



Vocational Opportunities and Integration for Refugee Community Empowerment

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WP2 Mapping and Needs Assessment

D002.002 – Aggregated Report

Consolidated by: IHF as WP2 leader (based on partners' country reports)

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**Social
Innovation⁺
Initiative**

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How to read this document

This aggregated report synthesizes evidence from the four completed WP2 reports – **EU-level, Spain, Poland, and Italy** – produced using the **Common Methodology** and the **Annex A Template (Needs Assessment & Identification of Training Gaps)**. Citations appear in-text to the source reports for traceability (e.g., *VOICE WP2 Report – Spain*). Where data points are shared across multiple sources, we indicate the primary national/EU report; underlying data sources (Eurostat, UNHCR, national statistical offices) are listed in Section 7 and in the original country reports.

1. Executive Summary

The **VOICE** project – *Vocational Opportunities and Integration for Refugee Community Empowerment* – is an ESF+ Social Innovation initiative designed in response to the call “*Innovative approaches to mitigate the societal consequences of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine within EU countries*”.

Its overarching ambition is to contribute to a **smoother social and professional integration of Ukrainian refugees** through **innovative learning pathways, open educational resources** and **localised training models** that promote employability, self-reliance and community empowerment.

Within this overall framework, **Work Package 2 (WP2)** provides the **analytical backbone** of the project. It establishes the evidence base needed for the later adaptation, piloting and transfer activities foreseen under WP3 and WP4. Activity A002.002 – *Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Identification of Training Gaps* – has therefore been devoted to conducting a systematic analysis of the **situation, needs and opportunities** of Ukrainian refugees in **Spain, Poland, Italy** and at the **EU level**. The work was guided by the **Common Methodology** (D002.001) validated at the **Kick-off Meeting in Brussels** and implemented through a shared **Annex A template** and harmonised research tools.

This **Aggregated Report** consolidates the findings of the four national reports (*VOICE WP2 Reports – EU, Spain, Poland, Italy*), cross-referencing quantitative indicators and qualitative insights gathered by partners. It outlines the main trends, convergences and divergences that shape the employability prospects of Ukrainian refugees across these diverse national contexts.

Across all countries, the assessment confirms that **Ukrainian refugees represent**





a pool of highly qualified, motivated and resilient individuals. More than two-thirds of respondents in the national reports hold upper-secondary or tertiary education and many have pre-war professional experience in teaching, administration, healthcare or IT (*VOICE WP2 Report – Poland; – Italy*).

Yet, despite this strong human capital, employment trajectories remain **fragile and frequently below skill level**. Persistent barriers – especially **insufficient language proficiency, limited recognition of prior qualifications and difficulty navigating host-country training systems** – hamper full integration. These barriers are compounded by **gendered care responsibilities**, and, in some cases, **uncertain residence or childcare arrangements**, which reduce the time available for structured learning (*VOICE WP2 Report – EU*).

The mapping also shows that **training opportunities exist but remain fragmented**. A rich ecosystem of courses, projects, and NGO-led initiatives operates in all three countries, yet coordination, visibility and transferability of results are limited. Refugees often rely on informal networks or social media to identify learning options, while local employment services rarely offer tailored guidance. The **VOICE WP2 Repository of Social Innovation Initiatives** has already catalogued over 40 promising practices that illustrate the potential of small-scale, community-driven interventions, but their impact is still geographically uneven.

From this comparative analysis, four **cross-cutting needs** clearly emerge:

1. **Language for Social Inclusion and Employability** – not only generic language training, but also *sector-specific, job-task-oriented* modules that accelerate workplace readiness and confidence
2. **Applied Digital Skills** – capacity to use online job platforms, manage e-services and perform remote or hybrid work tasks effectively
3. **Soft and Transversal Skills** – interpersonal communication, teamwork and intercultural awareness that facilitate adaptation to new work environments
4. **Entrepreneurial and Self-Employment Competences** – foundational knowledge to transform existing professional skills into micro-business or freelance opportunities, a need voiced particularly in the Spanish and Italian reports





These **four pillars** are consistent with EU-wide evidence on the integration of displaced professionals (*VOICE WP2 Report – EU*), and together they form the **training priorities** for the next implementation phases.

Finally, the assessment highlights the necessity to **translate policy ambitions into learner-centred, flexible training models**. Effective solutions must bridge the gap between existing competences and host-country labour-market demands through **modular, blended and localised training** supported by **digital tools and employer partnerships**.

The recommendations derived from this evidence – detailed in Section 6 – provide a roadmap for WP3 to design adaptable learning content (multi-lingual, gender-sensitive and competence-based) and for WP4 to pilot and validate the approach with real beneficiaries. In this sense, WP2 not only maps needs but also establishes the **conceptual and empirical foundation** upon which the entire VOICE project will build tangible integration outcomes across Europe.

