



Development of sustainable labour migration and skill formation pathways: migrants' perspective

Executive summary

This policy brief addresses the issues surrounding the inclusion of migrants' voices by deriving insights for migration, skills formation, and employment policies. These insights are based on the findings of a migrant survey executed in 11 countries as part of the Horizon Europe research project *Skill Partnerships for Sustainable and Just Migration Patterns* (Skills4Justice), Horizon-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-03, No. 101132435. The project aims to develop a systemic analysis of skills shortages in five EU and six non-EU countries in the context of global workforce migration. It achieves this by providing research-based evidence on the nature and development of skill shortages, as well as the potential of different skills partnerships to tackle these shortages in the countries of origin and destination of migrants. One of the key research activities implemented in the project was the quantitative and qualitative study of migrants' perspectives on sustainable and just migration pathways, conducted from May to November 2025. The research team conducted quantitative and qualitative surveys of voluntary and involuntary migrant workers in Lithuania, Poland, Germany, France, Italy, the UK, Norway, North Macedonia, Türkiye, and Ethiopia, as well as surveys of war refugees from Ukraine. A total of 2,305 migrants participated in the quantitative survey, while 429 took part in the qualitative study. The surveys investigated migrants' pathways from immigration to subsequent training and employment in the destination countries by examining their aspirations, skills development opportunities, and perceptions of justice. Research report can be found on the project website <https://www.skills4justice.eu>.

This policy brief addresses the following questions:

1. How can migration policy create opportunities for the realisation of migration aspirations and their alignment with the labour and skills needs and sociopolitical conditions of destination countries?
2. How can skill formation and employment policies and measures of the destination countries create opportunities for the realisation of migration aspirations, including return and circular migration aspirations?
3. How can migration, skill formation, and employment policy measures facilitate justice in the integration of migrants into the labour market and skill formation systems?

POLICY BRIEF

Horizon Europe research project 'Skill partnerships for sustainable and just migration patterns (Skills4Justice) Horizon-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-03 No. 101132435.



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The document first introduces the migration profiles and policy trends in the above-mentioned project partner countries, and then discusses the findings of the migrant surveys by focusing on the perspective of migrants regarding the realisation of their aspirations: views on migration, skill formation and employment policies, and justice. It concludes with a policy discussion and recommendations.

The proportion of immigrants relative to the overall population varies widely among the project partner countries, as reflected in the latest 2024–2025 demographic indicators from Eurostat, the OECD, and the United Nations. Accordingly, the project partner countries can be classified into 3 groups: 1) high immigrant share countries (15% to 22%) – Germany, Norway, UK, and France; 2) moderate immigrant share countries (6% to 12%) – Italy, Lithuania, and Türkiye; and 3) low immigrant share countries (under 5%) – Poland, North Macedonia, and Ethiopia. Ukraine cannot be assigned to these groups due to the war situation, which induced significant emigration and a flight of population.

Surveyed migrants notice various opportunities to realise migration aspirations and match them with labor and skill needs and socio-political conditions which are or potentially can be created by the migration policies.

The experiences and perspectives of migrants regarding the processes of immigration, employment, and skill formation reveal a complex picture of the continuing interaction between narrowing and expanding opportunities across migration-employment trajectories, created by legal migration status, institutional recognition systems, credential regimes, and workplace hierarchies. Research findings highlight that migrants' employment and skill formation outcomes depend less on their individual skills than on the institutional and structural conditions that shape access to jobs, education, qualification recognition, and rights. While migrants often possess significant educational and skill endowments and actively invest in education after arrival, their competencies are only partially utilised in the labour market. This is due to a widespread skill mismatch among qualified and highly qualified migrants, which reflects constraints in task allocation, sectoral segmentation, and the limited conversion of recognised qualifications into appropriate occupational positions.

Persisting trends of narrowing opportunities lead to the underutilisation of migrant skills and reduce the possibilities of mitigating labour shortages with the help of migration, especially through the overqualification of migrant workers. Deskilling, overqualification, and underutilization of migrants also foster feelings of injustice and discrimination, which in turn poses a serious risk to the long-term, sustainable contribution of migrants to the solution of future labour shortages in societies with an ageing population. Low trust between migrant workers, stakeholders, and the civil society of destination countries also prevents the development of sustainable migration pathways by reducing opportunities for the deployment and development of migrant human capital.

High-capacity, high-quality, and highly demanding regimes of immigration, employment, and the skill formation of migrants, such as in the case of Norway, France, Germany, and the UK, face a dilemma: how to handle existing barriers to full skill utilization and equal opportunity without compromising relatively effective systems. The solution lies in recognizing the mutual disadvantages that employment and skill formation barriers create for both migrants and the stakeholders of destination and origin countries. This approach can help in the search and development of mutu-



ally beneficial and sustainable solutions. Examples include implementing agreements and arrangements for the automatic and fast-track recognition of qualifications with countries of origin. It can also facilitate schemes and programs that bridge the recognition of credentials with skill formation arrangements targeted at adjusting human capital to the destination country's skill needs (e.g., apprenticeships and traineeships). Alternatively, it can reduce administrative burdens and improve the transparency of assessment and recognition procedures without compromising well-functioning quality assurance mechanisms.

Forced migrants who flee existential threats report high levels of stress both before and after their arrival in a destination country. This trend is observed in surveyed migrants in Italy, war refugees in Ethiopia, and Ukrainian refugees in various nations. Furthermore, many responses from involuntary migrants show elements of post-traumatic experience that should be considered in integration and reintegration policies. Respondents also highlighted that child safety is a critical factor throughout the migration process, influencing everything from the decision to flee to long-term labor market integration and skill formation. This factor significantly contributed to the urgency of departure decisions and the prioritization of safety and security over economic aspects of integration in the destination country.

Migrants demonstrate a stronger readiness and non-selectiveness in choosing employment opportunities, working long hours and making other sacrifices in order to sustain families, and invest in the education and training of children in the destination country by compromising their own opportunities for skill formation. This aspect emphasizes the need for specially targeted policies focused on supporting families with children in close cooperation with the institutions and authorities of the home countries, where possible and relevant.

The presence of family and children is also a significant factor in the decision to return. These decisions are influenced by the children's level of socialization and integration into the destination country's education and skill formation systems. They are also driven by potential returnees' much higher expectations regarding safety and stability in the home country and the availability of systems that provide basic needs—such as housing, security, work, and a future for their children (based on interviews with Ukrainian war refugees in Western Europe and the USA conducted by the Institute of Educational Analytics, as well as interviews with Ukrainian war refugees in Lithuania).

Lack of accessible language training often leads to over-qualification and suboptimal usage of the skills and productive potential of migrant workers, especially those working in the service field and in high-skilled sectors. The learning potential of work and workplace communication can be better exploited by removing the mastering of knowledge as a prerequisite of employment (in professions and occupations that allow such an option) and replacing it with the requirement to acquire language skills in a phased way through structured workplace language training facilitated by employers, training providers, NGOs, and other bodies. Stronger integration of language training with the development of vocational or professional skills on the job, as well as expanding opportunities for practicing language in the contexts of work and leisure activities, can bring significant improvements, especially over the long term. Collaborative initiatives and projects involving civil society (NGOs), volunteers, schools, students, and interested enterprises could make a difference here.



Also, making the national and sectoral systems of qualifications more transparent and accessible, and creating smoother and accessible pathways for gaining formal qualifications, equally benefits the local population and migrant workers, just like incentives for enterprises to invest in fair and accessible skill development and promotion opportunities for staff.

Experiences of discrimination by migrants and a lack of social contacts have a significant impact on inclusion, especially on the experience of social justice. Positive experiences in relation to education and work contribute to the empowerment of labour migrants, which can have a positive impact on their everyday experiences. Research participants who have had positive experiences through social support offer support to new migrants, so that help is passed on. There are also people who have experienced little social support themselves but want to do something different; therefore, they want to support new migrants to prevent them from having the same experiences as themselves.

A team of researchers from Stavanger University, based on the findings of a quantitative and qualitative survey of migrants in Norway, developed the "Migration–Skills–Opportunity Funnel" (MSOF) (Tikkanen, Eslen Ziya, Austdal & Normand, 2026). This model depicts the existing setting of supports and hindrances for the integration of migrants in the Norwegian labor market and society. The model shows that even in affluent countries with strong welfare state mechanisms, the overall long-term integration process of migrants is not homogeneous in terms of the distribution of supporting and hindering factors. At some stages, there is strong institutional support (e.g., safety standards, accessibility of further education). However, there are also areas where this support is weaker, leading to the partial success of integration (e.g., job finding, general employability), or where bottlenecks emerge (e.g., skills/credential recognition, regulated professions, discrimination, and language barriers).

Surveys of the war refugees from Ukraine disclosed that forced emigration during the war is not only a problem and potential risk, but also an opportunity for national renewal, as it forms a new type of citizen who is open to the world, competent, worthy, and aware of their roots. To exploit this opportunity, researchers suggest different solutions. These include the creation of a national program for the return and reintegration of refugees—taking into account the recognition of skills, certification, employment, and business support—and the implementation of mechanisms for the recognition of international professional experience and informal skills. These mechanisms include a "skills portfolio," short recertification programs, and state adaptation courses.



1 Introduction

Page | 5 Migration becomes an increasingly important object of national and international public policy regulating the areas of national security, economics, employment, skill formation, social affairs, culture, and other fields of public life. The growing importance of migration in these areas of political regulation raises the question of considering the voice and perspective of the migrants themselves in the design, implementation, and development of policies in origin and destination countries. The arguments for considering migrant voices in shaping policies seem rather evident, starting from the idea that listening to the lived experiences and positions of migrants helps to design effectively functioning pathways for the acceptance, integration, and deployment of migrants' human capital on the one hand, and helps to create responsive policies preventing the marginalization and exclusion of migrant communities in the destination countries on the other hand (Fasani 2024; OECD 2025). Listening to migrant voices and perspectives in policy design enhances realistic and informed policy decisions, crucially important for the labour market and skill formation, primarily in seeking to address skill mismatches with the help of migrant workers (Edwards 2023). Consideration of the migrant perspective in public policy design also enhances policy legitimacy by ensuring democratic representation of migrants as the target population of the policies, as well as contributing to the empowerment of migrants as effective contributors to public policy and societal development (European Commission 2018; 2025). Another important argument for the consideration of migrants' perspectives in public policies is the potential for the development of better targeted, mutually beneficial, and sustainable institutional arrangements and instruments in the fields of skill formation, employment, public justice, social participation, and others (International Organization for Migration 2022).

