

CHAPTER 5

‘Learn Skills and Get Employed’

Constituting the Employable Refugee Subjectivity through Integration Policies and Training Practices

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Who cares in the end? Because the most important aspect in integration, is that [refugees] could find a job? So if eventually they find a job, no one cares what they went through, or what potentials were lost, because they found a job! It is definitely sad. (Teacher of integration programme, 2017)

The context of this chapter is Finland, where, according to the Finnish Integration Act (2010), refugees’ integration into society is successful when they have managed to become employable (see FMEC, 2016). Employability as an indicator of refugees’ successful integration into society is also common in other European Union member states (Bucken-Knapp, Fasih & Spehar, 2018; Vesterberg, 2016; EC, 2016). Employability is part of the ‘transition machinery’ for refugees as well, to put on the move in very specific ways, to manage and govern. Therefore, participating in integration training to learn new skills and a profession is part of the

How to cite this book chapter:

Masoud, A., Kurki, T. and Brunila, K. 2020. ‘Learn Skills and Get Employed’: Constituting the Employable Refugee Subjectivity through Integration Policies and Training Practices. In K. Brunila and L. Lundahl (eds), *Youth on the Move: Tendencies and Tensions in Youth Policies and Practices* (pp. 101–123). Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-3-6>

integration plan for refugees that claims to expedite their labour market entry (MEAE, 2016; FMEC, 2016). Integration programmes also promise that becoming employable is only possible by learning new skills, by rehabilitating old skills, by enhancing competencies, and through vocational studies (FNBE, 2012). In the pursuit of making refugees employable, numerous educational interventions and projects have been developed, each promising that it will expedite refugees' entry into the labour market. Consequently, integration training is becoming part of the wider changes taking place in the welfare state, which has allowed for market-oriented interventions towards maintaining competitiveness, through enhancing skills and competences (Kurki et al., 2018; Brunila et al., 2017; Kärkkäinen, 2017; Svensson, 2004). Despite these numerous educational interventions, previous research has highlighted how refugees face difficulty finding jobs in Finland, and that their previous skills and qualifications are not valued, which could be due to various political, social and cultural barriers (OECD, 2018; Kurki et al., 2018; EC, 2017; Yijälä & Nyman, 2017; Larja et al., 2012; Forsander, 2008; Ahmad, 2005). For instance, in the EU report on Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Finland was found to be one of the most discriminatory countries among the 28 EU Member States (FRA, 2017).

In this chapter, we examine the employability discourse in integration policies and training practices, especially in terms of constructing a specific type of employable refugee subjectivity. What is problematic is the fact that it is not clear what constitutes the right set of skills and competences to become employable (Shan & Fejes, 2015; see also Chapter 4). Therefore, we are interested in how an employability discourse works in constructing 'employable refugee subjectivity' in Finnish integration policies and training practices, where the entry to the labour market remains a challenge for refugees. Employability, which is influenced by particular government policies that aim to produce employable individuals, requires a continuously 'productive' self (Moore, 2010). Hence, we ask how people categorized as refugees constitute their subjectivities and are being constituted within these integration policies and practices. This chapter seeks to contribute to the current debate on the integration of refugees in Finland, through highlighting what happens to them when employment is the key element of successful integration, and what this integration process entails.

Integration policies and training practices in Finland

Finland's quite short history with refugees has led to integration challenges, mainly concerning their labour market entry (OECD, 2017, 2018). In Finland, integration training is implemented based on the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, which was reformed in 2010. The reform widened the scope of integration training to include all immigrants—including asylum seekers and refugees—who have permanent permission to stay in Finland. Officially, integration training is voluntary and consists of labour market training and self-motivated training (FMEC, 2016). In order to be qualified to participate

in integration training, one has to register as an unemployed jobseeker in the Employment and Economic Development Office. This registration should not be made later than three years after the issue of the first residence permit. In order to receive unemployment benefits, refugees are obliged to participate in integration training and adhere to the personal integration plan (TE, 2013).

The first step to start integration training is a meeting with an employment officer. In the meeting, the personal integration plan should be drawn up based on the individual's educational background and interests (Finnish Integration Act 2010). The plan may include, for instance, language courses, vocational training, enhancing skills and competences, work practice and/or career guidance.

Integration training is provided by various educational institutions (FMEE, 2016). Since municipalities have the autonomy to execute integration training in cooperation with different actors, including the private sector (see SITRA, 2016), they can have different kinds of integration programmes funded by the city or the Ministry of Education and Culture or the Ministry of Employment and Economy (which receives funding from the EU) (see Saukkonen, 2017; also Kurki et al., 2018).

