



VETVOICES

Vocational Education and Training
self-guidance for career-seeking refugees

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



**Vocational education and training in Europe for young
refugees and other migrants: Experiences, motivations,
and pathways for support**

James Edwards

SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH

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James Edwards, SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH

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Executive summary (EN)

The **Vocational Education and Training Voices project** (<https://vetvoices.eu>), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, expedites integration by letting refugees and other migrants quickly assess their job-related interests, find job centres, and watch motivational videos within a streamlined progressive web app. This report introduces the findings of 12 video interviews with young migrants living in Germany, Greece, Spain, and Türkiye. In addition to generating content for the VET Voices app, the interviews provided a rich source of data on young migrants' life-worlds. The sample of interviewees was chosen using the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) occupational categories, thus ensuring the representation of diverse perspectives in the dataset and videos alike.

Both **before and after migrating**, interviewees testified to shared experiences and needs. All migrated seeking security and opportunity, and arrived in their new countries of residence with high expectations – but often little concrete information about educational systems and labour markets. Language learning was universally considered the first step toward integration; interviewees proactively engaged in both formal classes and informal study groups. Contacts made through language learning (and general education, for those who entered school) went on to become key sources of information and decision support on vocational training and education (VET).

Interviewees shared both positive and challenging experiences **during VET and on the job**. Although they pursued diverse VET programmes, common threads emerged. For instance, few ended up pursuing the training tracks they had first envisioned; however, nearly all found tracks that aligned well with their broader skills and interests. Nearly all testified to linguistic and cultural divides, financial and legal barriers, and/or the need for social and psychological help. The interviewees sustained their motivation and overcame these challenge thanks to a combination of intrinsic drive and help from key supporters – often professionals, but also people in their social circles.

These stories offer a foundation for **evidence-based policy and practice recommendations**. To improve young refugees' and other migrants' chances of successfully orienting themselves in host country vocational education and training systems, policymakers and practitioners should:

- **Identify and support diverse language-learning venues**, including both formal classes and informal study groups organised by CSOs or community members. Interviewees took advantage of – and appreciated – a broad range of such opportunities.
- **Provide VET information early, often, and in multiple (interactive) formats**. Interviewees stressed the importance of having access to multilingual information, both simple and detailed, in both digital and physical form. Interactive formats, such as the VET Voices app, can make the information search more engaging and personal.
- **Prioritise coordination with civil society and host communities**. Civil society organisations and informal social networks are often as critical to young migrants as governmental institutions, both as information channels and sources of social, psychological, and material support.
- **Amplify the voices of migrants themselves**. Participatory qualitative research, creative media projects such as VET Voices, and sustained mechanisms for consultation and discourse can all help shed light on the human stories behind migration statistics. They can also improve migrants' sense of participation in decision-making processes that impact them.

ملخص تنفيذي (AR) Executive Summary

يعمل مشروع أصوات التعليم والتدريب المهني (<https://vervoices.eu>) ، الذي يشارك في تمويله برنامج إراسموس+ التابع للاتحاد الأوروبي، على تسريع الإدماج من خلال السماح للاجئين وغيرهم من المهاجرين بتقييم اهتماماتهم المتعلقة بالعمل بسرعة، والعثور على مراكز التشغيل، ومشاهدة مقاطع فيديو تحفيزية ضمن تطبيق ويب متقدم و مبسط. يعرض هذا التقرير نتائج 12 مقابلة فيديو مع مهاجرين شباب يعيشون في ألمانيا واليونان وإسبانيا وتركيا. بالإضافة إلى إنشاء محتوى لتطبيق VET Voices ، قدمت المقابلات مصدرًا غنيًا للبيانات حول عوالم حياة المهاجرين الشباب. وتم اختيار عينة من الأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم باستخدام الفئات المهنية للمهارات والكفاءات والمؤهلات والمهن الأوروبية (ESCO) ، وبالتالي ضمان تمثيل وجهات نظر متنوعة في مجموعة البيانات ومقاطع الفيديو على حد سواء .

ولذا فقبل وبعد الهجرة، شهد الأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم عن تجاربهم واحتياجاتهم المشتركة. لقد هاجروا جميعاً بحثاً عن الأمن والفرص، ووصلوا إلى بلدان إقامتهم الجديدة بتوقعات عالية . ولكن في كثير من الأحيان كانت المعلومات الملموسة لديهم قليلة عن الأنظمة التعليمية وأسواق العمل. كان تعلم اللغة يعتبر على مستوى العالم الخطوة الأولى نحو الإدماج ؛ شارك الأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم بشكل استباقي في كل من الفصول الدراسية الرسمية ومجموعات الدراسة غير الرسمية. هذا وأصبحت الاتصالات التي تمت من خلال تعلم اللغة (والتعليم العام لأولئك الذين دخلوا المدرسة) مصادر رئيسية للمعلومات ودعم القرار بشأن التدريب والتعليم المهني (VET).

شارك الأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم تجارب إيجابية وصعبة خلال التعليم والتدريب المهني وفي العمل. وعلى الرغم من أنهم تابعوا برامج التعليم والتدريب المهني المتنوعة، فقد ظهرت نقاط مشتركة. على سبيل المثال، انتهى الأمر بعدد قليل منهم إلى متابعة المسارات التدريبية التي تصوروها في البداية؛ ومع ذلك، وجد جميعهم تقريباً مسارات تتوافق بشكل جيد مع مهاراتهم واهتماماتهم الأوسع. وقد شهد جميعهم تقريباً على الاختلافات اللغوية والثقافية، والحوازر المالية والقانونية، و/أو الحاجة إلى المساعدة الاجتماعية والنفسية. وقد أقر الأشخاص الذين أجريت معهم المقابلات على دوافعهم وتغلبوا على هذه التحديات بفضل مزيج من الدافع الذاتي والمساعدة من الداعمين الرئيسيين أغلبهم محترفين، ولكن أيضاً فاعلين في دوائرهم الاجتماعي.

توفر هذه التجارب أو الوقائع المعاشة أساساً لتوصيات السياسات والممارسات القائمة على الأدلة. لتحسين فرص اللاجئين الشباب وغيرهم من المهاجرين في توجيه أنفسهم بنجاح في أنظمة التعليم والتدريب المهني في البلد المضيف، ينبغي لوضع السياسات والممارسين :

- تحديد ودعم أماكن متنوعة لتعلم اللغات، بما في ذلك الفصول الرسمية ومجموعات الدراسة غير الرسمية التي تنظمها منظمات المجتمع المدني أو أفراد المجتمع. وقد استفاد الأشخاص الذين أجريت معهم المقابلات من مجموعة واسعة من هذه الفرص، وأعربوا عن تقديرهم لها.
- توفير معلومات التعليم والتدريب المهني في وقت مبكر، وفي كثير من الأحيان، وبأشكال متعددة وتفاعلية. وشدد الأشخاص الذين أجريت معهم المقابلات على أهمية الوصول إلى المعلومات المتعددة اللغات، البسيطة والمفصلة، في شقيها الرقمي والمادي. كما أن الصيغ التفاعلية، مثل تطبيق VET Voices ، يمكنه تسهيل البحث عن المعلومات وإرجاعها أكثر جاذبية وشخصية.
- إعطاء الأولوية للتنسيق مع المجتمع المدني والمجتمعات المضيفة. غالباً ما تكون منظمات المجتمع المدني والشبكات الاجتماعية غير الرسمية ذات أهمية بالغة للمهاجرين الشباب مثل المؤسسات الحكومية، باعتبارها قنوات معلومات ومصادر للدعم الاجتماعي والنفسي والمادي.
- تقوية أصوات المهاجرين أنفسهم. كما يمكن للبحث النوعي التشاركي، والمشاريع الإعلامية الإبداعية مثل أصوات التعليم والتدريب المهني (VET Voices) ، والآليات المستدامة للتشاور والخطاب، أن تساعد جميعها في تسليط الضوء على التجارب الإنسانية وراء إحصاءات الهجرة. ويمكنها أيضاً تحسين شعور المهاجرين بالمشاركة في عمليات صنع القرار التي تؤثر عليهم

Execudtive summary – Kurzfassung (DE)

Das Projekt Vocational Education and Training Voices (<https://vetvoices.eu>), das vom Erasmus+ Programm der Europäischen Union kofinanziert wird, beschleunigt die Integration, indem es Geflüchteten und anderen Migrant*innen die Möglichkeit gibt, ihre beruflichen Interessen schnell

einzuschätzen, Jobcenter zu finden und Motivationsvideos in einer optimierten progressiven Web-App anzusehen. Dieser Bericht stellt die Ergebnisse von 12 Videointerviews mit jungen Migrant*innen vor, die in Deutschland, Griechenland, Spanien und der Türkei leben. Neben der Erstellung von Inhalten für die App VET Voices boten die Interviews eine reichhaltige Datenquelle über die Lebenswelten junger Migrant*innen. Die Stichprobe der Befragten wurde anhand der europäischen Berufskategorien für Fertigkeiten, Kompetenzen, Qualifikationen und Berufe (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations - ESCO) ausgewählt, um sicherzustellen, dass sowohl im Datensatz als auch in den Videos unterschiedliche Perspektiven vertreten sind.

