifications in the Slovak Republic. However, according to the focus groups, this procedure is not used at all and they recommended that an effective toolkit would address how this process works in practice.¹

Stakeholders identified several problem areas related to the professional/career development of TCNs. In general, concerns stemmed from a lack of priority when it came to individuals with international protection. Many of these individuals, if they find a job, keep it for as long as possible, and rarely change positions. However, in pursuit of better working conditions and increased wages, many economic migrants do

want to change their jobs. In their case, the biggest complication is the complex bureaucratic procedure involved with doing so. Essentially, these individuals have to go through the whole procedure as if they were entering the Slovak labour market for the first time. For example, they must, again, obtain the consent of the Labour Office. Instances, where their applications are rejected, are not uncommon. Thus, many TCNs do not even attempt to change their jobs, as repeating the process potentially having to leave Slovakia (if permission is not granted) discourages them from doing so. Stakeholders recommended a new policy where, if an individual has lived in Slovakia for more than two years, has not broken any laws, and has paid taxes, then they should be able to undergo a simplified process.

Stakeholders also mentioned the lack of a functional, unified integration strategy. While the Slovak Republic has adopted a relatively high-quality and up-to-date policy document that sets the goals, starting points, and priorities in the integration of foreigners (Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic, 2014), the enforceability of measures is still lacking. This is because of (1) a lack of finances, and (2) complications arising from the (lack of) coordination across several ministries. The guarantor of this integration policy is the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, but as this is a cross-cutting agenda, it would be best if the integration policy was developed at the level of, for example, the Government Office or another responsible coordinating entity. Another recommendation concerning the integration policy is that it should have a clearly defined financial impact and that what has been achieved can be measured and defined in a transparent and effective way.

As the *Analysis* identified the language barrier as one of the main problems related to finding employment, stakeholders also focused on this topic in the focus groups. The discussion mainly

¹ The full text of the law is available at:
<https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2015-422>

focused on how individual courses should be organized and implemented:

- Foreigners should have the opportunity to attend courses in their neighbourhood or local community
- Courses should be implemented by local governments in cooperation with local NGOs or commercial service providers
- Courses should be implemented and evaluated through a common framework (e.g., The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)
- TCNs should be motivated to improve their Slovak language (one respondent mentioned a positive example from Vienna in the form of education vouchers; others suggested that documentation related to language proficiency should be necessary for obtaining permanent residence)
- An effective, collaborative, and easily accessible network of course providers should be created
- Courses should take into account TCN diversity, as well as the specific needs of the target group (e.g. courses for women only, courses at different times, courses focused on certain specific areas).

Respondents noted that further educational and professional development for TCNs is a problematic area. Educational or retraining courses are conducted exclusively in Slovak (rarely in English) and clients have to pay for them from their own funds. Recommendations included that the education of foreigners should be part of the Slovak Republic's general integration policy and that specific funding should be set aside for this purpose. A concrete suggestion involved setting up individual educational accounts, a strategy in which each adult receives a certain financial budget for the year, which can be used for their further education or professional development.

The representative of the Association for Adult Education mentioned several concrete

recommendations related to his expertise in professional and career development for TCNs. He noted that adult education in Slovakia has a large number of problems generally. The theme is not adequately addressed and lacks systematic financial support. To remedy these problems, the representative noted that adult education should be directly addressed in two key policy documents: (1) the Human Resources Development Strategy under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; and (2) the Lifelong Learning Strategy under the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. Moreover, it is crucial that the government allocates a sufficient amount of funds for the implementation of these policies so that the measures can be applied in practice. An explicit link between adult education and the labour market, building on cooperation with employers, is key. Ultimately, the further education of TCNs can be key to their social integration as well. Several European countries where adult learning is a long-term priority can provide inspirational examples for the Slovak context².

Finally, respondents also focused on some future improvements that are in the process of being implemented. Specifically, respondents mentioned an EU-funded IOM project contracted by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The project is based on the existing "Strategy for Job Mobility of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic from 2018", and is meant to address both employment shortages on the Slovak labour market, and problems related to the employment of TCNs. The program will connect representatives of key state institutions, employers, local governments, and professional experts for the purposes of facilitating the admission of foreign workers to the Slovak labour market. In pursuit of increased job mobility, the program plans to shorten wait times, enable an accelerated process of employing foreigners in professions with high demand, and reduce bureaucratic burden. The project will also work to

² For example, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century: The Power and Joy of Learning available here:

<https://eaea.org/our-work/influencing-policy/manifesto-for-adult-learning-in-the-21st-century/>

maintain effective protections of foreign workers' rights, and provide various support and training programs. Stakeholders plan to implement the program in May 2021.

Stakeholders' feedback also included some further recommendations:

- Relevant state institutions should have one to two employees who work specifically on issues related to TCNs
- Relevant forms should be available in different languages or, at minimum, be accompanied by instructions in multiple languages
- Employers should strive to promote diversity in the workplace
- Any established services for foreigners should be adjustable to the specific needs of the diverse target groups
- TCNs should be advised that not hearing back from employers does not necessarily mean discrimination, but rather that employers have a large number of candidates to choose from and contact only a small minority
- Restrictions on the opening of bank accounts, especially for respondents from the Middle East, should be lifted

Feedback on Best Practices Report (IO2)

Although some participants did not have the opportunity to read the Best Practices Report in detail, many agreed that it was great that such a document was created and is available to them. They indicated that they will reference the document in the future, and share it with colleagues.

The manager of the integration program for individuals with international protection specially mentioned two examples as very beneficial. She was interested in the way of working effectively with specific groups of migrants in the mentoring activity (Mentor-Állás) and can imagine that they could implement some of the project's elements in their ongoing integration program. She was also interested in the New Beginning project and its adaptation to

women TCNs. Several participants pointed out that the identified best practices were very inspiring in terms of targeting the specific and diversified needs of different target groups.