Officially, the Finnish integration policy is based on the idea of inclusive democracy, equality, and an individualized integration plan, which makes refugees' integration appear to be smooth (FMEE, 2016; MIPEX, 2015; Finnish Integration Act 2010; Saukkonen, 2017; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015). Previous research reminds us that the welfare system, with its claimed inclusive mechanisms, has not fully embraced refugees in the labour market and higher education (Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck, 2012; Blomberg et al., 2008). Apparently, what is missing is knowledge of how the Finnish integration policy 'works in practice' (Saukkonen, 2017; see also OECD, 2018, p. 144).

While the broad objective of integration training is to increase refugees' participation in all aspects of society, the main focus is on enhancing refugees' participation in the labour market. Thus, unless refugees gain employment, integration is considered unsuccessful (MEAE, 2016; FMEE, 2012; Saukkonen, 2017; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015). Employment is a pressing issue in the welfare state policies (Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck, 2012), as well as for refugees, where employment means the ability to integrate and have a better life (Forsander, 2008). Nevertheless, putting the emphasis on employment as a successful measure of refugees' integration has consequences for integration policies and training practices (Wahlbeck, 2007), and shapes refugees' subjectivities, as we will discuss later in this chapter.

Finnish migration policies highlight the importance of attracting skilled workers who are third-country nationals in order to sustain competitiveness (FMI, 2018; Finnish Government, 2015, 2016). It is worth noting that refugees have an unrestricted right to work in Finland, once they have received their residence permit (EMN, 2015). This is contrary to the current reality of refugees, who face discrimination in entering the labour market and challenges in getting their skills and qualifications recognized (EC, 2017). Even before the

so-called ‘refugee crisis’, Ala-Kauhaluoma and Härkääpää (2006) showed that ‘employers displayed a preference for hiring a young person without vocational training or a long-term unemployed rather than someone with an immigrant background’ (Larja et al., 2012, p. 60). As a result, refugees remain in a ‘state of limbo’ (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017) and in prolonged integration training (EMN, 2015). The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2016), on the other hand, claims that integration training will support and preserve the previous professional experience of individuals. Nevertheless, the skills and knowledge that refugees possess have not been effectively utilized in the Finnish labour market (MEAE, 2016; OECD, 2018), and the FMEC (2016) acknowledges that ‘the immigrants’ routes to education and working life are long and contain idling, overlapping and also sometimes inappropriate studies’ (p. 25). The Ministry also indicates that training is based on ‘what training is available, not based on what the person’s actual educational needs are and what the appropriate training would be, considering their competence and educational background’ (ibid.). Even when refugees succeed in becoming employed, they continue to have poor financial outcomes or work in temporary low-skilled jobs (OECD, 2017; Näre, 2013; Könönen, 2011). The unemployment rate among immigrants in Finland remains high (OECD, 2016), but among refugees it is even higher (OECD, 2018; Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck, 2012).

Employability discourse as a policy imperative for integration

EU policies concerning the integration of refugees as well as previous research indicate that learning to become employable is a way to promote inclusion of refugees, and maintain the global competitiveness of the state (EC, 2015, 2016; Dahlstedt, 2009; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). The concept of employability is seen to be beneficial, especially concerning groups who are considered vulnerable, such as refugees (Dahlstedt, 2009). However, the un/employability of refugees is, in most cases, determined by employment policies and the integration system (Williams, 2009). Previous studies define the notion of employability in educational training and labour market policies as the individual’s ability to become employed, making the individual herself responsible for becoming employable (Fejes, 2010; Moore, 2010; Fejes & Berglund, 2010; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004; Brunila & Siivonen, 2016). Consequently, employability as an integration tool demands a wide set of skills that must be developed, resulting in increased pressure on the individual to continuously develop herself, in accordance with unclear demands (see Moore, 2010; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Employability in that sense becomes politicized and a ‘one-size-fits all safety net’ (Moore, 2010), which attempts to redefine the individual, offering a new subjecthood (Fejes, 2010). This has caused a shift from knowledge (what refugees know and could bring to society) to adopting new skills—a shift that could waste potentials (see Moore, 2010; Guo, 2010; Olssen, 2006).

* Correction notice. A correction has been made to this direct quote since it included words not present in the original quote. The original wording has now been restored. Original release date: February 3, 2020. The publication has been reloaded in its corrected form on June 23, 2021.

In measures concerning refugees' integration into the labour market, employability is increasingly being attributed to the ability to learn to increase individual's potential and form new 'employability' skills, which shape the subjectivity of the individual (see Williams, 2005; also Williams, 2009). In the knowledge-based society 'competence and skill are seen as perishable goods' (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004, p. 1). Skills, in this case, are not necessarily associated with specific job-related duties but comprise a more generic set of skills (Moore, 2010; Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). These skills are related to the individual's ability for 'self-management' (Moore, 2010; see also Rose, 1996), and to constantly train and retrain the self to be able to change (Walkerdine, 2006). Allan Williams (2009) indicates that 'employability is also about learning and the social recognition of migrants' knowledge' (p. 24). He also questions whether managing to find a job should be considered a 'stepping stone' in refugees' labour market entry. Nevertheless, he posits that learning should not only be associated with the refugee's individual knowledge but should also be visible on a structural level such as integration systems, employment policies and addressing discrimination (Williams, 2009; see also Kroll et al., 2008).

