PIPE

Programme of **Inclusion**
for Migrant People at risk
of social exclusion.

D3.2: International Report

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1. General Overview

1.1 Introduction

Immigration is a significant challenge in today's globalized world, particularly at the European level. In 2019, there was a noticeable increase in asylum seekers in several European countries, a situation that has been only exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. While many migrants arrive in European countries without papers or legal documents, they often bring unique skills, knowledge, and a strong desire to contribute to society, prosper, and start a new life in safety. Unfortunately, they face numerous obstacles in achieving these goals. Since 1999, the EU has been improving the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and enhancing the integration of migrants and asylum seekers. The resolution of 12 April 2016 emphasizes the need for a holistic EU approach to migration, particularly in the Mediterranean.

According to the Official Journal of the European Union, "Europe is facing several urgent tasks: restoring job creation and economic recovery; achieving sustainable growth; bridging the investment gap; enhancing social cohesion; coordinating a response to the migration flow; giving priority attention to preventing radicalization and violence".

The PIPE project has been devised to promote greater inclusion and diversity across several key sectors, including education, training, youth, and sport. Moreover, the PIPE program is developed to facilitate access to high-quality learning opportunities for adult migrants, specifically focusing on language acquisition, soft skills, and cultural and professional competencies, to enable successful integration into European societies. Its remit is to improve the quality of education for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and to foster intercultural awareness and social inclusion in Europe.

This report is based on a research protocol, which outlines a structured approach to conducting desk research on soft skills, cultural awareness and mentorship programs, facilitating employment integration in partner countries. It provides a transparent and structured approach to data collection, extraction, analysis, and reporting, ensuring a comprehensive and reliable examination of the topic, according to the needs of the third activity of WP3 of the PIPE Project. The result of this activity is the present report drawing conclusions from each country regarding the skills that are in demand by migrants and those that are in demand in the host country related to soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for adult migrants.

This report, based on desk research, has the potential to inform strategies that facilitate social inclusion of migrants and refugees in European societies.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main research objective is to create, through desk research in each partner country, an international report on national priorities and needs related to soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for adult migrants.

Specifically:

1.   To identify the essential soft skills required for the successful integration of migrants in each partner country. To understand the soft skills that adult migrants consider essential for integration, employment, and social interaction in host countries.

2.   To evaluate the importance of cultural awareness for migrants in partner countries, including understanding local customs, language, and social norms.

3.   To determine the soft skills and cultural competencies that are most valued by employers and society in the host countries.

4.   To examine existing mentorship programs designed for adult migrants, focusing on their effectiveness in addressing soft skills and cultural awareness needs.

1.3 Operational definitions

By defining the following terms operationally, the study ensures clarity and consistency in understanding and measuring the key concepts involved in examining the soft skills, cultural awareness needs of migrants in partner countries, and national priorities.

1.3.1 Adult Migrants

Individuals who have moved from their country of origin to a host country for various reasons such as employment, education, asylum, or family reunification. Includes both voluntary migrants (e.g. economic migrants) and involuntary migrants (e.g. refugees, asylum seekers) or migrants with or at risk of irregular migration.

1.3.2 Migrant vulnerability

Migrant vulnerability refers to the heightened risk and exposure to harm that migrants often face due to a combination of legal, economic, social, and political factors. These vulnerabilities can arise from various aspects of a migrant's journey, including the process of migration, the conditions in transit, and the circumstances in the destination country (UNHR & GMG, nd). Migrant vulnerability is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that contribute to the risks migrants face, including:

- Legal Vulnerabilities: Migrants often face legal vulnerabilities due to their uncertain or undocumented status. This can limit their access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and legal protection. Undocumented migrants, in particular, may be reluctant to report crimes or seek help due to fear of deportation (Koser, 2005).

- Economic Vulnerabilities: Migrants are often employed in low-paying, precarious jobs with little to no labor protections. They are more likely to experience exploitation, such as wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and lack of social security. Economic vulnerability is particularly pronounced among migrant workers in informal sectors (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014).

- Social and Cultural Vulnerabilities: Migrants often face social exclusion, discrimination, and xenophobia in host countries. Language barriers, cultural differences, and the lack of social networks can exacerbate their isolation and make it difficult to integrate into the host society. This can lead to a lack of access to social services and support systems (Phillimore, 2011).

- Health Vulnerabilities: Migrants are often at a higher risk of poor health outcomes due to limited access to healthcare services, substandard living conditions, and the stress of migration. Mental health issues, such as depression and PTSD, are also prevalent among migrants, especially those who have experienced traumatic events during their journey (Zimmerman, Kiss, & Hossain, 2011).

- Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities: Women and children migrants often face specific vulnerabilities, including a heightened risk of gender-based violence, trafficking, and exploitation. Female migrants may also face barriers in accessing reproductive health services and may be more vulnerable to labor exploitation due to gendered labor market dynamics (Freedman, 2016).

- Environmental Vulnerabilities: Migrants, especially those living in informal settlements or refugee camps, are often exposed to environmental hazards such as floods, extreme weather, and inadequate sanitation. Climate change is also increasingly becoming a driver of migration, creating new vulnerabilities for displaced populations Black, Bennett, Thomas, & Beddington, 2011).

1.3.3 Soft skills

According to the definition of a European Commission working group (2004, p. 3), the term competence is broader than the term skill as it is a set of attitudes, skills, and knowledge and expresses the willingness to adapt to changing circumstances through continuous learning. A basic categorization of skills is the distinction between hard skills and soft skills. Soft skills are mainly skills related to individuals' personal characteristics, behavior, attitudes, and ability to function in different environments and manage situations. They are difficult to measure and identify.

Soft skills are a set of non-technical skills and knowledge that underpin successful participation in work. They are non-job specific and closely connected with personal attributes and attitudes (confidence, discipline, self-management...), social (communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence.), and management abilities (timekeeping, problem-solving, critical thinking). Due to a certain level of intangibility, some of them are rather difficult to quantify and develop (Green, Francis 2011).

Unfortunately, there is no global consensus in the terminology to be used to indicate such skills and there is no generally accepted skills taxonomy. A large variety of names are often used as synonymous with soft skills, such as Generic Skills, Essential Skills, Skills for Life or Basic Skills, People Skills, Key Skills/Competencies, Employability Skills, Core Skills, and Transversal Skills (Folkuniversitetet, 2013). Moreover, the distinction between hard and soft is not always so easy because the perception of what a soft skill is may vary from context to context: a skill may be considered soft in a specific sector or working area but it may be considered hard in another one,

for instance, cultural awareness might be just useful for a chemist, but it is a must for a HR manager in multi-cultural societies (European Commission, 2014).

Lippman et al., (2015, p. 4) mention that «*Soft skills refer to a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. These skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills*».

According to Heckman and Kautz (in Cinque, 2016), soft skills are personality traits, goals, motivation, and preferences that are valued in the job market, in school, and in many other areas. There are different ways of naming soft skills (sometimes called competencies or even learning outcomes), different definitions of them, and different manners of classifying and clustering them. Furthermore, the theme of soft skills — or "non-technical" skills — sometimes overlaps and intersects already known concepts, like "life skills", "generic competencies", "key competencies", etc. (Cinque, 2016).

Soft skills are the behaviors that the individual has learned and correspond to skills acquired rather than psychological gifts. Soft skills can be cultivated in the individual after practice which requires both time and knowledge (Balcar, 2016). According to Lippman et al. (2015) the general term "soft skills" includes a set of skills: social skills, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, how to learn, lifelong learning skills, and interpersonal skills (self-control and positive self-concept):

- **Social skills:** Social skills are universally important. They help people get along with others. This skill includes respecting others and their cultural identity, behaving appropriately in their environment and context, and empathy

- **Communication skills:** This competency includes effective verbal (written and oral) and non-verbal communication (body language) as well as listening skills.

- **Interpersonal skills:** The ability of a person to manage his/her emotions, control his/her impulses, and be able to regulate his/her behavior (self-control). An individual's ability to have a realistic knowledge of self and one's abilities (positive self-concept/confidence).

- **Teamwork:** The ability to cooperate and work with heterogeneous groups, an individual's ability to understand the goals of the group and work to achieve them, respect the opinions of members, value and accept feedback from others, and work to resolve conflicts

- **Problem solving:** the ability to identify a problem/problematic situation and to create and implement a plan of action

- **Critical thinking**: the ability to analyze and evaluate different points of view, approach-evaluation-use of information, responsibility, and creativity. It is also the ability to identify the problem, use prior knowledge or experience, evaluate possible solutions, and draw conclusions

- **Decision making:** an individual's ability to calculate risk, generate alternatives, and evaluate and select the best alternative.

- **Lifelong learning skills:** exploratory learning; learning through research, reflection, evaluation, and use of information and communication technologies

- Learning how to learn: an individual's ability to use learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills (Lippman et al., 2015).

However, according to Cinque (2016, p. 163) "*Some authors identify soft skills with EI (Emotional Intelligence) or EQ (Emotional Quotient), i.e. the "emotional side" of human beings in opposition to the IQ (Intelligent Quotient). One might debate if soft skills like "critical thinking" or "problem-solving" might be considered emotional skills. Some authors call them "noncognitive skills" but soft skills include both social/interpersonal skills and methodological skills or meta competences, i.e. the capacity to work on competences, to reframe and transfer them from one field to another, even from informal to formal learning. Soft skills must also be conceptualized in a broad sense, as competencies transferable from job to job, from company to company, from one economic sector to another*".

To prevent any misunderstanding or different interpretations, we took the definition proposed by Cedefop into account to a greater extent, incorporating not only personal and communication competencies but also all attitudes and behaviors that contribute to achieving results in a workplace, including management competence (CEDEFOP, 2012).

In the present desk protocol research, the use of soft skills is particularly relevant to adult migrants in the context of integration into the labor market and social life.

1.3.4 Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness refers to the recognition, understanding, and respecting the differences and similarities between cultures. It involves being aware of one's cultural values and beliefs, as well as those of others, and recognizing how these factors influence behavior, communication, and interactions (Winkelman, 2005). So cultural awareness impacts the integration process of migrants and how it is perceived and addressed by both migrants and host communities (Ward & Szabó, 2023).

The base **components** of cultural awareness are:

- Self-Awareness: The process of recognizing one's cultural influences, values, and biases, and understanding how this shapes one's perceptions and interactions with others. According to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), self-awareness is crucial in intercultural communication as it allows individuals to comprehend how their cultural background affects their communication behavior.

- Knowledge of Other Cultures: Gaining an understanding of the customs, traditions, social norms, and values of different cultural groups. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) emphasize that knowledge of other cultures involves learning about the historical, social, and cultural contexts that influence a group's behaviors and perspectives.

- Sensitivity and Respect: Being attuned to the differences in cultural practices and showing respect towards them, avoiding stereotypes and prejudices. Bennett (1993) describes sensitivity and respect as part of developing intercultural sensitivity, which moves individuals from ethnocentric stages to more ethnorelative stages of understanding and appreciating cultural differences.

- Adaptability: The ability to adjust one's behavior and communication style to fit different cultural contexts and enhance interaction effectiveness. According to Deardorff (2006), adaptability is a

core component of intercultural competence, which is essential for successful communication and interaction in multicultural environments.

- Effective Communication: The capability to convey and interpret messages appropriately and effectively across cultural boundaries, taking into account language, non-verbal cues, and cultural contexts. Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2012) highlight that effective intercultural communication involves understanding and appropriately responding to cultural differences in communication styles and practices.

- Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of others from different cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual respect and trust. Reference: Empathy is seen as a critical component in intercultural interactions, as noted by Bennett (1998), who describes it as the ability to experience another's cultural world and reduce ethnocentric perspectives.

- Inclusion and Equity: Promoting fair treatment, opportunities, and inclusivity for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, ensuring that systemic barriers are addressed. Banks and Banks (2009) discuss inclusion and equity within multicultural education, emphasizing the need to create environments where cultural diversity is acknowledged and valued, and where all individuals have equal opportunities to succeed.

1.3.5 Integration

According to IOM, while the term "integration" is understood differently depending on the country and context, it can generally be defined as the process of mutual adaptation between the host society and the migrants themselves, both as individuals and as groups (IOM, n.d.). Integration can also be considered as the process by how soft skills and cultural awareness contribute to migrants becoming accepted into and be part of the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the host country.

⬥　　Dimensions

- Economic Integration: Participation in the labor market, access to employment, and career progression.

- Social Integration: Building social networks, community participation, and access to social services.

- Cultural Integration: Adopting certain cultural norms and values of the host country while maintaining aspects of the original culture.

- Political Integration: Participation in the political processes, such as voting and being active in civic organizations (IOM,2006).

The main actions of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) include (European Commission, 2020):

- Inclusive education and training
- Improving employment opportunities and skills recognition
- Promoting access to health services
- Access to adequate and affordable housing

1.3.6 Mentorship Programs

Initiatives, projects, programs or services currently implemented by governments, NGOs, or other organizations specifically designed to support adult migrants integration, particularly those that address soft skills and cultural awareness.

 Types

- **Language Courses:** Programs designed to teach the language of the host country.

- **Vocational Training:** Courses and workshops aimed at enhancing employability skills.

- **Cultural Orientation:** Programs that provide information about the host country's culture, norms, and values.

- **Employment Support:** Services that help migrants find jobs, such as job placement services, resume workshops, and interview preparation.

-**Mentorship programs:** Mentorship programs are structured initiatives designed to foster professional and personal development. These programs aim to provide guidance, support, and knowledge transfer, helping mentees navigate their careers, develop skills, and achieve their goals.

1.3.7 National Priorities

Suggested actions or strategies aimed at addressing identified gaps and improving the support systems for migrants.

 Types

- **Policy Changes:** changes in laws or regulations to better support migrant integration.

- **Program Development:** new programs or the enhancement of existing ones.

- **Resource Allocation:** more resources to critical areas of need.

- **Partnerships:** development collaborations between governments, NGOs, and the private sector to support migrant integration.

1.4 Methodology of the research

This report, based on desk research, was drafted following the collection of information about the national priorities and needs related to soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for adult migrants in each partner country. Desk research, also known as secondary research or documentary research, is a type of research that relies on data that has already been collected and published by others. Its data sources include public libraries, websites, reports, surveys, journals, newspapers, magazines, books, podcasts, videos, and other sources. Desk research does not include gathering new information from primary sources such as interviews, observations, experiments, or surveys. Secondary research involves data assimilation from different sources, that

is, using available research materials instead of creating a new pool of data using primary research methods. It can also be categorized into qualitative and quantitative data.

