

Why only 33 percent of people entitled to asylum are working.

For many refugees, access to the labor market is a real struggle against bureaucracy. They receive hardly any help with it.

Luxembourg. The facilities for refugees run by the National Reception Office are filled to bursting. People who have received a positive asylum decision cannot find housing. This, in turn, is connected to the fact that not even half of all recognized asylum seekers have regular employment. No surprise there: finding a job is difficult for refugees in Luxembourg. The overwhelming bureaucracy takes its toll on them.

Coopération Nord-Sud supports asylum seekers and recognized refugees in their search for work. Yet they, too, repeatedly observe how refugees fail due to waiting times, deadlines, and requirements. And all the while, the local economy would benefit from having more skilled workers.

How the state blocks refugees' path to employment

Refugees find it difficult to get a job. Organizations working with refugees say the state does this to limit incentives for illegal migration.

Simona Palladino has little understanding for the long processing times at the Directorate of Immigration.

Elisabetta Lano heads the APES project at Nord-Sud, which helps recognized refugees and asylum seekers become ready for the job market.

Access to the labor market is completely blocked, says Roberto Marta, Director of Nord-Sud.

Elisabetta Lano and Simona Palladino deliver bad news in their daily work. When asylum seekers want to find a job, they turn to the two women. Both lead projects for the association **Coopération Nord-Sud**, through which they help asylum seekers (DPIs) and recognized refugees (BPIs) find employment.

During the initial interview, people first have to come to terms with bad news: those who worked as doctors in Syria will, for better or worse, have to look for another job in Luxembourg. For them, there is *"no hope"* that their qualifications will be recognized here. *"On a personal level, we have to prepare people for this news,"* explains Lano.

Most of them say to us: 'Okay, just give me any job, I need to work!'" adds Palladino. She heads the **"ReStart!"** project, which focuses on helping asylum seekers — people who have not yet been officially granted asylum — find work. **"We hardly had to advertise the project at all; word spread quickly within the reception facilities."**

Previously, their association had promoted the **APES project** (*Accompagnement Personnalisé pour l'Emploi dans les Structures d'accueil*) within the structures of the National Reception Office (ONA). “We were then flooded with requests,” recalls **Roberto Marta**, Director of Nord-Sud, in an interview with *the Wort*. Initially, they had planned to support 60 people — in the end, it became 115.

The ****APES project**** also focuses on recognized refugees who have already received a positive asylum decision.

Lano and Palladino know all too well the obstacles refugees face when they start looking for work. The overall situation regarding the professional integration of asylum seekers and recognized refugees into the Luxembourg labor market is something of a *black box* — even for politicians. Very little is known about it. Currently, discussions are taking place within an interministerial working group between the Ministry of Family Affairs and the Ministry of Labor.

The *Autorisation d'occupation temporaire* is a bureaucratic monster. Different rules currently apply to asylum seekers (DPIs) and recognized refugees (BPIs). Anyone who comes to Luxembourg and applies for asylum must wait six months before they are even allowed to start looking for work. In its coalition agreement, the government announced its intention to reduce this waiting period to four months. That has not happened yet, but it is still supposed to be implemented.

After this period, DPIs have the opportunity to take up employment through an ***Autorisation d'occupation temporaire (AOT)***. The AOT allows asylum seekers to work “**only for a specific job and a specific employer.**” It is valid for six months but can be renewed.

Among the organizations that advocate for the rights of refugees, the AOT is known as a true bureaucratic monster. Even employers often hesitate to hire DPIs under an AOT. For them, it means more bureaucracy — and the uncertainty that an employee might suddenly be gone without warning if their asylum application is rejected. So, if the employer was counting on that manpower, they suddenly have to manage without it.

In response to an inquiry from *Wort*, the **ADEM** stated that in 2023 it received 170 requests for an AOT. In 2024 and 2025, the numbers were significantly higher: 358 each year, and so far 463 in the current year. This is because, in 2023, a law passed through parliament stating that for professions listed as shortage occupations, **ADEM** no longer has to conduct a labor market test. This makes it easier for DPIs to obtain an AOT, as the employment agency does not first need to check whether a job-seeking person on the national or EU labor

market is already qualified for the position — such a person would otherwise be given priority.

Because of the authorities: Employers withdraw job offers from asylum seekers

The AOT, however, meets with little approval among refugee organizations. *“There is a huge problem with the deadlines for approving AOTs by the Directorate of Immigration,”* says Roberto Marta. *“Normally, the process takes three weeks, but we work with people who have been waiting for months for their AOT to be approved.”*

Most of them say to us: ‘Okay, just give me any job, I need to work!’” — Simone Palladino, head of the **ReStart!** project at Coopération Nord-Sud

In such cases, employers who had agreed to an AOT can become impatient — some even withdraw their job offer. *“When we asked why it was taking so long, we were told: the person responsible for approving AOTs is currently on vacation.”* Convincing employers to accept an AOT is already difficult enough. Many request documents after the first job interview. However, asylum seekers are required to submit their official documents — their passport — to the **Directorate of Immigration** in order to receive the so-called *“pink slip,”* which confirms that they are in the asylum process. Employers often look at this with skepticism.