Previous research on refugees' integration through employment in EU countries has not focused enough on the integration process from the refugee's point of view (Bucken-Knapp, Fasih & Spehar, 2018). Thus, we aim to address this gap by highlighting how integration policies and training practices in Finland shape and construct refugees' subjectivities, where the main aim is to make refugees employable. The process towards becoming employable, as an integration end, is regulatory as well as enabling, as it makes and remakes the individual according to the 'characteristics of the discursive field of employability' (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Power 'works through, and not against, subjectivity' (Rose, 1996, p. 151). Hence, employability as a form of discursive power is not only suppressive but also produces and shapes subjects (see Butler, 1997a). Power in Foucault's terms is understood as multidimensional and reciprocal, constituting and reconstituting subjectivities in certain discursive practices (Foucault, 1995). In this chapter, integration policies and practices create possibilities for certain subjectivities, through giving the impression that the subject has the choice (see Kurki et al., 2018; Brunila & Siivonen, 2016; Davies et al., 2001). In the neo-liberal ethos, the ideal employable subjectivity is entrepreneurial (Mononen-Batista & Brunila, 2016), autonomous, yet controlled by an integration system which demands constant working and reworking of the self (see Brunila & Siivonen, 2016; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Davies, 2006; Rose, 1996).

Data and method

This chapter is based on Ameera Masoud's PhD study on integration policies and practices for refugees in Finland, with the research conducted as part of an ongoing research project: 'CoSupport—Interrupting Youth Support Systems in the Ethos of Vulnerability', funded by the Academy of Finland and led by

Kristiina Brunila. Throughout the studies of the project, we have shown how education and training are becoming geared towards skills training rather than knowledge-based education, creating the ideal individual who needs to be self-motivated and self-disciplined (see Brunila et al., 2019). Masoud produced ethnographic data during 2017–2018 in vocational integration programmes for immigrants, provided by two different educational institutions in southern Finland. The data were collected at several vocational programmes, such as practical nursing, childcare, construction and technical fields. These data include participant observations, interviews with 18 Arabic-speaking refugees (age 20–35) who had received their residence permits in Finland, two integration project managers and five teachers/trainers. Additionally, 14 EU-level and Finnish policy documents¹ in relation to integration practices and employability were analysed from the period 2010–2018 in order to understand the discourses that shape the policies and how ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are produced as discourses in the texts and practices (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

The refugees interviewed were participating in integration training in two different institutions as part of their personal integration plans. Participants in the first institution had completed a Finnish language course (of about nine months) followed by one year of pre-vocational training. In order to be eligible for the current training, participants need to possess a B.1. (language skills of an independent user level of Finnish). The other institution has a new programme established as a response to the refugee inflow, the prolonged process of integration, and the financial cuts in integration training that claim to expedite labour market entry. Instead of attending the language course, the interviewees were placed in vocational schools to learn Finnish language skills alongside other skills and a profession. In this second programme there were no language skill requirements. During the interviews, Masoud found out that some of the participants barely knew the basics of Finnish but were still participating in the programme. This created a considerable challenge for both the teacher and participants. Interviewees in both institutions were starting vocational education that lasts from two to three years and leads to a vocational degree. The studies in both programmes include a practical part and/or on-the-job training.

In this chapter, we utilize a Foucauldian-inspired discursive approach as an analytical tool (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014; Foucault, 1972). We understand discursive practices as multiple processes that construct, alter and locate subjects into certain processes, producing meanings, subjectivities and discourses in each setting. Foucault refers to discursive practices as how knowledge is formed and produced, and what kind of reality and consequences discursive practices entail (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). Accordingly, we study integration policies and discursive practices related to employability in terms of discursive power, by acknowledging the relation of knowledge, discourse and power as productive and regulative (see Foucault, 1980, 1995). Furthermore, we focus on an employable refugee subjectivity and the ways in which it is shaped by integration policies and training practices, and power relations that influence

and produce subjectivities (see Mertanen & Brunila, 2018; Brunila & Siivonen, 2016; see also Kurki et al., 2018). Hence, following the work of Judith Butler (1993, 1997b), Bronwyn Davies (2006) and Deborah Youdell (2006) related to how discursive practices constitute subjectivities, our analysis will explore how refugees engage in the ambivalent process of the simultaneous submission to and mastery of the employable subjectivity, what subjectivities are produced and also challenged, and what effects this has on the construction of their subjectivities. In our analysis we will focus on discursive regularities: how refugees discursively start to understand and construct themselves as employable subjects, and how they are constructed by integration policies and professionals. We will also explore the possibility of speaking and acting, as well as the ambivalent process of submitting to and mastering the employable subjectivity, and what consequences these discursive processes entail for the integration of refugees.