- Qualitative data research refers to analyzing existing data (e.g. interviews, surveys, observations) to gain insights into people's behaviors, motivations, and opinions. This method delves deeper into the context and meaning behind data.

- Quantitative research refers to analyzing and interpreting numerical data to draw conclusions and make predictions. This involves quantifying patterns and trends to find relationships between variables.

Desk research in each partner country was based on a research protocol employing the following data collection methods related to the study topic: literature review, policy analysis, case studies, and statistical analysis.

1.4.1 Data sources

In order to meet the needs desk research described in the protocol, it was necessary to include the collection and analysis of secondary quantitative and/or qualitative data from various sources, such as:

- **National Reports and Statistical Data:** Official statistics, policies, and programs related to migrant integration and skills development.
- **Academic and Scholarly Articles:** Publications in journals or/and Libraries regarding the situation in partners' countries offered insights into theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on the soft skills and cultural needs of migrants.
- **International Organizations' Reports and databases:** Publications from international organizations such as the EU, UNHCR, IOM, OECD, and Council of Europe hold data or other information per country providing a broader context and comparative data.
- **NGO Documents:** Reports and case studies from NGOs highlighting grassroots-level initiatives and challenges.
- **Media Reports:** News articles offering real-time updates and highlighting public discourse on migration issues.
- **Programs Evaluations:** Assessments and evaluations of existing mentorship programs for migrants, focusing on soft skills and cultural integration.

1.4.2 Selection Criteria

In conducting desk research on the topic of soft skills and cultural awareness demanded by migrants and by the host country, it was essential to establish clear selection criteria to ensure that collected information is relevant, reliable, and comprehensive. Research teams in the five partner countries were requested to take into account the following criteria:

➢ **Relevance**

Alignment with Study Objectives: Ensure the sources directly address soft skills and cultural awareness in the context of migration.

Geographic Focus: Prioritize studies and reports that focus on your country

Temporal Relevance: For the need of this research, it would be advisable to concentrate primarily on data from the last five-year period (2019-2024) to ensure the information reflects the current demands and trends.

➢ **Source Credibility**

Authoritative Sources: Look for information from reputable organizations, such as government agencies, academic institutions, and recognized NGOs.

Peer-Reviewed Journals: Prioritize studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals for reliability.

Expert Authors: Consider the qualifications and expertise of the authors in the fields of migration, cultural studies, and employment.

➢ **Comprehensiveness**

Coverage of Key Aspects: Ensure the sources cover both soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving), and cultural awareness (e.g., understanding cultural norms, language proficiency).

Diverse Perspectives: Include a variety of perspectives from different stakeholders, including migrants, employers, policymakers, and social scientists.

➢ **Methodological Rigor**

Robust Methodologies: Prefer studies with clear, transparent, and scientifically sound methodologies.

➢ **Accessibility**

Public Access: Prioritize sources that are publicly accessible or available through institutional access.

Language: Ensure the sources are in a language you can read and understand, or have reliable translations available.

➢ **Specific Content Areas**

Soft Skills Demands by Migrants: Look for information on the specific soft skills migrants need to succeed in the host country's job market.

Soft Skills Demands by Host Country: Research the soft skills that employers in the host country prioritize when hiring migrants.

Cultural Awareness Needs by Migrants: Investigate the aspects of cultural awareness that migrants need to integrate successfully into the host society.

Cultural Awareness Expectations by Host Country: Understand what cultural awareness competencies the host country expects from migrants.

Integration: the process by which soft skills and cultural awareness contribute to migrants becoming accepted into and become part of the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the host country.

Mentorship programs: Initiatives, projects, programs, or services currently implemented by governments, NGOs, or other organizations specifically designed to support adult migrants

National priorities: Suggested actions or strategies aimed at addressing identified gaps and improving the support systems for migrants

1.4.3 Data Collection Tools

Regarding desk research, it was important to document the data collection tools and the strategies/methods, which were used. This helped in maintaining the integrity of the research, but also provided a clear pathway for others to follow or critique the methodology. The guidelines agreed by the partners were the following:

- Keywords should include at least "soft skills", "cultural awareness", "mentorship programs", and "employment integration" regarding filters applied in academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR).
- Accessing online repositories and archives of relevant organizations.
- Using search engines to find pertinent news articles and reports.
- Reviewing bibliographies and references in collected documents to find additional sources.

1.5 Descriptive data modules

Creating data extraction templates for the protocol ensured that the information gathered during the research was systematic, consistent, and comprehensive. Below are the data extraction templates tailored for the protocol focusing on soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for adult migrants.

The subject areas for which information needed to be gathered are the following:

1. General Information Extraction Template

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
Source	Author(s), Year, Title, Journal/Publication	Full citation details for referencing
Type of Document	Academic Article, Report, Policy Document, etc.	Specify the type of document
Country of Origin	Country(ies) of study or focus	The country or region the study pertains to
Study Population	Description of the population studied	Specifics about the migrant group (age, gender, etc.)

Purpose of Study/Report	Objective of the study or document	The main aim or focus of the research

2. Soft Skills

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
Definition of Soft Skills	How soft skills are defined in the study	Note the specific skills highlighted
Identified Soft Skills	List of soft skills in demand	Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, etc.
Soft Skills Gaps	Identified gaps or deficiencies among migrants	Areas where migrants need further development
Training Programs Available	Description of available training programs	Focus on programs aimed at developing these skills
Program Effectiveness	Outcomes or effectiveness of training programs	Measured impact or success of programs
Barriers to Soft Skills Development	Challenges in developing soft skills	Language, cultural barriers, access to education
Recommendations	Suggested strategies for improvement	Suggestions for policy or program improvements

3. Cultural Awareness

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
Definition of Cultural Awareness	How cultural awareness is defined	Include key components like customs, language, norms
Cultural Awareness Programs	Description of programs focused on cultural integration	Include program objectives and methods
Effectiveness of Programs	Outcomes or effectiveness of cultural programs	Measured impact on integration
Barriers to Cultural Awareness	Challenges in fostering cultural awareness	Include both migrant and host community challenges
Migrant Experiences	Migrants' perceptions and experiences	How migrants perceive and experience cultural integration
Host Country Perceptions	Host community perceptions of migrants	Include any documented biases or support
Recommendations	Suggested strategies for improvement	Suggestions for enhancing cultural awareness

4. Mentorship Programs

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
Definition of Mentorship Programs	How mentorship is defined	Include details on mentor-mentee relationships
Program Description	Description of existing mentorship programs	Include program structure, duration, and activities
Target Population	Specific groups targeted by mentorship programs	E.g., newly arrived migrants, women, young adults
Program Effectiveness	Outcomes or effectiveness of mentorship programs	Impact on integration, employment, social networks

Barriers to Participation	Challenges in accessing or participating in programs	Include factors like awareness, resources, and eligibility
Success Stories	Documented cases of successful mentorship	Examples of positive outcomes
Recommendations	Suggested improvements or new program ideas	Include ideas for scaling or replicating successful models

5. Employment Integration

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
Definition of Employment Integration	How employment integration is defined	Include key elements like access to jobs, job retention
Barriers to Employment	Challenges in securing and retaining employment	E.g., language barriers, discrimination, lack of skills
Soft Skills Impact	Role of soft skills in employment outcomes	How soft skills influence job acquisition and performance
Cultural Awareness Impact	Role of cultural awareness in employment outcomes	How cultural understanding affects workplace integration
Mentorship Impact	Role of mentorship in employment outcomes	Document the contribution of mentorship to employment success
Employer Perspectives	Host country employer perspectives on migrant workers	Include any documented biases or supports
Recommendations	Strategies to improve employment integration	Suggestions for policy or program improvements

6. National Priorities

Category	Data to be Extracted	Description/Notes
National Integration Policies	Description of national policies on migrant integration	Focus on soft skills, cultural awareness, and employment
Priority Skills for Migrants	Skills prioritized by the host country	Include soft skills and other competencies
Policy Gaps	Identified gaps in national integration strategies	Areas needing improvement or further development
Government Initiatives	Description of government initiatives and programs	Include any special programs for migrants
Stakeholder Involvement	Role of different stakeholders in policy formation	Include NGOs, community groups, employers
Recommendations	Suggested policy or program improvements	Ideas to align national priorities with migrant needs

1.6 Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis, used for this report, is a fundamental aspect of data analysis that focuses on summarizing and interpreting the characteristics of a dataset. It provides a clear overview of the data by employing various statistical techniques to describe its main features. This type of analysis is essential for understanding the underlying patterns and trends within the data, making it a critical first step in any data-driven decision-making process (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

It encompasses several key components, including central tendency measures, variability, and data visualization techniques. Measures of central tendency, such as mean, median, and mode, help to identify the central point around which the data clusters (Doyle L et al., 2020). Measures of variability, including range, variance, and standard deviation, provide insights into the dispersion of the data points. These components offer a comprehensive view of the dataset's characteristics (Nisk, T.G., 2007).

Descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon. It can answer *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how questions* but not *why* questions. A descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables. It is an appropriate choice when the research aim is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, patterns, and categories (Carter and Littler, 2007).

1.7 Ethical Considerations

While the fundamental ethical issues related to secondary use of research data remain the same, they have become more pressing with the advent of new technologies. Data sharing, compiling, and storage have become much faster and easier. If the data is freely available on the Internet, books, or other public forums, permission for further use and analysis is implied. However, the ownership of the original data must be acknowledged. If the research is part of another research project and the data is not freely available, except to the original research team, explicit, written permission for the use of the data. However, there are certain other issues about the data that is considered revised for secondary analysis. The data obtained should be adequate, and relevant but not excessive.

In secondary data analysis, the original data are not collected to answer the present research question. Thus the data should be evaluated for certain criteria such as the methodology of data collection, accuracy, period of data collection, purpose for which it was collected, and the content of the data. It shall be kept for no longer than is necessary for that purpose. Therefore, research teams in the five partner were requested to be aware of ensuring the use of credible and reliable sources to maintain the integrity of the research, respect intellectual property rights by properly citing all sources, and being mindful of potential biases in sources and striving for a balanced perspective (Emmanuel, et al, 2000).

1.8 Quality Assurance

Research teams for the five partner countries coordinated their efforts to ensure quality in desk research by ensuring the accuracy, reliability and validity of information collected from secondary sources, such as academic journals, books, online databases and websites. The process included several key steps:

a. Source Evaluation:

Credibility: The author's qualifications, the publication's reputation, and the date of publication were assessed.

Relevance: The information was ensured to be relevant to the research question or objective.

Accuracy: The facts were verified through cross-referencing with multiple reliable sources.

b. Data Collection Methods:

Descriptive Approach: Findings related to data collection tools and selection criteria were collected.

Documentation: Detailed records of search strategies, keywords used, and sources consulted were kept.

c. Data Analysis:

Descriptive Analysis: The main findings were summarized and presented, considering potential biases and limitations of the sources.

Consistency: Consistency and coherence in the data collected from different sources were checked.

d. Ethical Considerations:

Proper Citation: All sources were correctly cited to avoid plagiarism.

Transparency: The methodologies and limitations of the research were transparently reported.

e. Review and Verification:

Peer Review: Where possible, the research was reviewed by colleagues or experts in the field.

Reassessment: The collected data were periodically reassessed to incorporate new information and perspectives (Fink, 2019).

2: Migration background of the five countries and methodology

2.1 Migration Background

This chapter offers an overview of the five countries' (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain) migration history, current situation and migration policy.

Denmark

Denmark's migration history is shaped by shifts in global migration trends and domestic policies. Historically, Denmark was a homogenous society with limited immigration until the mid-20th century. After World War II, labor shortages led to an influx of migrant workers from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Yugoslavia. This marked the beginning of a multicultural shift. During the late 20th century, migration patterns changed with an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers from conflict zones, such as Vietnam, Somalia, and the Middle East. In recent decades, EU freedom of movement policies and global migration dynamics have further diversified Denmark's population. Refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine have joined economic migrants from Eastern Europe and beyond.

As of 2024, the top five countries of origin of EU citizens and third country nationals in Denmark are Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Germany and Syria. Approximately 49,000 Polish citizens reside in Denmark, primarily for employment opportunities, especially after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. Around 41,000 Ukrainian refugees have settled in Denmark, with a significant influx following the 2022 Russian invasion, leading many to seek protection. In addition, approximately 40,000 Romanian immigrants are in Denmark, attracted by better economic prospects within the EU framework. About 34,000 German citizens also reside in Denmark, often due to geographical proximity and economic opportunities. Approximately 33,000 Syrian immigrants have arrived, primarily as refugees escaping the civil war that began in 2011.

The total number of migrants as of 2023 was 810,000, comprising approximately 13.8% of Denmark's total population (Statistics Denmark). Around 51% were women (413,000) and 49% men (397,000). Among them, the estimated number of immigrants was approximately 700,000 and of refugees 60,000, primarily from Syria and Eritrea (UNHCR). The number of asylum applications was approximately 2,000. Undocumented migrants, immigrant workers or rejected asylum seekers, present in Denmark were estimated from 5,000 to 10,000. The above statistics exclude minors.

Over the past five years, from 2019 until 2024, Denmark has implemented strict migration policies aimed at controlling immigration and enhancing integration. Restrictive asylum policies have tightened asylum criteria and limited family reunifications, aiming to reduce the number of asylum seekers. Regarding integration, the government emphasizes Danish language proficiency and cultural assimilation, requiring participation in language courses and civic orientation programs. Employment policies encourage migrants to enter the labor market swiftly, with some social benefits contingent upon employment or active job seeking. Concerning mentorship initiatives, programs have been established to assist migrants in navigating the Danish labor market and society, though their reach and effectiveness vary. These policies reflect Denmark's approach to balancing immigration control with integration efforts, often sparking debates on their humanitarian implications.

Germany

Germany's migration history is marked by a series of significant waves shaped by political, economic, and social transformations. The mid-20th century saw a major influx of "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) from Southern Europe, Turkey, and North Africa during the post-World War II economic boom. The recruitment agreements, beginning in the 1950s and peaking in the 1960s, brought millions of foreign workers to fuel Germany's rapid industrial growth. Although these programs were intended to provide temporary labor, many migrants settled permanently, contributing to Germany's evolving demographic and cultural landscape. By the 1980s, family reunifications further increased the migrant population, particularly from Turkey, which remains one of the largest migrant groups in Germany today. In 1990s, Germany has also become a key destination for refugees and asylum seekers due to its humanitarian policies and geographical location within Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant influx of migrants from Eastern Europe. More recently, the European migrant crisis of 2015 marked a pivotal moment, with over 1 million refugees arriving, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Between 2019 – 2024, Germany received migrants primarily from Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, and the Western Balkans during this period. Syrians constituted one of the largest groups, with around 1.2 million residing in Germany by 2024, many of whom fled civil war and instability in their home country. Afghan migrants, estimated at 375,000 by 2024, arrived due to ongoing conflict and deteriorating security following the Taliban's resurgence in 2021.