Die Befragten berichteten über gemeinsame Erfahrungen und Bedürfnisse, sowohl vor als auch nach der Migration. Alle wanderten auf der Suche nach Sicherheit und Chancen ein und kamen mit hohen Erwartungen, aber oft mit wenig konkreten Informationen über Bildungssysteme und Arbeitsmärkte in ihren neuen Wohnsitzländern an. Das Erlernen der Sprache wurde allgemein als erster Schritt zur Integration angesehen; die Befragten nahmen sowohl an formellen Kursen als auch an informellen Lerngruppen teil. Kontakte, die durch das Erlernen von Sprachen (und allgemeiner Bildung für diejenigen, die eine Schule besuchten) geknüpft wurden, wurden später zu wichtigen Informationsquellen und Entscheidungshilfen für die berufliche Aus- und Weiterbildung.

Die Befragten berichteten sowohl über positive als auch über herausfordernde Erfahrungen **während der Berufsausbildung und im Beruf**. Obwohl sie unterschiedliche Berufsausbildungen absolvierten, gab es Gemeinsamkeiten. So haben zum Beispiel nur wenige von ihnen den Ausbildungsweg eingeschlagen, der ihnen ursprünglich vorschwebte; fast alle haben jedoch einen Weg gefunden, der gut zu ihren allgemeinen Fähigkeiten und Interessen passte. Fast alle berichteten über sprachliche und kulturelle Unterschiede, finanzielle und rechtliche Hürden und/oder den Bedarf an sozialer und psychologischer Hilfe. Die Befragten hielten ihre Motivation aufrecht und überwandern diese Herausforderungen dank einer Kombination aus intrinsischem Antrieb und Hilfe von wichtigen Unterstützer*innen - oft Fachleuten, aber auch Menschen aus ihrem sozialen Umfeld.

Diese Geschichten bieten eine Grundlage für **evidenzbasierte politische und praktische Empfehlungen**. Um die Chancen junger Geflüchteter und anderer Migrant*innen zu verbessern, sich erfolgreich in den Berufsbildungssystemen des Aufnahmelandes zurechtzufinden, sollten politische Entscheidungstragende und Praktiker*innen:

- **Verschiedene Möglichkeiten zum Erlernen von Sprachen identifizieren und fördern**, darunter sowohl formelle Kurse als auch informelle Lerngruppen, die von zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen oder Gemeindemitgliedern organisiert werden. Die Befragten nutzen – und schätzen – ein breites Spektrum an solchen Möglichkeiten.
- **Frühzeitig, häufig und in verschiedenen (interaktiven) Formaten Informationen zur Berufsbildung bereitstellen**. Die Befragten betonten, wie wichtig es ist, Zugang zu mehrsprachigen Informationen zu haben, die sowohl einfach als auch detailliert sind und sowohl in digitaler als auch in physischer Form vorliegen. Interaktive Formate, wie die App VET Voices, können die Informationssuche ansprechender und persönlicher gestalten.
- **Die Koordinierung mit der Zivilgesellschaft und den Aufnahmegemeinschaften priorisieren**. Organisationen der Zivilgesellschaft und informelle soziale Netzwerke sind für junge Migrant*innen oft genauso wichtig wie staatliche Einrichtungen, sowohl als Informationskanäle als auch als Quellen für soziale, psychologische und materielle Unterstützung.

- **Die Stimmen der Migrant*innen selbst verstärken.** Partizipative qualitative Forschung, kreative Medienprojekte wie VET Voices und nachhaltige Mechanismen für Konsultation und Diskurs können dazu beitragen, die menschlichen Geschichten hinter den Migrationsstatistiken zu hervorzuheben. Ebenso können sie bei Migrant*innen zu dem Empfinden beitragen, an Entscheidungsprozessen teilzunehmen, die sie betreffen.

Executive summary – Περίληψη (EL)

Το πρότζεκτ **Vocational Education and Training Voices** (<https://vetvoices.eu>), το οποίο συγχρηματοδοτείται από το πρόγραμμα Erasmus+ της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, επιταχύνει την ένταξη των προσφύγων και των υπόλοιπων μεταναστών, επιτρέποντάς τους να αξιολογούν γρήγορα τα επαγγελματικά τους ενδιαφέροντα, να εντοπίζουν γραφεία εύρεσης εργασίας και να παρακολουθούν βίντεο παρακίνησης μέσα από μια βελτιστοποιημένη προοδευτική διαδικτυακή εφαρμογή. Η παρούσα έκθεση παρουσιάζει τα ευρήματα 12 βιντεοσκοπημένων συνεντεύξεων με νεαρούς μετανάστες που ζουν στη Γερμανία, την Ελλάδα, την Ισπανία και την Τουρκία. Εκτός από τη δημιουργία περιεχομένου για την εφαρμογή VET Voices, οι συνεντεύξεις παρείχαν μια πλούσια πηγή δεδομένων σχετικά με τη ζωή των νέων μεταναστών. Το δείγμα των ερωτηθέντων επιλέχθηκε με βάση τις επαγγελματικές κατηγορίες των Ευρωπαϊκών Δεξιοτήτων, Ικανοτήτων, Προσόντων και Επαγγελμάτων (ESCO), εξασφαλίζοντας με αυτόν τον τρόπο την εκπροσώπηση διαφορετικών προοπτικών, τόσο στο σύνολο των δεδομένων όσο και στα βίντεο.

Τόσο πριν όσο και μετά τη μετανάστευσή τους, οι ερωτηθέντες μίλησαν για κοινές εμπειρίες και ανάγκες. Όλοι μετανάστευσαν αναζητώντας ασφάλεια και ευκαιρίες και έφτασαν στις νέες χώρες διαμονής τους με μεγάλες προσδοκίες, αλλά συχνά με πολύ λίγες σαφείς πληροφορίες σχετικά με το εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα και την αγορά εργασίας. Η εκμάθηση της γλώσσας θεωρήθηκε από όλους ως το πρώτο βήμα προς την ενσωμάτωση. Οι ερωτηθέντες συμμετείχαν ενεργά τόσο σε επίσημα προγράμματα μαθημάτων όσο και σε ανεπίσημες ομάδες μελέτης. Οι επαφές που δημιουργήθηκαν μέσω της εκμάθησης γλωσσών (και της γενικής εκπαίδευσης, για όσους φοίτησαν στο σχολείο) εξελίχθηκαν σε βασικές πηγές πληροφόρησης και υποστήριξης αποφάσεων σχετικά με την επαγγελματική τους κατάρτιση και εκπαίδευση (ΕΕΚ).