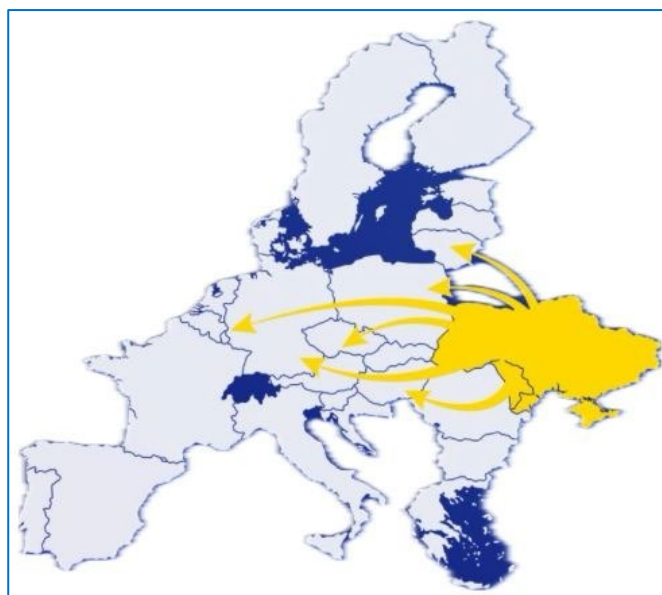


2. EU & National Context Overview

2.1 EU Overview

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union has become the main destination for displaced people from Ukraine. According to Eurostat (2025), 5.137 million Ukrainians were receiving temporary protection in EU Member States as of September 2025, an increase of +0.8% since May 2025. Among these, 98.4 % were Ukrainian citizens (Operational Data Report 2025). Women account for the largest share, followed by minors and a smaller group of adult men; the proportion of women continues to rise (Eurostat 2025, *Temporary Protection for Persons Fleeing Ukraine – Monthly Statistics*). (VOICE WP2 Report – EU)

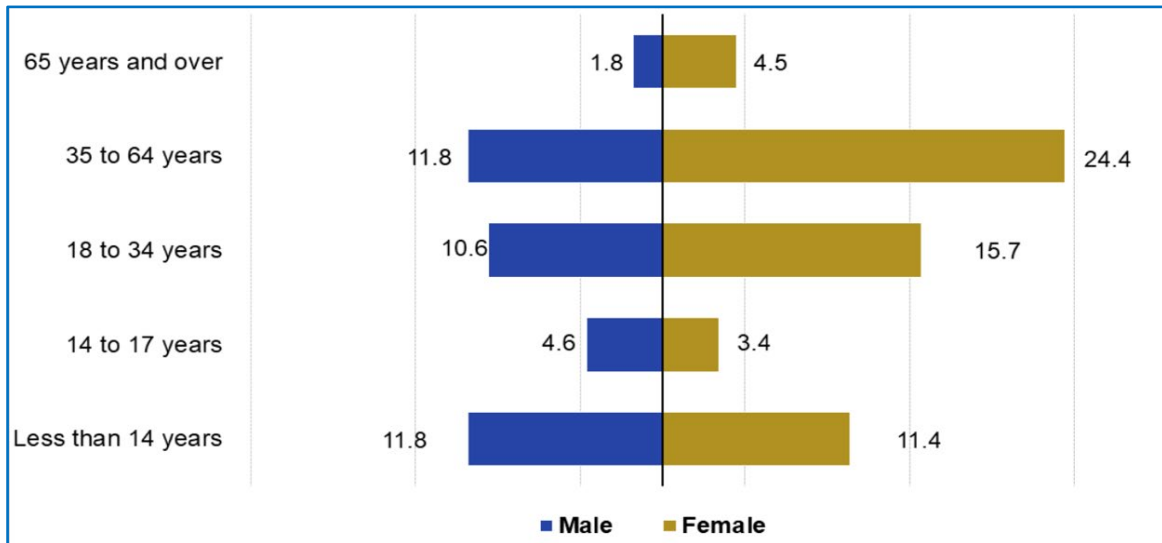
Figure 1 – Migration of displaced people from Ukraine to EU countries



Source: Home Affairs of EU 2025, Migration Management.

The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), activated in March 2022, grants collective protection and access to residence, healthcare, housing, education and the labour market. In 2025, the Council extended the Directive until March 4 2027 (Council of the EU 2025 a). This predictable legal framework has enabled millions of Ukrainians not only to reach safety but also to start working, studying, and integrating in host communities (VOICE WP2 Report – EU).

Figure 2 – Structure of Ukrainian beneficiaries by age and sex EU, end June 2025 (%)



Source: Eurostat 2025

Beyond emergency protection, the EU has invested in long-term inclusion. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 promotes a *whole-of-society* approach involving employers, migrant communities, civil society, and multi-level governments. Within the European Education Area, Member States exchange best practices on *language assessment, qualification recognition, intercultural communication and management of linguistic diversity* (VOICE WP2 Report – EU).