Turkey remained a significant source of migrants, rooted in Germany's historical guest-worker programs initiated in the 1960s. By 2024, over 2.8 million individuals of Turkish origin lived in Germany. Additionally, labor migrants from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria took advantage of free movement within the EU, filling gaps in industries such as construction, agriculture, and healthcare.

Between 2019 and 2024, Germany has experienced notable migration trends influenced by its policies, global crises, and economic factors. Between 2019 and 2024, male migrants consistently outnumbered females among applicants for asylum in Germany. In 2023, for example, 71.5% of applicants were male, and 28.5% were female. Among children, 31.5% of applicants were minors, including 4.6% who were unaccompanied (UNHCR, n.d.). The country received over 1.3 million refugees and asylum seekers during this period, largely driven by conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. By 2023, asylum applicants included 235,000 individuals seeking protection, with significant numbers gaining refugee status or subsidiary protection (Destatis, n.d.). These decisions reflected a robust asylum framework accommodating humanitarian needs. Germany remains one of the top destinations for asylum seekers in Europe. In 2023 alone, the country processed over 225,000 first-time applications. These figures represent a diverse range of migrants, including families fleeing war zones and individuals seeking political asylum (UNHCR, n.d.). While exact numbers for irregular migration are challenging to quantify, enforcement and monitoring efforts reveal a growing trend of individuals entering Germany without formal documentation, particularly through Balkan and Mediterranean routes. The federal government has worked to balance border enforcement with humanitarian obligations, contributing to regional stability (UNHCR, n.d.). These figures underscore Germany's continued role as a leader in migration

management within Europe. Comprehensive policies have aimed to support integration while addressing demographic needs, ensuring economic benefits and fostering humanitarian protection. For more detailed numbers and context, references from BAMF and UNHCR provide thorough insights.

Between 2019 and 2024, Germany implemented a series of significant migration policies aimed at addressing labor shortages, enhancing integration, and modernizing its immigration framework. Key policies enacted during this period include:

    a)   Skilled Immigration Act (Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz)

Introduced in 2020, this act streamlined the immigration process for skilled workers from non-EU countries. It expanded opportunities for those with vocational training and professional experience, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and making it easier for employers to hire international talent. Changes in 2023 further enhanced flexibility, allowing skilled workers to work in Germany while their qualifications were recognized, and introduced lower salary thresholds for high-demand occupations under the EU Blue Card program.

    b)   Opportunity Card

In 2024, Germany adopted a points-based immigration system known as the "Opportunity Card". It allowed foreign professionals to come to Germany for up to one year to search for employment. Criteria included qualifications, language proficiency, and financial independence, signaling a shift towards a merit-based migration model.

    c)   Family Reunification Policies

Reforms during this period also made family reunification more accessible. Skilled workers were no longer required to demonstrate sufficient living space for their dependents, and they could bring close relatives under less restrictive conditions. These changes aimed to make Germany a more attractive destination for talent by promoting family-friendly migration.

    d)   Western Balkans Regulation

Extended and expanded in 2023, this regulation allowed up to 50,000 workers annually from Western Balkan countries to fill labor shortages in industries such as construction and healthcare. This policy also provided streamlined processes for these applicants.

    e)   Citizenship Reforms

As of 2024, Germany began reforming its citizenship laws, including the option for dual citizenship and reduced residency requirements for naturalization. This initiative is part of broader efforts to encourage long-term integration and retention of migrants.

Greece

Until the latter half of the 20th century, Greece was mostly a country of emigration rather than immigration. In the 1920s and 1930s ethnically Greek populations from Turkey (including 1.4 million refugees from Asia Minor in 1923), Russia and Balkan countries resettled to Greece (Ceccorulli et al., 2021). After the Second World War and the 1970s, approximately one million Greek citizens emigrated to western countries, mostly Germany, United States of America, Australia and Canada (Kasimis, 2012). At the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, however, Greece

started hosting increasing numbers of migrants from east European countries and former Soviet republics following the collapse of communist regimes, mostly from Albania (Black, 1994; Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2007). Armed conflicts and political instability in Asia, Africa and the Middle East resulted in an increase of arrivals in the 2000s (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012). While most of those migrants considered Greece as a transit rather than destination country, the establishment of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the implementation of Dublin Regulation prevented many from moving onwards to other EU countries, despite the shortcomings of the Greek asylum system (Sitaropoulos, 2000). The period from 2015 to 2016 marked a radical change when approximately one million of migrants from the Middle East, the conflict zones of Asia, and Africa arrived on the Greek islands through Turkey, resulting in the so-called *refugee crisis* (Gilbert, 2015). The overwhelming majority of applicants for international protection moved to Western and Northern Europe through the *Balkan route*.

According to the last population census of 2021, 7% of the total population of Greece are foreign nationals. Most permanent residents are Albanians numbering 374,900 residents, far surpassing the Bulgarian and Pakistani residents of the country, numbering about 35,000 in each ethnic community. Next in place were Romanians, Georgians, Bangladeshis, Ukrainians and Afghans. The census shows a 16% decrease in the foreign population compared to 2011. According to the data, the outflows concern people with long residence in the country, mainly Albanians. According to the most recent data of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (September 2024), 848,571 third country nationals (including minors) were legally and permanently present in Greece: 1) 482,982 third-country nationals, 2) 256,058 EU citizens and expatriates of Greek ethnic origin, 3) 77,750 recognized refugees and 4) 31,781 beneficiaries of temporary protection (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2024).

The first category of migrants (482,982 third-country nationals, 256.923 men and 226.059 women) were granted residence permits for reasons of employment, family reunification, studies and other reasons. The category "other" types of residence permit include various types of permits, including the permanent residence permit of an investor (golden visa), as well as financially independent individuals. This category also includes long-term residence statuses, such as residence permits for second generation and long-term residents, as well as residence permits for vulnerable groups of third-country nationals (humanitarian grounds) and exceptional grounds. The 10 top countries of origin are Albania, China, Pakistan, Georgia, Bangladesh, Russia, Ukraine, Egypt, India and Philippines. The second category (256,058 EU citizens and expatriates of Greek ethnic origin) includes documents granted to citizens of Albania, ex-USSR and Turkey (expatriates of Greek ethnic origin) and EU countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Czech Republic ant other).

The two latter categories, recognized refugees and beneficiaries of temporary protection, concern forcibly displaced populations. The top five countries of origin of recognized refugees are Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Somalia. Countries of origin of beneficiaries of temporary protection are not specified but it is obviously Ukraine because the relevant EU Directive has not been implemented for mass influxes from other countries. Furthermore, the Asylum Service registered 57,891 initial applications and 6,321 subsequent applications in 2023 mainly from asylum seekers from Syria (21.8%), Afghanistan (14.8%), Palestine (10.5%), Iraq (10.1%) and Pakistan (6.3%) (ECRE, 2024).

The National Strategy for Integration published by the Ministry of Migration Policy in 2019, refers to soft-skills, cultural awareness and mentorship programs regarding the following goals:

a)   Socialization and integration into the work environment (learning terminology related to labor law and conditions in the work environment, acquiring communication skills in the workplace, etc.)

b)   Mentoring, training and apprenticeship/internship program to facilitate access to the labor market for beneficiaries of international protection

c)   Interactive and experiential actions to strengthen the interaction between migrants, applicants and beneficiaries of international protection and the host society. The action seeks to highlight the points of convergence of different cultures in the fields of sports and art through experiential and informative activities, targeted at both groups (host society and migrants, applicants and beneficiaries of international protection).

The National Integration Strategy published by the Ministry of Migration & Asylum in 2022, refers to cultural awareness and mentorship programs regarding the following actions:

a)   Raising awareness on issues of religious tolerance and respect for all religions as well as the public space, by organizing workshops and seminars.

b)   Participation of refugees to the training of other refugees depending on the ongoing programs and their professional profile.

Italy

Italy, due to its geographic position in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, has always been a crossroads for migration flows. Historically, since the Roman era, it has been a land of transit and a meeting for different cultures. Over the centuries, migratory flows from Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe have traversed Italian territory, reflecting different dynamics (Braudel, 2002). Since the 1990s, migrations from North Africa and the Balkans have surged, leading Italy to face an increasing influx of refugees and economic migrants, particularly crossing the sea. The flow intensified in the 2000s, especially during the migration crisis that followed the Arab Spring in 2011 (Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, 2012): Between 2015 and 2016, over 330,000 migrants arrived in Italy—more than 153,000 in 2015 (including over 16,000 minors) and over 181,000 in 2016 (Sole24Ore, 2016; Save the Children Italia). Even with fluctuations in numerical terms, migration flows have remained constant over time, and Italy, as well as other countries positioned on the external borders of the EU, faces daily challenges in managing these flows, together with reception, and integration policies. Italy's response has involved a combination of regulatory measures and policies shaped by European legislation, particularly the Dublin Regulation, which aims at determining which EU Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application (typically the country of first entry). This has put significant pressure on the national reception and integration system, which still operates by considering the timeframes related to the completion of the procedure for recognizing refugee status/international protection beneficiaries.

The migration management – of regular and irregular flows - and the integration of migrants is governed by a series of instruments that combine national laws, European regulations and directives, and local policies. These legal frameworks are essential for regulating entry, stay, and

measures to protect the rights of migrants (Camera dei Deputati, 2024). There are also integration policies and programs that, while not strictly regulatory, have a significant impact on the social and economic inclusion of migrants. Among these instruments, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). This financial instrument was established with EU Regulation 516/2014 (European Union, 2014) with the aim of promoting the integrated and participatory management of migratory flows considering all aspects that belong to the phenomenon (therefore asylum, integration and repatriation).

This analysis focuses on migrants from non-European countries; institutional reports in recent years (2019-2024) have indicated that the largest non-EU communities are those originating from Morocco, Albania, Ukraine, China, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, the Philippines, Pakistan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Nigeria, Tunisia, Peru, and Ecuador (data provided by the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies and ISTAT) (Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 2020). For irregular migration flows, particularly arrivals by sea, the Ministry of the Interior's data, updated as of November 15, 2024, highlights the declared nationalities of migrants disembarking in Italy from January 1 to November 15, 2024. The primary countries of origin include Bangladesh, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, Guinea, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Mali, and Gambia (Immigration Statistical Dashboard, 2024). The diversity in migrants' countries of origin paints a highly heterogeneous picture of migration in Italy, reflecting a complex interplay of factors driving movement. Generally, migrants leave their home countries in search of greater security, improved economic opportunities, and a more stable future. Global causes of displacement include conflict, violence, human rights violation, political and religious persecution, climate change, and poverty. These factors are also significant drivers of irregular migration flows. It should also be taken into consideration that Italy is both a country of destination and a key transit country. Analyzing the data collected for this report, the number of foreigners legally residing in Italy, including EU citizens, remained relatively stable between 2019 and 2023. The total foreign population was approximately 5,300,000 in 2019, saw a decrease of about 250,000 individuals between 2020 and 2022, and recovered by 2023, returning to around 5,300,000 (for 2019 data: IDOS, 2020; for 2020 data: IDOS, 2021; for 2021 data: ISTAT, 2022; for 2022 data: Fondazione Migrantes, 2023; for 2023 data: Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 2024).

Focusing specifically on non-European nationals legally residing in the country, these are the numbers of reference: in 2019, there were 3,615,826 individuals (ISTAT, 2020), which decreased to 3,373,876 in 2020 (IDOS, 2021), before rising again to 3,561,540 in 2021 (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2023) and 3,727,706 in 2022 (ISTAT, 2023); by 2023, up to 3,600,000 (ISTAT, 2024). It is important to note that these data also include minors. Regarding the percentage of men and women among the total number of non-European foreigners legally residing in Italy, the data has fluctuated with minimal variations, always maintaining a limited percentage gap. According to ISTAT, in 2023, 49.2% were women, and 19.5% were minors (with an average age of 36 years) (ISTAT, 2024). By the end of 2023, there were 298,296 beneficiaries of international protection (Centro Astalli, n.d.), 135,815 asylum seekers (Osservatorio permanente sui rifugiati, 2024), and 458,000 irregular migrants in Italy (ISMU, 2024). For data on asylum applications between 2019 and 2022, refer to the European Parliament's "Asylum and Migration Infographic in the EU." (EU Parliament, n.d.) As of October 2024, there were 19,215 unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs) in Italy, a decrease from December 2023, when the number of UAMs was over 23,000 (Con i bambini, 2024). The total number of migrants who landed in Italy in 2024, as of November 15, 2024, was 59,511, nearly 90,000 fewer compared to the same period in 2022 (Ministry of the Interior, Immigration Statistic Dashboard, November 2024).

The latest Dossier Statistico Immigrazione by IDOS (with 2023 data), specifically for the reception and integration system (RETESAI), indicates the number of beneficiaries received (54,512) and their nationalities (92.3% of beneficiaries come from 20 countries). The top ten countries are Nigeria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ukraine, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Gambia, and Somalia. The Dossier also highlights the various statuses granted, in order of number: asylum seekers, refugees, minors' permits, special protection, subsidiary protection, administrative continuation, temporary protection, family-related permits, and special cases (IDOS, 2024, p. 158).

Spain

The history of migration in Spain is a tale of social, economic and cultural transformations that reflects changes in global and national dynamics over the centuries. This phenomenon has been influenced by factors such as economic conditions, political conflicts and the search for better opportunities, placing Spain both as a sending and receiving country of migrants. Since the second half of the 20th century, Spain has gone from being a sending country to a receiving country. Since the 1990s and early 2000s, Spain has experienced a significant increase in immigration, mainly from Latin America (Ecuador, Colombia, Peru), North Africa (Morocco, Algeria) and Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria). With the economic crisis of 2008, immigration temporarily decreased due to unemployment, but a steady flow of refugees and economic migrants continued. In recent decades, Spain has become one of the main gateways to Europe for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, via the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands. With an ageing population and an economy dependent on certain labour sectors, Spain still needs migrants to sustain its economic model. At the same time, migration policies and integration strategies will be essential to guarantee peaceful and fair coexistence.

