

# UNITY EUROPE

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### Activity 1

#### Drivers and challenges assessment

## Final Assessment Report

Developed by: UNITY EUROPE Partnership

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## Introduction

*"Immigration is not a threat. Immigration is a necessity. It will contribute to make Europe more dynamic, prosperous, and competitive."*

Cecilia Malmström, former European Commissioner for Home Affairs

We begin this report by quoting Cecilia Malmström to underscore our vision regarding immigration and reaffirm our partnership's commitment to supporting the effective and sustainable integration of young immigrants in European countries and the broader European Union.

This Final Assessment Report reflects the collaborative efforts of our partners in mapping and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the situation of young immigrants in Europe. Its purpose is to identify the main challenges and training gaps that impede their full social and professional integration.

Specifically, the report examines the various drivers and obstacles faced by young immigrants in the partner countries (France, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Türkiye) and across Europe. It provides in-depth insights into the factors affecting their integration, including language barriers, legal complexities, cultural diversity, and economic challenges. This report serves as a valuable resource for understanding the specific needs of this target, informing future project activities, in particular the development of the UNITY EUROPE Toolbox (WP3) and policy recommendations.

After analysing quantitative and qualitative indicators, describing opportunities and support systems and assessing challenges and main inhibitors to integration, the partners have identified **8 specific training areas** and relevant topics/skills that will serve as a roadmap for the development of targeted educational content, ensuring that the courses offered in WP3 are highly relevant and impactful:

1. Networking, communication and soft skills
2. Language & Cultural Competence
3. Crafting an EU-Compliant CV
4. Entrepreneurial competence
5. Financial literacy
6. Digital Literacy
7. Mental well-being
8. Legal Rights Education and civic/political engagement

## Quantitative and Qualitative Indicators on Young Immigrants

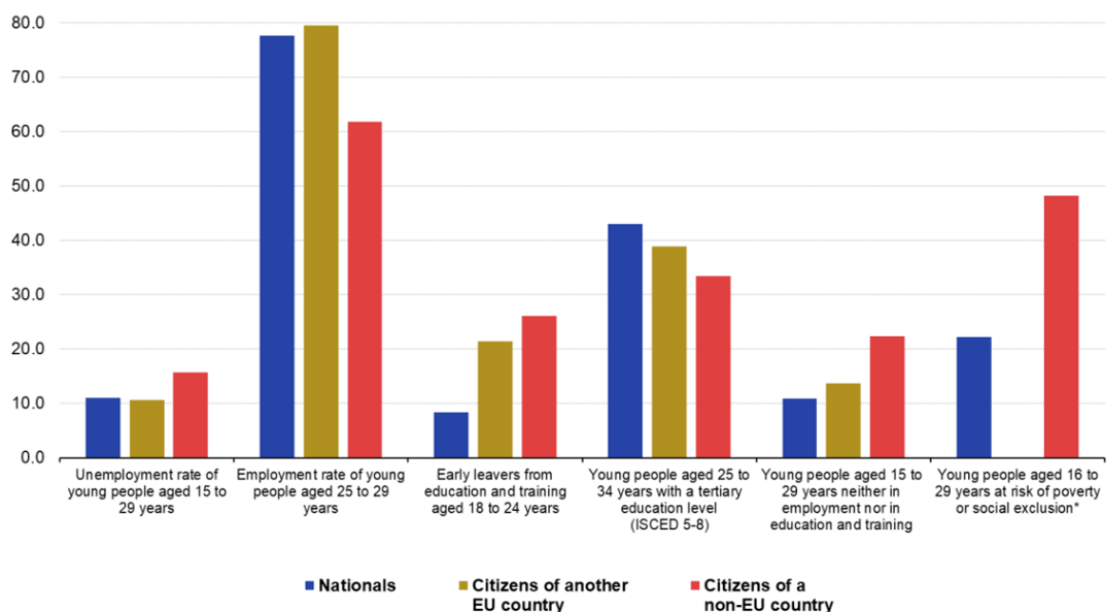
This part of the reports highlights key demographic trends, challenges in education, employment, and social integration, as well as the distinct experiences of immigrant youth in Europe, with a particular focus on France, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, and Türkiye, drawing attention to the barriers faced by non-EU citizens.

### European level

In 2023, approximately 20.9 million people living in the European Union were non-EU citizens, while another 3.9 million were citizens of different EU member states. The largest concentrations of non-nationals were in countries such as Germany, Spain, France, and Italy. Across most EU nations, the majority of non-nationals were from outside the EU and tend to be younger than the resident population. The median age of non-nationals was 36.5 years, significantly younger than the median age of 45.7 for national populations (Eurostat, 2023).

Young people with immigrant backgrounds, particularly those either born abroad or with foreign-born parents, make up a growing demographic in the EU. This group faces **distinct challenges, especially in education**. For instance, young adults aged 25 to 34 with foreign-born parents are less likely to attain higher education compared to their peers with native-born parents. Furthermore, they are more likely to leave school early and face greater risks of being neither employed nor engaged in education or training.