Οι ερωτηθέντες μοιράστηκαν τόσο θετικές όσο και δύσκολες εμπειρίες **κατά τη διάρκεια της ΕΕΚ, αλλά και της εργασίας τους**. Παρόλο που ακολούθησαν διαφορετικά προγράμματα ΕΕΚ, προέκυψαν κοινά ζητήματα. Για παράδειγμα, μόνο λίγοι κατέληξαν να ακολουθήσουν τις εκπαιδευτικές κατευθύνσεις που είχαν αρχικά οραματιστεί. Ωστόσο, σχεδόν όλοι βρήκαν κατευθύνσεις που ταίριαζαν με τις ευρύτερες δεξιότητες και τα ενδιαφέροντά τους. Σχεδόν όλοι κατέθεσαν μαρτυρίες για γλωσσικό και πολιτισμικό χάσμα, οικονομικά και νομικά εμπόδια ή/και για την ανάγκη κοινωνικής και ψυχολογικής βοήθειας. Οι ερωτηθέντες διατήρησαν το κίνητρό τους και ξεπέρασαν αυτές τις προκλήσεις χάρη σε έναν συνδυασμό εσωτερικής δύναμης και βοήθειας από βασικούς υποστηρικτές - συχνά επαγγελματίες, αλλά και άτομα του κοινωνικού τους περίγυρου.

Αυτές οι ιστορίες προσφέρουν τα θεμέλια για **προτάσεις πολιτικής και πρακτικών, οι οποίες βασίζονται σε στοιχεία**. Για να βελτιωθούν οι πιθανότητες των νέων προσφύγων και άλλων μεταναστών να προσανατολιστούν επιτυχώς στο σύστημα επαγγελματικής εκπαίδευσης και κατάρτισης της χώρας υποδοχής, οι υπεύθυνοι χάραξης πολιτικής και οι επαγγελματίες θα πρέπει:

- **Να αναγνωρίσουν και να υποστηρίξουν ποικίλους χώρων εκμάθησης της γλώσσας**, συμπεριλαμβανομένων τόσο επίσημων εκπαιδευτικών προγραμμάτων όσο και άτυπων ομάδων μελέτης που οργανώνονται από Οργανώσεις της Κοινωνίας των Πολιτών (ΟΚΠΑ) ή μέλη της κοινότητας. Οι ερωτηθέντες αξιοποίησαν- και εκτίμησαν - ένα ευρύ φάσμα τέτοιων ευκαιριών.

- **Να παρέχουν πληροφορίες για την ΕΕΚ εγκαίρως, συχνά και σε πολλαπλές (διαδραστικές) μορφές.** Οι ερωτηθέντες τόνισαν τη σημασία της πρόσβασης σε πληροφορίες σε πολλές γλώσσες, τόσο απλές όσο και λεπτομερείς, σε ψηφιακή και φυσική μορφή. Οι διαδραστικές μορφές, όπως η εφαρμογή VET Voices, μπορούν να κάνουν την αναζήτηση πληροφοριών πιο ελκυστική και εξατομικευμένη.
- **Να δώσουν προτεραιότητα στον συντονισμό με την κοινωνία των πολιτών και τις κοινότητες υποδοχής.** Οι οργανώσεις της κοινωνίας των πολιτών και τα άτυπα κοινωνικά δίκτυα είναι συχνά εξίσου σημαντικά για τους νέους μετανάστες όσο τα κυβερνητικά ιδρύματα, τόσο ως δίαυλοι πληροφόρησης όσο και ως πηγές κοινωνικής, ψυχολογικής και υλικής υποστήριξης.
- **Να ενισχύσουν τις φωνές των ίδιων των μεταναστών.** Η συμμετοχική ποιοτική έρευνα, τα δημιουργικά έργα των μέσων ενημέρωσης, όπως το VET Voices, και οι συνεχείς μηχανισμοί διαβούλευσης και διαλόγου μπορούν να βοηθήσουν ώστε να φωτιστούν οι ανθρώπινες ιστορίες πίσω από τις στατιστικές της μετανάστευσης. Μπορούν επίσης να βελτιώσουν το αίσθημα συμμετοχής των μεταναστών στις διαδικασίες λήψης αποφάσεων που τους επηρεάζουν.

Executive summary – Resumen ejecutivo (ES)

El **proyecto 'Voces de educación y formación profesional'** (<https://vetvoices.eu>), cofinanciado por el Programa Erasmus+ de la Unión Europea, acelera la integración permitiendo a los refugiados y otros inmigrantes evaluar rápidamente sus intereses laborales, encontrar centros de trabajo y ver vídeos motivadores en una aplicación web progresiva y optimizada. Este informe presenta los resultados de 12 entrevistas en vídeo con jóvenes inmigrantes que viven en Alemania, Grecia, España y Turquía. Además de generar contenidos para la aplicación Voces de EFP, las entrevistas proporcionaron una rica fuente de datos sobre el mundo y la vida de los jóvenes inmigrantes. La muestra de entrevistados se eligió utilizando las categorías profesionales de Competencias, Cualificaciones y Ocupaciones Europeas (ESCO), garantizando así la representación de diversas perspectivas tanto en el conjunto de datos como en los vídeos.

Tanto antes como después de emigrar, los entrevistados dieron testimonio de experiencias y necesidades compartidas. Todos emigraron en busca de seguridad y oportunidades, y llegaron a sus nuevos países de residencia con grandes expectativas, pero a menudo con poca información concreta sobre los sistemas educativos y los mercados laborales. El aprendizaje de idiomas se consideró universalmente el primer paso hacia la integración; los entrevistados participaron activamente tanto en clases formales como en grupos de estudio informales. Los contactos establecidos a través del aprendizaje de idiomas (y de la educación general, para aquellos que ingresaron a la escuela) se convirtieron en fuentes clave de información y apoyo a la toma de decisiones sobre formación y educación profesional (EFP).

Los entrevistados compartieron experiencias tanto positivas como difíciles **durante la EFP y en el trabajo**. Aunque siguieron diversos programas de EFP, surgieron puntos en común. Por ejemplo, pocos terminaron siguiendo los itinerarios formativos que habían previsto en un principio; sin embargo, casi todos encontraron itinerarios que se ajustaban a sus aptitudes e intereses más amplios. Casi todos dieron testimonio de las diferencias lingüísticas y culturales, las barreras financieras y jurídicas, y/o la necesidad de ayuda social y psicológica. Los entrevistados mantuvieron su motivación y superaron estos desafíos gracias a una combinación de impulso intrínseco y ayuda de apoyos clave, a menudo profesionales, pero también personas de sus círculos sociales.

Estas historias ofrecen una base para **recomendaciones de políticas y prácticas basadas en pruebas**. Para mejorar las posibilidades de los jóvenes refugiados y otros inmigrantes de orientarse con éxito en los sistemas de educación y formación profesional del país de acogida, los formuladores de políticas y los profesionales deben:

- **Identificar y apoyar diversos espacios de aprendizaje de idiomas**, incluyendo tanto clases formales como grupos de estudio informales organizados por OSC o miembros de la comunidad. Los entrevistados aprovecharon, y agradecieron, una amplia gama de oportunidades de este tipo.
- **Proporcionar información sobre EFP de forma temprana, frecuente y en múltiples formatos (interactivos)**. Los entrevistados subrayaron la importancia de tener acceso a información multilingüe, tanto sencilla como detallada, en formato digital y físico. Los formatos interactivos, como la aplicación VET Voices, pueden hacer que la búsqueda de información sea más atractiva y personal.
- **Dar prioridad a la coordinación con la sociedad civil y las comunidades de acogida**. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil y las redes sociales informales suelen ser tan fundamentales para los jóvenes inmigrantes como las instituciones gubernamentales, como canales de información y fuentes de apoyo social, psicológico y material.
- **Amplificar las voces de los propios inmigrantes**. La investigación cualitativa participativa, los proyectos creativos en medios de comunicación, como VET Voices, y los mecanismos permanentes de consulta y debate pueden contribuir a arrojar luz sobre las historias humanas detrás de las estadísticas de migración. También pueden mejorar el sentido de participación de los inmigrantes en los procesos de toma de decisiones que les afectan.

Executive summary – Yönetici özeti (TR)

Avrupa Birliği Erasmus+ Programı tarafından finanse edilen **Vocational Education and Training Voices projesi** (<https://vetvoices.eu>), mültecilerin ve diğer göçmenlerin işle alakalı ilgi alanlarını hızlı bir şekilde değerlendirmelerine, iş merkezleri bulmalarına ve modern aşamalı bir web uygulamasında motivasyon videoları izlemelerine olanak tanıyarak entegrasyonu hızlandırıyor. Bu rapor, Almanya, Yunanistan, İspanya ve Türkiye'de yaşayan genç göçmenlerle yapılan 12 video görüşmesinin bulgularını sunmaktadır. VET Voices uygulaması için içerik oluşturmanın yanı sıra, görüşmeler genç göçmenlerin dünyaları hakkında zengin bir veri kaynağı sağlamıştır. Görüşülen kişilerden oluşan örneklem, Avrupa Beceriler, Yetkinlikler, Yeterlilikler ve Meslekler Sınıflandırması (ESCO) meslek kategorileri kullanılarak seçilmiş, böylece hem veri setinde hem de videolarda farklı bakış açılarının temsil edilmesi sağlanmıştır.

