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No Integration Without Employment: Asylum-Seekers in Serbia and their Search for Employment

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NO INTEGRATION WITHOUT EMPLOYMENT:
ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN SERBIA AND THEIR SEARCH FOR WORK

Jona Block

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Humanitarian Assistance & Crisis Management

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List of Abbreviations

AS: Asylum-seeker

BCHR: Belgrade Center for Human Rights

CSO: Civil society organization

EU: European Union

KI: Key informant

LATP: Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection

LEF: Law on the Employment of Foreigners

NGO: Non-governmental organization

UK: United Kingdom

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Abstract

Employment is traditionally viewed as an integral component of refugee integration. Previous research suggests that for refugees, employment benefits psychological well-being, provides economic security, and develops social networks. The current research explores the dynamic between integration and employment for asylum-seekers and refugees in Serbia. It seeks to understand the difficulties these displaced populations face finding employment and why they remain in a country which is traditionally viewed as a transit country into the European Union. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, qualitative interviews with asylum-seekers, refugees, and Key Informants in Serbian CSOs (Civil Society Organizations). The data shows that employment is a top priority for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia. It is an immediate need upon arrival, providing an income, cultural exchange opportunities, and overall stability. Due to waiting periods imposed by the Serbian government, and a general institutional lag, asylum-seekers are unable to fully participate in the Serbian labor market when it would benefit them most. Those who do find stable employment are most likely to remain in Serbia and build a life. The current research discovered that the reciprocal relationship between integration and employment in Serbia is currently fractured. Only by shifting public policy and investing in refugee integration can this relationship be mended.

Introduction

The right to work is an inseparable and foundational component of human rights. It is an enshrined article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a landmark human rights treaty to which 192 countries are signatories (United Nations, 1948). Participation in the labor market provides income, security, and stability. However, the benefit of work is most visible via its absence. A life without work contributes to neglected families, squandered aspirations, and unused skills.

When displaced communities arrive in a new nation their vulnerabilities are heightened. Traumatic journeys, minimal economic security, and fractured social networks are significant disadvantages to building a new life. Therefore, for displaced peoples in particular, work fosters success in a new nation. Upon working, they are more likely to interact with the host community, learn the local language, become financially independent and build confidence and esteem (Phillimore & Goodson, 2006). As of mid-2022, 103 million people have been forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order. Over 37 million of these displaced persons are categorized as refugees or asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2022). For this population, exercising the right to work offers them the chance to start anew and thwart regression.

Access to the labor market is just one crucial aspect of a greater concept known as integration. In this context, integration is seen as a comprehensive framework used to evaluate a population's experience within a new social system. Integration is comprised of the health, economic, social, and educational contexts (Robila, 2018). To varying degrees, state institutions are present in all components of the integration amalgam.

When states incorporate historic human rights treaties into their national legislation, they oblige themselves to facilitate the employment process for their population. The degree of state-provided assistance varies vastly between nations. Serbia is one of the many nations which ratified articles in their constitution guaranteeing the right to work. Not unlike many other states, Serbia's legislation specifically includes the refugee's right to work as well. Their constitution designates certain institutions to handle this process (A11, 2020). However, the full realization of the right to work for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia is insufficient (BCHR, 2023).

The goal of the current research is to examine the social and economic experience of refugees and asylum-seekers as they search for work in Serbia. Due to its location on the so-called 'Balkan Route' (a corridor of prolific refugee movement into the European Union used throughout the previous decade), Serbia's policies affect the refugee experience in the entire region. Interviews with refugees, asylum-seekers, and key informants are used in the current research to analyze the dynamics between integration and employment in Serbia. The obstacles to labor market access, and any subsequent assistance provided, will be highlighted as they shape this dynamic.

Figure 1: Western Balkans Map

Displaced populations are categorized by two criteria: the reason for leaving their native county and their intention upon arrival in a new nation. The relevant legal terminology will henceforth be described because categorical differences dictate the services available to displaced persons both internationally and in Serbia.

The *1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010, p.3). When written, the definition was bound by geographic and temporal limitations related to the Second World War, whereby one was only eligible for refugee status if they met the criteria *in Europe no later than 1951*. The *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* removed these limitations which universalized its jurisdiction (UNHCR, 2010). In other words, the *1967 Protocol* updated the *1951 Convention*; anyone meeting the criteria, regardless of time or place, could be granted refugee status.

These refugee conventions outline basic standards of treatment towards refugees, including "access to the courts, to primary education, to work, and the provision for documentation, including a refugee travel document in passport form" (UNHCR, 2010, p.3). The document also states that contracting States shall provide favorable treatment to refugees as they fulfil their right to wage-earning employment (UNHCR, 2010, p.22)**.** *Asylum-seekers* are defined as "individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined" (UNHCR, 2016, p.56). They must apply for international protection in the country of their destination, meaning they must do so at a border or somewhere within the country (IRC, 2018).

Subsidiary Protection is a lesser form of protection which may be given when a person does not meet the criteria for refugee status. To qualify for subsidiary protection, a person must usually prove that they would face a risk of serious harm if returned to their country of origin. To be granted subsidiary protection, it is not necessary to be at risk for a specific reason such as race, religion, or political opinion (Gil-Bazo, 2006). The criteria are more lenient. One only needs to prove they would face serious harm if they returned to their country of origin. Unlike refugee status, subsidiary protection does not include the right to family reunification (MacGregor, 2021).

Temporary Protection is an exceptional protection status granted *en masse* to populations entering the European Union. The procedure is invoked when there is a risk that the asylum system will be unable to process the influx without jeopardizing its efficiency (Council Directive 2001/55/EC, 2001). For example recently throughout the world, Serbia included, Ukrainians have been granted *temporary protection* following the Russian invasion of their nation (BCHR, 2023).

Literature Review

Refugee Integration & Employment

When one population moves into a new environment, they rarely exist in isolation. Integration refers to the incorporation of a new community into an existing group. According to Mihaela Robila (2018) the process of integration is, "a complex and multidimensional construct, referring to integration into the economic, health, educational and social contexts. Multiple factors contribute to how smooth refugees' integration occurs, including their experiences, their physical and mental health, or social support" (p.10). There are two components to Robila's framework of integration.

The first is the *structural component*, referring to the socioeconomic aspects of integration such as education and employment. Employment is a fundamental aspect of the structural component of integration. The second is the *social component*, referring to cultural adjustment, shared norms, and social contacts with locals. These two components are intertwined. Migrants with good social positions (higher education, stable job, etc.) have more informal contact with society (Robila, 2018). However, due to their interrelatedness, employment also affects the social component. While at work, refugees interact more with the host community and have greater opportunities to learn the local language. The economic independence gained through employment fosters confidence and esteem building that are foundational to a new life (Phillimore et al., 2021). 8/9/2023 7:24:00 PMStable employment should produce a set of factors which collectively facilitate social integration with the host community.

Integration's inherently complex nature makes it difficult to measure. The UK's Home Office (the Government office in charge of issues of immigration, security, and law and order) developed a framework to measure integration by evaluating its progress on a series of indicators

(Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). By measuring various indicators over time, it is possible to evaluate how integrated a newcomer is in a host community. Most importantly, the framework recognizes the multi-dimensional and context-specific needs of intervention to facilitate integration. The indicators are divided into four categories. The UK's Home Office indicators are conceptually compatible with Robila's framework of integration because they recognize similar inputs.

