

MIGRANT WOMEN AS LEARNERS

INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS AND PROSPECTS

**Cross-country analytical report: Georgia,
Morocco and Tunisia**

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This report has been drafted by Sona Kalataryan and edited by Mariavittoria Garlappi.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women account for almost half of the constantly growing migrant population. In 2020, the number of female migrants in the world reached 135 million or 48 per cent of the migrant population. **Despite the importance of female labour migration – accounting for 42% of the total in 2021, the question of skills development among women has so far been neglected.** There is a lack of specific support measures to upskill and reskill migrant women to help them make the best of their migration experience. This leads to underutilization of female migrants' skills and qualifications with negative effects on salary levels, professional development and living conditions.

To harness the untapped potential of female migrant workers' knowledge and expertise, the European Training Foundation (ETF) launched a research project - *Migrant women as learners: Individual pathways and prospects*. **The distinct contribution of this research project is in analysing migrant women's skills development and use from an individual perspective.** A set of in-depth ethnographic interviews is used with migrant women. The research exercise covers three countries in the EU Southern (Morocco and Tunisia) and Eastern (Georgia) neighbourhoods. The migrant categories in the sample of interviewees include seasonal agricultural workers, returnee caregivers and potential migrants.

This report is the analytical component of the research project and aims (a) to understand how migrant women's skills and qualifications pathways in a life-long learning perspective are currently shaped and how they could be better valued and used; and (b) to formulate recommendations for public and private organisations in education and training and EU and international donors on how to better address the skill and qualification needs of migrant women to improve their socio-economic integration in the destination countries and in the origin countries upon return.

The report consists of three main sections. The first section presents the objectives and methodological approach adopted for this study, summarises the relevant academic literature and presents the origin country-specific migration trends. The second section presents an analysis of information collected through interviews with migrants, stressing differences and similarities across the countries and migrant categories included in the study. The third section contains some reflections on the main research questions and provides policy suggestions based on insights collected in the interviews.

Key findings

Migration is perceived as a positive experience by female migrants (whether seasonal agricultural workers or those with longer engagements abroad). The level of satisfaction is higher among low-skilled seasonal migrants in the agricultural sector. Those with formal middle-level skills see these seasonal migration experiences as a stepping stone towards longer-term employment abroad. They are determined to improve their language skills and look for a better job.

With few exceptions, none of the seasonal workers or returnee caregivers was looking to move abroad permanently. Rather they want a job which would allow them to stay close to their families.

The skills, formal qualifications, and experiences possessed by migrants before migration influence the migration decision and define its nature (seasonal/circular, temporary, permanent), status (regular vs irregular) and employment type abroad (high vs low occupation, regular vs irregular employment).

The formal skill and qualifications spectrum ranges from low (illiterate or elementary level), middle (vocational education and training in nursing, culinary, logistics, etc) and high level (bachelor's and master's degree in life and social sciences, engineering, etc.). Informal skills are diverse, too, and include those relevant to agriculture, food processing, textile and garment production, retail, hospitality, other services, and entrepreneurial sectors. These skills were acquired either within the family or community or in the workplace.

The level of education is positively associated with foreign language skills, as most women gained their language proficiency through formal schooling. For seasonal workers, the destination language was not a necessary condition for employment. In contrast, for caregivers and nurses working in healthcare institutions abroad, language proficiency was necessary to secure a contract abroad. Potential migrants see proficiency in their destination language, together with their professional skills, as a bridge to the job they want in the destination country.

The majority of the interviewed migrant women did not undergo formal pre-departure training. Rather than comprehensive training sessions some attended basic informational meetings which provided limited insights into the nature of their jobs and the working conditions.

Skills and qualifications possessed before migration are key for securing employment abroad. **The migration experience in turn provided an opportunity to acquire new skills: professional, practical and soft skills, and foreign language skills. The type of skills and the opportunities to acquire them depend on the duration of migration and the employment type/nature abroad.**

For potential migrants the complex interplay between skills, qualification and migration can be noticed. On the one hand, skills and qualifications (especially those in high demand abroad) coupled with the wage difference become facilitators in the migration process. On the other, the desire/ intention to migrate (often driven by limited labour market possibilities locally) encourages young women to actively acquire skills and qualifications that are in demand abroad. Some change their profession and invest time and financial resources to increase their chances of success in their migration project. This is a recurrent theme among potential migrant women interviewed in Tunisia.

Seasonal migration is characterised by a narrow set of tasks, a short duration of stay abroad, and high work intensity. However, even within this limited period, many manage to enhance their expertise in farming practices, improving their abilities after initially finding themselves in unfamiliar situations. Upon arrival at their destination, most seasonal workers underwent training. There they learned the duties and tasks they needed to perform, as well as any techniques for work optimisation.

The employment environment abroad affects learning possibilities even within the same occupation. Caregivers who work in private homes have little communication and few skills enhancement opportunities outside the household. Those working in healthcare institutions are retrained before departure and have numerous opportunities in the destination country. There is formal training and exchange with colleagues from whom they can learn new skills and approaches.

The work abroad experience fostered the development of crucial qualities such as confidence, independence, punctuality and a robust work ethic. These experiences played a pivotal role in shaping the women's personal growth and in expanding their worldview.

Upon return migrant women would like to apply the skills and experiences they acquired abroad or acquire a new set of skills which would allow them to have a more stable income at home. However, the interviewed women demonstrated limited awareness about re-skilling/upskilling opportunities in their countries of origin.

The interviews point to a set of skills and qualifications that are missing or need to be enhanced to improve the migration experience. These include language skills, digital skills, interview skills, soft skills, practical skills, business/entrepreneurial skills and literacy, and financial literacy.

According to migrant women, the courses should be designed for adult learners, provide orientation ahead of enrolment, be well advertised to reach the target audience, take place relatively nearby, combine theory and practice, and provide an opportunity to learn in-person and online.

Introduction

Background and objectives

Migration has always been an important element in the European Union's cultural diversity landscape. More recently, while often the subject of political debates, it is also seen as a remedy for addressing the EU's labour market shortages, a result of its rapidly ageing population and shrinking workforce. Migration is a complex phenomenon. It requires significant efforts and constant dialogue between policymakers to be managed for the benefit of countries of origin, countries of destination and the migrants themselves. **Whether looked at from an individual or macro perspective, knowledge, skills and qualifications are fundamental for turning the migration process into a 'triple win'.**

From a country-of-origin perspective, full utilisation of its citizens' skills while living and working abroad can at least partially compensate for the negative consequences of the brain drain, thanks to the financial remittances sent home. Moreover, improving labour market conditions and a better business environment can incentivise some to return with their new skills and qualifications. Hence, **the skills dimension of migration is closely related to the migration and development nexus.** From a country-of-destination perspective, attracting migrants with skills and qualifications corresponding to persistent labour shortages can contribute to addressing the shrinking labour force and help to keep a number of sectors competitive. Finally, from the individual perspective, skills and qualifications, together with practical knowledge are the only assets migrants have. Hence, it is of crucial importance to make the best of these skills and qualifications throughout the migration process – from intention to migrate to return and reintegration in the country of origin. For **these individual skills and qualifications to 'sprout' requires a fertile environment, which is created through migration and mobility dialogues between origin and destination countries.** The recent initiatives at EU level, such as Talent Partnerships, aim to reinforce cooperation between the EU, its Member States and Partner countries. The aim is to boost legal international labour mobility and skills and talent development¹.

