

# Labour Market Integration of Status Holders in Amsterdam

## —Challenges Faced by Caseworkers to Integrate Status Holders into Labour Market

Ali Chakari

University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, Netherlands  
Email: alichakari1@gmail.com

**How to cite this paper:** Chakari, A. (2022). Labour Market Integration of Status Holders in Amsterdam. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 10, 1867-1884. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2022.104096>

**Received:** May 26, 2022

**Accepted:** July 24, 2022

**Published:** July 27, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

### Abstract

There has been a lot of scholarly work on the role of frontline workers in fostering labour market integration of status holders. The challenges and dilemmas newcomers and caseworkers face are also discussed comprehensively. However, there is still a need to focus on the obstacles that caseworkers are facing during the coaching of status holders towards labour market integration. This article is meant to find out the challenges that caseworkers are facing during the coaching of status holders towards labour market integration. It mainly focuses on the challenges that are primarily caused by the participation law that caseworkers have to implement. On the one hand, the participation law demands caseworkers to help status holders to labour market integration. Whereas, on the other hand, the law indirectly demotivates status holders to accept a job. The findings show that the participation law makes it difficult for caseworkers to achieve their goals. For this article, I have interviewed 26 caseworkers to collect data. This is one-third of the caseworkers for status holders in the City of Amsterdam. The caseworkers were selected from all the seven districts of Amsterdam and they were from different age groups (25 to 65). In addition, I have carried out 15 participatory observations with the focus on how caseworkers interact, motivate and deal with their clients as far as labour market integration is concerned.

### Keywords

Refugees, Status Holders, Labour Market Integration, Caseworkers, Frontline Workers, Dutch Participation Law

---

## 1. Introduction

Western countries have experienced increasing amounts of applications for asy-

lum in recent years. Recent research indicates that more than 65 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide (Welch, 2017) in 2015 alone more than 1 million (Badenoch & Clark, 2017). It means nearly one out of every 100 people in the world is currently displaced from their homes. This displacement poses a serious challenge to the host countries as they need to be prepared for a relatively long if not permanent presence of the immigrants (Scholten, Baggerman, Delouche, Kampen, Wolf, & Ypma, 2017). Newcomers need housing, education, healthcare and employment. Once legislation regarding the above facilities occurs, frontline workers become one of the most important players, as they have to execute the law (Espersson & Westrup, 2019). In other words, caseworkers are the first frontline workers who have to provide emotional and practical support to newcomers (Robinson, 2014).

The integration process of newcomers is not an easy task; it is difficult, challenging and puzzling for policymakers, frontline workers and newcomers themselves (George, 2012). Labour market integration is considered one of the most crucial and challenging tasks that need to be done after the arrival of refugees in the host countries. Caseworkers are playing a key role in order to accomplish this complicated process successfully and effectively (Winter, 2005; Duncan, Shepherd, & Symonds, 2010).

A lot of important work is published on different challenges and obstacles that caseworkers face (Bloch, 2004; Desiderio, 2016; Zetter & Ruauadel, 2018; Sigona, 2005; Tilly, 1998; Stadler, 2016; Valtonen, 2016; Duncan, Shepherd, & Symonds, 2010; Esses & Hamilton, 2017). Language barrier for instance makes communication very difficult. Certainly, it is difficult for status holders to adopt the new norms of the host countries as they face barriers like: new language, different culture and new environment with a dissimilar political and welfare system in comparison to their homeland (Ivry, 1992; Shaw, 2014). There are also scholarly suggestions and recommendations available on how to deal with these problems. For instance, the national and local governments, the companies hiring refugees and all other actors who are involved in the process of labour market integration of refugees need to demonstrate understanding, adopt changes and be aware of intercultural differences. These are important elements for facilitating labour market integration of refugees (Badenoch & Clark, 2017; Mikkel & Mattia, 2017; Büchel & Frick, 2005; Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010; Heckmann, 2008; Józsa, 2015).

A lot of scholarly work is done on what challenges caseworkers and status holders are facing as far as economic integration is concerned. There is still a need to focus on the importance of labour market integration of status holders, it is necessary to focus on how the relevant legislation, the Participation law, impedes or assists caseworkers to enhance this integration. As a result, caseworkers find themselves in a problematic situation. This leads us to the main question of this article. How does the participation law hinder or support the work of caseworkers as far as labour market integration of status holders is con-

cerned? Examining the objectives of the participation law, I develop the theoretical framework of this article and relate it to “impossible situation”, a concept used by [Zacka \(2017\)](#).

## 2. Labour Market Integration in Participation Law

What does the participation law demand?