The main nationalities of immigrants in Spain were Colombian, Moroccan and Venezuelan. The Community of Madrid (0.44%), the autonomous city of Melilla (0.40%) and the Valencian Community (0.36%) experienced the largest population increases. The main reasons for moving to Spain include the search for employment, family reunification, fleeing situations of conflict or economic crisis (such as in Venezuela), and the attractiveness of Spain as an educational and tourist destination. In addition, cultural and linguistic connections with Latin American countries reinforce the preference for Spain as a place of residence.

Population statistics in Spain for the first quarter of 2024 establish that Spain's population increased by 82,346 people during the first quarter of 2024 and stood at 48,692,804 inhabitants as of April 1, 2024. If we consider all people born abroad as migrants, the total number of migrants in Spain as of April 1, 2024, would be 8,915,831. If we only consider people with foreign nationality, the total number would be 6,581,028 (Statistics Spain, 2024). The registered foreign population has increased more than tenfold in the last 40 years, although there are no significant differences between the percentage of female and male growth. In 2021, they represented 15.31% of the total Spanish population and, of them, 51.49% were women (Ministry of Equality, 2023) [A migrant is a person in the household who was born abroad, is over 15 years old and has been living in Spain (or intends to do so) for 1 year or more. (This does not include Spaniards by birth born outside of Spain who were under 2 years old in the year of arrival in Spain]. 2.363.172 of migrants were males and 2.163.350 females. In 2023 140.652 asylum applications had been submitted. 5.311 were granted refugee status and 3.338 subsidiary protection, while 26.545 applications were rejected

and 22.615 were accepted for humanitarian reasons. Regarding refugee status, asylum seekers from Congo and Sudan had a recognition rate of 100%, Mali 98%, Somalia and Ukraine 96%. Regarding subsidiary protection, applicants from Congo and Sudan had a recognition rate of 100%, Mali 98%, Venezuela 97% and Somalia 96%. The total number of migrants arriving in Spain by sea and land in 2024 were 8067, which means 6775 more persons compared to 2023. The total number of migrants who arrived in Spain by the sea were 7,974, compared to 1,205 the previous year. Migrants arriving in the Canary Islands by sea were 7.270 in 2024, compared to 566 the previous year [Provisional accumulated data from January 1 to January 31, 2024 compared with the same period in 2023. National Migration Policy (2019–2024) (Home Office)].

2.2 Methodology of the report

As already mentioned, the methodology adopted for this report is based on desk research that aims to collect detailed information to identify, present and evaluate findings on employment integration of adult migrants and refugees in 5 countries of the European Union (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain). These findings include statistical data about each country's migration background and focus on soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for facilitating employment integration with a view to highlight national priorities, needs and best practices.

The research was based on the collection of secondary data, using keywords and applying filters to open access sources and academic databases per country, which are available to the public (Google Scholar, JSTOR, etc.), so that the research is as comprehensive and accurate as possible. The keywords searched in each of the countries in the research framework and related to migrants and refugees were: historical and statistical data, soft skills, cultural awareness, mentoring programs, employment integration, difficulties and gaps, national priorities and recommendations etc., with the a temporal criterion including the time period from 2019 to 2024.

The main data types included government reports, academic articles and studies, publications of international, national and non-governmental organizations and program evaluations in each country. This methodological approach ensures that the findings are based on existing, reliable evidence, while avoiding duplication of primary research efforts.

A major limitation of the research is that the methodology relied heavily on secondary data, which may not fully capture the real situation experienced by migrants and refugees or the informal challenges in their integration into new environments. This is especially true in the case of countries where the findings were limited to the available data from national reports and official migration policies.

The research process included a review of official reports and statistical data at the national level to create a fundamental understanding of the demographics and integration policies of migrants and refugees. In parallel, academic literature and scientific articles were reviewed to incorporate frameworks and empirical findings into the analysis. This step allowed to each partner for the effort to document and deepen the analysis and understanding of the issues under consideration, such as the role of soft skills and cultural awareness in promoting integration, as well as the effectiveness of mentoring programs in addressing the challenges of migrants and refugees to each

country. These sources provided comparative information highlighting both best practices and existing difficulties and gaps, and focused on areas for improvement.

HMU team summarized the findings of the five research teams for Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain regarding national priorities and needs related to soft skills, cultural awareness, and mentorship programs for adult migrants and refugees.

3: Research results

This chapter presents the results of the desk research conducted in the five countries. The sources for each subchapter are available in different templates listed in Annex. Numbers cited in parenthesis refer to sources that can be found in the General Information Template regarding each country.

3.1 General Information

This subchapter presents the total of sources including articles, reports, or other materials consulted for each country. They provide information mostly for the time period from 2019 until 2024. Below are presented the type of documents used for each country, their target groups (age, gender, etc.) and their scope.

The **Danish** study drew on seven credible sources: two policy frameworks and five programs, including governmental policies, mentorship programs, cultural initiatives, and public-private partnerships. The research began with statistics at national-level and policy documents to establish a baseline understanding of integration frameworks. Academic and empirical studies helped analyze the impact of soft skills and cultural awareness, while reports from actors like the European Commission, IOM, and UNHCR provided a broader international context and highlighted best practices. Evaluations from NGOs and local programs offered real-world insights into initiatives like the Integration Basic Education (IGU) and KVINFO's Mentor Network. Media sources added current perspectives on public discourse and societal attitudes toward migrants. All findings were synthesized into a clear narrative outlining key integration challenges and opportunities. The study concluded with recommendations for strengthening integration efforts, emphasizing the importance of inclusive policies, cultural competence, and mentorship in supporting successful migrant integration in Denmark. The target groups of these sources included adult migrants, refugees, mainly aged 18–50, and women facing gender-based barriers.

The **German** study analyzed seven documents: 1 policy assessment report and 6 programs, including mainly policy and training framework, a program guide, as well as Implementation reports, all of them focused in Germany in order to address three main goals: evaluating migration policies, identifying key integration skills, and assessing the role of mentorship. Key legislative measures like the Skilled Immigration Act (2020) and Opportunity Card (2024) were analyzed alongside reports from the European Commission and OECD to understand policy impacts. Integration skills such as language proficiency, adaptability, and problem-solving were identified through academic and NGO sources, including Diakonie and Caritas. Training programs like Deutsch für den Beruf were assessed regarding effectiveness. Cultural awareness efforts were examined through EU reports and German integration course evaluations. Mentorship initiatives, such as

Start with a Friend and Job Coaches for Migrants were reviewed to evaluate their impact on employment and social inclusion. The study synthesized data from governmental, academic, and NGO sources to highlight how policy, skills training, and mentorship work together to overcome integration challenges in Germany. The targeted groups were mostly adult immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Regarding **Greece**, a total of 41 sources were reviewed, including academic articles (15), governmental and NGOs surveys (2), reports (12), programs and projects (9), and policy documents (3). Most of those focused exclusively on Greece, while 7 programs were implemented in cooperation also in other EU countries through partnerships. A wide range of material from Greek and international bibliography relevant to Greece was utilized, such as integration policies, programs and good practices, research studies on the views of local societies and migrants themselves regarding the difficulties and gaps, as well as the strengths of their social integration. The target groups included adult migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (28), migrants women with no prior work experience in Greece (1), newly arrived migrants and local communities (1), newly arrived and long-term resident migrants (1), beneficiaries of international protection (2), migrants, professionals and local community members (6), local governments, employers, and NGOs (1), policymakers, professionals and practitioners from the media, NGOs and government at all levels (activists, experts and civil society representatives) together with experts and academics (1).

The **Italian** study was based on six available documents: online platform (1), manual (1) and reports based on programs and pilot projects (4). Their objective was to outline a structure considering the heterogeneity of the actors involved and the available documentation (online platforms, programs, pilot projects, studies, and reports), with a focus on Italy. This study relied on open-access secondary sources —including institutional reports, NGO materials, and research center publications— to analyze migrant integration in Italy. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the approach focused on identifying key challenges and opportunities within the integration system. Central to the analysis was the role of soft skills, viewed as essential for social, cultural, and workplace integration despite being informally acquired and hard to measure. This framework drew on Ager and Strang's (2008) model of integration. To construct a national overview, the study reviewed documents from the Italian Ministry of the Interior's FAMI Platform and Repertory (2014–2020), as well as regional initiatives like Emilia-Romagna's "Plurale, Equa, Inclusiva" program (2022–2024). Practical guidance from IOM's Manuale di Progettazione supported analysis of migrant-led integration efforts. Additional insights came from ISMU's "DimiCome" project on workplace inclusion, UNHCR's "Welcome" initiative for refugee employment, and Refugees Welcome Italia's mentoring programs for young migrants. The target groups were migrants, with a specific focus on beneficiaries of international protection and particularly vulnerable groups.

Finally, regarding **Spain**, ten credible sources were found and reviewed governmental, international organizations and NGO's reports (6), academic papers (3), and program evaluation (1). An initial review of national statistics and policy documents from bodies such as the National Statistics Institute (INE) and the Permanent Immigration Observatory (OPI) helped understanding the migrant demographics and Spain's integration policies. Academic studies framed key concepts, particularly regarding the role of interpersonal skills and cultural awareness in integration processes. Reports from international organizations—including the EU and IOM—offered broader

context, while NGO and local program evaluations provided practical insights into implementation and impact. These sources also identified best practices and highlighted persistent structural barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion. The findings underscored the importance of soft skills and cultural understanding in overcoming social barriers, as well as the effectiveness of mentoring programs in supporting migrants' adaptation. Together, these insights led to recommendations for enhancing Spain's integration strategies. The target groups were migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, vulnerable population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, migrants residing in the Canary Islands, LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees.

3.2 Information for Soft Skills

In **Denmark**, soft skills are increasingly recognized as essential for the successful integration of migrants into both the labor market and broader society. While technical competencies and language proficiency remain important, it is often the soft skills—such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, and emotional intelligence—that determine whether migrants can truly thrive in their new environment. Communication skills, particularly fluency in Danish, are viewed as fundamental. Without a strong command of the language, migrants struggle not only to access employment opportunities but also to form meaningful social connections.

Programs like the *Mentoring Program for Migrants* (1) are designed to address this by helping newcomers develop the ability to express themselves clearly and confidently in both professional and everyday contexts. Workplace success in Denmark increasingly depends on interpersonal skills. Teamwork, collaboration, and problem-solving are seen as vital in a work culture that values consensus, shared responsibility, and open dialogue. The *IGU educational program* (2) integrates these competencies into its curriculum, helping migrants understand and adapt to the unwritten norms and expectations of Danish workplaces. The *Integration Act* (2), although focused on language acquisition and civic education, contributes indirectly to the development of soft skills by fostering intercultural understanding and promoting civic responsibility. This holistic approach supports migrants in becoming active and engaged members of Danish society. One of the notable initiatives, *Culture Code* (5), targets the invisible social rules that often pose challenges for newcomers. Through training and workshops, it promotes trust-building and interpersonal adaptability—skills critical for social and professional inclusion. Similarly, *KVINFO's programs* (7), which focus on immigrant women, emphasize leadership, confidence-building, and networking, recognizing the unique barriers faced by women in integration processes.

Despite the availability of these programs, gaps remain. Migrants with limited formal education or prior work experience may find it especially difficult to acquire and apply soft skills. These challenges can lead to long-term disadvantages, including unemployment, underemployment, and social isolation. Evidence from Denmark shows that when soft skills are actively supported through targeted initiatives, participants demonstrate improved employment outcomes, increased community involvement, and greater self-confidence. Therefore, it is essential that future integration strategies in Denmark place equal importance on soft skills development alongside language and vocational training. To foster inclusive growth and ensure that all individuals—regardless of background—can contribute meaningfully to Danish society, policy-makers and organizations must continue investing in programs that support not only what migrants *know*, but also how they *interact*, *adapt*, and *engage*.

Regarding **Germany,** soft skills include communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and cultural competence (1), which are essential for migrants to navigate workplace expectations effectively. Many migrants struggle with professional communication, cultural differences in workplace behavior, and confidence in networking, leading to barriers in securing and maintaining employment (1, 2). Existing training programs often focus on language acquisition but neglect job-specific soft skills (2). Programs such as "Job Coaches for Migrants" offer mentoring, job application support, and cultural adaptation training, significantly improving job readiness (1). Additionally, Roma-focused vocational programs help develop self-confidence and basic literacy, although systemic discrimination and social exclusion hinder long-term success (3).

There are many programs designed to support migrant integration. Integration courses and vocational language programs (e.g., Deutsch für den Beruf) focus on improving language proficiency, which is essential for employment and social inclusion. "Job Coaches for Migrants" (1) offer mentoring, job application support, and cultural adaptation training, significantly improving job readiness. Additionally, Roma-focused vocational programs (3) aim to develop self-confidence and basic literacy, although systemic discrimination and social exclusion hinder long-term success. These programs are designed to address the soft skill gaps that migrants face in adapting to the labor market and society.

However, several challenges and gaps in migrant integration are observed in Germany. Despite progress, a 2023 study revealed that 50% of migrants struggle with German proficiency, limiting their job prospects, particularly in rural areas where adequate language training programs are lacking. Many migrants also face difficulties with professional communication, cultural differences in workplace behavior, and confidence in networking (1, 2), leading to barriers in securing and maintaining employment. While existing training programs primarily focus on language acquisition, they often neglect job-specific soft skills (2). Furthermore, systemic discrimination and social exclusion hinder the success of programs aimed at specific groups, such as the Roma community (3). These challenges highlight the need for broader institutional support to integrate soft skills into language courses and provide sector-specific training (2).

The recommendations focus on expanding mentoring opportunities (1), integrating soft skills into language courses (2), and offering job-specific training programs. Also increasing financial support for training and encouraging employer participation is suggested (2, 5). Additionally, addressing systemic discrimination and social exclusion is crucial for the success of marginalized groups, such as the Roma community (3).

Regarding **Greece**, the identified key soft skills for migrant integration include language proficiency, which is essential for independence in daily life, access to employment, and full participation in society (2). Effective communication, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities are also critical, helping migrants navigate local systems and integrate into workplaces (3). Skills such as decision-making, stress tolerance, and time management further enhance employability and workplace retention (7, 9). Importantly, intercultural competence allows migrants to understand and adapt to diverse work environments, which is increasingly necessary in multicultural societies (7).

Several programs address these needs in Greece. The Open Cultural Center (OCC) provides language courses that combine practical skills like CV preparation and IT training, along with cultural orientation to strengthen self-confidence and social inclusion (13). The HELIOS project

supports migrants with language learning, job counseling, and housing assistance, promoting their active participation in Greek society (20). Tools like the NADINE Soft Skills Test assess competencies across categories including interpersonal and organizational skills (3), while the SOSMIE program and the Worldplaces project focus on workplace readiness, especially for women, offering training in communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution (7, 9). Additionally, online resources such as the SKILL educational toolkit and initiatives by Caritas Hellas have made significant impacts, helping thousands of migrants gain employment skills and find jobs (14, 20).

