

AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL-04-LABOUR

GO2VET

**A common approach to foster the access to the Vocational Education
and Training career opportunities for immigrants**

Collection of the lessons learnt by partners' operators
*Challenges and solutions for the access of Third-Country Nationals
to Vocational Education and Training*

WP2 – preparatory phase
Deliverable N. 2.2

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project acronym:	GO2VET
Project full title:	A common approach to foster the access to the Vocational Education and Training career opportunities for immigrants
Coordinator:	ANOLF Marche ODV
Funded by:	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)
Project no:	101140710 — GO2VET — AMIF-2023-TF2-AG-CALL
Project website:	https://www.go2vetproject.eu/

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Author:	IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH
Dissemination level:	Public
Document status:	Final as of 15.04.2025

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1. Executive Summary

The GO2VET project is dedicated to enhancing access to vocational education and training (VET) as well as labour market opportunities for third-country nationals (TCNs) across Europe. As part of this initiative, consultations were conducted with key stakeholders in Italy, Belgium, Greece, Sweden, Germany, Spain, and Cyprus to identify the most significant challenges TCNs face in accessing VET and to explore potential solutions. This report presents a comprehensive summary of the consultation results, offering a comparative analysis of the most pressing issues identified across participating countries. Additionally, it highlights country-specific recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges and improving the integration of TCNs into vocational training systems and the labour market.

The aim of the peer-to-peer consultation

The primary goal of the consultations is to identify key challenges and obstacles that third-country nationals (TCNs) face when accessing effective vocational education and training (VET) career guidance services. To achieve this, project partners conduct internal consultations with their respective operators. These consultations serve as a structured process to assess where critical information gaps exist and which bottlenecks hinder TCNs in navigating the VET system successfully.

As a first step, all partners receive a predefined list of topics to be addressed during their internal consultations. This structured approach ensures that relevant issues are thoroughly examined and that findings can be systematically compared across different contexts. By gathering insights directly from professionals working within the system, the project aims to develop targeted solutions that improve the accessibility and effectiveness of VET career guidance for TCNs.

Key findings and recommendations

The consultations conducted with operators and professionals working with TCNs have provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by third-country nationals (TCNs) when accessing vocational training in Europe. A key finding is the critical importance of language support, which was consistently emphasized across all participating countries. The need for flexible, needs-based language courses, including vocational language training, is essential for facilitating integration.

Another major challenge is the recognition of formal and informal qualifications. Streamlining these processes is crucial for enabling TCNs to enter the labour market more quickly. Bureaucratic and legal obstacles, such as difficulties with visas, work permits, and administrative procedures, further complicate access to vocational training and employment. Addressing these issues requires stronger cooperation between educational institutions, employers, labour market agencies, and policymakers.

Discrimination and limited access to information were also highlighted as significant barriers, particularly in Belgium, Sweden, and Germany. Ensuring equal opportunities and creating centralized,

multilingual information platforms can improve awareness of available services and support mechanisms. Additionally, some countries, including Italy and Sweden, stressed the importance of targeted support for specific groups, such as women, refugees, or individuals with skill gaps.

Based on these findings, the most effective measures for improving TCNs' labour market integration include expanding access to tailored language courses, simplifying the recognition of foreign qualifications, and reducing bureaucratic hurdles related to work and residency permits. Strengthening interinstitutional collaboration is essential to create more inclusive and efficient support structures. Furthermore, implementing policies to combat discrimination, enhancing access to information, and developing specialized programs for vulnerable groups will play a crucial role in fostering successful integration.

These recommendations provide a strong foundation for developing comprehensive strategies to improve TCNs' - access to vocational training and employment opportunities across Europe.

2. Introduction

Background and objective of the project

Vocational and Educational Trainings (VET) play a crucial role in equipping individuals with the practical skills and knowledge required to meet labour market demands. As industries evolve and economies shift, ensuring that vocational training remains relevant and accessible is essential for workforce development and economic growth. According to the OECD (2021), well-structured vocational training programs significantly enhance employability, reduce skill mismatches, and contribute to economic resilience. Similarly, research by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2020) highlights that VET fosters lifelong learning, enabling workers to adapt to technological advancements and industry transformations.

However, access to vocational training paths for TCNs based on assessment and validation of skills or qualifications is not widely available across EU countries. Even though at local, regional and national levels the market needs in terms of employability of this target population are clear and well defined, most of the EU countries lack a well-established system for training opportunities of TCNs to be employed. This report is a deliverable of the GO2VET project, which aims to foster access to Vocational Education and Training career opportunities for Third-Country Nationals (TCNs). GO2VET is an EU project co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) under the topic of multi-stakeholder initiatives for migrant integration into the labour market with the Grant Agreement number 101140710.

GO2VET wants to reduce obstacles to VET career guidance services for TCNs young and adult people living in the partners' countries by facilitating their access to information, by improving quality of the services provided and by fostering the capacity of the operators. The insights gathered will also play a crucial role in shaping the next steps of the project, particularly the development of a targeted training program for VET operators. This program will address the identified challenges, equipping professionals with the tools and knowledge needed to support TCNs more effectively in their career development and vocational training journey. The project consortium consists of nine partners from seven EU countries that are Italy, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Cyprus and Germany:

1. **Italy:**

- Anolf Marche Odv (Associazione Nazionale Oltre Le Frontiere), COO.
- IAI Marche s.r.l (Innovazione Apprendimento Lavoro Marche srl Impresa Sociale)
- Welcome a.p.s.

2. **Sweden:** SUPPORT GROUP NETWORK (SGN).

3. **Spain:** FUNDACION RED INCOLA (RED INCOLA).

4. **Belgium:** LE FOREM.

5. **Greece:** ZEFXIS ASTIKI MI KERDOSKOPIKI ETAIREIA (Zeuxis NGO).

6. **Germany:** IHK- PROJEKTGESELLSCHAFT MBH (IHK).

7. **Cyprus:** CY.R.C. CYPRUS REFUGEE COUNCIL (CYRC).

The findings presented in this report are particularly relevant for VET facility operators, policymakers, NGOs and social organizations working with TCNs, as well as companies and employers that employ or train TCNs. While the primary aim of the report is to document the challenges and solutions identified during the project, it also serves as a practical foundation for the development of targeted training programs for operators. By applying the insights gained from these findings, operators can implement effective measures to enhance the integration of TCNs into vocational education and the labour market.

Importance of Peer-to-Peer Consultations

Collaborative consultations play a crucial role in the GO2VET project, as they facilitate direct exchange among operators, professionals, and key stakeholders actively involved in supporting third-country nationals (TCNs) in their integration into vocational education and training (VET) and the labour market. By engaging directly with operators and professionals actively working with TCNs in career guidance, training, and administrative processes, these consultations provide valuable practical insights that go beyond theoretical analyses, offering a deeper understanding of real-world challenges. By drawing on the experiences of *operators and professionals working with TCNs*, these consultations help identify critical barriers and information gaps that hinder access to VET. Additionally, they create a platform for knowledge exchange between different countries and institutions, allowing best practices to be shared and adapted for broader application.

Another key advantage of this approach is its ability to pinpoint bureaucratic obstacles and inefficiencies within existing systems. The insights gathered directly from *those working on the frontlines* inform the development of practical solutions that enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of VET programs for TCNs. Ultimately, this method plays a vital role in shaping sustainable strategies for their successful labour market integration across Europe.