The participation law of the municipality of Amsterdam aims to assist status holders to integrate in the society as soon as possible. It supports status holders through an intensive, personal and integral approach. The emphasis is on intensive coaching towards work and civic integration. The municipality of Amsterdam aims to provide status holders a place in the society as soon as possible (6 - 12 months). This mainly includes labour market integration and advising on language course. The municipality of Amsterdam helps status holders to participate actively in the society. For instance, it advises status holders on language courses and motivates them to start as soon as possible. The municipality of Amsterdam also provides help as far as finding a job and/or study is concerned. In this case, the municipality hires caseworkers and job-hunters to accelerate this process with the aim to pave the way for labour market integration. In order to implement the participation law, caseworkers have to meet each status holder at least once a month. In such meetings, caseworkers try to gain information about study, background, work experience and qualities of the status holders, through carrying out profound conversations. Accordingly, caseworkers develop action plan, which mainly includes advice on language courses and employment. Caseworkers also ask job-hunters to help status holders to find a job. Caseworkers and/or job-hunters for instance, accompany the status holders while visiting companies and organizations in order to help them with finding a job, appropriate training or study.

The Amsterdam integration policy is meant to be inclusive and wide-ranging, it demands from individuals to be active in numerous aspects and as soon as possible. [Vasta \(2007\)](#) states that the Dutch integration policies are very encompassing as these policies demand from individuals to be active in more aspects of life simultaneously. Examples of such policies, as mentioned above, are mandatory language courses, active participation in the society (work and study).

### Context of the covenant

The Mayor, city council members and all the parties involved signed the covenant of the Municipality of Amsterdam in May 2015. The covenant is composed of a collective approach in cooperation with other partners, namely: ministries, universities, language schools, job centres, immigration office etc. It has been decades that immigrants are coming to the Netherlands for different reasons such as security, peace and freedom. They leave their country because of war, oppression and civil war. At their arrival in the Netherlands, they have to wait in refugee camps for a residence permit. The city of Amsterdam welcomes

approximately 2400 status holders each year. Helping status holders to become financially independent and providing language courses are the two important objectives of the municipality of Amsterdam. All the parties involved are committed to cooperate and assist status holders to build their career.

To sum up, the participation law in Amsterdam demands rapid and active engagement of status holders in the society. The focus lies on labour market integration of status holders within 6 to 12 months after obtaining their status. Caseworkers, in this case, play a crucial role as they are asked to implement the participation law and achieve its goals. While the participation law flags up the importance of quick labour market integration of status holders, it might (indirectly) impede the whole process of labour market integration. The participation law in some way hinders labour market integration of status holders because it provides or supports facilities that are very attractive to status holders. When a status holder decides to work, then he will lose those facilities or he may possibly use them partially. For instance, a status holder who receives social welfare benefits is automatically eligible for housing benefits, healthcare benefits and transportation costs (which is a huge amount of money per month). The moment a status holder decides to work, he either loses all these attractive facilities, or may possibly have the right to use them partially.

Lipsky (1980) in his theory of street-level bureaucracy emphasizes the role of the caseworkers as their decisions and actions become the policy of the government agency they work for. This is because caseworkers translate the theory (law) into practice (implementation). Street-level bureaucrats make policy since they can exercise discretion by interpreting legislation related to integration. It is extremely important to realize that street-level bureaucrats can often be in conflict or have standpoints that differ from both the managers they work under and the organization they work for. Both Lipsky and Zacka argue that the goals caseworkers inherit are uncertain, unpredictable and conflicting; characteristics that force caseworkers to interpret the policies and go beyond it. Caseworkers, in fact, have no other option than giving their own interpretation of policies. The action of a street-level bureaucrat is made by the nature of his work and circumstances in which he functions. A street-level bureaucrat frequently develops routine and interpretation in order to reduce complexity. In this way, a street-level bureaucrat can make policy, for instance, providing fast services to some status holders (who are motivated and willing to work) and delaying others (who are not motivated to accept a job). Lipsky and Zacka agree that caseworkers use their own judgment and interpretation while implementing directives.

The participation law demands from caseworkers to help status holders in their labour market integration process. At the same time, the participation law provides or supports attractive facilities. Interesting to find out whether these facilities make it problematic for caseworkers to achieve this goal. In other words, does the participation law contradict its objectives? In order to examine how such incompatible, conflicting and contradicting objectives occur in practice, I

refer to “impossible situation” used by Zacka (2017). “Impossible situation” will help us to understand how the participation law in Amsterdam creates obstacles for caseworkers to achieve their goals. It is important to mention that the phrase “impossible situation” is interpreted in different ways. Zacka (2015) for instance states that there are varieties of impossible situations. It can literally refer to a situation where 1) someone is asked to perform an action, which he or she cannot do, 2) asked to attain objectives that are unattainable, 3) asked to work towards two or more objectives that are incompatible. Referring to another definition of “impossible situation”, Zacka says:

*“This brings us to yet another--perhaps the most common--way in which the phrase appears in ordinary discourse. ‘Impossible situation’ is often used as a shorthand for a kind of ‘incongruous situation’ a situation where agents have to contend with several conflicting practical demands...” Zacka (2015: pp. 12-13).*