Görüşülen kişiler **göçten önceki ve sonraki** ortak deneyimlerini ve ihtiyaçlarını aktarmıştır. Hepsi de güvenlik ve fırsat arayışıyla göç etmiş ve ikamet ettikleri yeni ülkelere yüksek beklentilerle ancak genellikle eğitim sistemleri ve işgücü piyasaları hakkında çok az somut bilgiyle gelmişlerdir. Dil öğrenimi genel olarak entegrasyona yönelik ilk adım olarak görülürken görüşülen kişiler hem resmi derslere hem de gayri resmi çalışma gruplarına proaktif olarak katılmışlardır. Dil öğrenimi (ve okula gidenler için genel eğitim) yoluyla kurulan bağlantılar, mesleki eğitim ve öğretim (VET) konusunda önemli bilgi ve karar desteği kaynakları haline gelmiştir.

Görüşülen kişiler, **Mesleki Eğitim ve Öğretim sırasında ve iş yerinde** hem olumlu hem de zorlayıcı deneyimler paylaşmıştır. Farklı mesleki eğitim programları takip etmelerine rağmen, ortak hususlar ortaya konmuştur. Örneğin, çok azı ilk başta öngördükleri eğitim programlarını takip etmeyi başarmış, neredeyse hepsi daha farklı becerileri ve ilgi alanlarına uygun programlar bulmuştur. Neredeyse hepsi dilsel ve kültürel farklılıkları, mali ve yasal engelleri ve/veya sosyal ve psikolojik yardıma duyulan ihtiyacı dile getirmiştir. Görüşülen kişiler motivasyonlarını korumuş ve bu zorlukların üstesinden kendi güçleri ve kilit destekçilerin yardımları (genellikle uzmanlar olsa da sosyal çevrelerindeki insanların da yardımıyla) sayesinde gelmişlerdir.

Bu hikayeler, **kanıta dayalı politika ve uygulama önerileri** için bir temel sunmaktadır. Genç mültecilerin ve diğer göçmenlerin ev sahibi ülkenin mesleki eğitim ve öğretim sistemlerine başarılı bir şekilde uyum sağlama şanslarını artırmak için politika yapımcılar ve uygulayıcılar şunları yapmalıdır:

- Hem resmi sınıflar hem de STK'lar veya topluluk üyeleri tarafından düzenlenen gayri resmi çalışma grupları dahil olmak üzere **çeşitli dil öğrenme mekanlarını belirleme ve destekleme**. Görüşülen kişiler bu tür fırsatlardan geniş bir yelpazede yararlanmış ve bunları takdir etmişlerdir.
- **Mesleki eğitim ve öğretim bilgilerini erkenden, sık sık ve birden fazla (interaktif) biçimde sağlama**. Görüşülen kişiler, hem dijital hem de fiziksel formda, hem basit hem de ayrıntılı olarak çok dilli bilgiye erişimin önemini vurgulamışlardır. VET Voices uygulaması gibi interaktif formatlar, bilgi araştırmasını daha ilgi çekici ve kişisel hale getirebilir.
- **Sivil toplum ve ev sahibi topluluklarla koordinasyona öncelik verme**. Sivil toplum kuruluşları ve enformel sosyal ağlar, hem bilgi kanalları hem de sosyal, psikolojik ve maddi destek kaynakları olarak genç göçmenler için genellikle devlet kurumları kadar kritik öneme sahiptir.
- **Göçmenlerin kendi seslerini duyurma**. Katılımcı niteliksel araştırmalar, VET Voices gibi yaratıcı medya projeleri ve sürekli istişare ve söylem mekanizmaları, göç istatistiklerinin ardındaki insan hikayelerine ışık tutmaya yardımcı olabilir. Ayrıca, göçmenlerin kendilerini etkileyen karar alma süreçlerine katılma isteğini de geliştirebilir.

Introduction

The International Organisation for Migration estimated the number of international migrants worldwide in 2022 as 281 million; their contribution to the global economy in international remittances totalled 702 billion USD (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). When supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to robust and inclusive economies and societies in countries of destination. However, integration challenges persist for many migrants, especially those who have experienced forced migration (Eurostat, 2023a, b). Policy responses to this vary dramatically, and cross-national interventions are clearly needed (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). *The VET VOICES project (<https://vetvoices.eu>), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, expedites integration by letting refugees and other migrants quickly assess their job-related interests, find job centres, and watch motivational videos within a streamlined progressive web app.*

This report introduces the findings of video interviews with young refugees and other migrants conducted during the VET Voices project. In total, 12 such explorations have been conducted. The interviews had a dual purpose: to generate motivational content for integration into the VET Voices web app (the videos themselves) and to generate research data. As a data source, they offer valuable insight into young migrants' backgrounds and motivations for moving; the challenges they faced in their new countries of residence; their vocational education and training journeys; and their sources of support along these journeys. The interviews also shed light on information and support gaps that future research and innovation should strive to fill.

Methodology

The basic inclusion criteria for research participation were as follows:

- First-generation migrant to Germany, Greece, Spain, or Turkey from a non-EU country, preferentially who arrived as an asylum-seeker;
- Has EITHER completed vocational education and training in the country of residence within the past 5 years, OR plans to complete vocational educational training (VET) within the next 2 years; and
- Consents to taking part in a video interview, the video of which will be hosted for motivational purposes within the VET Voices app.

The sampling strategy was based on the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) Level 1 occupational categories:

0. Armed forces occupations
1. Managers
2. Professionals
3. Technicians and associate professionals
4. Clerical support workers
5. Service and sales workers
6. Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers
7. Crafts and related trades
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers

9. Elementary occupations

The category “Armed forces occupations” was exempted due to citizenship requirements, while the category “Managers” was exempted due to the fact that tertiary education, rather than vocational education and training, is generally required. Due to the fact that recruiting took place in urban settings, the category “Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers” was also exempted (although this is a high-priority category in many labour markets).

For each remaining category, key indicators were identified using the CEDEFOP Skills Panorama dataset (<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en>): e.g., future job prospects, job satisfaction, median monthly gross salary, and educational requirements for the EU27 level, along with future job prospects per VET Voices target country. Larger samples were sought for occupations with better combined scores on the above indicators, especially future job prospects. The final sample follows:

ID	Gender	Origin	Residence	Vocational training programme: ESCO level 3 or 4	Vocational training programme: ESCO level 1
R1	F	Syria	Cham, DE	Optician	3 - Technicians and associate professionals
R2	M	Afghanistan	Cham, DE	Hotel reservation clerk	4 - Clerical support workers
R3	F	Afghanistan	Heidelberg, DE	Child care worker [in training]	5 - Service and sales workers
R4	M	Afghanistan	Thessaloniki, EL	Social work assistant	3 - Technicians and associate professionals
R5	M	Pakistan	Thessaloniki, EL	Shop assistant	5 - Service and sales workers
R6	M	Burundi	Thessaloniki, EL	Plumber / pipe fitter	7 - Craft and related trades workers
R7	M	Mali	Thessaloniki, EL	ICT technician [in training]	3 - Technicians and associate professionals
R8	F	Ecuador	Vigo, ES	Hairdresser	5 - Service and sales workers
R9	F	Peru	Vigo, ES	Marketing assistant [in training]	2 - Professionals
R10	M	Syria	Kayseri, TR	Hairdresser	5 - Service and sales workers
R11	F	Syria	Kayseri, TR	Hairdresser	5 - Service and sales workers
R12	M	Syria	Kayseri, TR	Hairdresser	5 - Service and sales workers

An interview topic guide was developed by SINUS-Institute (<https://www.sinus-institut.de/en>) with input from the full VET Voices consortium (<https://www.vetvoices.eu/partners/>). Loosely based on the model of the problem-centred interview (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), the topic guide began with an open, narrative introductory question to ensure that the interviewee was an active contributor to the knowledge production process, then moved on to focused questions on experiences in vocational education and training, experiences on the job, hopes for the future, and recommendations to other migrants and to migration stakeholders in the country of residence.