3. Methodology

This lesson learnt report provides a comprehensive overview of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the sector, offering insights into emerging trends, skill gaps, and best practices. The World Bank (2019) emphasizes that countries with robust VET systems experience lower unemployment rates and stronger economic performance, further underscoring the importance of continuous investment in vocational training.

Description of the developed guideline with 12 questions

The methodology for the peer-review consultations within the GO2VET project is designed to systematically identify and analyse the key information bottlenecks preventing third-country nationals (TCNs) from accessing effective vocational education and training (VET) career guidance services. This structured approach ensures that insights are gathered directly from professionals and stakeholders actively working with TCNs in the field, leading to practical and actionable recommendations.

Peer-Review Consultation Approach

The consultation process follows a consultation model, where project partners conduct structured discussions with operators, career guidance professionals, and other stakeholders directly supporting TCNs. These consultations aim to explore specific challenges faced by TCNs and to evaluate existing strategies and policies. To ensure consistency across different countries and organizations, a standardized list of topics guides each consultation.

To ensure a consistent and comparable process across all partner countries, a standardized list of 12 core topics guided the consultations. These topics addressed key issues such as language barriers, bureaucratic challenges, and access to digital resources (see detailed list below). By aligning each consultation to these predefined themes, the project ensured that findings could be systematically compared and analysed.

Sampling Process and Stakeholder Selection

A total of 17 peer review consultations were conducted across the participating countries: Italy, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Cyprus, and Germany. The number of consultations and participants varied depending on the national context and the availability of relevant stakeholders. The distribution is as follows:

- Italy: 5 consultations with 23 participants
- Greece: 4 consultations with 8 participants
- Belgium: 3 consultations with 7 participants
- Germany: 2 consultations with 6 participants
- Spain: 1 consultation with 11 participants
- Sweden: 1 consultation with 2 participants
- Cyprus: 1 consultation with 3 participants

The consultations involved project partners, as well as representatives from vocational education providers, NGOs, public institutions, and other relevant actors. They were conducted in both remote and in-person formats to ensure accessibility and flexibility. Each partner was responsible for coordinating a defined number of consultations in their respective country, ensuring that the results reflect specific regional and national contexts.

Key Topics of Investigation

Twelve core topics were identified as critical areas of concern and served as the foundation for the consultations:

1. **Language Barriers** – Examining access to multilingual guidance, translation services, and comprehension of vocational terminology.
2. **Lack of Awareness of Available Services** – Assessing outreach effectiveness and collaboration between institutions.
3. **Complexity of Bureaucratic Processes** – Identifying administrative hurdles in training registration and qualification recognition.
4. **Cultural Differences and Mismatch** – Evaluating how cultural backgrounds impact career aspirations and job market alignment.
5. **Access to Digital Resources** – Exploring digital literacy and availability of online guidance platforms.
6. **Limited Access to Personalized Guidance** – Investigating the availability of trained counsellors and mentoring programs.
7. **Economic and Social Barriers** – Understanding financial constraints, childcare responsibilities, and transportation challenges.
8. **Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning** – Addressing gaps in acknowledging prior learning experiences.
9. **Legal and Policy Constraints** – Analysing residency, visa, and legal barriers to VET participation.
10. **Interagency Coordination and Information Gaps** – Reviewing the effectiveness of collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and employment agencies.
11. **Integration of Soft Skills and Local Workplace Norms** – Identifying training needs for workplace behaviour and cultural adaptation.
12. **Impact of Discrimination and Bias** – Assessing challenges related to unequal treatment in career guidance and job placement.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Each participating partner conducts consultations with relevant stakeholders, including career counsellors, training providers, government representatives, and NGOs. The discussions were structured to collect qualitative insights on the challenges, best practices, and potential solutions for improving VET accessibility for TCNs.

The collected data were then analysed to identify common themes, cross-country differences, and emerging trends. A comparative analysis was conducted to highlight recurring issues and develop targeted recommendations. The findings serve as the basis for formulating concrete policy and programmatic improvements aimed at enhancing the integration of TCNs into vocational training and the labour market.

By employing this peer-review methodology, the GO2VET project ensures that the perspectives of those directly involved in VET guidance services are taken into account, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.

5. Results of the Peer-to-Peer Consultations

The exchange discussions across seven countries reveal a consistent pattern of challenges faced by Third Country Nationals (TCNs) in accessing vocational training. While the specific manifestations and priorities of these issues vary, their overarching presence underscores the systemic barriers hindering TCN integration into the labour market.

Language barriers emerge as a fundamental obstacle in all countries. Insufficient language proficiency impedes both participation in educational programs and successful labour market integration. The universal call for additional, flexible language courses tailored to TCNs' diverse needs highlights the centrality of this issue.

A pervasive lack of awareness regarding available support services and educational pathways further compounds the problem. Across all nations, the need for effective information campaigns and multilingual counselling services is recognized as crucial for bridging this knowledge gap.

Bureaucratic hurdles, particularly the complex and time-consuming processes involved in recognizing foreign qualifications, create significant barriers to vocational training. The consultations consistently emphasize the necessity for simplified and accelerated administrative procedures.

Cultural differences and gender roles also present challenges. Varying cultural norms and expectations, especially concerning gender roles, can impede labour market integration. Intercultural training and awareness programs for educational institutions and employers are seen as vital in addressing these disparities.

The increasing importance of digital literacy is reflected in the shared concern regarding access to digital resources. Lack of digital skills and limited access to technical equipment hinder TCNs' ability to utilize online services and educational opportunities. Promoting digital skills and providing necessary infrastructure are identified as critical solutions.

Discrimination and prejudice remain significant obstacles. TCNs often encounter discriminatory practices in the labour market. Anti-discrimination measures and the promotion of diversity and inclusion within companies and educational institutions are deemed essential.

Social and economic hurdles further complicate matters. Financial difficulties, inadequate childcare, and transportation problems impede participation in educational programs. Financial support, childcare provisions, and flexible learning models are considered indispensable.

A recurring theme is the lack of coordination between institutions. Insufficient cooperation among authorities, educational institutions, and NGOs leads to inefficiency and duplication of effort. Improving interinstitutional collaboration and information exchange is a central concern.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements presents a major challenge. Difficulties in recognizing qualifications and experience acquired in their home countries create significant barriers. Developing procedures for recognizing informal and non-formal learning is seen as a crucial step towards integrating TCNs into the labour market.

Legal and political framework conditions play a decisive role. Restrictive residence regulations and unclear political guidelines can hinder access to vocational training. The consultations emphasize the need for flexible and inclusive policies.

Finally, the integration of soft skills and local workplace norms is recognized as vital. Lack of familiarity with local customs and behaviours in the workplace can impede integration. Imparting soft skills and knowledge of local workplace norms is considered an essential measure.

