RESEARCH & POLICY REPORT



HARNESSING SENIOR EXPERTISE
TO INCLUDE MIGRANTS AND
YOUTH IN THE EU LABOUR
MARKET







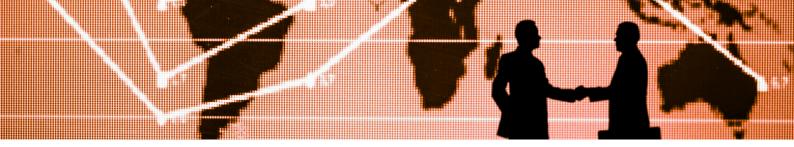
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Introduction

The European Union is home to a diverse population, with migrants and young people contributing significantly to its economic, social, and cultural fabric. However, these groups continue to face systemic challenges in securing employment, resulting in persistent inequalities in the labour market. As the EU struggles with demographic shifts, such as an ageing population and a growing skills gap, innovative solutions are required to ensure that all individuals - especially youth and migrants - can participate fully in the workforce.

At the same time, an under-utilised resource exists within Europe: senior expert volunteers. These individuals, often retirees or semi-retirees, possess valuable skills, professional experience, and deep sector knowledge that could greatly benefit the integration of young people and migrants into the EU labour market. This report examines how senior experts can play a crucial role in **upskilling**, **mentoring**, and therefore fostering **social cohesion**, enabling the successful **integration** of these groups into the labour market.

The European Education Area (EEA) represents a shared goal among EU Member States to unite in rendering education and training systems more robust and inclusive. Whilst traditionally focused on improving quality and equality in education, the EEA framework now intersects with broader societal challenges related to migration, employment, and social cohesion. European nations are faced with the double task of successfully integrating diverse migrant populations while simultaneously addressing constant skills gaps and youth employment challenges. These issues are



magnified by long-term demographic trends, such as ageing populations, and profound economic and societal shifts driven by digitalisation and the energy transition.

From remarks at the policy discussion 'Advancing the EU's migration and asylum agenda', it is clear that as a result of recent global political instability, the European Union is now perceived as a stable and reliable partner and attracts interest for cooperation from new partners. This brings new opportunities for cooperation and requires better integration practices.

Recent data collected in 2023 suggests that 41 million immigrants resided in EU Member States, with 27.3 million being non-EU citizens. Their effective integration, especially into the labour market, is vital for individual well-being and the economic prosperity and social stability of receiving countries. Nevertheless, significant disparities persist in labour market outcomes between migrants and native-born populations. That raises concerns about labour shortages and skills mismatches across the EU, calling for policies that bring to life the entire potential workforce, including migrants and young people entering the labour market. High youth unemployment rates in some regions and the specific difficulties faced by young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs), particularly those with migrant backgrounds, remain key policy concerns.

To tackle these interconnected challenges, the European Union has put in place several key policy priorities and initiatives. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 offers a comprehensive framework, emphasising access to employment, education,



I. European Policy Centre, 'Advancing the EU's Migration and Asylum Agenda' (June 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

^{2.} Eurostat, 'Migration and Asylum in Europe – 2023' (January 2024), [Accessed September 2025].

healthcare, and housing. This expands previous actions and aligns with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which lays out principles for fair, well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The European Year of Skills (2023) further underscored the importance of upskilling and reskilling. Different EU bodies responsible for shaping and funding these efforts are: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

This research combines desk studies from several EU countries, comparing different policies, programmes, and practices, while exploring how senior volunteers can contribute to overcoming barriers faced by migrants and youth. The report provides actionable insights and recommendations to policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners, ensuring that senior expert volunteers are better integrated into strategies for labour market inclusion.

Relevance of the research for current and future labour market

The complexity of approaches to migrant integration, skills development, and social inclusion across the EEA requires constant re-evaluation. Policymakers, programme managers, and companies require timely, evidence-based insights into what works, what fails to deliver desired results, and where opportunities for mutual learning exist. This desk research aims at providing a



^{3.} European Commission, 'Legal Migration and Resettlement' (July 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

^{4.} European Commission, 'European Pillar of Social Rights: 20 Principles', [Accessed September 2025].

^{5.} European Commission, 'European Year of Skills 2023', [Accessed September 2025].

comprehensive outlook on the potential where resources to support capacity building, mutual learning, and the exchange of best practices within the EEA. The results are made with regards to recent research, policy documents, and evaluations, enriched by insights and consultative processes like consultations with CESES members, to provide a clear overview.

This research and policy report summarises information from these different sources to give a comparative outlook.