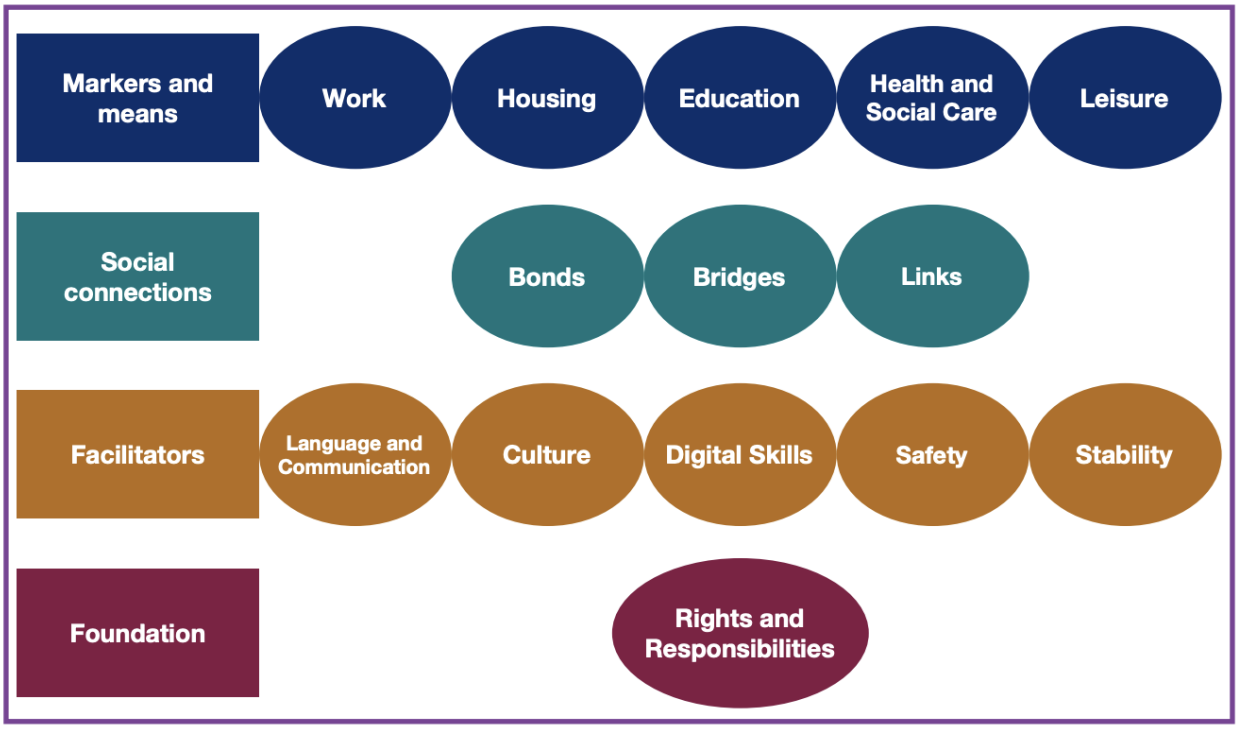

Figure 2: UK's Home Office Integration Indicators

(Adapted from Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, p.14)

The first category, *Markers and Means,* include the domains: housing, education, health and social care, and leisure. These represent the physical spaces in which integration takes place. The second category, *Social Connections,* include the domains: social bonds, social bridges, and social links. These domains emphasize the importance of relationships between the refugee and the receiving community. *Social Connections* can "facilitate both individual and collective access to resources. Networks of relationships characterized by trust and reciprocity can be understood

as generating ‘capital’ because they enable people to use and exchange resources” (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, p.16)

The third category, *Facilitators,* includes the domains: language, culture, digital skills, safety, and stability. These are key traits which impact the success of one’s integration. The fourth category, *Foundations,* refers to rights and responsibilities. This refers to the ideas of citizenship and associated rights in the receiving community (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Progress on all the indicators depends on more than just the refugee’s efforts; success depends on the attitude of the receiving community and the state’s policies towards refugees.

This dynamic between refugee efforts, state policy, and host community is visible via four major factors: 1) the host state political perspective and its existing integration policies, 2) the refugee’s perspective on their access to the labor market, 3) the host community perspective regarding refugees in the labor market, and 4) the donor’s perspective on integration (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021). These perspectives, constantly in flux due to evolving political landscapes, shape the quality of social relationships. Civil society initiatives and state-sponsored policies promoting integration can alleviate concerns of perceived discrimination and open doors to labor markets when access appears limited.

Existing literature regarding refugee employment shows a positive effect on many other integration indicators. When refugees participate in the local labor market, their overall well-being improves. However, this positive effect is often complicated by cultural barriers and host community perception (Ginn et al., 2022).

A qualitative study about African refugees integrating in Australia revealed recurring themes on the beneficial results of employment (Wood et al., 2019). Nine refugees were interviewed to explore the impact of employment and volunteering on their health and wellbeing.

Three general themes were uncovered. The first theme is *self / self-worth*. Within this category, refugees claimed to have higher levels of self-fulfillment, feelings of value, personal and professional development, and a more important role in their family. Within the theme *work, health, and illness,* refugees reported a better perceived health status and higher standard of living. Most relevant to the current research is the third theme: *belonging in a new community.* The African refugees in Australia reported more social connectedness, active community involvement, and thoughts of building for the future (Wood et al., 2019).

Table 1: Recurring Themes of the Benefits of Employment

Self / Self-Worth	• Higher levels of self-fulfillment • Feelings of value • Personal and professional development • More important role in the family
Work, Health, Illness	• Better perceived health status • Higher standard of living
Belonging in a New Community	• More social connectedness • Active community involvement • Thoughts of building for the future

Even though employment provides likely improvements to well-being, refugees still fight an uphill battle to integrate. They arrive in host countries with elevated levels of psychological disorders compared to the general population (Li et al., 2016). Most commonly, these disorders are post-traumatic stress disorders, depression, and anxiety. These are referred to as pre-

migration stressors. After settlement, a new cohort of stressors known as post-migration stressors develop. Perceived discrimination is linked with higher depression levels (Li et al., 2016, p.3).

Continuity is an important and often overlooked component to successful integration. In her research on the employment continuity of highly skilled Syrian refugees, Susanne Bygnes coins an apt term: *mobility dissonance.* This term describes the asynchronous relationship between the physical mobility caused by displacement and the feeling that displaced persons are not *going anywhere in their own lives*. In addition to gainful employment, fluency in the host language, owning a car or property, and education continuity are factors uncoupling this asynchronous relationship, contributing to the feeling of *moving forward* with their lives (Bygnes, 2021).

There are inevitable barriers to success for refugees participating in a host country's labor market (Seyidov, 2021). These are most visible in their interactions with the host community. Excessive amounts of misinformation, spread through anti-migrant groups and even standard media platforms, limit the possibility of social cohesion and the potential for social networks to develop. For example, 77% of the host community, Turkish citizens in Ankara, interviewed in a particular study, cited the language barrier as a main obstacle for building relationships. Many Turks held erroneous beliefs that Syrian refugees have greater access to social services than natives. Natives said equality of access is essential for solidarity amongst themselves and refugee communities (Seyidov, 2021). Incorrect perception of refugee status and perceived "privileges" limit accessibility into social networks at work and in the community. This sort of cultural knowledge clashing limits relationship building.

Understanding social cohesion when it is threatened is crucial for improving host/refugee relationships. Cohesion, among all types of vulnerable refugee populations and the host country,

improves refugees' levels of subjective well-being and fosters further relationships. Social cohesion is "generally valued in and for itself, as it reflects solidarity and social harmony. It is also regarded as an important collective resource for economic success and individual quality of life" (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016, p.164). The benefits of cohesion on relationships are not uniformly positive among countries. While cohesion is positive for all individuals, the positivity is correlated to the host country's affluence (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016). More research is required regarding social cohesion among Serbs and refugees.

