

VET VOICES Guidelines: Spain (1)

Migration, vocational education, and work in Spain: 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 Spain**, with a focus on conditions facing asylum-seekers and refugees.

Refugees and other migrants in Spain

Spain has been witnessing significant refugee and migration movements in recent years, after its net migration had been negative up until 2015 (INE, 2022a). Due to its geographic location, it has become an important entry point for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea, particularly from North Africa. In 2018, Spain saw a notable increase in arrivals, with net migration peaking in 2019 and declining since (ibid.). Today, more than one in 10 residents of Spain is of

foreign origin, placing the country in the middle range compared to other European Union countries (Eurostat, 2023e). Immigrants from Morocco and Romania constitute the single two biggest diasporic populations in Spain (INE, 2022b); those seeking asylum in Spain predominantly originate from Latin American and North African nations. In 2022, around two-thirds of asylum-seekers in Spain were younger than 35 years of age (Eurostat, 2022).

Migration to Spain: Key numbers in 2021

- Total population: **ca. 47 mil.**
- Net in-migration: **153,094**
- **65,301** asylum claims

Sources: IMF (2023), INE (2022a),
WorldData (2022)

VET and the labour market in Spain

Throughout the last decades and especially subsequent to the global financial crisis, Spain has grappled with significant challenges relating to unemployment: around 12.8 % of its general population, as well as almost a third of youth (15 to 24), without work as of May 2023. Although these quotas have been declining for the past ten years, only interrupted due to the pandemic in 2020 (INE, 2023), Spain still places last in the European Union in terms of (youth) employment rates. Despite high unemployment rates, Spain also faces shortages of skilled labour in certain sectors: Developments such as an aging population or the post-pandemic resurgence of tourism have been creating demand for skilled employees in sectors such as nursing or hospitality (Schengen Visa Info, 2023). It is assumed that by 2030, nearly half of all job offers in Spain will require a high level of qualification (Cedefop, 2023). Another significant issue in the Spanish labour market is the prevalence of short-term employment. In response, several policy measures have been introduced to reduce the number of temporary work

contracts, although their effectiveness has been mixed. It is worth noting that the Spanish economy heavily relies on small businesses, with eight out of ten companies employing two or fewer workers (INE, 2021).

The precarious situation of Spain’s labour market places substantial demands on the country’s ability to prepare its citizens for employment. The Spanish VET model can be characterized by its modular structure, as well as a comparatively high degree of variance between regions, due to Spain’s

VET in Spain:
Key numbers in 2021

- **771,042** pupils enrolled in VET
- **259,236** graduates in VET

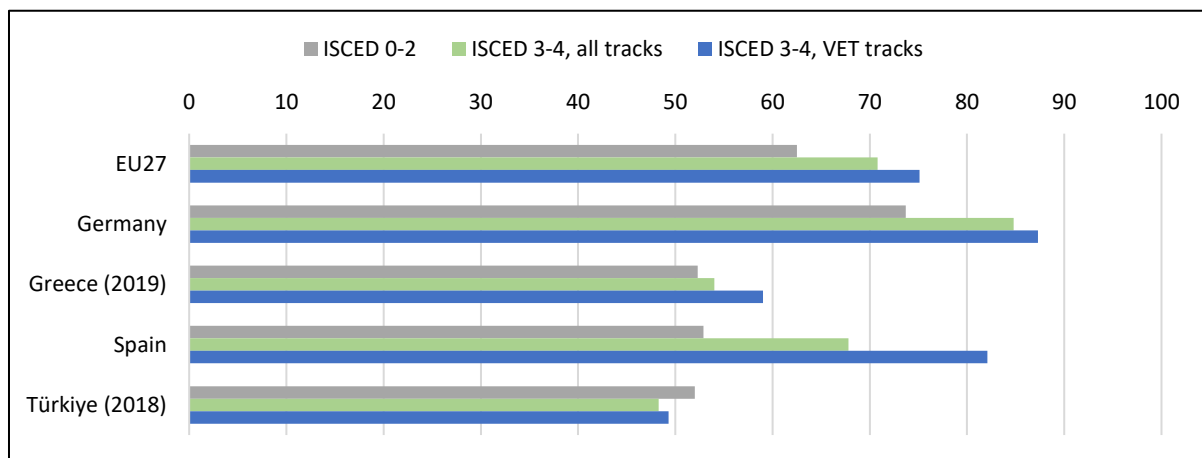
Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET. Source: Eurostat 2023a, b.

