



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Refugees and asylum  
seekers in informal and  
precarious jobs: the role  
of temporalities in the  
early labour market  
insertion from the  
professionals' and  
volunteers' perspectives

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## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Theories on (migrant) workers' involvement in informal jobs and recent case studies on refugees and asylum seekers</b>    | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>The concept of migrant temporalities</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Methods</b>   | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Context of inquiry</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Findings</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| <i>Temporalities and the intersection between migrants' needs and personal characteristics</i>                               | <i>8</i>  |
| <i>Temporal practices in governing asylum and temporalities in migratory trajectories</i>                                    | <i>10</i> |
| <b>Conclusions and Discussion: temporalities, RAS' early insertion in informal/precarious jobs and long term integration</b> | <b>14</b> |
| <b>References</b>  | <b>15</b> |

## **MAGYC [Peer reviewed journal article]**

This article examines the engagement of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) in informal and precarious jobs from a civil society actors' perspective. Despite a burgeoning literature on refugee integration and focus on institutional integration programmes, and a rich body of literature on the insertion of migrants at the bottom end of labour markets, little is known about RAS' early insertion into informal and precarious employment since the arrival of increasing numbers of asylum seekers to Europe in 2015. Drawing upon rich qualitative data collected in Northern Italy, I explore pro-migrant actors' representations of RAS' informal/precarious working activities in confrontation with latter's insertion in subsidized integration programmes. Moving beyond perceptions of RAS as exploited workers, we highlight the temporal dimensions in the analysis of people's early labour market insertion. In doing so, I contribute to the debate of migrants' involvement into informal employment by underscoring the relevance of temporalities in explaining informal workers' decision-making. I then update the debate on migrants' access in the secondary labour market upon arrival in the host society. I conclude by discussing the outcomes of integration programmes and informal/precarious employment in terms of long-term integration.

### **Introduction**

The right to work with its corollaries (e.g., vocational training, recognition of qualifications and educational attainment, language courses) are fundamental to refugees' and asylum seekers' (RAS) social and economic integration into European societies upon arrival (Federico and Baglioni 2021; Kaida et al. 2021). RAS' timely economic integration hinges on the implementation of a series of measures aiming to facilitate newly arrived people's insertion into the (formal) labour market<sup>1</sup> through the cooperation of public and private organisations, as well as volunteers (Besic et al. 2021).

Integration programmes entail language tuition, guidance, access to preventive health, work placements and mentoring programmes. In this way, policy makers intend to combat barriers related to RAS' labour market insertion; either these concern individual characteristics (e.g., reasons to migration disconnected from job-seeking, limited knowledge of the host country labour market, lack of local language competences, lack of access to social networks, vulnerable health), or structural elements in the host society (e.g., policies regulating access

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<sup>1</sup> While refugees are guaranteed a series of entitlements in relation to their access to labour markets (e.g., integration programmes), asylum seekers are conferred fewer rights and experience different treatment depending on the country they enter, including time-ban limits to access formal employment (Federico and Baglioni 2021).

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

to asylum, recognition of qualifications and skills, dispersal policies, discrimination and hostility across locations) (Dimitriadis et al. 2021; Federico and Baglioni 2021).

A growing body of literature deals with the complexities of and the reasons for which integration programmes fail to successfully integrate people into the labour market, criticizing integration policies for reproducing structural inequalities and entrapping migrants in low-wage jobs in the long run (Lumley Sapanski 2019; Ortlieb et al. 2020; Battisti et al. 2019; Kaida et al. 2020; Brorström and Diedrich 2022). This is because integration programmes often entail lengthy vocational training and apprenticeship schemes, as well as low income for beneficiaries. Their success is further challenged by administrative procedures and continuous policy changes and complex laws. Yet, little is known about the early engagement of RAS in the secondary segment of the labour market characterised by informality and precariousness as an alternative to possible integration programmes. Indeed, an increasing number of studies indicate that both refugees and asylum seekers RAS are forced to access informal and precarious labour-intensive jobs in domestic work, transport, logistics, agriculture, construction and gig economy (e.g., couriers)<sup>2</sup> in order to get by upon arrival (Lintner and Elsen 2020; Van doorn et al. 2022; van Nierop et al. 2021). Despite a consolidated knowledge on the insertion of migrants in general at the bottom end of labour markets (Anderson 2010; Lewis et al. 2017; Piore 1979), the reasons for which RAS find themselves into informal and precarious jobs rather than accessing available integration programmes in the early period of their stay in the host society remain elusive in the aftermath of the arrival of increasing numbers of people asking for asylum in Europe since 2015.