In a study on Syrian resettlement in Germany, the host community was more concerned with cultural clashing than the newcomers. For the refugee populations, their priorities are stability and independence. That is not always an easily attainable prospect, specifically in the labor market, when they are dealing with foreign protocols, unknown documents, and abstract, unfamiliar rules (Pearlman, 2017). Refugee populations in Serbia share similar barriers.

The current research will utilize Robila's framework on integration to explore the relationship between the structural and social components of refugees and asylum-seekers pursuing work in Serbia. Qualitative research will uncover if employment has the expected positive effect on the structural component. The UK's Home Office indicators will provide background criteria for the data collection. The Serbian asylum system and employment assistance mechanisms will be evaluated to understand if their policies compound upon pre-existing migration stressors or if they facilitate integration.

The Serbian Context

The Republic of Serbia is centrally located in the Western Balkans. Since the early 2010's, this region gained notoriety as a migrant corridor into the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as the Western Balkan Route. It is surrounded by EU member-states,

making it a pivotal stepping-stone towards greater perceived opportunity (European Council, 2023).

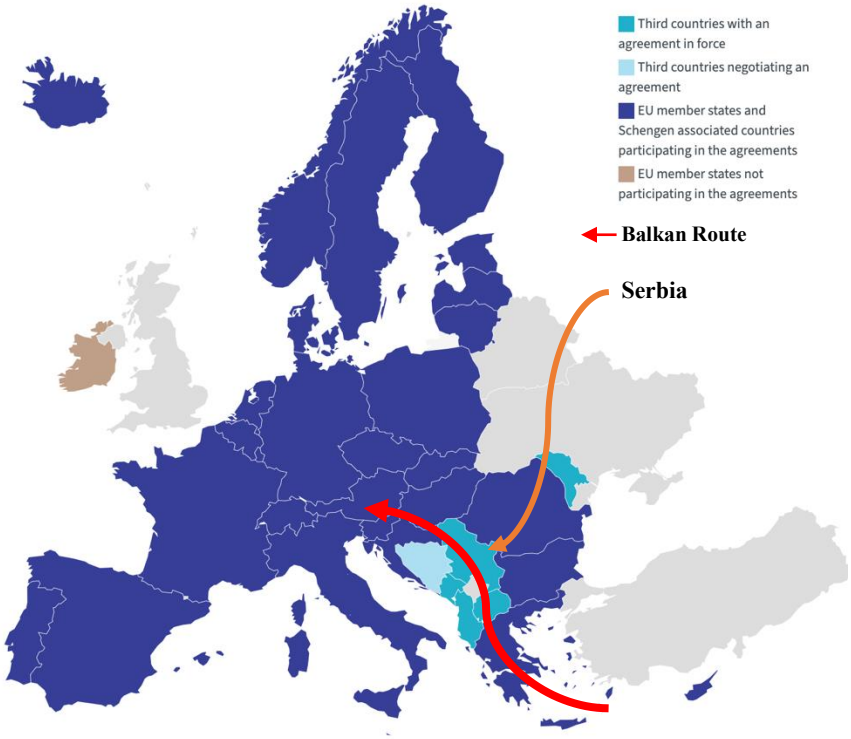

Figure 3: Map of the Balkan Route

Graphic adapted from (European Council, 2023)

Irregular border crossings on the EU's external borders peaked in 2015-16 but are rising once again after a period of calm. The Western Balkan countries account for over half of these crossings (Frontex, 2023).

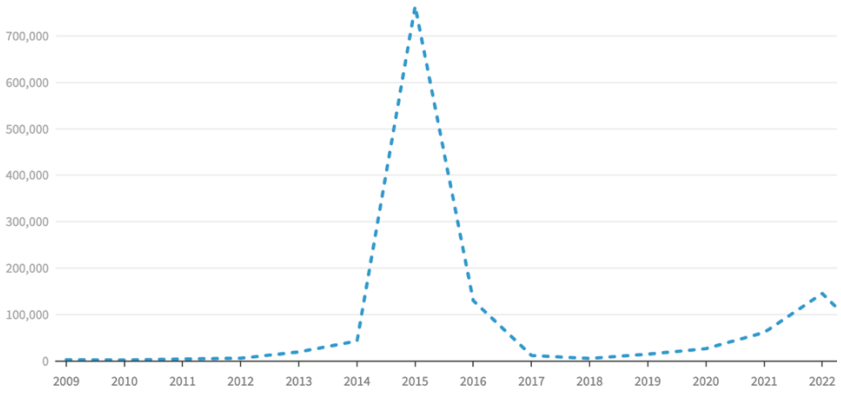

Figure 4:Irregular Border Crossings on the EU's External Borders (2009-2022)

Graphic adapted from (Frontex, 2023)

Around 2017, public and bureaucratic opinion on the treatment of refugees in Serbia shifted substantially. Two far-right political movements, *Leviathan* and *The People's Patrol,* were influential drivers of this rhetoric shift towards a deeply xenophobic and chauvinistic view on immigration (Petrovic & Pejic Nikic, 2020). Changes in rhetoric intensified and developed into physical conflicts between Serbians and migrants. Members of these groups patrolled the streets, threatening and committing violent acts towards migrants (Todorovic, 2021). In the study, *Migrants Are Leaving, But Hatred Remains – The Anti-Migrant Extreme Right in Serbia*, survey results are particularly illuminating regarding this anti-migrant sentiment. As many as 70% of surveyed Serbian citizens feel an increase in the number of migrants increases the crime rate in Serbia. Of the surveyed Serbian citizens, 68% feel that migrants are a threat to Serbian culture, values, and customs. All other survey questions show that a majority of those surveyed believe migrants are a threat in some way to life in Serbia (Petrovic & Pejic Nikic, 2020).

Compared to the previous decade, the crisis-driven style of humanitarian assistance is now a fraction of necessary services for asylum seekers. They require more nuanced integration strategies to enhance their social networks and increase participation with the Serbian community. Perceptions on refugees are shifting. Lenner and Turner state that, "Increasingly they are portrayed as enterprising subjects, whose formal integration into labor markets simultaneously can create self-sufficient actors and cure the economic woes of host countries" (Lenner & Turner, 2019). To be seen as an enterprising subject, not a receiver of humanitarian aid, is a veritable shift in perception.

While studying refugees in Belgrade who were entrepreneurs (i.e. running their own businesses), one study found that social capital is *the* crucial indicator of successful business development and integration. Entrepreneurial refugees in Belgrade (the capital of Serbia) were as

successful as the host community in finding employment. Researchers noted that, “family members and relatives are the biggest support in business operations, while members of the same refugee group are largely recruited as workforce” (Predojevic-Despic & Lukic, 2018, p.651). According to Predojevic-Depic and Lukic’s research on entrepreneurs in Belgrade, employment was not the sole driver of social integration into the host community.

Laws & Legal Procedures in Serbia

Various legal frameworks in the Republic of Serbia (RS) stipulate the working rights of refugees and asylum-seekers seeking protection in Serbia. The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (LATP) states that the RS “shall provide conditions for the inclusion of persons who have been granted the right to asylum in social, cultural, and economic life” (A11, 2020, p.23). The LATP guarantees that those who have been granted asylum, or subsidiary protection, have the right to access the labor market in accordance with RS’ regulations on the employment of foreigners. The conditions and institutional procedures governing the employment of any foreigner in Serbia are outlined in detail in the Law of Employment of Foreigners (LEF) (RS, 2019)

As of December 3, 2014, asylum-seekers benefited from a positive legislative change to the LEF. Anyone granted Subsidiary Protection and anyone who has *applied* for asylum, but is still awaiting an asylum decision, would be granted the same access to the labor market as asylum-grantees (A11, 2020).