The scope tackles policies and programmes within countries participating in the EEA framework. The analysis aimed at identifying patterns, comparing different governmental approaches, and evaluating effectiveness judged by the available evidence.





1. Social Cohesion Through the Senior Volunteering Prism

Social cohesion is central to the process of integrating migrants and young people into the EU labour market. While employment is essential, it is the quality of integration - involving social relationships, shared values, and community trust - that ultimately determines the success of these efforts. Migrants and youth often face isolation or marginalisation, which hinders their ability to participate in society fully.

1.1 The Importance of Social Cohesion for Labour Market Integration for Successful Intergenerational Cooperation

Social cohesion encompasses more than just job opportunities. It involves building connections between diverse communities and creating a sense of belonging, which is essential for long-term economic success. A lack of social cohesion can result in higher levels of unemployment, as individuals feel disconnected from their peers and employers. According to a 2023 study by the European Commission, countries with stronger levels of social cohesion exhibit lower unemployment rates among migrants and young people.⁶

Additionally, social cohesion can reduce discrimination, increase trust in institutions, and promote cultural understanding - all of which help create a more inclusive labour market. Inclusive societies are more likely to encourage active participation from all citizens, including vulnerable groups such as migrants and youth.



^{6. &}lt;u>Eurostat, 'Migrant Integration Statistics - Socioeconomic Situation of Young People</u>' (October 2024) [Accessed September 2025].

1.2 The Role of Senior Expert Volunteers in Promoting Social Cohesion

Senior expert volunteers are well-placed to foster social cohesion due to their deep understanding of local culture and their ability to serve as bridges between different generations and backgrounds. These individuals can engage in mentoring, coaching, and training, which help migrants and young people overcome challenges related to cultural integration. Through programs like intergenerational mentoring, senior volunteers can foster mutual respect and understanding between diverse groups.

Furthermore, senior volunteers can create spaces for intercultural dialogue, where migrants, youth, and seniors work together to share experiences and address social issues. In many cases, these initiatives go beyond the workplace, encouraging social activities that strengthen community ties and promote inclusion.

The Centre for European Volunteer (CEV) has identified numerous examples of senior volunteers who have acted as mentors to migrants in local communities across Europe, helping them integrate into the social fabric. Such initiatives reduce social exclusion and increase community cohesion, making the labour market more accessible to everyone.



^{7. &}lt;u>Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), 'WISH – Working for Inclusion of Senior and Host communities'</u>, [Accessed September 2025].



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2. Integration, Policy & Initiatives

2.1 EU Policy Landscape on Labour Market Integration

In response to the challenges of migration and youth unemployment, the European Union has introduced several key policy frameworks aimed at enhancing inclusion. These policies are designed to create opportunities for both migrants and young people by addressing barriers to employment, training, and integration.

The European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 sets out key objectives for migrant integration, focusing on employment, education, health, and housing. The plan highlights the importance of tailored approaches, particularly for migrants who face multiple forms of disadvantage.⁸

The Youth Guarantee is another critical EU initiative that aims to ensure all young people under 30 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed. This initiative has been instrumental in reducing youth unemployment in countries like Sweden and Finland, but challenges remain in some southern EU states.⁹

Another relevant legislation is The Pact on Migration and Asylum, which is a set of new rules managing migration and establishing a common asylum system at EU level, that deliver results while remaining grounded in the European values. It requires collective

^{8.} European Commission, 'Pact on Migration and Asylum' (May 2024) [Accessed September 2025].

^{9.} European Commission, 'Reinforced Youth Guarantee', [Accessed September 2025].

implementation of this initiative by all member states and evokes the fact that migration should be managed and not feared.

2.2 National Policy Initiatives

Each EU country has tailored its own policies and initiatives to address national labour market challenges. For instance:

Germany has introduced integration courses that combine language learning with vocational training, allowing migrants to gain the necessary skills to enter the workforce. These programs are supported by senior volunteer mentors, who provide quidance both on professional skills and cultural integration.





Sweden operates fast-track for migrants, programme particularly those with qualifications in fields with labour shortages, such as healthcare engineering. This and includes the programme \circ f involvement senior professionals, who help mentor and coach newcomers through the Swedish work culture and industry-specific practices.

Spain has introduced dual vocational training programs, which combine work experience and education, offering young people a path into employment technical fields. programs are highly supported by senior volunteers, who share their professional expertise to enhance the hands-on training provided.