**Figure 1:** Selected indicators of youth integration in the EU by citizenship, 2022



Source: Eurostat, 2023

Educational disparities contribute to their **higher unemployment rates**, as young non-EU citizens face unemployment at a rate 1.4 times higher than young EU citizens. Employment and economic security are also areas where non-EU youth struggle, especially during times of crisis. Data from 2019 to 2020 show that youth unemployment rates for non-EU-born individuals rose more significantly compared to native-born youth during this period, indicating their lower resilience to economic shocks (OECD, 2024).

Another group that deserves particular attention is **young refugees**. Despite the difficulties they face, there is a noticeable lack of detailed data about their specific situations once they turn 18 and lose the protections granted to minors, being the major focus only on “unaccompanied minors”. In 2023, the EU received 1.14 million applications for international protection, the highest in seven years (EUAA, 2024). Conversations with refugees from the Middle East and Africa have revealed perceptions of unequal treatment, particularly when compared to the support provided to Ukrainian refugees, who have benefitted from smoother asylum processes and easier access to education and employment (Drosopoulos, 2024). On the status of **Ukrainian immigrants**, the Commission (2024) reported the following data:

- Over 4.2 million people have registered for temporary protection
- Nearly 50,000 asylum applications have been submitted by Ukrainian nationals within the EU (European Commission, 2024)
- More than 860,000 Ukrainian students have been integrated into member states

### France

Immigration in France is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that reflects the country’s diverse population and evolving demographic trends. As of 2022, **immigrants constitute just over 10% of the population**, which translates to more than seven million people officially residing in the country. Notably, approximately 2.5 million of these immigrants, or 35%, have acquired French nationality. This statistic highlights the significant number of immigrants who have successfully integrated into French society and obtained citizenship.

Examining the age distribution of immigrants reveals a varied demographic profile. In 2019, there were about 338,805 immigrants under the age of 15, indicating a young immigrant demographic that contributes to the country’s educational and social systems. Moreover, over three million immigrants fell within the working-age group of 25 to 54, representing a substantial portion of the workforce and playing a crucial role in the economic vitality of the country.

The gender distribution among immigrants adds another layer to this narrative, revealing a notable trend where **women make up a significant portion of the immigrant population**. This gender imbalance can be attributed to several

factors, including family reunification policies and the increasing number of women migrating independently for work or education. This reflects broader global trends in migration, where women's mobility and economic participation are on the rise.

Geographically, immigrants in France are unevenly distributed, with some areas exhibiting higher concentrations of foreign-born residents. The Île-de-France region, particularly the **department of Seine-Saint-Denis, stands out as one of the most ethnically diverse areas**, with nearly one-third of the population being foreign. This region has long been a hub for immigrants due to its economic opportunities and historical significance as a gateway for newcomers. Additionally, regions like the Paris basin and areas near the Swiss border have transitioned from being primarily characterized by South European and North African immigration to being highly diverse in terms of the geographic origins of their populations. This evolution reflects broader trends of globalization and the increasing mobility of people from various parts of the world.

The reasons for migration to France are varied, with **family reunification and university studies being predominant motives**. In 2021, **economic migration accounted for only a minority** of residence permit issuances. Those in irregular situations face several options: they may continue to live clandestinely, voluntarily return to their home country, opt for assisted return, or face the possibility of forced deportation.

Humanitarian reasons also play a significant role in migration trends. In 2021, **nearly 40,000 residence permits were issued for humanitarian purposes**, which includes refugees who have fled their countries due to fear of persecution or conflict and require international protection. The French **Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA)** provides guidelines for asylum applications. If asylum is denied, individuals may still be granted subsidiary protection under specific conditions, offering an alternative form of protection for those at risk. The integration of immigrants into French society involves navigating various challenges, including legal, social, and economic hurdles. The French government, alongside various organisations, provides support to facilitate this process. They offer language courses, job training programmes, and assistance with housing and healthcare. Despite these efforts, integration remains a complex and multifaceted issue, influenced by cultural differences, economic conditions, and social attitudes.

For those seeking more detailed information on immigration trends and statistics, resources such as the International Migration Outlook 2023 by OECD and the INSEE reports on immigrants and descendants of immigrants in France provide comprehensive data and analyses essential for understanding these complex dynamics.

## Spain

As of January 1, 2023, Spain had a population of 48 million, with 12.7% being foreigners. Of these 6 million foreigners, about 1.27 million were aged 15-29, with a slight male majority (51.5%).