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2 Migration Profile of the Skills4Justice Partner Countries

The proportion of immigrants relative to the overall population varies widely among the project partner countries, as reflected in the latest 2024–2025 demographic indicators from Eurostat, the OECD, and the United Nations. Accordingly, the project partner countries can be classified into 3 groups: 1) high immigrant share countries (15% to 22%) – Germany, Norway, UK, and France; 2) moderate immigrant share countries (6% to 12%) – Italy, Lithuania, and Türkiye; and 3) low immigrant share countries (under 5%) – Poland, North Macedonia, and Ethiopia. Ukraine cannot be assigned to these groups due to the war situation, which induced significant emigration and a flight of population (see Table 1).



Table 1. Migration profile of the Skills4Justice partner countries. *Prepared by authors by referring to the below discussed sources of information.*

Country	Approximate Immigrant Share of Population (2024–2025)	Character of migration flows
Germany	20.5% – 21.2%	Voluntary (labour) and involuntary immigration driven by the long established labor programs and recent refugee inflows
Norway	15.5% – 16.0%	High share of labour migrants and expatriates from the EEA, as well as refugees and asylum seekers, including significant share of immigrants coming h for the educational purposes.
UK	15.0% – 16.0%	Significant share of non-EU work and study immigrants and asylum seekers
France	14.0% – 15.0%	Immigration driven by the post-colonial ties, family reunification, and asylum
Italy	11.5% – 12.0%	Immigration largely consisting of the irregular migrants and asylum seekers from the Mediterranean labor transit, as well as seasonal workers
Lithuania	7.5% – 9.7%	Recently emerged and rapidly growing net-immigration consisting of the labour immigration from the Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other regions, involuntary migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and other countries
Turkey	6.5% – 7.5%	Large-scale humanitarian displacement host with predominant share of refugees from Syria, Lebanon and olther Near East countries (hosting of over 3.1 million Syrians under temporary protection alongside over 3 million other international migrants
Poland	2.5% – 2.6%	Recently emerged and rapidly growing net-immigration consisting of the labour immigration from the Eastern Europe (large influx of Ukrainian



refugees), Central Asia and other regions, providing large temporary protection

Page	North Macedonia	2.5% – 3.0%	Nett-emigration and transit country
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	Ethiopia	~0.8%	Nett-emigration and transit country, regional refugee corridor relative to a massive population hosting nearly 1 million of refugees from the neighbouring regions
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At the end of 2024, **Germany** hosted over 14 million migrants, with Türkiye (1 544 480) and Ukraine (1 334 005) being the most common countries of origin outside the EU (Destatis, 2025). Similarly, in 2024, a total of 224 810 residence permits were issued to migrants from third countries¹ in the areas of education and work (Heß, 2025), of which 195 130 were temporary permits (divided into 74 935 for education and 120 195 for work). Three main reasons for immigration predominate: (1) refuge, asylum, and international protection, (2) work/employment, and (3) family reunification (Destatis, 2025; BAMF, 2025; SVR, 2025). Labour immigration is regulated **by** the Skilled Labour Immigration Act (FEG) and supported by various initiatives to recruit skilled workers from third countries, such as Triple Win Caregivers, Specialised, and APAL – Training Partnerships with Asia and Latin America (Netzwerk iQ, 2025). The Skilled Labour Immigration Act offers three pillars through which individuals can migrate to Germany: (1) skilled labour pillar, (2) experience pillar, and (3) potential pillar (Schröder 2024). The Western Balkans Regulation governs the immigration of people from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia (BAMF 2024). Most third-country nationals work as skilled workers (1 131 283), most of whom come from Türkiye (297 606) and the Western Balkans (262 146) (Federal Employment Agency 2025).

France is an immigration destination country with a continuously rising number of immigrants (defined as French residents born abroad with non-French nationality) between 2006 and 2024, reaching 6 million immigrants in 2024. Immigrants mainly come from Africa and Europe, with the Maghreb as the main area of origin, especially Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Ined 2026). This population is unevenly distributed across French regions, with higher shares in Île-de-France and southern regions. Overall, immigrants in France have an older and more work-oriented age structure than the native-born population, with family and work remaining the dominant motives for migration. Overall, while immigrants include a higher share of low-educated individuals, the share of highly educated individuals is either comparable to or higher than that of the native-born population. Activity and employment rates are higher among individuals without a migratory background, while their unemployment rates are lower. Among immigrants, those from Europe display higher activity and employment rates and lower unemployment compared to immigrants from other regions. Inactivity due to education or training is particularly common among descendants of immigrants. Both immigrants and natives contribute to reducing labour shortages in different

¹ Third countries refer to countries outside the EU.



occupations, reflecting distinct patterns of occupational concentration. Immigrants are overrepresented in non-routine manual occupations and underrepresented in non-routine cognitive tasks, although this pattern partly reverses among highly educated immigrants, who are more concentrated in routine cognitive jobs. France's institutional framework prohibits discrimination and regulates immigrants' access to employment, health care, and social protection according to residence status. While legally resident immigrants are generally covered by social insurance, access to non-contributory benefits depends on additional residence conditions. Refugees benefit from broad rights and support schemes, whereas access remains more restricted for some groups, particularly non-EU students, who face significantly higher tuition fees and limited eligibility for public financial aid.

Italy hosts over 5.4 million legally resident foreign citizens, corresponding to 9.2% of the total resident population (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2025). The main countries of origin remain Morocco, Albania, Ukraine, and China, while recent years have recorded significant growth in arrivals from Bangladesh and Peru. Residence permits are predominantly issued for family reunification (43.7%) and work-related reasons (40.7%), whereas asylum-related permits account for approximately 7.2% (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2025). Migration pathways into Italy include planned labor migration through quota systems (*Decreto Flussi*), family reunification, international protection claims, and irregular routes through the Central Mediterranean and the Balkan corridor. Employment of migrant workers is strongly concentrated in sectors involving predominantly manual labor, including construction, agriculture, trade, hospitality, and domestic and care services. Irregular work, the so-called 'lavoro nero,' remains a critical dimension. The rate of irregularity among migrant workers is estimated at around 22.2%, particularly in agriculture, construction, tourism, and domestic work (ILO 2023). The Italian immigration framework has been subjected to a series of reforms that have alternated between restrictive and selective approaches. The Bossi-Fini Law (Law 189/2002) firmly linked residence permits to the existence of an employment contract and institutionalized a work-based logic of migration governance. Meanwhile, the Decreto Sicurezza (Law 132/2018) restricted humanitarian protection and access to integration pathways, and the Decreto Cutro (Law 50/2023) and subsequent reforms expanded labour entry quotas while simultaneously tightening asylum procedures and reception conditions. These recent laws introduced stricter requirements for family reunification and differentiated access to reception services based on the mode and timing of arrival (European Commission 2025). Discrimination and exploitation continue to affect migrant workers, particularly in sectors such as agriculture—including forms of neo-slavery known in Italian as 'caporalato' (Perrotta & Raeymaekers 2023)—and domestic work (INPS 2025; FRA 2017).

Lithuania and **Poland** became immigration countries only about a decade ago, when the negative net migration balance, which was typical for many decades after the fall of communism, reversed to a positive one due to economic development and integration into the EU and the global economy (Tverdostup 2024). Regarding flows of immigration, these countries attracted significant numbers of labour migrants from Belarus, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet countries. The launch of the active phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 led to the arrival of war refugees from Ukraine, which was followed by rather successful labour market integration (European Migration Network 2023). Immigration policy in these countries oscillates between the liberalization of migration—supported and pushed by employers facing increasing skills shortages—and stricter migration control and reduced migration, both imposed by geopolitical tensions in the



region. Voluntary immigration consists of the immigration of contracted labourers, seasonal workers, and highly skilled professionals with higher education. This pathway of migration has been regulated by referring to the skills needs in the national labour market and applying different instruments, including quotas and lists of shortage occupations. Involuntary immigration mainly consists of the immigration of war refugees from Ukraine. There are also accepted small volumes of refugees according to EU agreements and distributed quotas, including refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, and other conflict zones, as well as political refugees seeking protection from persecution in countries with authoritarian regimes. Despite the declared priorities of economic and migration policies to attract highly-skilled migrants and talents, only a minority of migrants work in highly qualified jobs.

Norway has shifted from a country of emigration to one of immigration since the 1970s (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli 2008; Vassenden 2012). As of 2025, immigrants make up 17.2% of the population (965 112 people), originating from over 200 countries, though immigration remains highly concentrated (Statistics Norway 2025). European migrants constitute the majority (56.3%), with EU-27 nationals forming the largest regional group (36.6%). The largest countries of origin are Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Syria, Sweden, Somalia, Eritrea, Germany, the Philippines, and Pakistan. Migration reasons (1990–2024) are dominated by family (33%), work (32%), and refugee migration (23%), though the recent surge in Ukrainians has shifted European arrivals toward protection (54% in 2024). Migrants are vital to several major sectors: health and social work (104 186 migrants; 19.5% of all migrant workers), retail and sales (56 221), and construction (53 650, with migrants making up 24.6% of the sector). Migrants are also strongly overrepresented in cleaning (making up 76% of workers), hospitality, and passenger transport. In 1975, Norway's immigration policy shifted from a liberal regime to tighter regulation, introducing a distinction between “desirable” and “undesirable” labor migration (Hagelund 2003; Brochmann & Kjeldstadli 2008). EU/EEA free movement policies have shaped both labor markets and migration patterns. Recent policy changes (2015–2025) reflect responses to the Syrian civil war and large-scale Ukrainian displacement. Norway introduced temporary collective protection for Ukrainians in 2022, later narrowing eligibility and tightening rules and benefits (Tronstad et al. 2025; Skenteris et al. 2025). Research shows persistent structural inequalities: migrants face wage penalties, occupational downgrading, and discriminatory labor segmentation, such as differentiated roles for Eastern European workers in construction (Friberg 2012; Midtbøen 2015) and discrimination in hiring processes (Larsen & Midtbøen 2024).