According to recent estimates, women account for almost half of the constantly growing migrant population (UNDESA 2020). Many of these women are employed, constituting 42% of the total number of labour migrants (ILO 2021). However, **despite the importance of female labour migration, the development of the skills needed by migrant women to make the best out of migration is often neglected.** There is a lack of specific support measures to upskill and reskill female migrants. This leads to underutilization of female migrants' skills and qualifications with negative effects on salary levels, professional development and living conditions.

To harness the untapped potential of female migrants' knowledge and expertise, the European Training Foundation (ETF) launched a research project *Migrant women as learners: Individual pathways and prospects*. This project aims to understand the skills and qualifications landscape of migrant women and identify the skills needs, focusing mainly on low and medium-skilled migrant women. The distinct contribution of this research project is in analysing migrant women's skills development and use from the individual perspective. In particular, a set of in-depth ethnographic interviews is used. They bring together a rich information set which is then analysed to provide policy pointers based on explicit explanations, actions and decisions of migrant women and validate insights from secondary data. **The strength of this approach is in providing rich and holistic insights into people's views and actions. It is a way to highlight meanings, capture success, challenges, expectations, and concerns.**

This report is the cross-country analytical component of the research project. The overall objective of the study is:

¹ The Talent Partnerships aim to provide a comprehensive policy framework, as well as funding support. They are to boost mutually beneficial international mobility based on better matching of labour market needs and skills between the EU and Partner countries. For more details see the dedicated page https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/talent-partnerships_en Last accessed 10 February 2024.

(a) to understand how their skills and qualifications pathways in a life-long learning (LLL) perspective are currently shaped and how they could be better valued and used;

(b) to formulate recommendations for public and private organisations in education and training on how to better address the skill and qualification needs of migrant women to improve their economic integration in the destination countries and in the origin countries upon return.

The research exercise covers three countries in the **EU Southern (Morocco and Tunisia) and Eastern (Georgia) neighbourhoods**. The research project seeks to find answers to the following three questions, which are the pillars of the study.

Table 1. Research questions and sub-questions

Research question 1 on Skills and qualifications availability What are the specific skills and qualifications of the low-medium skilled women migrants (academic skills, technical skills, transversal skills) and how have they been acquired?	
	Related sub-questions: 1.1 Which skills and qualifications did migrant women have before their first migration experience? 1.2 Which skills and qualifications were acquired during the migration trajectory? 1.3 If, to what extent and through which channels (formal/informal), are low-medium skilled migrant informed about re-skilling/upskilling opportunities in countries of origin?
Research question 2 on Maximization of skills and qualifications utility To what extent are the skills and qualifications acquired useful for migration purposes?	
	Related sub-questions: 2.1 Which skills and qualifications are most useful to maximise the benefits of migration? 2.2 How are these skills and qualifications used or not used to maximize the current migration experience? 2.3 For which specific areas are skills and qualifications used and prove useful: personal well-being, social inclusion, finding a job, professional career advancement, or other? 2.4 What are the challenges that migrant women face in using their skills and qualifications? What issues are related to the recognition of qualifications?
Research question 3 on Improving opportunities through skills and qualifications What skills and qualifications are still missing to support the migration experience?	
	3.1 What skills and qualifications are still needed to improve the migration experience? 3.2 What training modalities would be most suitable to acquire new skills and qualifications? 3.3 What opportunities do migrant women see for their skills development and recognition in all phases of their migration trajectory?

Note that the **Cross-country Analytical report** *is not* conceived as a stand-alone document. It is a working document that is part of a joint package with²

- The **Research Design** that provides the rationale, the research questions and the methodology adopted in the study.
- The **Interview Guides** that helped the country experts to conduct the interviews.
- The **Fieldwork Reports** that document implementation modalities and challenges of interviewees.
- The **Desk Research Reports** that provide the country specific migration patterns, policy and institutional context.

² All these documents can be shared by ETF upon request.

The Cross-country Analytical report includes three **Country sections, one each for Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia**. The Cross-country Analytical report provides the basis for the **Policy Brief** which contains the key policy findings and recommendations.

For the purpose of this research project, the ETF has identified three partner countries and targeted sub-groups of migrant women to provide nuanced insights and different perspectives. The subgroups of migrant women have been selected together with national authorities and EU delegations in the three countries to respond to country-specific expectations. As the three countries are quite advanced in the policy dialogue on migration management with the EU and have substantial migration flows with European countries, they demonstrated a particularly interesting observatory. **Findings and recommendations stemming from the three countries are however meant to be useful for ETF Partner countries at large, and for EU Member states.**

Methodological approach

The methodological approach developed by the ETF research team is based on a combination of two qualitative elements:

- **Desk research**, which aims to (i) detect country of origin-specific macro trends using the quantitative and statistical data available; and (ii) identify any information gaps that will be investigated during the interviews. The desk research conducted during the initial stage of the project led to development of three country specific 'Desk research' reports.
- **In-depth qualitative and ethnographic interviews of migrant women**, tailored to gain an in-depth understanding of their individual experience in relation to the migration phenomenon and how it affects their skills and qualifications. The 'Interview guide' helps country researchers to tailor the questionnaire to the sub-groups identified in each partner country and allows for a general comparison of data across countries of origin and migrant categories. There are also interviews with representatives from national institution(s) working on migrants' skills to get insights into the institutional aspects.

The combination of these two elements were central to the approach used in this study, which involves the integration of data, the validation of research results, and a more comprehensive explanatory framework. All information collected in the desk research and received in the interviews was checked against interviews or further explored during the research project.

The research design was developed on two sets of principles (i) independence and impartiality and (ii) confidentiality, integrity and transparency. More details can be found in the Research Design report.

The study takes an ethnographic, biographical approach focused on individual experiences. It is meant to bring to the fore the voices of migrant women as the main source of evidence and knowledge. The main source of information is the transcripts of the 58 face-to-face interviews (about twenty per country). These were conducted by adopting a biographical approach in the native language of the interviewed women. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted in terms of structured conversations and hence do not provide any statistical figures. Also, the interviews do not contain answers to all research questions. Rather there is a set of information that provides important insights. With these, it is possible to detect recurrent patterns, draw conclusions and make recommendations for policymakers.