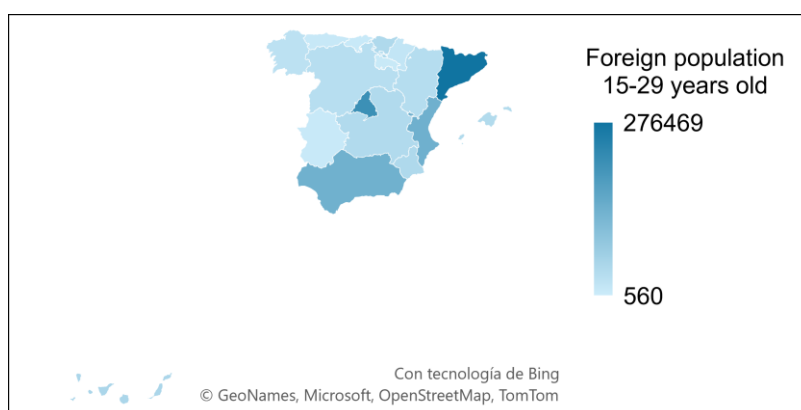
**Table 1:** Age and gender distributions among young immigrants by 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. 2023

Age	Persons	Men	% Men	Women	% Women
15-19	280.805	150.569	53,6%	130.236	46,4%
20-24	414.920	217.443	52,4%	197.477	47,6%
25-29	574.001	285.751	49,8%	288.250	50,2%
Total (15-29)	1.269.726	653.763	51,5%	615.963	48,5%

Source: INE, 2024

Young immigrants are primarily concentrated in Catalonia, Andalusia, Valencia, and Madrid.

**Figure 2:** Distribution by Spanish regions of the foreign population aged 15 to 29 years old on 1 January 2022



Source: INE, 2023

There is limited data on the legal status of these young immigrants, though 32,643 individuals aged 20-29 acquired Spanish nationality in 2023. The largest nationalities among young immigrants are Moroccan (14.5%), Colombian (10.1%), and Romanian (8.4%). The foreign population from South American countries represents 29.6%, which indicates that a good part of the immigrants already has a basic knowledge of the language, and when they arrive, they only need to adapt to the accent and pronunciation, as well as some grammatical differences, vocabulary and customs.

**In education, young immigrants face challenges.** They are underrepresented in advanced education and overrepresented in vocational training, with a school enrolment rate 24% lower than native Spaniards. Foreign students are also more

likely to drop out and repeat grades, with a dropout rate double that of their Spanish peers (Mahía & Medina, 2022).

In the **labour market**, young immigrants face higher unemployment rates (23.4%) compared to young Spaniards (20.9%), often working in hospitality, commerce, agriculture, or construction (EPE, 2022). To conclude, there is no concrete data on participation in social activities and sense of belonging, being the experiences of each migrant very subjective. However, further research on the topic should be encouraged.

### Italy

As of January 1, 2024, Italy's population is 58.99 million, with 5.3 million foreign citizens, making up 9% of the total population ([Integrazionemigranti.gov.it](https://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it)). This figure includes only those officially registered, while an additional estimated 1 million foreigners reside either unregistered or irregularly. The primary countries of origin for migrants include Romania, Morocco, Albania, China, and Ukraine.

The distribution of foreign residents is heavily concentrated in the northern and central regions of Italy. Over a third of all migrants live in the North-West, with Lombardy hosting the largest share of the foreign population, followed by Lazio and Emilia-Romagna. Notably, Emilia-Romagna has the highest percentage of migrants relative to its population, exceeding 12%. Between 2010 and 2023, while Italy's total population declined by 840,000, the foreign population grew by 1.2 million. This increase in immigration has partially offset Italy's shrinking native population, which has been decreasing due to low birth rates. Immigration peaked in 2017 but saw a temporary decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it rebounded strongly with 336,000 new arrivals in 2022 and 360,000 in 2023, marking a substantial rise from pre-pandemic levels.

Gender distribution among migrants shows a slight female majority overall, though in the **younger age range (18-30)**, men outnumber women. Migration to Italy is largely driven by employment opportunities, and foreign workers contribute significantly to the labour force, accounting for approximately 12% of Italy's GDP.

**Figure 1:** Presence of young foreigners (18-30) in Italy, by gender and age groups

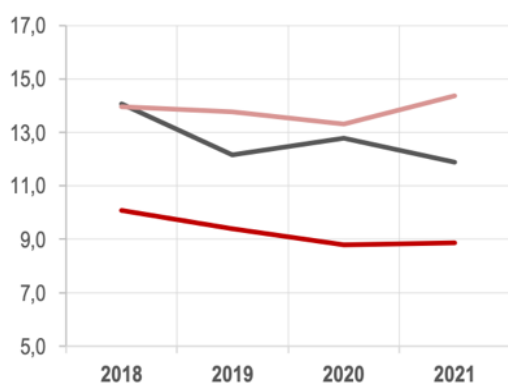
Age Group	Male	Female	Total
18-19	2,894,022	1,041	2,895,108
20-24	2,892,517	44,372	2,938,344
25-29	2,690,455	299,048	2,995,670
30	2,235,510	970,689	3,234,123

Source: Own elaborated from data by [ISTAT](https://www.istat.it), [Stranieri residenti al 1° gennaio](https://www.istat.it)