2.3 Senior Expert Volunteers in Policy Implementation

Senior significantly expert volunteers can enhance the implementation of these policies by providing mentorship, industry-specific advice, and cultural orientation. Their long-term experience enables them to understand the barriers migrants and youth face and offer tailored support to help overcome them. By senior volunteers in policy-driven engaging programmes, policymakers can ensure that migrants and young people receive practical guidance and insider knowledge that can significantly improve their employment prospects.

For instance, senior volunteers can assist in reviewing training curricula, ensuring that programs reflect real-world demands and industry trends. Furthermore, they can help build local networks for job seekers, connecting them with businesses, community leaders, and public-sector employers.





3. Upskilling: Equipping Migrants and Youth with Expertise and Tools

3.1 Addressing the Skills Gap

One of the most significant barriers labour market to integration is the mismatch between the skills migrants and young people possess and the demands of the labour market. According to the European Commission, more than 40% of young Europeans aged 15-24 are under-skilled for the positions thev hold, and а similar percentage of migrants in the EU face a skills gap.¹⁰



Additionally, many sectors are experiencing a rapid demand for new skills, such as those required for digital technologies and the green economy. Migrants and youth are often left behind due to lack of access to quality training and upskilling opportunities.

3.2 Tailored Training and Mentoring Programmes

Tailored training and mentoring programmes are essential to bridge the skills gap. These initiatives should focus on several different key areas in terms of capacities:



^{10. &}lt;u>European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023: Addressing Labour Shortages and Skills Gaps in the EU'</u> (July 2023), [Accessed September 2025].



Language proficiency: Ensuring that migrants and young people can communicate effectively in the local language, helping them understand instructions, collaborate with colleagues, and access a wider range of employment opportunities.

Technical skills: Providing vocational and technical training in sectors with labour shortages, such as healthcare, IT, and renewable energy, ensuring that new entrants can contribute directly to areas of critical need.





Soft skills: Promoting skills such teamwork, communication, and time management, which vital in most work are environments. Moreover, sharing unique life lessons which are crucial in building а well integrated workforce. Experience in negotiation, conflict resolution, and navigating economic downturns - resilience that is forged over a long career.



3.3 Role of Senior Expert Volunteers in Upskilling

Senior experts bring a wealth of experience to upskilling efforts. They can design and deliver training programmes, offer one-on-one mentorship, and provide practical insights into industry-specific as well as general expectations. Their role as mentors allows them to not only teach technical skills but also help migrants and youth navigate the cultural aspects of the workplace, such as understanding workplace norms, building professional networks, and managing conflict.



Programmes like SENT (Senior Experts Nurturing Talent) demonstrate the value of senior volunteers in the upskilling process, pairing their expertise with the specific needs of younger or migrant workers.

From interviews with Magnus Brunner¹¹ and Alberto Horst-Neidhardt,12 it became evident that projects involving mentoring migrants to better integrate into society is of utmost importance for both the European Commission and European Policy Center. They mentioned that in order to show the public the possibilities that migration could offer to the society and labour market.



- 11. <u>European Commission, 'Speech Press Corner SPEECH/25/1660'</u> (June 2025), [Accessed September 2025].
- 12. European Policy Centre (EPC): Alberto Horst-Neidhardt.



3.4 Migrant Entrepreneurship and Senior Volunteering

The involvement of Senior volunteers can further benefit the economic situation in the European Economic Area by helping future entrepreneurs to set up and grow their own businesses. This is coherent with the work by Rinaldi, R. et al. (2023), which mentions that one-size-fits-all policies for migrant entrepreneurship are doomed to fail due to the regional, cultural differences within Europe. Hence, the involvement of senior volunteers who possess invaluable insights into the country's specifics of doing business could only benefit the cooperation.

Experienced volunteers could also link the migrants to local suppliers and provide them with practical advice.

As seen from CESES members' testimonies, there have been astonishing results for pairing young entrepreneurship and experienced volunteers.







4. Challenges Within the EU Sphere

4.1 Structural Barriers

The successful integration of migrants and refugees into the labour market is a critical issue for European Union countries, influencing not only the welfare of migrants but also the economic well-being and social cohesion of host societies. It reduces welfare dependency, increases economic contributions to the budget, helps address labour shortages exacerbated by ageing populations, and boosts overall productivity. Not least, successful integration of migrants reduces apprehensions and helps to prevent discrimination. Despite these benefits and ongoing policy efforts, significant challenges persist.

Research consistently shows slow and incomplete economic integration for migrants in Europe, particularly for those who were born outside the EU (mainly Africa and the Middle East) and those with lower education levels. Migrants generally exhibit lower employment probabilities and higher unemployment rates than comparable native workers. These gaps are particularly pronounced for non-EU migrants, women, and refugees.