In Germany, Greece, and Spain, fieldwork was conducted by SINUS-Institute between June and September 2022, with assistance from the local project partners in each site. Due to challenges in accessing the target group followed by the earthquake in Kayseri, fieldwork in Turkey was delayed until July 2023 and conducted by the local project partner, 21st Century Educators' Association (<https://21yyegitimder.org.tr/>). GDPR-compliant informed consent procedures were used¹.

The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed, after which the transcripts were pseudonymised and translated into English². They were coded using the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner (<https://provalisresearch.com/>). First, structural codes were created based on the sections of the interview topic guide; second, inductive codes were added based on the topics raised by the interviewees. These inductive codes were then systematised and used as the basis for analysis.

Findings

Before migrating: Background, hopes, and expectations

What were the interviewees' educational and work experience before migration?

The interviewees' educational and work backgrounds prior to migration varied widely. Some interviewees had already pursued advanced degrees and were working in highly specialized fields (e.g., banking), while others had not even completed elementary education and were barely literate. A number of interviewees, especially those whose migration journeys brought them through a number of countries, testified to 'patchwork' biographies: e.g., partially completed educational programmes and/or short-term work in a range of fields in different places, often unaccompanied by any formal qualification. One factor that united the interviewees regardless of their background, however, was that their educational and work experiences were seldom smooth. Structural factors in the countries of origin, ranging from gender disparities to patterns of corruption, blocked their ability to effectively pursue an education and/or capitalize upon it through meaningful and rewarding work.

"I grew up in Afghanistan and Iran, and [in Afghanistan] I only attended elementary school. And then in Iran, unfortunately, I didn't [attend school]. And I also got married very early, at 16, and then I was a housewife" (R3, female, child care worker [in training], Germany)

"I finished school in Syria with good grades. That's why I was able to go to university and then studied economics. And during studies I also worked as a, how do you say, secretary, in a small

¹ For more information on the interview topic guides and/or informed consent procedures, please contact the coordinating institution at info@sinus-institut.de.

² The videos are available to registered users within the app: see <https://vetvoices.eu>.

hospital, and afterwards, so after studies, I worked in a bank, but wasn't for long because of the war." (R1, female, optician, Germany)

"Before I arrived in Greece, my field in Afghanistan: I was studying for a BBA [Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration], and worked in a bank." (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

Interviewees' often-irregular educational and employment histories, ambivalent experiences at school or work, and frequent lack of formal qualifications sometimes complicated their educational and employment journeys in their new homes. However, negative experiences in their countries of origin also sometimes underscored their resolve to find better living conditions elsewhere, and helped motivate them to take full advantage of better opportunities in their new countries of residence.

What were the interviewees' reasons for migrating? What were their expectations, hopes, fears, and concerns regarding their destination countries?

Human mobility is complex, and no migration decision is driven by a single factor. However, a trend within the interviewees' migration narratives was insecurity in their countries of origin. Some faced immediate threats to their physical safety, whether due to war (Afghanistan, Syria), endemic crime (Ecuador, Venezuela), or legal discrimination (Burundi, Iran). Profound economic precarity was furthermore universal among the interviewees.

"For me, it wasn't 'why Greece'. For me was a safety first. That's what matters. That's why I did not even consider going to France or going to Belgium or going elsewhere. Safety first." (R6, male, plumber/ pipe fitter, Greece)

"We didn't have a certain future in the country. I have my family, I have friends, but we did not see a 100% certain future in Peru." (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

"In any case, my great hope was that I would want to live in a country where there is peace...my great hope was that I could just live freely" (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

First and foremost, the interviewees believed that their intended destination countries offered comparative security. However, they also saw their destination countries as sites of opportunity. Many interviewees had high expectations of accessing better educational opportunities in their destination countries. They aspired to pursue vocational training and/or higher education, to the end of building successful careers. That being said, interviewees were seldom aware of the specifics of the educational and labour systems in their countries of destination: rather than concrete information or educational/career aims, they held emotionally charged visions of these countries as spaces of relative safety and opportunity.

"That's what I had in mind, to become an interpreter and help people who don't know Greek or any language, to help the other person, whoever has a problem." (R5, male, shop assistant, Greece)

"I didn't know at all. I was not informed. As I said, was for me that anyway my children are safe [...] My goal was to establish or have a good normal life here in Germany. (...) Because I come from a country where there was a war and at the beginning people only think that I only want a normal life." (R1, female, optician, Germany)

The interviewees were aware from the offset that these goals would not be easy to achieve. Even before migrating, they expected to encounter language barriers, legal obstacles, and a degree of culture shock. They furthermore expected a period of uncertainty and economic precarity prior to finding a stable educational and career track.

“Before I come to Greece, my expectation was to start the job, to find job in my field and the fear was how to find, from where I can find this, and where to go, from where I can ask this help.” (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

“When I came I was very afraid of what was going to happen, it was very, very difficult, when I came at the beginning it was difficult and I didn’t know what was going to happen” (R5, male, shop assistant, Greece)

All of the interviewees cited self-reliance as a key aim and virtue: throughout their migration journeys, they maintained the hope to achieve economic stability, provide for their loved ones, and integrate successfully into their new societies.

After migrating: First experiences, language education, and general education

What challenges arose during interviewees’ migration journeys? What surprised the interviewees upon arrival in the new countries of residence?

The interviewees’ migration journeys were varied: some passed through numerous transit countries (e.g., from Afghanistan through Iran to Turkey and then Germany), while others arrived directly (e.g., from Ecuador to Spain). Those interviewees who took irregular pathways encountered challenges on the way, sometimes including separation from loved ones and significant risks to their personal safety and security. For some, arrival in their countries of destination also brought challenges: e.g., periods spent in refugee camps with no clear idea of when residence and work permits would be granted.

“I didn't have my kids with me. And that was really hard for me. They were little, and all of a sudden gone [...] when I found my children and visited them for the first time [...] that was ‘wow’ for me, yes, of course, beautiful.” (R3, female, child care worker [in training], Germany)

However, compared to the journey, most experienced arrival as a respite, characterised by modernity, safety and security, community and social support, and expected and unexpected opportunities. Some interviewees also mentioned the diversity and inclusivity of their cities of arrival as positive factors. With regard to the pace of integration, both personal and institutional factors came into play: some interviewees, who arrived via regular routes with language skills and study/work permission granted in advance (e.g., migrants from South America to Spain), began looking for education and training programmes and/or jobs immediately. By contrast, those who arrived via irregular routes often underwent a period of limbo. Even during this period, however, the interviewees sought to prepare themselves for life in their new countries, e.g., by proactively learning the language.

“Um, to be honest, what surprised me the most was how modern it is compared to Peru” (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

“I was surprised because, as I said, I did not know that so many opportunities there are yes, so you are supported and first with the language, there are still, there are many voluntary courses

and you can also learn the language there.” (R3, female, child care worker [in training], Germany)

What were the interviewees’ experiences with language education and general education in the new countries of residence? How did they inform themselves about the next steps, i.e., vocational education and training?

The interviewees universally emphasised the importance of learning the languages of their new countries, both as a step toward their educational and career goals and as a more general prerequisite for social and cultural integration. They identified numerous language-learning opportunities: all took formal classes, and some also took part in informal study groups and language cafés. While all interviewees found the language learning process challenging, they all expressed a high level of dedication. A resource here was that some interviewees were already multilingual upon arrival.

“With the Galician language. I didn't understand anything, so I was very nervous, I was very nervous, scared. It was a very complicated thing for me.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

“So in the beginning the German group helped me so much, they were actually three people who helped me so much (...) and then here in the training, I have a really nice team. And they really supported me. So my language was so bad. (...) that takes patience from the team that you put up with that.” (R1, female, optician, Germany)

“The first three months I only learned German, and after three months I went to school, got my secondary school leaving certificate, and after that, after a year, I started my training.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

Interviewees’ experiences with general education in their new countries of residence varied greatly: some arrived with recognised secondary school leaving certificates in hand, while others had not yet completed elementary education. The differences between educational systems in interviewees’ countries of origin and new countries of residence were often difficult to understand and navigate, especially for those with limited formal educational experience. However, the interviewees proactively connected with teachers, counsellors, interpreters, new friends, and others who were capable of providing support. In some cases, these supporters helped the interviewees reach decisions about what courses to pursue; in other cases, interviewees themselves took the lead in searching out information and primarily followed their interests.