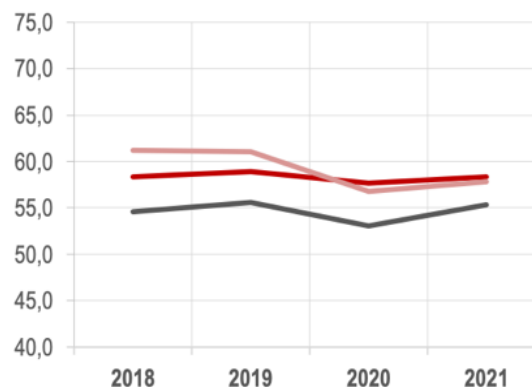


However, there are notable **challenges related to education and employment**. Foreign workers in Italy are generally less educated than their native counterparts: 54.1% have only middle school education, compared to 10.1% of migrants holding a university degree, versus 17.3% for Italians. Yet, **over-qualification** is a persistent issue, with 73.6% of extra-EU workers in Italy employed in jobs below their qualifications, compared to 17.5% of Italians. Foreigners face **higher unemployment rates**, though their labour participation is high, with many working in sectors like agriculture, construction, and low-skilled services. These migrants are vital to Italy's economy, yet integration challenges remain, particularly around access to better education and employment opportunities.

**Figure 4: Employment Level**



**Figure 5: Unemployment Level**



— Italiani dalla nascita — Naturalizzati — Stranieri

Source: [Stranieri e naturalizzati nel mercato del lavoro](#)

Overall, migration in Italy is a developing phenomenon with substantial economic contributions, particularly from younger immigrants. However, further efforts are needed to enhance their integration and fully leverage their potential in the Italian workforce.

### Cyprus

Cyprus has seen a notable increase in its immigrant population over the past two decades, with immigrants now representing approximately 16-18% of the total population, with a notable portion from non-EU countries like Syria, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Within the immigrant population, **young people aged 18-30 account for around 20-25%**. This age group is particularly mobile, often seeking better economic and social opportunities.

In terms of employment, young immigrants predominantly find work in **low-skilled sectors** such as hospitality, construction, agriculture, and domestic services. Despite a substantial employment rate, young immigrants face **precarious working conditions**. Notably, their employment rate is slightly lower than that of their Cypriot counterparts. The unemployment rate for young immigrants is higher than that of the native population, with **young women from immigrant backgrounds experiencing particularly elevated unemployment rates**.

A significant challenge for many young immigrants is **overqualification**. Approximately 40-50% of immigrant youth in Cyprus hold qualifications that exceed the requirements of their jobs, largely due to their educational credentials being unrecognised due to bureaucratic hurdles or language barriers. Educational attainment among young immigrants reveals stark disparities. **High dropout rates** are prevalent, with studies indicating that dropout rates among non-EU immigrant youth can reach 25-30%, compared to 10-15% for native Cypriot students. Furthermore, about 20-30% of immigrant youth have only basic education levels, which severely limits their employment prospects.

**Housing conditions** for young immigrants are concerning, with about 30-35% living in overcrowded accommodations, a stark contrast to 10-15% of the local population. Economic constraints contribute to this issue, as low-paying jobs make it difficult for them to afford quality housing. **Social integration** poses additional challenges, as many young immigrants experience cultural isolation and social exclusion. A lack of access to social networks further complicates their ability to navigate educational systems, labour markets, and social services. **Mental health challenges** are also prevalent, with young immigrants reporting feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness due to migration trauma, social isolation, and economic stress. Access to mental health services is limited, further exacerbating these issues.

## Türkiye

Türkiye hosts over 5 million foreign nationals, with a significant portion of young immigrants aged 18-30. The largest group among them is Syrians under temporary protection, followed by Iraqis, Turkmens, Iranians, and Uzbeks. Urban areas are primary destinations, with Istanbul hosting the highest number of foreign residents at 684,054, followed by Ankara and Antalya.

Young immigrants display a **balanced gender distribution** with a slight male predominance, mainly due to employment opportunities. Their **legal status varies**: many Syrians are under temporary protection, while Central Asian immigrants typically hold work or student visas. However, **a considerable number of immigrants, especially from Afghanistan and Africa, remain undocumented**, complicating their access to services.

Proficiency in Turkish is varied, with many Syrians and Central Asians improving through integration programmes, while language barriers persist for non-Turkish speakers, affecting access to education and jobs. **Educational backgrounds also differ significantly:** many Syrians and Afghans have had disrupted schooling due to conflict, while immigrants from Azerbaijan often come for higher education, resulting in better job prospects.

**Unemployment among young immigrants is notably high.** Most find work in low-skilled sectors such as construction, agriculture, and services, often in informal jobs lacking security and legal protections. Social and cultural participation varies, and although many engage in community activities, exclusion and discrimination hinder full integration. Legal status, language skills, and social inclusion heavily influence their sense of belonging and integration into Turkish society.

## Drivers, Opportunities and Support System

The following paragraph explores policies, education & training initiatives, youth-focused programmes, and the strength of social support systems designed to address the needs of young migrants across Europe and within the partner countries.