The chapter has the following structure: in the first part of our analysis, we analyse integration policies and interviews with project managers as well as integration professionals to demonstrate how refugees' subjectivities are constructed within the integration discursive setting. This will allow us to grasp in what ways refugees are being constituted through integration policies and training practices which aim towards creating the employable subject. The second part of our analysis focuses on how integration participants themselves constitute their subjectivities, which enables us to analyse what kinds of consequences this integration process has on the subjects involved.

The making of 'employable' refugee subjectivity

According to our analysis of the policy documents, the making of employable refugee subjectivity takes place through adopting specific predetermined skills, which is a common aim in integration policies and training practices in Finland. These skills do not only include language skills, for 'skilling' takes a broader dimension that requires the individual to change. In this case, change means that the individual has to be able to continuously accept a new subjectivity that requires a ceaseless skilling process, as the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants states:

One of the key objectives of integration training is to increase students' own initiative and learning-to-learn skills. Through learning to learn, students are helped to see and understand the effects of their own actions on learning. Students start to pay active attention to their own ways of learning and working and understand how these influence learning. ... Learning is visible as a change in a learner's ways of thinking and operating. The change may mean a new skill or changing an old way of operating into a more meaningful or efficient one. (FNBE, 2012, p. 16)

In integration training, skills are often vaguely defined, using concepts such as ‘learning to learn skills’, ‘life planning skills’, ‘everyday life skills’, ‘unlearning habitual ways of working’, ‘goal oriented’, ‘interactive’ and the ability to set objectives (ibid.). The objective that participants have to focus on setting is the ability to adopt the aforementioned generic skills in order to find a job faster. Accordingly, in the above extract as a prerequisite for being employable, participants in integration training are expected to construct specific productive subjectivities throughout the integration process. For example, refugees are expected to acquire ‘new skills’ in order to live in accordance with the way Finnish society is considered to operate (see also FNBE, 2012, p. 10):

Integration means that immigrants adapt themselves to the Finnish society and acquire new skills, competences and practices which help them actively participate in the life of their new home country. (FMI, 2015)

In this way, integration training becomes a tool towards preparing ‘adult migrants for the operating methods of Finnish Society, a sustainable lifestyle and everyday life skills’ as well as ‘fixing’ and ‘correcting’ (FNBE, 2012) the individual, through the assumption that refugees need to be reskilled in order to have an ‘active’ role. Accordingly, refugees are expected to ‘review’ and ‘reform’ their traditions and skills that are presupposed to be in conflict with their ability to integrate, and they should learn to live from the point of view of the new society (ibid., p. 10; see also Kärkkäinen, 2017). Preparing refugees to live the way Finnish society operates is vague and lacks concretization through integration policies and training, which assumes immediately the difference and lack of knowledge among refugees. This also entails that Finnish society is homogenous, and that refugees are not prepared to function in a society that promotes social justice and equality. Hence, refugees are construed as automatically unemployed, and their unemployment is mostly related to their lack of ‘employability’ skills (see Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Yet, even when refugees are identified as people who have skills, their inability to find a job demonstrates quite a paradoxical situation that refugees face during the integration process. The following two extracts demonstrate this:

They have been working all their life and they do have knowledge and skills, but the context is now different for them, and their background is completely different. There is this total paradox, which our integration system makes them feel zero. At the same time, they have the skills that we can benefit from ... that is why through our programmes we will help rebuild their skills ... they need a lot of help, fixing and rehabilitation. (Integration training project manager, 2017)

First, they have to study or do some training, because there is, of course, a big difference in their skills, culture, what they know, and the Finnish

way of doing work. ... They have to change if they want to find work or even work practice ... and kind of accept anything, to show that they are willing to work. (Job coach, 2017)

In line with the aforementioned interviews is the excerpt given below from a trainer, who sees that it is important for refugees to demonstrate a certain subjectivity, namely to be active. This implies that the refugee has to adopt a subjectivity that devalues the self:

I try to convince them that they should at least look at it from a different perspective [why they are in the integration training]. I always tell them you should start from somewhere, and accept anything, it would be good in your CV that you are active. You should keep thinking as if you are now working. (Job coach, 2017)