In this article I investigate the early involvement of RAS in informal and precarious jobs in confrontation with insertion into institutional integration programmes by analysing the perspectives of civil society actors (CSAs)<sup>3</sup> who – professionally or voluntarily - assist migrants to integrate into the host society. Recent studies highlight the important role of non-state actors in enabling the insertion of RAS into the labour market. Several authors show that CSAs promote and implement integration programmes for RAS (Besic et al. 2021; Verwiebe et al. 2019; Vitus and Jarlby 2022), sometimes regardless of one's legal status (Dimitriadis and Ambrosini 2022), or in the absence of national policies; in the latter case, professionals are considered to do “integration work” that is a way to favour people's integration and combat irregular employment (Sivis 2020). Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have yet explored problematisations in the insertion of RAS into informal/precarious jobs from a civil society actors perspective.

The investigation of this question is of particular interest in Italy for several reasons. First, an unprecedented number of RAS arrived to Italy in the last decade where many of them remain

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the existence of a contractual agreement between registered workers and digital platform providers, it has been argued that labour platform formalize only some aspects of gig work, while perpetuating aspects that are common in informal work such as uncertainty on income, overtime, control over the labour process, opaque policies regarding the collaboration between workers and platforms, misclassification of workers' employment status (Stewart and Stanford 2017; Veen et al. 2020; Van Doorn, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> By Civil Society Actors (CSAs) I intend non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations, trade unions, religious institutions, social movements, activist networks and independent supporters.

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

entrapped due the closure of borders and rigidity in border controls across Europe since 2016 (XXX). Second, the rise of a xenophobic government in 2018 has introduced stricter policies in relation to the possibility that one enjoys international protection (legal status), thus making harder or impossible the access to formal employment in the long run; given the rigid connection between legal migrant status and job contract. These become of greater relevance in the aftermath of the resounding triumph for the far-right Fratelli d'Italia party in the Italian elections and the formation of a right-wing government in 2022. Third, migrant workers have traditionally found employment opportunities in the informal realm of the Italian economy that is particularly high at the European level (Çaro and Danaj 2022). Fourth, the study of this phenomenon from CSAs' perspectives becomes central as Italy's approach to integration is highly decentralized, in the sense that integration policies are predominantly based on the engagement of civil society actors (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021).

Moving beyond views seeing migrants as exploited workers, this article highlights the role of temporalities in shaping RAS' early insertion in informal/precarious jobs, thus contributing to the debate of migrant workers' engagement into the informal economy. By temporalities I mean different and multiple temporal dimensions such as speed, duration, tempos, rhythms, repetition that are crucial in understanding migration processes (Cwerner 2011). Temporal dimensions produced by asylum governance (e.g., time to examine asylum requests, timing of changes in laws defining rights to access legal status) interplay with people's subjective experience of time (e.g., how awaiting affects one's well-being) and temporal nature of one's needs and plans (e.g., send money back home, plans for future mobility). RAS' decision, therefore, to engage in informal/precarious jobs seems to be the outcome of such temporalities, which differs from the imagined temporariness of new migrants at the early stages of their immigration careers leading people into the secondary segment of the labour market (Piore 1979). This article also challenges negative views of informal/precarious work in terms of long term integration, as it claims that not only informal jobs can enable survival, but – in some cases – they can be the basis for economic integration; despite the impacts of informality and precariousness on people's employment and life (Anderson 2010).

This article is organised as follows. The next two sections introduce the main theoretical debates and concepts deployed in this study. After these, some information is provided in relation to the methods used to collect and analyse the empirical material, as well as the context of inquiry. The research findings are then presented, while the last section includes the main conclusions of this study and offers some reflections on the debate of refugee integration.

### **Theories on (migrant) workers' involvement in informal jobs and recent case studies on refugees and asylum seekers**

In this article I see informal economy as “all income-earning activities that are not regulated by the state in social environments where similar activities are regulated” (Castells and Portes 1989:12). People's participation in the informal economy has been often explained by adopting two contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, scholars sharing a structuralist

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

perspective claim that informal work entails forms of waged employment undertaken as a survival practice mostly by marginalized populations (Castells and Portes 1989; Slavnic 2010). On the other hand, the neoliberal thesis sustains that social actors' (mainly artisans and entrepreneurs) participation in the informal economy is the outcome of a rational choice to evade the restrictions imposed by burdensome states. According to the so-called 'exit option' or 'reinforcement' perspective (De Soto 1989), own-account informal workers exit voluntarily the formal economy in order to save money, time and effort of formal bureaucratic procedures.