### European Union

In November 2020, the European Commission introduced the "**Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027**," aiming to foster inclusion through collaboration between migrants, local communities, employers, civil society, and governments. This plan focuses on targeted support throughout all stages of integration, with key areas such as education, employment, language learning, and social inclusion playing a central role.

The EU supports these efforts, notably through the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**, which, with a budget of €9.88 billion, helps countries strengthen migration management and share responsibilities. AMIF funds initiatives like early integration programmes, education, language learning, and professional training for non-EU nationals, particularly those in vulnerable situations. In November 2023, the European Commission also proposed a "**Skills and Talent Mobility Package**" to attract foreign talent, facilitating the recognition of qualifications and reducing barriers to international recruitment. Tools like [SkillsOVATE tool](#) and the [ENIC-NARIC project](#) support these aims by identifying skills gaps and providing guidance on recognizing foreign qualifications.

A significant impact is, of course, produced by the **Erasmus+ Programme** that facilitates the integration of young immigrants through language learning, cultural immersion, and the building of international networks. It promotes social inclusion by encouraging immigrants to engage in activities that foster civic participation and mutual understanding, thus reducing social barriers. Additionally, the EU has taken steps to support Ukrainian refugees through the [Solidarity Platform](#), launched in response to the war, providing guidance on asylum, employment, and education. Similar online resources are available for migrants of all nationalities through the [EU Immigration Portal](#), offering practical information for those seeking to move to the EU.

### France

The social and professional integration of young immigrants in France is addressed through a comprehensive policy framework that emphasizes the importance of welcoming diverse populations. This French integration model not only seeks to provide economic and social benefits to citizens of immigrant descent but also aims to foster a more inclusive society. By focusing on underprivileged groups, including young immigrants, the policies encourage contributions to both the economy and community.

From an educational perspective, the European Commission supports France in integrating migrants into its education and training systems. This involves various initiatives spanning from early childhood to higher education, with a strong emphasis on language learning, essential for social integration. Efforts are also made to recognise foreign qualifications, facilitating a smoother transition into the French labour market. EU funds play a vital role in financing these educational inclusion programmes. France's youth policies are designed to be cross-sectoral and foster partnerships that address young people's needs as they pursue autonomy. These policies encompass diverse actions supporting the development, civic engagement, education, counselling, training, and labour market integration of young people, particularly relevant for young immigrants. They aim to ensure that all youth, regardless of their background, have access to opportunities that enable them to build successful futures.

Numerous organisations in France provide critical support to young immigrants, offering legal, social, and administrative assistance. For instance, the **Bureau d'Accueil et d'Accompagnement des Migrants (BAAM)** offers free legal and social services, helping immigrants access healthcare, job opportunities, and French language classes - key components for successful integration. Social networks and support systems for young immigrants are robust, with many NGOs and aid groups providing essential services like food, clothing, accommodation, and legal advice. Organizations such as **La Cimade** and **Gisti** offer legal assistance and help with administrative processes, crucial for establishing stability in their new environment.

To sum up, France has developed a structured approach to integrate young immigrants into society, equipping them with the necessary tools and support to thrive socially and professionally. Through comprehensive policies, educational initiatives, and strong support networks, young immigrants are given the opportunity to become active contributors to French society, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone can achieve their full potential.

### Spain

Spain has made considerable progress in supporting the integration of young immigrants through policies like the Integral Law 15/2022 for equal treatment and the **Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion (2023-2027)**. These initiatives align with EU plans and address key areas like education, employment, housing, and legal protection against discrimination. The framework emphasizes language proficiency, vocational training, and public service access, fostering a more inclusive society.

The **National Integration Fund (FAMI)** backs local governments in tailoring projects to immigrant needs, financing language courses, employment training, and cultural activities. Spain also participates in the **EU's Youth Employment**

**Initiative and Youth Guarantee programmes**, providing job placements and training to help young immigrants enter the workforce.

Regional programmes, such as Barcelona Activa, complement national efforts by offering specialised services like entrepreneurship training and business incubation. Additionally, NGOs and local organisations provide crucial social and legal support, especially in urban areas like Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, where immigrant populations are higher. In contrast, **rural areas often face challenges** due to fewer resources and limited access to integration programs.

Overall, Spain's policies, in collaboration with the EU, NGOs, and local governments, are aimed at ensuring the social and professional integration of young immigrants, with a strong focus on education, employment, and community support.

### Italy

Italy has implemented several policies and initiatives aimed at integrating migrants into its socio-economic fabric. A key policy is the "**Charter of Values of Citizenship and Integration**," introduced in 2007, which serves as a framework for promoting social cohesion and integrating migrants while respecting both cultural diversity and common societal values.

Another significant measure is the "**Integration Agreement**" introduced in 2009, which requires newly arrived immigrants to engage in activities aimed at integrating into Italian society. The agreement includes language and civics courses, with immigrants expected to accumulate credits over two years (no less than 30 credits with 16 assigned upon subscription). Failure to meet integration requirements can result in penalties, including expulsion.