Table 2 summarises the interviews in terms of geographical coverage and the category of migrant women interviewed. It demonstrates that in addition to the 'country of origin–migrant category' specific analysis, the set of interviews allows the cross-country challenges for seasonal migrants to be identified, as this category is interviewed in all three countries, and potential migrants in Morocco and Tunisia. In addition, it is possible to compare the views of seasonal workers and those of returnees in terms of skill utilization upon returning to the country of origin.

Table 2. Number of interviews by country of origin and migrant category

	Georgia	Morocco	Tunisia	Total
Seasonal migrants	9	10	7	26
Returnee caregivers	11			11
Potential migrants		11	10	21
Total	20	21	17	58

Note: Overall 60 interviews were conducted. However, two interviews conducted in Georgia were of poor sound quality, hence were excluded from the final sample.

Age is an important factor when discussing skills and human capital investments in the framework of lifelong learning, as the decision to return is a function of age (Shaw, 1989). Caregivers interviewed in Georgia have the highest average age (44) across countries and migrant categories. They are followed by seasonal migrants in Morocco and Georgia, both on average 42 years old. Tunisian (potential) seasonal migrants are much younger. However, this might be explained by the fact that they are at the very beginning of their migrant career path. The interviews revealed that in the caregiving sector, caregivers of a certain age often have an advantage in finding employment as the elderly frequently prefer experienced women.

Country-specific facts and figures

Before describing these countries' emigration trends, it is important to understand the role women play in the labour market in the origin countries. **The three countries included in this study differ both in terms of the share of women in the total employed working-age population, and major sectors.** According to ILO statistics, in Morocco the percentage of women among the employed is 22%; the highest share of women at the sectoral level is observed in the agricultural sector (34%). In Tunisia, the percentage of women among the employed is 27%. But the highest concentration of women is observed in services (30%), which is also the sector that accounts for more than half of employees in the country. The situation is very different in Georgia. About half of all those employed are women (48%): 50% in agriculture and 54% in services ³.

Table 3. Key migration figures from Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia

Country	Total stock of emigrants abroad, 2020, thousands	Total stock of female emigrants abroad, 2020, thousands	Percentage of population, 2020	Percentage of women in emigrants 1990	Percentage of women in emigrants 2020	Main destinations in terms of stock (top 3), based in UNDESA estimates, 2020	Number of those coming to the EU for employment activities and share in total, first residence permits, Eurostat, 2022	Main destinations for female migrants in the EU, first residence permits, Eurostat, 2022	Percentage of those willing to migrate temporarily	Percentage of those willing to migrate permanently
Georgia	861	432	23%	51.4%	50.2%	Russia Greece Ukraine*	8,864 56%	Italy, Poland Germany	47%	12%

³ Working-age population by sex and age, International Labour Organization, Available online https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/Bulk_ilostat_en.html, Last accessed 10 February 2024

								Greece Spain		
Morocco	3 262	1 555	9%	43.7%	47.7%	France Spain Italy	8,183 11%	Spain France Italy Germany Belgium	N/A	28%
Tunisia	902	399	7%	39.5%	44.3%	France USA Italy	3361 19%	France Italy Germany Belgium Spain	N/A	38%

Source: UNDESA (2020); First permits by reason, age, sex and citizenship [migr_resfas]; First permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship [migr_resfirst], Eurostat; Caucasus Barometer 2021, Georgia; Arab Barometer 2022.

*Ukraine before the war started in February 2022

Georgia

Georgia is located in the Caucasus region, bounded by the Black Sea to the west, the Russian Federation to the north and northeast, Turkey to the southwest, Armenia to the south and Azerbaijan to the southeast. The country covers an area of 69,700 square kilometres, and according to the latest UNDESA estimates has a population of 3.7 million, which is expected to decline to 3 million by 2020. The stock of migrants abroad is relatively stable. In 2020 it stood at 861,000, which is equivalent to 23 percent of the country's population. Georgian migrant stock abroad is balanced in gender terms as women constitute 50.2 per cent (Figure 1). According to the most recent Caucasus Barometer Survey conducted in 2021, **only a small percentage of Georgian women would like to leave the country permanently (12%). About one in two, meanwhile, would like to leave temporarily** (see Figure 3).

Georgia, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, experienced a large wave of emigration driven by poor economic conditions, insecurity and widespread poverty. Most Georgian migrants settled in the neighbouring Russian Federation due to social ties, language knowledge and better opportunities for employment and business. A considerable number of Georgians emigrated to Greece (including ethnic Greeks), Ukraine, and the USA. Emigration patterns have changed since the late 2000s. Whereas in the past Georgians left the country mostly in an disorganised manner or through irregular channels, **in more recent times the number of students, low- or highly-skilled professionals leaving for pre-defined purposes and establishing themselves legally abroad has been growing**. The number of legal entries from Georgia to the EU increased fourfold over the last decade. In 2022, the number of first residence permits issued to Georgian citizens reached 37,698 (mostly to Poland, Italy and Germany), 45 per cent of which were for women (same countries in different sequence). **Employment is the main reason for EU entry by Georgian migrant women (56% in 2022).**

Along the regular entries, after the visa-free regime went into force in 2017, many Georgians used the possibility to reach European countries, overstayed or applied for an asylum to stay in receiving countries for a longer period of time. According to Eurostat, the number of asylum seekers increased from 6,000-7,000 before 2017 to 19,000 in 2018. In 2022 (the most recent available figure), it reached 26,000, 43 percent of whom were women. Three quarters of all asylum application claims are for France (34.3%), Germany (30.7%) and Italy (12.5%)⁴. The vast majority of applications (over 90%) are rejected. The rejection rate reaches 100 percent in Germany. **According to the OECD, in 2015/16, six out of ten Georgian emigrants in the OECD area were women. Georgian women are in high demand in the elderly care and domestic sectors in OECD countries.** In Turkey and Italy, women account for more than 80% of the Georgian emigrant population (OECD 2022).

⁴ Georgia, Atlas of Migration. European Commission. Available online at https://migration-demography-tools.jrc.ec.europa.eu/atlas-migration/AoM_CP?selection=GEO#NEU_POP_MIG. Last accessed 10 February 2024.