The immigration profile in the **United Kingdom** has significantly changed after Brexit, with the number of EU citizens working in the UK steadily falling. Official Census data suggest 16% of people in the UK, which has a total estimated population of 66.9 million, were born abroad, an increase of 34% between the last two Censuses. Most migrants (63%) in the UK were born in non-EU countries (Cuibus 2024). The main countries of origin historically were Commonwealth countries such as India and Caribbean nations and in Africa, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. In recent years, excluding EU countries, the main countries of origin are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but there are also significant numbers of migrant workers from China, Philippines, Vietnam and the African Commonwealth countries as well as South Africa. Labour migrants to the UK are mainly motivated by perceived higher earnings. Many recent migrants are fleeing conflict or persecution in their countries of origin, which accounts for increased arrivals from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. There are special arrangements for refugees from Hong Kong and



Ukraine. Highly skilled migrants are usually working in roles commensurate with their qualifications, including in higher education, financial services, and knowledge-intensive technical sectors. Less-qualified migrant workers are concentrated in low-status occupations in hospitality, agriculture, and construction, often experiencing poor working conditions and unattractive salaries. Undocumented migrant workers are in the least desirable, precarious work and are highly vulnerable to extreme levels of exploitation, including "modern" slavery. The policy context has become significantly more challenging for migrant workers, with policy rhetoric contradicting employer discourse which highlights the role of migrant workers in addressing immediate labour and skills shortages. In the medium term, reduced reliance on migrant workers will only arise if sufficient local workers take up training and development opportunities, which is the intention of government policy.

Türkiye occupies a unique position in the global migration landscape, simultaneously serving as a country of origin, a country of destination, and a significant transit hub. In recent years, the country has been profoundly affected by forced international migration movements stemming from political instability and civil conflicts in neighboring Near East regions. Irregular migration has emerged as one of the defining challenges within the national context. Furthermore, Syrians under temporary protection (can be explored via the [Prague Process](#)) constitute a significant portion of the migrant population. Many of these migrants are below working age, possess relatively low levels of education and vocational skills, and are mostly confined to manual labor, particularly among the male population. Migrant participation in the labor market in Türkiye is characterized by high rates of informality and sectoral concentration, with a large share of migrants working in precarious conditions without social security coverage in the sectors of agriculture and animal husbandry, construction and manufacturing, textiles, and services. Türkiye's migration policy has shifted toward a "human-centred, rights-based, and inclusive" approach (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı 2023). The primary objective is to manage migration through data-driven governance in order to prevent regular flows from becoming irregular, while maintaining social cohesion. Örmeci-Güney and Cengiz (2023) highlight that the arrival of migrants has deepened pre-existing structural problems, including informality and low wages, and has increased flexibility and downward pressure on wages in certain sectors. Furthermore, the sudden nature of migration waves has reinforced migration policies generally focused on "containment" and immediate humanitarian needs rather than long-term occupational integration.

North Macedonia is predominantly a country of emigration with a presence of immigration, return, and transit migration, with national policy treating migration as multidirectional and emphasizing data, governance, and development alignment (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2021; International Organization for Migration 2022). In North Macedonia and the Western Balkans, the persistence of emigration coexists with circularity and return; openness to return rises with improved working conditions and institutional quality (International Organization for Migration 2021a, 2021b; Petreski 2021; Cvetanoska Ristovska, and Trpeski, 2024; Taravari Rexhepi and Asani 2025). In North Macedonia, a skills mismatch in the labour market drives emigration and also affects migrants abroad and upon return (Petreski 2021; Taravari Rexhepi and Asani, 2025; International Organization for Migration 2021b). Reforms of migration policy and legal regulation target institutional capacity development, data collection, legal channels, and reintegration, but are characterised by a lack of a systemic approach and significant gaps (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2021; International Organization for Migration 2022).



Ethiopia has been known since the 1960s as a country of emigration for migrants heading to other African countries, the Middle East, North America, and Europe (Zekarias 2023). At the same time, Ethiopia is recognized as a major African hub, hosting over 1.2 million international migrants from countries sharing geographical borders with Ethiopia, including South Sudan (38%), Somalia (33%), Eritrea (15%), and Sudan (8%), alongside 3% from other nations and 3% of unknown origin (IOM 2025). Political instability, ethnic tensions, climate change, economic hardship, and youth unemployment in the Horn of Africa are key drivers of this immigration (Ayanie et al. 2020; IOM 2017). Many of the migrants are young (12–24 years of age), have fled war-torn areas, and require support for basic survival as well as longer-term life preparation. Ethiopia also accommodates highly skilled international workers in sectors that drive economic growth, particularly where the relevant labor force cannot be readily sourced from the local market. The country issues work permits for such employees carefully to avoid negatively affecting nationals (FDRE 2019). The sectors that require the recruitment of international experts include technical fields, manufacturing, and services. Consequently, the most sought-after skills are in technical, managerial, and specialized professional roles that help bridge local expertise gaps (Gezehegn & Bakewell 2022). Furthermore, Ethiopia is also benefiting from the skills of returning migrants, particularly those who were well-educated prior to migrating to developed countries (IOM 2017; Ayane et al. 2020). The government has been working to increase the contribution of these skilled emigrants to the national economy through incentives that encourage them to return and contribute through investment and employment (FDRE 2022). Regarding the hosting of refugees, for a long time the country followed an encampment-based refugee policy, under which refugees were kept in camps and mainly supported by donors until they were either resettled to a third country or repatriated (Halakhe 2025). More recently, a legal framework has been established for granting refugees the right to work, own businesses, access education, and benefit from other services (FDRE 2024). Refugees and asylum seekers are now allowed to obtain a special biometric-based national identity card, which enables access to public services similar to that of citizens, although the process of obtaining this ID remains slower than desired (Riggan 2026).

Ukraine, from the point of view of this study, is a country where war inflicted by the Russian Federation has caused and continues to cause significant emigration and loss of human capital (Institute of Educational Analytics 2025). Meanwhile, migration, skill formation, and employment policies are influenced by the requirements of martial law on the one hand, and strategic considerations for the future socioeconomic reconstruction of the country after the war on the other.



3 Migrants' perspectives on the realisation of their aspirations: views on migration, skill formation, employment policies, and justice

3.1 How can migration policy create opportunities for the realisation of migration aspirations and their alignment with the labour and skills needs and sociopolitical conditions of destination countries?

Surveyed migrants notice various opportunities to realise migration aspirations and match them with labor and skill needs and socio-political conditions which are or potentially can be created by the migration policies.

3.1.1 Promoting Academic and Professional Mobility of Higher Education Students and Highly Skilled Professionals

Surveyed migrants noted the benefits of home country and EU migration policies that facilitate academic mobility and the acquisition of valuable human capital abroad. For instance, home country incentives enable migrants to utilize their foreign degrees upon returning. One Indian PhD researcher cited these incentives, alongside Poland's academic standing, as their primary motivation:

There was a new education policy in 2022, which says that if I do my PhD from outside India... I can come back to India directly and will be eligible to become an assistant professor... I checked the ranking of the [name of the university], and I found that it is around [position in the ranking]... which was very good for me. (migrant worker interviewed in Poland)

Of course, migration policies open to academic exchanges have to be supplemented with attractive opportunities for skill formation, such as a favorable correlation between the price and quality of studies. Additionally, the opportunity to stay in the country after graduation to gain international experience helps attract talent.

I came here for my studies. The main factors in choosing Lithuania were the reasonable tuition fees and the high-quality education. (migrant student and worker from Morocco interviewed in Lithuania)

From the academic migrants' perspective, the quality of education in the UK is supplemented by other advantages compared to other Western countries, such as relatively warmer weather, a high quality of life, and cultural diversity.

Furthermore, the UK has a good reputation in terms of its degrees. When you hear from people outside the UK, it has a very good reputation, and it offers a two-year course—or I think an 18-month course. The two universities I chose had good ratings and good lecturers, so it sounded perfect for me. (migrant worker interviewed in the UK)

The survey of migrants conducted in Germany also discloses the importance of the destination country's attractiveness—driven by educational and employment opportunities—alongside the role of external agencies, trusted individuals, and immigration service providers. The interviewed migrants distinguish two key reasons for studying in Germany: on the one hand, it is mentioned in the context of the desire to 'do something good for the planet', which is not possible in the



country of origin due to corruption and war; on the other hand, it is cited as an opportunity for a better life, which has been instilled since childhood by relatives. The opportunities in terms of work and education make refugees consciously choose Germany, because 'Germany always sounds good to us back home' (refugee interviewed in Germany), especially with regard to qualifications, 'because Germany was the best way to continue studying here, continue working or secure official residency documents' (ibid.).

Alternatively, a country's achievements and developed infrastructure in specific fields also create space for the realization of migrants' professional development, career aspirations, and long-term goals in these areas.

When I tried to pick a country for my master's education, I was very intrigued by the standard of operations in Norway, especially within the engineering, and oil and gas industries. That is how Norway became my destination country because I believe it is a country that has everything I need and fits my long-term goals and plans. (migrant interviewed in Norway)

3.1.2 Navigating Involuntary Migration: The Role of Open Borders, Legal Status, and Migration Authorities

While war refugees (e.g., from Ukraine) highly appreciate the opportunities provided by ad-hoc border-opening policies, political refugees (e.g., from Belarus and Hong Kong) are provided security through pre-issued visas. Ukrainian war refugees moved to Poland and Lithuania via ad-hoc border openings, whereas Belarusian political refugees rely on visas obtained before the start of the war.

We arrived with my family: my mother and younger sister. My father was already working in Lithuania. Only during the war did it become very difficult to live in Ukraine. (Ukrainian refugee in Lithuania, woman)

The survey of Ukrainian refugees in the 12 destination countries revealed the emergence of a two-layer structure of Ukrainian migrants: established economic migrants who left voluntarily before the war, and recent displaced refugees who fled temporarily for security reasons. This latter group exhibits high levels of human capital, presenting substantial potential for post-war economic recovery.

Irregular necessity migrants experience vastly different, hazardous immigration pathways. Their journeys are marked by high uncertainty, various contributing factors, coincidences, and severe hardships, including violence, forced labor, and the perils of sea crossings.