Although migrants face multiple barriers, including language difficulties, prejudices, and racism, which create obstacles in both social and professional integration (3, 6). Moreover, economic disparities, coupled with temporary housing conditions and a lack of understanding of mental health challenges, further hinder their ability to settle and progress (3, 6). Additionally, there are notable gaps including the absence of culturally tailored assessment tools, limited employer training on migrant integration, and underutilization of EU funding opportunities to enhance training and support services (4, 7). Furthermore, there is a need for greater emphasis on mental health care and more stable housing solutions to ensure sustainable integration (4).

To improve the integration of immigrants, it is recommended to develop adapted assessment tools that reflect migrants' diverse backgrounds, enhance employer training programs, and make better use of EU funds to expand training initiatives. Increasing mental health support, conducting further cross-cultural research, and fostering cooperation between local and national authorities are also key tools for achieving more effective and inclusive integration strategies (3, 4, 7).

Regarding **Italy**, soft skills for successful integration include communication skills (such as intercultural dialogue and active listening), which facilitate cultural adaptation (1). Emotion-based communication (self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation) strengthens the management of emotions during social and cultural interactions (1). Adaptability and resilience remain critical for overcoming challenges and achieving effective social inclusion (1).

Many projects enhance the skills of vulnerable groups through participatory methods and autobiographical storytelling, fostering self-awareness and recognition of competencies (1, 3, 4) .In addition, the "Welcome-in-one-click" program helps refugees connect their skills with job opportunities and vocational training (5).

Key challenges include bureaucratic barriers, stereotypes, and inequalities, which hinder smooth integration (4). Developing and recognizing soft skills is also complex due to their close link with technical skills (4). There is a lack of integrated approaches that combine soft skills development with cultural awareness and socio-economic inclusion (1). Additionally, greater use of culturally sensitive methods and targeted support for vulnerable groups is needed (4, 1).

It is recommended to develop participatory projects that empower migrants and combine both soft and technical skills (1, 3), to strengthen vocational training programs and to promote culturally sensitive approaches, which are also considered critical (1, 4).

Regarding **Spain's** social and professional environments, communication skills, particularly proficiency in Spanish, are essential for migrants' integration. In regions with co-official languages such as Catalan, Galician, or Basque, learning these languages enhances migrants' opportunities for connection and belonging. Intercultural communication skills are crucial for effective communication across cultural boundaries. Adaptability helps migrants adjust to new cultural

environments, while conflict resolution skills are essential for addressing and resolving disagreements constructively within teams. Self-management and adaptability are also key in navigating constant change and overcoming challenges.

To address these challenges, various programs have been introduced to equip migrants with essential soft skills. Programs that combine soft skills training with psychological support have proven particularly effective. Mentoring programs play a key role in helping migrants, particularly young individuals, improve their social and communication skills and gain more confidence in their socio-cultural development. Language training and digital literacy initiatives are helping migrants access public services and perform administrative tasks, further supporting their integration.

Despite the success of these programs, several barriers to soft skills development remain. Economic instability forces many migrants to prioritize survival over skill development, making it difficult to commit to long-term training. Digital illiteracy also prevents full utilization of online education and job platforms, while discrimination in hiring practices limits professional development opportunities. Additionally, cultural misunderstandings and a lack of critical thinking skills contribute to social exclusion and hinder professional growth. There is a clear gap in the provision of integrated approaches that combine soft skills with cultural awareness and socio-economic inclusion. More use of culturally sensitive methodologies and specialized support for vulnerable groups is necessary to address these gaps effectively.

It is recommended to develop participatory projects that empower migrants by combining soft and technical skills. Strengthening vocational training programs and promoting culturally sensitive approaches are considered crucial. Increased use of mentoring initiatives and recognition of informal skills should be prioritized. Governments and NGOs should focus on investing in structured training programs, expanding access to digital resources, and promoting workplace inclusion to support long-term migrant integration.

Conclusions on soft skills

The integration of migrants and their successful participation in both the labor market and broader society is a complex process that is deeply influenced by the development of soft skills. While there are notable similarities in the soft skills emphasized across Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain, each country has unique challenges and strategies for migrant integration.

Across all five countries, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain, **key soft skills** such as *communication*, *adaptability*, *problem-solving,* and *teamwork* are identified as essential for migrant integration. In particular, *language proficiency* plays a critical role in enabling migrants to navigate social, cultural, and professional environments. Furthermore, *emotional intelligence*, including *self-awareness*, *resilience*, and *stress management*, is seen as crucial for coping with diverse and sometimes challenging situations. Many programs across these countries focus on *enhancing communication and social skills*, often combining language training with cultural orientation and civic understanding to foster both personal and professional growth. In all countries, mentoring programs also feature prominently, supporting migrants' **confidence** and *social integration*. Additionally, there is a common recognition of the importance of *intercultural communication*, which helps migrants understand and respect cultural differences, fostering better workplace dynamics and social cohesion.

Despite these shared priorities, each country faces distinct challenges and has tailored its **strategies** accordingly. **Denmark** emphasizes the development of leadership skills, particularly among migrant women, and stresses civic understanding alongside professional skills. It also highlights the need for gender-sensitive approaches, which is less prominent in other countries. **Germany** places a strong focus on the integration of migrants through language acquisition, but there is a noticeable gap in job-specific soft skills. Moreover, systemic discrimination, particularly against marginalized groups such as the Roma community, remains a significant barrier in Germany. **Greece** faces considerable challenges with economic disparities, temporary housing, and mental health issues. The gap in culturally tailored assessment tools and employer training programs is particularly notable in Greece, where the emphasis on migrant integration is still growing. **Italy** highlights the importance of emotion-based communication and self-regulation to help migrants manage intercultural interactions. The country's integration efforts also prioritize participatory projects that combine soft and technical skills, with a focus on empowering vulnerable migrant groups. Spain shares several challenges with the other countries, such as economic instability and digital illiteracy, which hinder long-term integration. However, **Spain** also places a unique emphasis on regional languages, like Catalan, Galician, and Basque, and includes these in integration programs to enhance migrant belonging in local communities.

Across the countries, **common barriers** include **limited language proficiency**, **lack of tailored programs for migrants** with diverse educational backgrounds, and **systemic discrimination** that hampers access to opportunities. Additionally, the challenge of **digital illiterac**y prevents many migrants from accessing online education and employment opportunities, while **economic instability** often forces migrants to focus on survival rather than skill development. Each country also faces **gaps in** their **integration strategies**. For example, Germany and Italy both lack integrated approaches that combine soft skills development with cultural awareness and socio-economic inclusion. Meanwhile, Greece and Spain face gaps in employer training and the underutilization of available EU funding for integration programs. Denmark highlights the lack of gender-sensitive approaches in integration efforts, specifically with regard to migrant women.

Across all five countries, **recommendations** for improving integration strategies include **expanding mentoring programs**, developing **more flexible and tailored training programs**, and **addressing systemic discrimination**. Additionally, integrating both soft skills and technical training into language courses is seen as essential to enhancing migrants' employability. Strengthening digital literacy programs and ensuring wider access to digital resources is recommended, particularly in Spain, Germany, and Greece. Gender-sensitive policies are especially highlighted in Denmark, while Italy emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive approaches and participatory methods for vulnerable groups.

In summary, while there are common soft skill requirements for migrant integration across Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain, each country has its own unique approach, challenges, and priorities in supporting migrants' successful integration into society and the labor market.

3.3 Information for Cultural Awareness

Research conducted in **Denmark** shows that cultural awareness is fundamental to successful integration and social cohesion, as evidenced by multiple programs reviewed. The role of soft skills

and cultural awareness in achieving employment integration cannot be overstated. Migrants who possess communication skills, teamwork abilities, and an understanding of Danish workplace norms are better positioned to succeed. Mentoring initiatives, such as the Mentoring Program for Migrants (1), directly incorporate intercultural communication training, ensuring that both mentors and mentees are equipped to understand and respect cultural differences. Similarly, IGU programs (2) integrate cultural orientation sessions to help migrants adapt to both formal workplace expectations and informal social norms.

The Immigrant Museum (4) plays a crucial educational role by showcasing Denmark's immigration history, fostering a sense of shared heritage and empathy between migrants and the local population. Culture Code workshops (5) provide practical, hands-on guidance about how to behave and interact within Danish society, covering topics such as punctuality, social etiquette, and civic behavior.

Participants in cultural awareness programs often report increased confidence, improved social interactions, and greater acceptance by host communities. However, barriers such as language difficulties, logistical challenges in accessing cultural programs, and persistent societal biases hinder full effectiveness. Migrants who do not fully grasp cultural expectations often experience exclusion or miscommunication, exacerbating social isolation. Expanding cultural education programs, increasing their accessibility, and fostering mutual cultural exchange between migrants and locals are crucial recommendations to strengthen social bonds and facilitate smoother integration.

Understanding Danish cultural norms, values, and social etiquette profoundly influences the success of integration efforts. Migrants have highlighted the need for comprehensive language and cultural orientation programs that extend beyond basic language acquisition to include insights into Danish societal expectations and workplace behavior. These programs are vital for bridging cultural gaps and enabling migrants to navigate community and professional interactions effectively. Employers, too, view cultural awareness as a critical factor, particularly for roles requiring client-facing responsibilities and seamless workplace collaboration.

Findings from research conducted in **Germany** prove that cultural awareness training is essential for migrants to understand workplace norms, social expectations, and communication styles (1). Many integration programs, such as language and orientation courses, focus on daily interactions, legal rights, and responsibilities (2). However, limited engagement with native Germans and a lack of real-world exposure reduce their effectiveness (2, 4). Community dialogues, cultural exchange workshops, and intercultural events promote mutual understanding but often suffer from low participation rates from host communities (4). Programs targeting Roma populations focus on education, employment, and anti-discrimination efforts, yet they face challenges related to entrenched stereotypes and social exclusion (3). Effective cultural awareness programs improve workplace integration and job retention rates by helping migrants adapt to professional norms (1, 6). However, bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of direct interaction with German professionals hinder the full realization of these benefits (6). Policymakers should expand practical integration activities such as internships and mentorship programs and increase outreach to host communities to foster cross-cultural engagement (3, 4). Fostering cultural awareness through community-driven initiatives can strengthen social inclusion and counter discrimination.

Regarding **Greece**, it was found that cultural awareness aims to improve the civic engagement and societal integration of migrants and refugees, which includes language proficiency and practical knowledge of the labor market (6, 15, 2). Relationships with the local community significantly improve refugees' access to essential services such as public transportation, healthcare, and local businesses. Initiatives by local authorities that sensitize the native population to integration issues through programs and actions have proven to be valuable (19).

For instance, the SYMBIOSIS educational program, affiliated with the Council of Europe, focuses on human rights, anti-discrimination, democratic citizenship, and social inclusion through an annual seminar cycle and capacity-building training. Similarly, Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRIC) within municipalities address integration challenges, promote civic participation, and organize community events to raise awareness and enhance social cohesion (16, 21). Integration efforts in Greece also involve cultural initiatives like Refugee Week, which celebrates the resilience and creativity of displaced individuals through community activities, fostering mutual understanding and inclusion. Additionally, programs such as the Multaka initiative promote intercultural dialogue by training refugees as guides in museums and historical sites, encouraging discussions on shared values and experiences. (22). The Cities Network for Integration (CNI), which unites Greek municipalities to promote coordinated local and national efforts to integrate migrants and refugees, sharing Best Practices and innovative approaches for social cohesion, exemplifies such initiatives (17). Such projects bridge cultural divides and foster meaningful connections between different demographic groups (15).

Despite these efforts, significant barriers to integration persist. Refugees often face linguistic challenges, limited employment opportunities, and social isolation. Temporary housing in refugee camps further hampers their integration into Greek society. Additionally, issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stemming from past violence and displacement, exacerbate mental health challenges for refugees, complicating their adjustment process. Systemic barriers, including racism, socio-economic inequalities, and bureaucratic hurdles, also impede progress. The isolation of migrant populations in urban ghettos fuels stereotypes and hinders effective communication with natives, perpetuating social and cultural divides (6, 18, 19).

Addressing obstacles for raising cultural awareness requires a strategic, two-way integration approach that prioritizes collaborative, cross-sectoral policies involving national and local authorities. However, successful integration also demands addressing economic hardships and unemployment, as well as fostering trust in institutions and enhancing social capital. Providing targeted mental health support and education can reduce refugees' sense of isolation, combat discrimination, and facilitate societal inclusion (17, 19). Ultimately, cultural awareness and integration depend on collective efforts that respect diversity and nurture social cohesion. Both central authorities and local communities must align their strategies to create inclusive, equitable societies where all individuals, regardless of origin, can thrive (5, 6).

Cultural awareness for effective integration requires the active participation of both migrants and the native population. It involves shared respect for fundamental values and understanding each other's customs, challenges, and aspirations. Establishing direct or indirect dialogue channels between refugees, migrants, and native citizens is vital for fostering mutual understanding. This can be achieved through community exchanges, media platforms, and social media discussions. A well-designed two-way integration strategy with targeted actions – in public spaces, libraries, neighbourhoods – can overcome barriers and cultivate positive feelings between natives and

migrants. A well-designed two-way integration strategy can break down barriers and foster positive relations between natives and immigrants. Key actions should include targeted integration in public spaces (e.g. organizing events and activities in libraries, neighbourhoods, and public spaces for promoting interactions between locals and immigrants, helping to overcome stereotypes and cultivate mutual understanding), recognition and certification of migrants' qualifications, professional language training, and practical employment opportunities, pairing migrants with employers for accelerating their participation in the labour market. Furthermore, issues like unemployment, inequalities, and poor-quality housing, which affect both migrants and the indigenous population, creating competition and distrust and leading to social division, should be addressed [6].