In our analysis of the above interview extracts, refugee subjectivity is constructed as a person who needs fixing. For instance, as in the above extract, to 'accept anything' offered by the integration system becomes part of refugees' 'learning to learn' to become active. Becoming 'active' indicates that refugees are doing something right for their own integration. This was demonstrated through the coach's reminder to integration participants that, regardless of what they are studying, integration training is good because it shows that they are active and willing to do anything. Integration professionals mentioned how important it is for refugees to 'fix' their attitudes and the way they behave, especially when they meet potential employers. They are unemployed mainly because they are not changing themselves and they are not active enough in seeking job opportunities, and finding creative ways of presenting themselves to employers. The assumption that they do not have skills or that their skills need continuous mending, and they do not know the Finnish way of doing work, tends to control their integration path rather than utilize their skills. This contrasts with what Finnish integration policies promise (see FMEC, 2016). As our interviews with integration professionals as well as the policy analysis have shown, the integration measures target the unemployed, which disregards other societal and political issues that are hampering refugees' unemployment. Previous research has argued how immigrants with various backgrounds in Finland are often perceived as 'unskilled' (Näre, 2013). A similar type of idea was also present in the interviews with project workers and trainers, where previous skills were disregarded, and refugees need to accept anything in order to show they are willing to work. If they do not demonstrate enough willingness, it means they are not active or skilful enough. Integration training promotes a conditioned subjectivity, which is that the individual has to master the ability to perform. This reminds us how the focus of integration training tends to be oriented towards 'changing selves' (see Williams, 2005). The extracts above also demonstrate how integration practices are affected by the wider global shift, which disregards the skills of those who are 'employable' and

ready to work, towards focusing on changing the (un)employable individuals' state of mind, through engaging them in constant education, re-education and training. In this way, individuals will supposedly be able to adjust to the changing demands of the labour market (Moore, 2010).

Within the policy documents analysed, refugee subjectivity becomes constructed as a learning subjectivity built within limited choices and with particular characteristics, as the following policy extract shows:

Successful integration in Finnish society always starts from the individual and requires an active and responsible attitude on the part of the participant. Support provided by society may serve this individually oriented learning process, once it is ensured that the system provides incentives, is fair and works effectively. (MEAE, 2016, p. 15)

The above extract is indicative of certain subjectivities that must be replicated by the integration participant in order to be successfully integrated: having an active, responsible attitude, where the learning process is individually oriented. As a result, refugees have to become responsible subjects. Notions of autonomy and individuality throughout integration envisage an implicit subjectivity among participants, namely constructing individuals to believe that they have control over their success and failure. This makes individuals accountable for whatever misfortune they may encounter (Kurki et al., 2018; Diedrich & Styhre, 2013). Consequently, people who work with refugees are also shaped by the same discursive practices designed to construct the 'employable' refugee, as the following extract shows:

Project Manager: we had several meetings with the employment office, where we will focus more on those who have not succeeded after their three year integration period and did not manage to proceed further, either through finding employment or getting a vocational degree. ... The reason is because their skills did not reach a sufficient level to enable them to go to work or start vocational education.

Ameera Masoud (author1): What do you mean by their skills?

Project Manager: well ... like skills in a specific vocation, that they need to stick with, in order to succeed, and move forward ... some have problems still with the language. ... But also, they need to concentrate, work on being motivated, become more committed, study more and all these things. ... I know it is not easy especially some are mentally ill or struggling with their past or ... starting all over again, but they are mature enough and have to try.

Our reading of the project manager's talk and the earlier policies both indicate a subjectivity offered by the employability discourse, namely that the refugee is

not putting enough effort into becoming employable. Refugees have to submit to and master employable subjectivity; they are required to become suitably responsible through concentrating and studying more. Learning new skills seems to be the answer to refugees' integration and the only solution to their unemployment. Since they are mature, they need to show commitment, as if that is the only thing hampering their employment.

In our discursive analysis of the policies, we also found that integration practices aim at the social inclusion of refugees, but at the same time integration training is used as a form of power over refugees (see Anthias, Morokvasic-Müller & Kontos, 2013). Accordingly, policies and institutions aim at helping individuals integrate, and promote the idea that refugees have many options to choose from in order to become employable (see Fejes & Berglund, 2010). According to the EU and Finnish integration policies (Finnish Government, 2015, 2016; EC, 2015), so-called skilled migrants are not obliged to reform or rehabilitate their skills through integration training, but our analysis suggests that refugees have to (see also Anthias, Morokvasic-Müller & Kontos, 2013). In this sense, integration programmes have created what is called 'a regime of skills' that produces differences (Shan & Fejes, 2015). Refugees are guided to have a reverse kind of skilling; instead of learning skills that suit their potentials, they become constructed as subjects who should relearn a completely new profession or a profession they have previously mastered. Their past and earlier success is not given much significance. It seems that integration practices target specifically those who are considered 'different' and automatically depicted as incompetent (Anthias, Morokvasic-Müller & Kontos, 2013; Guo, 2010).

Integration into the labour market becomes the mere aim, and learning skills is positioned as a vital part of the integration training. This is very much related to how refugees and their unemployment is considered as a burden to the welfare system (Keskinen, 2016). Refugees have to accept whatever is offered and become active citizens rather than a burden. Not only does this make integration training a mode of control (see Shan & Fejes, 2015; Guo, 2010) but it requires refugees to submit to and master a skilled subjectivity in order to become employable.