Instead of seeing informal work as the result of deprivation or difficulty in accessing the formal economy, studies on the micro-level highlight that engagement in informal work can be connected to individuals' desire for autonomy and economic flexibility (Coletto and Bisschop 2017), and can be shaped by communitarian social relations in which individuals are embedded (Williams and Round 2010), professional and gender identities (Snyder 2004). When analysing migrant population's involvement in informality, several scholars added that informal work not only is opted as a means for survival, but it can be supplementary to insufficient income (Boels 2014). In addition, informal work can be the result of people's inability to meet formal work criteria (e.g., language skills, qualifications) and lack of citizenship rights. It can be also linked to the desire to escape feelings of being exploited (in the case of independent workers), or to meet gender conventions and expectations (e.g., men who do not want to lose the breadwinner status within the household or women who aspire to feel free and affirm their autonomy) (Vianello and Sacchetto 2016). Family plans and decision-making (e.g., when people engage in transnational work trips to increase incomes) can also be on the basis of migrants' involvement in informal economy (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009; Dimitriadis 2022a; 2022b).

In recent years, some studies have focused on the insertion of RAS in the informal economy, without though clearly entering the theoretical debate on informal economy as presented above. Most scholars suggest that RAS' engagement in informal jobs equates to exploitation. Failure to access the formal labour market or integration programmes forces asylum seekers to get informal jobs in order to secure an income and make ends meet (Simsek 2020; Sivis 2020; Lee et al. 2020; May, 2020; Pelek 2018). People's insertion into the informal sphere of the labour market is also the result of lack of access to legal status, either this concerns impossibility to renew one's stay permit or refusal of asylum request. Integration in the long-term is therefore challenged by informality, as the possibility to regularise is narrow or inexistent (May 2020). RAS' chances to integrate into the formal labour market become higher when local governments and civil society actors autonomously implement vocational training programmes in the absence of integration policies (Sivis 2020), or when people initiate informal economic entrepreneurial activities (Simsek 2020). However, informal entrepreneurship is often considered ineffective in enhancing integration in terms of relations with the state and the locals (Atasü-Topcuoğlu 2019).

Drawing upon the theoretical debate on informal economy and building upon previous cases studies, I adopt a temporal dimension for the analysis of the empirical material, as presented in the next section.

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

### **The concept of migrant temporalities**

According to Cwerner (2001), analytical focus on time enables better understandings of migration processes. Although migration has been traditionally studied as a spatial process in which time had an implicit role, there is a burgeoning literature that examines how migration process, personal experiences and socio-political constructions of (im)mobility entail a temporal dimension (Andersson 2014; Griffiths et al. 2013; King and Della Puppa 2020). In other words, migration is not only about moving from one place to another, but it concerns a set of temporalities (e.g., duration, frequency, rhythm, timing, speed and tempo) that the travel and transition from place X to Y, as well as a periods of stasis or settlement involve; “waiting, accelerating, queuing, being still are among the different experiences of the journey, although they are not, of course, experienced equally by all” (Griffiths et al. 2013: 11). For instance, states govern migration through temporal devices and rationalities such as censuses or qualification periods for citizenship. Time concerning spatial confinement, as well as speed of processing times are other examples of how national governments shape migration processes.

Recent studies on the experiences of asylum seekers who await the outcome of their applications and refugees in conditions of protracted displacement have argued that time can be used as a way to create borders excluding people from normative experiences of life (Fontanari 2018; Brun 2015; Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021). Time affects people’s lives as the duration of protracted displacement and the quality of waiting time can change personal plans and aspirations to move (Brun 2015). Similarly, processing times have a psychological effect on forced migrants in the sense that these create uncertainty about one’s future, which, in turn, can shape people’s actions (e.g., decision to have children, possibility to bridge with native people, willingness to ask help from state services) (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021).

Here I use a temporal dimension to analyse RAS’ insertion into the informal economy and precarious labour by entering the classical debate on migrants’ insertion in secondary labour markets too (Piore 1979; Anderson 2010). Migrants get low-paid 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous, demanding) by having low expectations in relation to the quality of their employment due to the perceived initial temporariness of their permanence abroad. They can hence see indecent work purely in instrumental terms: a means to rapidly gain higher incomes than those in their country of origin; a way to acquire better language skills that can increase their possibility to access better jobs or accommodation services; as something temporary before a better opportunity is presented.

Before moving to the analysis of empirical material, it is necessary to account for the methods that have been used to collect data, as well as to contextualize this case study.

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

### Methods

I draw on data collected within the WP5 of H2020 MAGYC project focusing on the barriers that RAS face to integrate in the host society and their practices to cope with overcome structural constraints. Empirical material was collected through 45 semi-structured interviews with service providers including: reception centre managers (6), social workers (9) and volunteers (11) in formal and informal reception facilities, professionals of Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) promoting integration programmes (9), employees of public employment centre (1) and labour agency (1), trade unionists (5) and lawyers with expertise in immigration (3). The important role of civil society in facilitating the settlement and integration of RAS in the last years (Dimitriadis et al. 2021; Glorius and Doornik 2020) led me to opt to explore RAS' engagement in informality and precariousness through the perspectives of service providers. The sampling was purposive. I initially contacted some representatives of pro-migrant organisations known to be active in providing services to RAS. These people, then, introduced me to other colleagues or people engaged with migrants. The selection of research participants was based on the heterogeneity of types of CSAs and their services towards migrants. In order to explore RAS' early insertion into the labour market, research participants were asked the following questions:

- What do you think about the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs in the early stage of their stay in Italy?
- What do you think about people's decision to access informal and/or precarious jobs when integration programmes are available?