I had a difficult journey at sea. Where I lived in Messina there was the sea. If I could still see the sea... Yes, yes, I still had it in my head and I said "over there, no!" and I ran away from Messina to here in Bologna. [...] From Tunisia the journey started at 9 am, we spent three days at sea. The boat capsized... a boat saved us... We didn't hurt ourselves, they, I saw so many dead people. (necessity migrant from Africa interviewed in Italy)

Upon arrival, such migrants often receive little guidance from the reception centres:

When I arrived they made my fingerprints, they took me to the police station ... I don't know what honestly they gave me the residence permit and I didn't even know that it was the residence permit at that time. And they gave it to me, a yellow permit, it was yellow () I was still a minor yes ... I didn't even know that it was really a residence permit (...) I went to Catania, then from Catania



I went to Rome and then from Rome I came to Bologna (...) when I arrived in Bologna I didn't know anyone... I always moved alone (necessity migrant from Africa interviewed in Italy)

A survey of war refugees and returnees in Ethiopia disclosed that mitigating conflicts in the countries of origin, along with improving education and economic conditions, could significantly reduce negative migration pressures and enhance positive migration circulation. This was evidenced by surveyed and interviewed Ethiopian returnees, who contribute freely to the economies of both their origin and destination countries, as well as to their own livelihoods.

3.1.3 Creating Conditions for Family Reunification and Socio-Political Freedom

Surveys disclose that the choice of migration and the destination country can be complex and defined by a range of different factors, including family reunification, and seeking refuge and protection from persecution in the home country. For example, a migrant interviewed in France indicated leaving the home country in Africa for both family and political reasons because her husband, a French national, decided she and their children should leave in view of the security situation. Another female migrant first came to France for a medical internship before returning to her home country in Africa, only to come back to France due to political unrest and her professional and family situation. Hong Kong refugees declare the political pressure in Hong Kong as a main reason for relocation to the UK, but some admit their consideration for children's education as well.

Honestly, I want my daughter to grow up in a place with more freedom, you know what I mean? Because of Hong Kong, you see an absolutely different now. And I don't want my daughter to be brainwashed. Because we used to be grown up in Hong Kong, it is a colony of UK, so we grew up in that kind of culture that you have the right of speech, you have the right of freedom. But it's changed a lot in Hong Kong. I don't want my daughter to stay in Hong Kong anymore. That's why we decide to leave. (refugee from Hong Kong interviewed in the UK)

Economic necessities and difficulties very often complement family reasons for necessity migration:

I didn't finish school because school and working together is hard. I did 8 hours at school and 5 hours of work. I didn't sleep because my family needed a lot of money. I have two brothers and a sister (...) It was difficult, very difficult. We arrived on a boat from the sea. We both made the crossing from Tunisia. (necessity migrant from Africa interviewed in Italy)

Linguistic and cultural affinity also serves as a motivator for migration and for the choice of the destination country, as is evidenced by the interviews with migrants who came from former French colonies in Africa, or the interviews with migrant workers from Egypt whose decision to move to Italy was defined by their studies at the VET centre established in Egypt by an Italian NGO.

Costs of study and communication possibilities play an important role in the choice of a destination country. One of the interviewees living in Germany reports that he did not consider this country during his second migration from an African country to Europe because: '[it] was cheaper to study [in Ukraine] and they offer courses in English [...] compared to Canada or America. And I didn't even think of Germany because [...] we always have this impression that English is not spoken in Germany at all' (migrant worker interviewed in Germany). Even when the war broke out in Ukraine, he 'never thought of even coming to Germany [...] But



at that moment it was about the only country [...] accepting people who were fleeing from war, you know. So I just found myself here' (ibid.).

3.1.4 NGO Support

Migrants (especially involuntary and necessity-driven) face multiple challenges, including language barriers, the bureaucratization of visa issuance, long processing times, and a lack of social networks in the destination country. Surveyed involuntary migrants who arrived in the destination country through regular pathways highlight the support provided by non-governmental organizations:

My father was a political opponent and dissident of the regime. Therefore, it was dangerous for our family to stay there. The organization "Freedom House" helped us a lot in preparing the documents and obtaining refugee status in Lithuania. In 2019, we received all the documents formalizing and legalizing our status in Lithuania. (political refugee from Tajikistan).

3.2. *How can skill formation and employment policies and measures of the destination countries create opportunities for realisation of migration aspirations, including return/circular migration aspirations?*

Surveyed migrants suggest designing various skills development and employment measures that help to realise migrants' aspirations including return or circular migration.

3.2.1 **Stable Immigration Status as an Essential Precondition for Employment and Skill Formation in the Destination Country**

Immigration status is considered to have a significant impact on the access to the labour market and training in some countries like the UK. Most migrants require visa sponsorship to be eligible to work in the UK. However, with recent immigration policy changes in terms of an increasing salary threshold, many migrants, including those international master study graduates, have found it difficult to find a job in the UK.

I don't have quite like a proper status like residence card, quite hard to hunt for a job, to look for a job. So the first 1-2 years I worked in a restaurant like as a staff. ...Then I became assistant manager in, but still it wasn't (...) the place where I wanted to be (...) in the job market.'.... 'So I started to looking for jobs. Still there was like, what's your status? What's your immigration status? Do you have a status? My status after my graduation, it was pending because.'....' And after some time now I've got a status, I've got indefinite. I applied for operations supervisor in in Tesco and I got I got accepted. (migrant worker MA graduate interviewed in the UK)

Young refugees with stable immigration status and longer-term residence permits have better possibilities for schooling and employment. Malik, a refugee interviewed in France, had a 10-year residence permit, enabling him to choose education or work after eighteen: he worked in a school before becoming a student. For unaccompanied minors, the situation can be different: the potential for not granting residence permits when unaccompanied minors turn eighteen if they are not in training or employed is used by French institutions as a way of creating economically "useful" workers for short-staffed sectors (Carayon et al. 2021). In Sayed's account, educators



helped him navigate the different and sometimes contradictory injunctions to leave education at eighteen, “work first,” and obtain a qualification by guiding him towards a professional apprenticeship which gave him the choice to stay in education longer and perhaps change pathways later.

Refugees, in particular, said that some employers are reluctant to hire them when they are asylum seekers, given the administrative procedures they have to go through.

No, I hadn't worked because, at first, asylum seekers are not allowed to work. You have to wait six months and then you're allowed to work. But even then, you have to go and see an employer so that they can submit the application online to the Prefecture. But it didn't work because many employers are reluctant. When you show up with your asylum application certificate, they have nothing to offer you because they have to write to the Prefecture about it all. They think it's a waste of time. (...) I tried everything, but all doors were closed to me.” (Mourad, social worker interviewed in France)

3.2.2 Accessible Recognition of Credentials and Qualifications; The Importance of International Corporate Certificates

Many surveyed migrants call for the revision and reduction of barriers to the recognition of qualifications and employment in regulated professions. They also seek support in the process of nostrification of qualifications in the form of specific preparatory courses, reading materials for nostrification exams, and the introduction of conditional licences for medical and educational professionals. This would allow them to work under supervision while completing full recognition, thereby preventing brain waste.

Regarding the recognition of qualifications, research has disclosed that labour and voluntary migrants rarely face obstacles to recognition, because of their better preparation in collecting all needed documents and acquiring the language skills needed for recognition. This is not the case with involuntary and forced migrants, who are often without documents evidencing their acquired qualifications and struggle with language communication with responsible institutions.

My A-level was not recognised at first. I had to go back to [country of origin] to get it. In my village, that was a bit difficult. And then, in 2017, I finally got my A-levels certificate and it was recognised as a secondary school qualification. (refugee interviewed in Germany)

Involuntary migrants—especially war refugees and necessity migrants—may face exclusionary attitudes from the existing systems and processes of diploma recognition, as evidenced by a Ukrainian war refugee interviewed in Poland:

I spent a year gathering documents, a year translating them... I calculated that, in total, it came to more than 10,000 zlotys. The university... they determine the subject you have to pass, and they don't let you study it... you have to find books on the internet... The Poles themselves say that Ukrainians have a very low pass rate on those tests... it's as if five or four percent of the people who take the test pass. (Ukrainian refugee interviewed in Poland)

Migrants whose non-European qualifications are not recognized in their destination countries are often required to restart their university studies or complete vocational training.

I am studying social work here, which is my second qualification, as I already hold a higher education degree in pedagogy and a qualification as a social work specialist from Ukraine. My



first job was teaching the Ukrainian language and literature. Then, I transitioned to a role in social work and social education, earning numerous non-formal education certificates while working as a specialist. In Lithuania, I faced the challenge of not being able to work in education or social work without a recognized diploma. As a result, I am currently completing my studies in social work management and expect to receive my diploma in December. (female work refugee from Ukraine interviewed in Lithuania).

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Obstacles in getting qualifications and credentials acquired in home countries recognized lead to destination countries becoming a 'second education country.' This is evidenced by a survey in France, where 70% of respondents stated they obtained their highest diploma in France, while 26% completed their highest level of education in their country of origin. Immigrants upgrade or complement their qualifications after arrival as part of individual strategies to improve labor market prospects and deal with institutional barriers limiting the transferability of foreign credentials. Difficulties and obstacles in the recognition of qualifications and educational credentials also prompt changes in professional self-realization. Mourad, who chose to 'turn the page' on his work experiences in the medical biology field in his home country, recounts how he enrolled in a program to move toward working in NGOs supporting migrants:

I have always dreamed of helping these people. That's why I was interested in this training course, the course I took, a diploma in migrant health. (migrant, social worker).

Magui also recounts how the non-recognition of her medical degree led her to train to requalify as a nursing assistant. She then embarked on an accelerated programme to qualify as a nurse, which she had to stop to deal with her child's health condition. Only after many years in France was she able to envisage completing the training necessary to become a doctor again.

A lack of information and guidance regarding recognition, the administrative complexity of the process, and high anticipated costs deter many immigrants from initiating it. Instead, they are encouraged to pursue local formal education and qualifications. During the recognition process, 'many authorities' (migrant worker interviewed in Germany) are involved, and yet 'there are many people who don't really know what they have to do. [...] They don't know exactly whether they are responsible for it' (ibid.). Due to the involvement of numerous authorities and unclear responsibilities, the application process can be significantly prolonged, meaning it can take 'half a year in total' (ibid.) until the respective decision is issued. This is especially challenging for irregular migrants lacking formal education from their home countries. Sometimes these migrants bring only elementary life skills:

In Africa, there is no age limit for working. When you can do it, you can do it. Washing dishes, cleaning houses. So for us, there is no such thing as they say in France, I never went to school, so of course, I started helping my mother from a very young age. (Aminata, refugee, jobseeker in the domestic care sector).