The deskilling, reskilling and skilling of employable refugee subjectivity

The Finnish government integration programme articulates the importance of 'utilizing immigrants' knowledge and skills for the benefit of Finnish society' (MEAE, 2016, p. 16). However, the following extract from an interview with one of the participants in the integration training shows how, even when one has the required knowledge, experience and skills, one is expected to submit to and master a new form of subjectivity:

In my meeting with the employment officer, I was asked what my profession is. When I said I had a lot of experience in business and a previous good career, and I speak fluent English, I was told that I definitely have a problem. Because for two years I could not find a job. I was then told: do not worry, now that you are in the integration system we will fix the problem. So what profession would you like to choose now? (Participant in integration training, 2017)

In the training practices, refugees are positioned as people with ‘problems’. This entails that they have to develop subjectivities that learn to submit to and master what is suggested, even though integration training did not meet the previous education or current interests of our interviewees. In the situation above, the participant was given three options to choose from: childcare, practical nursing and the technical field. Similar to other integration training participants, he starts to construct his ‘employable’ subjectivity according to the constitutive force of integration practices. He becomes a speaking subject and constructs a new subjecthood by acting according to the characteristics of the ‘employable subjectivity’, which entails finding a new profession within the desirable choices offered by integration discursive practices.

Our analysis of the policy documents indicates that refugees have to keep in mind that they are supposed to be ‘active jobseekers’ and become more independent (see Rose, 1996) even during the integration training that treats them as dependent:

The conditionality of unemployment security will be changed so that the unemployed and part-timers are obligated to seek employment more actively and independently than before. (FMEE, 2017)

In integration policies, being unemployed tends to be considered a personal deficit; thus, getting a new profession, mastering new skills and submitting to the integration process will be the solution for the ‘problem’. This is clearly associated with the neo-liberal understanding of self-responsibility that creates faulty beliefs about the reasons why someone is unemployed: that they are not capable, they lack the appropriate skills, they are not putting in enough effort, and thus need correction (Thomas, 2016; Mertanen & Brunila, 2018). In the end, the individual needs to figure out how to continuously self-improve and be autonomous, active and motivated regardless of the uncertainties and difficulties of integration (see Kurki et al., 2018). This means that refugees are expected to understand that, even if they are unemployed, they still need to perceive themselves as ‘employable subjects’ (see Moore, 2010). Accordingly, our interviewees needed to demonstrate an enhanced active employable subjectivity, even though they are still in integration training. Refugees’ subjectivity during the integration phase is built on a constant state of ambiguity, while at the same time they have to try to make themselves employable. This process creates mul-

multiple subjectivities (Diedrich & Styhre, 2008). Refugees are obliged to adhere to the integration plan by studying for a vocational degree, but at the same time it is considered that they ought to be searching for jobs, keeping themselves engaged and accepting long hours of unpaid practical training:

I was asked to fill in a form and indicate only two months of unemployment. I was confused. ... It is not like after two months there is a job waiting for me! The officer said: 'Well you never know, maybe you will find a job this month.' I got even more confused. ... I am studying and committed to finishing this vocational education, which will last for another two years. It was not even my choice, and within this period there is no work. It only includes the practical part for five months for eight hours per day. ... I said I will start searching for jobs when I finish my course. It is confusing ... because are they expecting us to find a job or to study? ... I am studying, this is what I was told to do in order to find work. ... I feel I have a problem that I am unable to find a job, and studying is not that important. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

Here, we can see the ambivalent process that refugees have to deal with constantly. Also, during the integration process, refugees should become experts on themselves, which Rose (1996) calls the 'expertise of subjectivity' (p. 160). This means becoming competitive and responsible for making their own integration successful and meaningful through the choices they make, despite the constant ambivalences and the lack of choices (see Kärkkäinen, 2017, p. 219). This expertise includes overcoming various challenges in order to become 'employable', but this ignores the challenges that those expectations produce:

It is hard to be motivated. I cannot focus. In the class I feel I need to keep talking and joking. Not because I do not respect the teacher ... but because this is not where I want to be. This path is not similar at all to my previous background. How can I be motivated? ... I am young and so depressed. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

Without the ability to simultaneously submit to and master employability, there is a risk of losing the ability of 'learning to learn', which seems to be the only way to possible employment. As a result, refugees become speaking subjects in accordance to these discursive practices. They are also expected to have self-control, even if what they are studying does not suit their background, as the integration plan claims. The following extract demonstrates this:

I studied for four years in my home country business and accounting. When I chose Finland because of its education system and of course

it is a safe country, I was full of hope. But when I went to prepare for my integration plan, I was told that with this field it is hard to find a job here [Raising his eyebrows, looking surprised]. That the best way would be to start a new vocational education ... this way, they said, I can find a job faster or then study at a university. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