Morocco

Morocco is a country in the Maghreb region of North Africa. It borders the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and has land borders with Algeria to the east. The country covers an area of 446,300 square kilometres and according to the latest UNDESA estimates, has a population of roughly 37.5 million, which is expected to reach 46.5 million by 2070. **The stock of migrants abroad has doubled since 1990. In 2020 it was equal to 3.3 million, which is equivalent to 9 per cent of the country's population.** Fewer than half (47.7%) of Moroccan migrants are women, which is three percentage points higher than 1990, demonstrating the feminisation of emigration flows from Morocco. According to the most recent Arab Barometer Survey conducted in 2021/2022, **almost one-quarter of Moroccan women would like to leave the country permanently** (see [Figure 3](#)).

Most Moroccan emigrants reside in the EU (88%). The top five destinations are France (33%), Spain (24%), Italy (14%), Belgium (7%) and the Netherlands (5%). These destinations remain important for recent flows, too. According to Eurostat, the number of first residence permits issued by EU Member States to Moroccan citizens in 2022 was about 165,000 which demonstrates a significant increase over the last decade (95,000 in 2014). Fewer than half (44%) of these new entries were women (mainly to Spain, France, Italy, Germany and Belgium). Family unification was and continues to be the main entry reason for Moroccan women (67%). Only 11 percent of all first permits issued to Moroccan women in 2022 were for remunerated activities (compared to 29% in 2014) and 13 percent for education (compared to 1% in 2014). **The decrease in the share of first permits issued for employment and the increase in share of first permits for education might indicate that women are trying to enter the EU labour market through its education system.** Finally, only a small number of Moroccan asylum seekers in the EU are women (9%).

Spain remains the destination for almost all these workers in the context of international placement carried out by ANAPEC: over 97% (95% between 2001 and 2009). Furthermore, almost all the people placed are women (98%), working mainly in the agricultural sector (98%). **The typical profile of a seasonal worker is that they are female, between 25 and 45 years of age, have at least one dependent child under the age of 18 and preferably have experience in agricultural work.** In fact, 27% of seasonal women have at least one dependent child, 26% have two children and 24% have three children. According to a survey carried out by IOM among 300 seasonal workers, three quarters came from rural areas, mainly from the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region (30%), Larache (10%), from Sidi Slimane (7.6%) and from Khemisset (7%). More than half (55%) were illiterate and did attend school (57% had never been to school and 27% had only been to primary school, while 11% finished their secondary school education).

Tunisia

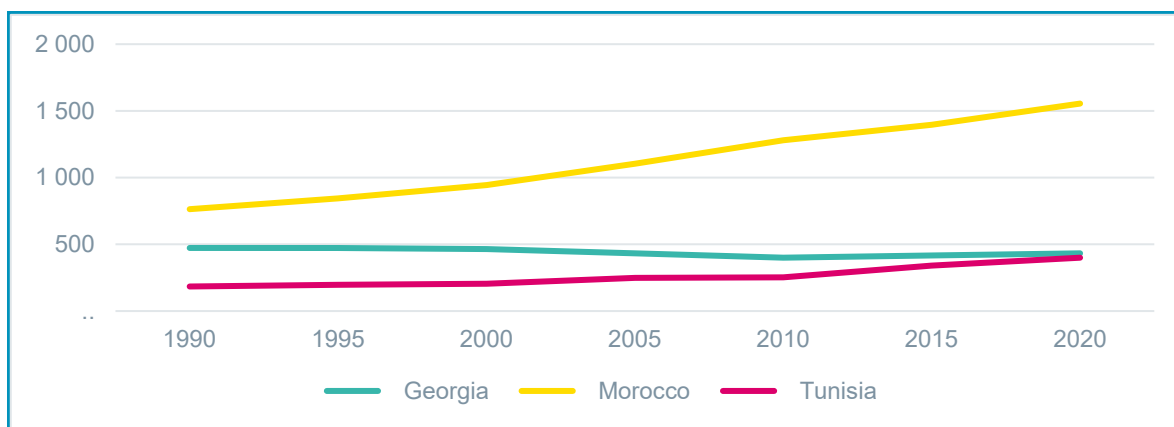
Tunisia is a country in the Maghreb region of North Africa, bordered by Algeria to the west and southwest, Libya to the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north and east. The country covers an area of 163,610 square kilometres and according to the latest UNDESA estimates has a population of roughly 12.3 million. This is expected to reach 14.5 million by 2060, after which it will start to decline. The stock of migrants abroad has doubled since 1990. In 2020 it was 909,000, which is equivalent to 7 percent of the country's population. **The share of women reached 44%, which is almost five percentage points higher than 1990.** According to the most recent Arab Barometer Survey conducted in 2021/2022, **more than one-third (38%) of Tunisian women would like to leave the country permanently** (see [Figure 3](#)).

Most Tunisian emigrants reside in the EU (71%), but there is more diversity in destination than among Moroccans. About half of Tunisian emigrants live in France (49%), followed by the USA (20%), Italy (12%), Germany (5%) and Israel (2.5%). Focusing on the EU as a destination, these Member States remain popular for recent migrants too. According to Eurostat, the number of first residence permits issued by EU Member States to Tunisian citizens in 2022 was about 42,000, which demonstrates a significant increase over the last decade (24,500 in 2014). Fewer than half (42%) of these new entries

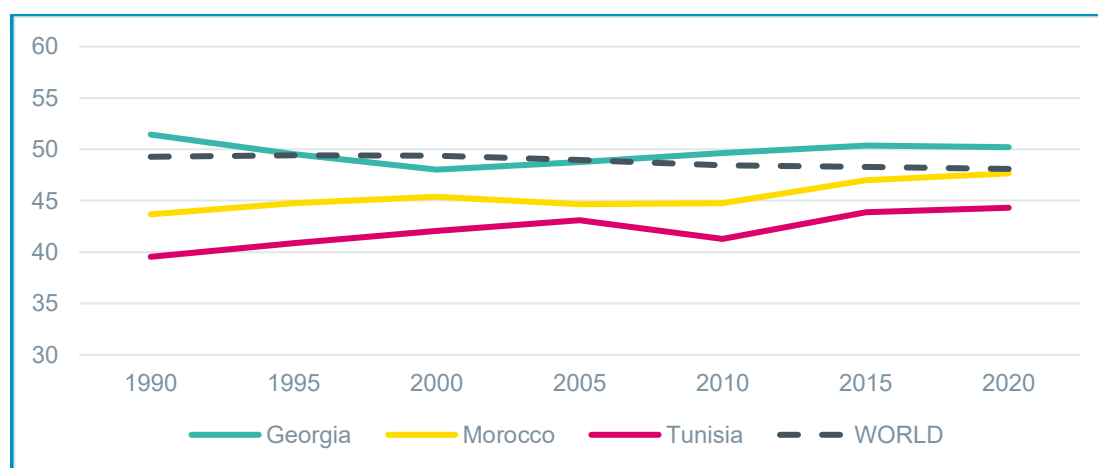
were women (mainly to France, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Spain). However, the share of women has increased by 14 percentage points since 2014. Family unification was and continues to be the main entry reason for Tunisian women (53%). Only 19 percent of all first permits issued to Tunisian women in 2022 (compared to 24% in 2014) were for remunerated activities and 23 percent for education (compared to 4% in 2014). Here, too, **the education system might be used to access the EU labour market**. Despite the sharp increase in the number of Tunisian asylum seekers in the EU, only a small number are women (9%).