Findings from research in **Italy** show that cultural awareness programs are relevant in order to promote a participatory approach to cultural integration and the exchange of perspectives to foster intercultural dialogue. It is rooted in key principles such as community, proximity, autonomy and empowerment (2, 3) and promotes participation through linguistic inclusion, civic education, and public participation, as well as co-designing programs with migrants to ensure their needs, and perspectives are included (2). The effectiveness of these programs is determined by their territorial anchoring, based on the integrated Italian reception system. To improve the effectiveness of these actions, strengthening multilevel synergies to create a national framework from local best practices, particular attention must be given to functional gaps, such as gender asymmetries, low literacy levels among beneficiaries, and uneven distribution of resources (1). Promoting linguistic and digital skills is crucial for integration and increasing a person's autonomy (2), while recognizing skills as a tool to strengthen trust and integration. Cultural awareness programs also aim to valorize cultural diversity, creating more receptive environments and supporting effective interactions. Programs that enhance cultural diversity must integrate diversity management, addressing non-visible aspects of diversity and promoting the inclusion of migrants (4). Furthermore, the promotion of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) policies through training activities for companies helps raise awareness about the importance of cultural diversity, contributing to a greater understanding and integration of refugees into society (5). National integration policies aim to promote the co-development of initiatives that raise awareness of the value of diversity and foster greater social integration (3). An important action involves disseminating best practices, such as mapping companies that combine competitiveness and inclusion and defining guidelines to raise awareness and train stakeholders on business strategies to value migrants' skills (4).

The development of cultural awareness programs faces several challenges that affect their effectiveness. Among these is the difficulty of designing initiatives that are fully adapted to the specific needs of different migrant communities, taking into account their varying levels of education, language skills, and cultural experiences. Although many programs aim to improve social integration, there is often a disconnect between local initiatives and broader national strategies. Communication barriers also contribute to these challenges, as migrants with low literacy levels or limited access to linguistic and digital resources may face greater obstacles in fully participating in these programs, which must be adequately addressed. This access gap is further amplified for women, particularly those who have been victims of exploitation, as they often encounter additional social and cultural barriers that prevent them from taking part in programs designed to support their empowerment. Although the importance of participation is frequently emphasized, the challenge remains to ensure that migrants' voices are genuinely included and that their needs are effectively prioritized in the development of services. Finally, there can be a lack of

effective diversity management in workplaces. While intercultural exchange programs exist, many organizations struggle to fully recognize and value the diverse experiences and skills of migrants, thereby missing opportunities to create truly inclusive and diverse work environments. Without adequate diversity management strategies, both overt and subtle forms of discrimination may persist, hindering the integration process. The analyzed projects aim to overcome these gaps and barriers. For raising cultural awareness, the research suggests strengthening intercultural dialogue through projects involving schools, associations, and community spaces, promoting the learning and knowledge of Italian language and culture as tools to foster social participation.

Regarding **Spain**, cultural awareness is a crucial element of migrant integration, ensuring coexistence, respect for diversity, and inclusive policies. It is defined as the knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and human rights as a foundation for peaceful coexistence. It emphasizes respect for different identities, experiences, and expressions, acknowledging that there is no single way to live, express identity, or experience relationships. This perspective promotes the acceptance of diverse social norms and values, fostering an inclusive society where individuals are not judged based on cultural or personal differences. The interaction between different cultures enriches local traditions, introducing new perspectives, arts, and cuisines. However, it also presents challenges for refugees and migrants adapting to a new cultural environment, as the integration process requires time, support, and structured policies. Host countries must address these challenges by offering resources such as language training, employment support, and community engagement initiatives to facilitate adaptation. Cultural awareness also involves institutional engagement, with training provided to public service workers, employers, and community leaders to improve their interactions with migrants and refugees.

Several organizations and institutions actively promote intercultural education and social inclusion. These programs are tailored to different migrant populations, including women, youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, and refugees, addressing their specific challenges. One significant initiative is the Fundación Secretariado Gitano project, which focuses on providing social support and educational reinforcement to Roma families, helping them integrate into formal education systems. Similarly, Fundación CEPAIM targets migrant women, improving their digital skills and access to local resources. International efforts also play a critical role in cultural awareness. Organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) manage projects like Includ-EU and Share Sira, which provide legal education, cultural orientation, and employment support to migrants. These programs help migrants understand their host societies, access social services, and navigate legal frameworks, ultimately contributing to smoother integration.

Cultural awareness programs have had a significant impact on migrant integration, social cohesion, and community development. Reports highlight that families who participated in the Fundación Secretariado Gitano project showed increased involvement in their children's education and greater community participation. Similarly, migrant women engaged in Fundación CEPAIM's program demonstrated a 31% increase in knowledge about community resources and improved digital skills, which contributed to their ability to navigate their new environment. Studies also show that 82% of individuals surveyed believe that cultural awareness programs have positively influenced their perceptions of diversity and inclusion. Such programs help create environments of positive intercultural coexistence, benefiting both migrants and local communities by fostering tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding.

Host country perceptions of migrants vary. While some employers appreciate their motivation and work ethic, they frequently cite language proficiency and cultural adaptation as challenges. Public opinion is heavily influenced by media narratives, political discourse, and integration policies, making awareness programs critical for improving acceptance and reducing discrimination. Reports highlight that employers who participate in cultural awareness training are more likely to hire migrants and integrate them into their workforce successfully. Additionally, workplaces that actively promote cultural diversity and inclusion policies experience greater employee satisfaction and productivity. Ensuring that migrants feel welcomed and valued within their professional environments contributes to higher job retention rates and increased workplace cohesion. Employers generally recognize the value of hiring migrants, citing their strong work ethic, adaptability, and motivation as significant assets. However, many businesses still face bureaucratic challenges in hiring migrants, including complex legal requirements, lengthy work permit processes, and administrative barriers. To address the barriers and challenges faced by migrants in the labor market, reports suggest Enhancing Employer Engagement – Encouraging businesses to participate in cultural awareness training and mentorship initiatives to improve hiring practices.

Continuing to develop personal and social interaction skills, as well as fostering historical awareness, is essential for building cohesive and inclusive societies. It is equally important to focus on educating and raising awareness among host communities, emphasizing the value of diversity and fostering respect for multiculturalism. Recognizing that intercultural exchange enriches societies both culturally and economically can shift public perceptions and strengthen social cohesion.

Cultural awareness is not only a tool for understanding societal norms and expectations but also a bridge to fostering mutual respect and connection between migrants and host communities. Programs that combine language learning with cultural immersion, such as those by Fundación CEPAIM and Red Acoge, help migrants appreciate Spain's historical and cultural heritage while encouraging them to share their own traditions. This exchange of perspectives enriches both migrants and local populations, showcasing the value of cultural diversity. Equally important is the sense of community development.

Despite the positive impact of cultural awareness programs, several barriers still hinder migrant integration. One of the primary obstacles is language barriers and limited institutional support, which make it difficult for migrants to access public services, secure employment, and integrate into local communities. Discrimination remains a persistent issue, as racism, xenophobia, and exclusionary practices continue to affect workplaces, schools, and public institutions. Administrative inefficiencies further complicate integration, with delays in credential recognition and bureaucratic obstacles preventing migrants from validating their qualifications. Another critical barrier is misinformation and negative stereotypes about migrants, which are often propagated through social media and mainstream narratives. These stereotypes shape public opinion, increasing hostility toward migrant communities and limiting their acceptance in host societies. Additionally, a lack of formal intercultural training for professionals and employers leads to workplace exclusion and hiring discrimination.

Furthermore, migrants often prioritize employment over long-term education due to financial pressures, forcing them to accept low-wage jobs regardless of working conditions. Many are unable to pursue further education or skills training due to economic constraints and limited access to learning resources. Additionally, LGBTQ+ migrants face double discrimination due to their

gender identity and migrant status, which makes it even more challenging to secure employment and social acceptance.

Expanding cultural awareness programs is not just beneficial for migrants but also for host societies, as it promotes economic growth, social stability, and innovation. By bridging cultural gaps, supporting community engagement, and reinforcing policies that encourage inclusion, we can create more equitable and diverse societies where everyone could thrive. Cultural awareness significantly impacts employment outcomes by improving community relations, workplace inclusion, and intercultural communication. Institutions that invest in cultural competency training for professionals and public officials report better interactions with migrants and reduced workplace discrimination. Understanding workplace cultural norms, social expectations, and business etiquette is essential for migrants to navigate their work environment effectively and foster positive professional relationships.

To strengthen cultural awareness and promote migrant integration, the research suggest the following strategies:

1.   Enhancing Employment and Cultural Integration Programs: Employment support should be combined with cultural orientation initiatives to improve workplace diversity and inclusion.

2.   Expanding Community Engagement Efforts: Local governments and NGOs should encourage intercultural dialogue programs and cultural exchange activities to foster mutual understanding.

3.   Bridging the Digital Divide: Providing migrants with digital skills training and online education resources will facilitate access to job opportunities and essential services.

4.   Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Policies: Ensuring that workplaces and public institutions adopt and enforce diversity policies will reduce systemic discrimination.

5.   Involving Migrants in Policy Development: Migrants should have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes to ensure that policies reflect their actual needs.

Conclusions on cultural awareness

Research conducted in the five partner countries shows that cultural awareness is highly appreciated and specific programs have been developed. While **Denmark** seems not to face particular difficulties, raising cultural awareness in Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain presents many different challenges.

In **Germany**, programs targeting Roma populations face challenges related to entrenched stereotypes and social exclusion (3). Bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of direct interaction with German professionals hinder the full realization of these benefits (6). Community dialogues, cultural exchange workshops, and intercultural events promote mutual understanding but often suffer from low participation rates from host communities (4).

In **Greece**, significant barriers related to lack of cultural awareness are connected with refugees' linguistic challenges, limited employment opportunities, and social isolation. Temporary housing in refugee camps further hampers their integration into Greek society. Additionally, issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stemming from past violence and displacement, exacerbate

mental health challenges, complicating the integration process. Systemic barriers, including racism, socio-economic inequalities, and bureaucratic hurdles, also impede progress.

In **Italy**, the development of cultural awareness programs faces several challenges that affect their effectiveness. Among these is the difficulty of designing initiatives that are fully adapted to the specific needs of different migrant communities, taking into account their varying levels of education, language skills, and cultural experiences. Although many programs aim to improve social integration, there is often a disconnect between local initiatives and broader national strategies. Communication barriers also contribute to these challenges, as migrants with low literacy levels or limited access to linguistic and digital resources may face greater obstacles in fully participating in these programs, which must be adequately addressed. This access gap is further amplified for women, particularly those who have been victims of exploitation, as they often encounter additional social and cultural barriers that prevent them from taking part in programs designed to support their empowerment. Finally, there can be a lack of effective diversity management in workplaces. While intercultural exchange programs exist, many organizations struggle to fully recognize and value the diverse experiences and skills of migrants, thereby missing opportunities to create truly inclusive and diverse work environments

In **Spain**, despite the positive impact of cultural awareness programs, several barriers still hinder migrant integration. One of the primary obstacles is language barriers and limited institutional support, which make it difficult for migrants to access public services, secure employment, and integrate into local communities. Discrimination remains a persistent issue, as racism, xenophobia, and exclusionary practices continue to affect workplaces, schools, and public institutions. Administrative inefficiencies further complicate integration, with delays in credential recognition and bureaucratic obstacles preventing migrants from validating their qualifications. Another critical barrier is misinformation and negative stereotypes about migrants, which are often propagated through social media and mainstream narratives. These stereotypes shape public opinion, increasing hostility toward migrant communities and limiting their acceptance in host societies. Additionally, a lack of formal intercultural training for professionals and employers leads to workplace exclusion and hiring discrimination.

Furthermore, migrants often prioritize employment over long-term education due to financial pressures, forcing them to accept low-wage jobs regardless of working conditions. Many are unable to pursue further education or skills training due to economic constraints and limited access to learning resources. Additionally, LGBTQ+ migrants face double discrimination due to their gender identity and migrant status, which makes it even more challenging to secure employment and social acceptance.

3.4 Information for Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs across Europe have emerged as critical tools in facilitating the integration of migrants and refugees into host societies. Greece, Germany, Denmark, Italy, and Spain have adopted a ***variety of mentorship approaches to support migrants' socio-economic inclusion, education, and personal development***. While all share a common goal — to help migrants become self-sufficient and socially integrated — each country tailors its initiatives to address specific socio-political contexts, economic conditions, and migrant demographics. In this point we are

trying to *evaluate the effectiveness of mentorship programs in these five countries, identified key areas for improvement, and offers a comparative analysis of commonalities and divergences*.

Denmark is widely recognized for using mentorship as a tool for migrant integration. Programs such as KVINFO's Mentor Network (7) and the Mentoring Program for Migrants (1) have been effective in improving employment outcomes and building migrants' confidence in engaging with local communities. These mentorship relationships help newcomers navigate job searches, understand societal expectations, and expand professional networks. Integration into the workforce is further supported by the IGU program (2) and the Tripartite Agreement (6), under which companies assign mentors to help migrants adapt to workplace culture. Although these initiatives demonstrate positive results, including high job retention and increased social participation, they face notable challenges. The number of trained mentors is insufficient to meet demand, particularly outside urban centers. Additionally, funding remains inconsistent, and cultural or language misunderstandings occasionally hinder the depth of integration. Future improvements must focus on expanding the mentor network, improving intercultural communication training for mentors, and targeting outreach to isolated and vulnerable groups such as refugee women and youth.

Germany's mentorship landscape is distinguished by its practical orientation toward employment and integration into social systems. Structured programs equip social workers, volunteers, and educators with intercultural competence, allowing them to better support migrants (5,6). Notable examples include the "Frauen stärken" initiative and Job Coaches for Migrants, which provide individual support in navigating bureaucratic processes, job applications, and cultural norms (7). These programs particularly benefit women, who face compounded barriers such as childcare responsibilities and cultural expectations (7). Personalized guidance not only facilitates smoother adaptation to German society but also promotes long-term self-sufficiency. Despite the promising outcomes, several systemic obstacles remain. Funding for mentorship initiatives is often limited, and there is no standardized national framework guiding mentor training (5,6). Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles and inconsistent regional implementation reduce program effectiveness. To address these gaps, Germany must enhance financial backing, diversify mentorship models to suit varying migrant profiles, and streamline training programs for mentors to ensure consistent quality (1,7).

In **Greece**, mentorship initiatives such as the DREAMM Project and the RISING Project reflect an evolving strategy aimed at fostering the integration of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs). The DREAMM Project, launched in 2021, focuses on a two-way integration model that emphasizes intercultural understanding and community participation. It engages both migrants and local citizens in peer-to-peer learning events and joint social activities, promoting a sense of belonging and reducing social tensions like xenophobia and discrimination. The program highlights the transformative potential of volunteering for social development, though it recognizes that this potential is limited by the underdevelopment of professional skills in the migration sector. Through the DREAMM One-Stop-Shop, migrants receive orientation, legal guidance, and access to public services. Furthermore, the program develops two types of competence profiles—Lead-Mentors and Mentors—who undergo professional training, making the model adaptable for other contexts through dedicated toolkits (16).

