



World Refugee Day / Incubator Villages and Universal Basic Employment for Refugees?

L.S.,

Preventing refugee arrivals seems to be a trend in Europe's politics and many of its leaders are currently celebrating lower numbers of newcomers as victories. Compared to 2017, in the first half of 2018, the amount of refugees and migrants reaching Europe by sea dropped by more than [50%](#). Furthermore, starting from August, the right to family reunification for subsidiary status holders in Germany will be maximized to [1000](#) people per month, meaning that family members – depending on the estimate – may on average have to wait between [2.5](#) and [12.5](#) years before they can live together again. With Europe proclaiming to be an open society and with an unchanged high number of refugees worldwide, the present situation – speaking from a moral and humanitarian point of view – is shameful and catastrophic for refugees seeking asylum, it therefore cannot remain as it is. However, in order to solve the existing objections, a number of issues must be addressed.

The political reality is that member states can actually not be forced to accept refugees and that, in the current system, refugees cannot be effectively obliged to settle in countries where they do not want to go. In practice, this means that within the EU the allocation of refugees has been very unequal and that the “burden” is almost entirely on a few preferred rich destination countries where everyone wants to reside and a few countries with an external EU sea border like Spain, Italy and Greece where at the moment nearly everyone enters the continent (and where refugees often get stuck and live in fully [inacceptable](#) conditions).

Most refugees [lack the skills](#) to immediately join the European labor force. Thus, for an average of [5 years](#) upon their arrival to Europe, they are unemployed and fully dependent on social benefits. Yet, this is not caused by an absence of willingness to work. Many refugees have high debts due to (borrowed) payments to human traffickers and till reunification, their families abroad often greatly depend on their remittances. This means that most refugees in Europe are highly motivated to seek employment and earn an income.

Since general wage levels [vary](#) among EU members, it is logical that nearly all refugees currently target the most prosperous countries – with high income potential – as their preferred destination to live. But, these countries – not entirely coincidental – also typically have the best developed [welfare systems](#) and offer the highest benefits. This situation leads to **two undesirable consequences**. Firstly, one has to realize that free movement of citizens inside of the European Union is not as free as it may be advertised. Despite EU citizens being allowed to work in any EU member state, they are initially only entitled to unemployment and welfare benefits in the country of their origin. In practice this means that if a person does not straightaway find a job and housing in another EU country and has no other source of income, he or she cannot move there. Since social security levels substantially [differ](#) among member states, welfare systems of countries with higher standards are this way protected from attracting “free riders” from other EU countries. However, since refugees – despite lacking the skills needed to enter the labor market – in practice often get the opportunity to – welfare supported – live, work and integrate in the “prosperous country of their choice”, many **refugees become privileged over European citizens**. Secondly, from a macro EU perspective and due to the high living standards at the preferred destinations of refugees, their **integration costs are often maximized instead of minimized**.

Addressing these issues, Refival proposes to implement two of its conceptual frameworks. The first solution offered is to create [Incubator Villages](#) in low cost rural areas of Europe where, using an Internet based [Inclusion Sourcing](#) approach, refugees can be prepared for and connected to the European labor market ([or](#) for the future labor market in their country of origin). The second recommendation is to replace welfare payments to refugees by [Universal Basic Employment](#) (UBE) in order to optimize the contribution of refugees to their hosting society and speed-up their integration. By implementing these two schemes, the solidarity between refugees and their hosts can be expected to increase reciprocally.

Compared to cities, rural areas are usually low-cost and with ample space. Mechanization of agriculture and a lack of non-agricultural job opportunities have lead to strong out-migration of young people over time and have resulted in [demographic](#) ageing of the remaining population. However, with collaboration tools available and with the amount of Internet based jobs [growing](#), the possibility to structurally revitalize countryside areas by enabling remote working there, has meanwhile been established.

Rural areas therefore offer the chance to allocate urban welfare funds for refugees differently. More precisely, by offering voluntary relocation to the countryside to refugees, the difference between urban and rural living cost may be invested in their education, [remote apprenticeship](#) programs and other types of skills development. Besides, the countryside offers better quality (more spacious, affordable and less stressful) conditions for living and family reunification, which potentially strongly increases the refugees' well-being. Finally, because of the absence of larger groups of compatriots, there is no possibility for refugees to establish parallel societies; villages offer a more [direct interaction](#) with the local European culture, which in turn speeds-up refugee integration.