The recognition of qualifications and skill formation is often a secondary priority for forced migrants who are more concerned with immediate settlement and employment in their destination country:

I haven't really focused on that path. It's not my priority. What I am focused on now it's (.) hoping that I get my special protection and then-. (.) because any time they can kick me out of this country ... (necessity migrant from Italy)



International certifications and qualifications frequently outperform university degrees in the job market, creating a pathway that bypasses national educational gatekeepers:

"What we are doing for cyber security... It is interesting to us that it is an international certification process... if you have one of those (...) I can say that 70 or 80% of the HR, they will not be interested in what you graduated." (migrant worker from Türkiye interviewed in Poland)

3.2.3 Flexible forms of language training

Research participants also call for increasing the accessibility and affordability of language courses for migrants, as well as for the establishment of information and guidance centres providing integrated legal, career, and skill-formation guidance. Migrant workers can shift from formal language courses to self-directed learning through social networking and online media, considering these approaches more effective. Migrant workers surveyed in Germany suggest creating opportunities to communicate with other migrants in similar situations, supplemented by educational opportunities, especially language courses. Joint activities with the German population are also mentioned as an effective support measure by the majority of surveyed migrants.

Migrants believe that employment-friendly approaches are possible when language acquisition is viewed as part of the integration process, rather than a prerequisite for entering the workforce or starting vocational training.

So these people, they want to learn something like "muletto" (in English "forklift") (.) at least this can help them to get a job, you know? (...) But they cannot, because this course is taught in Italian language. (...) If people come here (...) especially immigrants (...), some courses should be allowed to be done in English (...) to facilitate (employment)- at least some basic courses, like "muletto" course, (...) a 1-day course. (...) Someone can use this course to change their life. It will keep them busy. They will go to work and come back, but if they cannot even learn this simple "muletto", because it's in Italian, (...) so they will be forced to sell drugs, because it's the best way to get money faster. (...) I did the "muletto", I got the certificate, but I suffered in the class because (...), how am I supposed to understand this language? I'm just 8 months here now. (...) But at least I speak a little bit. (...) They will learn the Italian faster (.) at the job sites (where) they will speak the broken English...Faster. (...) Let them try to bring the basic courses to English (.) to help the immigrants. (...) The other courses that are more professional, keep them in Italian language. If you have to be in that professional level, then you should understand this Italian language. (necessity migrant worker interviewed in Italy)

Migrants also face issues regarding the geographical accessibility of language training, especially when living in small towns and rural areas with a poor selection of language courses in terms of available slots and training quality.

I wanted to learn the language, but it turns out that there are no language courses in this city. They said there were courses for Ukrainians, but not for us... [sarcastic smile]... I would like to learn Lithuanian. (migrant worker from Kazakhstan working in a big industrial enterprise in Lithuania)

And here, in a small town, I also wanted to attend a German course. (...). And then I did attend a German course, but it was only for four months, twice a week, in the evenings for two hours – so basically nothing. It wasn't enough. I was a bit disappointed. (migrant worker interviewed in Germany)



Bureaucratic obstacles at language-providing institutions can also hinder the language learning efforts of migrants:

“When we first settled here, I felt it was important to kind of get into the language. And so we applied straight away to the learning center that was right across the street from us. [...] We were rejected a place because we weren't refugees or asylum seekers. We were paying customers. So we didn't get a spot until the next fall.” (migrant worker from Norway)

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3.2.4 Tackling Migrant Overqualification and Skill Gaps Through Expanded On-the-Job Training and Mentoring

Access to continuing education and training is critical for involuntary and necessity migrants who have experienced interrupted pathways of education and skill formation:

I went to all schools, even the accounting and management university. For three years. I finished university to do my master's degree. My father had to help me do my master's degree. There is a great university in Guinea (...) where I went to university, and I wanted to do my master's degree I only finished university in 2020. I wanted to do my master's degree in 2021, then they murdered my father, first my brother was killed on December 22, 2020. (a refugee interviewed in Italy)

Research participants claim that high accessibility of vocational training for involuntary migrants contributes to the effectiveness of the training regarding their employment and integration. A significant proportion of surveyed migrants in Ethiopia reported receiving vocational courses after their migration—regardless of their education level—mainly from Vocational Training Centers. Migrants who accessed vocational training (whether through centers or workplaces) reported better integration outcomes than those who did not. Similarly, surveyed Ukrainian war refugees positively evaluate the impact of vocational training on their employability in destination countries, while internally displaced persons highlighted the high effectiveness of short-term, work-based learning courses providing micro-qualifications.

Being a forced decision, overqualification often brings emotional and psychological trauma to migrant workers while simultaneously serving as a catalyst for developing resilience. Fabien, a nursing assistant in France, acknowledges that “they [the employers] take advantage” of him, but his objectives are so important that he feels compelled to accept their demands. Magui says that although she sometimes cries when she gets home in the evening, she continues to do her job:

I too sometimes cry at home. When I think about it all, I cry, but I have a goal. In any case, whether I complain or shout, I have to keep going. It's pointless, at least for me. That's my point of view. What's the point of shouting or sulking? It only slows me down and hurts me. So I keep going, even if it's slowly. (medical doctor completing the requalification process in France)

For some migrants, past working experience is often dismissed. When faced with a scarcity of jobs corresponding to their qualifications, they are either told they are ‘overqualified’ or that they lack specific skills. For instance, an immigrant interviewed in the UK was unable to secure a position despite holding a master degree from a UK university and possessing 20 years of IT experience across his home and third countries. Rapid technological evolution means employers demand specific new skills that the applicant cannot meet. When attempting to apply for lower-level roles, he was labeled ‘overqualified’. To survive, he continues to take on odd jobs while navigating a difficult job hunt.



They want to like global qualification, even though I have a Master's degree, they say you're overqualified, you know, so nobody like taking me in. And the company is like saying, oh, you're overqualified, we want this also, we want that also. (...) For example, now we have AI coming in, cloud computing is coming in. So they want to employ to do everything, every sectors. That's not possible. (...) So I am a specialist in the infrastructure management, the center management, but they want more and more things. So that is I can't find any job properly.... So on both side I'm getting rejected and it last more than three and half years now. So finally I have to work. I have to work into some warehouses which I get job when there's a shortage. (migrant worker from the UK)

Surveyed migrants indicate that on-the-job training and internal courses are the primary forms of support provided by employers. Enterprises also offer individualized training in the workplace, alongside tandem training with local employees for retraining purposes. In Germany, migrant workers frequently must complete formal training courses in parallel to their employment to obtain a permanent contract, which increases their overall workload.

Complex sectoral qualification systems and costly training courses required to obtain local credentials act as significant obstacles to employment for migrants in state-regulated sectors and professions:

I didn't work in the UK for being a doctor here. I should complete firstly IELTS high level 7.5. It's like C1. Now my level B1B2 between not enough unfortunately for now, but I look forward... Next I will should complete the level one and level two. It's like medical exam, general medical, not my field (...). First the level one, it's theoretical parts and level two it's practical parts and just after that I could have opportunity to register in GMC system like a doctor, like in young doctor... Usual when I seek a job they ask about Level 3 some NQII (...). Some qualification which I didn't, I don't understand what is mean. They ask some company asking about Level 3, some company asking level two but they would be pleased if you have Level 3... I go into the site and unfortunately I found just like private (course). It's so expensive, it's around 1000 pounds or whole course few months. it's not allowed for me. (Ukrainian refugee in the UK)

Strongly market-oriented institutional arrangements of skill formation can create insurmountable obstacles for migrants in accessing training. This was stated by unemployed Ukrainian female refugees struggling to access training courses for the acquisition of new qualifications demanded in the Lithuanian labour market.

Currently, if you want to get training through the employment office, you first need to find an employer to sign a training contract. This is fine, but what should people do who have no acquaintances or contacts with employers, who are foreigners and isolated in the community, like us? Now, when I want to find a job, nobody knows me, and I have no references in the community or amongst companies. Therefore, this training and employment option is not feasible for me. (female Ukrainian refugees interviewed in Lithuania).

Interviewed Ukrainian refugees suggest that supporting informal learning should be integrated into state-provided training programs in the form of education vouchers, grants, and access to courses—especially for women, people with children, and people with disabilities.

3.2.5 Incentive mechanisms for employers



Creating support and incentive mechanisms for companies that employ and pay forced migrants reduces employers' reluctance to accept migrants due to initial integration challenges. Employers who hire and train involuntary migrants require further incentives:

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Besides, when thinking about the integration of forced migrants and refugees, we should create incentives and support mechanisms for employers who decide to employ them. Working with or employing forced migrants is challenging, especially in the beginning, and requires a steep learning curve. Otherwise, employers would not be eager to hire these individuals. When running our recruitment business, we faced this exact challenge. (business owner from Lebanon living in Lithuania).

3.2.6 Conditional licenses and programs supporting training and employment of involuntary migrants

Countries can introduce conditional licenses for medical, educational, or research staff, allowing them to work under supervision while full recognition of their diplomas is taking place, thus avoiding “brain waste”. For example, state subsidies for researchers' salaries allow them to continue their academic careers without mandatory language proficiency at the initial stage. Deploying the human capital of refugees acts as a key factor in their integration into the destination country's society.

I have a doctorate (Ukrainian Candidate of Sciences diploma) and I am lucky in the sense that here, in Lithuania, there is a special state-run program to support Ukrainian scientists. Higher education institutions that employ scientists from Ukraine receive subsidies for their salaries.(...). Therefore, I did not need to get my diploma recognized, learn Lithuanian, or fulfill other requirements. I worked according to the qualification documents I had. They simply took my documents, made copies, and submitted them to the National Science Council. Then the council made a decision in 2024 to subsidize my salary. And now I work at a university, as a lecturer/researcher. Well, maybe in Ukraine I had a higher position in my academic career as an associate professor, but this is very important, because I have the opportunity to pursue an academic career here as well. This significantly strengthened my psychological well-being and motivation to learn Lithuanian. (female Ukrainian refugee interviewed in Lithuania).