6. Country-Specific Insights

While these overarching themes are consistent, each country also highlights specific nuances and priorities. In Italy, the focus is on language courses, a central information platform, simplified qualification recognition, targeted support for women, and strengthened employer partnerships. Belgium emphasizes language courses (structural reforms), better education-employment linkages, overcoming deficit-oriented approaches, and combating discrimination. Greece highlights legal and political restrictions, visa and work permit issues, and the need for better interinstitutional coordination and language support. Sweden stresses language support, targeted outreach to TCN communities, stronger partnerships between educational institutions and employers, improved digital access, and combating discrimination. Germany focuses on regional differences, culturally sensitive advice, improved funding access, and specific recommendations for recognizing informal learning and integrating soft skills. Spain identifies language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and economic barriers as primary challenges, advocating for more language courses, simplified procedures, better information and coordination, and competence recognition. Cyprus emphasizes legal and political framework conditions, language barriers, and lack of interinstitutional coordination, calling for more flexible residence regulations, more language courses, and better cooperation among relevant actors. These shared challenges and country-specific insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced by TCNs in accessing vocational training.

Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy changes, improved coordination, enhanced support services, and a commitment to fostering inclusive and equitable environments.

Country	Key Insights and Measures
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on language courses and a central information platform • Simplified qualification recognition • Targeted support for women • Strengthened partnerships with employers
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on structural reforms and better links between education and employment • Moving away from deficit-oriented approaches by promoting TCNs' strengths • Specialized solutions for recognizing informal learning and combating discrimination
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on legal and political restrictions • Challenges related to visas and work permits • Need for improved interinstitutional cooperation and language support
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on language support and targeted outreach to TCN communities • Stronger partnerships between educational institutions and employers • Improved digital access and focus on digital inclusion
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on regional differences and culturally sensitive counselling • Improved access to funding opportunities • Concrete recommendations for recognizing informal learning and integrating soft skills
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and economic challenges • Emphasis on expanding language courses and simplifying procedures • Better information sharing and improved cooperation to facilitate competence recognition
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on legal and political framework conditions • Call for more flexible residence regulations • Need for improved interinstitutional cooperation and increased language support

Transnational Challenges

Across all countries, several overarching challenges impede TCNs' access to vocational training:

- **Language Barriers:** A fundamental obstacle to educational and labour market integration. This encompasses not only general language proficiency, but also sector-specific language skills required for particular occupations.

- **Information Gaps:** Limited awareness of available support services, often due to a lack of multilingual information campaigns and counselling. This leads to underutilization of existing resources.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Complex and lengthy procedures for recognizing foreign qualifications, significantly delaying, and hindering access to vocational training initiatives.
- **Integration Challenges:** Cultural differences, gender roles, and discrimination, all of which impede the social and professional integration of TCNs. Intercultural training and awareness programs are deemed crucial for fostering mutual understanding and acceptance.
- **Digital Divide:** Lack of digital skills and access to online resources, particularly relevant given the increasing digitization of the workplace and educational offerings.
- **Socioeconomic Barriers:** Financial difficulties, inadequate childcare, and transportation problems, which create significant barriers to participation in educational programs. Flexible learning models and financial support are identified as essential frameworks.
- **Coordination Deficiencies:** Inefficient interinstitutional cooperation, leading to duplication of efforts and a lack of streamlined services.
- **Recognition of Informal Learning:** Difficulties in validating non-formal skills and competencies, which hinders the integration of TCNs into the labour market.
- **Legal and Political Constraints:** Restrictive residency regulations that limit access to vocational training opportunities.

Country-Specific Characteristics and Responses

Each country addresses these challenges with tailored strategies, reflecting its specific context:

Italy:

- Prioritizes targeted support for women, recognizing their specific needs and challenges.
- Aims to enhance information dissemination through a centralized information platform.
- Focuses on strengthening collaboration with employers to facilitate job placements.
- Highlight the role of language as foundational for integration
- Emphasize the deep impact of unrecognized qualifications

Belgium:

- Belgium emphasizes "structural reforms" (i.e., long-term systemic changes) to move beyond deficit-oriented approaches.
- Focus on overcoming deficit-oriented approaches, meaning that they want to move away from only seeing the problems of the TCNs, and instead see and promote the strengths that they bring.
- Focus on language courses.

Greece:

- Identifies legal and political restrictions as primary obstacles.
- Emphasizes improving interinstitutional coordination to streamline access to services, highlighting the impact of its regulatory environment.

Sweden:

- Emphasizes targeted outreach to TCN communities.
- Focuses on strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and employers.
- Prioritizes enhancing access to digital resources, reflecting its focus on digital inclusion.

Germany:

- Addresses regional disparities by advocating for culturally sensitive counselling.
- Focuses on improving access to funding opportunities.
- Acknowledges the diverse needs of TCNs across its regions.

Spain:

- Focuses on mitigating economic barriers.
- Prioritizes streamlining the recognition of competencies, reflecting the country's economic context.

Cyprus:

- Emphasizes the need for flexible residency regulations.
- Focuses on enhancing interinstitutional cooperation, recognizing the impact of its legal framework on TCN integration.

Comparative Analysis

While all countries face similar challenges, their approaches vary. Greece and Cyprus place a strong emphasis on legal and political reforms, while Sweden and Germany prioritize digital inclusion and community engagement. Italy highlights the importance of targeted support for women, showcasing a focus on specific demographic needs. Strengthening language courses, improving their distribution, and implementing *certain* structural reforms are key objectives in Belgium, while the recognition of informal learning is a key focus in Spain. Almost every country mentions the need for better interinstitutional cooperation. This highlights that while the problems are similar, the solutions must be tailored to the specific political, economic, and social landscape of each nation.

7. Detailed country analyses

Peer Review Consultation in Italy: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration Italy Country-Based Context

Italy, particularly the Marche region, presents a unique context for the integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into Vocational Education and Training (VET). The region, like much of Italy, grapples

with demographic shifts and labour market demands that necessitate the inclusion of migrant populations. However, the Italian system, while striving for inclusivity, is characterized by regional disparities in administrative procedures and service provision, creating significant obstacles for TCNs. The Marche region, specifically, lacks a standardized system for recognizing prior learning and qualifications, a stark contrast to regions like Piemonte and Abruzzo, which have established frameworks. This disparity leads to inconsistent experiences for TCNs, hindering their ability to leverage existing skills and knowledge. The consultation occurred in a moment where the SAI projects, offering some language education, were present, but also showed their limits. The economic context, with its inherent challenges, also adds another layer of complexity, impacting the availability and accessibility of resources for both TCNs and service providers.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

A total of five peer review consultations were conducted in Italy by IAL Marche and ANOLF Marche OdV between November 4, 2024, and January 7, 2025. These sessions brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to analyse the information bottlenecks preventing TCNs from accessing effective VET career guidance. Across the consultations, a series of interconnected challenges were identified that hinder TCNs' access to and success in vocational training.

A primary finding was the pervasive linguistic barrier. Participants highlighted that TCNs' struggles with Italian language acquisition are multifaceted, stemming from varying levels of prior knowledge, individual learning styles, educational backgrounds, and psychological factors such as past traumas. The rigidity of course schedules, often incompatible with work commitments, and a perceived lack of alignment between course objectives and TCNs' personal goals further exacerbated the issue. The limited availability of language courses due to resource constraints at CPIA (Provincial Adult Education Center), coupled with the insufficiency of the 15-hour language courses offered by SAI (Reception and Integration system) projects, underscored the need for more robust language support.

