Interventions to improve the economic self-sufficiency of unemployed immigrants from non-Western countries
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Title of the review

Interventions for increasing economic self-sufficiency among unemployed immigrants from non-Western countries

Background

Immigrants can be refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification (Dumont, Liebig, Peschner, Tanay, & Xenogiani, 2016). In 2015, permanent migration to the OECD countries reached its highest level since 2007 with 4.7 million entries – partially due to the surge in refugees during recent years (OECD, 2017). Although in the OECD countries more than two in three immigrants are employed, unemployment affects immigrants, and especially refugees, to a larger extent than the rest of the population. The average unemployment rate of immigrants was 8.3 percent in 2016 in all OECD countries and 12.4 percent in the European OECD countries. This is, respectively, 1.8 and 4.3 percentage points higher than the rate of native workers. However, in some OECD countries the gap is much larger. In countries such as Belgium, France, Spain and Sweden the employment gap between native and foreign born workers is between 7.5 to 11.0 percent in 2016. In other OECD countries, such as the Slovak Republic and Israel, foreign-born workers are in fact employed to a higher extent than native workers.¹ Among immigrants, refugees represent one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market given an average employment rate in the EU among economically active refugees that is 9 percentage points lower than native-born persons (Dumont et al., 2016).

Unemployment is a challenge to economic self-sufficiency and the well-being of the affected immigrants, including refugees (Kennedy & McDonald, 2006; Lindert, Ehrenstein, Priebe, Mielck, & Brährler, 2009; Roelfs, Shor, Davidson, & Schwartz, 2011). The detrimental impact of unemployment is especially strong among young people – given that youth unemployment gives rise to long-term negative mental health effects (Strandh, Winefield, Nilsson, & Hammarström, 2014). Moreover, the relatively low employment rates of immigrants affect public finances in host countries with comprehensive social protection systems negatively, due to lower average tax contributions from unemployed immigrants (OECD, 2013). Therefore, labour market integration of immigrants in the form of economic self-sufficiency is a central political goal to most host countries.

Different programmes are deployed by different countries to raise the employment level of immigrants. Some of these interventions are specific to unemployed immigrants – such as language training to recent immigrants. Other programmes are not specific to immigrants but deployed to further re-employment prospects among unemployed citizens in general,

¹ Own calculations based on OECD-data. See http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG.
such as active labour markets programmes (ALMPs), e.g. coaching or mentoring, on-the-job-training, or subsidized employment.

A gap in the literature remains in terms of outcomes from interventions aiming at improving immigrant (including refugee) economic self-sufficiency. This review will look at research on the outcome of programme participation, i.e. effects during and after programme participation. To our knowledge this is the first systematic review to compile this evidence.

Objectives

The review systematically collects and synthesizes evidence from controlled evaluations of interventions designed to improve economic outcomes for immigrants from non-western countries residing legally in a Western country (see definition below). The review seeks to answer the following question:

1) Do interventions designed to improve the economic self-sufficiency of unemployed immigrants decrease their unemployment rate, decrease cash assistance, increase their average hourly wage, increase their salary, or increase their job retention?

Existing reviews

Ott & Montgomery (2015) have conducted and published a systematic review of interventions designed to improve the economic self-sufficiency of resettled refugees. The review we propose targets a broader population. An important argument for targeting a broader immigrant population is that many empirical studies of effects of interventions on the labour market performance of immigrants do not specify in a precise manner the target population as either refugee, family reunification or labour immigrants. Hence a broader approach to the target population, as proposed in our review, is likely to find more studies of effects from interventions in this field.