According to the LEF, to participate in the labor market, foreigners must acquire a personal work permit**.** The permit grants that person free employment, self-employment, and allows them to register as unemployed. To receive a work permit, the applicant must present a certified copy of their ID card, a certified copy of the decision verifying their asylum status, and

evidence of paid administrative fees (14,360 RSD + 330 RSD administration fee). One prominent flaw in this process is that asylum-seekers may only be issued a work permit *nine months after* they submit their asylum application (BCHR, 2023). This situation leaves two options. During the waiting period, asylum-seekers are often forced to work informally in jobs where they have zero legal protection or spend nine months without an income which substantially increases vulnerabilities.

Asylum Statistics in Serbia

Due to its position on the Balkan Route, thousands upon thousands of migrants passed through Serbia throughout the last 15 years. Greater global refugee trends, and Serbia's place in those trends, are visible in the asylum data. In 2022, a total of 4,181 migrants expressed the intention to apply for asylum in Serbia. 320 people followed through with the intention and officially applied for asylum. In 2022, most applications (181) were filed by nationals of Burundi. Out of the 320 applications, only 10 applicants were granted refuge and 20 granted Subsidiary Protection (BCHR, 2023).

Table 2: Number of Expressed Intention to Seek Asylum in Serbia by Year

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
77	275	522	3,123	2,723	5,066	16,490

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
577,295	12,821	6,199	8,436	12,937	2,830	2,306	4,181

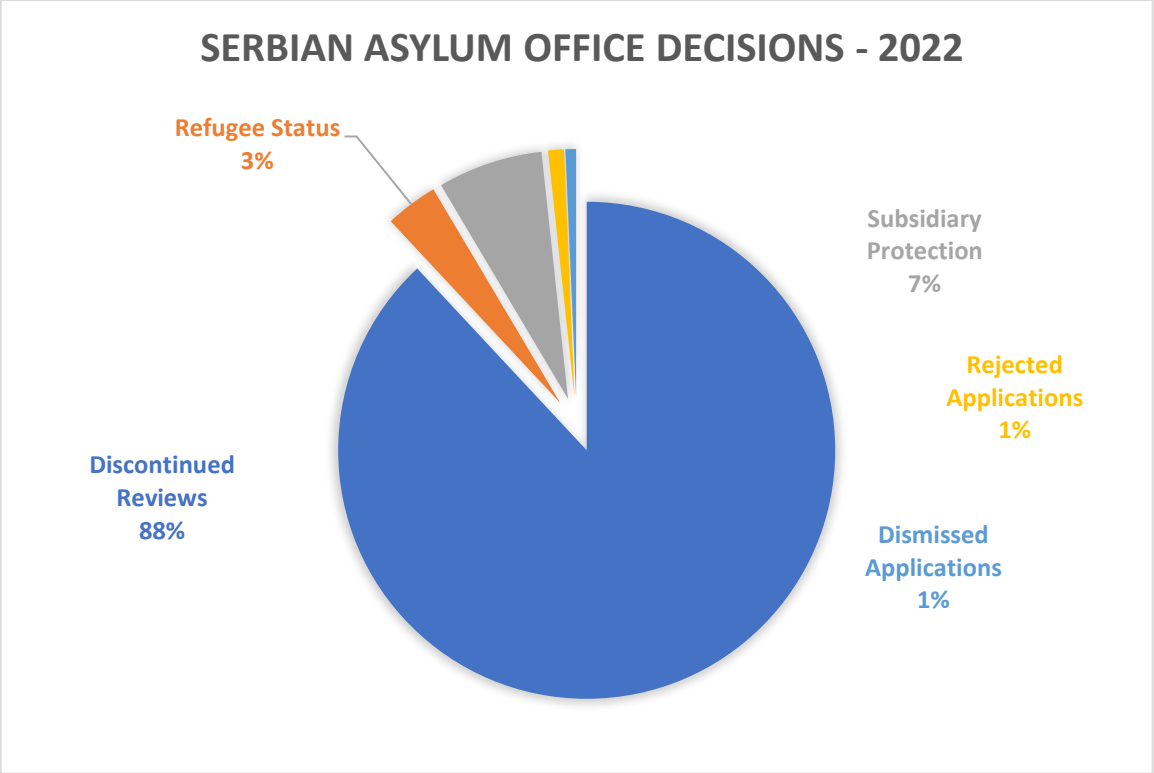

Figure 5: Serbian Asylum Office Decisions 2022

Less than 10% of those who expressed the intention to file for asylum in RS ended up officially applying. One explanation for this statistic is the fact that Serbia is primarily viewed as a *transit country* on the way into the European Union (EU). It is viewed as a stepping-stone to destinations perceived to have greater economic possibility and security (IHD, 2022).

Research Questions

The current research explores the following three questions:

1. **What are the dynamics between employment and integration for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia?**
    - *Do social networks precede employment? Or vice versa?*
    - *Do social networks grow through employment and does that change their perception on integration in Serbia?*

2. **What factors lead to migrants settling in a country that is traditionally seen as a transit country?**

3. **What obstacles do migrants face in the search for employment?**
    - *How do they receive assistance to mitigate these issues?*

Methods

Data collection was conducted in Belgrade, Serbia during April and May of 2023. The period was limited due to visa restrictions; the researcher was required to leave Serbia during the second week of May. Data analysis began in May 2023 in Serbia and continued in the United States through July 2023.

Two population groups participated in the current research. The first group, **Population One,** includes refugees and asylum-seekers. The second group, **Population Two**, includes key informants who work in the integration sector in Belgrade. Purposive snowball sampling was used to recruit all participants. Numerous civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Belgrade, Serbia were contacted. All of them specialize in refugee and asylum-seekers' integration. The initial outreach email included information about the current research, ideal research participants, and consent protocols. The representatives from the CSOs and NGOs who responded to the initial outreach email organized appointments with additional participants from both population groups who fit the research criteria.

All participants were given an Informed Consent Form prior to the interview (Appendix). Before starting the interview, the researcher read the form with the participant. They explained to the participants that they were not obliged to participate, they could opt out from any questions or from the interview entirely, the interview would be recorded, and any personal identifying information would not be disclosed. All participants expressed an understanding and signed the Informed Consent Form.

In the initial outreach, Population One was informed that they would receive a 1000-dinar (~$9 USD) voucher to a grocery store as a token of appreciation for participating. In this context, the amount is not considered enough to entice this population into participating if they otherwise

would not have agreed to do so. Prior to the interviews, the researcher confirmed that if the participants were not fluent in English, a translator would be provided by the coordinating CSO. Only one participant from Population One required a translator to be present. All interviews were conducted in English, recorded, and transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. Data (transcripts, audio recordings, field notes) were stored on a private file on the researcher's personal computer. Only the researcher had access to these files.

Population One (Refugees & Asylum-Seekers)

Three men and one woman were interviewed. These participants are adults (18+) who either have already been granted refuge in Serbia or have formally applied for asylum and are awaiting a decision. If they are asylum-seekers, they have a work permit, have applied for a work permit, or expressed intention to apply (meaning they are still within the nine-month waiting period). Their countries of origin were Syria, Burundi, Afghanistan, and Cuba. At the time of the interviews, two participants were 23 years old, and the other two were 30 years old. Two participants have been granted asylum in Serbia. The other two participants have applied for asylum and are within the nine-month waiting period to apply for a working permit. They intend to apply for their working permit immediately once legally allowed to do so.