Additionally, participants observed that motivation to learn Italian can be low among some TCNs, particularly those who view their stay in Italy as temporary and intend to move on to another country. This limited motivation significantly affects their engagement with the Italian system and should be carefully considered when designing and implementing language support measures.

The lack of Italian proficiency not only prevents participation in VET but also severely limits TCNs' ability to complete administrative tasks, access public services, use digital applications, and navigate daily life. These barriers illustrate how language acquisition is foundational to successful integration.

The consequences of the lack of a recognition system were also highlighted during the consultations. Highly qualified individuals, such as those holding university degrees or PhDs, often cannot have their qualifications recognized. As a result, they are forced to take on jobs they are overqualified for, leading to professional downgrading, frustration, and a pronounced mismatch between their expectations and the reality of the Italian labour market. This misalignment can be deeply discouraging and hinders long-term integration. Furthermore, the Italian labour market, with its specific norms and expectations, often differs significantly from those in TCNs' countries of origin, leading to misaligned expectations and challenges in labour market integration.

Another significant finding was the lack of awareness of available services. TCNs often lacked knowledge about the existence and nature of professional training opportunities. This was compounded by ineffective information dissemination methods and insufficient knowledge among operators about available training and opportunities, as exemplified by the lack of awareness about first-level apprenticeships.

The consultation also highlighted the complexity of bureaucratic processes. The absence of a standardized regional system for recognizing prior educational paths in Marche, unlike in Piemonte and Abruzzo, created significant challenges. Moreover, the difficulties in aligning training durations with TCNs' objectives further complicated their access to vocational training.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

One of the most salient learnings from the consultation was the recognition of the interconnectedness of the challenges. Addressing the linguistic barrier, for instance, requires not only increased language course availability but also tailored teaching methodologies and flexible scheduling. Furthermore, strengthening language support must be seen as a tool to facilitate digital literacy, access to public services, and autonomy in navigating the Italian system. Similarly, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles necessitates systemic reforms and streamlined procedures.

The discussions revealed a critical gap in interagency coordination. The reliance on informal networks for information about courses and employment opportunities underscored the need for enhanced collaboration and information sharing among training and career-oriented entities. The lack of clear information from official sources further compounded the problem.

The consultation also shed light on the digital divide. Limited digital literacy among TCNs, coupled with language barriers in Italian-only interfaces of job placement apps and administrative platforms like SPID, hindered their ability to access essential resources and services.

While participants reported minimal instances of overt discrimination in local offices, the underlying issue of cultural mismatch and the challenges in recognizing certifications obtained in TCNs' home countries remained a significant concern. The consultation emphasized the need for culturally sensitive guidance and support to bridge the gap between TCNs' expectations and the realities of the Italian labour market.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

The discussions were punctuated by moving anecdotes and insights that underscored the challenges faced by TCNs. For example, a participant noted, *“The 15 hours of language courses offered by SAI projects are simply not enough to achieve meaningful language proficiency.”* Another participant highlighted the bureaucratic complexities, stating, *“In Marche, we lack a standardized system for recognizing prior learning, unlike in Piemonte and Abruzzo. This creates significant inconsistencies and delays for TCNs.”*

The lack of digital literacy was also a recurring theme, with a participant observing, *“Many TCNs struggle with using job placement apps and administrative platforms because they lack digital skills,*

and the interfaces are only in Italian.” The point of digital access is therefore closely tied to language barriers, which must be addressed holistically.

The issue of cultural mismatch was poignantly illustrated by a participant who remarked, *“TCNs often have unrealistic expectations about the Italian labour market because it differs significantly from what they are used to in their home countries.”*

A particularly noteworthy insight was the reliance on **informal networks** as a substitute for official communication channels. As one participant explained, *“Operators often rely on informal networks for information about courses and employment opportunities because there is a lack of clear information from official sources.”* This statement points to a systemic communication gap that not only affects TCNs, but also service providers themselves. The absence of centralized, up-to-date, and accessible information leads to an environment where informal word-of-mouth becomes the primary method of information exchange.

While informal networks can offer practical, immediate support, they also risk spreading **incomplete or outdated information**, thereby reinforcing exclusion and inequality. TCNs who are not embedded in such networks may miss opportunities altogether. Moreover, over-reliance on informal systems can prevent the development of structured and transparent guidance services.

This highlights the urgent need for **official, multilingual information platforms** that consolidate available training opportunities, administrative requirements, and support services in a user-friendly format. Strengthening interagency communication and ensuring that frontline staff are consistently informed can help shift reliance away from informal sources and build a more resilient, inclusive support structure.

These quotes and case studies illustrate the multifaceted challenges faced by TCNs in accessing vocational training in Italy. The peer review consultation provided valuable insights into the information bottlenecks and systemic barriers that impede their integration into the labour market. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, service providers, and stakeholders to create a more inclusive and equitable system.

Peer Review Consultation in Belgium: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration Wallonia Country-Based Context

Belgium's institutional complexity and regional divisions create significant challenges for Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) seeking vocational education and training (VET). While integration pathways exist, barriers in language learning, qualification recognition, and employment access remain. The decentralized labour market and multi-layered governance system add to the complexity, as does the coexistence of French and Flemish language requirements. TCNs also face obstacles such as limited awareness of available services, bureaucratic processes, and uneven training distribution across regions. Qualification recognition is often slow, costly, and misaligned with market needs. Additionally, economic and social barriers such as mobility issues, childcare, and housing instability further restrict access to VET opportunities, making integration even more difficult.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

During peer review consultations with Patrick Monjoie (CRIBW) on January 13th and 15th, 2025, Dr. Altay Manço (IRFAM) on January 13th, 2025, and a focus group at LE FOREM on January 14th, 2025, key barriers to TCN integration were identified. Language barriers were a major concern. Intensive, vocationally focused French courses were often insufficient and underfunded. French assessments varied across providers, complicating progress tracking.

Public service entrance tests are rigid, rely on inadequate IT tools, and offer no immediate remediation for failed attempts, reinforcing exclusion.

The language barrier is closely linked to digital literacy, further limiting TCNs' ability to access essential services. The recognition of foreign qualifications was described as overly bureaucratic, rigid, and costly, often creating delays. The process is frequently disconnected from Wallonia's labour market needs, slowing TCNs' workforce integration.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

Vocational training programs often lack practical learning and fail to align with job market demands. Limited employer involvement in program design contributes to this gap, while public institutions are seen as slow to adapt to employer needs. Digital barriers also persist, with outdated IT systems and the absence of multilingual tools making it difficult for TCNs to access services, especially for non-French speakers.

Economic and social challenges such as mobility issues, childcare responsibilities, and housing instability further restrict TCN participation. The cost of training, transportation issues, and insufficient childcare options add additional strain.

To improve access, participants recommended alternative assessments like trade trials, improved communication between advisors and trainers, and adapted tests with language facilitators. Digital lexicons for operators and job seekers were also suggested.

Many TCNs remain unaware of available services, and participants proposed creating multilingual one-stop shops and a centralized digital platform to improve access to information. Geographic disparities in training availability were another concern, prompting suggestions to redistribute training resources more evenly and increase entry points for programs.

Further administrative challenges include difficulties obtaining driving licenses and renewing residence permits. Participants recommended expanding license recognition to non-EU countries, offering foreign language test options at reduced costs, and enabling early residence permit renewals to avoid disruptions in training.