In this article, when I use “impossible situation” I refer to incongruous, odd, strange, conflicting and contradicting situations. Plainly, a situation in which an agent is asked to attain goals that are conflicting and problematic in practice, problematic due to contradiction and conflict in directives of the organisation. Zacka (2017) argues that “impossible situations” come into existence when management demands conflicting objectives from frontline workers. Zacka believes that “impossible situation” involves a special form of impossibility. It does not necessarily refer to the familiar idea of unattainability, incompatibility or irreconcilability. It arises when frontline workers are asked to develop and maintain a particular professional identity. While, on the other hand, they are required to undertake actions that are not in line with such an identity. Such situations come into existence when hard and soft tools of management go in conflicting directions. This phrase is also used to describe the situation of an agent who is willing to fulfill his duties but is obliged to undertake an action that is out of line with the nature of his role. Zacka adds that “impossible situation” also threatens the individual moral of caseworkers and in the end may lead to its breakdown. Plainly, such situations arise when caseworkers become unable to act in ways they think are justified. Impossible situations force caseworkers to take actions that are not reconcilable with their role. As a result, they experience conflict within themselves, which then threatens their sense of moral integrity. Therefore, caseworkers either quit, or object by conveying their message to their superiors or by showing loyalty what Zacka calls deception of themselves. In the next section, I will examine how caseworkers react when their moral integrity is threatened.

How do frontline workers deal with “impossible situation”?

Zacka (2017) describes different ways how frontline workers deal with such a situation. 1) Exit; Zacka believes that some caseworkers quit their jobs either due to a burnout or the impossibility of fulfilling their task. 2) Voice, those caseworkers who refuse to quit; they object and try to communicate the nature of their problems with their superiors, in the hope to see structural reform. 3)

Loyalty, here caseworkers decide to stay in the organisation and try to face up to the impossible situation. Loyalty can have a variety of flavors, some caseworkers refuse to compromise on their moral integrity and stay righteous and true to themselves and act against all odds. Some caseworkers respond to impossible situation by becoming steadfast and unwavering, and some others try to convince themselves that impossible situations are part of the job, which Zacka calls self-deception. It is important to note that self-deception does not mean that caseworks will not keep functioning.

Caseworkers, who do not exit, adopt one of the following pathology to deal with the directives of the organisation. Zacka believes that caseworkers do not function as a machine; they make rational choices. They are moral agents and can exercise their will and choice in fulfilling their duties. Therefore, caseworkers can embrace reductive and pathological moral dispositions. In this case, caseworkers adopt one of the following three pathological types of behavior to deal with their clients. 1) Indifference, here caseworkers rely on hierarchical directives and do not take into account the differences between clients. 2) Care giving, it refers to perception of responsibilities in which clients need more attention and clients are no longer cases but individuals who are treated with the compassion and respect they deserve. The risk here is the fact that some clients might use this situation in a way of “gaming the system”. It may also pave the way for them to present themselves in the most unfavorable and helpless manner (unintentionally). 3) Enforcement, frontline workers are responsible for upholding and implementing the law and must do their best to enforce it strictly when needed. Enforcement helps frontline workers to take their job seriously despite having face-to-face and friendly contact with their clients. Enforcement is necessary as it discourages clients to abuse the system. This section constructs a crucial part of this article. As mentioned earlier, helping status holders to integrate in the labour market is one the main objectives that caseworkers have to achieve. In order to achieve this goal caseworkers exercise their discretion and use their choice to fulfill their duties. More plainly, caseworkers adopt reductive and pathological moral dispositions in order to deal with status holders. Therefore, some caseworkers become “caregivers” others “enforcers” and some remain “indifferent”. I will explain in the later (results) section how this in practice works.

### 3. Methods

After having introduced the theoretical framework of this study, I will discuss the methodology that is used for this article. In this article, I aim to answer the following research question *To what extent does the participation law hinder or support the work of caseworkers as far as labour market integration of status holder is concerned?* I have interviewed 26 caseworkers to collect data. In addition, I have also carried out 15 participatory observations with the focus on how caseworkers interact, motivate and deal with their clients as far as labour market integration is concerned. Caseworkers are one of the most important respon-

dents as they are directly, intensively and frequently in touch with status holders. They have enough knowledge of the topic, and interviews are one of the powerful methods to study and analyse that knowledge. I developed open-ended questions to gain more information on the topic. Open-ended questions also enabled me to ask respondents to elaborate more on their points. It helped me to gain detailed information about how caseworkers assisted status holders, which strategies they used and how caseworkers experienced the implementation of the participation law. By asking open-ended questions, I did not restrict the respondents to few options. I gave them the opportunity to share their thoughts on the challenges they faced, while implementing the participation law. Furthermore, an interview is a crucial method to collect data because:

- It is a direct method of enquiry, one is directly in touch with the respondent;
- An interview is not restricted to spoken words, but one can also notice facial expression, gesture and voice intonations of the interviewee;
- In an interview one can collect data extensively and inclusively;
- Information collected in an interview is reliable as it is collected personally, face to face;
- An interview helps to study abstract factors like attitude, feeling, experience and views;
- An interview helps you to ask counter questions and gain deep information.