Figure 1. Emigration trends over time: Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia

A) Stock of migrant women over time (thousands)



B) Share of women in total stock of emigrants (%)



Source: Own elaborations of International migrant stock at mid-year, both sexes combined, UN DESA.

Literature summary

The migration literature links the feminisation of migration to socio-economic changes in migrant-origin countries, changes in destination-country labour markets, structural factors, and changing social attitudes. However, questions about how the feminisation of migration begins and how it becomes socially institutionalised remain largely unanswered (Hofmann and Buckley, 2013). Meanwhile, the gender structure of migrant flows might have implications for country-of-origin development prospects. For instance, Le Goff (2016) demonstrates that the higher share of female migrants seems to be associated with more remittances received by home countries, as female migrants are more likely to send money home than male migrants. Moreover, their remittances are

more resilient and reliable and, thus, potentially more useful for poverty reduction in recipient countries. **In the context of striving for a better life and heightened economic standing, skills emerge as having a pivotal role.** Numerous studies note the significance of skills for migrants, skills that enable them to navigate their professional journey and capitalise on opportunities abroad (Bates, 1994; Hawes et al., 2017;). For the three countries included in this study, the academic literature can be summarised as follows.

Georgia

Hofmann and Buckley (2012) state that **deteriorating economic conditions in Georgia leave women with few local opportunities to financially support their families.** Institutional and geopolitical changes have, meanwhile, altered the accessibility and attractiveness of international destinations, leading to stronger motivation and opportunities for women's migration. Hofmann and Buckley (2013), looking at the factors driving this phenomenon in Georgia, identify the importance of human capital, increasing divorce rates, and the absence of local economic opportunities. All these motivate increasing numbers of women to migrate. **The feminisation of migration from Georgia occurred in response to new local structural constraints (such as the increased difficulties in emigrating to the Russian Federation, a traditional destination for men), reinforced by a shift in migration destinations from Russia towards Europe and Turkey** (OECD 2022). In these new destinations, women perceive greater employment opportunities for them (Hofmann and Buckley, 2013). The shortage of permanent workers in Germany's care institutions is well noted (King-Dejardin, 2019), and new bilateral labour agreements, such as the one between Germany and Georgia, are meant to help meet these labour needs (OECD, 2021). To bolster the economy, Poland has made efforts to recruit foreign workers, establishing bilateral recruitment schemes with countries such as Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine (OECD, 2021). **The proliferation and dynamics of seasonal worker arrangements and temporary labour programmes are altering migration flows and are gendered.** The recent study carried out by Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) suggests that despite Georgia's recent progress in developing migration systems, the feminisation of migration is often overlooked, and the experiences of labour migrant women illustrate how significant gaps and lack of gender perspectives in legislation, policy and state programmes hinder their return and sustainable reintegration. Moreover, **access to necessary information during migration is constrained due to the high reliance of families on remittances and the absence of relevant education and information for successful reintegration upon return** (Chachava and Zubashvili, 2023).

Morocco

Since the 1960s, Morocco has become a major source of emigrants globally, and the influence of migration has deeply penetrated the country's social, cultural, and economic fabric. Nevertheless, Morocco's role in global and especially in Mediterranean migration systems appears to have experienced noteworthy shifts since the 2000s. First, while the country remains primarily a country of emigration, it is also becoming a destination for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa and, to some extent, from Europe (Berriane et al 2015; Norman, 2016). Second, Moroccan emigration has become more diversified, both in terms of destination countries and origin regions within Morocco. More relevant in the context of this study, **while migration of low-skilled workers to the EU country periphery continues today, it is complemented by more recent and growing emigration of Moroccan high school and university graduates to Canada, especially to its French-speaking province of Québec and to the USA** (De Haas, 2007). This reflects structural development trends in Morocco, such as the increasingly urban and literate character of Moroccan society. The enrolment rate in tertiary education increased from 10 percent in 2000 to 46 percent in 2022. The increase is even more notable for women – from 8 to 49 per cent over the same period. However, the returns on education as an investment are quite low (World Bank, 2012). **The low return to education and skills mismatches are fuelling migration** (Ayadi et al 2018). This growing disjuncture between fast-rising professional and material aspirations and professional opportunities in Morocco has also affected migration patterns: **while emigration in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by low-skilled workers from rural areas, since the 1990s the Moroccan middle class has increasingly used emigration as a way for achieving upward socio-economic mobility to access better professional opportunities, as well as different lifestyles** (Berriane et al., 2021). Finally, an

increasing proportion of women are migrating independently among recent Moroccan emigrants. An increasing number of Moroccan women work as domestic workers, nannies, cleaners, or in agriculture and small industries in southern Europe, whereas one third are highly skilled. This is in contrast to the situation before the 1990s when most Moroccan women migrated as their spouses' or parents' dependents in the framework of family reunification (Berriane et al, 2015).

The changing gender patterns of Moroccan emigration influence the role women play in Moroccan society. In Morocco, traditional male migration leads to a temporary increase in the tasks and responsibilities of women, but this new role is generally perceived as a burden and should therefore not be equated with emancipation in the meaning of making independent choices against prevailing gender norms (de Haas and van Rooij, 2010). **Female migration from Morocco is a result of emancipation** (Heering et al. 2004). However, **migration itself is likely to be associated with further emancipation (especially in Western countries) through exposure to societies where women enjoy more freedom, improving financial independence or at least significantly contributing to the household budget.** In this respect knowledge, skills and qualifications play crucial roles in making migration an empowering experience tool. Indeed, in Morocco, education is positively associated with migration intentions and is associated with greater returns from the migration experience (Collyer and Bardak, 2013).

