

## VET VOICES Guidelines: Türkiye (1)

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

## Refugees and other migrants in Türkiye

Türkiye hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally: as of May 2023, based on data from the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), more than 5 million foreign nationals were present in the country, of whom 3.7 were seeking international protection (IOM, 2023). Of these, around 3.37 million are Syrians living under temporary

protection status, as governed by the 2014 Temporary Protection Regulation (migration in general is regulated by the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection). An additional 1.3 million foreigners of various nationalities hold residence permits, while around 319,000 are refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. In some provinces, registered Syrian refugees make up a significant part of the population (e.g., between 10% and 25%; the province of Kilis at the border with Syria is an outlier at 73%). As Türkiye sits at the junction of migration pathways from Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Africa, it is also a country of destination for non-asylum-seeking irregular migrants, as well as a country of transit on the way to Europe. While statistics are imprecise, the PMM estimates that there are nearly 60,000 migrants in irregular situations in Türkiye (IOM, 2023). Nevertheless, emigration has trumped immigration for the past several years in Türkiye, compounding the problem of slow population growth; if well-managed, migration under international protection regimes could help offset this trend, to the long-term benefit of the Turkish economy.

### Migration to Türkiye: Key numbers in 2021

- Total population: **ca. 84,775,000**
- Net in-migration: **-69,729**
- **29,256** international protection claims

*Source: United Nations Population Division 2022;  
Asylum Information Database 2023*

## VET and the labour market in Türkiye

Economic activity in Türkiye is grouped under four broad sectors: services (ca. 59% of total employment), industry (22%), agriculture (14%), and construction (6%) (Turkstat, 2023). Vocational education and training (VET) plays a central role in preparing young people for employment in all of these sectors. The Turkish VET system is multi-faceted, entailing formal qualification-granting programmes at the secondary level (e.g., Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools) and post-

**VET in Türkiye:**  
**Key numbers in 2021**

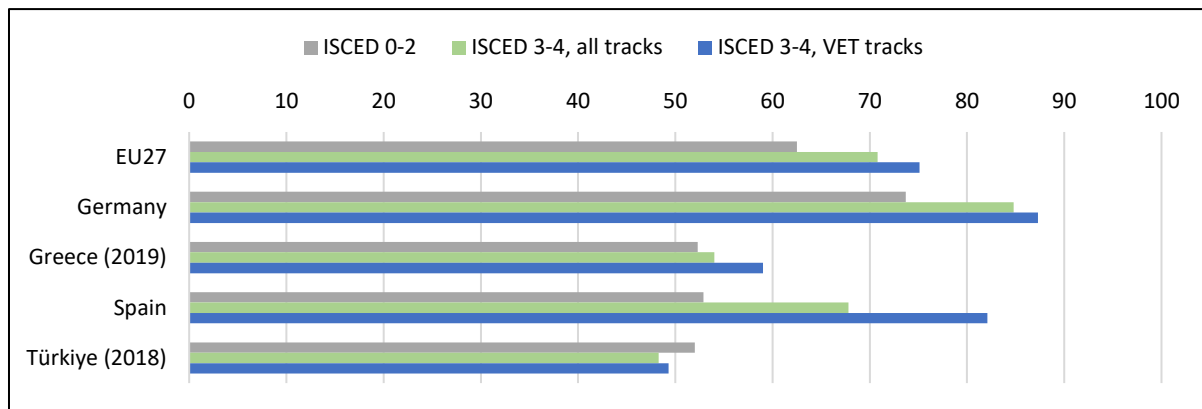
- **2,398,519** pupils enrolled in VET
- **472,554** graduates in VET

*Upper secondary VET. Source: Eurostat 2023a, b.*

secondary level (e.g., Vocational Colleges), as well as non-formal programmes (such as Vocational Open High Schools, which adopt a journeyman and master testing and qualification structure) (Numanoğlu et al., 2018). Comparing Türkiye to the EU27 and the other VET Voices target countries, in terms of raw employability, the added value of a vocational school leaving certificate (ISCED 3-4) over a lower

secondary school leaving certificate (ISCED 0-2) is less evident (see Figure 1).

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

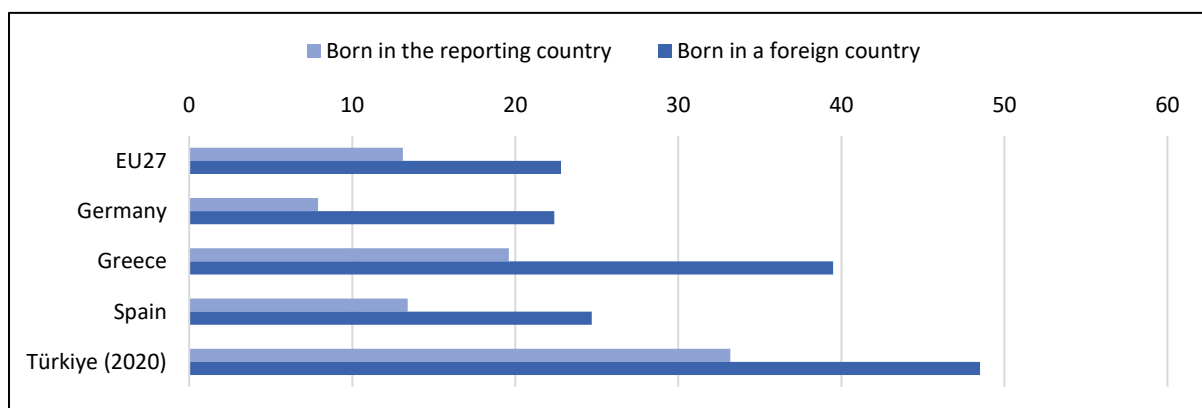


However, as the Turkish economy advances technologically, it is foreseeable that this gap will shrink (Numanoğlu et al., 2018). From a quality-of-life perspective as well, VET brings benefits: vocational high school graduates earn significantly more than high school graduates without vocational certification, not to mention primary or secondary school graduates (Turkstat, 2020).

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

These conditions suggest that access to VET could improve the lives of young asylum-seekers and other migrants in Türkiye. However, barriers persist. As in the European Union as a whole and the other VET Voices target countries, young residents of Türkiye who were born in a foreign country are more likely to be neither in employment nor education and training (see Figure 2).

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



Similar discrepancies show in related statistics. For instance, research suggests that labour market participation among Syrians with temporary protection is around 30% (Erdoğan, 2019).

Because of this, educational and labour market integration are regarded as high priorities among Turkish stakeholders. A number of institutions have taken significant steps toward integrating asylum-seekers and other migrants into VET: in 2020, there were a total of 156,332 trainees (67,423 male and 88,909 female) from 135 different countries who benefited from public education centres; 83,214 completed their courses and received certificates (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2021). Examples of recent good practices will follow in *VET VOICES Guidelines: Türkiye (2)*, which focuses on **pathways to vocational education and training for asylum-seekers and other migrants in Türkiye**.

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