The RISING Project, launched in 2022, addresses the motivational and psychological barriers that hinder migrant participation in education and training. It focuses on increasing self-esteem, civic

competence, and proactive behavior through a structured mentoring approach. A key outcome is a handbook of mentoring tools, which includes success stories to inspire and guide both mentors and mentees. This approach enables mentors to better understand migrants' fears and aspirations, ultimately equipping migrants to become agents of change in their communities (18). Nevertheless, both programs face limitations. Challenges include underinvestment in mentoring infrastructure, a lack of private sector coordination in labor integration, and persistent economic hardships that amplify public skepticism toward migrants. Integration strategies must therefore be co-developed by local communities and national institutions to maintain social cohesion and inclusive development (19).

Italy's mentorship programs emphasize personalized integration pathways that combine technical training with socio-relational skill development (4). These programs often result from collaboration between companies and civil society organizations, aiming to facilitate workplace integration through language support, safety education, and social orientation (4,5). Mentorship also plays a crucial role in career counseling and familiarizing migrants with labor regulations and public services (1). A unique aspect of the Italian model is the presence of informal mentoring within host families, which fosters environments of trust, cultural exchange, and mutual respect. This approach is particularly beneficial for young migrants, as it offers flexible, goal-oriented guidance (6). However, there is room for improvement. Informal mentorship lacks the structure needed for widespread replication, and many regional initiatives operate in silos, reducing their cumulative impact. To enhance the system's effectiveness, Italy must invest in cross-sectoral collaboration, ensure flexibility in mentorship models, and promote the sharing of best practices across local and national programs (6).

Spain has developed a robust network of social mentorship programs that supplement national policies with peer-based support in education, employment, and social adaptation (7,8,9). These initiatives target a broad range of beneficiaries, including unaccompanied minors, refugee women, and adolescents from foster care backgrounds. Organizations like "Fundación Adsis" and Accem lead the way in providing individualized and group mentorship, addressing both professional development and personal well-being. Language exchange and psychological support services further ease the integration process. Research confirms that these programs significantly enhance migrants' emotional resilience, classroom participation, and sense of belonging. Mentorship also benefits mentors by fostering empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking. However, several challenges restrict full participation. Limited access to digital tools hinders engagement in online mentorship, and many migrants are unaware of existing programs due to weak outreach. Economic pressures and time constraints reduce mentees' ability to participate, and mentor-mentee pairings are sometimes misaligned due to differing skill sets or expectations. Expanding access to technology, offering stipends or flexible training options, and raising awareness through targeted outreach can help address these barriers. Moreover, integrating mentorship into national employment frameworks would enhance coordination and amplify long-term impacts. Examples like the #EmpleandoJuntxs initiative and Mentoring for Refugee Women, in collaboration with the Tent Foundation, illustrate how public-private partnerships can create inclusive and empowering mentorship opportunities. Nevertheless, greater effort is required to extend these services to rural areas, where migrant populations are often underserved.

Conclusions on mentorship programs

Across all five countries, several shared themes emerge. Firstly, mentorship is universally recognized as an **effective tool for migrant integration**, particularly when it offers personalized, structured support. Programs that combine **career guidance, socio-cultural education, and emotional development** consistently demonstrate positive outcomes for mentees. Secondly, the importance of mentor training and intercultural competence is a recurring theme, underscoring the need **to equip mentors with the necessary skills to navigate complex cultural dynamics**. Thirdly, each country experiences **logistical and structural challenges**—whether in funding, program coordination, or regional accessibility—that limit the scale and sustainability of mentorship efforts.

Despite these similarities, significant **differences** mark the national approaches. **Greece** places strong emphasis on civic engagement and interculturalism, viewing mentorship as a bridge between local and migrant communities in a context of economic hardship. **Germany and Denmark** adopt more labor-market-driven models, using mentorship as a tool for economic integration, with Denmark particularly emphasizing workplace-based mentorship. **Italy**'s approach is more personal and trust-based, often embedded in informal settings and small-scale community initiatives. **Spain** offers the most diverse and multi-tiered model, integrating mentorship into both urban and rural contexts and tailoring programs to the specific needs of vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, mentorship programs across these European countries show great promise in promoting integration, self-reliance, and social cohesion among migrants. While each nation tailors its approach to its socio-political landscape and migrant demographics, all must address **common challenges of scalability, mentor preparation, and consistent funding**. Best practices such as **one-on-one mentorship, cultural competence training, and integration with employment services** should be scaled and adapted across borders. **Strengthening national coordination, expanding digital access, and fostering cross-country learning** can further enhance the effectiveness of mentorship programs and ensure that migrants are not only welcomed, but empowered to thrive in their new communities.

3.5 Information for Employment Integration

Denmark has developed a comprehensive approach to migrant employment integration, with initiatives like the Integration and Qualification Program (IGU) and the Tripartite Agreement aiming to facilitate the transition of migrants into the workforce. These programs focus on a mix of vocational training, apprenticeships, cultural education, and mentorship, which not only promote financial stability but also foster social inclusion. Employment in Denmark is seen as a gateway to learning the Danish language, understanding workplace culture, and engaging with the broader community. Furthermore, soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and cultural awareness are critical for migrants to succeed in the labor market. Mentorship programs provide essential guidance and bridge the gap between migrant workers and the expectations of Danish employers.

Despite these structured programs, migrants face significant challenges in Denmark. Language barriers remain a substantial obstacle, alongside issues like the non-recognition of foreign qualifications and limited access to professional networks. While employers are increasingly open to hiring migrants through initiatives like IGU, unconscious biases and discrimination continue to hinder their advancement. To improve employment integration, policy recommendations include enhancing language and soft skill training, creating more recognition pathways for foreign

qualifications, incentivizing businesses to hire and mentor migrants, and ensuring long-term career progression opportunities for migrant workers.

In **Germany**, employment integration for migrants is a multifaceted process that focuses on mentorship, skill-building, and career guidance. Initiatives like "Job Coaches for Migrants" offer personalized career support, addressing the key barriers of language proficiency, unfamiliarity with German workplace culture, and non-recognition of foreign qualifications. Roma populations face additional challenges due to discrimination and low educational attainment, which further limit their access to the labor market. While online platforms provide job placement and credential recognition services, the lack of mentorship opportunities diminishes their effectiveness in supporting migrants' long-term career success. Moreover, gender-based challenges also persist, with migrant women encountering more significant hurdles in accessing employment due to cultural constraints and limited childcare support.

To improve employment integration in Germany, strengthening anti-discrimination policies, creating Roma-specific mentorship programs, and promoting inclusive hiring practices are crucial steps. There is also a need to simplify visa procedures, enhance job-matching services, and offer more incentives for employers to hire and support migrants. Employers must be encouraged to overcome biases and better recognize the value migrants bring to the workforce, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, have equal access to career opportunities and professional growth.

In **Greece**, employment integration is seen as a critical component of social justice, as it helps migrants and refugees move from welfare dependency to economic self-sufficiency. The labor market integration process is complex, influenced by factors like the refugees' experiences of persecution and flight, national labor policies, and local labor market conditions. Language barriers, particularly Greek, remain a major obstacle to integration. However, migrants and refugees who acquire language skills, digital competencies, and vocational training show better integration outcomes. Social capital, including networking with local communities, and mentorship programs play an essential role in addressing the emotional and psychological challenges faced by migrants, improving their chances of long-term success in the workforce.

Despite the progress in employment programs, migrants in Greece still face significant barriers such as high unemployment rates, legal instability, and limited access to formal employment sectors. Economic crises and austerity measures have worsened the labor market conditions, especially for those working in seasonal or low-wage sectors. To improve labor integration, Greece needs to focus on expanding language acquisition programs, providing vocational training, and addressing legal and bureaucratic barriers, particularly for asylum seekers. Gender-sensitive programs, including childcare support, and stable housing are also crucial in helping migrant women and families integrate successfully into the workforce.

Italy's approach to employment integration focuses on empowering migrants through the development of both formal and informal skills, with a strong emphasis on inclusive leadership and workplace diversity. The goal is to help migrants contribute meaningfully to the labor market by providing not just training programs, but also the opportunity to showcase their abilities and perspectives. Through initiatives that consider gender dimensions, the integration process becomes more inclusive and ensures that all migrants, regardless of background, are supported.

Employers who embrace diversity tend to see enhanced collaboration, increased productivity, and improved company reputation, which ultimately benefits both individuals and organizations.

However, challenges remain in Italy, particularly regarding vulnerability and the need for better-targeted support for different groups of migrants. Employers are encouraged to adopt inclusive leadership practices that foster a supportive environment for migrant workers. This approach not only improves job satisfaction but also helps in overcoming biases that hinder migrant employment. For integration to succeed, a combination of vocational training, mentorship, and community-based support is necessary to empower migrants and ensure their long-term economic and social inclusion.

In **Spain**, employment integration is recognized as a critical aspect of long-term migrant and refugee success, with a focus on building skills, providing mentorship, and fostering digital literacy. Employment programs often incorporate psycho-emotional training, workplace culture orientation, and job search strategies to help migrants adapt to the local labor market. Specialized programs for young migrants and unaccompanied minors also play a crucial role in improving job readiness and expanding professional networks. These programs aim not only to equip migrants with job-specific skills but also to help them navigate the bureaucratic hurdles and legal barriers that often complicate their entry into the workforce.

However, migrants in Spain face substantial barriers, including limited access to childcare services, digital illiteracy, and bureaucratic inefficiencies in processing work permits and recognizing foreign qualifications. These challenges are compounded by discrimination in hiring practices, which often force highly skilled migrants into low-wage jobs. To enhance employment integration, Spain should focus on improving vocational training, simplifying the recognition of foreign qualifications, and expanding soft skills training programs. Additionally, strengthening anti-discrimination policies and providing more support for employers willing to hire migrants will create more opportunities for long-term employment and career advancement.

Conclusions on employment integration

Across various countries, there is a strong consensus on key elements that support migrant integration into the labor market. One major similarity is the universal emphasis on host-language proficiency, recognized as a foundational skill for employment. Alongside *language*, soft skills such as *communication*, *adaptability*, and *teamwork* are highly valued, as they help migrants navigate and integrate into workplace culture and expectations. Another widespread issue is *the difficulty migrants face in having their foreign qualifications and work experience recognized*, often leading to underemployment despite having relevant skills.

Discrimination remains a persistent barrier across nations, with both structural and unconscious biases disproportionately affecting marginalized groups, including women, Roma communities, and asylum seekers. To counter these challenges, many countries invest in *mentorship programs and professional networking opportunities*. These initiatives are essential for helping migrants build social capital, gain industry-specific insights, and improve their chances of finding sustainable employment. Overall, despite different national contexts, these shared strategies and challenges highlight the global nature of migrant labor integration efforts.

In terms of **_policy models_**, **_Denmark and Germany_** focus heavily on state-run programs and systems to support employment and social integration. On the other hand, **_Spain and Italy_** prioritize empowerment and inclusive leadership, encouraging participation from various community groups. **_Greece_**, however, adopts a more reactive approach due to ongoing economic and political instability, limiting the effectiveness of its policies. When it comes to digital skills, **_Spain_** is particularly focused on fostering digital literacy and technological capabilities, a priority that is less emphasized in the other countries within the region.

Regarding targeted support, **_Germany and Spain_** have developed programs specifically tailored to women and youth, aiming to address the unique challenges these groups face in the labor market. **_Greece_**, while acknowledging the importance of these groups, lacks consistent and effective actions to support them. The economic context further compounds Greece's difficulties, as the financial crisis has had a uniquely negative impact on employment integration, unlike the experiences in other countries. Additionally, Greece stands out for its recognition of the crucial link between stable housing and job access, highlighting how secure accommodation can significantly influence employment outcomes and retention.

To enhance workforce integration and reduce barriers to employment, it is essential to expand language learning and vocational training opportunities, ensuring individuals acquire the skills necessary for various job sectors. Recognizing foreign qualifications can significantly improve the prospects for immigrants and foreign-trained workers, while the development of soft and digital skills enables employees to stay competitive in an evolving job market. Implementing employer incentives and anti-discrimination training fosters more inclusive workplaces, promoting diversity and equal opportunities for all. Additionally, providing targeted support for women, youth, and vulnerable groups can help overcome societal challenges and create a more equitable job environment.

Facilitating mentorship programs and building social support networks also play a crucial role in empowering individuals to navigate their careers and access growth opportunities. Addressing legal and bureaucratic barriers, such as visa restrictions or complex hiring procedures, is necessary to remove obstacles preventing individuals from entering the workforce. Strengthening inclusive hiring practices and promoting workplace diversity policies will further enhance the opportunities for underrepresented groups, ensuring that employment opportunities are accessible and fair for everyone. These initiatives collectively support a more inclusive and prosperous labor market for all.

3.6 Information for National Priorities

Denmark has developed a comprehensive framework for migrant integration, driven by its Integration Act and various national programs. The Integration Act mandates that municipalities create personalized integration plans, offering language courses and employment-oriented programs. Additionally, Denmark's IGU program supports vocational education and cultural integration, ensuring that migrants can quickly enter the labor market. The Tripartite Agreement exemplifies the government's push for public-private partnerships, which are seen as essential in meeting integration goals. However, there remain significant policy gaps, including inflexible programs that fail to accommodate migrants' diverse educational backgrounds and inconsistent

municipal execution. Furthermore, gender-sensitive integration remains an underdeveloped area within national policy, which hinders the successful integration of female migrants.

Key stakeholders, such as municipalities, employers, and civil society organizations, play a crucial role in Denmark's integration efforts. Despite their involvement, challenges in coordination limit the overall effectiveness of these initiatives. Recommendations to improve Denmark's integration policies include the incorporation of gender-sensitive approaches in all integration programs, enhancing mentorship and leadership opportunities for vulnerable groups, especially women, and creating more flexible, individualized integration pathways. By addressing these gaps, Denmark can build stronger, more sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships that ensure long-term integration success.

Germany's integration policies are largely aligned with EU strategies aimed at ensuring equal access to essential services like education, employment, healthcare, and housing for migrants. Language proficiency, workplace communication, and technical skill development are key priorities within Germany's national frameworks. While these efforts have made notable progress, the country continues to grapple with several policy gaps, such as weak enforcement of anti-discrimination measures, limited vocational training for marginalized groups like the Roma, and bureaucratic barriers to visa approvals. In addition, the lack of employer awareness about migrant career pathways and the absence of gender-sensitive employment policies remain obstacles to full inclusion.