Integration policies and training practices work by making and remaking refugees' subjectivities. It is a process that starts by devaluing the self. As in the above extract, when the interviewed participant was planning his integration plan, a couple of options were given to him and one of them was a childcare programme, which was a totally different path. He mentioned that he would have preferred to work or at least study something relevant to his experience, namely business and accounting. But, instead of opposing or resisting, most of those who were interviewed preferred to abide by anything that the employment officers said. Not because they wanted to, but it was expected, as rational subjects, that they would follow the choices that had been made for them. As a result, they have to be constantly appreciative, as well as 'good managers' of their integration process, through taking advantage of the many integration programmes provided for them. At the same time, even when integration participants tried to discuss other options, they were told that this is what is available and the best for them. Consequently, they start to draw on the available integration discursive practices and begin to constitute themselves as 'employable' within these practices. In addition to the above-mentioned interview extract, these two examples from different integration participants show that:

Of course you can refuse what is offered to you and try to find the programme that suits your own experience or interests. but if you do so, you are on your own, and it is not easy to find the right place. ... I tried and I know many of my friends tried to do so ... eventually this will affect your unemployment benefits. ... You become afraid of more losses and decide to go with what the employment office and integration professionals suggest for you ... there is no time to think, and you just have to learn how to handle your integration until you get a job. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

Before coming to Finland I used to work as a barber. ... As part of my integration plan, I was guided to short courses related to barbering and hairdressing. This was going quite fine, until an integration professional told me that it is better for me to start a vocational programme in construction because it is for three years. ... I tried to remind her that these courses suit my previous experience and I have the knowledge in the field of barbering ... so these courses will be a good way to introduce

me to the Finnish context and then I can start working. ... Surprisingly, she told me to think realistically, because it is hard to find a job, and studying for three years will offer me a more stable situation at least for three years. ... I asked her if it is easier to find a job in the construction field. She said it is not easy to find a job in any field, but at least you will have three years to build up your skills and during this time you will not have to keep going on from one short course to another, you will not have to worry about finding a job and you will just focus on studying a new profession. ... Somehow I got convinced. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

These extracts demonstrate how the individual integration plan drawn up 'according to one's interests' becomes a one-to-one plan within a system that denies one's own potential or redirects previous experiences into what is promised to be best for the refugee. Integration becomes systemized, treating refugees as a homogenous group and offering them limited choices. Thus, the problem is not with the education provided, but with the different path that has been drawn up for most refugees.

We have discussed elsewhere (Kurki et al., 2018) how integration training becomes an advertising campaign, and the effects this produces on the subjectivity of immigrants. Integration programmes promise faster employment by adopting new skills, thus creating uniform expectations among all refugees. We suggest that this process is exclusionary, as it claims that all individuals have similar abilities to succeed and become employable (see Moore, 2010; Guo, 2010). Also, integration training becomes a tool towards providing refugees with an incentive. In this context, refugees become regulated as well as enabled, as they manage to submit to and master the process of skilling. As several refugees mentioned, during the planning stage of their integration plan they were encouraged to study a vocational degree—even though they had the skills and their previous certificates had been validated—in order to be exempt from the Finnish language test required for obtaining citizenship. When they were asked whether or not they were sure that this information is true, none of them replied with total certainty. One participant did, however, mention:

I was trying to discuss what other choices I can study. ... I mentioned I have around 10 years of experience in construction, my Finnish is very good, and my previous certificate has been validated. I asked: can you at least put me in some work practice where I can demonstrate my skills. ... I was told that studying is the best choice for me now, and if I study for a vocational degree, then I do not need to do the language test when I have to apply for citizenship. Somehow, that really tempted me, and they knew how to kind of 'shut me up' ... at least they put me in a construction program, it is depressing because I have to study again something I know, I could already work. (Participant in integration training, 2017)

It becomes clear that, to become ‘employable’, refugees succumb to the fact that they need to redefine themselves by speaking and acting accordingly, whereas their motivation and skills are directed towards achieving an objective already set by the integration system. They should also be able to ‘start from zero’ (see K ononen, 2011; Kurki et al., 2018). In the above extract, the appropriate response for our interviewee was to be thankful that he was guided to a study programme which was similar to his previous experience. This presumes that refugees have had choice, and have a constant ability to adapt themselves to this new discursive setting and to be grateful.