All of Population One (refugees and asylum-seekers) were actively affiliated with an integration organization. They were volunteers, employees, or beneficiaries of one or more of the participating organizations.

Population Two (Key Informants)

These participants are working in the integration sector of Serbian civil society. Participants include employees from the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, Crisis Response and Policy Centre, and the Ideas Centar. They are case managers, integration counselors, and legal assistants for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia. They work directly with refugees and asylum-seekers. Six individuals were interviewed. Five females and one male. All were Serbian.

Measures

Both populations participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews which lasted around 50 minutes. An interview guide was used in all sessions. Interviews with Population One covered topics such as: demographics, language skills, education, work experience, asylum and work permit process in Serbia, social networks in Serbia, cooperation with CSOs, discrimination, and plans for their future in Serbia. Interviews with Population Two covered topics such as: difficulties for asylum-seekers in Serbia, services provided by their organization, potential improvements to the asylum and work permit procedures, and the social networks of their beneficiaries.

Data Analysis

Upon completing an interview, the researcher edited the recorded transcripts while listening to the audio to confirm its accuracy. Qualitative analysis was conducted using a coding software (Taguette.org). A concept-driven coding technique was used to analyze the data. Prior to coding, a collection of codes was developed based on a familiarity with the literature review. Data-driven coding, allowing the data to speak for itself without preconceived ideological

notions, supplemented the initial approach (Gibbs, 2007, p.40) Passages from the transcripts which shared similar themes were highlighted and attached to a specific code. Each code was analyzed according to its collection of data, as well as the relationship between various codes.

Findings

Key themes emerged from the data analysis and were expanded upon with direct accounts from both Population One and Two. The key themes are: employment and social networks, obstacles to integration, the role of civil society organizations, why stay in Serbia, the Refugee Council, and the value of employment for asylum-seekers.

Employment and Social Networks

The number of social connections which one has influences how easily one can find employment and integrate. The data shows that no participants from Population One (refugees and asylum-seekers) had any social connections in Serbia prior to their arrival. Multiple, however, had connections in other countries further along the Balkan Route. Their friends and family were often dispersed throughout Europe. According to Population Two (key informants), it is rare for asylum-seekers to have social connections in Serbia prior to arrival. When they do arrive in Serbia, their social network is limited to the company with whom they are traveling. If social networks are considered useful areas to learn about employment opportunities, asylum-seekers in Serbia have few options.

Social networks are further stifled by Serbian asylum procedures. The aforementioned work permit waiting period circuitously impacts social networks. Asylum-seekers are only able to apply for a personal working permit nine months after submitting their asylum application. They are not allowed to work legally in Serbia during this period. After the nine-month waiting period when their application is submitted, it often take additional weeks to actually receive the work permit. AS-1 (asylum-seeker one) aptly describes his mental state during the waiting period:

"It's been a tough couple of months now. It's been a very tough couple of months. So, at some point, like, you want to give up, you know. Rest. It's not physical rest anymore. It's tired from inside. You're not just lazy. You just have a certain amount of energy and you're using all this energy just for basic, for stupid things, like surviving, which you should be using this energy to, like, improve yourself, improve your skills. And you don't you don't have this ability. It doesn't happen. You don't have work. You don't have anything. The only thing you can do is just run around the camp and speak to the people, just to help my mental illness. Just to keep me, like, sane. I think that's the only thing you can do."

During the interim period, many asylum-seekers pursue work in the informal "black-market" economy. According to KIs, this kind of work has many disadvantages. It offers zero legal protection for the employee and provides limited potential for developing a social network. KIs recall very few cases when novel social connections developed in the informal market, especially when compared to the formal market. Informal jobs are inconsistent and lack security.

AS-3 described her informal labor in the kitchen of a restaurant in Belgrade, "*It's not friendly. When we are working, we are just working."* The informally hired kitchen employees socialize very little while at work. The scant socialization which does occur rarely extends beyond the workplace. AS-1 echoed this sentiment, "*If it's like a work that's illegal, it's like, maybe construction, or something like that. You meet people who are in the same or similar situation as you are, Serbian or refugee. It doesn't really make that kind of difference. Because both are in a bad position. And you just, you go to that work just to do the job, take the daily*

money you get, and go home." Finding employment which develops social networks is vital but rare.

Obstacles to Integration

Frustration with the ineptitude of Serbian institutions unifies all participants. AS-1 stated, *"Serbia is not a terrible country, but it's terrible in the way that they're managing refugees."* These frustrations begin early. Language barriers and low-grade identification documents divide Population One from genuinely participating with the Serbian community. To acquire a work permit, one stumbles into a process fraught with barriers and seemingly unnecessary complications. For new arrivals, the first difficulty is that legal asylum documents are written exclusively in Serbian Cyrillic. Translations are unavailable and the number of translators does not fulfill the need. Therefore, Population One must navigate an unfamiliar bureaucratic architecture without the support of the state.

Additionally, identification documents provided to asylum-seekers are inadequate. Unlike the standard issue ID cards for Serbian citizens, asylum-seekers' IDs are handwritten, laminated pieces of paper. Both KIs and asylum-seekers stated that most institutions are unfamiliar with this ID and are therefore hesitant to conduct any official business using this ID. AS-2, an Afghani refugee, describes his experience with the ID: "*Many times, problems. When I go to the bank, when I go to the doctors, they don't know."* Interviewed asylum-seekers encounter this problem in government offices, post offices, healthcare facilities, and any other institution requiring identification. AS-2, who is now fluent in Serbian, further expressed that even upon explanation, officials are still reluctant to proceed due to their unfamiliarity with the documents.

With or without a work permit, asylum-seekers search for labor. KI-3 explains that understanding the Serbian language is the most important skill which allows access into the labor

market. Postings for available jobs are rarely written in any language besides Serbian. This is an understandable, yet inconvenient, obstacle for any foreigner seeking work without assistance. When Population One does find work, they struggle to communicate with employers and fellow employees when they do not speak the same language. This experience is more common in the informal labor market. KI-1 stated that a knowledge of English does not guarantee an easier opportunity to find informal work. She stated, "*There are language barriers from both sides. They don't know Serbian, but the employers don't know English. This happens a lot and I wasn't aware until I started working here. I thought everyone knew English."*

The Role of Civil Society Organizations

Once it is understood that the Serbian government provides little assistance, asylum-seekers seek help elsewhere. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are categorized as any organization unaffiliated with the government which fill a gap in public services. This sweeping definition more specifically includes: providing information to the public, monitoring government action, engaging in advocacy, providing essential services to the public, and defending social rights (Ingram, 2020). The research participants in Population Two either work or volunteer for CSOs in Belgrade, Serbia, and provide a variety of services to asylum-seekers. The participating CSOs provide integration assistance, legal counsel, language courses, vocational trainings, cultural exchange programs, and advocacy on behalf of asylum-seekers.

Ideally, CSOs and governments should be synergistic, leaving no public service neglected. AS-4 works closely with both civil society and government actors to improve conditions for asylum-seekers in Serbia. He describes the relationship between the two parties, "*The government has procedures and standards and it's like the skeleton, not a very efficient skeleton. And the civil society fills up the rest. So, the better they work together, the better the*

conditions are." All participants shared this sentiment. Civil society provides necessary services while asylum-seekers are neglected by the Serbian government.