I used three methods to recruit caseworkers in Amsterdam. First, I approached caseworkers whom I knew, through email and face-to-face contact. I informed them about the research and asked them whether they would like to participate. Some caseworkers agreed to participate; others could not due to lack of time. Second, I sent an email to all caseworkers in different districts of Amsterdam, north, south, east and west, whom I did not know, to give them equal chance to participate. I deliberately chose different districts to find out whether caseworkers, working in different districts, experience the implementation law differently. Third, I have also used snowball method to recruit respondents by asking caseworkers to introduce me to a potential candidate. 30 out of 75 caseworkers wanted to participate and I selected respondents from different districts, between 25 and 65 years old with work experience from 6 months to 4 years, I have deliberately interviewed caseworkers from different age groups. The aim was to find out whether young caseworkers with less experience think differently about the challenges of labour market integration of status holders as young caseworkers come with fresh perspectives. Finally, I managed to interview 26 caseworkers, 4 caseworkers were unable to take part due to some reasons.

Furthermore, the interviews were carried out in the Dutch language and they took 30 to 45 minutes; each observation lasted approximately 1 hour. In the observations, I focused on the challenges that caseworkers were facing. I also paid attention how caseworkers were dealing with status holders who were not willing to work. In the interviews, caseworkers were asked to share their experience as far as the implementation of participation law was concerned with a specific

focus on labour market integration.

I present the results in three sections. First, what motivates caseworkers to coach status holders? The answer to this question will provide information about the intention, dedication and commitment of caseworkers regarding the implementation of the participation law. Second, how do caseworkers experience the implementation of the participation law? The answers of caseworkers will unveil the challenges they are facing due to the participation law. Third, how do caseworkers deal with status holders who are not willing to work? The answer to this question will help me to gain more information on the strategies that caseworkers are using to implement the participation law. Based on this, I will be able to answer the main question of this article.

## 4. Results

In the interviews with caseworkers, the focus lay on how the participation law and the facilities it provides, support or demotivate status holders to accept a job. In the coming section, I will examine how the caseworkers experienced the implementation of the participation law, and how they dealt with it.

### **Motivation of caseworkers**

It is important to find out what motivates caseworkers to help status holders. This will enable me to understand how dedicated caseworkers are. It is crucial to know about their commitment, as it will help me to know that caseworkers are willing to implement the participation law. Yet, there might be some other factors, which either hinder or assist caseworkers to attain the objectives of the participation law. This is in line with Zacka's "impossible situations" as he does not object the intention of the caseworkers but refers to the contradicting and conflicting objectives.

Respondents replied differently to the question why they have chosen this job. This section is important as it indicates that caseworkers are determined and dedicated to help status holders.

Few respondents referred to their own story as caseworkers. One of them said that she was a status holder a few years ago. She did her best and as a result, she is currently working as a caseworker at the municipality of Amsterdam. She uses her own story and experience to inspire status holders to participate actively in the society.

*"I have been a status holder myself, now I work as caseworker and help status holders in their integration process. I want to inspire them and set a good example"* (K, 2020).

Some respondents were interested in learning about different people from different backgrounds. These caseworkers said that they have empathy with status holders and wanted to assist them. They aimed to pave the way for status holders to become self-sufficient.

*"I am interested to learn about different cultures. It appeals to me to help people who are in need. I have empathy with this group, I want to help them and*



*I want them to become independent” (M, 2020).*

Some caseworkers referred to the opportunities that existed for the status holders. These caseworkers wanted to coach status holders and enable them to use these chances effectively as they did not exist decades ago.

*“I am interested to help this group because they are vulnerable. They get opportunities to participate and I can help them to use these opportunities positively and establish their career. It is important to supervise them in this whole process because these facilities did not exist decades ago” (S, 2020).*

These examples indicate that all caseworkers are motivated and willing to help status holders to become (financially) independent, to use the opportunities positively and to establish their careers. All caseworkers were committed to help status holders. They had different reasons; few caseworkers were helping status holders because they have been part of the same process themselves. They wanted to use their story to motivate status holders. Some caseworkers were assisting status holders because they were interested in their culture and background. Some caseworkers stated that there are many opportunities for status holders, which did not exist decades ago. These caseworkers wanted to help status holders to use these opportunities and build their career.

#### **Participation law, caseworkers and the challenges**

All the respondents, 26 out of 26, 100%, argued that the participation law creates obstacles for their work and demotivates status holders to accept a job. The interviews indicated that caseworkers find the facilities provided by the current system too attractive and long lasting, which made it difficult for caseworkers to achieve their goals.

Twenty three out of twenty six (23 out of 26, 88%) of the respondents stated that work does not lead to financial progress directly.