Feedback from third-country nationals

To obtain feedback from TCNs, Mareena emailed 16 respondents who participated in the research phase of IO1 and asked them to fill out a questionnaire related to the *Summary of the Situational Mapping Analysis* as well as the *Best Practices Report*. Out of 16 respondents, Mareena managed to obtain completed questionnaires from five. Subsequently, they approached these five respondents with the opportunity to participate in a focus group. Unfortunately, none of the participants showed an interest in such an interview (the most common reason was a lack of time). However, the questionnaires were filled in enough detail to draw some conclusions for this analysis.

In all, Mareena received feedback from one low-skilled worker, three high-skilled workers, and one unemployed individual who had lost his job during the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the participants emigrated from Slovakia during the last year, due to not being able to find a job that matched his education and experience level, or his professional goals.

Feedback on the Situational Mapping Analysis (IO1)

Respondents emphasized that it is very beneficial to give a voice to foreigners who can best describe their experiences with employment and social integration in Slovakia. They stated that the enumerated recommendations correspond to the challenges they face in the process of labour market integration. According to some answers, the analysis lacked a focus on foreigners who are already in Slovakia, with some residence status. These individuals are not affected by the mentioned problems to the same extent as foreigners who have yet to enter the Slovak

labour market. Respondents recommended that the project could also focus on foreigners who had lived in Slovakia for a longer period of time. Participants emphasized that Slovak language knowledge is key to successfully finding work and socially integrating. However, they also stressed that language acquisition is a very lengthy process, which is frustrating for many, especially as there is a lack of accessible opportunities to learn the Slovak language.

The second major problem identified by respondents is a lack of access to the labour market. According to many, this can be overcome by creating programs that break the barrier between TCNs and employers directly. Once initial barriers are broken down, finding employment becomes much easier. Respondents also noted a need to focus on educating employers about being more open to the recruitment of TCNs who have appropriate experience and skills for the position.

Participants stated that another problematic area within labour integration is changing employment. The mobility of TCNs to change jobs is very limited due to bureaucratic issues. Many TCNs felt that they only function in a limited "bubble" and do not feel that they are sufficiently integrated into the Slovak labour market. They recommended simplifying the processes of changing jobs for those who are already working in the Slovak labour market.

TCN stakeholders also provided some other recommendations:

- Start new businesses/projects to make the job market more diverse
- Support programs related to "on the job training", where TCNs can pursue professional development within the workplace

- Institute a small grants program to help TCNs pursue individual entrepreneurship or professional development
- Provide a systematic, low-cost program of professional courses that allow TCNs to retool their skills (e.g. digital skills courses for women interested in pursuing a career in IT).
- Create a centralized informational database where TCNs could find resources related to labour market integration (e.g., where to find Slovak language courses, where to improve qualifications, or where to find support related to the bureaucratic process)
- Publicize the results of this project widely, so that both foreigners and stakeholders can be informed about the process of labour market integration in Slovakia

Feedback on Best Practices Report (IO2)

Responses of TCN stakeholders to the *Best Practices Report* were positive. Many TCNs agreed that if they had the opportunity to participate in some of the examples, it would facilitate their integration processes into the labour market by helping them pursue personal and professional development.

At the same time, however, respondents emphasized that, although there are many interesting projects and initiatives, information about them does not always reach TCNs. They recommend talking more about foreigners living in Slovakia in the media, on social networks, and thus informing the majority, so that they may see TCNs as people with similar needs, desires, fears and interests.

On the path of building welcoming societies

The overall feedback of stakeholders from civic and public institutions, non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental institutions, HR managers and employers, as well as third-country nationals, gives a positive impression of the *Situational Mapping Analysis*, claiming it provides new information, as well as a good overview of the legal framework, key actors and key issues in the area of TCNs' integration into the labour market. Many stakeholders found it interesting and useful to read about the practices and procedures of other countries. This report in some segments also delivered opposing views of the authorities and other relevant stakeholders when it comes to the identification of the main issues TCNs face. For instance, in terms of bureaucratic procedures and barriers, language issues, lack of political will, and cooperation between the state and civic sector. The above-mentioned stakeholders highlighted further need for information on specific procedures focused on TCNs with various types of stay permits. Most of the stakeholders emphasized discrimination as a serious problem TCNs face in the labour market, as well as the issues related to exploitation in terms of coping with low-paid positions and unjust working conditions due to fear of losing the job (and consequently in some cases the permit as well).

The *Best Practices Report* proved to be very useful in terms of learning about other implemented practices and finding ideas for possible solutions in respective national contexts, again factoring political will and cooperation among stakeholders as crucial for the possibility to translate such practices into national contexts in a successful way.

This report proved that even though they are different in contexts, policies, and practices, these countries often face similar issues and relevant national stakeholders often go through similar hardships in efforts to build welcoming societies and improve TCNs' integration into the labour market. Recommendations provided by the stakeholders will be further elaborated in the following phases of the Career Path project in order to encourage decision-makers to implement policies that will allow for the TCNs to achieve professional aspirations and potential in their new communities and help us build truly welcoming societies.

LABOUR MARKET
INTEGRATION OF
THIRD-COUNTRY
NATIONALS
IN CROATIA, THE
CZECH REPUBLIC,
HUNGARY AND
SLOVAKIA

Impressum

Analysis of the stakeholders' feedback to the Situational Mapping Analysis and Best Practices Report

Feedback from public institutions, non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations, employers, and third-country nationals related to the economic integration and professional growth opportunities of third-country nationals in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia

Zagreb, 2021

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