Interviews were conducted from May 2019 to May 2021, and typically lasted between 40 minutes and two hours. Those conducted before March 2020 took place face to face in public spaces or at the venues of associations, whereas most of those done after the pandemic outbreak were carried out via video communications platforms or telephone. All participants were informed about the scope of the research and gave their consent to participation, audio registration and processing of personal data. The process of data collection and analysis was approved by the ethics committee of my University. Answers were anonymised, coded and analysed using QDA Miner that facilitates thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Data were collected through fieldwork that was carried out in the region of Lombardy in Northern Italy which is the locomotive of the Italian economy and where the majority of migrants are concentrated (almost 22% of migrant population living in Italy reside in Lombardy ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it))). In addition, 45.6% of asylum seekers and people under humanitarian protection reside in Northern Italy ([www.regioni.it](http://www.regioni.it))).

### Context of inquiry

The provision of services for the integration of (forced) migrants in Italy can be characterised as decentralised, as the national government defines the minimum standards and key

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

priorities of people's insertion in the society, whereas regional and local institutions promote and implement a series of measures and policies. Services for forced migrants' integration are often provided through third-sector organisations (Scholten et al., 2017). In this context, the goal is to promote inclusion and integration through access to the labour market, basic rights and welfare services (e.g., housing, healthcare), education, language courses and civic participation.

Labour market integration is implemented through job training and placement services offered to RAS with the aim to increase people's self-sufficiency (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021). Integration programmes consist in short-term internships (for 3 to 6 months) with an allowance ranging from 400 to 500 euro per month. Nowadays, these are subsidized with the use of state funds for refugees and holders of international protection status, while those available for asylum seekers and people outside the institutional system of reception through private funds (Bonizzoni and Dimitriadis 2021). The former enjoy unlimited access to the labour market, whereas asylum seekers are allowed to work only from the sixtieth day from the submission of the application for international protection (Federico and Baglioni 2021).

Since 2002, reception and integration of RAS in Italy has been provided within the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum seekers and Refugees) network run on a voluntary basis by municipalities with the possible engagement of third sector organisations (law 189/2002). People were offered accommodation in single unit apartments or group occupancy facilities and other services aimed at their integration. In dealing with increasing arrivals of people seeking international protection since 2015 and facing municipalities' reluctance to be involved in the reception of RAS, the Italian government introduced a complementary reception mechanism. The law n. 142/2015 provided the opening of emergency reception centres (CAS) for those who could not be hosted within SPRAR facilities upon arrival. These new structures are managed by various private actors, namely NGOs, hotel owners and other conventional employers, without the engagement of municipalities, and were designed to offer temporary stay. Yet, CAS became the main reception facilities hosting between 75 to 80 per cent of asylum seekers in Italy in the period 2014-2018 (Campo et al. 2020). Asylum seekers remain at CAS locations for many months or some years while waiting the decision of their asylum application (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021). Therefore, CAS reception facilities had been initially called to align the quality of services for RAS' basic needs and integration to those offer by the SPRAR system (then renamed SAI).

However, RAS' integration pathways were challenged due to the implementation of new restrictive asylum policies. The law no.132/2018 (the so-called Salvini decree or Security decree) excluded asylum seekers from ordinary reception facilities, thus making CAS the only structures that can host them until the final judgment upon their application is made. In other words, only people with a legal status can access the SAI network where they can stay for 6 months; or one year in a limited number of cases. The same amendment provided also reductions in the fares that cover asylum seekers' needs, namely from 35 to 20 euros per day, which additionally limited integration services offered previously in CAS centres, such as Italian language courses, orientation to the labour market and psychological and medical assistance. Being deprived of integration services while waiting the decision upon asylum requests, economic integration among refugees and holders of the international protection

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

status can be, therefore, hardly achieved through a six-month project offered by the SAI network (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021). Moreover, with the new amendment, the possibility to access and maintain the status of humanitarian protection was narrowed only to those facing serious health problems, coming from countries suffering natural disasters, or those who have been abused. People who are not able to prove that have suffered persecution, and come from unstable or non-democratic countries in which they are equally at risk are now excluded. Therefore, the number of refused asylum seekers was increased over the years (Dimitriadis and Ambrosini 2022), including both newly arrived people who could not access international protection and holders of international protection who failed to renew their status or convert it into stay permit for work reasons.