*“...there are different obstacles that make it difficult for status holders not to find or accept a job...not experiencing financial progress directly demotivates status holders to accept a job.” (B, 2020).*

Five out of twenty six (5 out of 26, 19%) of respondents said that work might lead to financial growth in the long run. Because status holders get familiar with the system, gain work experience and come across new opportunities, this refers especially to status holders who are highly educated.

Twenty three out of twenty six (23 out of 26, 88%) of respondents blamed the participation law. In this case, when status holders decide to work, they lose some important facilities like housing and healthcare allowances, which is a huge amount of money (average 300 euro) per month. When a status holder gets a fulltime job then he does not receive these facilities. These facilities will be either removed completely or minimized partially.

*“The current social welfare system is a kind of punishment for status holders who decide to work. They lose some attractive facilities like housing and healthcare allowances. It demotivates them to accept a job, and makes our work much more difficult” (A, 2020).*

Few respondents stated that highly educated status holders responded differently to the risk of losing benefits. They accept a job even if they lose some facilities probably because they expect this to be a temporary situation, after which they will earn more money.

Eighteen out of twenty six (18 out of 26, 69%) of respondents argued that status holders who receive social welfare benefits feel more secure. They are confident because they will not lose social benefits, whereas there is less certainty as far as jobs are concerned. One might lose his job due to several reasons. This is also one of the reasons, which make it difficult for caseworkers to motivate status holders to take distance from social welfare benefits. Managing a lot of paperwork (especially with taxation office) is another reason why status holders are hesitating to accept a job.

*“There is more certainty in social welfare benefits than work, when a status holder decides to start work then he is automatically surrounded by a lot of paperwork, this is demotivating”* (M, 2020).

Twenty four out of twenty six (24 out of 26, 92%) of the respondents also find it problematic that social welfare benefits are very long lasting. One can use it for a very long period, for many years. In other words, social welfare benefits do not end automatically after a few months or after a year. Social welfare benefits are attractive and long lasting, which make it tough for caseworkers to disengage status holders from it. Whereas job offers are temporary and lead to uncertainty.

*“Status holders can use social welfare benefits and other facilities for a long period of time, these facilities are too attractive and make it difficult for us to achieve our objectives. It is important to be careful with social benefits and other facilities. If we make them too attractive then we make work less attractive”* (S, 2020).

The interviews clearly indicate that the participation law makes it difficult for caseworkers to achieve their goals. The fact that social welfare benefits provide certainty, and the fact the work is surrounded by a lot of paperwork discourage status holders to accept a job.

### **Caseworkers dealing with the participation law**

The previous section indicated that caseworkers struggle to achieve the objectives of the participation law. In this section, I will examine how caseworkers deal with this problem. Which strategies they use to make their objectives feasible and how effective these approaches are. I present some examples of how respondents have replied.

Status holders, who are motivated to work, gain more attention from their caseworkers. Some caseworkers focused only on status holders, who were willing to work, to meet their targets (placing x number to work). These caseworkers somehow ignored those status holders, who were not willing to participate into the labour market. This is how caseworkers adopt, what Zacka calls, “moral disposition”. Caseworkers show “indifferent” behaviour towards status holders who are not willing to work.

*“I focus on clients who are already motivated and willing to establish their careers. Clients who are motivated and willing to participate positively in the society need less attention, I can help them easily” (H, 2020).*

Some caseworkers became “enforcers” because they believed that imposing sanctions could lead to attain the desired goal. They imposed sanctions in order to gain the desired results. However, it is noteworthy that imposing a sanction does not occur effortlessly as a lot of paperwork and formalities surround it. For example, caseworkers have to invite status holders for a couple of meetings officially. In addition, caseworkers have to carry out these meetings in presence of a colleague. The rules and regulations related to these formalities discourage caseworkers to impose sanctions, as this administrative work asks more time and energy from them. Hence, it does not happen in the practice regularly.

*“I warn clients who are not willing to participate in the society and do not follow the rules of the participation law. If warning does not work, then I make it official and try to impose sanctions. But I must admit that imposing sanctions in itself requires a lot of paperwork”.*

The coming segment indicates that some caseworkers became what Zacka calls “caregiving”. They tried to understand the situation of a status holder. They did not impose sanctions. They instead tried to remove the obstacles and pave the way for labour market integration in the long run.

*“I give additional time to status holders who are unwilling to participate. I try to use an individual approach to find out what exactly the problems are. Afterwards I seek professional assistance, for example if a status holder needs psychological help, then I arrange that first. When he becomes job-ready then I help him further” (T, 2020).*

In these interviews, all three dispositions (caregiving, indifferent and enforcer) are visible. It is difficult to suggest which disposition occurs seldom and which disposition happens regularly. Caseworkers use different strategies in different circumstances. Some caseworkers become “enforcers” because they believe that imposing sanction leads to desirable outcomes, if it works then they apply it more often. Some caseworkers become “indifferent” because they do not want to waste their time on status holders who are not motivated. They instead focus on those status holders who are motivated and willing to participate into the labour market. In this way, caseworkers achieve what is asked from them (finding job for x amount of status holders). Some other caseworkers become “caregiving”, they pay additional attention to status holders with the hope to remove all the obstacles that hold them back from work, and try to empower them for work in the long run.