Cultural differences also present challenges. Migrants often arrive with unrealistic expectations about how their skills will transfer to the Belgian labour market, leading to mismatches. Participants stressed the need for intercultural awareness in public services and the inclusion of local workplace norms in training programs.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

To improve TCN integration, participants proposed expanding funding for intensive language courses that focus on outcomes rather than attendance, harmonizing French assessment tools across Wallonia, and simplifying qualification recognition processes. They recommended increasing employer involvement in vocational training design, relocating parts of training to workplaces for practical learning, and creating internship pathways linked to employment contracts.

To improve institutional responsiveness, participants suggested delegating targeted training initiatives to private organizations or NGOs for greater flexibility and effectiveness.

To address digital inequality, expanding free digital spaces in community centres and modernizing IT systems were recommended, along with developing multilingual digital platforms for better accessibility.

Lastly, participants emphasized the need for socio-economic support, including improved childcare services and better transport options to ensure TCNs in rural areas can access educational and employment services. Promoting intercultural training for public services and businesses was also highlighted as key to reducing discrimination and fostering inclusive recruitment practices.

By implementing these measures, Wallonia can improve TCN integration outcomes and support their successful transition into the workforce.

Peer Review Consultations in Greece: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration Greece Country-Based Context

Greece, as a frontline state for migration into Europe, faces unique challenges in integrating Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The country's socio-economic landscape, marked by the lingering effects of economic crises, strained infrastructure, and a complex legal framework, significantly impacts TCNs' access to VET services. The reliance on paper-based bureaucracy, coupled with regional disparities and a fragmented approach to service delivery, creates substantial obstacles. Moreover, the Greek labour market, characterized by high unemployment rates and specific sectoral demands, requires TCNs to navigate cultural nuances and adapt to local workplace norms. The consultations were held in a period where the problems of the system were clear, and the need for a better integration was obvious.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

Three peer review consultations were conducted in Greece, hosted by ZEUXIS, to identify and discuss the most significant challenges hindering TCNs' access to effective VET services. The consultations, involving project partners and external experts, revealed a series of interconnected challenges that impede TCNs' access to and success in vocational training.

A primary finding was the pervasive language barrier. Participants highlighted the lack of multilingual guidance materials, limited translation services, and the difficulty in understanding complex vocational terms and application procedures in Greek.

Another significant finding was the lack of awareness of available services. Participants noted inadequate dissemination of information about VET services to TCNs, limited outreach strategies targeting TCN communities, and insufficient collaboration between educational institutions and government services.

The consultations also highlighted the complexity of bureaucratic processes. Complicated documentation and administrative requirements, limited understanding of the recognition of prior learning or foreign qualifications, and difficulty navigating registration processes for training and education programs were identified as significant obstacles.

Cultural differences and mismatch were also identified as significant challenges. Participants noted the lack of culturally sensitive guidance and counselling, challenges in aligning TCNs' skills and qualifications with Greek job market demands, and misalignment between career aspirations and available VET opportunities.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

One of the most salient learnings from the consultations was the recognition of the interconnectedness of the challenges. Addressing the language barrier, for instance, requires not only the development of multilingual resources but also the integration of language learning within vocational curricula. Similarly, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles necessitates the development of clear and concise guides and the digitization of application processes.

The discussions revealed a critical gap in interagency coordination and information. The weak coordination between employment agencies, education authorities, NGOs, and government bodies, fragmented information sources, and lack of standardized information-sharing practices underscored the need for enhanced collaboration and information sharing.

The consultations also shed light on the challenges associated with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Difficulties in validating skills acquired outside formal education systems, such as informal or community-based learning, and the lack of systems in place to acknowledge and assess prior informal work experience from the country of origin were identified as significant issues.

The issue of discrimination and bias was also a recurring theme. Participants noted perceived or real instances of discrimination in accessing services and biases in the counselling process or during job placement support. The consultations emphasized the need to conduct anti-bias training for staff and implement transparent selection criteria.

The limited access to personalized guidance was also considered a major issue, with the inadequate number of trained counsellors with experience in working with TCNs, overreliance on generalized career advice, and lack of mentoring and peer support networks.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

The discussions were punctuated by poignant anecdotes and insights that underscored the challenges faced by TCNs. For example, a participant noted, "Language is one of the biggest hurdles. Without multilingual resources, it's hard for TCNs to understand VET systems." Another participant highlighted the bureaucratic complexities, stating, "Bureaucracy can feel overwhelming. Simplifying application processes and offering clear guidance, especially for recognizing foreign qualifications, is essential to make VET more accessible."

The lack of interagency coordination was also a recurring theme, with a participant observing, "It's not just about one organization; it's about working together." The issue of cultural mismatch was poignantly illustrated by a participant who remarked, "A lot of TCNs arrive with skills that don't align with local job markets. Conducting skill assessments and tailoring programs to match labour demands would help close this gap."

Regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, a participant stated, "Many TCNs bring valuable skills acquired through non-formal or informal learning, like farming, craftsmanship, or community-based knowledge. However, these skills often go unrecognized in traditional VET systems."

The Greece consultations exposed systemic barriers to TCN vocational training, including language, bureaucracy, cultural mismatches, and coordination gaps. Participant anecdotes highlighted daily struggles. Effective reform demands a holistic, collaborative approach. This includes multilingual resources, streamlined processes, interagency coordination, recognition of informal learning, anti-bias training, and personalized guidance. Policymakers, institutions, and NGOs must unite to create an accessible and equitable system empowering TCNs in the Greek labour market.

Peer Review Consultations in Sweden: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration Sweden Country-Based Context

Sweden, known for its progressive social policies and commitment to integration, presents a unique context for the inclusion of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) in its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The country's emphasis on lifelong learning and a robust social welfare system aims to provide equal opportunities for all residents.

However, challenges persist in effectively integrating TCNs, particularly in navigating language barriers, accessing relevant information, and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. The Swedish labour market, characterized by its emphasis on soft skills and adaptability, requires TCNs to adjust to local workplace norms and practices.

While Sweden has a history of providing information and programs in various languages, recent shifts in funding and policy have impacted the accessibility of these resources. The consultations occurred in a moment when the need for a better integration was clear, but also when the limits of the system were shown.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

The peer review consultation conducted in Sweden on December 6, 2024, by SGN, aimed to identify the main information bottlenecks preventing TCNs from accessing effective VET career guidance services. The consultation, involving Claudio Mc Connel(SGN), revealed a series of interconnected challenges that impede TCNs' access to and success in vocational training.

A primary finding was the persistent language barrier. Participants highlighted the benefits of providing information and applications in multiple languages and emphasized the need for language training to include key vocational terms. The driving license test, available in 15 languages, was cited as a successful example.

Another significant finding was the lack of awareness of available services. Information dissemination in mother tongue languages was deemed crucial, and the role of newcomer-created companies and schools in offering multilingual training was acknowledged. Participants also noted that refugees have more resources than those who come through reunification programs.

The consultations also highlighted the complexity of bureaucratic processes. Online courses, particularly post-COVID-19, posed challenges for newcomers, and the importance of multilingual announcements for training was emphasized.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

One of the most salient learnings from the consultation was the importance of mother tongue language support. The emphasis on providing information and training in multiple languages underscored the need for culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible services. The driving license test example served as a model for effective multilingual communication.