Italy has also implemented several EU-funded programmes, such as the **Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**, and the **Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA)**, designed for both Italians and foreign citizens who have reached the age of 16. These programmes offer language courses and vocational training to help migrants integrate professionally and socially. Other initiatives at national level include:

- The **Paths for Training and Integration of Young Migrants programme**, launched in 2016, that supports unaccompanied minors transitioning into adulthood, offering financial support for internships and job placements.
- The **PUOI project** focusing on integrated approaches for the social and work integration of migrants and targeting 4,500 work opportunities for young migrants.

However, despite these efforts, Italy's integration **policies remain fragmented and lack centralisation**. While national and regional initiatives exist,

bureaucratic hurdles and inconsistent programme availability hinder the full integration of young migrants, particularly young adults. To fill this gap, **non-governmental organisations** like CESVI and Save the Children Italia play a vital role in providing vocational training and support at the local level, yet further efforts are needed to address the unique challenges faced by young foreign adults.

### Cyprus

The primary drivers for young immigrants coming to Cyprus can be categorized into three main areas.

1. **Economic migration** plays a significant role, as the demand for labour in sectors such as construction, agriculture, hospitality, and domestic services attracts many young people, particularly from non-EU countries. These young immigrants often seek better employment opportunities and greater economic stability.
2. **Political** instability and conflict contribute to the influx of refugees and asylum seekers, especially from regions like Syria and Lebanon. Young immigrants arriving from these conflict zones often possess few resources, making their urgent need for social and economic integration paramount
3. **Educational aspirations** also draw some young individuals to Cyprus, where they seek higher education in a stable environment. The country's EU membership and its robust higher education system enhance its appeal to students from both EU and non-EU countries

Despite the challenges, there are notable opportunities for young immigrants in Cyprus, particularly in employment and education. The Cypriot economy continues to generate job openings in key sectors, especially hospitality and tourism. These sectors not only provide financial stability but also serve as pathways for social integration, allowing young immigrants to establish connections within the local community.

Educational opportunities abound, with numerous higher education institutions accessible to both EU and non-EU nationals. Young immigrants can enrol in various programmes, particularly in fields like business, information technology, and hospitality management, which are in demand within the Cypriot labour market. Additionally, vocational training centres offer alternative routes for those who may not pursue traditional academic pathways, equipping them with marketable skills in construction, healthcare, and IT. There are also entrepreneurial opportunities, as Cyprus supports various programmes that provide funding and mentorship to young people looking to start their businesses. While immigrant youth may face challenges, such as limited access to financing, government and EU-backed initiatives create pathways to self-employment for those with entrepreneurial ambitions.

Cyprus has established a multi-faceted support system designed to assist young immigrants in their integration journey. This system includes both government initiatives and efforts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on the ground to address the specific needs of immigrants. The **National Action Plan for Integration of Third-Country Nationals** outlines strategies to facilitate access to education, employment, healthcare, and social services. A critical aspect of this plan involves providing Greek language courses, as proficiency in the local language is vital for success in school and securing employment. While government initiatives are crucial, **NGOs** play an equally significant role in the integration process. Organisations like Caritas Cyprus and KISA (Action for Equality, Support, and Antiracism) offer language courses, legal advice, and various social services tailored to the needs of immigrants. Many NGOs provide mentorship programmes that assist young immigrants in navigating the challenges of adapting to their new environment, helping them build networks, learn about Cypriot culture, and develop essential skills.

### Türkiye

Turkey has implemented a range of policies to support the integration of young immigrants, particularly Syrian refugees, into society and the workforce. These efforts are part of a comprehensive migration policy framework developed in collaboration with international organisations like the United Nations and the European Union. Key initiatives focus on education and employment opportunities for young immigrants.

Education is central to Turkey's strategy, with programmes providing language courses and vocational training aimed at improving professional skills and language proficiency. Specific programmes, such as the **Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE)**, encourage school attendance among young Syrian refugees. Other targeted initiatives, like the **Young Syrian Business Programmes**, offer entrepreneurship training to help young Syrians start businesses and contribute to the economy.

Government bodies like the **Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM\*** and organisations such as the **Turkish Red Crescent** provide essential services, including healthcare, legal assistance, and educational resources. Programs like "**My Business Partner**" offer mentorship and business skills training to help young immigrants access financial resources. The integration process is further supported by strong social networks facilitated by government agencies, NGOs, and local municipalities, which organise community events and cultural activities to help young immigrants build social connections and foster a sense of belonging.



## Challenges and Skills' Gap Assessment

The findings across various countries reveal a common set of challenges faced by young immigrants, including language barriers, skills gaps, and cultural/legal obstacles. Although the specific context may differ, certain key themes recur across partner countries and in the EU. These issues primarily hinder the educational, social, and professional integration of young immigrants, affecting their ability to contribute fully to their host societies.