Furthermore, migrants are often concentrated in low-paid occupations, are more likely to hold temporary or part-time contracts, and frequently experience skill downgrading, working in jobs below their actual qualification levels. While recent years have



^{13.} Eurostat, 'Unemployment Experienced by Migrants in the EU' (May 2020), [Accessed September 2025].

^{14.} European Commission, 'Statistics on Migration in Europe' (May 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

seen some progress, especially in labour market outcomes driven partly by higher educational levels of recent arrivals, substantial disparities remain.

While EU policies such as the Youth Guarantee and the Integration Action Plan aim to improve labour market access for young people and migrants, their implementation varies across Member States. A report by the Social Platform indicates that existing EU policies are not tailored to the specific needs of young migrants, leading to gaps in support and integration efforts.



The following sections look at several key barriers hindering effective labour market integration across the EU, and how senior experts can help alleviate these barriers.

4.2 Networks, Support Services and Legal Issues

One key obstacle is limited access to networks. Professional and social connections are essential for securing higher-quality jobs, yet many migrants arrive without established ties in their host country. While ethnic community networks can offer initial support, integration into broader professional circles is often far more effective for long-term career progression. Senior experts, drawing on their extensive professional experience and contacts, can serve as crucial connectors. By mentoring, facilitating introductions, and sharing knowledge of local business practices, they help migrants and young people overcome isolation and gain entry into trusted professional networks.



A second barrier relates to legal and administrative hurdles. Migrants frequently encounter complex migration policies, lengthy asylum or work permit procedures, and inconsistent access to support services such as vocational training, language courses, or career counseling. These bureaucratic challenges delay entry into the labour market and reduce incentives for long-term skills investment. Senior experts can help by guiding migrants through these processes, advising them on how to access available services, and acting as intermediaries between newcomers and local institutions. Their involvement reduces uncertainty and supports faster, smoother integration.

A range of other structural factors further complicate labour market access. These include skills residential mismatches. limits segregation that opportunity, and weak bargaining power in negotiations with employers. These affected individuals also face may disadvantages compounded related to trauma and legal while uncertainty, migrant often experience women "double disadvantage" tied both gender and migrant status. Here, too, senior experts can contribute by tailoring mentoring and training individual to circumstances, supporting





women's empowerment initiatives, and providing psychosocial encouragement rooted in experience and empathy.

Taken together, these challenges highlight the critical role that senior expert volunteers can play. They not only provide technical and professional guidance but also offer interpersonal capital - networks, trust, and cultural insights - that help migrants and young people transition from marginalisation to active participation in Europe's labour markets.

4.3 Socio-Economic Disparities

Migrants and young people across the EU often face higher rates of poverty and economic inequality, even when they are relatively well-educated and actively engaged in the labour market. In Ireland, for instance, foreign-born residents are more likely to be employed and hold higher education degrees than Irish-born residents, yet they tend to earn lower incomes. High housing costs add to this disparity, with about one-third of migrants spending more than 30% of their income on housing, compared to only 9% of Irish-born residents. This pattern is echoed elsewhere in Europe. Across EU member states, non-EU immigrants earn on average nearly 18% less per year than natives, even when they are overqualified for the jobs they hold. The European Commission and OECD further report that immigrants earn around 30% lower wages and hold roughly 60% less net wealth compared to similarly situated natives, leaving them more financially vulnerable and less able to build long-term security.¹⁷

Housing costs also reveal sharp inequalities. Eurostat data show

^{17. &}lt;u>European Union Publications Office, 'Labour Market and Wage Inequalities in Europe'</u> (2022), [Accessed September 2025].



^{15.} Frances McGinnity et al., 'Monitoring Report on Integration 2022' (March 2023), [Accessed September 2025].

^{16. &}lt;u>Euronews, 'Overqualified and Underpaid: Are Immigrants Earning Less than Native Workers?'</u> (July 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

that around 25% of non-EU citizens are overburdened by housing expenses, spending more than 40% of their disposable income on accommodation, compared with about 9% of nationals. Moreover, migrants are disproportionately likely to live in overcrowded or substandard housing, with one in three third-country nationals facing such conditions, compared with about one in seven national citizens. These disparities extend to poverty risks: migrants born outside the EU remain at a significantly higher risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to native-born residents, with the gap especially pronounced among women and refugees. ¹⁹

Senior expert volunteers can help to mitigate these inequalities by providing targeted mentoring and financial literacy training to migrants and young people, ensuring they can better navigate housing markets, employment contracts, and wage negotiations. Through various initiatives such as CESES-supported mentoring programmes such as the MAB project, experienced retirees and professionals have already offered guidance on career progression, entrepreneurship, and sector-specific skills. Senior experts can also advocate at the local and regional level by sharing their knowledge with policymakers, ensuring migrant workers are not trapped in underpaid or overqualified roles but instead matched to positions where their skills are recognised and rewarded.