The discussions revealed a critical gap in interagency coordination and information. The weak coordination between employers and educational establishments and the inconsistent coordination of educational establishments with the labour market highlighted the need for improved collaboration.

The consultations also shed light on the challenges associated with legal and policy constraints. Residency challenges limited labour market entry, and temporary residents had lower chances of employment compared to permanent residents or citizens.

The issue of discrimination and bias was also a recurring theme. Participants noted discrimination in counselling, with TCNs being directed towards simpler studies, as well as discrimination against women and in job and study applications.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning was also considered a major issue. The rapidly changing labour market emphasized the importance of internships, and the validation of experience from home countries depended on individual engagement.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaway

The discussions were punctuated by poignant anecdotes and insights that underscored the challenges faced by TCNs. For example, a participant highlighted the importance of language support, stating, "Information and applications in multiple languages are beneficial." Another participant emphasized

the bureaucratic complexities, noting, "Online courses, particularly post-COVID-19, pose challenges for newcomers."

The lack of interagency coordination was also a recurring theme, with a participant observing, "Coordination between employers and educational establishments is weak." The issue of discrimination was poignantly illustrated by a participant who remarked, "Discrimination exists in counselling, with TCNs being directed towards simpler studies."

Regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, a participant stated, "Validation of experience from home countries depends on individual engagement."

The Sweden consultation highlighted key barriers for TCNs: language, information access, bureaucracy, coordination, legal constraints, discrimination, and recognition of informal learning. Participant feedback stressed the need for multilingual resources, improved coordination, and anti-discrimination measures.

To create an equitable system, Sweden must prioritize accessible language training, streamlined processes, interagency collaboration, and standardized recognition of prior learning.

Peer Review Consultation in Spain: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration

Spain Country-Based Context

Spain, with its diverse regional landscapes and evolving labour market, presents a complex context for the integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The country's commitment to social inclusion and economic integration is challenged by bureaucratic complexities, regional disparities, and the specific needs of migrant populations.

The labour market, while offering opportunities in certain sectors, requires TCNs to navigate cultural nuances and adapt to local workplace norms. The lingering effects of economic challenges and the increasing reliance on digital tools further complicate the integration process. The consultation happened in a time when the need for a better integration was clear, and the difficulties of the system were evident.

Results of the Peer Consultations

A focus group discussion was held at Red Incola in Valladolid, Spain, on November 29, 2024, as part of the GO2VET project, to identify and analyse the main information bottlenecks preventing TCNs from accessing effective VET career guidance services. The consultation, involving representatives from various entities working with migrants, revealed a series of interconnected challenges that impede TCNs' access to and success in vocational training.

A primary finding was the pervasive linguistic barrier. Participants strongly supported the idea of incorporating language training within VET centres and noted a lack of accelerated language immersion courses. Technical language proficiency and illiteracy among some TCNs were also highlighted.

The consultations also highlighted the complexity of bureaucratic processes. Complex documentation requirements, varying protocols across centres, and issues with the allocation of places for asylum seekers were identified as significant obstacles.

Economic and social barriers were also identified as significant challenges. Lack of knowledge about grants, the high cost of private VET, and difficulties in reconciling work and family life were noted.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

One of the most salient learnings from the consultation was the recognition of the primacy of linguistic barriers. The strong support for incorporating language training within VET centres underscored the need

for integrated language support. The suggestion for the Ministry of Education to offer summer language courses for prospective VET students further emphasized the importance of addressing language needs proactively.

The discussions revealed a critical gap in interagency coordination and information. Poor inter-institutional coordination, the need for unified VET guidance, and a lack of support for disseminating information were highlighted. The need for a "one-stop shop" for VET information was emphasized as a potential solution to streamline access to services.

The consultations also shed light on the challenges associated with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Difficulties in validating modules within VET, misinformation about access to recognition and accreditation, and regional policies that disadvantage migrants with recognized qualifications were identified as significant issues.

The issue of access to digital resources was also a recurring theme. Limited digital literacy and access to devices were identified as serious obstacles, particularly for adult migrants.

The legal and policy constraints, such as the requirement of a passport for VET access and regional policies that disadvantage migrants, were also noted as significant barriers.

While cultural differences and mismatch were acknowledged, participants did not perceive major difficulties in this area. However, the use of unfamiliar social codes and differences in work habits and business culture were mentioned.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

The discourse was enriched by compelling anecdotes and expert insights, illuminating the obstacles encountered by TCNs. For instance, a participant advocated for the integration of language training within VET centres. Another emphasized the bureaucratic complexities, observing, 'Bureaucracy presents challenges even for native Spaniards

The lack of interagency coordination was also a recurring theme, with a participant emphasizing "the need for a 'one-stop shop' for VET information." The issue of recognition of qualifications was poignantly illustrated by a participant who noted, "Recognition of qualifications was identified as a major problem."

Regarding digital access, a participant noted, 'Lack of digital literacy and access to devices are significant obstacles.' Concerning legal constraints, it was criticized that 'regional policies disadvantage migrants with recognized qualifications.'

These quotes and case studies illustrate the multifaceted challenges faced by TCNs in accessing vocational training in Spain. The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into the information bottlenecks and systemic barriers that impede their integration into the labour market. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, service providers, and stakeholders to create a more inclusive and equitable system.

Peer Review Consultation in Cyprus: Navigating Barriers to TCN Vocational Integration

Cyprus Country-Based Context

Cyprus, as a small island nation, faces unique challenges in integrating Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The country's demographic landscape is increasingly diverse, necessitating effective integration strategies.

However, the existing system is characterized by restrictive legal frameworks, limited interagency coordination, and a significant language barrier. The legal status of TCNs, particularly asylum seekers, plays a crucial role in determining their access to VET services. Visa regulations, coupled with limited policy frameworks specifically targeting TCN integration, create a complex and often exclusionary environment. Additionally, the labour market in Cyprus presents its own set of challenges, with a disconnect between labour gaps and the VET training courses offered. The economic context, including barriers to accessing private institutes offering English-language courses, further complicates the situation. The consultation took place in a moment when the limits of the current system were clear, particularly concerning the access of asylum seekers to VET.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

The peer review consultation conducted on November 11, 2024, at the Cyprus Refugee Council, aimed to identify and prioritize the most significant information bottlenecks preventing TCNs from accessing effective VET career guidance services. Participants, guided by a list of potential challenges provided by IHK, prioritized the top three issues: interagency coordination and information gaps, legal and policy constraints, and language. Mind mapping exercises facilitated in-depth discussions about these challenges and potential solutions.

The top priority identified was interagency coordination and information gaps. Participants highlighted the limited coordination and communication between various stakeholders, including VET providers, the Labour Department, academia, employment services, monitoring bodies, ministries, businesses, and NGOs. This lack of coordination negatively impacts the design, implementation, and accessibility of VET services. The "Equal Project" was cited as a successful example of effective interagency collaboration, demonstrating the benefits of strong partnerships between diverse bodies.

Legal and policy constraints were identified as the second most critical issue. Restrictive visa regulations limit TCNs' access to state-funded VET services, with recognized refugees having access,

while asylum seekers and individuals with working visas face significant limitations. Furthermore, there is a lack of policies and frameworks that specifically target and facilitate TCNs' access to VET, regardless of labour restrictions.