“I chose my training, vocational program with my social worker there in the camp. She helped me.” (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

“I decided to look for information if there was something similar to the ‘techniques’ in Peru, the so-called ‘techniques’, here. And then I came across what was vocational training, which also covered large training cycles, so since then I was aiming to do a training cycle, because for me it has always been very important to study.” (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

In addition to gaining language skills and overall cultural competence, the interviewees indicated that language classes, integration classes, and (when relevant) the general education system were

important sources of information and spaces for dialogue about vocational education and training – as well as the job market.

“[Our] former teacher mentioned Jobcenter to us, and we went there, and they mentioned to us the possibilities of what we could do, and of course they also asked us what we wanted to do. And accordingly, we informed ourselves.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

“A women from there [an integration CSO] named Maria, she helped me a lot in finding a job, and so I managed to start my first job with the hotel in Halkidiki.” (R7, male, ICT technician [in training], Greece)

“So I got a job to take care of some children and then from there I started to tell my mother that I was going to study and I started to ask people where I could study a career, and they started to give me information [...] through the UGT, through the Red Cross, through these centers that normally keep us informed.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

Here, it should be noted that self-selection bias may be a factor: the interviewees volunteered to take part in the research, with the knowledge that their interviews would be filmed and integrated into motivational videos. It stands to reason that those who chose to participate had relatively positive, if also challenging, experiences in their new countries of residence: this is not the case for all refugees or other migrants. However, the interviewees’ stories make it clear that investments in building the capacity of language and integration programmes, as well as improving pathways into vocational education and the job market, can improve the odds.

Experiences, emotions, motivation, and support during VET

What vocational education and training (VET) programmes did the interviewees pursue? How did the interviewees decide what VET programmes to pursue?

The interviewees pursued a wide range of vocational education and training programmes in their new countries of residence. For instance (note only first initials are given):

- D (from Afghanistan, living in Heidelberg, Germany) is pursuing training as a child care worker. Her end goal, after completing her A-levels (Abitur), is to train as an early childhood educator.
- E (from Afghanistan, living in Cham, Germany) initially aimed to become an interpreter, but found his multilingual and multicultural competence equally suited to the hospitality field. He completed an apprenticeship in hotel management and is currently working in the industry.
- F (from Afghanistan, living in Cham, Germany) completed an apprenticeship as an optician and is currently working in the field.
- T (from Burundi, living in Thessaloniki, Greece) is currently working as a plumber, and attending a technical school to advance his skills in plumbing and pipefitting.
- A (from Pakistan, living in Thessaloniki, Greece) is currently working in a retail shop while completing his Greek language training, with the hope of becoming an interpreter.
- D (from Mali, living in Thessaloniki, Greece) is also currently working while pursuing technical education in information and communications technology.
- M (from Afghanistan, living in Thessaloniki, Greece) has a degree in business administration, but is employed as an assistant social worker and volunteering as an interpreter and counsellor

for other refugees; he is currently exploring pathways to having his qualifications recognised or moving into another field.

- Y (from Peru, living in Vigo, Spain) received certification as a lifeguard, which gave her a love for swimming and fitness, and also completed a certificate in marketing and sales – she is currently pursuing further training in the latter field.
- S (from Ecuador, living in Vigo, Spain) completed training as a hairdresser and is currently working in the field.
- T, A, and B (from Syria, living in Kayseri, Türkiye) are all currently in vocational school completing training as hairdressers/barbers.

Factors that many interviewees share, despite their very different vocational education and career pathways, are a high degree of motivation and interest balanced with an awareness of the practical need for flexibility and adaptation. Among the interviewees, only a few ended up studying or working in the fields they originally aimed for; however, all found their way to training programmes that engaged their interests and capitalised on their skills and experience. This was in equal parts due to their own ambition and resilience, and the assistance of key supporters: often counsellors or teachers, sometimes interpreters or civil society organisation volunteers, and sometimes friends or family.

What challenges have the interviewees faced during their VET programmes?

The interviewees were open about the challenges they faced during their VET programmes. For many, language was the first and most salient barrier to overcome. This was especially the case as most VET programmes required a certain minimum level of language competence (e.g., B1 in some cases, unclear in others). Education gaps often also needed to be overcome prior to starting training: this was not only the case for interviewees who had not yet completed secondary school, but also for those who had received qualifications but had difficulty getting them recognized. Fortunately, numerous language learning resources existed in all four target countries.

“I knew that German, the language, was important first.” (R3, female, child care worker [in training], Germany)

“It's the key things that I need to learn Greek. Essential.” (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

“I chose to become a barber [...] I started vocational school [...] they were teaching language and culture. There were also lessons related to the profession. This added benefit for us.” (R10, male, hairdresser, Türkiye)

Related barriers were cultural differences and a feeling of ‘otherness’, which sometimes extended to discrimination. Fortunately, no interviewees indicated that they had been subject to hate speech or other serious incidents – though other studies have found that this can be a problem, including within VET programmes and on the job.

“All the people looked at me so strangely [...] ‘What is she doing?’ Yes, that was actually a difficult situation in the first year of learning. And then, well, I think I got used to these looks, or I think people got used to me too [...] They have gotten to know me. I'm not as foreign as I used to be.” (R1, female, optician, Germany)

“Yes, there are people who don't decide in favour of foreigners or refugees, or who feel against them. But there are also many, many kind people who say ‘yes, we are only human, no matter what country, what origin or what colour, what nationality or so’.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

For those who worked in parallel to training, or whose VET programmes involved a practical component, work-life balance and time management were an issue. Financial and legal challenges were also mentioned by some interviewees: homelessness, the threat of deportation, etc. Fortunately, the interviewees overcame these challenges – though not every refugee does, and better financial and legal support systems are urgently needed.

“When i came to Greece, to Athens [...]I had no house, I had no money, I had no clothes, I was sleeping in the streets and crying about what would happen. I was 15 years old and it was very, very difficult.” (R5, male, shop assistant, Greece)

“After one year of training, during my training period, my asylum application was rejected because I am from Afghanistan and not from Syria. [...] During my training I organized a lawyer and fought to stay here in Germany.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

Finally, building up psychological and social resources – self-confidence and motivation on the one hand, and a support network on the other – took time for some interviewees. Here, stakeholders in the VET system were of critical importance. While interviewees held strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to continue, supporters within the system were instrumental in sustaining and directing this motivation.

“What I didn't know when I entered, I was a little disappointed because nobody had told me that it was going to be so hard and so difficult to do a lifeguard course.” (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

What has helped motivate the interviewees during their VET programmes? Where have the interviewees sought support during their VET programmes?

A prior study by the VET Voices coordinator found that both intrinsic motivations (e.g., interest, enjoyment, the chance for social contact, ambition, etc.) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., earning potential, the desire to integrate, the desire to support one's family, etc.) played a role in young refugees' career orientation and decision-making (Calmbach & Edwards, 2019). The present interviews confirmed this finding.

“It was to fulfil my dreams [...] I always wanted to be a hairdresser, and so here I am, fulfilling my dreams.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

“I was working general jobs [...] one year after that, I started realizing that I can never rely on seasonal jobs, if I want to live or to survive. Secondly, I realized that I need to be skilled for me to be accommodated or be integrated in Greek society.” (R6, male, plumber/ pipe fitter, Greece)

“If I have money, then [I will be able to] get married. That's my goal. To not have problems.” (R7, male, ICT technician [in training], Greece)

The present findings also contributed new insight into factors that sustain motivation over time. While the respondents in the prior study were 14 to 17 years old, the present interviewees were somewhat older (20s and early 30s). Some described ‘waves’ in their motivation level over time, which is natural given the challenges they faced (and still face). They underscored the importance of both formal and informal support systems in helping them through the low points: each interviewee mentioned at least one key individual (in some cases several) who had gone above and beyond to support them throughout their VET and job-search journey.

