

## VET VOICES Guidelines: Greece (1)

# Migration, vocational education, and work in Greece: Challenges and opportunities

It is estimated that the number of persons living outside of their country of origin reached 281 million in 2020. The largest number of international migrants resided in Europe, with a total of 87 million. When supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to robust and inclusive economies and societies in countries of destination. However, integration challenges persist for many migrants, especially those who have experienced forced migration. *The VET VOICES project seeks to expedite integration by allowing migrants to quickly and easily assess their interests, explore jobs, create a watchlist, network with professionals, and watch short videos of other migrants who have made it in relevant fields.*

This guideline introduces the topics of **migration, vocational education, and the labour market in Greece**, with a focus on conditions facing asylum-seekers and refugees.

## Refugees and other migrants in Greece

Greece sits at the intersection of several important migration routes: the Aegean Sea route from Türkiye to the Aegean islands; the Ionian Sea route from Albania to the Ionian islands or mainland Greek coast; the Greek-Turkish land border, e.g., along the Evros River; and the Greek-Albanian land border, e.g., around the area of Epirus. In 2022, around

18,780 refugees and other irregular migrants arrived in Greece (12,758 by sea and 6,022 by land); this is somewhat higher than the 9,157 persons that arrived in 2021, but still represents a downward trend as compared to 2019 (74,613 persons total) or especially 2015 (861,630 persons total) (UNHCR, 2023). The most applicants from asylum in 2022 originated from Afghanistan (5,624 applications), followed by Syria (5,050), Pakistan (4,572), Palestine (2,907) and Iraq (2,671); the Council also notes that there was a significant backlog of 22,316 applications by the end of 2022 (Asylum Information Database, 2023). Around 28% of applicants were minors. Although attitudes toward irregular migration in particular in Greece are ambivalent at best, the natural decrease of the population due to aging (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2021) means that in-migration must be regarded as a significant social and economic opportunity.

### Migration to Greece:

#### Key numbers

- Total population (2020): **ca. 10,678,632**
- Net in-migration (2020): **6,384**
- **28,320** asylum claims (2021)

*Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority 2021;  
Asylum Information Database 2023*

## VET and the labour market in Greece

The Greek labour market has faced stubbornly challenging conditions since the financial crisis of 2008: these include a high unemployment rate, particularly among young people; low labour force participation, in part due to demotivation among the long-term unemployed; wage reductions and little subsequent growth; and brain drain among the young and highly educated. These conditions have furthermore aggravated the growth of the informal economy, as people have sought alternative sources of income. While the Greek economy has seen improvement over the past few years, much remains to be done.

**VET in Greece:**  
**Key numbers in 2021**

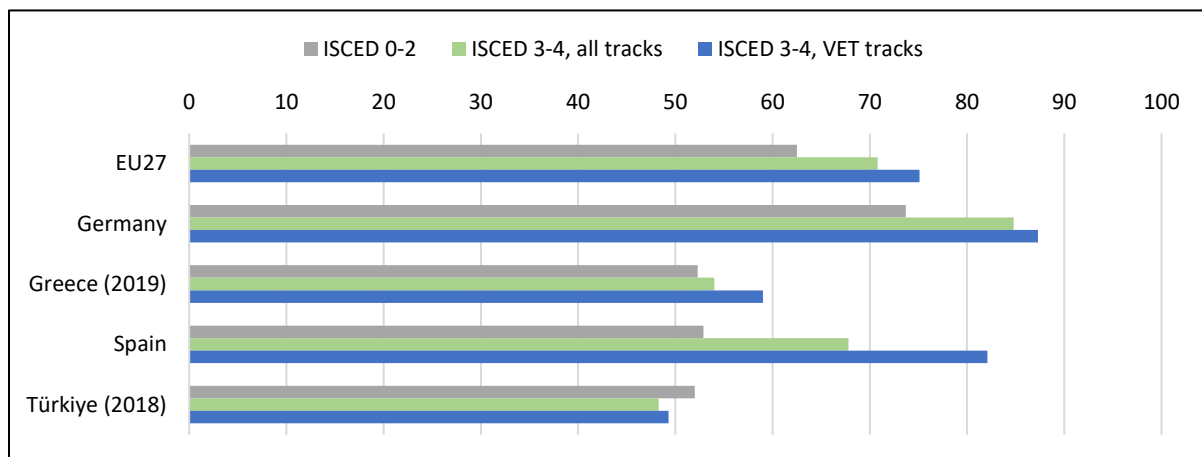
- **184,737** pupils enrolled in VET
- **44,364** graduates in VET

*Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET. Source: Eurostat 2023a, b.*