The language barrier was identified as the third critical challenge. VET courses are primarily offered in Greek, which most TCNs do not know. There is a lack of systemic provision of Greek language courses, translation, and interpretation services. The VET setup lacks flexibility to accommodate language needs.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

The consultation revealed several specific challenges and learnings. The lack of interagency coordination was highlighted as a pervasive issue, impacting all aspects of VET service delivery. Participants learned that successful projects, like the "Equal Project," rely on strong partnerships and effective communication between diverse stakeholders.

The restrictive legal framework was identified as a major impediment to TCNs' access to VET. Participants learned that policy reforms are necessary to create a more inclusive system that facilitates TCNs' access to VET, regardless of labour restrictions. The discussions also emphasized the importance of aligning the existing labour force with labour market needs and considering offering training to asylum seekers during the nine-month period before they can access work.

The language barrier was recognized as a significant challenge, requiring the integration of language support into the design of VET courses. Participants learned that developing appropriate partnerships for language integration, considering language needs in VET campaigns, and offering VET courses in English or other languages where appropriate are essential steps to address this issue.

The limitations placed on asylum seekers regarding permissible work industries were also highlighted, restricting the benefits of VET training. The disconnect between labour gaps and VET training courses, as well as economic barriers to accessing private institutes offering English-language courses, were also noted. The appropriateness of language support was recognized to vary depending on the course's nature, with soft skills being easier to translate than technical skills. Finally, the difficulty for unemployed individuals to access and pay for VET was identified as a significant issue, due to higher course fees compared to employed individuals.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

The discussions were enriched by specific examples and insights. One participant pointed to the "Equal Project" as a model for interagency collaboration, stating, "The 'Equal Project' included Greek lessons, education on labour market laws, Cypriot society, technical training, and strong partnerships between various bodies, effectively connecting participants to employers."

Regarding legal constraints, a participant noted, "Visa restrictions prevent most TCNs from benefiting from VET. They don't have access to services or limited access depending on their visa type." Another participant emphasized the need for policy reform, stating, "We need policies and frameworks that facilitate TCNs' access to VET, regardless of labour restrictions."

The language barrier was illustrated by a participant who observed, "VET courses are primarily offered in Greek, which most TCNs do not know. There is a lack of systemic provision of Greek language courses."

A participant highlighted the restrictive nature of VET access for asylum seekers, noting that they are excluded from vocational training unless employed in relevant fields, a decision ultimately left to the Ministry's discretion, leading to discouragement if employment in their desired field is unlikely."

These insights underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by TCNs in accessing VET services in Cyprus. The peer review consultation provided valuable insights into the information bottlenecks and systemic barriers that impede their integration into the labour market, highlighting the need for a holistic and collaborative approach to address these challenges.

Peer Review Consultations in Germany: Navigating the Complexities of TCN Vocational Integration Germany Country-Based Context

Germany's decentralized federal structure and regional diversity create a complex environment for integrating Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) into its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. While Germany's VET system is a cornerstone of its labour market, TCNs face considerable challenges in accessing these services. Regional disparities in administrative practices, inconsistent experience in working with migrant populations, and complex bureaucratic procedures create additional obstacles. Funding limitations and bureaucratic complexities frequently hinder effective support services. The consultations took place at a time when both the limitations of the existing system and the urgent need for improved TCN integration were evident.

Results of the Peer Review Consultations

Two peer review consultations were conducted in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, to identify key challenges impeding TCNs' access to VET services. The discussions revealed interconnected challenges that limit TCNs' success in vocational training.

A primary issue was the language barrier. Participants emphasized insufficient financial resources for training providers to offer language courses, inconsistent proficiency assessments, and a lack of flexible scheduling options such as evening classes. Delays in enrolment and a shortage of qualified language instructors further compounded the issue. Additionally, the language barrier is closely tied to digital literacy challenges, restricting TCNs from accessing essential resources and services.

Another key challenge was the lack of awareness about available services. Participants highlighted insufficient collaboration between educational institutions and government services, as well as the underuse of community events and workshops to inform TCNs about support programs.

Bureaucratic complexity was also a significant concern. Participants identified issues such as difficult language in official documents, outdated and user-unfriendly digital tools, and forms that are only available in German, making navigation challenging for non-German speakers.

Cultural differences were also identified as a major barrier. Participants noted a lack of culturally sensitive communication by counsellors, challenges in aligning TCNs' qualifications with local labour market needs, and regional disparities in experience working with TCNs. Cultural expectations around gender roles and hierarchy further complicated workplace integration, while employers often struggled to recognize and value cultural diversity.

Specific Challenges & Learnings

The consultations underscored how interconnected these challenges are. Addressing language barriers requires not only better funding for language courses but also standardized assessments and flexible scheduling. Similarly, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles calls for simplified language in official forms and the development of user-friendly digital tools.

Participants identified a significant gap in interagency coordination and information sharing. Poor communication about funding opportunities, job fairs, and apprenticeships highlighted the need for improved collaboration between agencies. Additionally, participants emphasized the need for better integration of local professional norms into VET programs and greater financial support for initiatives helping TCNs adapt to workplace cultures.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning also emerged as a challenge. Participants noted inconsistencies in the recognition of informal competencies, differences in validation procedures based on TCNs' country of origin, and limited awareness of rights regarding workplace discrimination.

Discrimination and bias were recurring concerns. Participants shared examples of unfair treatment during job placements and highlighted regional differences in how diversity and TCN needs are addressed. Raising awareness among career counsellors and providing cultural sensitivity training for counsellors and employers were identified as key solutions.

Limited access to personalized guidance was another concern. Funding shortages had led to the closure of counselling centres, and there was a lack of career advisors with multicultural or migration expertise.

Discussion Highlights or Key Takeaways

The consultations highlighted several key insights. Participants emphasized that insufficient financial support for language courses is a major barrier, preventing many TCNs from accessing essential language training. Bureaucratic complexities, particularly with forms and applications available only in German, make navigating services difficult for non-native speakers. Participants stressed the lack of a unified system for sharing up-to-date information between agencies, making it harder for TCNs to access guidance and opportunities.

Cultural diversity in the workplace remains underappreciated, with many employers failing to recognize the value of TCN skills and experiences. The inconsistent recognition of informal learning, particularly in sectors like healthcare and technology, further limits TCNs' access to stable employment.

Overall, participants emphasized that improved language support, better interagency collaboration, enhanced guidance services, and increased cultural sensitivity in public services and workplaces are essential steps toward creating a more inclusive and effective VET system in Germany.