In the following section, I will discuss how caseworkers deal with the implementation of the participation law. Caseworkers react differently to the problems caused by the law of the organisation. Some caseworkers objected the participation law, this is what Zacka calls “voice”. Caseworkers object the law of the organisation and convey the message to their superiors with the hope to see profound reforms. Some caseworkers consider the problems caused by the organi-

sation as part of their job and carry on, Zacka calls it “loyalty”. And some caseworkers “quit” because they cannot fulfill their duties.

Some respondents argued that the organisation has to amend its policy in order to accelerate the labour market integration process of status holders. If the policy is not strict enough, then status holder will misuse it by not accepting a job offer. This is what Zacka calls “voice” as these caseworkers object they policies of the organisation and discuss it with their superiors.

*“I believe the organisation has to deal with such problems not me as caseworker. The organisation has to make social benefits temporary and convey this message loudly. Status holders should be examined regularly whether they have taken serious steps towards work. Have they actively and effectively applied for a job”* (N, 2020).

*“The organisation has to make social benefits temporary and convey this message loudly”*, respondent was referring to strict policies.

Some respondents argued that it is part of the job. We as caseworkers have to motivate status holders to accept a job by carrying out motivational speeches.

*“I think it is common that some status holders might not accept our offer. It is up to us to convince them”* (J, 2020).

This is what Zacka calls “loyalty”. It is important to mention that because of the intensity of the job, few caseworkers resigned, they were unable to fulfill their duties. This is according to Zacka “exit”.

## 5. Discussion

Labour market integration of status holders is one of the key objectives that caseworkers have to achieve. The participation law is meant to pave the way for the caseworkers to achieve their objectives. Several limitations and obstacles make the work of caseworkers complicated. As discussed earlier, existing literature did shed some light on the challenges faced by both caseworkers and status holders. For example, the fact that status holders are unable to speak the national language makes it difficult for caseworkers to communicate about the rules and regulations of the organisation (Robinson, 2014). It is also important to recognize that status holders usually need some time and attention in order to be able to integrate in a new society successfully as they are unfamiliar with the culture and political system of the host countries (OECD, 2018).

Furthermore, there are researches that suggest the labour market integration process of status holders is challenging for caseworkers, as several issues have to be addressed. For instance, education background, work experience, healthcare and cultural differences. Caseworkers need to gain enough information on these subjects in order to be able to assist refugees effectively (Ager & Strang, 2008; Carrera, 2006). There are also publications suggesting that status holders are facing difficulties to integrate into the labour market. There are different reasons that complicate this process, namely: gender, education, and health status. Gender, it becomes problematic for caseworkers to help some female status holders with

a job because they have either never worked in their country of origin, or they were never allowed to work outside, as it was culturally not accepted. Education, companies do not easily hire status holders who are not well educated, they prefer to hire skilled people. Health status, caseworkers face problems to facilitate labour market integration process for status holders with physical and mental illness (Bevelander, 2020; Ruiz & Silva, 2018).

This research added that caseworkers adopt different strategies to cope with the above-mentioned situations. Caseworkers become “indifferent” and focus on status holders who are encouraged and have the ability to work. Caseworkers become “caregiving”, give status holders additional time, and help them to remove the obstacles. In case of serious mental and physical illness, caseworkers do not become “enforcers” because status holders with severe mental and physical problems are exempted from work either temporarily or permanently. As far as education and work experience is concerned, few caseworkers might impose sanctions and become “enforcers” if a status holder does not participate in projects that lead to paid jobs.

Confirming these challenges and obstacles, this article referred to some new challenges that make the work of caseworkers problematic. In this article, I argued that the participation law in itself could create an obstacle for caseworkers. In addition, the fact that social welfare benefits give more certainty. Status holders can use social welfare benefits for a long period. As a result, it becomes problematic for caseworkers to convince status holders to take distance from social welfare benefits.

Drawing on the concept of “impossible situation” (Zacka, 2017), I examined whether and how the participation law hinders the work of the caseworkers as far as the labour market integration of status holders are concerned. Referring to “impossible situation”, I argued that it asks from caseworkers to achieve objectives that are conflicting and contradicting. The participation law demands from caseworkers two objectives that bring them in a problematic situation. For instance, assisting status holders towards labour market integration, whereas, at the same time the participation law provides and facilitates services that make it difficult for caseworkers to convince status holders to accept a job. The findings also demonstrated that the participation law and the system do not have any reward system. In other words, if a status holder decides to work and does not lose facilities (healthcare benefits and housing benefits) he will experience financial growth. This will make work more attractive for him. Or a status holder who decides to work and receives an amount from the municipality as gift or reward, this will also make work more attractive.