“I was homeless, so it was very a tough time because I was living in my friend's house, but there was also not enough space to live there. And then I decided to resign my job [...] my social worker told me: do not give up, you will do it, and we will find another one. Then, she sent my CV to another organization, and they asked me for interview, and I succeeded. And fortunately, I found a house also, and I started to integrate in the Greek society through this job, and I'm very happy.” (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

“So at the adult education centre, I always had a good relationship with the teacher. So with the two German courses, I actually had the same teacher. We have a good relationship, and so far, we have contact. She writes to me and I write to her, so she is a very good teacher. And yes, in the beginning, you need a lot of motivation.” (R1, female, optician, Germany)

“Yes, I am very happy because in my training system, I had a lot of encouragement, right? Professional support from my teachers. I had a lot of moral support, more than anything else, and from my classmates [... and] my first work experience was chosen by the girl who opened the doors for me when I did my internship, she offered me to work with her on weekends so that I could open doors in the working world.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

“Even though I wanted to leave the course, well, the certificate, when I got home, my mother was always a great support for me, she encouraged me, she said nice things to me, she comforted me [...] my classmates they did it too.” (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

In many cases, the key partners in the interviewees’ VET journeys were professionals (e.g., counsellors or teachers), while in other cases they were family members or friends. While professional qualifications were unquestionably important to many of these key partners’ roles, the ‘soft’ factors of attitude and dedication were equally decisive.

Experiences at work and hopes for the future

What is working life like for the interviewees?

Most of the interviewees were working at the time of fieldwork. Around half were working in the same fields in which they have sought or are seeking training, while around half had part-time jobs in unrelated fields. Those interviewees working in their prospective career fields were overwhelmingly positive about their jobs. They spoke straightforwardly about having encountered challenges, but also expressed a high level of motivation and a strong desire for career development. They see their jobs as pathways to personal growth and long-term success in their new countries of residence.

“I am super satisfied. When I think about how I started, how I had thoughts, how I had fears, I always said to myself, ‘you won’t make it, it won’t work’. But now, I can only look. I have made it, yes. And now I say, ‘yes, I want to continue, I want to develop more in my profession’. [...] So, I’m planning to do my master’s degree in optometry.” (R1, female, optician, Germany)

“[A hairdresser can] give value to the personality of each client, right? It is something motivating [...] In doing that job, in offering my work to the client, I am happy and I know that the client will leave happy and satisfied, more than anything else.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

Those interviewees who were working in unrelated fields were also generally positive about their jobs, though some made it clear that they viewed the situation as temporary. This is in part because these jobs were unskilled, and the interviewees indicated that the working conditions were sometimes demanding. However, the interviewees expressed both gratitude for the ability to earn a living and resilience and determination in overcoming obstacles. They saw their part-time jobs as a waystation rather than a destination, and expressed their hope that VET would open pathways forward. All interviewees, regardless of their present situation, made it clear that they intend to persevere on their course.

“All I do (in my current job) is carry boxes and it’s too hard. And sometimes I don’t want to [continue].” (R5, male, shop assistant, Greece)

“I looked at the jobs that I’ve been doing previously, which were unskilled jobs. I’ve been washing dishes in the restaurants, I’ve been collecting rubbish in every way [...] I prefer something skilled, something that I can live with.” (R6, male, plumber/pipe fitter, Greece)

What are the interviewees’ hopes for the future?

Their hopes and aspirations for the future vary, but common themes include seeking stability and security, education, career development, personal growth, and autonomy. While expressing gratitude for the support they have received, the interviewees also expressed a desire to become self-reliant; in many cases, the stated end goal was to open one’s own business.

“In ten years I definitely want to buy a house, definitely in the district of Cham, where I currently live. To bring my fiancée to Germany and start a family, live happily ever after.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

“In the next five years I hope to have finished a higher education cycle and to have found a stable job, which, well, I suppose it won’t be easy to find, but that and maybe starting a university degree, which is good. I think my main objective at the moment is to get a university degree and then a master’s degree. “ (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

“It is my dream to open my (own) workplace in the next five years.” (R11, female, hairdresser, Turkey)

In addition to autonomy, altruism is a key theme: several of the respondents identified the desire to help others, whether their own families or other migrants, as a motivator to remain on track. Notably, several interviewees volunteered alongside their training and work, for instance, as interpreters or social work assistants at reception or integration centres, at hospitals, or with the police. They framed

volunteering as simultaneously an opportunity to give back in the same way as they themselves had been supported, and as a vector for expanding and deepening their social and professional networks, which could potentially lead to new opportunities in the future.

“Outside of classes, I was working as a volunteer here in the camp, in the clinic with [...] refugee patients also in the hospitals, when they had appointments for their medical problems in the hospital, I went [...] Working with people is, you feel very proud and you feel relaxed, you did something meaningful to yourself.” (R4, male, social work assistant, Greece)

“As I said, my dream job is to work as an interpreter. And at the moment I'm not doing that full-time, but on a freelance basis. I am registered with the Federal Police as an interpreter, and I will translate there from time to time.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

Interviewee suggestions for migrants and migration policymakers

What suggestions would the interviewees give to other migrants in their countries of residence? If the interviewees could write a letter to their past self, what would they say?

In addition to narrating their own migration, vocational education, and career journeys, the interviewees gave concrete suggestions both for other recent migrants and for the institutions that seek to support them. With regard to first steps, the interviewees advised other recent migrants to seek information about education in their new countries of residence via multiple channels: on the internet, through formal or informal language classes or teachers in the general education system, through job centres, and via their social circles. The same applies to vocational education and jobs: among the interviewees, only around half found their first positions through formal sources such as job centres; the rest found them via recommendations by teachers, counsellors, contacts at integration CSOs, or family or friends.

“The most, most, most important advice I could give would be to never stop looking for information, to look for lots and lots of information, to never be satisfied with only one source of information” (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

“Knowledge and information, more than anything else, is what leads you to be a professional.” (R8, female, hairdresser, Spain)

“There are of course opportunities at school [...] they are of course informed, and there are also job centres that always advertise [...] contact persons at the job centre who of course mention the opportunities [...] And contact with people is also very important. For example, I got my current job through my former teacher, or she also informed me, because she knows the hotel and also the boss, and that was a big advantage. So, just stay in contact with people.” (R1, female, optician, Germany)

The interviewees stressed the importance of honesty about how long and difficult this process can be, and emphasised the need to be patient. They also recommended that new arrivals remain open to opportunities outside their original fields of interest, mentioning that they themselves often had to compromise in order to get a foot in the door. Finally, they recommended proactively engaging in self-reflection about one's aspirations and interests, making it clear that having a well-grounded

understanding of oneself can serve as a powerful motivator during the inevitable difficult phases in one's journey.

"Openness, you need that." (R3, female, child care worker [in training], Germany)

"Have patience. It is not easy. Everything I achieved, I managed only with patience." (R5, male, shop assistant, Greece)

"If I were to write a letter to my past self, four years ago, well, I would say: don't be afraid. What you are doing is not bad. It can be better, obviously. But, you don't know what is going to wait for you in the future right now." (R9, female, marketing assistant [in training], Spain)

"If I were to write a letter to myself in Afghanistan now, I would write: just keep doing what you're doing, and stick to the dreams or thoughts you've always had." (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

"The piece of advice that I would like to give for newcomers, I would want them to stand up themselves to define who they are, to know what they want, and to know where they want to be. So a self-motivation is the key." (R6, male, plumber/ pipe fitter, Greece)

What recommendations would the interviewees give to governments and other institutions in their countries of residence?

Interviewees were also asked whether, based on their experience, they could offer recommendations to the government or other stakeholders in migration and integration. Specific recommendations provided by more than one interviewee follow:

- Governmental integration stakeholders should work together with vocational education and training providers to create and pilot-test informational materials that combine general information on systems in the country with concrete examples and real-life stories that illustrate that information (not unlike the VET Voices video interviews themselves).
- Language and integration courses should be offered and promoted in targeted formats as well as mixed formats: e.g., courses specifically for young women, in addition to courses for all ages, genders, etc. This is especially important when power differentials among refugees/migrants themselves might make it difficult for some groups (e.g., younger people and/or women) to speak up in a mixed format.
- Educational institutions should ensure that information about courses of study and scholarships is available in simplified language, and should consider more flexible application procedures and deadlines for refugees and other migrants. Scholarship requirements should be double-checked to ensure they do not exclude those without fully documented personal and professional histories (e.g., in the case of refugees, scholarships limited to children of single parents should not require legal proof of the parents' separation).

