

VET VOICES Guidelines: Greece (2)

Pathways to vocational education and training for asylum-seekers and other migrants in Greece

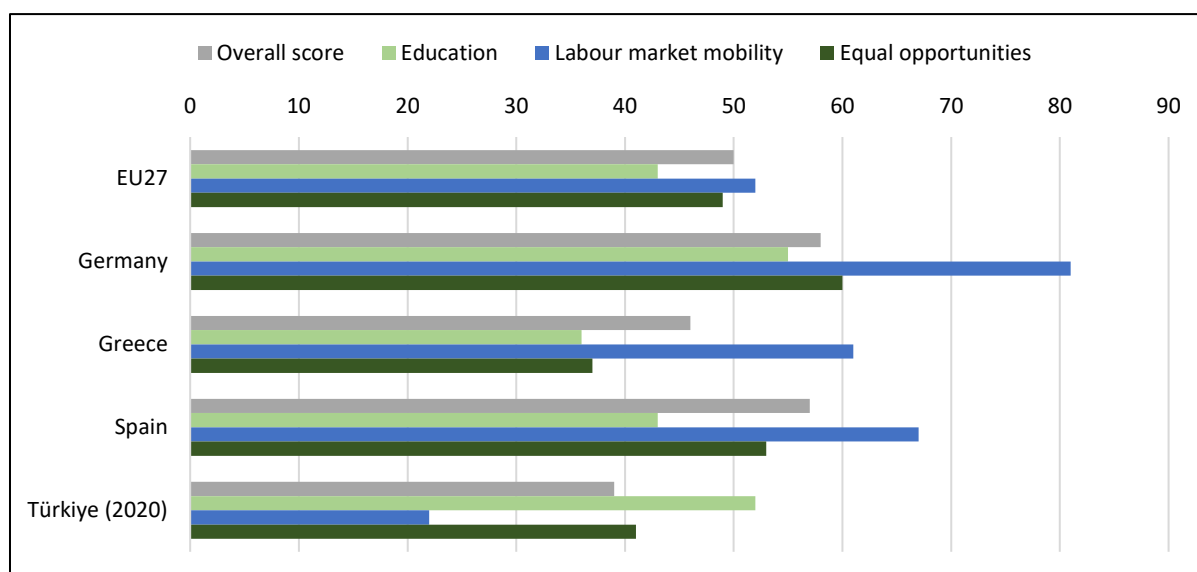
It is estimated that the number of persons living outside of their country of origin reached 281 million in 2020. The largest number of international migrants resided in Europe, with a total of 87 million. When supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to robust and inclusive economies 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 outlines **pathways to vocational education and training for asylum-seekers and other migrants in Greece**, with examples of good practices implemented by a range of institutions.

Rights to education and educational integration policies

RIGHT TO EDUCATION. Under Article 55 of the Greek International Protection Law (L. 4939/2022), asylum-seeking minors in Greece are not only allowed, but required to attend primary and secondary school, and competent authorities are respectively required to provide adequate facilitation and support. Minors who reach the age of maturity are furthermore not to be denied access to secondary education, as long as no removal measures are enforced (Asylum Information Database, 2023). The Migrant Integration Policy Index 2019 rated school integration policy in Greece as somewhat lower than the EU27 average – it should be noted, though, that the Index was based on data collected before the current legal regulations were introduced (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Migrant Integration Policy Index 2019 – maximum score = 100 (Solano & Huddleston, 2020)



Of course, the formal right to education does not always translate into real access. Several factors impede asylum-seeking children’s capability to attend and profit from compulsory education in Greece, including lack of staffing for reception classes, lack of appropriate curricular materials and

teachers with intercultural training, dispersed and irregular living conditions, lack of transportation, local restrictions on movement (as in the case of the East Aegean islands), and parents' reluctance to deal with potentially hostile authorities (Asylum Information Database, 2023; cf. Greek Council for Refugees/Save the Children/Terre des hommes 2022; Greek Council for Refugees / OXFAM / Save the Children International 2022).

Access to the vocational education and training system

Refugees, tolerated persons, and asylum-seekers can access vocational education and training systems in Greece under certain conditions. As mentioned in the *VET Voices Guideline: Greece (1)*, vocational education 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. Article 58 (1) of the International Protection Law (L. 4939/2022) holds that as with compulsory education, asylum-seekers should have access to VET under the same conditions as Greek nationals.

However, as with compulsory education, several barriers often prevent asylum-seekers from taking full advantage of this right. As in many countries, qualifications are a persistent issue. A pilot study conducted in Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Leros, Rhodes, and Tilos found that the majority of asylum-seekers had both prior educational experience and job-relevant skills (UNHCR, 2021). However, this does not necessarily mean they have the documentation required to apply within the Greek system. As of June 2023, despite the existence of precedents and resources such as the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR), Greek authorities had not yet set conditions for assessing the qualifications of asylum-seeking applicants without documentation (Asylum Information Database, 2023). Another precondition for entering VET in Greece (in nearly all cases) is sufficient Greek language ability: a majority of asylum-seekers in Greece interviewed by UNHCR indicated lack of language ability as a major barrier to labour market integration (2022a).

Key institutions and good practices

The Asylum Information Database affirms that “access to the labour market is the means for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection to integrate into the social environment [and] regain their autonomy and self-esteem and feel empowered” (ibid.). Fortunately, a range of governmental and non-governmental institutions have developed initiatives to help open up vocational education and training to asylum-seekers – not just in principle, but also in practice.

With regard to language, for example, the **Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS)** programme, co-developed by the IOM, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), several other NGOs, and several municipal authorities, provides six-month integration courses including Greek language training, alongside housing and employment support (IOM, 2023). Tuition-free language courses are also offered to refugees and asylum-seekers by several universities and NGOs (e.g., **University of the Aegean**, 2022).

Other institutions have focused on improving employability through counselling and targeted training. In early 2022, the **UNHCR**, together with partners CRS and Caritas, opened the **Adama Employability Centre**. Based in Athens but accessible nationwide online and via partner institutions, Adama provides beneficiaries of international protection with information on education and employment rights and responsibilities, CV and interview coaching, and networking with employers (UNHCR, 2022b). Together

with partner **METAdrasi**, UNHCR has also piloted projects training refugees as cultural mediators, childcare assistants, and caregivers for people with disabilities (UNHCR, 2022c).

The forthcoming *VET VOICES Guidelines: Cross-Country Research Report* will focus on young refugees' and other migrants' experiences navigating vocational education and training systems in the target countries, and will offer concrete recommendations for addressing common barriers and concerns.

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