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF 2021–2027) – with a total budget of € 9.88 billion – has become a cornerstone of EU support (Migration and Home Affairs 2025). Since 2022, AMIF has financed housing, healthcare, and integration measures in countries most affected by arrivals – Poland, Germany, Czechia – and funded language and vocational training, qualification recognition, and labour-market guidance (AMIF 2024). The European Investment Bank (EIB) complements this effort through a € 58 million loan and € 8.5 million grant for modernising Ukraine’s VET infrastructure (EIB 2023), reinforcing both Ukrainian reconstruction and refugee employability within the EU.

Despite progress, challenges persist: pressure on housing and schools, teacher shortages and the psychological strain of displacement. Roughly half of displaced children remain outside regular education systems (Council of the EU 2025 a). Nevertheless, displaced Ukrainians show above-average employment rates, often filling shortages in healthcare, construction, logistics, and ICT (EIB 2023).



The Solidarity Platform (European Commission 2022, DG HOME) now acts as the central hub for practical information and coordination among EU institutions, IOM, UNHCR, and partner governments such as the US and Canada.

The EU's multi-layered approach – combining protection, funding and coordination – provides the policy baseline for VOICE's focus on language, digital and vocational upskilling to promote inclusion and employability across Member States.

2.2 Spanish Overview

Spain has granted temporary protection to approximately 236 000 Ukrainian citizens since 2022 (Government of Spain 2025). The refugee population is predominantly female, with most arrivals being women with dependent children and high educational attainment, yet frequently employed in temporary or low-paid roles below their qualifications (*VOICE WP2 Report – Spain*).

The national response is framed by the Reception Plan for Ukrainian Refugees, coordinated by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, together with Autonomous Communities and third-sector organisations. This decentralised model enables broad territorial coverage but also results in regional disparities in access and coordination. Andalusia, where Arrabal-AID and IWS operate through consolidated networks, shows more effective integration outcomes compared to regions with fragmented support structures.

Language proficiency remains the main barrier to labour-market inclusion. Free Spanish courses are available through public institutions and NGOs, but they are often short, general and rarely aligned with professional contexts. Digital skills gaps compound these challenges – particularly among women managing care responsibilities and older adults with limited ICT experience (OECD 2023; *VOICE WP2 Report – Spain*).

Qualification recognition also represents a major obstacle. The absence of unified national procedures delays the validation of degrees and work experience acquired abroad. As a result, many refugees work in hospitality, domestic services, construction, and agriculture, sectors that provide immediate income but limited professional development (*VOICE WP2 Report – Spain*).

Entrepreneurship has emerged as an alternative integration pathway, yet refugees need training in business planning, taxation and digital marketing to succeed. The Spanish report recommends mentorship and micro-finance mechanisms to



support these initiatives. At the same time, the development of soft and transversal skills – communication, teamwork, intercultural understanding – remains essential for professional reintegration and social cohesion (*VOICE WP2 Report – Spain*).

Spain’s experience reflects a system with strong institutional and civil-society engagement but fragmented implementation. Strengthening cooperation between regional administrations and NGOs, expanding sector-specific language courses and embedding digital and entrepreneurial skills into vocational pathways are identified as key priorities for the next phases of VOICE.

2.3 Polish Overview

According to *VOICE WP2 Report – Poland*, Poland remains the main host country for displaced Ukrainians within the EU. As of mid-2022, approximately 1 million refugees were registered under the Temporary Protection Directive, the vast majority being women (about 76%) and children.

Figure 3 – Comparison of Ukrainian Groups in Poland

Category	Labour migrants (2014–2021)	War refugees (after 24.02.2022)
Population size	Approx. 1.35 million	Approx. 1.0 million in Poland (3.8 million crossed the border)
Period of arrival	2014–2021 (before the invasion on 24.02.2022)	After 24.02.2022 (post-escalation of the war)
Reasons for migration	Economic (employment, better earnings, education)	Flight from armed conflict
Polish language proficiency	58% declare knowledge of Polish	Low proficiency, major barrier to integration
Gender structure	40–54% women	76% women, 1/3 are children
Social integration	High level of social and labour market integration	Lower integration, reliant on institutional support
Labour market situation	Low unemployment, employment matching qualifications	65% employment rate (often below qualifications)
Legal status	Labour migrant status	Refugee status with temporary protection

Source: own study based on available stats data and research results (*VOICE WP2 Report – Poland*)



The report highlights that Poland's geographic proximity, shared language roots and existing diaspora networks facilitated rapid entry and settlement during the first months after February 2022.

Governmental actions were guided by the Special Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine (2022), which provided an immediate legal framework for residence, access to education, employment, and social services. Through this act, refugees obtained a PESEL identification number granting full access to the labour market and healthcare.

By early 2025, employment rates had stabilised at around 65%, supported by simplified procedures for job registration and by temporary work agencies. However, most refugees remain employed in low-skilled or short-term positions, particularly in services, hospitality, manufacturing and logistics. The report notes that this pattern reveals a deskilling phenomenon, as many hold higher education degrees or specialised professional experience (teachers, engineers, healthcare staff).