**Language** remains a significant barrier to integration for young immigrants, particularly refugees, who often struggle to achieve the proficiency required for education and employment in their host countries. While many governments and NGOs offer language programmes, these initiatives frequently lack quality and accessibility, especially in rural areas, leaving many young immigrants without essential linguistic skills. However, it is increasingly recognised that language proficiency alone does not guarantee successful integration. Many native citizens with varying levels of language ability enjoy full civil rights, indicating that integration involves a broader range of factors, including access to social networks, employment opportunities, and cultural adaptation (European Council, 2024). Therefore, while addressing language barriers is crucial, integration policies must also consider these other social, economic, and legal factors to support young immigrants effectively.

In **education**, young immigrants face significant challenges. Many enter the system with gaps in their schooling due to migration, often **dropping out at higher rates** than native-born students. The lack of tailored support, such as language assistance, exacerbates their difficulties, leading to academic underperformance. This is a common issue in countries like Spain, Cyprus, and Italy, where immigrant students struggle to adjust to new curricula and cultural norms. Even those who complete secondary education often find it difficult to pursue higher education due to financial constraints, language issues, or bureaucratic hurdles.

Across the board, there is a mismatch between the skills they possess and the demands of the local job market. In most countries, immigrants are **overqualified** for the jobs they hold, working in sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, or domestic services, despite having professional qualifications. Across the EU in 2021, the over-qualification rate was 39.6% for non-EU citizens, compared to 20.8% for EU citizens (OECD, 2023). Bureaucratic difficulties in **recognising foreign qualifications** are pervasive, often forcing immigrants to accept low-skilled jobs. This issue is particularly pronounced in Italy, Cyprus, and Türkiye, where the process of getting foreign degrees recognised is convoluted and expensive, resulting in underemployment.

Additionally, **digital literacy** is identified as a significant gap for young immigrants, particularly those from non-EU countries. Gaps in digital skills can vary greatly depending on the country of origin, as access to digital education and technology is often shaped by factors such as local economies, educational systems, and infrastructure. In increasingly digital economies like those in Cyprus and France, a lack of digital skills limits opportunities for higher-skilled jobs, particularly in sectors such as IT, finance, and business services. This digital divide not only hampers professional advancement but also restricts access to essential services and information, further marginalising young immigrants. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, can fully participate in the digital economy.

**Cultural challenges** also pose significant barriers to integration. Cultural differences often lead to misunderstandings, discrimination, and social isolation. Many young immigrants struggle to navigate unfamiliar social norms, which hinders their ability to form social networks and access job opportunities. This is a common issue across countries like Spain, Italy, and France, where immigrants feel disconnected from local communities due to differing customs, values, and sometimes outright discrimination. Furthermore, **mental health issues**, including depression, anxiety, and trauma from displacement, exacerbate the difficulties of social and professional integration. This is particularly evident in contexts like Türkiye, Italy, and France, where economic hardship and social isolation contribute to the mental health challenges faced by immigrants.

The **legal and bureaucratic hurdles** young immigrants face are a consistent obstacle across all countries. The complexity of immigration systems, coupled with uncertainties surrounding legal status, work permits, and access to social services, creates additional stress. In countries like Spain and Turkey, these bureaucratic challenges are compounded by a lack of clear information, leaving immigrants unsure of their rights and entitlements.

**Financial and entrepreneurial literacy** is another area of concern. Due to limited financial risk management skills, migrant workers and their families often take on loans based on expectations rather than realistic opportunities. Many face challenges such as taking out loans to cover travel costs or underestimating the true expenses of living abroad, including housing, food, and unexpected costs like healthcare. This, combined with limited access to financial resources, impedes their ability to achieve financial security or establish entrepreneurial ventures. This gap is particularly noted in countries like Italy and Türkiye, where immigrants also face structural barriers in accessing financial services. Overall, learning how to save wisely, budget effectively, and use formal channels for remittances can help young migrants build financial security (Caucasus Research Resource Centre, 2020).

Finally, the lack of comprehensive support policies tailored to the specific needs of young immigrants (in particular more vulnerable categories like asylum seekers and trafficking victims) is a recurring issue. Many countries have focused **on initial reception rather than long-term integration**. This short-term approach is evident in Italy's and Türkiye's strategies, where the absence of a sustained focus on long-term integration limits the opportunities for immigrants to thrive.

To conclude, while the specific context varies from country to country, the challenges faced by young immigrants are strikingly similar across Europe and beyond. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach that improves language education, facilitates the recognition of qualifications, bridges the digital divide, fosters financial and entrepreneurial competences and provides tailored support for mental health and social inclusion. By tackling these issues, countries can help young immigrants overcome the obstacles to their successful integration and enable them to contribute more fully to their new communities.



## Key Takeaways and Identification of Training Areas

Based on the findings of the partners' research and analysis, at both country and EU levels, 8 main training needs have emerged to support the effective integration of young migrants. The following list will guide the partners' selection of the training topics to be tackled by the UNITY EUROPE Toolbox (WP3).