In the following lines, I explore how service providers represent RAS' involvement in the informal/precarious work in confrontation with integration programmes at the earlier stages of people's stay.

### Findings

Talking about RAS' insertion into informal and precarious jobs, the great majority of interviewees perceive that such employment indicates discrepancy from what is considered to be decent work, that is a productive work delivering a fair income, security and better prospects for social integration ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)). Such depictions were transversal across any economic sector to which participants referred to. This is to say that insertion into odd jobs, street commerce, cleaning services, construction, as well as platform economy (e.g., riders) was linked to poor working conditions and exploitation. However, there was a variety of answers in relation to the motivations of individual cases to exit or reject integration programmes and access informal economy. These are analysed in the following sections.

### Temporalities and the intersection between migrants' needs and personal characteristics

Some professionals talked about RAS' involvement in informal and precarious jobs by reflecting on RAS' individual characteristics and plans. In this respect, informality is often seen as the result of RAS' voluntary exit from or rejection of integration programmes:

There were people that asked you to change the hour of the course because they said "I have to go to sell my stuff"... Then, there're other people who abandon vocational training, because they find an odd job. This is let's say "I prefer the egg today, rather than the chicken tomorrow" (Director of a vocational training institution)

These jobs bear little fruit over the long-term, because people necessitate to renew their stay permit sooner or later, or how to say, to find a job that enables them to have a contract which, in turn, can allow them to access housing. Because, otherwise, you don't see your future in Italy (if RAS have an informal job). However, I have to say that there's a big flow of people into jobs as riders. It's not a exactly a regular job, because it's close to exploitation, to gang mastery

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

(caporalato). By becoming riders, these guys prefer gaining much more money compared to that in an integration programme, although an (integration) project is a bit more structured and leads to a more secure and durable outcome. (Reception centre manager n.3)

Underestimating the importance of vocational training and internships in the long-term integration process, opting for informal jobs is perceived as a choice that responds to present needs and jeopardises one's settlement. According to some interviewees, informal and precarious jobs by no means lead to the possibility to acquire skills, increase one's employability (and possibility to access the formal labour market) and maintain legal status. Due to the rigid connection between migrants' formal employment and legal status (Bonizzoni 2017; Dimitriadis 2018; 2022b), RAS' engagement in informality can result in irregularity of stay, which can put at risk people's plans to settle into the Italian society and contribute to further socioeconomic exclusion and insecurity (Anderson 2010). Instead, getting a job contract through an integration pathway suggested by professionals and being inserted into the formal labour market are perceived as practices oriented toward the future that can secure people's settlement. The second quote also places particular attention to the exploitative nature of digital platform jobs that are carried out in person (e.g., delivery services). As highlighted in recent studies, this kind of jobs are considered to entail poor working conditions (Van Doorn et al. 2022). Seeing the involvement in informality as a result of short-term planning of RAS' lives too, the following participant focus on some individual characteristics shaping decisions for the participation in informal and precarious jobs:

Many people are happy - in quotation marks - to be riders, because this (kind of job) is objectively one of the first keys to enter the world of work today in Italy. However, they (RAS) may have different skills that they could enhance by putting effort into and orienting themselves towards an integration path that is certainly longer (Social Worker n.4)

Engagement in precarious jobs is here perceived as an easy way to access the labour market, which indicates lack of patience, determination and long-term planning by the (potential) beneficiaries of integration projects. This recalls Verwiebe's and colleagues' (2019) study showing that self-discipline, patience and persistence are key elements for successful job research among refugees. Being inclined to gain money immediately upon arrival, RAS may not leverage their own skills and qualifications, thus undermining the success of integration into the host society. Reproducing a similar argumentation, another professional added a cultural dimension to the discussion:

I think this (rejection of integration programmes and involvement in informal economy) is partly due to a cultural dimension, it's not about what is right or wrong. When I started dealing with foreign people, I realized that the language codes were a bit different. I was talking about an integration programme or path, assuming that that stuff was understandable. But, we (Italian professionals) have this concept of the project (integration programme), that is the development of something that starts and gets to something ... instead, you often realize that you are dealing with people's needs that do not correspond to the necessary time (to develop a programme) (Reception centre manager n.3)

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

This quote suggests that rejection of structured integration programmes and insertion into the informal economy derive from a cultural discrepancy between professionals and RAS. Service providers may perceive that RAS find it difficult to comprehend the importance of education, vocational training and internship projects in terms of long-term integration. A similar finding was presented by Lumley-Sapanski and Dotsey (2022) who argued that local politicians used racialized preconceptions of African people and presumed lack of cultural compatibility to participate in structured integration paths proposed by the local municipality. Here, such an incompatibility is perceived to drive migrants into informal jobs. Once again people's integration paths are represented to be dependent on the ability to dedicate adequate time into vocational training schemes, as this is in contrast to the needs and plans of informal workers. In a similar vein, another professional added:

Overall, even if I generalize too much, it is also the issue of relation of trust (between professionals and beneficiaries); it's fragile. We're trying to build a relation of trust, in the sense that we (professionals and beneficiaries) are working to the same direction; that we have the same intentions. But, the other part calls our intentions into question. (Social worker n.3)

The temporal dimension is present in this narrative too. People's decision to access the informal economy may be due to the lack of trust between them and CSAs. Such a relation is hard to be built due to the limited time of interaction between professionals and RAS, mainly in the case of those who reside in SAI facilities.

All in all, criticizing RAS' involvement in informal and precarious jobs instead of integration programmes, the above research participants largely perceive that migrant workers' actions are dependent upon temporalities linked to the latter's individual characteristics and inherent in their plans. In the following section though, the analysis of the empirical material shows that RAS' temporalities are largely shaped by temporal dimensions produced by governments, institutions, and labour market structures.

### Temporal practices in governing asylum and temporalities in migratory trajectories

Previous studies have accounted for the impact of temporality on RAS' lives (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021; Fontanari 2018). Waiting time characterises the everyday life of asylum seekers who reside at CAS facilities (Fontanari 2018). Experiences of waiting result in a high degree of inactivity and uncertainty about one's future, thus leading to stress, disorientation, and a feeling of being out of place. Similarly, a six-month stay period at a SPRAR facility is also seen as too short to enable people to become financially independent, thus generating further hardships in relation to housing (e.g., homelessness) and leading to social marginalisation (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021).

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

According to interviewees, temporary structures are considered to shape people's insertion into the informal economy. In the words of a trade unionist who is engaged in programmes for the integration of asylum seekers:

The factor time is very important for asylum seekers. They have the necessity to be inserted into the labour market as soon as possible, otherwise the rate of abandonment (of integration programmes) risks of being extremely high. This is because either they decide to go to other countries or enter irregular employment. This is because they need to send money back home or, sometimes, to repay the debt that they have created in order to undertake the journey (to Europe). [...] Another thing we noticed is that the later you (professionals) propose a vocational training pathway, the higher is the probability that integration paths fail. This is because (people's) enthusiasm to put effort (into education or vocational training) goes drastically down. (Trade Unionist n.2)

In this quote, informal jobs are seen as the result of institutional failure to timely intervene by offering integration programmes to asylum seekers. Waiting time for replies to asylum requests may be too long (Fontanari 2018). Informal jobs can be thus opted by those who have to send money back to their families or repay the debt incurred to reach Europe (Piore 1979; Anderson 2010). Waiting time also shapes people's loss of desire and ability to dedicate efforts into a path that probably lead them to get a good job in the future. Distinction between refugees and asylum seekers when talking about informality is even more clearer in the account of the following participant:

Such a trajectory (get informal jobs) is pointless for those at SAI facilities, because they really lose time (when working in the informal economy). They are offered only six months of hospitality, in few cases one year. We're trying to make them understand the importance of undertaking a formal integration pathway and then doing an internship, even if this is not aimed at hiring. But, in any case, three months of internship is better for one's cv than working in the black market. If you work irregularly, you don't have the possibility to prove your skills, you cannot have a lease agreement. [...] As far as it concerns those living in CAS, we are less rigid, since everything is so precarious. They're people who have few probabilities to access the SAI system (by obtaining a refugee or international protection status): almost 10% of them. Most of them are destined to lose their stay permit and right to stay at institutional facilities. This (informal economy) can give them the possibility to put aside some money in order to survive when they exit reception facilities, to meet the expenses of a trip (Reception centre manager n.1)

This is a telling quote revealing how informal jobs are differently seen on the basis of one's migration trajectory. In other words, timing expressed as having access or not to a (more) permanent legal status and the possibility to access state funded subsidized jobs shape perceived outcomes of informal employment in terms of socio-economic integration. Instead, the precariousness of the waiting period for those staying at CAS reception facilities and low probabilities of people to access legal status due to the tightening of asylum laws lead CSAs to perceive informality as something that enable RAS to get by in the host society or activate new mobilities (Fontanari 2018; Sanò and Della Puppa 2021). However, such a distinction on the basis of one's legal status and stage inside the institutional reception system was not shared among all participants. In the words of two volunteers:

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

According to our researcher (person collaborating with the association), the probability of finding a job at the end of ten or so, or about a hundred hours of vocational training is very low; and this is known (among RAS). So, they (RAS) prefer a precarious activity that enables them to make ends meet and yet send 10 or 20 euro home. In my opinion, many of them are disheartened and disappointed due to long vocational training courses that we (association) suggest to them. Since the possibility to access international protection doesn't exist anymore, they're terrified and [...] opt to accept on-the-call jobs rather than an internship. (Volunteer n.8)