For recent arrivals in Serbia, building a social network can be daunting. CSOs remedy these initial difficulties by organizing social events among asylum-seekers and with the Serbian community. The goal of these events and initiatives is to create connections between communities, reduce feelings of isolation, and shift public bias about migrant communities. In a culinary school in Belgrade, a CSO teaches cooking classes with Serbian and refugee participants. The class learns to cook traditional Serbian dishes and then the refugee group teaches native Serbs to cook foods from their country. KI-1 described a new program, Refugee Buddies, which pairs refugees with Serbians who share similar skills or professions: "*It's a more non-formal way of helping refugees to integrate better. So, we connect our clients, refugees, and asylum-seekers, with people from local community that can help them even like going to the bank and stuff like that, but moreover, learn Serbian in a non-formal way, hang out and network with people to maybe get some new opportunities to find more about the culture exchange experiences, and just feel like proper human beings*." The program is coupled with a social media campaign aimed to provide a positive narrative about the contribution of refugees in Serbian life. KI-3 described another program addressing the isolation of the particularly vulnerable group of LGBTQI+ refugees in Serbia. They coordinate meetings with members of this community and other CSOs in Belgrade. LGBTQI+ refugees meet others with similar identities and learn about valuable services in a safe space.

CSO's efforts towards integration are not without critique. AS-4 details his thoughts on the civil society's efforts towards genuine integration, *"So, we need a more humane and more cultural touch. It's not going to a museum. It's that they actually engage in the tradition. That*

they actually engage in their processes or cultural process, and that we actually feel that we have a future here. That we're going to be part of something. That we're going to be part of the processes of the society. That we're going to feel part of this is very important." Half of Population Two addressed this concern, acknowledging that their integration efforts focus on genuine cultural exchange as well as providing services for asylum-seekers. The other half of Population Two did not address this concern.

Why Stay in Serbia?

Given Serbia's proximity to the European Union and maladroit asylum mechanisms, one's curiosity is piqued by those who choose to remain. Population Two expressed that asylum-seekers' reasons for staying are as heterogeneous as the population themselves. Some groups, such as Cubans and Iranians, capitalized on windows of time when there were relatively porous asylum requirements for their country of origin (BCHR, 2023). Other participants have more unique arrival stories. For example, AS-2 arrived in Serbia as an unaccompanied minor and was placed in government housing for Serbian youth. During the two years when he lived there, he developed integral social bonds during formative teenage years, accelerated his Serbian language skills, thereby fast-tracking his integration.

Many others traveled on traumatic and circuitous paths which led them to Serbia. After such arduous journeys, any semblance of security found in Serbia may be enough motivation to stay. AS-1 recognizes that a continued journey deeper into Europe would not guarantee prosperity, *"For me, for myself, I know if I'm successful in my own country, I'm successful everywhere. So, I don't care if I want to go to Germany or Austria or Finland. No, doesn't matter. If you're successful, you're successful."* Population One is confident that their resolute attitude towards success will shape their future more than the destination.

Serbia's refugee and asylum-seeker community is abundantly diverse. Their nationalities, professions, interests, sexual orientations, religions, etc., vary from person to person. However, Key Informants did express one uniform characteristic among asylum-seekers regarding their intention to stay. Those who find stable employment and community are more likely to remain in Serbia. When asked what would characterize a good life in Serbia, AS-3 stated, "*To have security. To have papers. Then I can be free."*

The Refugee Council

In October 2022, a group of refugees and asylum-seekers started to organize themselves to advocate with a unified voice to the Serbian public and government. Although they receive some financial and logistical support from a CSO in Belgrade, they operate independently. The makeup of the Refugee Council is intentionally heterogenous. Members have different genders, sexual orientations, protection statuses, and countries of origin. Their primary goal is to convey the refugee perspective directly to the Serbian government. In the words of AS-4, the lead coordinator, "*The Refugee Council is a very, I always say, ambitious project. And basically, its goal is to give voices to refugees to advocate for themselves, to find a way in which they can be empowered towards themselves and to institutions and to become actively participants in the process of integration*." Asylum-seekers have been historically absent from asylum policy decisions. Their presence in government discussions regarding the work permit waiting period is therefore significant. During the interviews, all KIs state that the work permit waiting period may be reduced later in 2023. They attribute some success about this significant shift in policy to the presence of the Refugee Council.

The Value of Employment for Asylum-Seekers

All participants (key informants, refugees, and asylum-seekers) stressed that employment is a crucial factor towards the fulfillment of integration. Additionally, all participants corroborated the idea that finding work is the most valuable component to successful integration. Key Informants (KIs) agree that finding work is the first request of their clients. KI-2 stated, "*In most of the cases, the first thing that they're asking us is where can I find work? How can I work? Can I work? I mean 90% of cases, I'm sure. And of course, it will if people affect the decision to stay here. I'm sure about it."* Legal, formal work is preferred from the outset, opposed to informal labor. The value of employment is visible in the search and in the acquisition. KIs notice significant positive shifts in overall attitude/mental well-being once their clients are employed, *"You can see the change that people show, refugees show, when they find a job where the people who are working are good to them. If they, if they speak with them like they are normal people, if people are nice to them, if they have like a salary that's equal to salaries of other people working, if they treat them like they're just people who work. You can see the big positive change in their attitudes towards things."*- KI-1

When asked about priorities of recent arrivals, KI-4 emphatically stressed, "*Work. Work. They need to be able to engage and work."* Refugees see themselves as hard-working, enterprising individuals who can contribute to the Serbian economy. KIs agree and facilitate the employment process to actualize this possibility. Work provides crucial income and stability.

"The most important thing is to work. It doesn't matter what you work. The matter is the income so you can maybe do a change in your life. At this point, my life is like, I don't know how to explain this. Terrible. So, you need work. You need to find a job." – AS-1

Discussion

The primary goal of the current research is to understand the dynamic between employment and integration for refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia. To evaluate this dynamic, according to the research findings, it is useful to view the case chronologically from the perspective of an asylum-seeker. Current asylum statistics show that asylum applications in Serbia are rising, and that the applicant population is diverse (BCHR, 2023). Regardless of their country of origin, it is rare for them to have any connections in Serbia prior to their arrival. However, asylum-seekers in Serbia are homogenous in one regard: their immediate desire to seek employment. Without exception, all Key Informants confirm this trait about recent arrivals. Although the concern is paramount, the search for employment is a frustrating endeavor for both asylum-seekers and Key Informants. The asylum-seekers must navigate an insufficient, foreign landscape. In their attempt to facilitate this process, the Key Informants receive virtually no assistance from the Serbian government. Civil Society Organizations attempt to fill the dearth of government support but are not equipped to be sole providers of integration services. In their search for employment in Serbia, refugees and asylum-seekers face an uphill battle.

According to the current research findings, employment sits atop the asylum-seekers hierarchy of needs upon arrival in Serbia. Employment can be seen as the key which is inserted into the lock of integration. As the key turns, it presses on enough lock pins for integration to take place. The UK Home Office's indicators for integration guide includes a few metaphorical 'lock pins' of note, including *Housing, Leisure, Stability, Language & Communication,* and *Culture (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019).* The first three notable lock pins (*Housing, Leisure,* and *Stability)* are only possible when the individual receives an income via employment. Population One in the current research all stated that employment allowed them to move out of the asylum

center or government housing. By definition, *leisure* activities require the counterpart of work. Finally, *stability* occurs when one has a consistent income and routine in their daily life. Economic stability also fosters confidence which is foundational for life in a new environment (Phillimore et al., 2021). The remaining 'pins' (*Language & Communication* and *Culture*) can be accessed through formal work. Key Informants recognized that the workplace is an ideal locale for language practice. Many asylum-seekers, AS-2 in particular, were hired because they were multilingual and affable. *Culture*, meaning the participation with and the absorption of Serbian culture, is possible in the formal workplace. Unlike CSO cultural exchange events, work is a space which one *routinely* interacts with Serbians.

