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MIGRANT WOMEN CALL FOR SKILLS: What education and training systems can do

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Skills of Migrant women

Based on interviews conducted by ETF in 2023 with 58 migrant women from Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia, this policy brief presents findings and recommendations to enhance skills development and recognition for female migrants. The brief highlights the perspectives of often neglected low and medium-skilled migrant women, offering insights for policymakers and civil society organisations, EU services and international donors to promote legal labour migration pathways for them.

'Everything is difficult in a foreign country and a foreign land.'

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

Migrant women encounter challenges such as limited education and skills enhancement opportunities or under-utilisation of skills. Against this background, policymakers should intensify efforts to improve skills assessment and leverage migrants' skills and expertise, aiming for a triple-win scenario benefiting migrants, countries of origin, and destination countries.

Women in International Labour Migration: Mapping Skills Needs

For 2019, ILO data revealed that women constituted 41.5% of migrant workers, with a lower labour market participation rate than men (59.8% vs 77.5%). Women increasingly migrate independently to work, yet evidence and policies to address their skills needs are scarce, especially concerning low and medium-skilled migrant women.

'I can change (country) to discover other cultures and other skills in another country, the objective of emigration is to raise my level and my value, I will emigrate to acquire new skills.'
Moroccan potential migrant woman

Recognising the role of skills development in empowering migrant women and enhancing their economic opportunities, the ETF research "Migrant Women as Learners: Individual Pathways and Prospects" explored the skills and qualifications of migrant women using desk research and in-depth ethnographic interviews. Georgia, Morocco, and Tunisia appeared as a particularly interesting observatory, being quite advanced in the policy dialogue on labour migration management with the European Union and having substantial migration flows with European countries.

To provide nuanced insights and different perspectives, three distinct sub-groups of

migrant women were selected, reflecting diverse socio-economic profiles, through collaboration with national authorities and EU delegations in each country, aligning with country-specific expectations. In Georgia, the research surveyed seasonal migrant workers in agriculture and returning caregivers; and in Morocco and Tunisia, it covered both seasonal and potential migrants.

The report examined a series of interrelated questions about the skills and qualifications acquired before migration, their relevance to migration choices, and the skills needed to enhance the migration experience. Interviews were conducted in person and the snowball method was used to identify candidates. For further information on the methodology and findings readers can refer to the ETF concept design, cross-country analytical report and country sections available on the ETF website.

While acknowledging the constraints posed by the study's limited number of interviewees, the findings and recommendations from the three countries are designed to provide elements that can be of significant value to other ETF partner countries and to EU Member States to develop targeted interventions and policies.

Potential of Migrant women: Insights from Georgia, Morocco, and Tunisia

The 26 **seasonal workers** interviewed are engaged in temporary employment abroad in agriculture and tourism lasting 3 to 6 months, and often repeated over time. They reside in rural areas, with a large majority married with children, and their employment status varies from unemployed to having a temporary or a permanent job. Georgian women possess secondary and higher secondary education, Tunisian migrants have diverse educational backgrounds from low to highly skilled, while Moroccans often have basic literacy skills gained from non-formal education programmes. Agricultural skills and previous work experience in the sector influence migration decisions, facilitate task performance abroad and increase employability. Pre-departure training programmes are valued for the guidance they offer.

The skills and qualifications of some Georgian women are under-utilised as they work abroad in jobs for which they are over-qualified. Despite the short stay abroad and high work intensity, women acquire new skills relevant to the agricultural sector and improve their soft skills such as communication and relationships management.

Once they return, aspirations among migrant women vary, focusing on balancing professional growth with their role in the family. Financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills are identified by women as essential to economic empowerment, but women are more inclined to pursue entrepreneurship out of economic necessity rather than being attracted by opportunities.

The 11 **returnee caregivers** interviewed include healthcare, care and domestic workers from Georgia who worked in healthcare institutions and private households. Unlike seasonal workers, the duration of work abroad is longer, and repetition over time is less frequent. As access to health and care professions is governed in destination countries by legal and professional regulations, education impacts individuals' decisions to migrate. Licensed Georgian nurses must undergo technical and language training to

work abroad. For domestic workers, as caregiving is rooted in traditional women's roles, experience in household tasks affects the migration path. Deskilling is prevalent among women in the domestic sector in destination countries.

Women working in institutions abroad benefit from formal training and skills development, while those working in households have limited exposure beyond their immediate environment.

Upon return, caregivers want to apply their skills or acquire new ones for a more stable income. Women are interested in sector-specific vocational skills training and re-training, and are asking for affordability, accessibility and the right balance between theory and practice in training provision. While entrepreneurial projects are points of interest, returning migrant women often lack the information, financial resources or skills to develop business plans, hampering their ability to secure their projects.

Unlike seasonal workers or returning caregivers, the 21 **potential migrants** interviewed are mainly young, single and often highly qualified individuals at various phases of their migration project. These women possess formal qualifications and diplomas that make them eligible for employment in various sectors and impact their migration prospects. Overseas employment opportunities often dictate educational paths, with women adapting their professional profiles to match foreign labour market demands. Women acquire informal skills, often through self-teaching and online courses on social media platforms. Potential migrants emphasised the practical value of occupation-specific language training.

Reliable information and pre-departure training are seen as playing a crucial role in equipping potential migrants with skills for socio-economic integration. Interviews show that potential migrants, who are already highly qualified, focus on continued professional development and skills enhancement.

Qualifications in high-demand sectors like healthcare can prompt migration. Significant return intention differences exist for different countries. Moroccan women plan to return and enhance the development impacts of

migration, while Tunisians are more inclined towards permanent migration.

Triple-win cases through labour migration

Seasonal migrant women from Morocco highlighted positive changes from gaining new skills and knowledge, including increased financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills.