Refival estimates that currently [80%](#) of the refugees in Europe reside in high living-cost urban locations. The refugees' assumption is often that connecting to their compatriots' network will give them rapid access to employment, but instead statistics unfortunately show very [high welfare](#) reliance levels. Depending on the rural locations and EU countries selected to establish [Incubator Villages](#), vast savings are achievable based on cost differences between urban versus rural life-style and geographical location. Refival therefore expects that implementing its approach would be much more cost effective than the currently applied one and would substantially speed-up refugee integration and the refugees' access to the labor market. In this way, there is a clear win-win for all stakeholders involved.

Optimally, funding of the envisioned incubator villages for refugees should be a common European responsibility. This would share the financial burden of refugee integration (or of the preparation cost for their return) much more equally among member states. Along with this, it would finance the revitalization of the European countryside – Europe's weakest economical area. Besides reallocation of funding and settlement of refugees, a structural approach to relocation of skills developing education and Internet based jobs to rural areas is needed. This is exactly what Refival targets to achieve with its [Inclusion Sourcing](#) proposition and where it is looking for involvement of the private sector.

In Refival's opinion and separate from the above incubation process, receiving welfare is probably not the best way to generate reciprocal acceptance between "**them**" (refugees) and "**us**" (local community). Integration should be based on mutual understanding and on equal social participation of refugees in the receiving communities. Welfare dependency easily induces an atmosphere of inequality with providers on one side and debtors on the other. Reducing such imbalance is not only important in relation to refugees. In the near future, anyone may face a very similar situation by becoming unemployed due to the 4th industrial revolution's [robotization](#). To address this issue, Refival developed and proposes to implement [Universal Basic Employment](#) (UBE), a conceptual framework to replace social benefits (or in other cases Universal Basic Income (UBI) payments) by a guaranteed minimum wage.

UBE's principle idea is [to redefine](#) the term "work". Instead of narrowly using this term for employment which is paid (paid job), Refival believes that every positive contribution to society is and should be considered valuable and to be remunerated. With UBE, compensation can be earned regardless of whether the executed task is currently classified as a "paid job", volunteering, care for children or elderly, getting educated and much more. In case of incubator villages, Refival believes that, besides the above involvement, paying refugees a minimum wage will give them agency and that this will substantially speed-up their integration as well as their connection to the labor market and the communities they live in. Being properly connected, they can then continue to grow further, achieve higher income levels, and become regular tax-payers.

UBE should not be confused with public work schemes as imposed on unemployed in some [countries](#). Refival's concept is to supply a guaranteed universal minimum wage in exchange for one's freely chosen contribution(s) to the well-being of the society and its members. Instead of "just" supplying income – as Universal Basic Income (UBI) proposes – the task of society would – in Refival's opinion – be to define and generate a sufficiently wide and optimized spectrum of engagement opportunities (= a mix of regular jobs, volunteering and skill development types of tasks). As a result, the value of contributing and belonging to one's community should be reestablished. This way, people will be able to freely participate in the economic and/or social future of their society and, at the same time, maximize their "contribution satisfaction" and self-fulfillment.

In Refival's incubation proposal, refugees **would be treated fully equal to European citizens** in regard to their freedom of movement. As soon as they can find employment and housing elsewhere and no longer depend on receiving social benefits, they would be totally free to resettle in any country in the European Union. By then the countryside should have been vitalized enough to be able to fill-in the open positions they leave, either with other refugees or with locals. However, it can be expected that not everyone who acquired skills and got integrated will leave rural areas for urban jobs. If life-quality in the countryside shows to be a [positive experience](#), many will likely want to stay and work remotely from rural areas. In this way the countryside could be revitalized structurally.

For Refival's mission to succeed, cooperation between refugee families, welcoming rural communities, educational institutions and employers from the private and/or public sector is needed. Ideally, such partnerships should be funded by a European scheme for refugee assistance to which all EU member states contribute. This way refugee support and eventual integration can be humanely managed and the available synergy with European interests fully exploited. [Wir schaffen das!](#) will then become an achievement instead of the fear of insecurity.

Regardless of supportive feedback and a high level of positive interest, Refival has, being a one-man self-financed initiative and working in the current political climate of Europe, so far failed to bring the required participants together in a pilot-project. Therefore, unfortunately, it is forced to put its activities on hold at present, until external funding is realized. Refival's current legacy is three years of concept development and research, with [results](#) of which I hope that – looking at issues Europe faces and cannot escape from – they will be applied soon. For the moment, I thank everyone for their interest and feedback. I especially want to thank Éva K. Déli, Barbara Guttman and Vesna Strika for their relentless editorial support. Personally, I will in the interim shift focus and undertake additional employment or project challenges; if you are aware of any [profile](#) matching opportunities, please let me know.

Kind Regards,

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Further Documentation