Language proficiency is described as a decisive determinant of employment quality. While similarities between Polish and Ukrainian allowed rapid adaptation for some, limited fluency continues to constrain access to higher-skilled occupations and formal VET programmes.

The Polish language barrier is particularly significant in regulated professions, where documentation and certification are required in Polish.

Stakeholders interviewed in the report emphasise the need for integrated support pathways, combining:

- Targeted **Polish-for-Work courses** aligned with specific job sectors
- Vocational upskilling and qualification **recognition mechanisms**
- Childcare provision and psychological support for women re-entering the labour market

Despite these challenges, Poland's experience is seen as a positive example of early labour-market activation. Rapid mobilisation of institutions and simplified legislation facilitated employment and self-reliance for many Ukrainians. Yet, the report concludes that without systematic validation of prior learning and stronger bridging programmes to professional sectors, under-employment could persist as a structural issue.



2.4 Italian Overview

As of May 2025, Italy hosts an estimated 205 307 Ukrainian refugees, as recorded by ISTAT (2025). The refugee population is predominantly female (143 497 – 70%), mostly highly educated and with professional backgrounds in education, administration and services (*VOICE WP2 Report – Italy*).

The Italian response is based on the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive, granting immediate access to healthcare, education and the labour market. Integration measures are managed at regional level, leading to uneven access and fragmentation across territories.

The report describes Italy's adult-learning infrastructure as solid but not fully inclusive. The Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CPIA) play a central role in delivering Italian language courses and basic skills training. However, the system struggles with capacity limits, administrative complexity and long waiting times for registration.

The main challenges identified are:

- **Language for work:** proficiency in Italian remains the primary obstacle, especially concerning professional and regional varieties required in hospitality and care sectors
- **Recognition of qualifications:** Italy lacks a unified national framework for validating third-country degrees; refugees face long delays in equivalency procedures
- **Mobility and bureaucracy:** lack of transport and extensive documentation requirements often discourage participation

Despite these barriers, good practices are emerging. Several regions (notably Abruzzo, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy) are experimenting with blended-learning approaches, combining in-person and online courses and with device-loan schemes enabling women and remote learners to participate. The report also points out that NGOs and regional VET centres increasingly collaborate to offer combined training packages – language + digital + employability – but coverage remains limited.

Employment patterns reveal that many Ukrainian women are working in care, hospitality, and domestic services, far below their qualification level. The labour market's structural characteristics – seasonality, informality and limited job stability – further restrict integration prospects. Stakeholders advocate for mentoring, internship opportunities and recognition of informal learning as key next steps.





Italy's case illustrates a context of high educational potential constrained by structural and bureaucratic barriers. Investing in task-based language training, recognition systems and flexible delivery models would significantly improve long-term integration outcomes.

2.5 Cross-reading the National Contexts through the EU Lens

Across the three national cases, trends mirror the **EU-wide picture**: high human capital, persistent language and recognition barriers, and uneven service coordination.

- **Spain** demonstrates the potential of NGO-driven flexibility within decentralised systems
- **Poland** shows how early labour-market activation works but needs complementary upskilling
- **Italy** highlights how bureaucracy and sectoral segmentation slow progress despite strong infrastructure

In all, the aggregated evidence confirms the rationale of the VOICE approach: to develop modular, blended, and recognition-friendly learning paths centred on Language for Employability, Digital, Soft, and Entrepreneurial Skills, directly responding to the real-world conditions.



3. Methodology

This aggregated report consolidates evidence gathered through a common research framework defined in the VOICE WP2 Common Methodology and implemented via the shared Annex A Template – Needs Assessment and Identification of Training Gaps – with a tailored set of guiding questions.

All four country reports (EU, Spain, Poland, Italy) followed the same structure, ensuring that results were comparable and consistent across different national contexts. The methodological approach was presented and validated at the Kick-off Meeting in Brussels and subsequently applied by the partner pairs assigned to each country, with IHF covering the EU-wide analysis as part of Activity A002.002.

Desk research and scope

Each country report relied primarily on desk research, drawing on updated and authoritative sources.

- The EU report reviewed documentation from the European Commission, Council of the EU, European Parliament, Eurostat, OECD, FRA, Eurofound, EMN and EIB to assess labour-market dynamics, education and VET systems and integration measures
- The Spanish report examined both European and national sources, such as the European Commission, UNHCR, OECD, EUAA and the Ministry of Inclusion and Migration, as well as NGO reports from organisations like CEAR and Accem
- The Polish report combined European and international evidence (European Commission, UNHCR, EUAA) with national data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the Office for Foreigners and sectoral ministries, complemented by academic and policy research from local think tanks
- The Italian report followed the same structure, drawing from institutional portals (Council of the EU, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), statistical databases (Eurostat, Civil Protection, Istat), and resources from CEDEFOP, UNHCR and IOM

All sources were selected according to two criteria: recency (mainly 2022–2025) and institutional reliability.