### 1. NETWORKING, COMMUNICATION AND SOFT SKILLS

In the light of the multiple challenges highlighted in this report, the training and education system should support migrants in acquiring a set of:

- **SPECIFIC NETWORKING SKILLS** aimed at:
  - Finding training opportunities
  - Receiving appropriate guide/mentorship
  - Finding a job
  - Connecting with local associations that offer support to migrants and defend them against any form of work exploitation and discrimination
  - Integrating with local communities through volunteering, community activities, participation in local events etc.
  
- **SOFT SKILLS** for social and professional integration. These may include:
  - Intercultural communication, with a particular focus on how to prepare for a job interview (considering possible different understanding of social norms, work ethic etc.)
  - Adaptability
  - Teamwork and collaboration
  - Public speaking
  - Problem-solving and conflict resolutions
  - Leadership skills
  - Planning and management

### 2. LANGUAGE & CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Language and cultural differences represent one of the main obstacles to effective integration. Therefore, **HORIZONTAL LANGUAGE & CULTURAL COMPETENCES** should be fostered, in order to allow young migrants to adapt to different linguistic and geographical contexts. Tailored training resources should include practical information and tips on how to:

- Improve the local language knowledge
- Access tailored language courses, based on personal necessities, job sector etc
- Align the language level to mandatory standards
- Prepare to language certification exams

- Understand cultural norms and social etiquette across various EU countries

### 3. CRAFTING AN EU-COMPLIANT CV

Although the overqualification of migrants is a broader structural issue, the training and education system can play a key role in helping migrants present their skills and qualifications obtained outside Europe in a manner that aligns with the requirements of the EU labour market. There is a clear need for additional resources to assist migrants in creating CVs that meet EU standards, utilise EU formats (such as Europass), and correspond with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

### 4. ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE

Fostering entrepreneurial competence is essential for all young migrants, as starting a business closely tied to local communities serves as a powerful tool for social integration. It also provides an alternative to the precarious job market and the bureaucratic challenges that migrants regularly face in employment. Tailored training materials should support young migrants in developing key entrepreneurial skills, such as establishing a business in a new country, accessing business support services, securing funding through finance or microcredits, understanding local legal and regulatory frameworks, and mastering effective marketing strategies.

### 5. FINANCIAL LITERACY

Financial literacy is a crucial skill that should be cultivated to help young migrants manage and save money effectively, considering the specific challenges they often encounter, such as sending remittances, limited personal resources, loans for travel costs, and underestimating the true cost of living abroad. Support systems should aim to enhance key financial skills, including:

- Understanding financial risks
- Budgeting and saving
- Making informed use of financial services
- Knowing their financial rights to avoid exploitation and unfair practices

### 6. DIGITAL LITERACY

To ease recognition of digital skills in the European labour market, dedicated training resources may introduce young migrants to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), and offer knowledge and competences that are useful for preparing the ECDL exam. It is also important to develop digital skills training divided into levels, from basic to advanced; this approach would tailor the courses to both different levels of knowledge and the various job positions they might apply for. Considering the scale and scope of the UNITY EUROPE project, its Toolbox might focus on basic skills and knowledge such as:

- Basic computer skills, basic software (e.g., Microsoft Office, Google Workspace)
- Online (intercultural) communication and netiquette
- Digital safety which is crucial in both professional and personal settings (cybersecurity awareness, information on data protection and safe internet practices etc.)
- Social media for effective integration in the local community
- Job search and digital tools (how to use digital platforms for job searching, building an online presence, and applying for jobs online)

## **7. MENTAL WELL-BEING**

Mental health issues may represent a great obstacle to effective integration and may hurdle the migrant's entire experience in the new country. Targeted support is required as each experience is unique and many have endured considerable trauma, which necessitate professional support; however, the UNITY EUROPE Toolbox may:

- Raise awareness about mental health
- Offer guidance on accessing mental health services
- Provide essential strategies for:
  - Understanding emotions
  - Handling mental health and well-being, covering stress management techniques (taking into account the unique challenges and obstacles faced by young migrants)
  - Managing relationships
  - Building self-confidence and self-esteem

## **8. LEGAL RIGHTS EDUCATION**

Navigating the legal system, understanding their rights and knowing how to advocate for them is a necessary skill for all migrants. However, young migrants often face additional challenges in grasping technical legal aspects and may require extra support. UNITY EUROPE offers a valuable opportunity to assist young migrants in:

- Strengthening their awareness of human, civil, and labour rights
- Understanding immigration, residence policies, and labour laws
- Identifying and utilising instruments for civic and social participation at both local and EU levels
- Recognising civil responsibilities and duties as workers

Information on specific laws, public services (such as healthcare, education, and social security), and labour rights (including contracts, working hours, and trade union rights) varies from country to country. The UNITY EUROPE repository (WP2) will serve as a valuable resource, offering concise information and

relevant links to help migrants navigate the specific national contexts of Italy, Spain, France, Cyprus, Türkiye, as well as the EU as a whole.

In contrast, the UNITY EUROPE Toolbox (WP3) should focus on developing cross-cutting skills that enable migrants to navigate these complex and diverse systems, and provide knowledge on rights, responsibilities, and opportunities that come with being part of a larger community: the European community.

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