4.4 Intra-EU Emigration and Brain Drain

In rural areas of countries like Romania, persistent youth unemployment and the lack of local opportunities have led to significant emigration. Brain drain, which is not just a demographic



^{18. &}lt;u>Eurostat, 'Foreign Citizens Overburdened by Housing Costs More Than National Citizens'</u> (February 2021), [Accessed September 2025].

^{19.} European Commission, 'Migrant Integration Hub' (July 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

^{20.} Mentoring Across Borders.

^{21. &}lt;u>OECD Publishing, 'The Labour Market and Social Situation in Romania: OECD Reviews of Labour Market and Social Policies: Romania 2025'</u> (July 2025), [Accessed September 2025].

issue - reflects deeper structural problems in the economy, including underinvestment in local industries, limited innovation ecosystems, and weak links between education and employment.²²

Senior volunteer programmes can play a significant role in mitigating these effects by informing talented individuals about local job opportunities and providing mentoring to help them navigate their career paths.²³ A senior expert support system can offer personal support, guidance on professional development, and inspiration to pursue projects that contribute to regional development. However, these initiatives risk treating symptoms rather than causes. Without broader structural changes - such as improving local employment infrastructure, creating meaningful career paths, and incentivizing investment in rural economies - the impact of mentoring alone may be limited.

Moreover, the expectation that senior volunteers can "keep talent at home" may overlook the agency and ambitions of young professionals themselves. Emigration is often a rational response to limited local opportunities, not a failure of guidance. Successful programmes, therefore, need to combine personal mentoring with systemic strategies: fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurship, and creating environments where staying in the region is not just possible but genuinely attractive. In this context, senior volunteers act as catalysts, bridging experience and opportunity, but they cannot substitute for the fundamental economic and social changes required to truly reverse brain drain.



^{22. &}lt;u>lacob (Bâra), R., 'Brain Drain Phenomenon in Romania: What Comes in Line after Corruption? A Quantitative Analysis of the Determinant Causes of Romanian Skilled Migration', Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations (July 2018), pp. 53–78, [Accessed September 2025].</u>

^{23. &}lt;u>lancu, D. & Ciobanu, C., 'Migrants' Role in Shaping Unemployment Duration and Labour Market Performance in a Sustainable Perspective: Empirical Evidence from Romania', International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning (August 2024), pp. 2275–2287, [Accessed September 2025].</u>

4.5 Institutional, Financial and Bureaucratic Challenges

Institutional barriers often make it harder for migrants and young people to find meaningful work. Migrants usually arrive with different levels of education, sometimes lower than host country averages. An even bigger issue is the international transferability and recognition of foreign qualifications and skills. An even bigger issue is the international transferability and recognition of foreign qualifications and skills. In order to get their diplomas or degrees recognised, potential workers have to go through cumbersome and slow procedures, which means they are frequently pushed into jobs below their abilities. Access to guidance, training, and professional networks is often limited, leaving individuals to navigate the labour market largely on their own. These obstacles not only prevent people from reaching their potential but also mean that communities and businesses miss out on talent they could use.



Limited access to financial services, such as opening bank accounts or obtaining credit, can also be challenging for migrants, particularly those without a stable employment history or local credit record.²⁵ This lack of access can hinder their ability to secure housing, transportation, or other necessities, affecting their overall integration into the labour market.



^{24. &}lt;u>European Commission, 'Recognition of Third-Country National Qualifications'</u> (2023), [Accessed September 2025].

^{25. &}lt;u>Migration Policy Institute, 'Often Shut Out of the Financial System, Refugees and Migrants Face Barriers to Financial Inclusion' (December 2023), [Accessed September 2025].</u>

Senior expert volunteers can help bridge these gaps in practical ways. By mentoring migrants and young people, they can guide them through administrative processes, explain how to validate skills or qualifications, and suggest steps to gain the local experience needed to succeed. Beyond technical support, volunteers can provide personal guidance, encouragement, and introductions to local networks, helping individuals feel more confident and connected. This one-on-one support makes it much easier for young people and migrants to access opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach.

These expanded insights provide a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted challenges faced by migrants and young people in the EU labour market. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts at the EU, national, and local levels, involving policy reforms, targeted support services, and initiatives to combat discrimination and bias.