Stakeholder mapping and practice scan

Each partner conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify institutions, NGOs, and agencies involved in refugee integration and training, following the template in Annex B of the Common Methodology.



- Spain identified stakeholders using public records and online platforms; although no primary interviews were conducted, secondary data and institutional inputs were incorporated
- Poland mapped a large set of actors – ministries, employment offices, regional administrations and social partners – combining institutional data with prior consultation outcomes
- Italy complemented desk research with informal insights from direct contacts with NGOs and regional training providers operating within the national system

These mappings were then used to populate the repository of social innovation initiatives, which complements the country reports.

Analysis and synthesis

The four reports followed a unified analytical process. Quantitative indicators (demographics, employment, training participation) were cross-checked with qualitative insights on barriers, training provision and stakeholder perspectives. Practical findings were then transferred into the common Skills Gap Matrix (Annex C), allowing aggregation and comparison across countries. Activity A002.002 also established shared deliverables, including the country reports, the repository of initiatives and this aggregated report, ensuring methodological consistency.

Quality assurance and limitations

The Common Methodology established quality standards for evidence-based reporting, internal review among partners, and compliance with data protection (GDPR) principles. All reports are desk-based studies; therefore, no direct fieldwork with beneficiaries was undertaken during WP2. This will be addressed in later stages of the project (WP3 and WP4) through participatory co-creation and piloting activities with end-users and employers.

Summary of key methodological features

- **Research design:** Common framework and shared template applied across four reports; partner-pair execution per country
- **Method:** Structured desk review of reliable EU, international and national sources; unified analytical grid for comparability
- **Stakeholders:** Identified via internal mapping, databases and NGO records; no direct field research in WP2
- **Criteria:** Recency (post-2022) and official or peer-reviewed sources
- **Quality and ethics:** Evidence-based drafting, partner peer review and GDPR compliance throughout



4. Key Findings

4.1 Demographics & social profile

Across all countries, the Ukrainian refugee population is predominantly female (70–85%), mostly aged between 25 and 49 years, and demonstrates medium-to-high educational attainment – a significant share holding tertiary qualifications. This pattern is consistent across the four reports (*VOICE WP2 Reports – EU, Spain, Poland, Italy*).

Most refugees previously worked in education, administration, health and services, but transition into equivalent professions remains constrained by language barriers, non-recognition of prior qualifications and care responsibilities that disproportionately affect women.

In the EU report, these structural constraints are accompanied by housing shortages, transport limitations and the difficulty of reconciling training or work with childcare. The Spanish report further highlights that refugees' profiles are highly qualified but under-employed, while the Italian report underlines the mismatch between education levels and actual job opportunities. In Poland, the profile is similar, but employment rates are higher due to immediate access to the labour market following the Special Act (2022).

The data reveal a population with strong human capital but limited opportunity to deploy it effectively. Training actions under VOICE must therefore:

- **Acknowledge and credit prior learning** through flexible validation mechanisms
- **Adapt delivery to gender realities**, offering childcare-friendly options
- **Encourage requalification** in sectors that recognise transferable competences

4.2 Employment & economic participation

All reports confirm strong work motivation among refugees, yet employment patterns vary substantially by country. While many beneficiaries quickly entered the labour market thanks to the Temporary Protection Directive and simplified national frameworks, their occupational trajectories remain unstable, often marked by overqualification and temporary contracts. Figure 4 provides a comparative synthesis.



Figure 4 – Employment participation – summary

Country	Employment rate	Main sectors of employment	Key barriers
EU	55–60 %	Services, hospitality, logistics, care	Language, qualification recognition, childcare
Spain	40–50 %	Hospitality, domestic care, admin support	Spanish proficiency, regional disparities
Poland	65 %	Manufacturing, logistics, services	Temporary contracts, deskilling, Polish fluency
Italy	45–55 %	Care, hospitality, services	Italian proficiency, bureaucracy, awareness of VET offers

Source: Data consolidated from EU/national studies as reported in the four country snapshots

Poland displays the highest participation levels, owing to early activation measures and simplified work access, but a majority are in low-paid or temporary jobs. Spain and Italy reveal slower entry into the labour market due to linguistic and administrative hurdles; in both, a considerable proportion of refugees hold university degrees yet work in service or domestic sectors. The EU-level report stresses that across Member States, the combination of recognition bottlenecks, childcare responsibilities and fragmented training pathways remains the strongest impediment to upward mobility.

4.3 Skills: Language, Digital, Soft/Transversal, Entrepreneurial

The four reports converge on the same finding: **language proficiency** is the single most critical skill gap. All partners recommend sector-specific and task-oriented language training instead of generic language courses. In Spain and Italy, this is linked to jobs in hospitality, healthcare and administration, while in Poland the emphasis is on manufacturing and logistics. At EU level, the WP2 analysis also stresses the need to embed language within employability contexts, linking it to real job tasks.

