

"WE" Organization is a young, innovative, social initiative aims to develop several projects targeting different segments of the society in order to fight xenophobia, build bonds & promote social inclusion. "WE are THE REFUGEES" | "WE are THE ELDERLY" | "WE are THE LABELS" | "WE are THE INFORMATION".

**Adel AlBaghdadi**, The Founder, 27 years old from Damascus-Syria living in The Netherlands since August 2015. Adel seeks to make a meaningful, transformational and sustainable change for an enhanced well-being. He boldly calls himself a "Change Maker" because he makes the daily decision to be a part of the solution and not the problem. He believes in possibilities, and in a better future.

Aspiring to spark positive curiosity for migration in the Dutch Society, and working keenly together with Adel at "WE" towards cultivating spaces for empathy, inter-cultural dialogue and effective communication, **Razan Damlakhi**, 35 years old from Aleppo-Syria, living in The Netherlands since October 2011. She fulfils her interests in societal work by getting engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of various "Refugee-Related" projects. Cultural Diversity, Capacity Development, Socioeconomic Integration, Women Empowerment, and Storytelling are topics she is actively interested in.

## **Labour Market Integration of 'Refugees': the Challenges and Chances**

### **The Challenges**

Often integration practices have been addressing 'refugees' as a homogenous group whilst ignoring their individual needs and potentials. Most labour market integration support-measures have targeted "employable" refugees, a fraction of the overall refugee population. Many eye-catching projects focus on the highly-educated; this is of course good for utilizing their skills, but recent initiatives targeting the less employable groups (e.g. women and the low-educated) cover only a very small proportion of the whole refugee group.

Moreover, measures that aim to facilitate self-employment of the refugees are either mainstream initiatives or are targeted at immigrants in general and thus do not take the specific needs of refugees into account.

Private agencies (intermediary agencies and temporary work agencies) have little involvement in delivering employment services for refugees. While there is variability in the skills and attributes of refugees, there are several factors that make access to the labour market very challenging for them, among these are:

- Their knowledge of, and capacity to access recruitment and job placement services and processes (i.e. absence of information among refugee populations about potential job opportunities);
- The transferability of, and demand for, their skills in the Dutch labour market;
- Their access to the resources required to support work force participation (like child care and transportation);
- Their access to resources for self-employment such as loans & knowledge of the business sector in The Netherlands.
- Proficiency in the Dutch language; shortage in trajectories combining language-training with activation and activities towards employability.

## The Chances

Refugees have a lot to contribute as workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, taxpayers, consumers and investors. Policymakers should stop considering refugees as a “burden” to be shared or shirked and instead emphasize that they are an opportunity to be welcomed.

**Support for Higher & Secondary Vocational Education:** for some permit-holding refugees, investment in a specific course (in higher or secondary vocational education) would significantly improve their long-term prospects in the Dutch labour market. It is vital that these individuals receive proper guidance in choosing a course and during their studies.

**Labour Market Activation:** there is a substantial group of permit-holding refugees who are at a great disadvantage in the labour market. Various activities are required to activate them and facilitate their integration if they are to have any prospect of finding paid work. Some refugees also have socio-psychological problems that need to be addressed since they form a barrier to finding work. Women and disabled refugees are special target groups who should not be forgotten in labour-market integration support-measures, they need specialized support schemes to effect labour-market entry.

**Invest in Manageable & Maintainable Programs:** Integration takes time, and programs with a long-term focus will have the greatest impact. Job training and skills development are good investments if they enable refugees to find higher-skilled and better-paid work in the long term. Language training tailored to refugees’ workplace needs should be offered as part of their job-placement program.

**Self-employment:** chances also need to be available for both employable and entrepreneurial refugees. For many newcomers, self-employment is an important option in becoming independent from state subsidies and in improving social status. Up to now, the self-employment of refugees has hardly been considered. However, the dominant concept of “refugees as employees” cannot alone solve the problems. Business start-ups for refugees should thus be supported as well.