Tunisia

Since the 1990s, **the number of Tunisians living abroad has doubled.** High structural unemployment, a lack of suitable employment opportunities, low wages, wage disparities with Europe, and substandard living conditions are the most commonly cited reasons for migration from Tunisia (Bardak, 2015; De Bel-Air, 2016). In parallel, there was an increase in the share of women among Tunisian migrants. Looking at the progressive feminisation of migratory flows from Tunisia to Europe over the period 2010-2017, Pober (2018) empirically demonstrates that the Tunisian economic crisis was among the recent drivers of the intensified female emigration. Moreover, **the generation of increasingly well-educated women, with very limited labour market opportunities in Tunisia emigrates in response to the growing demand for highly-skilled workers in destination countries.** Scholarly studies suggest a positive self-selection among migrants, meaning that Tunisian emigrants are generally better educated than non-migrants and returnees (David and Marouani, 2017). Moreover, **the level of education defines the choice of destination and job expectations. Educated potential migrants tend to consider North America as a migration destination rather than the EU** (Sabadié et al. 2010). The rising trend of female migration from Tunisia since 1990 has particularly affected women with higher education degrees (OECD, 2018). **Tunisian women increasingly cite reasons related to studies and career prospects as key motivators for migration, while marriage-related reasons have declined** (FAO 2018). This shift reflects a greater emphasis on seeking improved job opportunities and enhanced living conditions through skills acquisition abroad.

The study conducted by the Migration Policy Centre and FAO demonstrates that much as with Morocco, a decrease in marriage-related migration is recorded among Tunisian women. Even migrants from rural areas are increasingly highly educated and leave to pursue their studies abroad. Moreover, **migration proves to be rewarding for female migrants, in terms of occupational and social security outcomes.** In particular, migrant women have higher labour market participation and employment rates than non-migrants (Zuccotti et al., 2018).

The rest of this report is structured into two main sections. The first section presents the analysis of information collected through interviews with migrants, stressing differences and similarities across countries in the study and across groups of migrants. The second section contains some reflections on the main research questions and provides policy pointers/ suggestions based on insights provided by interviews.

Insights from the fieldwork

The findings from interviews are discussed first by groups of migrants underlining similarities and differences across the countries included in the study, and whenever relevant looking at the similarities and differences across groups of migrants within the same country. For each of the questions, a comparison of the findings with the relevant research and literature on the same topics will be provided. To better illustrate matters, common patterns in the narrative are enriched with quotes from interviews. Priority is given to cross-country comparisons for the same migrant category. **After all, common patterns of utilisation of previously acquired skills, and the accumulation of new ones are expected to appear as a result of a common migration experience.** Moreover, a comparison between the experiences of seasonal workers and potential migrants is possible only for skills acquired and possessed before migration, as, of course, potential migrants have not yet left the country.

Seasonal migrant women

The seasonal migrant women category is identified in all three countries and hence is analysed first. Overall, 26 women (nine in Georgia, ten in Morocco and seven in Tunisia) were interviewed to collect information. Before approaching the key research questions, it is necessary to present the socio-demographic profile of the interviewees and the main drivers that move women in the three countries to look for employment opportunities abroad, as well as the objectives they would like to achieve through this experience.

Socio-economic profile

Women interviewed under this category encompass **a range of socio-demographic profiles and family set-ups**. The average age of interviewed seasonal migrants in Georgia and Morocco is 42. The sample of Tunisian seasonal migrants is younger (34). This can be explained by the fact that none of the women interviewed in Tunisia under this category had migration experience; most of them are aspiring seasonal migrants⁵. All interviewed women resided in rural areas before migrating (or while planning to migrate) and when interviewed. In Georgia, eight out of nine interviewed women were married. All interviewed seasonal migrant women in Morocco were married (at a very young age) or widowed, with from two to five children in the household. Having children is a necessary condition for being allowed to be employed abroad as children serve as a guarantee for return. The family situation is somewhat more diverse among seasonal migrant women interviewed in Tunisia. Three out of seven are single; the remaining four are married, divorced or widowed, with two to four children in their households.

Interestingly, almost none of the interviewed seasonal workers had travelled abroad for reasons other than seasonal employment.⁶ Most seasonal migrants from Morocco have multiple episodes – on average five, but as many as thirteen trips. The destination country is always the same – Spain. Georgian seasonal migrant workers have only a few episodes of seasonal employment abroad, with the main destination being Germany, although they mention Italy, Greece and Turkey when speaking about previous seasonal employment experiences abroad. Tunisian (potential) seasonal migrants have never travelled abroad, but their desired destination is France.

Drivers and objectives of seasonal migration

In all three countries, the main reason for opting for seasonal work abroad is related to the pursuit of better livelihoods and an improved economic status. Financial problems, limited employment opportunities and low pay in origin countries are the most often mentioned reasons for migration. **In this context, skills – acquisition, utilisation, transfer – can play a pivotal role.** They

⁵ These women are all candidates for a seasonal migration visa. However, most of them despite having received a job contract had their entry visa requests rejected by the destination country consulates.

⁶ With few exceptions this is not the case even for Georgians who can travel to EU countries visa-free.

have the potential to transform circular migration from a ‘means of survival’ into a process/mechanism that allows for an improvement in the living conditions of single households in origin countries beyond the horizon of one year and contributes to the development of origin countries.

Women (and households in general) often rely on income generated by agricultural activities in their home country. However, this is highly volatile due to the adverse effects of climate change. This is not surprising as the region will be even more exposed to extreme climatic events in the coming decades (McMahon et al. 2021).

Along with these common patterns observed in all three countries, the following country-specific patterns are observed in how seasonal migrant women see a possibility of getting out of the need to travel every year. **In Morocco most interviewed women see seasonal employment abroad as an opportunity to improve the living conditions of their household.** In the mid-term, they would like to find gainful employment in Morocco instead of travelling abroad. **Tunisian women see seasonal migration abroad as an opportunity to earn money to set up their own projects** (business activity).

‘They (women) may be motivated by the idea of securing their future by working abroad and earning money, with which they can even create their own project here’. Tunisian potential migrant

The skills and learning pathways of seasonal migrants before migration

Most seasonal workers have a low level of education, especially when compared with the skill profile of the country of origin. In Georgia, most seasonal workers have at least secondary education, and in some cases, also some professional training in fields including manual therapy, pharmacy, paramedics and viticulture. In Morocco, most seasonal migrants appear to have a low education level, consisting of basic literacy acquired in non-formal settings, usually thanks to literacy programmes run at village mosques. Early marriage is often mentioned as the reason for interrupted studies, family duties and lack of time as an obstacle to attending literacy courses. Yet, most of them recognise that having basic literacy skills, including the ability to read, write and use phones, are major benefits. Potential Tunisian seasonal migrants represent the broadest skill spectrum. These range from being illiterate to a master’s degree in life sciences. While most seasonal migrants interviewed here have a low level of education (illiterate, primary, secondary, or high school), there are a few cases where a person had to interrupt higher studies due to financial difficulties. When considering formal education among those who have already had a seasonal employment experience abroad, Georgian seasonal migrants are systematically better educated than Moroccan seasonal migrants.