Digital skills appear more fragmented. While most refugees possess baseline digital familiarity (use of smartphones, social media, communication tools), the



reports highlight missing applied competences such as e-recruitment, online documentation, remote collaboration and basic cybersecurity. Italy and Spain show the largest gaps among older participants, while Poland presents better digital uptake among youth.

Soft and transversal skills – including communication, intercultural understanding, teamwork and adaptability – are increasingly valued by employers. Spain and Italy report that these competences are essential to rebuild confidence and accelerate professional reintegration.

Entrepreneurship and self-employment emerge as growing interests, particularly in Spain and Italy, where local initiatives already provide small-scale support. However, refugees often lack business-planning, financial literacy and regulatory knowledge, making structured mentoring and micro-finance essential to unlock this potential.

Figure 5 – Aggregated overview of skills gaps and training priorities

Skills Area	Common Gaps Identified	Primary Target Groups	Typical Country-Specific Features	Training Implications (Aggregated)
Language for Social Inclusion & Employability	Limited host-country language both for daily life and professional use; absence of vocational/contextualised training modules for participation and integration	All refugees, particularly women and those in care/hospitality/logistics	Spain/Italy: high dependency on language-intensive sectors; Poland: linguistic similarity but formal fluency needed for qualified jobs	Develop dual-purpose modules combining everyday communication and professional terminology; integrate with soft skills, civic orientation and employability tasks to enhance both integration and job readiness
Digital Skills for Work & Life	Basic ICT literacy common, but low applied digital competence (e-services, online job search, remote work)	Older adults; women with care duties; low-income groups	Italy/Spain: older participants less familiar with digital platforms; Poland: youth well connected	Design applied digital modules : online recruitment, e-documentation, cybersecurity, digital self-marketing; promote blended delivery
Soft / Transversal Skills	Communication, teamwork, intercultural awareness, adaptability; lack of self-confidence after displacement	Cross-cutting across all groups	Spain & Italy: critical for service-sector employment; EU: key to inclusion & community cohesion	Include role-plays, group projects, and peer-learning to strengthen interpersonal competences; connect with employers for real-scenario feedback



Skills Area	Common Gaps Identified	Primary Target Groups	Typical Country-Specific Features	Training Implications (Aggregated)
Entrepreneurial Competences	Lack of business-planning, fiscal/legal literacy, marketing and self-promotion skills	Refugees seeking self-employment or micro-enterprise creation	Spain & Italy: strong local potential for microbusiness; Poland: rising interest in freelancing	Create introductory entrepreneurship modules with mentorship, business canvas tools and links to microfinance initiatives
Validation & Recognition of Skills	Low awareness and complex procedures for recognising prior learning and informal experience	All refugees, particularly those with higher education	Italy: fragmented national system; Poland & Spain: limited institutional mechanisms	Integrate self-assessment and EU Skills Profile tools in training; guide learners toward national recognition services

Source: Data consolidated (own elaboration) from the evidence in the four country snapshots

Every national report underlines that **language, digital, and transversal skills** form the foundation for employability. Integrating **validation and entrepreneurship** ensures not only immediate labour-market access but also long-term sustainability. The aggregated findings call for training models that are modular, inclusive and directly linked to both sectoral demand and personal development.

4.4 Training offer and access

Mapping across the three partner countries and the EU level reveals abundant but fragmented training provision. Most opportunities are offered by regional authorities, employment centres and NGOs, but lack central coordination or visibility. The EU report observes that, while provision is widespread, programmes rarely combine language, digital and employability skills in an integrated format.

- **Spain** reports a strong NGO presence and innovative local actions but limited consistency in certification and follow-up
- **Poland** demonstrates rapid deployment of labour-activation measures but calls for more sustainable, long-term upskilling routes
- **Italy** highlights the maturity of its adult-education network (CPIA) but notes that bureaucratic barriers and limited awareness of opportunities still hinder access



Informal stakeholder input – summarised across the four reports – reveal common demands for:

- clearer information **pathways** and learner guidance
- stronger **employer involvement** in curriculum design
- **flexible and blended learning formats** compatible with family duties
- and more effective **validation of** informal and non-formal **learning outcomes**

Ultimately, the four reports depict a training landscape rich in initiatives but poor in integration. The evidence underlines the importance of VOICE's mission: to create an accessible, modular and cross-country learning model that connects language, digital and soft skills while ensuring recognition and sustainability at European level.





5. Training Gaps & Priority Areas

The Aggregated Skills Gap Matrix, together with the four national reports, highlights a consistent set of priority training areas that directly respond to the barriers and needs identified through the WP2 research. Despite contextual differences, Spain, Poland, Italy and the EU-level analysis all converge on four main training priorities – **Language for Social Inclusion and Employability, Applied Digital Skills, Soft/Transversal Skills, and Entrepreneurial Competences** – which represent the foundation for developing the learning content and adaptation strategies under WP3.

These domains are strongly interlinked and mutually reinforcing: language and digital competence act as enablers for access and communication; soft skills sustain workplace integration; and entrepreneurship opens self-employment pathways, particularly valuable where job-matching remains limited. The findings below synthesize the recurring evidence across all four reports, with distinctions drawn from each national context.