3.2.7 International cooperation in the field of skills recognition, training and studies

Developing short-term, adapted training programs together with universities in migrants' countries of origin helps avoid problems of diploma non-recognition. According to migrants surveyed in Germany, universities should play a proactive role in the social integration of foreign students by moving beyond mere academic enrollment. This includes creating mentorship programs to connect local and foreign students, combating isolation, and helping graduates transition into the local labor market. The higher education systems of EU member states demonstrate significant mobilization potential in integrating students from Ukraine, and Ukraine's participation in the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area greatly facilitates this effort.

I studied transport and logistics in Ukraine, completing my degree after arriving in Lithuania. ... I completed a three-year bachelor's degree in Ukraine, and transferring to the same program in Lithuania was very easy. I just continued the study program together with Lithuanian students. (female Ukrainian refugees interviewed in Lithuania).

Surveyed Ukrainian refugees also recommend creating unified portals for the recognition of education and certification (e.g., for Ukrainians abroad), which directly supports the preservation



of human capital for the future return and reconstruction of the country. They also suggest developing a national program in Ukraine to support the academic mobility of Ukrainians, in particular:

- vouchers for language learning,
- support for retraining, and
- partnerships with foreign universities.

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Ukraine, with the assistance of international institutions, should initiate the creation of a Single Portal for the Recognition of Education and Certification for Ukrainians Abroad.

3.2.8 The role of NGOs, charities, and migrant communities in providing skill formation and employment intermediation services

Education, training, and support in finding funding, provided by the third sector, increase migrants' self-confidence and job opportunities. NGOs and charities support involuntary migrants by providing vocational training and language courses in the UK. In the case of refugees from Ukraine and Syria, some individuals received vocational training with the help of local charities. They speak highly of these training courses, through which they not only gained new skills and certificates in the UK, but also improved their confidence and increased their chances of getting a job.

Ukrainian refugees provide assistance and support to their compatriots in dealing with the bureaucratic procedures of diploma recognition, which creates the potential for the development of user-friendly and trustworthy support and guidance structures:

"I successfully got my higher education diploma recognized. The staff of the local public library helped me a lot to understand and fulfill all the formal requirements. Now, I provide the same help and support to fellow Ukrainians seeking recognition for their diplomas. The procedure is not simple, so please contact me if you need assistance. (Ukrainian refugee in Lithuania)

Serving migrants and their communities also creates employment niches for migrant workers who have the skills and qualifications needed for such services.

I did not expect to continue practicing my profession here because I was pretty sure back then that who on earth would need an English teacher in the UK? Why would people need to learn English? But when I came to the UK, well, I was surprised to discover that the need for learning English language and for English tutors is really high. And there are lots of migrant communities in need of language provision. There are lots of refugees like myself who are aspiring to find jobs, to get into employment, and one of the obstacles, the most common obstacles for that is the language barrier. So, this is this is how I found myself teaching English in the UK (Ukrainian refugee in the UK).

3.3 How can migration, skills formation and employment policy measures facilitate justice in the integration of migrants in the labour market and skill formation systems?

Surveyed migrants recognize diverse possibilities for integrating into the labor market and education systems through migration, skills development, and employment policies.

3.3.1 Balancing the assessment and recognition of professional experience



Employers should more fairly assess a migrant employee's long-term practical experience, rather than just formal qualifications, to ensure just remuneration policies for entry-level workers without a local diploma. Migrant workers surveyed in Germany indicate the unfairness of the fact that qualifications are often valued by employers more highly than professional experience, even if the skills are ultimately the same, meaning that a person who may have only recently started working in this profession earns more than someone with longer professional experience, solely on the basis of a formal qualification. Having formal qualification can mean that a person who may only have been in the profession for a short time is paid more than someone with longer professional experience.

It's kind of disheartening because, of course the system values the qualification actually more than probably your experience. And that is the reason why there is a little gap between salary of those who have that qualification and those who [...] don't, even though they do the same job [and] those who have the qualification do not do anything special than those who do not have the qualification. But there is a huge difference in the pay. (migrant worker interviewed in Germany)

Migrant workers also feel that recognition of their work and output in the destination country requires a much greater effort compared to their colleagues originating from the destination country. Fabien and Marcelle from France believe that in order to be recognised or to have their requests met, they have to make a greater effort than their French colleagues:

As a foreigner, you realise that a French person will have to make an effort to get something, but a foreigner will have to make two or three times the effort. That's how it is. (nursing assistant)

For his part, Jean explains that while he understands the “preconceptions” about foreign doctors, the fact remains that to be accepted in the professional environment, he has to prove his worth constantly, and more so than his colleagues who have recently graduated in France. Moreover, the more socially advantaged, either because of their level of qualification or their professional position, seem to be less prone to discrimination. For example, Jean says that once he puts on his doctor's coat, there is no longer any distinction between him and his colleagues.

Recognition of work experience by employers and authorities, however, is not always treated as a priority object of justice-oriented practices and policies. For example, Ukrainian refugees report that working even in less qualified positions in developed countries gives them the opportunity to master modern labor, professional and qualification standards, technological practices, language, and production culture, which can be successfully used upon returning to their homeland. Surveys of Ukrainian refugees reveal that the professional and labor adaptation of Ukrainians in foreign labor markets is mainly practical and informal in nature, and is based on the initiative of the employees themselves and their gradual involvement in the production process. Ukrainian workers demonstrate high work capacity, the inclination and ability to learn, and a responsible attitude toward work and job duties, which forms a positive image of the Ukrainian workforce in European countries and beyond.

Migrant workers from France emphasize the need for policies that better recognize the contributions of migrants' human and social capital in destination countries. In this context, evidence-based research should play a crucial role in bringing the perspectives and voices of migrant workers to the forefront.

In my opinion, this interview will be most useful to politicians. It will change our politicians' view of immigration. Even though I am apolitical, I think of the speech by the current Prime Minister or even the Minister of the Interior, who said that “France does not need immigrants”. He said that, but I think he is completely wrong. Among these groups, there are many people who can really



contribute to France. There are many who can really be useful to French society. So there are really people who have the wrong ideas about immigration. I'm in a good position to talk about this because I've been through it myself. (migrant social worker interviewed in France)

3.3.2 Protecting labour rights and controlling overtime work

Page | 25 Surveyed migrant workers noticed discrimination in the form of imposed overtime when employers attempted to enforce it:

Half an hour turned into an hour and a half. Then we had to drive back again. That's not counted because we're just sitting in the car. (migrant worker from Germany)

Experiences in the area of injustice also relate to intersectional aspects, so that in addition to racism, ableism also occurs, in the sense that one is 'unconsciously ableist':

I just told you [the employer] yes, I'm not quite fit yet. After I took two days off sick, I didn't want to take any more so that I wouldn't come across as [...] if I was always sick or [...] weak or whatever. And then he just looked at me like that. And that was a disgusting moment for me. It was really disgusting. He just looked at me and smiled and laughed and said, "Well, I don't care, I don't care at all". (migrant worker interviewed in Germany)

Interviewed migrants report on contractual arrangements that formally guarantee low hours while requiring substantially more work in practice, particularly in service sector:

Sometimes your contract can be only like 20%, but you actually maybe work 80%... if you get sick and your contract is only like 20%, they will only pay you 20%. (migrant worker from the UK)

Some research participants reported working longer or harder than local citizens. However, they viewed this not as workplace injustice, but as a personal choice or a strategy to secure the financial resources needed to maintain their immigrant status and compensate for the lack of social protection in the destination country's inaccessible welfare system.

I was always volunteering to do more. I never saw anything, any task that was given. I never saw it as too much because I just want it. (...) So for me, being out of a job, I don't have access to any form of credit support.... so I will do whatever it takes to remain on that job. Even if it means me working extra hours, I would not complain because if I lose that job, I have children to feed. I have bills to pay."(graduate of master studies and migrant worker from the UK)

While these attitudes are understandable and the conditions that cause them are difficult to control, migrants' disposition to work overtime can be accompanied by further discriminatory practices and employer abuse, including open bullying.

My workload compared with the local people in that office, it's twice of them. I cannot have any time to rest, but they can have a lot of time for chatting, do other things. If I were on annual leave, other substitution people can only do 1/3 of my normal job when I came back, so that a lot of things accumulated for me to handle. (...) the boss always scold the staffs with very, very impolite way. He's very bad....he was stepping his dirty shoes on my sitting chairs and use the towel to rub it. That's in front of me, when I was doing the data entry- I'm handling with the computer, he step on my chair. That means just on just step near to me, maybe touch my trousers and use the towel to clean his dirty shoes. (...) This is torturing. (...) I guess he treat me as a slave. (refugee from Hong Kong in the UK)



3.3.3 Protecting Migrants and Refugees from Discrimination and Hostility by the Local Population

Hostility from local populations toward migrants is particularly noticeable in recent immigration countries such as Lithuania and Poland. This manifests as discrimination, psychological hostility, and reprimands at work or in public life due to 'insufficient' language integration or perceived competition in the labor and education systems. Ukrainian refugees in both countries report a distinct shift in public sentiment and their work environments, noting a rise in anti-Ukrainian rhetoric.

Now I feel a significant deterioration in the attitude towards Ukrainians... It's negative, aggressive. It's not what it used to be... (...). Probably, this is due to the fact that Ukrainians came to a foreign country and can do business. (Ukrainian refugee, small business owner interviewed in Poland)

Lithuanians also treat me like an outsider simply based on my name, language, and other aspects. One of my new colleagues at work in the kindergarten reprimanded me for my Ukrainian origin and tried to persuade the management to fire me, saying she was fed up with Ukrainians (задовбали ці українці). (...) In these situations, you feel like an outsider and defenseless, very vulnerable, but realize there is nothing you can do about it. Local people believe that it is a great merit to employ me, so I should behave very humbly, without causing any problems or asking questions, and just be very thankful for the favor received. (Ukrainian refugee interviewed in Lithuania)

Migrants' inability to communicate in the host country's language often leads to negative attitudes and discrimination from the local population, particularly in the workplace:

I faced racial and cultural issues at work when customers reprimanded me over my looks or my Lithuanian language skills, with some urging me to go back to my country. But I just ignore them and don't pay attention. (female migrant student and worker from Morocco interviewed in Lithuania).