26. <u>Heini Huhtinen, 'Senior Volunteers and Migrants Fighting Social Exclusion'</u> (April 2020), [Accessed September 2025].





5. The Role of AI in Intergenerational Synergy

5.1 Employment Trends

The EU labour market is undergoing significant transformation driven by digitalisation, globalisation, and the shift toward a green economy. Sectors such as IT, healthcare, and renewable energy are experiencing rapid growth, creating abundant job opportunities for both young people and migrants. Navigating these evolving sectors, however, requires guidance, access to networks, and knowledge of emerging skills - areas where senior expert volunteers can play a critical role.

5.2 Role of AI in Senior Volunteering

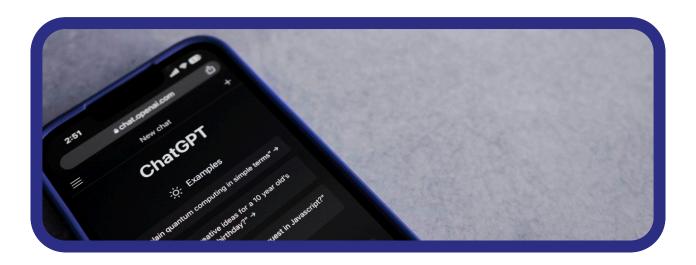
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly reshaping work processes, including volunteer activities. While AI offers potential efficiency gains - automating routine tasks, generating templates, or delivering standardised training - it also raises important challenges. Relying too heavily on AI risks reducing the human, relational dimension of volunteering, which is precisely where senior experts add the most value. Tasks like CV coaching, interview preparation, or professional mentoring are not just technical; they require empathy, cultural understanding, and experience-based judgment - qualities that AI cannot replicate.

Moreover, AI systems often embed biases from the data they are trained on. For migrants and young people, this can mean reinforcing existing inequalities: automated screening tools might undervalue non-traditional qualifications, unconventional career



paths, or culturally diverse experiences.²⁷ If there is a heavy reliance on using AI, there is a danger that vulnerable groups may be inadvertently disadvantaged, rather than supported.

There is also the question of accessibility. Not all migrants or young people have the digital literacy, language skills, or access to technology needed to benefit from Al-driven tools.²⁸ Without careful design and oversight, Al could widen gaps instead of narrowing them.



Nonetheless, AI can complement senior volunteers when used thoughtfully. By handling routine or administrative tasks, AI can free up time for seniors to focus on the uniquely human aspects of volunteering: mentoring, personal guidance, and fostering confidence. The critical challenge lies in the integration of AI in ways that 29 nhance, rather than replace, the intergenerational support that is essential for helping migrants and young people navigate the labour market.



^{27. &}lt;u>European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'Bias in Algorithms – Artificial Intelligence and Discrimination'</u> (2022), Section 2.2 'Discrimination and Bias in Al Systems', [Accessed September 2025].

^{28. &}lt;u>European Commission, 'Lagging Digital Literacy Among 14-Year-Olds Across the EU, Study Finds' (November 2024), Section 3.1 'Digital Skills by Socio-Economic Background', [Accessed September 2025].</u>

^{29. &}lt;u>European Parliament, 'Proposal establishing an EU Talent Pool' (July 2024), Section 4.2 'Automated Matching Systems for Third-Country Nationals', [Accessed September 2025].</u>



6. Conclusion

This report demonstrates the critical role that senior expert volunteers can play in supporting migrant and youth inclusion in the EU labour market. Senior expert volunteers are uniquely positioned to support migrants and young people in navigating labour market transitions. They can offer practical guidance on workforce entry, provide insights into local workplace culture and administrative procedures, and open doors to opportunities and professional networks that are often difficult to access without established connections. Through mentoring, upskilling, and fostering social cohesion, senior experts help bridge the divide between underrepresented groups and the workforce, offering mentorship and confidence-building to those seeking employment. By leveraging their expertise, we can create a more inclusive, dynamic, and resilient labour market across Europe.

Moreover, some CESES member organisations have already recognised the need for projects aimed specifically at integration of migrant workers into the labour force. The success stories and testimonials collected from such initiatives constitute the final part of this research.

One of the future focus areas of CESES is creating the methodology which will allow to consolidate experience and streamline the actions necessary for ensuring a smoother transition for newcomers. Assessing their needs and leveraging their strengths in a conceptual way may bring invaluable opportunities for both migrants and member organisations.



In this regard, research clearly demonstrates that integrating migrants and young people into the European labour market requires a structured, step-by-step approach. The complexity of the process means that no single intervention is sufficient; instead, coordinated actions are needed, where senior expert volunteers play a crucial bridging role. Their experience, networks, and knowledge of local labour dynamics make them ideal mentors to guide newcomers through each stage of integration.