One caveat of the 'lock pin' metaphor falls with the distinction between formal and informal work. Population One revealed that informal work is *not* a space in which genuine cultural exchange occurs. All participants have a utilitarian view on informal work. The shift to formal work brings about opportunity for greater social connectedness and more active community involvement (Wood et al., 2019)

An additional characteristic of stable, formal work unlocks yet another 'pin' of integration. When work is in line with an asylum-seeker's interests, profession, or previous education, feelings of *mobility dissonance* decrease. This concept refers to the asynchronous relationship between the physical mobility caused by displacement, and the feeling that displaced persons are not going anywhere in their own lives (Bygnes, 2021). In the current research, it is evident that all of Population One longed for employment catered to their individual interests. AS-3, while at the time working informally in a restaurant, longed for a job in a bank due to her B.A. in Economics. AS-2, at the time taking classes to become a barber, was optimistic that by opening a barber shop in Belgrade, he would find genuine stability in Serbia. For cases such as

these, nuanced integration strategies can create self-sufficient actors and in turn contribute back to the Serbian economy (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Stable employment, the established key to integration in Serbia, is only legal with a personal work permit. There is a 9-month waiting period to acquire the permit which is often extended due to bureaucratic inefficiencies. The organization of this system is unnecessarily protracted and denies asylum-seekers in Serbia their right to work. Long waiting periods in the asylum process are shown to increase levels of depression and anxiety (Li et al., 2016, p.4). The very thing which should grant asylum-seekers the right to work has become an *obstacle to work.*

The obstacles which refugees and asylum-seekers face in Serbia present themselves in both the social and socioeconomic components of integration. At first glance, the Serbian context appears to offer minimal support in either of these arenas. Therefore, the decision to integrate is a curious one. The asylum statistics, in conjunction with its position on the Balkan Route, show that the majority of displaced persons who arrive in Serbia do not remain (BCHR, 2023). The current research findings, supplemented by the experience of Key Informants, shows that the income, stability, and security granted by employment influence refugees to integrate in Serbia. This even overrides the perceived greater opportunity in the European Union.

However, the acutely difficult experience of finding employment as an asylum-seeker in Serbia degrades the possibility of successful integration. Due to the interrelatedness of the socioeconomic and social components of integration, the inability to find work actually inhibits social interaction with the Serbian community (Robila, 2018). As discussed in Robila's research on integration, migrants with better social positions (higher education, stable jobs, etc.) have more informal contact with society (Robila, 2018, p.10). For asylum-seekers in Serbia, ascending the social ladder is a tiresome endeavor. Due to long waiting periods for work permits and a

general institutional inefficiency, asylum-seekers have little opportunity for genuine involvement in the Serbian labor market. The social component of integration suffers due to inchoate socioeconomic participation.

Limitations

The ideal sample size for this research would be at least 15 participants (10 from Population One, 5 from Population Two). The current research includes the perspectives of 4 participants from Population One and 6 participants from Population Two. The sample was limited because the researcher had a limited period of time for data collection.

Additional refugees / asylum-seekers in this research could provide more information on the impact work has on social networks. First-hand accounts add textured descriptions of the ways in which individuals develop novel connections. The collected information from key informants, who have protracted experience with many asylum-seekers, however, does supplement this dearth. In particular, their experiences with a diverse group of asylum-seekers and refugees details their analysis. While more participants would contribute to a more robust sample, the current number does not discredit the findings. According to the consensus theory of purposive sampling, the collected experiences research participants do share commonalities which shape an external truth (Guest et al., 2006).

All key informants work for CSOs specializing in integration and all refugees / asylum-seekers are actively receiving services from these organizations. This is the ideal scenario for key informants but neglects a greater population of refugees / asylum-seekers. All of Population One was found through the CSOs because the research utilized a purposive, snowball sampling method. Many asylum-seekers and refugees who utilize services from integration CSOs are relatively recent arrivals in Serbia. Issues of integration are heightened for recent arrivals compared to those who have lived in the country for longer periods of time. For this reason, the selected participants are an adequate group to explore the research questions. However, it is expected that one's social network could change substantially after an extended period living in a

new country. The experience of those who are not actively seeking assistance from CSOs is not included. This population may have a different social experience in Serbia which is unknown at this time.

The researcher is a 27-year-old male from the United States. Engrained in the research questions is the idea that work is a space of nascent social connections which extend outside of that space. This conception of work is not universal. Participants are from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and nationalities which may not consider work to be an inherently social space. Initial research questions may have been formed differently without this conception in mind.

Conclusion

Previous research suggests that employment has a fundamentally positive relationship on refugee integration. Recognizing this reality, whilst using Serbia as a case study, the current research explores the dynamic between the social and socioeconomic components of integration. The diverse selection of research participants confirmed one statement: employment has a positive effect on the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia. It is the key which unlocks a better life for refugees in Serbia. The income and stability provided from employment facilitates greater reciprocal participation with Serbian life (i.e., integration). Unlocking the opportunity for economic and social participation leads many refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia to integrate into a country which is almost uniformly overlooked as a transit country.

While it is a possibility, acquiring the metaphorical key to integration is a process marred by numerous obstacles. Language barriers and a comprehensive institutional lag limit asylum-seekers from participating in the formal labor market. The work of civil society organizations mitigates this assistance deficit. Their contributions in Serbia should be commended, but CSOs cannot entirely replace government institutions. The Serbian government is responsible for upholding the right to work for asylum-seekers and refugees in Serbia. This responsibility must extend beyond the written rule of law. Such a discrepancy between policy and implementation is unjust. To actualize the laws in place, the Serbian government must provide additional services to integrate asylum-seekers and refugees. While the current research demonstrates the symbiosis of integration and employment, the relationship between these two components in Serbia is fractured. By providing services such as Serbian language classes, cultural exchange initiatives, and reducing the work permit waiting period, the relationship can be mended. Only then will formal employment be a legitimate possibility for asylum-seekers and refugees in Serbia.

The asylum-seekers and refugees struggling to integrate in Serbia are but a fraction of the nearly 40 million others in the world (UNHCR, 2022). Similar research should be replicated internationally to further generalize the findings and suggest more global approaches to integration.