Discrimination based on language manifests itself in various contexts. Even during visits to the doctor, migrants experience discrimination because of their language, with comments such as 'No, you are in Germany. You have to speak German.' (migrant worker interviewed in Germany), making treatment difficult and resulting in incorrect treatment.

Although negative experiences with social networks and participation were reported in established immigration countries, they were mainly described by migrants as loneliness and social isolation, compounded by a lack of openness from the host societies in Norway, Germany, and the UK. Migrants perceive that their powerlessness and isolation in host countries are also reinforced by a lack of understanding of how local social and state institutions' function:

We will never really understand this system. Yes, even if I work hard or something, I won't really understand the system and how everything works. And that's perhaps not an injustice that comes from the people or the country or anything, but it's an injustice that we can work on with people who help to close this gap with information. (migrant worker interviewed in Germany)

A potential solution to this issue is to raise local cultural awareness about migrants, which empowers them to take action. In Lithuania, a migrant entrepreneur demonstrated this through a socially oriented restaurant business that employs migrant workers and fosters cultural understanding of their home country among locals.



We established our restaurant not just for business. One of our goals was to create jobs for people from the Near East and other foreign countries. Another goal is to educate locals about the region's culture through its cuisine by offering traditional cooking demonstrations and showing videos. (small business owner from Lebanon living in Lithuania)

3.3.4 Eliminating restrictions on legal status, mobility and access to public welfare services

According to surveyed migrants, migration services should make issuing residence permits more transparent and less bureaucratic and ensure more effective communication with migrants and local employers.

Some migrants expressed frustration at the disconnect between their contributions as high taxpayers and the poor service received, describing a feeling of being unwanted despite being needed:

It feels like the government doesn't want us in here, but also they are aware of that. They need us... the process... takes up to two years just having a one card... I am paying huge taxes... for Poland and against my tax I'm almost having nothing. (migrant worker from Poland)

Migrants surveyed in France report that the legal status and the issuing of residency permits for migrants vary depending on their country of origin. Migrants from countries other than sub-Saharan Africa or the Maghreb are less likely to experience various forms of stigmatisation regarding their immigration status. Apart from minor stigmatisation related to linguistic differences, migrant workers from Australia, Ireland, and Brazil consider themselves to be relatively privileged, as they have never encountered such negative experiences.

I am part of a very privileged group of immigrants in that, as I said, I have an Australian passport. Even when I arrived in the country without speaking French, I found that I could get by. And listening to some of my colleagues, there are all these stories of people who have their residence permit renewals blocked in the system, and then their residence permits expire [...]. All of this was very stressful for them. And I have never had that kind of experience. Every time I renewed my visa, it went smoothly. I never had any problems. (Sophia, medical doctor)

Research participants suggest that refugee policies should be fair and non-discriminatory on the basis of nationality. For example, Ukrainians in the UK should not be specifically blocked from obtaining permanent resident status, and Hong Kong refugees should not have their terms extended unreasonably by up to 10 years. Ukrainian refugees expressed strong concern about their status in the UK. Although they are grateful for the support received, many feel that the refugee policy towards them is unfair. From their perspective, even those who arrive in the UK illegally in boats can be granted refugee status and settle in the UK after five years, but Ukrainians cannot. To them, this is discrimination that affects every aspect of their lives in the UK.

I don't feel that and especially Ukrainians that often report that that feel often discriminated because they perceive like white Europeans, so they're not protected with anti-racism like laws, but they are vulnerable.... Because Ukrainians are the only nationals that are specifically blocked to pass to permanent status, nobody else, and especially when we have access to benefits, we have right to work. And the only who is blocked from pass to permanent status when those visas, your time that you spent in the UK is not counted. Even 10 years, not counted, not saying about 5,



most refugees get in five years. We are not allowed even in 10 years, just Ukrainians.... it is a pure discrimination and we have even I am actually the part of or campaign about, you know, allowing path to settlement for Ukrainians... (Ukrainian refugee interviewed in the UK).

The Hong Kong refugees also expressed strong frustration in this regard, and a feeling of being cheated by the UK government, as it promised to receive them and take care of them. However, when many of them sold their property and gave up everything in Hong Kong to move to the UK, they were disappointed to find that there were no jobs, no benefits, and 'nothing'. The current immigration policy change in terms of extending the period for indefinite leave to remain is particularly concerning to them, as they are worried that their applications would be rejected if they did not contribute enough to the economy. Some, particularly those who are unemployed, feel this has affected their wellbeing.

Honestly, it's absolutely unfair to us all. And you break the promise, you know, because it is not trade kind of deal. It's the first day we've decided to give up everything to change to stay in the UK and then we don't enjoy any benefit. We don't get any support actually. (...) You don't entitle for any benefit in the UK. (...) And then we brought a lot of money, a lot of money from our saving, you know, you can check statistic, how much money we put into, you know, housing when people bought houses and how much they're worth. (political refugees from Hong Kong in the UK)

Involuntary migrants and refugees also face difficulties and obstacles in getting access to public social and health insurance in destination countries, as stated by the Ukrainian refugees interviewed in Lithuania:

I cannot get insurance as an unemployed refugee. In this case, I can only rely on private healthcare. As regards public healthcare, only urgent aid is provided. (female war refugee from Ukraine in Lithuania)

My daughter was receiving health insurance until she turned 18, after which it was discontinued. We were told that from the age of maturity, insurance must be covered by an employer. She is studying at a higher education institution, where students are normally entitled to student health insurance. However, this is not applicable to refugees from Ukraine because their residence permits are issued based on their refugee status rather than student status, which does not allow them to acquire this insurance. (...) I also have a husband who works as a sailor for a non-Lithuanian shipping company. He is not allowed to buy health insurance because of his refugee status. He now works by providing various services under an individual business activity to pay for his health insurance. He could also do this using his salary from the shipping company, but this is not permitted. (female war refugee from Ukraine in Lithuania)

The reduction of Ukrainian pensions and subsidies for war refugees—especially when they earn income in Lithuania—complicates and aggravates the financial situation for the refugees and their families.

The common support programs for refugees established by the governments of Ukraine and Lithuania could be revised. Some time ago, there was an agreement that retired individuals from Ukraine would receive their pensions and remain entitled to local financial support. Now, if a returning person receives official support from Lithuania, their pension paid by Ukraine is reduced accordingly. The person receives a minimal subsistence amount, which includes their Ukrainian pension along with an additional payment from Lithuania. However, these elderly individuals live with their larger families and contribute to shared household expenses, including the high cost of



rent. Furthermore, they face increased medical expenses due to severe health impairments brought on by the war. (female war refugee from Ukraine in Lithuania)

3.3.5 Improving access to higher education

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Public higher education is not accessible to Ukrainian refugee youth due to legal status restrictions, while private education is too expensive:

Accessibility to higher education is complicated. Studies are expensive; I found just one university offering a 50 percent discount on tuition fees. High-performing local students who completed high school in Lithuania can apply for state-funded places and scholarships, but this is valid only for citizens. (female war refugee from Ukraine in Lithuania)

These situations urge us to establish more study places and scholarships for young people with refugee status.

3.3.6 Reducing the digital divide through intermediaries

The digitalization of public services increases accessibility for the local population but reduces it for digitally excluded migrants:

Now, everything related to employment and immigration governance is digitalized and based on the presentation of documentary evidence, such as proofs of qualification. However, many of these immigrants lack basic skills to navigate digital platforms, or they do not have documentary proof of their skills. Furthermore, there are no clear guidelines on how these migrants can arrange and prepare all the bureaucratic stuff regarding their employment, social and health insurance, payment of taxes. When we were hiring immigrant workers for our restaurant, every single one of them claimed that it is extremely complicated to navigate the legal and bureaucratic procedures and requirements of employment. Therefore, my wife and I had to provide extensive consultations and explanations to these candidates on how to proceed with the formalities of employment—specifically, knowing which institution to go to, which documents to request, and what to bring. (small business owner from Lebanon living in Lithuania)

As the digitalization of services limits access for undocumented or digitally illiterate migrants, the state should support live consultations and intermediaries (e.g. public libraries or NGOs) to help with employment and insurance formalities.

3.3.7 The role of trade unions and migrant communities in protecting the rights of migrants

Migrant workers feel the insurmountable barrier caused by a lack of the social capital and networks needed to secure employment in affluent economies:

The employer in this country is very powerful, they hire people based on their network rather than by competence, if don't have a network you can not find easily based job application, Since I am switching from academia to industry I have applied for more than 1300 jobs in last 3 years without success. I am doing contract jobs at universities. (migrant worker in Norway)

Migrants often lack awareness of their labour rights, even in welfare states with strong trade unions:

People who come do not know about all the rights (obligations) that they have, are unsure about standing up for their rights from the Working Environment Act and employers exploit it. (migrant worker in Norway)



A qualitative survey of migrants in Germany discloses that salaries are perceived by migrants as fair, mainly due to collective agreements that leave little room for variability on the part of the employer. However, Ukrainian migrants mostly remain outside institutional mechanisms for the collective protection of rights, which limits their influence on working conditions and the level of social security. The low level of participation of migrants in the trade unions of destination countries (only about 10 percent of surveyed Ukrainian refugees declared membership) is due to a combination of several factors—short-term employment contracts, lack of information, fear of losing their job, and uncertainty about the benefits of membership. Positive examples from Germany, Italy, and partly from Scandinavian countries show that, given a developed trade union infrastructure, Ukrainians are potentially ready for greater participation in such associations. It is obvious that trade union organizations in host countries should strengthen information and educational initiatives and efforts among Ukrainians abroad in order to increase understanding of the benefits of trade union participation and opportunities for legal protection at the collective level.

With regard to diaspora organizations, research indicates that such organizations are more effective in the areas of cultural integration, education, and creating opportunities for the children of migrant workers to maintain their native language and cultural identity. At the same time, they create opportunities for the self-realization of highly educated migrants:

I am the head of the Tajik community organisation. Our community consists predominantly of young people, many of whom are students at general and higher education establishments. We have Sunday cultural and Tajik language schools for the children of our community. The children and young people speak fluent Lithuanian, but not all of them succeed in retaining their native language. Therefore, we created these Sunday schools for them. We have a considerable teaching staff in these schools because the majority of our Tajik community members in Lithuania hold higher education degrees. Of course, most of them work in lower-skilled jobs that do not correspond to their educational attainment, mainly because of their poor communication skills in the Lithuanian language. (political refugee from Tajikistan in Lithuania).