Rocco and Tummers (2015) state that it is not an easy and relaxed task to implement government policies. Caseworkers face challenges while implementing the policies of the government. In order to cope with challenges, caseworkers are inclined to “move toward clients” rather than “moving away” or “moving against” clients. In “moving toward clients”, caseworkers adjust to client’s need. This be-

havior is seen as coping in client's benefit. In this case, caseworkers bend the rules, work overtime and collaborate to help clients. In "moving away" caseworkers ignore some of their clients and in "moving against clients", caseworkers impose sanctions. Confirming this strategy of caseworkers, this research added that "moving toward clients" is not the only way caseworkers deal with challenges. The results showed that caseworkers deal differently as far as the implementation of the participation law is concerned. They use their own interpretation of policies by developing routine in order to reduce complexity (Lipsky, 1980; Zacka, 2017). Therefore, some caseworkers become *caregivers*, and give additional time to status holders. The risk of "gaming the system" arises and status holders might misuse it by remaining in distance from work. Some caseworkers become *enforcers*; they impose sanctions to gain their objectives. Some caseworkers become *indifferent*. They only focus on those status holders who are motivated to work and delay or ignore others.

Despite the remarkable outcomes, it is essential to mention that there are some limitations to this study. First, in this study, I have focused on caseworkers only, it is important to find out how policymakers approach the whole process of labour market integration of status holders. Second, the perspective of status holders is not included. Definitely, it is vital to shed some light on their experiences as well. Third, it is extremely important to focus on status holders with severe physical and psychological problems.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1. Conclusion

This research has assessed the obstacles posed by the participation law to the caseworkers with different experiences and different age groups. The evidence leads to the following conclusive remarks. First, labour market integration is one of the key objectives that caseworkers have to achieve. The current social welfare benefits system makes it problematic for caseworkers to achieve this goal. Status holders who decide to work lose facilities like housing and healthcare allowances and do not experience financial progress, most of the time. Second, the participation law does not create an obstacle for those status holders, who experience financial growth by accepting a job. Highly qualified status holders are encouraged to accept a job, despite the fact that they do not experience financial growth directly. Third, the current social welfare benefits system seems to be permanent. One can use it for a long period. Fourth, caseworkers do have authority but cannot use it properly. The current law makes it difficult to impose sanctions as a lot of administrative work surrounds it. Fifth, status holders feel more secure with social welfare benefits. They are hesitating to accept a job because of the fear that they might lose it.

### 6.2. Recommendations

The fact that status holders are not experiencing financial growth directly when

they accept a job, makes it difficult for caseworkers to motivate status holders to labour market integration. Hence, caseworkers suggest some recommendations to make the labour market integration of status holders less difficult. First, the municipality should introduce a reward system for status holders who decide to work. In this way, status holders will experience financial growth. Alternatively, status holders who decide to work should not be deprived from some facilities like housing allowances and healthcare allowances. Status holders should be able to use these facilities at least partially to improve financially.

Second, the law has to make the social welfare benefits temporary and convey the message convincingly. It seems that the social welfare benefit is a permanent facility, provided by the municipality. One can benefit from it for several consecutive years. To motivate status holders to get a job, only moral pressure is not enough, it seems. There needs to be also a strict inspection method to find out whether status holders are working towards financial independency. Third, caseworkers need to find out whether status holders are taking serious steps to participate in the labour market. For instance, do status holders apply for jobs effectively? Caseworkers feel that their authority and ability to impose sanction is restricted and surrounded by bureaucratic rules and regulations which prevents open communication in which insight in status holders specific assets and shortcomings can surface.

Fourth, the municipality has to help status holders to find more sustainable jobs. Sustainable jobs are attractive and motivate status holders to participate in the labour market.

### 6.3. Limitations

In this research, the focus has been on the caseworkers. The whole issue of labour market integration of status holders is approached from the perspectives of the caseworkers. It is important and further research is needed to approach the same issue from the perspective of the status holders. It is important to find out how they experience the implementation of the participation law, and what they experience as challenge and obstacle. Similarly, more research is needed to find out how policymakers can influence the issue of labour market integration of status holders.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere and deepest gratitude to Jan van der Oord and the municipality of Amsterdam for making this project possible. I would also like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my supervisor Professor Evlien Tonkens and my co-supervisor Dr. Thomas Kampen. Their coaching, patience and advice helped me a lot to bring my article at this stage. At the meantime, I appreciate the continuous and constant support of Professor Caroline Nevejan in all ups and downs of this project. Last but not least, I would like to