By researching the diverse backgrounds, skill levels, legal status, language proficiency, cultural norms related to work and specific challenges of the migrants and young people, a practical framework for this structured approach can be broken down into four core aspects, making it possible to help identify and understand the target groups:

 Administrative status: Both migrants and young people often face significant barriers when entering the labour market. Migrants must navigate work permits, visa applications, and the recognition of foreign qualifications, while young people, even if native-born, often struggle with understanding employment systems, contracts, career pathways, and the soft skills required



for workplace success, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and professional etiquette. Young people may also face challenges related to limited work experience, uncertainty about career choices, or balancing education with part-time employment. Senior experts play a crucial role in addressing these challenges for both groups: they can guide migrants through legal and bureaucratic procedures, advise on credential recognition, and connect them with relevant support services, while mentoring young people in practical workplace planning, and professional networking. By career providing hands-on guidance, personalized advice, and access to their professional networks, senior experts help both migrants and young people overcome structural and experiential barriers, laying the foundation for sustainable, confident, and effective labour market integration.

• Educational background: This is a key factor in successful labour market integration for both migrants and young people. Migrants often arrive with qualifications that may not be recognised locally, while young people may have limited work experience or lack clarity on how their education translates into employable skills. Senior experts can assess prior education and professional experience for both groups, advising on whether further training, credential recognition, or immediate job search is the most appropriate path. They can help design tailored pathways that match skills to opportunities, preventing overqualification, underemployment, or wasted potential, and ensuring that both migrants and young people are positioned for meaningful, sustainable employment.



- Language and workplace literacy: Language barriers are among the most significant obstacles to labour market integration for both migrants and young people. For migrants, limited proficiency in the local language can restrict access to higher-quality jobs, reduce employability, opportunities for workplace advancement. Similarly, young struggle with professional communication, people may understanding workplace norms, or expressing their skills effectively, even when fluent in the language. Senior experts can play a vital role in overcoming these barriers by providing targeted mentoring in communication strategies, facilitating access to language courses or workplace literacy programs, and helping both groups navigate situations where language proficiency directly affects employment outcomes. By bridging these gaps, senior experts ensure that migrants and young people can engage more fully, communicate effectively, and seize opportunities in the labour market.
- Family and personal circumstances: These play a crucial role in shaping labour market integration. Migrants may face challenges such as family reunification delays, childcare responsibilities, or difficulties accessing stable housing, while young people often contend with financial insecurity, the pressures of combining education with work, or limited social support networks. Senior experts can help both groups navigate these constraints by designing realistic, tailored career pathways based on their own experiences, accounting for personal circumstances, advising on time management and work-life balance, and connecting them with relevant support services, such as childcare, housing assistance, or financial guidance. By



addressing these personal and structural barriers, senior experts help migrants and young people build stability and resilience, enabling them to engage more fully and sustainably in the labour market.

Taken together, these steps provide a holistic model for integration that is both practical and human-centred. Senior expert volunteers are the cornerstone of this process: they combine technical knowledge with empathy, and they ensure that migrants and young people do not navigate this journey alone. By investing in such structured mentoring and guidance systems, the EU can not only ease labour shortages and skills mismatches but also strengthen social cohesion and economic resilience across member states.





7. Testimonials: Successful Integration of Migrants and Youth with Senior Volunteer Support

7.1. Student (Madrid, Spain) - Mohamed Yasin

A valued member of the CESES organisation, SECOT aided the inclusion of a young migrant into the Spanish labour market, providing a proof of how far-reaching intergenerational cooperation could be.

Mohamed Yasin's path to employment, accompanied by the volunteers, began as a student of Basic Vocational Training in Vehicle Maintenance at the IES Luis Vives secondary school in Leganés, Madrid. The 18-year-old student wanted to dedicate his life to cars and



had dreams of working in a car dealership after the completion of his training. His concerns were that it is not that the transition from the classroom to the labour market is not a straightforward process. His exemplary dedication to studies paired very well with the experience of a senior volunteer from the SECOT organisation. In his own words, "I am focused on studying and working and I don't think about anything else, that's all I have in my head. For me, the advice offered by the volunteers is very important. They have an experience that is very useful for me and I can see the potential in their work with other young professionals".



Mohamed values, almost more than other circumstances, "the trust you can have with the tutors. We know that they prepare us for the job market and we are grateful that there are people who come as volunteers to teach us how to start a business and give us advice for the future". The young man defines the key to a successful mentoring programme is, in one sentence, to "They open your mind to the future".