The government has launched several initiatives to address these issues, such as Roma-focused education and employment projects, internship programs for refugees, and digital job-matching platforms. However, the impact of these measures is often hampered by inconsistent participation from stakeholders. To improve integration outcomes, Germany should focus on strengthening anti-discrimination measures, customizing vocational training programs to meet migrant needs, and streamlining administrative processes. Tailored and coordinated approaches across all levels of society will enhance Germany's capacity to foster inclusive migration policies.

In **Greece**, the Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) serves as the backbone of the country's integration policies, aiming to align with European standards and address inefficiencies in previous legislation. The National Integration Strategy, developed under this code, focuses on both protecting human rights and fostering economic growth. It includes key initiatives like pre-integration measures for migrants and training programs designed to ease their transition into the labor market. However, the country's approach remains fragmented, particularly since 2015 when the focus shifted to emergency responses rather than long-term integration. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a critical role in providing services, but a lack of coordination between CSOs and grassroots initiatives continues to hinder effective integration.

The Greek government has taken steps to improve integration through projects like the HELIOS program, which assists refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in their social integration. Local institutions such as Migrant Integration Centres and the Migrant and Refugee Integration Council (MRIC) play pivotal roles in connecting migrants with services. However, more unified coordination is needed between governmental bodies and civil society organizations to streamline efforts. Expanding initiatives like HELIOS and fostering collaboration between stakeholders can lead to more integrated, comprehensive support systems, ensuring that migrants have better access to education, employment, and social services.

Italy's integration framework is based on a multilevel structure called RETESAI, which adapts to local needs while being centrally controlled to ensure equitable distribution of resources. National policies focus on raising awareness of the value of diversity and fostering social integration. Initiatives like Refugee Welcome Italia and mentoring programs are designed to involve citizens in migrants' integration processes, offering support through community engagement. The Italian government is also working on incorporating mentorship into its National Integration Plan to better facilitate refugees and migrants' adaptation into Italian society. Despite these positive efforts, Italy's integration system remains complex, requiring greater coordination between central and local authorities to maximize its effectiveness.

Stakeholder involvement in Italy's integration efforts is essential, with a focus on social awareness campaigns and workforce inclusion strategies that combine competitiveness with diversity. However, challenges remain in ensuring these policies are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. Strengthening the role of mentorship and community programs, expanding public-private partnerships, and ensuring more inclusive training for all stakeholders will help further Italy's efforts in integrating migrants. By enhancing these practices, Italy can create a more inclusive environment that fosters mutual understanding and supports migrants' full participation in society.

Spain has implemented a diverse range of policies designed to facilitate migrant integration, with an emphasis on employment pathways, social inclusion, and digital education. The Minimum Income Scheme (MIS) has been expanded to integrate social and employment initiatives, while Spain's Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan highlights the role of socio-labor measures in improving migrant integration. Special attention is given to unaccompanied minors (UAMs) through legal protections, educational opportunities, and pathways to employment. Spain also focuses on digital inclusion to ensure that migrants gain the digital skills necessary for the modern job market. Despite these initiatives, Spain faces challenges, including delays in processing work permits and certifications, which hinder migrants' ability to gain financial independence.

Spain's policies emphasize mentorship and civic engagement as crucial tools for integration, encouraging greater interaction between migrants and local communities. NGOs and regional governments have played a central role in this process, with organizations like Accem and IOM Spain facilitating community-building activities. However, further efforts are needed to streamline bureaucratic processes and develop structured support systems for UAMs as they transition into adulthood. Key recommendations for improvement include enhancing mentorship programs, expanding digital access, and fostering closer collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector. By addressing these gaps, Spain can strengthen its migration policies, ensuring more inclusive integration outcomes for migrants and refugees.

Conclusions on national priorities

Language proficiency and employment are critical components of migrant integration strategies across various countries, with each nation emphasizing *the importance of language skills through targeted programs.* These efforts aim to enhance communication abilities, which are essential for successful integration. Furthermore, vocational training and workplace skills are central to national policies, ensuring that migrants are adequately prepared for the labor market and can contribute effectively to their new communities.

Stakeholder involvement plays a vital role in the integration strategies of these countries, with collaboration occurring between governments, local authorities, NGOs, civil society organizations, and sometimes the private sector. This multi-stakeholder approach is designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of migrant integration. However, many countries, including *Denmark, Germany, and Spain, also recognize the need for special attention to vulnerable groups such as women, unaccompanied minors, and the Roma population.* Despite these efforts, *policy gaps and coordination issues persist*, particularly concerning the consistency of implementation and the tailoring of policies to meet the diverse needs of migrants. Gender-sensitive approaches and more flexible integration pathways are often highlighted as areas requiring further attention.

Denmark, Greece, and Germany each adopt distinct policy frameworks for migrant integration. Denmark's approach is more structured and individualized, emphasizing swift labor market integration through programs like the IGU. In contrast, Greece's system is fragmented, with gaps in coordination, particularly between civil society organizations and government policies. Germany, following a formal EU-aligned approach, focuses on anti-discrimination and provides support for Roma populations, but faces challenges due to bureaucratic hurdles that hinder the efficiency of its integration efforts.

Civil society plays a pivotal role in countries like Greece and Italy, where NGOs and grassroots initiatives have a significant influence due to the reactive nature of governmental responses. Greece, in particular, depends on NGOs to fill gaps in its fragmented system, whereas Denmark favors more formal governmental programs. Italy's decentralized integration system, exemplified by RETESAI, and Spain's collaborative approach with the private sector, especially in digital education, reflect their unique models. Both Spain and Italy prioritize mentorship and volunteerism, with initiatives like Refugee Welcome Italia and Spain's Minimum Income Scheme (MIS) fostering volunteer participation, in contrast to Denmark's more formalized programs. Germany also recognizes the importance of mentorship but faces challenges in raising employer awareness and lacks structures dedicated to volunteer-driven integration. Vulnerabilities and gaps are more pronounced in Greece, where the integration services are inconsistent, while Spain highlights the issue of unaccompanied minors aging out of the system, a challenge not as prevalent in the other countries.

Gender-sensitive approaches are crucial for the successful integration of migrants, and all countries should prioritize mainstreaming these strategies into their programs. Denmark, Germany, and Greece, in particular, must focus on creating more inclusive approaches for women and other vulnerable migrant groups. This can help ensure that these individuals are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to integrate effectively into their new communities, addressing their unique challenges and needs. Additionally, *fostering stronger coordination between civil society organizations, local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders* is essential. In countries like Greece, where fragmentation in service delivery is often evident, increased collaboration would enable a more cohesive and efficient response to migrant integration.

Another area of focus should be *enhancing vocational training opportunities and raising employer awareness about migrant career pathways*, particularly in Germany and Spain, where gaps in these areas still exist. Expanding access to vocational training can equip migrants with the skills needed to enter the workforce successfully. Moreover, *raising awareness among employers* can help reduce biases and create a more inclusive labor market. Furthermore, greater attention

needs to be given to **supporting vulnerable groups**, such as unaccompanied minors, especially in Spain, where the transition to adulthood remains a critical issue. Providing tailored support for these young migrants is crucial to ensuring their successful integration and preventing them from facing significant challenges as they mature.

In conclusion, while each country has made strides in migrant integration, they all share common challenges related to policy gaps, coordination issues, and the need for tailored approaches for diverse migrant groups. Addressing these gaps will help ensure more inclusive and sustainable integration outcomes.

4: Recommendations

Effective integration of migrants in Europe depends on *coordinated strategies that prioritize language acquisition, cultural understanding, mentorship, and employer involvement*.

In **Denmark**, offering tailored language courses that match migrants' skill levels, coupled with cultural orientation sessions, eases their transition into society and the labor market. Community-led cultural exchange projects further help dismantle stereotypes and foster inclusion. Expanding mentorship programs, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and refugees, and addressing logistical barriers like transportation and funding are vital for improving access and ensuring these initiatives support long-term integration.

In **Germany**, integration is built on a strong foundation of language proficiency and cultural awareness. Migrants must be equipped with the skills to navigate local systems and enter the workforce, making mentorship programs and personalized support critical tools. Initiatives like *Job Coaches for Migrants* and *Frauen stärken* provide guidance in job searching, housing, and building confidence. At the same time, employer engagement is essential, as companies often prioritize recognized qualifications and adaptability. Recommendations include streamlining credential recognition, expanding tailored training, and using public-private partnerships to foster inclusive employment pathways, particularly in underserved regions.

Greece faces unique challenges and opportunities in its integration efforts. A key priority is supporting the development of migrants' soft skills through culturally adapted assessment tools and targeted training, using EU funds where appropriate. Promoting mutual cultural awareness through dialogue and public initiatives can reduce social tensions and improve community cohesion. Two-way integration strategies that include job-specific language training and recognition of qualifications can help ease migrants' entry into the labor market, while also addressing shared societal challenges such as unemployment and housing inequality that affect both migrants and locals.

Mentorship is especially important in the Greek context, where refugees face specific barriers in employment and social integration. Employers, supported by coordinated policy frameworks, can contribute through skills mapping, anti-discrimination practices, and long-term employability efforts. A robust national strategy must include clear metrics, early support services for asylum seekers, and access to necessary documentation and banking systems. Importantly, integration in Greece requires a locally informed, cross-sectoral approach where both central and municipal actors collaborate to tailor solutions to local needs—such as placing agricultural workers in rural areas rather than urban centers.

Italy's integration approach emphasizes professional training and recognition of migrant qualifications to fill skilled labor shortages. At the same time, fostering intercultural dialogue through schools, associations, and community initiatives is crucial in countering xenophobia and promoting inclusion. Showcasing successful integration projects can serve as models for further action. Programs aimed at vulnerable populations—especially women, minors, and individuals with special needs—should focus on promoting autonomy through access to education, employment, and family support services.

Improving Italy's national Reception and Integration System (SAI) also requires fair resource allocation and streamlined administrative processes. Simplifying procedures for obtaining residence permits and recognizing qualifications, along with employing cultural mediators, can reduce institutional barriers. These efforts must be complemented by public campaigns that shift the narrative around migration, celebrating the contributions of migrants and reinforcing the country's commitment to a cohesive, inclusive society.

Spain's strategy for migrant integration focuses on expanding access to language and digital literacy programs, including training in co-official languages to support full community participation. Combining this with cultural and historical awareness fosters mutual understanding and a smoother adaptation process. Personal development workshops, addressing areas such as emotional resilience and self-confidence, are also crucial in empowering migrants on their path to independence. Expanding mentorship programs, particularly in rural areas, and raising public awareness through education and media are central to promoting social inclusion.

Ensuring equitable access to training programs across all Spanish regions is vital, requiring increased investment and outreach efforts. Furthermore, fostering intercultural exchange through the arts—such as music, theater, and festivals—provides platforms for both migrants and locals to celebrate their cultural heritage and build shared experiences. These initiatives not only strengthen community ties but also contribute to national unity through diversity, helping Spain build a more resilient and inclusive society.

Conclusions on recommendations

The integration strategies across Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain exhibit both similarities and differences, with a ***common focus on fostering language acquisition, cultural understanding, and inclusive employment opportunities***. In all these countries, tailored language courses and cultural orientation programs are seen as vital for easing migrants' transition into society and the workforce. Mentorship programs are highlighted as a key tool for addressing challenges faced by vulnerable groups, particularly women, refugees, and those with limited qualifications. Across these nations, there is an emphasis on expanding employer engagement, ensuring migrants can access meaningful employment, and promoting public-private partnerships to create inclusive job opportunities. Community-led initiatives, such as cultural exchange projects in Denmark and arts-based integration in Spain, also underscore the importance of mutual understanding and dismantling stereotypes.

However, each country adapts its approach to address unique national challenges. ***Denmark*** focuses on tailored language courses and cultural exchange, while ***Germany*** emphasizes personalized mentorship and credential recognition to address the demands of its labor market.

Greece's integration strategy highlights the need for soft skills development, two-way integration strategies, and a cross-sectoral approach, especially in rural areas. *Italy* concentrates on professional training, qualification recognition, and improving institutional frameworks, while *Spain* prioritizes digital literacy and access to training programs, particularly in rural areas, alongside expanding mentorship and intercultural dialogue through the arts. These differences reflect the countries' varying socio-political contexts, labor market needs, and available resources, while all share a commitment to fostering long-term, inclusive integration strategies.

5: Conclusions

Denmark's migrant integration programs prioritize communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, with initiatives like the Mentoring Program for Migrants and KVINFO showing success. However, low-skilled migrants face significant challenges in acquiring soft skills, often due to language barriers and limited educational opportunities. To enhance integration efforts, it is crucial to expand gender-sensitive training programs targeting these groups, alongside strengthening public-private collaborations to create better employment opportunities for low-skilled migrants.

Germany's integration approach focuses primarily on language skills, but it often neglects essential job-specific soft skills such as adaptability and teamwork. This gap can hinder migrants' effective integration into the workforce. To address this, it is recommended to incorporate soft skills training into both language and vocational education programs. Additionally, expanding mentoring services and involving employers in anti-discrimination efforts could improve workplace integration and foster a more inclusive environment.

In *Greece*, soft skills like stress tolerance and intercultural competence are critical for migrant integration. However, issues such as housing instability, mental health challenges, and limited employer involvement create significant barriers. Improving mental health services, stabilizing housing conditions, enhancing employer training on diversity and inclusion, and investing in digital literacy programs are vital steps to support successful integration for migrants in Greece.

Italy has long focused on using storytelling and emotional resilience in its migrant integration programs. However, fragmentation and access barriers have hindered their overall effectiveness. A more integrated approach, combining both technical and soft skills training while ensuring cultural sensitivity, could improve engagement. Additionally, stronger coordination between national and local programs is necessary to improve accessibility and effectiveness across regions.

Spain's integration strategies emphasize communication, adaptability, and digital literacy, but face challenges related to economic instability and high levels of digital illiteracy among migrants. Expanding digital training and mentoring programs, along with fostering regional inclusiveness, are crucial to bridging digital competency gaps and ensuring equal opportunities for all migrants. These initiatives will help build a more inclusive and resilient migrant integration process in Spain.

While each of the five countries—Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain—recognizes the importance of soft skills, their approaches vary significantly. Some countries have robust training programs in place, while others face challenges in integrating soft skills into education and workforce initiatives. Cultural awareness programs are often underfunded, and host community engagement is typically limited. Mentorship programs, where they exist, provide valuable support but are often hindered by financial constraints and scalability issues. These insights point to the

need for more comprehensive approaches that address both soft and technical skills while considering the specific needs of marginalized migrant groups.

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