When looking at practical skills, **seasonal workers in the three countries have agricultural skills. These skills have been acquired either while working from an early age on the family farm, or within the community (family, relatives, neighbours).** These locally nurtured skills proved invaluable for participating in seasonal agricultural work abroad. This was either because having them was a necessary condition for getting an overseas employment contract, or because it helped them successfully manage laborious and physically demanding tasks while abroad. This fact underlines the important role played by community-based learning and traditional knowledge transfer in skill acquisition. In addition to agricultural skills, the interviewed women reported having a wide range of other skills acquired informally. Most of these skills were acquired thanks to on-the-job learning, informal learning and/or are self-taught.

There is a clear generational divide in learning pathways. **The younger generation mentions that they use information available in digital networks to improve their skills (including those related to crafts or foreign language skills). The older generation, which is often also less educated, has limited digital skills.**

‘Through the internet, I learned more how to create useful things from discarded items. I was always interested in it somehow, and kept collecting them all my life, jeans that needed to be thrown away, for example, and just creating things from such items.’ Georgian seasonal migrant

Table 4. Seasonal migrants: summary of most frequently mentioned acquired skills and competencies, by country of origin

	Georgia	Morocco	Tunisia
Formal skills and qualifications before migration	Upper secondary education Medical professional (Tertiary) Viticulture (VET) Manual therapy (VET) Pharmacy assistant (VET) Stylist courses (certificate)	Less than primary Elementary	Elementary Biotechnology (Tertiary) Economics and management (incomplete) Digital skills (certificate) Sewing (certificate) First aid training (certificate)
Informal and non-formal skills before migration	Agriculture skills (crop production, husbandry, poultry) Artisan cheese production Household management and cooking Dishwashing Operator in ice-cream production Caregiving (abroad) Cashier Shop assistant Garment production operator Running bakery Entrepreneurship and basic business skills Tourist guide (abroad) Sewing (abroad)	Agricultural skills (farming) Entrepreneurship and basic business skills/ running a grocery shop Cooking/traditional cuisine Machine operator in a factory Seamstress Cleaning Embroidering Weaving	Agricultural skills Livestock husbandry Household management and cooking Digital skills Call centre operator Technicians in industrial maintenance Secretarial skills Hospitality sector, waitress Hospitality sector, chambermaids
Foreign languages before migration	Russian English German Turkish	No foreign languages	French English
Skills gained during migration	Improved agricultural skills Communication skills Team work	Improved agriculture skills One case with a formal certificate on fruit harvesting provided	N/A Improved agriculture skills (intention)

Moroccan seasonal migrant women have a relatively narrow set of skills: for instance, entrepreneurship and basic business skills, garment production-related skills such as sewing and embroidery. At least they have skills, compared to those reported by Tunisian potential seasonal workers. This is because their career paths include working in factories, where they performed production-related tasks. Some have worked as technicians in industrial maintenance, have experience in secretarial roles, and have gained solid experience in the hospitality sector (waitresses and chambermaids).

Georgian women interviewed in this study are from the generation that studied through a period of economic, political and geopolitical turbulence related to the collapse of the Soviet Union. They experienced at first hand the transition from a controlled to a market economy, characterised by a sharp decrease in industrial production and widespread unemployment. It took some time for the education system to respond to these drastic changes, Gvaramadze, 2010; Kitaevich, 2014; Jones 2016). The slow response, in turn, generated a cohort with skills that no longer corresponded to reality (Silova 2009).

Most of the interviewed seasonal migrant women knew some foreign languages: Russian, English, Turkish or German in Georgia; no foreign language skills in Morocco (in a few cases limited Spanish and French); French and English in Tunisia. Proficiency varied significantly across languages and countries of origin. **Seasonal migrants think that knowledge of a foreign language plays an important role both in defining the destination, their ability to navigate and integrate the foreign**

environment and in improving the employment opportunities both abroad and back in the country of origin upon their return. Taking this into account, the section provides a separate discussion on the topic of foreign language skills further in the report.

All potential Tunisian seasonal migrants looking for employment opportunities abroad regardless of their skill level and place of residence have skills and experience in agriculture. They gained these while working their own plot of land. Moreover, many of them, especially those with no other formal training, identify themselves with agriculture.

‘You know, I love agriculture, but in addition to being a passion, it is a profitable field and which offers a very pleasant atmosphere that others do not always perceive. I fully identify with this field, it represents me. Apart from that, I want to work in agriculture there to earn money and save.’ Tunisian seasonal migrant

A positive attitude is observed among the vast majority of interviewed seasonal migrant worker women. Perhaps this is what helped them to cope with the migration experience, as migration also requires adaptation. Having the courage to go abroad to improve living conditions requires some abilities not captured by ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ skills. Certainly, one can very easily find women with similar situations, with similar opportunities, who did not opt for migration. **This positive attitude is present across all skills groups and is among the drivers of these successful acts of migration.**

Pre-departure training and information sessions

Pre-departure training for seasonal workers in agriculture is crucial in ensuring safety, productivity, and well-being while working in a foreign (agricultural) setting. Pre-departure training can cover a wide range of areas including: professional practices (overview of the specific crops or livestock they will be working with; training on planting, harvesting, pruning, and other relevant agricultural tasks); safety procedures (proper use of personal protective equipment, farm equipment operation and safety guidelines, emergency response procedures for accidents or injuries); health and hygiene (training on the safe handling of pesticides and fertilizers, personal hygiene practices to prevent the spread of disease, information on common agricultural-related health issues and preventive measures); as well as cultural sensitivity (understanding local agricultural customs and practices, respect for the environment and local communities, effective communication with local supervisors and colleagues); information on housing (accommodation arrangements); logistics (transportation service); and employment conditions (understanding the typical work schedule and expectations, awareness of overtime policies and compensation). Moreover, pre-departure training should include language and communication training which covers basic language skills for effective communication in the workplace (on the farm for most of the seasonal migrants included in this study). This means common terms and phrases, clear communication of tasks and expectations with supervisors and fellow workers.

The interviews indicate that **a notable proportion of seasonal migrant women did not undergo any formal pre-departure training** before embarking on their work migration; though some mention that had there been the possibility they would have willingly taken such a course. Rather than comprehensive training sessions specific to the tasks to be performed abroad, **several interviewees in Georgia mentioned attending basic informational meetings that provided mostly limited insights into the nature of their job and the conditions they might encounter abroad.**

‘We had a training at first, they told us everything – what would happen there, what kind of work to expect, they told us that we may encounter obstacles and asked if we agreed. They explain everything to you. Working conditions, living conditions, they told us absolutely everything.’ Georgian seasonal migrant

Also, in the case of Moroccan seasonal workers, **pre-departure training was in the best cases limited to information meetings/sessions. Most of the women had attended no such meeting.** Only a few interviewees report receiving a set of information ‘on how to work and behave’.