8. Recommendations & Lessons Learnt

Central Insights & Recommendations for Future Peer-to-Peer Projects

The findings from the peer-review consultations across seven countries underline the need for systemic changes and emphasize the importance of a unified and comprehensive approach to integrate third-country nationals (TCNs) into vocational education and the labour market. These insights provide crucial guidance for future peer-to-peer projects aimed at improving vocational education and training (VET) access for migrants and refugees. Below are the key recommendations:

- 1. Enhanced Coordination Across Institutions:** One of the central recommendations for future peer-to-peer projects is to focus on improving the coordination between different institutions, including educational bodies, government agencies, and employers. Many of the challenges faced by TCNs stem from fragmented systems, where the communication between key actors is not sufficiently streamlined. Establishing clear channels of communication and collaboration will help bridge gaps in service delivery and ensure that TCNs receive the support they need for integration.
- 2. Inclusive Language and Digital Training:** Addressing language barriers and enhancing digital skills are two critical areas where peer-to-peer projects can make a significant impact. Language proficiency remains a key requirement for accessing vocational training, and as such, language programs must be expanded, especially in countries where these programs are underfunded or insufficient. Digital literacy is also crucial in the modern job market. Providing digital training as part of vocational programs will empower TCNs to navigate the increasingly digital labour market effectively. Future projects should incorporate both language and digital skills training as integral components of vocational education programs.
- 3. Streamlining Bureaucratic Processes:** Bureaucratic inefficiencies, particularly around the recognition of foreign qualifications, are a common challenge across countries. Peer-to-peer projects should focus on making bureaucratic processes more transparent, simpler, and accessible to TCNs. Developing better frameworks for the recognition and validation of qualifications can reduce delays and facilitate quicker integration into the labour market. Future projects could consider fostering bilateral agreements or initiatives that allow for the mutual recognition of qualifications between countries.
- 4. Tailored Support for Disadvantaged Groups:** It is essential that peer-to-peer projects take into account the specific needs of different groups within the TCN population. For example, refugees with limited education, women, or those with disabilities may face additional barriers to accessing education and integrating into the labour market. Future projects should prioritize tailored support for these groups, providing additional resources, mentorship, and support structures.

5. **Intercultural Awareness and Anti-Discrimination Training:** Another important lesson is the necessity of promoting intercultural awareness and combatting discrimination. Discriminatory attitudes and practices remain significant obstacles to the integration of TCNs into the labour market. Peer-to-peer projects should prioritize the development of intercultural competencies and address biases through training programs for employers, educators, and public service workers. Fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment will be crucial for the success of TCNs in the workforce.

9. Success Factors for Effective Consultations

The success of the peer-review consultations can be attributed to several key factors that can serve as a guide for future consultations:

1. **Collaboration with Local Stakeholders:** The involvement of local stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, educational institutions, employers, and migrant organizations, is essential for the success of consultations. These stakeholders provide valuable insights into the local context and help ensure that the recommendations are practical and applicable to the specific challenges faced by TCNs in each country.
2. **Data-Driven Approach:** A successful consultation process requires access to reliable data and comprehensive research. The peer-review consultations were informed by quantitative and qualitative data that allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by TCNs. Future consultations should continue to rely on data-driven insights to identify areas for improvement and measure the effectiveness of implemented measures.
3. **Focus on Practical Solutions:** Effective consultations should focus on generating practical, actionable solutions rather than theoretical discussions. The peer-review process allowed for the development of concrete recommendations that can be directly applied by governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Ensuring that recommendations are both realistic and actionable will be a key success factor for future peer-to-peer projects.
4. **Inclusive and Participatory Approach:** Ensuring that all relevant voices are included in the consultation process is critical. The peer-review consultations were successful because they engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, including TCNs themselves, educators, employers, and policymakers. A participatory approach ensures that the recommendations are grounded in real-life experiences and meet the needs of all involved.

10. Improvement Potentials

While the peer-review consultations have highlighted valuable insights, there are several areas where future projects can improve and evolve:

1. **Better Integration of Digital Tools:** Moving forward, there is potential to further integrate digital tools and platforms into the consultation process. This could include the use of online surveys, webinars, and digital collaboration platforms to facilitate broader participation and gather more extensive feedback from stakeholders, including TCNs themselves. These tools could be used to create more interactive and dynamic consultations that reach a wider audience.
2. **Building Long-Term Partnerships:** To achieve sustainable outcomes, it is crucial to build long-term partnerships between countries, organizations, and stakeholders. Peer-to-peer projects should aim to create networks that can continue to exchange best practices and collaborate on common challenges even after the initial consultation phase. This will help ensure that the recommendations are not only implemented but are sustained over time.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Future projects should establish clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of implemented recommendations. This could involve setting up longitudinal studies or regular assessments to track the progress of TCNs in accessing vocational education and integrating into the labour market. Monitoring will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the measures taken and allow for timely adjustments.
4. **Incorporating Feedback Loops:** It is essential to create continuous feedback loops throughout the implementation process. By regularly engaging with TCNs, educators, employers, and policymakers, future projects can ensure that the measures taken remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of TCNs. This will help to refine the interventions and make them more adaptable to changing circumstances.

11. Conclusion

The consultations conducted with operators and professionals working with TCNs across the seven countries have provided invaluable insights into both the shared challenges and unique opportunities faced by each region. By utilizing a standardized guideline with twelve key questions, the consultations revealed important commonalities in approaches as well as distinct local factors that influence outcomes. Despite the diverse starting points of each country, there were notable similarities in the types of obstacles encountered and solutions proposed, demonstrating the value of cross-border collaboration and the transferability of successful practices.

One of the most significant takeaways from this process is the importance of knowledge exchange. The consultations highlighted how peer learning can lead to innovative solutions that are both practical and adaptable to specific national contexts. Sharing successful case studies — particularly those addressing policy implementation, stakeholder engagement, and resource allocation — proved crucial in enhancing the overall effectiveness of the discussions.

Moreover, the consultations emphasized the need for clear communication and structured facilitation to ensure meaningful contributions from all participants. Creating an open yet focused environment enabled deeper exploration of key issues and led to actionable insights. The process also highlighted that successful consultations rely heavily on mutual respect, trust, and a willingness to learn from both successes and failures.

12. Call to Action

To build on the insights gained through this project, the following steps are recommended:

- **Implementation of Training Programmes:** Develop targeted training sessions for VET operators, focusing on strategies to improve TCNs' access to education and employment services.
- **Strengthening Cross-Border Collaboration:** Establish ongoing communication channels between countries to continue sharing best practices and innovative solutions.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Engage with policymakers to address systemic challenges identified during the consultations, such as bureaucratic hurdles and qualification recognition.
- **Enhanced Stakeholder Involvement:** Foster stronger partnerships between educational institutions, employers, and support organisations to improve coordination and service delivery.
- **Resource Development:** Create a comprehensive toolkit summarising best practices, practical solutions, and actionable recommendations that can be adapted by other regions.

By applying these recommendations, the project's outcomes can contribute to long-term improvements in TCN integration, ensuring that effective solutions are scaled and sustained across Europe. The peer consultation model has proven to be a powerful strategy for addressing complex issues, and its continued application will play a vital role in fostering inclusive and effective vocational training systems.

13. Insights

The peer-review consultations conducted across seven European countries revealed key challenges faced by Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) in accessing vocational education and the labour market. Major obstacles include language barriers, complex bureaucratic procedures, and limited financial resources for language and qualification programmes. To address these issues, the consultations recommend promoting vocationally tailored language courses, simplifying qualification recognition processes, and enhancing collaboration between educational institutions, authorities, and employers. Expanding intercultural counselling, promoting digital skills, and implementing anti-discrimination measures are also crucial steps to support TCNs' successful integration. These practical recommendations aim to improve access to education and employment opportunities, ensuring sustainable integration outcomes.