Intervention

The review will define as eligible any interventions designed to increase the economic self-sufficiency and reduce unemployment rates of immigrants, including refugees. Interventions can be given by public, i.e. state, regional or municipal, authorities, or by private for-profit or non-profit actors on behalf of public authorities. These can be language courses, job search assistance, training, education, subsidized work, mentoring and similar programmes. Some of these programmes demand full-time participation for long periods (e.g. months) while other programmes have a shorter duration (e.g. a few days or weeks). These interventions will be compared to a control or comparison group receiving no interventions (passive
benefits), ‘services as usual’, or alternative interventions. The review will not include interventions fully financed and implemented by civil society organizations (NGOs) since the purpose of this review is to evaluate the effects of programmes designed as elements in a public labour market integration policy.

### Population

The population consists of unemployed immigrants from non-Western countries receiving cash-benefits, unemployment insurance benefits or other kinds of public benefits related to unemployed persons, and residing legally in a Western country. Immigrants can be refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification. Western countries are defined as EU28/EEA plus the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Non-Western countries are all other countries. Individuals belonging to the population fall between the ages of 18 and 64 at the time of intervention. They may vary demographically including geographic, urban/rural, ethnicity, and by gender.

The review will not include illegal immigrants. Economically inactive groups will also be excluded including children, disabled persons, and older persons.

### Outcomes

The primary outcome is employment status (unemployment rate, dependency on unemployment insurance benefits or cash assistance). Secondary outcomes related to earnings and duration of employment will be included if they are reported in the studies (average hourly wage, salary, job retention).

### Study designs

The review will include all studies that estimate an effect of an intervention using either a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design or a quasi-randomized controlled design (QRCT: participants allocated to either treatment or control group using e.g. a person’s case number or alphabetical order). The review will also include studies based on natural experiments or quasi-experimental designs such as differences-in-differences, regression discontinuity design and instrumental variables design based on survey or register data. Non-randomized

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2 This is grouping of countries used for instance by the Statistics Norway, see http://www.ssb.no/en/innvandring-og-innvandrere/nokkeltall.
studies must provide baseline information on the comparability of the intervention and the control group and use statistical tools to adjust for baseline differences.

Meta-analysis will be used if appropriate.

References


Review authors

**Lead review author:** The lead author is the person who develops and co-ordinates the review team, discusses and assigns roles for individual members of the review team, liaises with the editorial base and takes responsibility for the on-going updates of the review.

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Roles and responsibilities

Give a brief description of content and methodological expertise within the review team. It is recommended to have at least one person on the review team who has content expertise, at least one person who has methodological expertise and at least one person who has statistical expertise. It is also recommended to have one person with information retrieval expertise.

Please note that this is the recommended optimal review team composition.

- **Content:** Frederik Thuesen & Vibeke Jacobsen
  Frederik Thuesen, Ph.D. (sociology) has been conducting research in the field of immigrant labour market integration for several years (Thuesen, 2016; Thuesen, Tørslev, & Jensen, 2011). Vibeke Jacobsen, PhD (economics) has been conducting research in the field of immigrant labour market integration for several years (Arendt, Pohl Nielsen, & Jakobsen, 2016).

- **Systematic review methods:** Frederik Thuesen has previously conducted two systematic reviews (in Danish).

- **Statistical analysis:** Vibeke Jacobsen & Frederik Thuesen
  Vibeke Jacobsen has strong expertise in statistical analysis. Frederik Thuesen also has knowledge of relevant statistical methods.

- **Information retrieval:** Bjørn Christian Viinholt Nielsen
  Bjørn Christian Viinholt Nielsen, Cand.Scient. Bibl. is an information specialist employed at VIVE who has conducted searches for several systematic reviews.
**Funding**

The review will be funded by VIVE – The Danish Centre of Applied Social Science.

**Potential conflicts of interest**

Frederik Thuesen and Vibeke Jacobsen are both currently involved in primary research evaluating Danish municipal interventions targeting newly arrived refugees and family members reunited with refugees aiming at raising their level of employment. Both researchers are keenly interested in interventions in this field. None of the authors stand to gain financially or in other ways from a positive or negative evaluation of interventions in this field.

**Preliminary timeframe**

- Date you plan to submit a draft protocol: 1 September 2018
- Date you plan to submit a draft review: 1 September 2019