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Appendix

Informed Consent Form (Population One)

Title Of the Study: No Integration Without Employment: Asylum-Seekers in Serbia and Their Search for Work
Researcher Name: Jona Block
My name is Jona Block, and I am a student with SIT. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my master's degree in Crisis Management & Humanitarian Assistance. Your participation is voluntary.
Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, please sign this form and you will be given a printed or electronic copy of this form.
Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experience of refugees and asylum seekers settling and finding work in Serbia. We hope to learn about the decisions that lead to settling in a country that is usually a transit country on the way to Europe. More specifically, the research will focus on the process of finding employment in Serbia. The researcher is interested in social networks, any difficulties encountered while finding work, and any assistance received in the process of finding employment.
Study Procedures
Your participation will consist of one interview that will last up to 60 minutes. The interview will take place at a location you find convenient and comfortable which is quiet and safe (e.g., park, café, civil society organization). The interview will be audio-recorded. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, you cannot be a participant in the study.
Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. The interview will cover topics such as departure from your home country and social difficulties you may face in Serbia. These questions could cause emotional discomfort if those experiences were difficult or traumatic. The interview is completely voluntary and during the interview you have the right to withdraw consent and not answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time. We may provide you links to mental health and social support services to reduce these risks if they arise.
Potential Benefits to Participants And/or To Society
There will be no direct benefit to the participant. The information gained from the interview (as stated above in 'Purpose of the Study') may contribute to the general field of social and economic integration. This could benefit civil society organizations as they assist migrants when they settle in Serbia.
Payment/Compensation for Participation
As a token of appreciation for participating in the research, you will be given a 1000-dinar voucher to a Serbian supermarket. Also, any travel costs incurred will be compensated by the researcher.
Confidentiality
Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. To maintain confidentiality, the information recorded in the study will be stored in a password-

protected file on an external hard drive. Only the researcher will have access to this information. All audio-recordings and related records will be erased in 5 years.
Anonymity will be protected throughout the research process. Your name will be linked with a pseudonym. Only the researcher will know the corresponding link. When recording the data, your real name will not be recorded in any of the research materials. Names or identifiers of your employer or which specific civil society you worked with (if any) will not be recorded in the data collection or presentation of the findings. Identifiable information about any specific individuals in your social network will not be recorded.
When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. Only certain information will be disclosed. This information consists of your age, gender, ethnicity, type of employment, and time spent in Serbia. The pseudonym will be used when presenting the findings.
As per Serbian-mandated reporting requirements, any information regarding domestic or child abuse, intention to harm oneself or others, will be reported to the police or corresponding public official.
Future Use of Data
Participant's information, even when personal identifiers are removed will not be used in future research. The information will not be shared with other researchers.
Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.
Researcher's Contact Information
If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at jona.block@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at rodoljub.jovanovic@sit.edu
Rights Of Research Participant – IRB Contact Information
In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by the SARB or by the SIT IRB. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@sit.edu
School for International Training, Institutional Review Board, 1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676, Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676, USA irb@sit.edu, +001-802-258-3132

"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participant's Signature *Date*

Researcher's Signature *Date*

Consent to Quote from Interview

I may wish to quote from the interview with you either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. If a pseudonym will be used, include this statement: A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.
Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

(initial) I agree to consent to quote from an interview

(initial) I do not agree to consent to quote from an interview

Consent to Audio-Record Interview
Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

(initial) I agree to consent to audio-record an interview.

(initial) I do not agree to consent to audio-record an interview.

Informed Consent Form (Population Two)

Title Of the Study: No Integration Without Employment: Asylum-Seekers in Serbia and Their Search for Work
Researcher Name: Jona Block
My name is Jona Block, and I am a student with SIT. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my master's degree in Crisis Management & Humanitarian Assistance. Your participation is voluntary.
Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, please sign this form and you will be given a printed or electronic copy of this form.
Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experience of asylum seekers and refugees settling and finding work in Serbia. We hope to learn about the decisions that lead to settling in a country that is usually a transit country on the way to Europe. More specifically, the research will focus on the process of finding employment in Serbia. The researcher is interested in social networks, any difficulties encountered while finding work, and any assistance received in the process of finding employment.
Study Procedures
Your participation will consist of one interview that will last up to 60 minutes. The interview will take place at a location you find convenient and comfortable which is quiet and safe (e.g., park, café, civil society organization). The interview will be audio-recorded. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, you cannot be a participant in the study.
Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right to withdraw consent, not answer any questions and to discontinue participation at any time.
Potential Benefits to Participants And/or To Society
There will be no direct benefit to the participant. The information gained from the interview (as stated above in 'Purpose of the Study') may contribute to the general field of social and economic integration. This could benefit civil society organizations as they assist migrants when they settle in Serbia.
Confidentiality
Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. To maintain confidentiality, the information recorded in the study will be stored in a password-protected file on an external hard drive. Only the researcher will have access to this information. All audio-recordings and related records will be erased in 5 years.
Anonymity will be protected throughout the research process. Your name will be linked with a pseudonym. Only the researcher will know the corresponding link. When recording the data, your real name will not be recorded in any of the research materials. Names or identifiers of your employer or the organization you work with (currently or in the past) will not be recorded in the data collection or presentation of the findings. Identifiable information about any specific individuals in your social network will not be recorded.
When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. As a key informant, only certain information will be disclosed. This

information consists of your gender, nationality, and the general kind of organization to which you are employed. The pseudonym will be used when presenting the findings.
As per Serbian-mandated reporting requirements, any information regarding domestic or child abuse, intention to harm oneself or others, will be reported to the police or corresponding public official.
Future Use of Data
Participant's information, even when personal identifiers are removed will not be used in future research. The information will not be shared with other researchers.
Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.
Researcher's Contact Information
If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at jona.block@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at rodoljub.jovanovic@sit.edu
Rights Of Research Participant – IRB Contact Information
In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by the SARB or by the SIT IRB. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@sit.edu
School for International Training, Institutional Review Board, 1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676, Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676, USA irb@sit.edu, +001-802-258-3132

"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participant's Signature *Date*

Researcher's Signature *Date*

Consent to Quote from Interview
I may wish to quote from the interview with you either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. If a pseudonym will be used, include this statement: A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.
Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:
(initial) I agree to consent to quote from an interview
(initial) I do not agree to consent to quote from an interview

Consent to Audio-Record Interview
Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:
(initial) I agree to consent to audio-record an interview.
(initial) I do not agree to consent to audio-record an interview.

Interview Guide (Population One)

Personal History

- Age? Gender? Home country? Education?
- Current asylum status? Work Permit?
- When you left your home country, did you have a specific destination in mind?
- What did you do for work before arriving in Serbia?
- How long have you been living in Serbia?
- Who are you living with?
- Language ability?

Social Networks

- Did you know anyone in Serbia before arriving?
- Who do you spend most of your time with while in Serbia? (Refugees or locals?)
- How did you meet the people you spend most of your time with?
- Could the people you spend time with help you find a job in Serbia?
- What do you have most in common with the Serbians you spend time with?
- Do you participate in activities through organizations to meet other asylum seekers?

Employment in Serbia

- Are you currently working? If so, what is your job?
- (If working) how did you learn about this job?
- (If not working) where are you looking for work?
- When you arrived in Serbia, when did you start looking for a job?
- Where will / did you go for help to find a job?
- If you are working, have you made any new relationships through work?
- Without a job, do you think you could develop a strong community in Serbia?

Obstacles Finding Work

- What are some difficulties you face / have faced while searching for a job?
- Do you feel that the asylum and work permit application process in Serbia are easy or difficult to understand?

- How would you change the system in Serbia so that asylum seekers in Serbia can start working more easily?

Final Questions

- What are some of the reasons you have stayed in Serbia?
- What is the most important thing for you to do live a good life in Serbia?
- Is there anything related to these topics that you would like to add?

Interview Guide (Population Two)

- What kind of services are provided to migrants and asylum seekers at […]?

- How valuable is employment for social integration?

- Serbia is primarily a transit country on the way to Europe. Do you see any demographic trends among the people who decide to apply for asylum here?

- In your opinion, what are some of the main difficulties this population faces in finding employment in Serbia?
    - Any specific stories?

- Do the people who integrate in Serbia have any social connections before arriving?
    - If they develop later, how does this happen?

- Once finding work, do you find that changes this population's thoughts about settling or staying in Serbia?

- What are some possible improvements, or services, that would help the integration and employment process for migrants in Serbia?