“For this reason, we provide individuals with recommendation letters explaining why the applicants cannot submit official documents. We also try to reassure employers and convince them that we will handle all the paperwork,” says Marta. *“However, if the authorities do not meet their deadlines, many employers become very frustrated. This puts DPIs at risk of losing the job offer.”*

In response to an inquiry from *Luxemburger Wort*, the Ministry of the Interior stated that the processing time to obtain an AOT is *“on average two weeks, starting from the receipt of a properly submitted application.”* The government is currently working on *“simplifying the AOT approval procedure.”*

The current deadlines are met with incomprehension by Palladino. **Nord-Sud** handles the administrative work related to the AOT. *“So we don’t understand why the whole process takes so long.”*

Elisabetta Lano advocates for abolishing both the six-month waiting period for DPIs in general and the AOT itself. *“Why couldn’t DPIs simply receive a temporary employment contract in the meantime? Once their asylum decision is positive, they could then get a permanent contract. The ministry would have less work that way.”*

The employment rate of recognized refugees (BPIs) stands at 33.6 percent.

However, these are by far not the only restrictions that refugees face on their way into the labor market — even for those who have received a positive asylum decision. BPIs are entitled to register as job seekers with **ADEM**. In

2023, 782 recognized refugees were looking for work; in 2024, the number was 836, and in 2025 it rose to 887.

The Ministry of Family Affairs cannot answer, in response to Wort, how many BPIs generally receive **Revis**. *“Recognized refugees have the same rights as all other residents and are treated as such. When a Revis application is submitted, the applicant’s status is not recorded.”*

How many BPIs have regular employment is also unknown to **ADEM**. They do not have such figures — nor does the Ministry of Labor, which refers to the **Inspection générale de la sécurité sociale (IGSS)**.

The IGSS actually has the figures. Out of 4,330 BPIs, 1,400 were employed in 2023, corresponding to an employment rate of 32.3 percent. In recent years, this rate has only increased marginally. In 2025, 1,700 of 5,000 BPIs aged between 15 and 64 were employed. The employment rate so far this year is therefore 33.6 percent.

“We don’t understand why the whole process takes so long.” — Elisabetta Lano, head of the **APES** project at Coopération Nord-Sud

The fact that the ministries do not have these figures demonstrates, as is often the case in Luxembourg, a lack of verifiable data to base evidence-driven policy on. The **Luxembourg Refugee Council (LFR)** criticized this last May in a press release, in which the umbrella organization of refugee associations called for an *“offensive”* to better integrate refugees into the labor market. *“Reliable statistics”* or *“more in-depth studies”* on the subject do not exist, the LFR complains. As a result, there is a risk that refugees remain *“petitioners.”*

In this context, the LFR refers to Germany. There, statistics exist on how many Syrians found a job after arriving following the start of the civil war in their country and the 2015 refugee crisis: around 70 percent. In Luxembourg, the number is not known.

Overcrowded language courses, no internships — refugees caught in a vicious circle

According to Marta, those registered as BPIs with **ADEM** quickly encounter limits — primarily regarding language skills. *“ADEM requires a relatively high level of French. Since most do not have this level, they are referred to the **Office national d’inclusion sociale (ONIS)**. However, there they cannot be offered a job on the primary labor market, only a **travail d’utilité collective (TUC)**, that is, community service work.”*

ADEM is not flexible enough in this regard, says Simona Palladino: *“Their criteria regarding language proficiency could be more flexible.”* Many refugees are caught in a vicious circle. While they can take language courses offered by the **Institut National des Langues (INL)**, these are regularly fully booked. *“I personally believe that*

languages need to be learned in practice. But because BPIs cannot find work, they cannot practice in daily life,” says Roberto Marta.

Some would like to improve their job prospects through internships. Unpaid internships of up to three months are possible — anything longer must be paid at 40 percent of the social minimum wage. However, such internships are only available to students or “*recent graduates*,” explains Marta. Asylum seekers are not allowed to study at the university at all. Those who want to continue their education to improve their CV quickly realize that the path is also blocked for them. To obtain a **Diplôme d’aptitude professionnelle (DAP)** in adult education, recognized refugees must have paid social security contributions for at least twelve months. But this applies to very few, as they cannot find work. There are hardly any continuing education programs offered by private providers in Luxembourg. “*Access to the labor market is completely blocked,*” criticizes Marta.