5.1 Language for social inclusion and employability

What: Practical, task-based modules that combine everyday communication with professional language for priority sectors such as hospitality, logistics, healthcare, education, and administration.

Why: All reports identify language as the most persistent and cross-cutting barrier to both social participation and access to qualified employment. Current language provision is often generic, classroom-based, and insufficiently aligned with work realities.

Where the need is strongest: In **Spain and Italy**, where language intensity and regional linguistic variations affect employability; in **Poland**, where linguistic proximity aids basic communication, but proficiency is still needed for regulated professions.

How it should evolve:

- Integrate **language, cultural mediation and workplace practice** into a single learning path
- Provide **sector-specific modules** (e.g., “Polish for Healthcare,” “Italian for Hospitality,” “Spanish for Office Administration”)
- Combine **in-person and digital delivery** for flexibility and scalability

Language training is also an essential tool for social inclusion, promoting self-confidence, autonomy, and interaction with local communities.





5.2 Applied digital skills for work & services

What: Skills related to digital identity, use of e-services, online job-search tools, remote collaboration, and basic cybersecurity.

Why: Digital skills are now essential for both employability and access to public services. The reports show that while most refugees are comfortable with mobile devices, they lack structured digital competences for work and learning.

Country differences:

- **Poland:** generally higher digital engagement and availability of online tools through public services
- **Spain and Italy:** visible generational and gender divides, with women and older adults requiring targeted support
- **EU level:** integration of digital and language skills recommended as a dual literacy approach

How to address:

- Create **hands-on digital labs** embedded in employability programmes
- Promote **digital inclusion** through simple, contextualised exercises (e.g., filling online forms, creating CVs, using collaborative platforms)

5.3 Soft / transversal skills for workforce integration

What: Interpersonal, intercultural, and behavioural skills that improve workplace readiness, confidence, and social cohesion.

Why: Employers in all reports emphasise that language and technical training alone are not enough; effective communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence are critical. These competences also support psychosocial recovery and empowerment after displacement.

Country nuances:

- **Spain and Italy:** employers report a clear gap in customer interaction and teamwork
- **Poland:** the focus is on adaptability and intercultural awareness in mixed workplaces
- **EU:** soft skills are framed as the “social capital” enabling both employability and integration

How to implement:

- Include **scenario-based simulations, peer-mentoring and group projects**
- Integrate informal feedback from participants to align soft-skill modules with actual workplace contexts



5.4 Entrepreneurial competences and self-employment pathways

What: Business ideation, basic financial literacy, marketing and communication, understanding of local regulations, and use of digital tools for entrepreneurship.

Why: Refugees—especially women and professionals unable to access regulated sectors—see entrepreneurship as a path to independence and stability. Yet, across all reports, there is limited access to guidance, mentoring, and seed funding.

Where it is most relevant:

- **Spain and Italy** have stronger local ecosystems supporting microbusiness and social entrepreneurship
- **Poland** shows growing interest in freelancing and remote work
- **EU level:** supports scalability and knowledge sharing through digital platforms

How to strengthen:

- Offer **introductory entrepreneurship modules** with step-by-step guidance and practical toolkits
- Link training to **microfinance institutions and incubators** already active in partner regions

Figure 6. Prioritised gaps and design implications for WP3

Training Gap	Design Implications for WP3 (Adaptation)	Delivery Considerations for WP4 (Piloting)
Language for Social Inclusion and Employability	Develop modular, sectorised “Language for Work and Life” units; integrate with digital and civic elements; include peer-learning and pronunciation labs	Combine online self-paced lessons with in-person feedback session and job-shadowing; involve participants in content validation
Applied Digital Skills	Build practical toolkits for job search, e-government use and digital collaboration; ensure compatibility with mobile devices	Use blended delivery and digital mentors; incorporate assessments via real online tasks (e.g., self-assessment tests)
Soft / Transversal Skills	Create interactive activities (role-plays, case studies, intercultural dialogues); co-design content with stakeholders	Deliver via mentoring, coaching sessions and peer feedback; recognise achievement through micro-credentials
Entrepreneurial Competences	Introduce entrepreneurship fundamentals and digital marketing; include gender-sensitive examples; link with local incubators	Support mentor-supported projects and community-of-practice groups; facilitate small-scale business challenges

Source: Data consolidated (own elaboration) from the evidence in the four country snapshots



The aggregated findings from the four reports clearly show that **training gaps are not isolated but systemic** – interconnected across linguistic, digital, and soft-skill domains. All countries call for **flexible, modular and practice-oriented learning models** that reflect real job contexts and link to recognition frameworks.

Addressing these gaps will not only enhance employability but also support **social inclusion, empowerment and long-term integration** – core objectives of the VOICE project and the upcoming WP3 adaptation phase.