All these Decrees have increased precariousness without reducing the number of people who are present in the (Italian) territory, so these laws create precarious conditions for loads of guys who don't even know where to sleep... (Volunteer n.7)

Dedicating much time for an integration programme may be considered as too risky in terms of long-term employment. This implies that Italian labour market's limited capacity to offer (good) jobs constitutes a deterrent for investing resources into an integration programme. This is confirmed in a recent study claiming that the results of participation in vocational training offered through the SAI system in a prosperous Northern Italian city were rarely a permanent job (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski 2021). In addition, the implementation of restrictive asylum policies couples with the weak labour demand, thus pushing more people into poor jobs. Talking about RAS' insertion into the informal economy, another participant makes even more clear how the changes in asylum policies affect job opportunities and people's employment choices.

*We are now conducting an integration programme with 15 young people from CAS reception centres collaborating with a labour agency. Despite having found some companies available (to hire these people), we are dealing with the fact that they are all asylum seekers whose requests are in appeal process and they're waiting for the response to the appeal, so the companies halted: even though they have been available (to hire people), now they are taking a step back because they are afraid to invest in people to whom (legal status) may be denied in a few months and who therefore can no longer work. This is a tragedy I would say (Volunteer n.8)*

Apart from the duration of asylum procedures that is a barrier for potential employers to hire asylum seekers (Federico and Baglioni 2021), greater insecurity about the outcome on asylum requests leads to more a restricted pool of employers. The risk about the outcome of asylum decisions limit job opportunities of people who may potentially access legal status, thus making integration programmes less attractive to asylum seekers. Similarly, scepticism towards integration programmes and access into informal jobs can be common among holders of international protection whose legal status renewal is but certain.

Another participant's narrative resounds the idea that informal jobs may offer people the means to face uncertainty and precariousness at the present and at the future, regardless of their legal status:

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

We have different views (within the association) about this point (access to informal jobs). The service (I offer) to them (RAS), all those who have a regular job, is to help them for any problem they might have in relation to their job contracts. [...] But, I also tell the guys I assist that they can probably do any irregular job because it is better to have a black job than not to work, because, in any case, having money in their pockets possibly guarantees them to find a good place to sleep, to find other solutions in sight... (Lawyer n.3)

This quote suggests that informal employment not only is perceived as preferable to unemployment among RAS and a means to get by, but it can open up new opportunities in the future. For instance, financial capital accumulation may enable onward migration (Ahrens et al. 2016) or entrepreneurship (Bizri 2017; Kloosterman 2010) that offer better opportunities for integration. Although the latter option is often dependent upon one's economic position prior to the arrival into the host country (Simsek 2020), the former becomes possible through the intermediation of social networks (Ambrosini 2017). In the words of a professional:

They (RAS) often astonish us, because when the reception period ends for them, we realize that they have already organised their move in France to join a cousin of theirs who has already found for them an odd job. (Reception centre manager n.6)

All in all, most participants referred to male RAS when talking about integration programmes and precarious jobs, as the great majority of newly arrived people since 2015 were men. Yet, some respondents made reference to female RAS claiming that women's insertion into informal and precarious jobs and failure to access or complete integration programmes were also due to the gendered structure of integration measures and childcare responsibilities.

*Vocational training courses were not at all designed for female asylum seekers. There were training courses for electricians, for mechanics, for purely male jobs. Furthermore, the other difficulty is that they (women) often have to take care of the children and they do not even manage to have the time, the opportunity to go to school to learn Italian... Some of them occasionally find some odds jobs as cleaners. (Social worker n.6)*

A last factor shaping RAS' early labour market insertion is perceived to be the COVID-19 pandemic. This is represented by almost all research participants as a catalyst element for people's access to informal and precarious jobs, mainly as platform workers in the delivery sector. The following quote explains this trend:

Despite the pandemic, SAI projects or other (integration) projects had already been funded by private foundations, which allowed us to start paths (integration programmes). What we lack is companies (employers). Before the lockdown, it was somehow easier to present these projects to labour agencies, companies or firms; now, this is the hardest part (Employee in vocational training agency n.2)

Everything stopped: the internships were suspended, some of them started again in the following weeks, but at the end they were cancelled. None of the (integration) projects we had

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

activated as internships with hiring purposes was completed. Our labour agency partner said: "after the lockdown there will be nothing left of what was before". We start from this point trying to give back a minimum of this awareness to the beneficiaries. (Reception centre manager n.3)

Unfortunately, we saw many layoffs or layoffs benefit schemes (*Cassa Integrazione*). [...] This meant that their mood and expectations (of asylum seekers) regarding their proactive insertion as aware citizens dropped significantly. (Reception centre manager n.5)

As shown in recent research, potential employers for RAS became more cautious in their hiring decisions since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Besic et al. 2021). Success of integration programmes was undermined because of lockdowns and poor performance of local economies. Therefore, the timing of the pandemic seems to be determinant for RAS' early labour market insertion. Increasing insecurity among RAS led to setbacks in integration processes (Falkenhain et al 2021), thus paving the way for RAS' insertion into the informal economy.