thank my family for believing in me and encouraging me.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21, 166-191. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>
- Badenoch & Clerk (2017). *The Labour Market Integration of Refugees. White Paper: A Focus on Europe*. The Adecoo Group.
- Bevelander, P. (2020). *Integrating Refugees into Labour Markets. Economic Integration of Refugees into Their Host Country Is Important and Benefits Both Parties*. IZA World of Labor. <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.269.v2>
- Bloch, A. (2004). Labour Market Participation and Conditions of Employment: A Comparison of Minority Ethnic Groups and Refugees in Britain. *Sociological Research*, 9, 15-33. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.919>
- Büchel, F., & Frick, J. R. (2005). Immigrants' Economic Performance across Europe. Does Immigration Policy Matter? *Population Research and Policy Review*, 24, 175-212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-004-1370-4>
- Carrera, S. (2006). *A Comparison of Integration Programmes in the EU: Trends and Weaknesses*. CEPS.
- Desiderio, M. V. (2016). *Integrating Refugees into Host Countries Labour Markets*. Transatlantic Council on Migration & Migration Policy Institute.
- Duncan, G., Shepherd, M., & Symonds, J. (2010). Working with Refugees—A Manual for Caseworkers and Volunteers. *Rural and Remote Health*, 10, 1406.
- Espersson, M., & Wetrup, U. (2019). Value Destruction in Swedish Welfare Services: Frontline Workers Impact on Asylum-Seeking Minors' Possibilities of Creating Value in Early Integration. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43, 115-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2019.1672729>
- Esses, V., & Hamilton, L. (2017). The Global Refugee Crisis: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implication for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement. *Social Issues and Policy Reviews*, 11, 78-123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12028>
- Fleischmann, F., & Dronkers, J. (2010). Unemployment among Immigrants in European Labour Markets: An Analysis of Origin and Destination Effects. *Work, Employment and Society*, 24, 337-354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017010362153>
- George, M. (2012). Migration Traumatic Experiences and Refugee Distress: Implications for Social Work Practice. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 40, 429-437. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-012-0397-y>
- Heckmann, F. (2008). *Education and the Integration of Migrants (NESSE Analytical Report 1)*. European Forum for Migration Studies (EFMS), Institute at the University of Bamberg.
- Ivry, J. (1992). Professionals in Refugees Resettlement. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 2, 99-118. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J285v02n01\\_07](https://doi.org/10.1300/J285v02n01_07)
- Józsa, I. (2015). Motivation and Integration of Hungarians Working in London. *Vadyba. Journal of Management*, No. 2, 7-12.



- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mikkel, B., & Mattia, S. (2017). *The Impact of Refugee on Labour Market: A Big Splash in a Small Pond*. CEPS.
- OECD (2018) *Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees*.
- Robinson, K. (2014). Voices from the Frontline: Social Work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia and the UK. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44, 1602-1620. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct040>
- Rocco, P., & Tummers, L. (2015). Serving Clients When the Server Crashes. How Front-line Workers Cope with E-Government Challenges. *Public Administration Review*, 75, 817-827. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12379>
- Ruiz, I., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2018). Difference in Labour Market Outcomes between Natives, Refugees and Other Migrants in the UK. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 18, 855-885. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lby027>
- Scholten, P., Baggerman, F., Dellouche, L., Kampen, V., & Ypma, R. (2017). *Policy Integration in Refugee Integration. A Comparative Analysis of Innovative Policy Strategies toward Refugee Integration in Europe*. Erasmus University.
- Shaw, S. A. (2014). Bridge Builders: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experience of Former Refugees Working as Caseworkers in the United States. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 40, 284-296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2014.901276>
- Sigona, N. (2005). Refugee Integration(s): Policy and Practice in the European Union. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 24, 115-122. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdi093>
- Stadler, A. M. (2016). *The Challenged Nation State: How to Successfully Integrate Refugees into German Society?* Uppsala University.
- Tilly, C. (1998). *Durable Inequality*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520924222>
- Valtonen, K. (2016). *Social Work and Migration*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315609669>
- Vasta, E. (2007). From Ethnic Minorities to Ethnic Majority Policy: Multiculturalism and the Shift to Assimilationism in the Netherlands. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30, 713-740. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701491770>
- Welch, K. (2017). *A Pivotal Movement for the US Refugee Resettlement Program*. Haas Institute.
- Winter, A. (2005). *The International Immigration Review*. Center for Immigration Studies of New York.
- Zacka, B. (2015). *When the State Meets the Street*. Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.
- Zacka, B. (2017). *When the State Meets the Street*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674981423>
- Zetter, R., & Ruaudel, H. (2018). Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labour Markets: Constraints, Challenges and Ways forward. *Forced Migration Review*, 58, 4-7.

### Other Links

<https://med.ucf.edu/global-health/files/2013/12/Know-Your-Neighbor-The-Florida-Refugee-Experience-Hiram-Ruiz.pdf>

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/KtbxLwgsSVLTKZwppFFbdNdpjWksRzKNV>

[?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1](#)  
<http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>  
<https://fmcusa.org/lightandlifemag/difficulties-faced-by-immigrants-and-refugees/>