6. Recommendations for WP3 (Adaptation) and WP4 (Testing)

The three national reports (Spain, Poland, Italy) and the EU synthesis consistently highlight that future training and testing activities under VOICE must build on a competence-based, modular and contextualised approach.

Recommendations focus on three complementary dimensions:

- (1) Adaptation and localization of learning content (WP3)
- (2) Testing and validation mechanisms (WP4)
- (3) Long-term policy and sustainability measures to ensure transferability beyond the project

6.1 WP3 – Adaptation and localisation

The next phase (WP3) should transform WP2 findings into flexible, inclusive and recognition-oriented learning modules.

All reports underline the importance of combining language, digital, soft and entrepreneurial skills within a unified structure that can be adapted to country-specific contexts.

Key recommendations:

- **Build competency-based modular courses** that **interconnect** core domains – *Language for Social Inclusion and Employability ↔ Digital Competences ↔ Soft Skills ↔ Entrepreneurship*.
This structure directly addresses the four priority gaps identified in WP2 (*VOICE WP2 Common Methodology; Aggregated Matrix*)
- **Localise content linguistically and culturally**, ensuring availability in **UA / EN / ES / PL / IT**, with real workplace examples and **sector glossaries** reflecting hospitality, healthcare, logistics and services (*VOICE WP2 Reports – Spain, Poland, Italy*)
- **Embed real-life tasks**: use **job-based narratives**, customer dialogues, administrative documentation and case studies collected during WP2 (*VOICE WP2 Reports – EU, Italy, Spain*)
- **Involve stakeholders** systematically in the design of modules, exercises and assessment rubrics, ensuring relevance and alignment with current job-market needs
- **Introduce micro-credentials** mapped to **EQF levels** to enhance cross-border



- recognition and visibility of acquired competences (*VOICE WP2 Report – EU*)
- **Ensure accessibility and inclusion by design:** modular pacing, mobile-first learning assets, **asynchronous and live options** and **childcare-sensitive scheduling**, to accommodate women and caregivers (highlighted in all national reports)
 - **Integrate digital and language training** into blended modules to support dual literacy, especially recommended in the Polish and EU reports

6.2 WP4 – Testing, validation and placement linkages

WP4 should translate the adapted learning content into practical pilot actions combining online and face-to-face components.

The four reports emphasise that pilot design must remain flexible and evidence-driven, with close collaboration between training providers, employers, and NGOs.

Key recommendations:

- **Develop blended pilots** that pair online modules with in-person **learning workshops** (e.g., language for employability workshops, digital-skill clinics and career-orientation sessions)
- Establish **mentoring and peer-learning cohorts**, involving **alumni ambassadors** from Ukrainian communities to foster mutual support and motivation (*VOICE WP2 Reports – EU, Italy*)
- **Engage employers / stakeholders** in co-assessing learners through **competence rubrics** and final project evaluations, issue **digital badges or micro-credentials** on completion
- **Collect data systematically** across pilots – baseline and post-assessment on language and digital skills, attendance, outcomes and learner/trainer satisfaction
- Strengthen **placement services** by linking pilots with **regional job agencies**, **NGO employment desks** and **employer networks** active in hospitality, logistics, healthcare, and education (all national reports)
- Facilitate **cross-country exchange of results** through the VOICE platform, allowing comparison of outcomes and mutual learning among partner organisations



6.3 Policy and sustainability

Sustainability recommendations focus on ensuring that the VOICE learning model continues to generate value after project completion, through coordination, validation and scaling mechanisms.

Rather than formal commitments, these actions focus on promotion, transferability and gradual mainstreaming of the project's outputs within the existing ESF+ ecosystem.

Key recommendations:

- **Recognition and validation:** promote the use of **learner evidence packs** (e.g., micro-credential approach, competence summaries, certificates of attendance / completion) as supporting tools for beneficiaries. These materials should remain compatible with national recognition systems and the EU Skills Profile Tool, encouraging further validation processes by learners or institutions when relevant
- **Coordination and visibility:** maintain and promote the **central VOICE repository** – currently containing over 40 mapped social-innovation initiatives – to become a long-term reference for knowledge exchange, inspiration and stakeholder exchange
- **Entrepreneurship ecosystems:** encourage **informal connections and referral** opportunities between refugees interested in self-employment and existing local actors such as incubators, chambers of commerce, NGOs, microfinance entities and mentoring networks
- **Policy dialogue:** encourage replication through dissemination at EU and national levels, involving local authorities in discussions on validation and integration of third-country qualifications
- **Post-project maintenance:** secure a **minimum three-year sustainability commitment** for the VOICE platform, ensuring periodic content updates, new partnerships and continued learner access (as indicated in the Project Form and Dissemination Plan)

In summary, the recommendations across the four reports converge on a single guiding principle: VOICE should deliver a flexible, learner-centred and employer-connected model of vocational inclusion. The WP3 adaptation and WP4 piloting phases represent not only a test of methodology but also a demonstration of how social innovation can translate needs assessment into tangible integration outcomes for Ukrainian refugees across Europe.



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