### **Conclusions and Discussion: temporalities, RAS' early insertion in informal/precarious jobs and long term integration**

I have explored the perceptions of civil society actors in relation to refugees' and asylum seekers' early involvement into informal and precarious jobs. By adopting a temporal dimension in the analysis of primary collected data, I advance the theoretical debate on migrants' engagement into the informal economy on the one hand, and update the one on migrants' early insertion into the secondary labour market of European societies, on the other. I also discuss the result of integration programmes and informal/precarious jobs in terms of long-term integration.

Previous studies on RAS' engagement into the informal economy mainly represent RAS as exploited workers facing social exclusion due to the precariousness or lack of legal status, as well as lack of integration policies (Simsek 2020; Siviš 2020; Lee et al. 2020; May, 2020; Pelek 2018). In these studies, people are considered to fail to gain access to job opportunities in the formal realm of the economy as a result of a set of barriers in relation to RAS' personal characteristics, as well as institutional and legislative contexts. Instead, the perspectives of professionals and volunteers assisting newly arrived people in this research show that some RAS can opt to access informal and precarious jobs as a way to meet their actual economic needs or to sustain future projects. Such representations emerge despite the availability of integration programmes for RAS and regardless of the positioning (critical, tolerance or positive) of the interviewees towards informal and precarious jobs. The innovative element concerning the study of migrants' insertion into the informal economy is the temporal dimension. Involvement in 3D jobs seems to be shaped by temporalities inherent in asylum governance and border regimes, as well as people's trajectories and experiences. The implementation of stricter asylum policies, lack of institutional readiness to insert asylum seekers into the labour market, RAS' need to access income in the short run and mistrust in the efficiency of integration programmes at the long term shape RAS' early insertion in

## D5.6. Refugees and asylum seekers in informal and precarious jobs: the role of temporalities in the early labour market insertion from the professionals' and volunteers' perspectives

informal and precarious jobs. Low demand in the labour market and the emergence of exogenous factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic is another factor pushing people into the informal economy and undermining the credibility and success of integration programmes. All these temporal elements may be relevant for refugees too, that is about people with secure legal status. This challenges views connecting migrants' early insertion into the informal economy exclusively due to the absence of legal status.

The analysis of the empirical data also updates classical works on migrant temporalities and access in the secondary segment of the labour market (Piore 1979; Anderson 2010). Instead of seeing migrants' involvement in 3D jobs as the result of perceived temporariness of their permanence abroad, this can be considered as a way to protect themselves from future insecurity and further precariousness. In other words, instrumentalisation of precarious jobs is linked to low probabilities to access or renew legal status, perceived fruitlessness of integration programmes and low labour demand in the host society labour market.

In light of the above research results and theoretical contributions, some reflections follow in relation to RAS' early insertion in precarious jobs and long term integration. According to the view of some participants, integration programmes are considered the only way that may facilitate RAS integration in the long run. Insertion in vocational training and investment in language courses are factors that can enable people's successful settlement in the host society. Yet, this view is not shared by all interviewees. Instead of seeing programmes of labour market insertion as tools for integration, it is suggested that the production of temporal dimensions through asylum policies, institutional and labour market structures may make informal and precarious employment an option securing survival, and, in some cases, opening up opportunities for integration at the long term; in the host society or in a new country. Although this is considered less likely among people with precarious or without legal status, extraordinary amnesties – as the one promoted in Italy (Bonizzoni and Hajer 2022) – or the limited possibility to access regular status for refused asylum seekers (May 2020) may enable people to regularise and access better job opportunities in the future; despite the implications of informal and precarious jobs in workers' lives (XXX).

Both the debates on RAS' motivations for insertion into informal and precarious jobs in the early stage of their stay, and that on integration outcomes in the long run would benefit from an investigation of the perspectives of informal and precarious workers themselves and their plans, desires, aspirations, and integration trajectories. Future research should also investigate the relevance of RAS' subjective meanings associated to the insertion of RAS in the informal economy highlighted in previous research (e.g., gender conventions, desire for autonomy, social relations). Finally, studies on the relation between professionals and refugees in relation to the former's insertion into jobs would enable better understandings in the local turn.

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