'[...] we learned many things about agriculture and how to treat, speak and communicate with others.'
Moroccan seasonal migrant woman

Skills development systems for (illiterate) women are seen as important, with preferences for adult-oriented, tailored to women's specific needs, ensuring accessibility at the local level and accommodating their limited schedules. *This pattern of seasonal migrant women providing advantages at many levels could be inspirational for other sub-groups of migrants – including men.*

Georgian women highlighted the need to strengthen skills recognition and career development, considering simplified and flexible options for harnessing and acknowledging the skill sets of individuals.

'I currently work in a clinic in Georgia, although I have caregiver status, which surprised me because my role in Germany was defined as a nurse. [...] I think there is a huge difference in the systems.'
Georgian returnee caregiver

Particular attention should be paid to *transversal skills*, such as communication or intercultural understanding, which should be addressed through innovative approaches. *The skills of returned emigrants could be a powerful tool in the formulation and implementation of development strategies.*

To enhance their employability, **Tunisian potential migrants** actively seek formal skills and qualifications with a view to migration. This is achieved through various means, including higher education institutions and private training centres.

'I invested and stayed focused 100% on my migration project.'
Tunisian potential migrant woman

Despite the potential loss of highly skilled workers through emigration, there are also potential benefits. A well-educated diaspora can be a valuable resource for Tunisia, as professionals facilitate access to capital, education, technology, and information from abroad. *Migrant women may act as conduits for foreign exchange, remittances, and investment.*

Conclusions and recommendations

If this (training) programme wasn't there, these changes wouldn't take place, so first of all, this is a positive change – that I changed the direction of my life.'
Georgian returnee caregiver

The ETF research provides a nuanced description of the situation of migrant women in Georgia, Morocco, and Tunisia, acknowledging each country's unique characteristics and

circumstances. Despite the differences in history, economy, and context, **the study reveals that migrant women encounter similar challenges. Providing adequate information, training and support measures is crucial to empowering migrant women for sustainable livelihoods.** The cross-country analytical and country sections offer detailed insights for stakeholders on targeted areas of interventions.

Table 1. Policy recommendation by relevance to country of origin and migrant sub-group

	Seasonal workers			Returnee caregivers	Potential migrants	
	GEO	MAR	TUN	GEO	MAR	TUN
Information						
Enhanced Information Landscape on Available Training Opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Training						
Comprehensive Pre-Departure Training	X	X	X	X	X	X
Language Proficiency Programmes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sector-Specific Skills Enhancement				X	X	X
Tailored Programmes for Women	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hybrid Training Formats	X	X	X	X	X	X
Soft Skills Development				X	X	X
Financial Accessibility of Training Courses	X	X	X	X	X	X
Entrepreneurship Training and Financial Support*	X	X	X	X		
Support Measures						
Skills and Qualifications Recognition				X	X	X
Psychosocial Support				X		
Networking Opportunities				X		
Mentorship Programmes				X	X	X
Professional Orientation Session	X	X	X	X		
Job Matching and Employment Support				X		

Source: ETF Cross-country analytical report “Migrant women as learners: Individual pathways and prospects” 2024

Interviews provided rich data and reflected the lived experiences and perspectives of migrant women, despite the fact that the sample size was relatively small and not statistically representative. Based on expectations expressed in the interviews the following thoughtful suggestions for action are suggested.

Training and Skills Development in origin and destination countries focusing on:

- **Pre-departure training programmes** covering job expectations, basic financial

literacy, interview skills and cultural adaptation.

- **Language proficiency courses** tailored to destination countries' requirements, focusing on occupation-specific vocabulary.
- **Sector-specific vocational skills** enhancement programmes to improve employability both locally and abroad.

Training should be designed to meet the needs of adult learners and offered **free of charge in hybrid formats (online and in-person)** to

accommodate diverse educational backgrounds and facilitate access.

Institutional Support Measures:

- Strengthening systems for the **validation of prior learning** and recognition of qualifications, both in origin and destination country
- **Offer orientation and career guidance** to return migrants, including mentorship programmes.
- Implement **entrepreneurship training programmes** and financially support migrant women upon return.

Wider Information in Origin Country:

- Implement **targeted campaigns** to raise awareness about available training or financing opportunities for migrant women using social media and adverts in public means of transport

- Establish a coordination mechanism involving relevant **state agencies and NGOs** to expand course offerings.
- Labour migration management needs to better target skills needs via **bilateral agreements** and multilateral initiatives such as **EU led Talent Partnerships**.

[...] women do better than men. It also depends on determination; perhaps women are more determined.'
Georgian returnee caregiver

Migrant women demonstrate profound dynamism and a willingness to embrace risks and challenges. Many of them are **agents of change** in their origin societies, especially upon returning to their country of origin. They serve as inspiring examples of determination and sources of expertise. Recognising and supporting their contribution is important, as is acknowledging women's fundamental role in shaping societies and fostering progress.

Key References and Useful links

This research is part of ETF support for the implementation of the labour migration component of the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e0329c71-3459-4903-9019-14384d04030c/asset-upload/document/15667064/1629492322769/20201104_01_1629492322769.pdf) presented in 2020, and of [Talent partnerships - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e0329c71-3459-4903-9019-14384d04030c/asset-upload/document/15667064/1629492322769/20201104_01_1629492322769.pdf) and of [Commission Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e0329c71-3459-4903-9019-14384d04030c/asset-upload/document/15667064/1629492322769/20201104_01_1629492322769.pdf) both from 2023. All ETF resources on labour migration are available at [Skills and migration | ETF \(europa.eu\)](https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/skills-and-migration) . For more details please contact migration-team@etf.europa.eu.