decentralized governance structures. While the latter means that vocational and educational training can be tailored to the specific needs of local constituencies, it may also impede efforts to standardize certifications and qualifications. While the portion of time spent learning practical skills in a partnered enterprise usually amounts to 25 percent, the introduction and recent accentuation of the *FP (Formación Profesional) Dual* system, inspired by the

German model, aims to enhance the integration of businesses within the VET system. This system seeks to strengthen the connection between education and the labour market by providing students with hands-on experience and aligning training with industry needs. To future-proof it, the Spanish government announced a revision of the country's VET system in 2021. These policy measures include the facilitation of over 100,000 new VET places by 2023, simplifying the recognition of informally acquired skills, and expanding the dual principle (Cedefop, 2022), which as of now still represents the exception in the Spanish VET system (Cedefop, 2021).

The numbers document that completing a vocational education track significantly improves employment chances for 15-34-year-olds in Spain who were born in a different country – an effect that also shows for the other VET Voices target countries of Germany, Greece, and Türkiye, as well as the EU27 as a whole (see Figure 1).

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

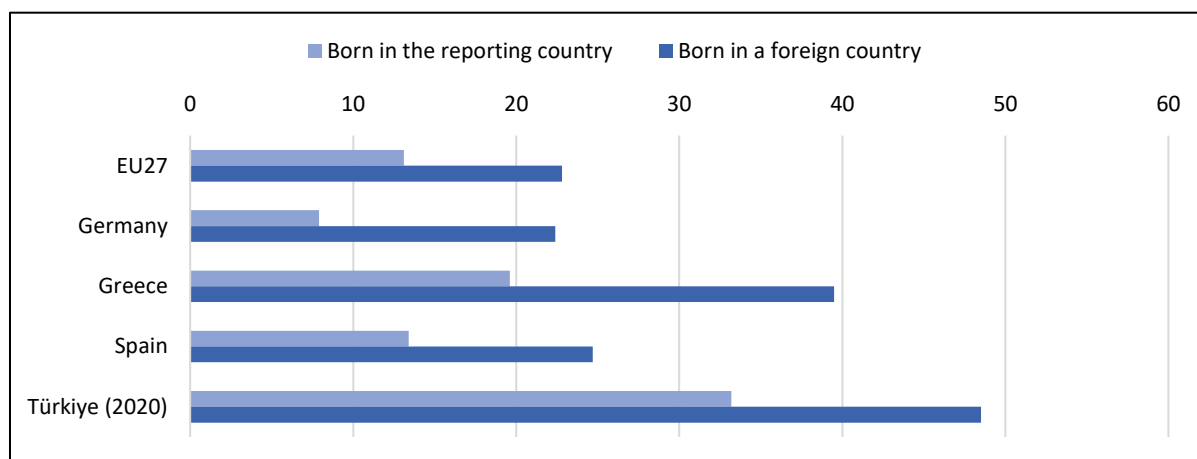


Integrating asylum-seekers and other migrants into VET in Spain

With an aging and thus evermore retiring workforce, as well as the growing trend towards a highly specialized service industry, it is anticipated that immigrants in Spain will play a crucial role in

sustaining its economy. Generally, asylum seekers are legally entitled to commence employment after a waiting period of six months once their asylum application is officially accepted and under examination (AIDA, 2022). Still, these groups may be handicapped by obstacles such as discriminatory practices, difficulties in the recognition of existing qualifications, or language barriers (though the latter are certainly less of an issue for migrants from Spanish-speaking countries). As Figure 2 shows, the proportion of 15-34-year-olds neither in employment nor in vocational or educational training is significantly higher among foreign-born residents as compared to residents born in Spain.

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



When combined with the high rate of unemployment fosters and the competition that it fosters among job-seekers, barriers to education and the increased tendency to drop out put refugees and other migrants at a disadvantage. However, the Spanish government as well as local constituencies and NGOs have been taking proactive measures to address this disadvantage, with the specific goal of promoting the labour integration of refugees by offering specialized employment programs, vocational training, language courses, and job placement support.

VET VOICES Guidelines: Spain (2) will focus on pathways to vocational education and training for asylum-seekers and other migrants in Spain.

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