Concluding discussion

In this chapter we have argued that the employability discourse related to integration policies and training practices is powerful. It works by defining the appropriate responses to events, and involves a set of associated practices through which refugees make sense of themselves and others. Consequently, integration as well as refugees’ autonomy tends to be limited to a question of acting in accordance with what is expected. As a result, any other discursive possibilities for participants in integration training is considered irrelevant or even threatening. Refugees need to ‘learn to learn’ to act as employable subjects through the power relations of integration discursive practices. As a result, employability in our analysis has been understood as an ongoing process whereby refugees become speaking subjects while being subjected to the constitutive force of integration discursive practices. The employable subjectivity formed by integration policies and discursive practices is always constructed and is never fixed. This is why we were interested in highlighting what integration policies and practices do to the subjectivities of refugees, and in their ability to integrate and become employable. We argued that the making of employable refugee subjectivity concerns a reversed process of skilling; a vicious cycle of deskilling, reskilling, and skilling. Refugees’ subjectivity is constructed by constantly submitting to and mastering the ability to survive the vicious cycle of skilling, and to manage their own integration through shifting and forming their subjectivities according to each situation, until they manage to find a job.

Integration training drives individuals towards a constant ideal of becoming employable, yet it seems, regardless of their efforts, that they are never employable enough in specific fields. This is an obstacle towards their transition to work life, remaining in transit rather than reaching the final destination of integration, namely employment. Consequently, refugees seem to remain in integration limbo for several years (see Kurki & Brunila, 2014). According to Shan and Fejes (2015), and our analysis, the one who is skilled and/or competent enough largely depends on how society considers the matter. Regardless of the fact that the interviewees in our study had extensive skills and their certificates have been validated, they were unable to find a job, which says a lot about the

social structures and labour market access in Finland. Attributing failure to reach employment as an individual deficit draws attention away from power relations and structures that created, and continue to create, unemployment and inequality among refugees (see Fejes & Berglund, 2010). Integration discursive practices represent a strand of regulative and productive power, encompassing subjects that can be known and spoken about, both by oneself and others such as integration policies and professionals. This makes it easier to create and recreate refugees as 'more manageable other[s]' (Spivak, 2004, cited in Andreotti, 2007, p. 72). It seems that integration practices are becoming more restrictive, whereas refugees' voices and previous skills remain absent within the integration sphere. Despite their qualifications and previous experiences, they are only 'conditionally employable.' This means that refugees are not seen as employable in certain fields, because they lack one important element: they do not demonstrate enough Finnishness (Näre, 2013; see also Forsander, 2008).

Employability as a form of successful integration constructs refugees as 'not yet employable', and as a homogeneous non-active group lacking agency, skills and resilience. Integration as a procedure has a tremendous impact on refugees, on their future, and on society as a whole. Integration programmes justify taking advantage of refugees' situation through numerous integration projects under the guise of making refugees employable. The negative perception towards the 'unemployed' constructs refugees as individuals who are incapable of being productive enough in society and the labour market, and are thus seen as dissimilar to work-related migrants simply because they are subjectified as 'unskilled'. Unifying the pathways of integration training may lead to an overflow of workers in those sectors into which refugees are guided.* This not only debilitates the individual but is also a waste of potential skills. Integration training does not always acknowledge what the individual would like to learn, as promised by the policies, but refugees cannot refuse what is given to them when an integration plan has been adopted. Accordingly, rather than pursuing self-interest education and employment, the refugee becomes a person who has to increase her value (as a commodity), in order to be more employable and cross the 'border' (see Walkerdine, 2006). This requires the constitution of different subject positions according to different discursive practices.

Providing further education could be beneficial to some refugees, but offering further education and skilling for everyone masks other societal reasons that are behind their unemployment. Hence, the 'employable refugee' subjectivity depends on a variety of elements and characteristics that requires constant making and remaking of the self to achieve the desirable and right kind of subjectivity. Consequently, the focus is on 'fixing the unemployed' rather than 'fixing the causes of unemployment'. Further education does not guarantee a job, nor is it enough to represent the new skills that refugees have acquired. Issues of ethnicity might signal a lack of cultural knowledge and could determine refugees' employability. Refugees' past success and skills are, in most cases, irrelevant and mean little either in the integration process or to employ-

* Correction notice. A correction has been made since this sentence was inadvertently missing and has now been included in the text. Original release date: February 3, 2020. The publication has been reloaded in its corrected form on June 23, 2021.

ers. We may thus ask, can new skills really guarantee employment? And what determines that refugees have become ‘employable’? Is it their skills, their ability to secure a job, or completing integration training?

Notes

- ¹ These documents were selected based on their central role in shaping national and European level of integration policies and practices in general, and integration through skills and employment in specific. These documents include, for instance, *A New Skills Agenda for Europe. Working together to Strengthen Human Capital, Employability and Competitiveness* (EC, 2016); *A European Agenda on Migration* (EC, 2015); *Integration of Beneficiaries of International/Humanitarian Protection into the Labour Market: Policies and Good Practices* (EMN: European Migration Network, 2015); *Work in Finland—Government Migration Policy Programme to Strengthen Labour Migration* (FMI: Ministry of the Interior, 2018); government integration programme outlines areas of focus for integration in the coming years (FMEE: Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016); *National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants* (FNBE: Finnish National Board of Education, 2012).

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