Along the same lines, one of the tutors accompanying the Basic Vocational Training students, Andrés Gallego, highlights the role of the SECOT volunteers: "They are better than anyone at giving advice to the students about entrepreneurship and the need to continue their training. I wish many of my generation had had a SECOT volunteer at their side in one of these programmes". Gallego expresses that "there is no way to give a grade to the work done by the volunteers. They are ten out of ten. It's an incredible job they do with young people".

Young people who ask for advice and knowledge but, above all, "experiences, experiences from your life that can help them in their present and future". And, in the end, they respond to this trust: "Seeing that most of them are willing to receive mentoring and learn about entrepreneurship is a good thing. All we have to do is bet on them and we will see how they return that trust a thousand times over".

7.2 NOISMART Start-up Assistance (Madrid, Spain) - Leira Atxa

"Having SECOTs Bilbao Seniors help has been a boost for me and, therefore, for my company. Juan Alberto's infectious enthusiasm



and Rafael's rigour are undoubtedly strengthening my project. Having their support, knowing that they are there at difficult times, encouraging me, is very helpful. The recognition granted by SECOT Spain endorses the work I do trying to reduce noise. The fact that senior people with great professional experience consider that the work deserves recognition not only encourages and supports, but also brings viability and sustainability to the company".



7.3 "Crafts" - Seniores Italia Lazio ODV

An example of senior volunteers assisting young individuals is the collaboration between Seniores Italia Lazio ODV and Città dei Ragazzi ("City of Youth"). Salvatore Leotta from the senior volunteering organisation formulates their mission as "Making one's time and experience available to guide young people towards their future". This initiative, still active on June 12, 2025, demonstrates senior volunteers working within the community to support and mentor young people.

In the Cook & Restart project, funded by Fondazione Prosolidar, volunteers offered young people insights on how to find their dream jobs. Professionals of the Ipseoa Tor Carbone, the participants have acquired the skills to enter the labour market. This included teaching them efficient self presentation, preparing compelling CV and distributing it through the right channels.



Through the efforts of volunteers from Seniores Italia Lazio ODV, many participants found promising jobs only a few months after the course had ended.

7.4 The MESTIERI Programme

The MESTIERI Programme is a free personal and professional training pathway designed to support job placement. It is based on a careful assessment of the needs of both migrants - who wish to become active members of Italian society - and businesses - looking for qualified workers. Launched in 2021, the program focuses on professions in the food service sector. The initiatives implemented so far have delivered encouraging outcomes: within three months of completing the programme, half of the participants typically secure employment.

ΑII courses share a common classroom-based training component, delivered by Seniores volunteers. This includes a brief introduction to Italian principles and values, an overview of migrants' rights responsibilities, and general knowledge about the Italian work environment. such as safetv regulations, contract types, best practices for job searching, and workplace behavior. These are all essential aspects of successful integration into any professional



setting, particularly given the diverse and often unfamiliar sociocultural backgrounds of the participants.

Thanks to various partnerships and funding sources, the programme offers three types of vocational courses tailored to specific target groups: women, unaccompanied minors, and adults. Upon completion, participants are supported in their job search through an established network of contacts or with the help of employment agencies.

Italian Cooking Courses for Migrant Women

"10 Traditional Italian Dishes" is the title of the course aimed at migrant women who seek employment as caregivers, domestic workers, or babysitters - roles in which they may struggle to find placement in Italian households if they can only cook dishes from their countries of origin. The course teaches participants how to prepare simple and traditional Italian recipes - skills that enhance their employability and can also be used at home to help their children become familiar with the flavors they will later encounter in Italian school canteens.





Courses for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors

This programme supports young people aged 16 to 18 who have arrived in Italy - often by taking one of dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean. These minors are seeking employment as assistant pizza chefs or kitchen assistants. In well-equipped training kitchens and under the supervision of professional chefs, they learn the basics of Italian pizza making and cooking. Senior volunteers help them understand the Italian work context and provide ongoing support throughout the program and during the job search phase - a practical and personal form of guidance to help them build their future and face the challenges of adult life with greater confidence.

Pastry Courses

Pastry chefs are among the most in-demand professionals in Italy's tourism and hospitality sector. For this reason, the organisation offers a training course for both unemployed Italians and migrants aged between 18 and 35 who have valid work permits. Held in the modern laboratories of a state-run hospitality school and using professional equipment, the course is led by a qualified pastry instructor. Participants learn the fundamental techniques of pastry making. At the end of the course, they are placed in internships at selected pastry shops.







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