In addition, interviewees found consensus on several broad recommendations. With regard to information on VET and job systems, they agreed that governments must produce short-format, multilingual materials in a wide range of formats, and must disseminate them using all available channels: e.g., mobile-first online sites, but also hard-copy brochures for distribution at accommodation centres, clinics, job centres, etc. Several suggested cooperating with practitioners to

make sure that abstract rules and regulations were accompanied with concrete examples (see above), as well as pre-testing the drafts for comprehensibility and relevance with refugees and other migrants prior to finalising them. Finally, with regard to immigration policy in general, interviewees agreed that more compassion and consideration of refugees' challenges was needed. They stressed that particular care should be taken to support people during transitional periods in their migration journeys: e.g., the period after a residence decision has been made, but before a newly-arrived refugee has had time to find training opportunities or build a social network. If housing and support are abruptly cut off during this period, it is easy for people to fall through the cracks; once this happens, it can be very difficult for them to find their way back into the system.

“If I could talk to someone from the Ministry of Migration, I would firstly ask them to look into the refugees' situations in Greece. Cutting their social grants without providing them ways to survive is something that needs to be looked at, because somehow, somewhere they are encouraging the criminals, because people will end up not finding jobs [...] so they end up going to steal.” (R6, male, plumber/ pipe fitter, Greece)

“There are black sheep in every nationality, but there are also people who simply want to integrate here and live a peaceful life. Me, for example, after seven years, I still have no concrete prospects of staying. I have my residence permit, which is always extended for a year, two or three years [...] And what do I want? I want to live here. I've finished my education and as I said, I want to buy a house here and then just live my life.” (R2, male, hotel reservation clerk, Germany)

Overall, the interviewees' recommendations highlight the importance of a proactive and determined approach on the part of both new arrivals and the institutions that are tasked with supporting them. Migration involves significant challenges, which do not end once one has received residency. Linguistic and cultural barriers take time to overcome, and can multiply the adverse impact of the normal ups, downs, and uncertainties of life. It also takes time to familiarise oneself with the spectrum of opportunities available in a new country when starting from zero, and to adjust one's expectations and hopes accordingly. A positive mindset is paramount – but can be difficult to sustain without adequate support. Each of the interviewees in the VET Voices project benefitted from having met individuals dedicated to supporting them over the long term with information, motivation, and access to personal and professional networks.

Discussion and recommendations

The value of the qualitative research conducted during the VET Voices project is practical as well as scientific: it has shed light on challenges faced by refugees and other migrants when seeking to enter vocational education and training in their new countries of residence; the importance of support networks; and gaps in those networks. The structural conditions in each of the project's target countries vary, as do the experiences and needs of each individual migrant – there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Nevertheless, evidence-based guidelines can be identified for the provision of VET orientation and guidance:

- **Identify and support diverse language-learning venues.** Studies consistently show that language proficiency is the foundation for integration (Delander et al., 2005). The VET Voices interviewees universally stressed the importance of learning their host country languages, and

took advantage of multiple types of learning opportunities. In some cases, their first exposure was through programmes organised by civil society organisations or informal learning circles organised by residents of the community, rather than official language and integration classes offered by state institutions. This evinces a potential gap in state services, but also testifies to the importance of non-state alternatives, which should be supported and promoted. Some interviewees furthermore noted that upon entering their VET programmes, learning specialised vocabulary was a challenge; developing tailored continuing language education programmes for foreign students in particular VET tracks could help fill this gap.

- **Provide information early, often, and in multiple (interactive) formats.** The spark for the VET Voices project came from the prior research finding that young refugees in Germany not only lacked information on the various vocational education and training tracks available to them – they often had a limited view of the types of skills and occupations ‘out there’ in the first place (Calmbach & Edwards, 2019). For a young person raised in Germany, it might be intuitive to connect a general interest in technical work to an informal information search on, for instance, skills related to operating precision equipment or jobs in machine operation. For someone who grew up surrounded by very different types of education and work, this connection might not arise as spontaneously. Two success factors shared by all VET Voices interviewees were a proactive approach to the information search and orientation process, and the presence of key individuals who could provide support when needed. However, neither factor is a given. Information must be provided early and often, in multiple languages, through multiple channels; it must also be backed up by readily accessible contact points for questions and support. The use of interactive formats – such as the VET Voices self-test and job-centre-mapping app – could also help make the process more engaging and personal. Keeping such formats short and user-friendly could help provide a ‘foot in the door’ and a bridge to more intensive assessment procedures, which generally take more time and assume a base level of knowledge and interest (e.g., the 2P | Potenzial & Perspektive tool in Germany).
- **Prioritise coordination with civil society and host communities.** Non-state support networks play a crucial role for many vulnerable individuals and groups, including refugees and other migrants. Such networks are heterogeneous, and can include established civil society organisations, informal initiatives organised by residents of host communities, and migrants’ own social circles, among other actors (Hernández-Plaza et al., 2006). They not only transmit critical information and enable socialisation, but also act as conduits for material support, especially when access to formal social welfare systems is limited (Edwards, 2022). CSOs can also assist with programmes that require expertise and experience on sending-country languages, cultures, and systems, such as recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms (Andersson, 2021). Many of the VET Voices interviewees testified to the instrumental role of civil society organisations, volunteers, friends, and family members in their VET journeys. Policymakers could strengthen relationships with such actors on the level of coordination by establishing dedicated (and resourced) local contact points; on the level of funding by exploring microgrant schemes and participatory budgeting mechanisms; on the level of governance by minimising bureaucratic barriers and developing standing bidirectional feedback channels; and on the level of promotion by establishing events, awards, and other means of extending formal recognition in view of the community.
- **Amplify the voices of refugees and other migrants themselves.** On both the international and national levels, data gaps are a persistent challenge in migration research and policy. Scientists

and policymakers alike recognise the urgent need to broaden and systematise the collection of statistical data on migration, including with regard to drivers, demographic attributes, movement patterns, etc. (Bircan et al., 2020). The VET Voices project demonstrates the added value of qualitative research, which sheds light on the human narratives behind the numbers. It is thus critical to improve the regularity, systematicity, and rigour of qualitative data collection in migration studies. Here, consideration should be given to participatory methods: this means giving migrants a role in the way research agendas and data collection methods are designed, rather than simply asking them questions (Mata-Codesal et al., 2020). The present project took a step in this direction by using an interviewing method intended to let the research participants help guide the discussion (Witzel & Reiter, 2012). Another project aim was to augment the research participants' sense of agency within migration discourse and practice by transforming their stories into a source of motivation for other young refugees and other migrants (see <https://www.vetvoices.eu/self-test-and-mobile-app/>). However, more than disparate projects, sustained mechanisms for consultation and discourse are needed. The European Migrant Advisory Board (EMAB), which conducted a structured consultation of migrants in 2018, is a promising practice in this regard (Abkr et al., 2019). Establishing such mechanisms specifically in education and labour policymaking could ensure that the unique needs of refugees and other migrants are not only identified, but understood – as well as improving migrant communities' sense of participation in political processes that impact them.

In addition to qualitative interviews, the VET Voices research process entailed policy research, secondary data analysis, and a review of prior good practices in vocational education and training for refugees and other migrants, with a focus on orientation and guidance. More information and inspiration are available in the full series of VET Voices guidelines and resources:

- *Migration, vocational education, and work in Germany, Greece, Spain, and Turkey: Challenges and opportunities* (<https://www.vetvoices.eu/guidelines/>)
- *Pathways to vocational education and training for refugees and other migrants in Germany, Greece, Spain, and Turkey* (<https://www.vetvoices.eu/guidelines/>)
- *Good practices in vocational education and training for refugees and other migrants in the EU, Germany, Greece, Spain, and Turkey* (<https://www.vetvoices.eu/good-practices/>)

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