Among the steps taken by Greek authorities address labour market conditions are the modernisation of the vocational education and training (VET) system via incorporation of new technologies, strengthening partnerships with employers, and other measures. Vocational education and training in Greece is state-regulated and follows the dual model, combining school-based and work-based learning at the upper

secondary and post-secondary levels. Historically, the Greek system has favoured general education, but this is changing in favour of VET; recently, a range of more flexible VET programme types and lengths have been made available to meet the needs of particular sectors, and access to higher education has been opened up to graduates of VET programmes. Perhaps in part as a result of these developments, enrolment in VET has risen considerably since the mid-2010s, and the share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training has dropped (Cedefop, 2020, p. 5). In Greece, as in the EU as a whole and the other VET Voices project target countries, vocational education tracks have proven a successful pathway to employment for young people born abroad (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Percentage of foreign-born 15-34 year-olds employed, by education level, 2021 (source: Eurostat 2023c)*

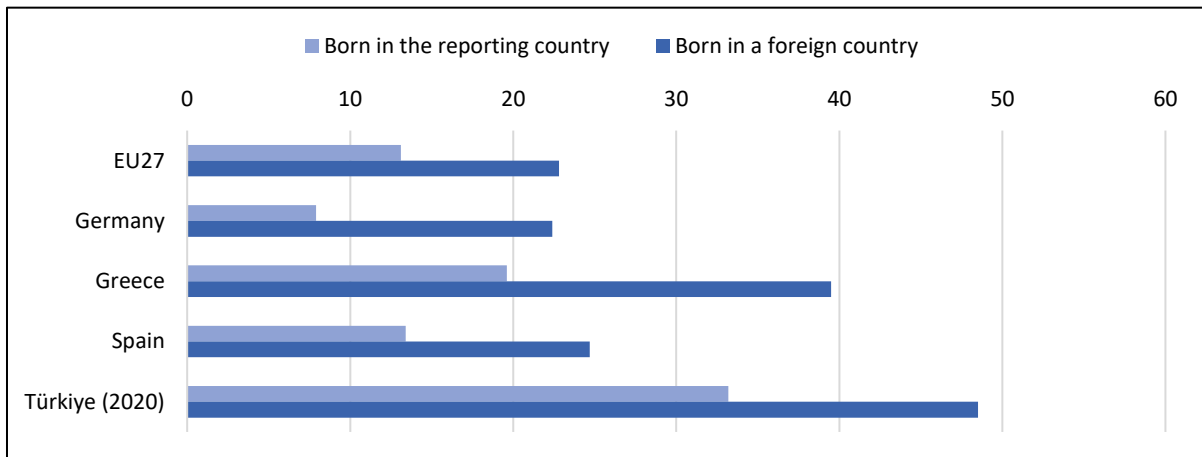


### Integrating asylum-seekers and other migrants into VET in Greece

High employment sectors in Greece include service, sales, and tourism, while sectors that are forecast to see job growth include processing, transport, storage, public administration, and education (EURES, 2022). Vocational education and training tracks are well-suited to preparing young people – including potentially young migrants – for these sectors. Moreover, soft skills that migrants possess, such as bilingual and bicultural competence, provide added value in several of these sectors.

However, a number of factors block the realisation of many young migrants’ potential. One is persisting high unemployment in the population as a whole, which demands broader-ranging structural solutions. Another is social inequality: as in the European Union as a whole and the other VET Voices target countries, young residents of Greece who were born in a foreign country are more likely to be neither in employment nor education and training (see Figure 2). Similar discrepancies show in other job- and education-related figures.

*Figure 2: Percentage of 15-34 year-olds neither in employment nor in education and training, 2021 (source: Eurostat 2023d)*



Access to employment, education, and training can be even more challenging for asylum-seekers and other irregular migrants than for foreign-born young people in general, as they face risks and barriers that many regular migrants do not. As often pertains to irregular migrants in the EU, these include both experiences of trauma and practical barriers such as the lack of qualifications or even valid identity documents (Greece has not yet acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness). Risks to physical and psychological wellbeing are particularly severe for those who arrive by sea, and can be aggravated by long stays in overcrowded reception facilities, as well as alleged human rights violations by border enforcement (UNCHR, 2022).

Fortunately, a range of Greek and European institutions have taken proactive steps to help young asylum-seekers, as well as other migrants, to find their way into the educational, VET, and labour systems. Examples of recent good practices initiated by IOM, UNHCR, and other institutions will follow in *VET VOICES Guidelines: Greece (2)*, which focuses on **pathways to vocational education and training for asylum-seekers and other migrants in Greece**.

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