4 Policy Implications

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The experiences and perspectives of migrants regarding the processes of immigration, employment, and skill formation reveal a complex picture of the continuing interaction between narrowing and expanding opportunities across migration-employment trajectories, created by legal migration status, institutional recognition systems, credential regimes, and workplace hierarchies. Research findings highlight that migrants' employment and skill formation outcomes depend less on their individual skills than on the institutional and structural conditions that shape access to jobs, education, qualification recognition, and rights. While migrants often possess significant educational and skill endowments and actively invest in education after arrival, their competencies are only partially utilised in the labour market. This is due to a widespread skill mismatch among qualified and highly qualified migrants, which reflects constraints in task allocation, sectoral segmentation, and the limited conversion of recognised qualifications into appropriate occupational positions.

Persisting trends of narrowing opportunities lead to the underutilisation of migrant skills and reduce the possibilities of mitigating labour shortages with the help of migration, especially through the overqualification of migrant workers. Deskilling, overqualification, and underutilization of migrants skills also foster their feelings of injustice and discrimination, which in turn poses a serious risk to the long-term, sustainable contribution of migrants to the solution of future labour shortages in societies with an ageing population. Low trust between migrant workers, stakeholders, and the civil society of destination countries also prevents the development of sustainable migration pathways by reducing opportunities for the deployment and development of migrant human capital.

High-capacity, high-quality, and highly demanding regimes of immigration, employment, and the skill formation of migrants, such as in the case of Norway, France, Germany, and the UK, face a dilemma: how to handle existing barriers to full skill utilization and equal opportunity without compromising relatively effective systems. The solution lies in recognizing the mutual disadvantages that employment and skill formation barriers create for both migrants and the stakeholders of destination and origin countries. This approach can help in the search and development of mutually beneficial and sustainable solutions. Examples include implementing agreements and arrangements for the automatic and fast-track recognition of qualifications with countries of origin. It can also facilitate schemes and programs that bridge the recognition of credentials with skill formation arrangements targeted at adjusting human capital to the destination country's skill needs (e.g., apprenticeships and traineeships). Alternatively, it can reduce administrative burdens and improve the transparency of assessment and recognition procedures without compromising well-functioning quality assurance mechanisms.



It is important to clearly define the status of immigrants on arrival, with clearly assigned rights to the recognition of qualifications and education, employment, and skill formation in the destination country. Removing ambiguities and fostering accessible communication of this information to immigrants would help their orientation in the labour market and skill formation systems.

Forced migrants who flee existential threats report high levels of stress both before and after their arrival in a destination country. This trend is observed in surveyed migrants in Italy, war refugees in Ethiopia, and Ukrainian refugees in various nations. Furthermore, many responses from involuntary migrants show elements of post-traumatic experience that should be considered in integration and reintegration policies. Respondents also highlighted that child safety is a critical factor throughout the migration process, influencing everything from the decision to flee to long-term labor market integration and skill formation. This factor significantly contributed to the urgency of departure decisions and the prioritization of safety and security over economic aspects of integration in the destination country.

Fostering digitization and streamlining the application process for residence permits to reduce processing times to the statutory limit can make the application process faster and enable candidates to start these processes before departure. However, this requires making online applications user-friendly for migrant workers with a low level of digital literacy. An easy to operate online tracking system allows applicants to monitor the real-time status of their applications.

Migrants demonstrate a stronger readiness and non-selectiveness in choosing employment opportunities, working long hours and making other sacrifices in order to sustain families, and invest in the education and training of children in the destination country by compromising their own opportunities for skill formation. This aspect emphasizes the need for specially targeted policies focused on supporting families with children in close cooperation with the institutions and authorities of the home countries, where possible and relevant.

The presence of family and children is also a significant factor in the decision to return. These decisions are influenced by the children's level of socialization and integration into the destination country's education and skill formation systems. They are also driven by potential returnees' much higher expectations regarding safety and stability in the home country and the availability of systems that provide basic needs—such as housing, security, work, and a future for their children



(based on interviews with Ukrainian war refugees in Western Europe and the USA conducted by the Institute of Educational Analytics, as well as interviews with Ukrainian war refugees in Lithuania).

Lack of accessible language training often leads to over-qualification and suboptimal usage of the skills and productive potential of migrant workers, especially those working in the service field and in high-skilled sectors. The learning potential of work and workplace communication can be better exploited by removing the mastering of knowledge as a prerequisite of employment (in professions and occupations that allow such an option) and replacing it with the requirement to acquire language skills in a phased way through structured workplace language training facilitated by employers, training providers, NGOs, and other bodies.

Making the opportunities for the recognition of skills and qualifications, employment, and skill formation an integral part of the reception process for involuntary migrants and asylum seekers would facilitate a faster and smoother transition from arrival to employment and an autonomous life.

Accessibility of vocational education and training—especially employment-focused, work-based learning and apprenticeships for involuntary migrants—could be improved by providing more propaedeutic training (e.g., short-term, work-based learning schemes) as well as labor market orientation support. This involves creating apprenticeship schemes in sectors experiencing workforce shortages, with the participation of interested employers, NGOs, education and training providers, and migrant communities and diasporas. Companies established by migrants could also be very interested in taking part in such schemes.



Access to higher education for migrants and foreign nationals should be further improved by supporting university and non-university schemes that already assist potential students and by rethinking tuition fee funding so that foreign nationals enjoy the same rights as other students.

Stronger integration of language training with the development of vocational or professional skills on the job, as well as expanding opportunities for practicing language in the contexts of work and leisure activities, can bring significant improvements, especially over the long term.

Sectoral- or occupation-specific language training can be expanded and its curricula could be more clearly linked with other language learning opportunities; combined digital and taught language learning provision can be offered in parallel to immersive schemes in professional contexts; better awareness of multilingualism in workplaces should also be promoted by enterprises.

Collaborative initiatives and projects involving civil society (NGOs), volunteers, schools, students, and interested enterprises could make a difference here.

Communities and migrant diasporas could also be more actively engaged in creating and promoting opportunities for skill formation and vocational education and training.



Also, making the national and sectoral systems of qualifications more transparent and accessible, and creating smoother and accessible pathways for gaining formal qualifications, equally benefits the local population and migrant workers, just like incentives for enterprises to invest in fair and accessible skill development and promotion opportunities for staff.

Policies should aim to better connect qualification recognition processes with concrete employment opportunities, so that recognized credentials translate into appropriate occupational outcomes. Information and signposting on pathways to the recognition of qualifications, particularly in state-regulated professions and sectors, need to be improved and made available not only to migrants, but to those who support them within public employment services and NGOs.

Experiences of discrimination by migrants and a lack of social contacts have a significant impact on inclusion, especially on the experience of social justice. Positive experiences in relation to education and work contribute to the empowerment of labour migrants, which can have a positive impact on their everyday experiences. Research participants who have had positive experiences through social support offer support to new migrants, so that help is passed on. There are also people who have experienced little social support themselves but want to do something different; therefore, they want to support new migrants to prevent them from having the same experiences as themselves.

A team of researchers from Stavanger University, based on the findings of a quantitative and qualitative survey of migrants in Norway, developed the "Migration–Skills–Opportunity Funnel" (MSOF) (Tikkanen, Eslen Ziya, Austdal & Normand, 2026). This model depicts the existing setting of supports and hindrances for the integration of migrants in the Norwegian labor market and society (Figure 1). The model shows that even in affluent countries with strong welfare state mechanisms, the overall long-term integration process of migrants is not homogeneous in terms of the distribution of supporting and hindering factors. At some stages (marked in green), there is strong institutional support (e.g., safety standards, accessibility of further education). However, there are also areas (yellow) where this support is weaker, leading to the partial success of integration (e.g., job finding, general employability), or where bottlenecks emerge (e.g., skills/credential recognition, regulated professions, discrimination, and language barriers, marked in red).

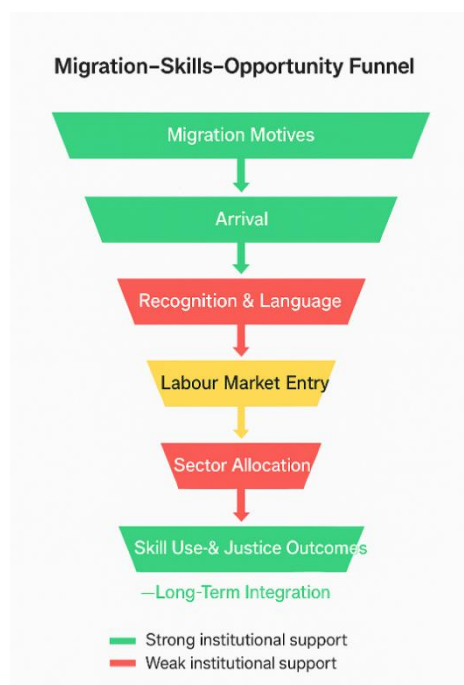


Figure 1. Migration-Skills-Opportunity Funnel (Tikkanen, Eslén Ziya, Austdal & Normand, 2026, p. 93).

Surveys of the war refugees from Ukraine disclosed that forced emigration during the war is not only a problem and potential risk, but also an opportunity for national renewal, as it forms a new type of citizen who is open to the world, competent, worthy, and aware of their roots. To exploit this opportunity, it is suggested to:

1. Create a national program for the return and reintegration of refugees, taking into account the recognition of skills, certification, employment, and business support.
2. Implement mechanisms for the recognition of international professional experience and informal skills through a “skills portfolio”, short recertification programs, and state adaptation courses.
3. Provide returnees with housing and social guarantees, with special attention to families, women, children, and socially vulnerable groups.
4. Introduce gender-sensitive reintegration policies, including support for female workers, flexible working hours, access to education and kindergartens, and grants for entrepreneurial activity.
5. Create an intersectoral platform for coordinating return policies to the homeland (state, communities, NGOs, and business) necessary to provide comprehensive support to returnees.
6. Develop differentiated assistance programs taking into account property losses, region of origin, specialty, and social status.



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