‘Yes, there were guidelines only on how to maintain our passports, on discipline at work, and they also advised us to save part of our salary to have plans to live and therefore progress in our lives.’ Moroccan seasonal migrant

Pre-departure courses, whether focused on technical or linguistic skills, provide an opportunity to get to know other people planning to work abroad, something experienced by Georgian seasonal workers. This created an opportunity to stay in touch while working abroad and to support each other whenever someone was feeling down due to an unfamiliar environment or separation from loved ones.

The influence of pre-migration skills and knowledge on the migration decision, destination and sector of employment

The impact of previous skills on seasonal migration decisions is multifaceted. The alignment of skills with the demands of seasonal industries, geographic factors, and adaptability to changing work environments can influence an individual's choice of destination and sector of employment during seasonal migration. Seasonal migration is often driven by the demand for labour in specific sectors during particular seasons (for instance, agriculture, tourism, and construction). Skills that are transferable across borders may make it easier for someone to find seasonal employment opportunities abroad. In certain seasonal jobs, having industry-specific certification or training may be a prerequisite. Individuals with relevant certification or experience, which can be proved in some way, may have a competitive advantage when seeking seasonal employment.

Regarding the importance of skills and knowledge in migration decisions, **most seasonal migrants interviewed in Morocco point to their experience in the agricultural sector as being fundamental.** It provides relevant skills for agricultural work in Spain, making the transition easier. Almost all seasonal migrants in agriculture had experience of working in the agricultural sector, whether on their own plot of land, or being employed in their home village. **Even those who had another profession were from rural areas and were used to working in the agricultural sector.** As previously mentioned, they learned these skills in an informal setting at different stages of their life. They also mention in interviews that **having those skills, on the one hand made it possible to find a job in the agricultural sector and, on the other defined their choice in terms of the employment sector abroad.**

Tunisian women with experience in agriculture consider that previous experience and informal skills played a crucial role in both opting for seasonal work in the agricultural sector abroad and in successfully managing tasks. They think **that working in that same sector in the origin country helped the potential employer (recruiters) reach them; otherwise they would not have been considered for this type of job.** For instance, one young (potential) seasonal migrant states that to prove her skills and experience in the agricultural sector she showed *via* videocall the plot of land her family cultivated to certify her skills in the agricultural sector.

'Even the (potential employer), after a video call on WhatsApp where we showed him our fields and our work, really appreciated us and decided to recruit us.' Tunisian seasonal migrant

Existing skills and qualifications and the acquisition of new ones during migration

Seasonal migration is characterised by a narrow set of tasks, a short duration of stay abroad, and high work intensity. This leaves little opportunity to use skills and to obtain new ones compared to other types of overseas employment opportunities. As has previously been demonstrated, most women interviewed under the category of seasonal workers have a relatively low level of education, which limits their opportunities in several ways. First, in their origin countries, they are not able to invest in their own skills development and access jobs with better pay. Cultural gender norms can also occasionally limit women's access to skills development opportunities and compel them to take on unsuitable roles, diminishing their satisfaction level. Second, a low level of education limits their options abroad to seasonal employment in agriculture. This, in turn, due to its characteristics, does not provide possibilities for acquiring many new skills, creating a somewhat vicious circle. However, for some the chance to participate in short-term agricultural labour provides a great learning opportunity, enhancing their expertise in farming practices, improving their abilities, and exposing them to unfamiliar situations.

'One thing I will say is that no one goes there for education, that's the real answer. People go there for money, to work and bring money. However, there are things you learn and you get a huge experience, you get a lot of experience.' Georgian seasonal migrant

The interviews conducted in Georgia and Morocco reveal that **skill and previous experience in the agricultural sector greatly contribute to performing the tasks abroad. These skills were the only ones mentioned as being useful, except language skills which are discussed separately below.** Moreover, one of the positive aspects of employment abroad was the foreign experience itself: new agricultural techniques gained abroad, and communicating in a foreign environment. As witnessed by seasonal migrants this helps/would help to secure another seasonal employment opportunity abroad.

None of the women mentioned recognition of formal foreign qualifications (earned in origin countries), or the formal validation of informal and non-formal skills. This might be partially explained by the fact that many seasonal migrants had no formal qualification. Hence there was little to recognise, or the formal qualification (except one instance when a Georgian seasonal migrant had a degree in viticulture) had little relevance for seasonal employment in the agricultural sector. It may also be the case that the absence of an effective qualification-recognition mechanism discourages the interviewees from seeking recognition (due to lengthy procedures with an uncertain outcome). This absence makes them opt for seasonal employment in agriculture.

The opportunities presented by practical skills acquired by seasonal migrant women are diverse. Both Moroccan and Georgian women report that employment abroad gave them a chance to acquire a set of skills that ranges from those they were performing on farms (or in factories) to time management and work ethics in a foreign and culturally diverse environment. **Experience abroad as a seasonal migrant is considered important for successful performance in the workplace.** This points to the way that those skills acquired on the job during one seasonal migration episode are utilised during the next employment opportunity abroad. **Even those with previous experience in agriculture learned new skills relevant to large-scale agricultural production such as sorting, weighing and pre-packaging, using machinery to treat crops, and using personal protection items** (for instance, iron gloves). Moreover, some were working with different crops, thereby widening their expertise within the agricultural sector.

Most women went through training during which they learned the duties and tasks they needed to perform, and any techniques for optimising work and making the most of their time spent on the farm. The duration of this training could vary from a few hours to several days. Moreover, while some would not result in new skills, in some cases a certificate was issued.

'I learned a lot because those who have work experience abroad are better prepared than those who don't. We learned how to be disciplined and prompt in harvesting crops, how to treat customers and other workers with respect and discipline.' Moroccan seasonal migrant

'I obtained a foreign training certificate in Spain in the field of agriculture, specifically fruit harvesting. A supervisor supervises us and shows us how to work and the techniques to use, this training is part of the work.' Moroccan seasonal migrant

Enhanced agricultural techniques emerge as a recurring advantage. Seasonal migrants in the agriculture sector mention that employment abroad gave them the chance to learn new agricultural techniques from planning to harvesting to crop preservation. They state that they would be happy to use those techniques back home. But they also realise that these techniques require more technologically advanced equipment, which is not available in their home country.

'I would like to introduce their systems locally, at home. It was a great experience, and it was helpful for me, and I even shared this with relatives, neighbours and (whoever I knew).' Georgian seasonal migrant

Opportunities related to new knowledge acquired during migration encompass the development of efficient work habits and improved cross-cultural communication skills. Many Georgian women mentioned that seasonal employment abroad helped them to value and better manage their time. In addition, they develop skills in managing income, expenses and family finances.

‘In Germany, yes, I was not very punctual, and agility was not my strength, so to speak, while in Germany time is very valuable. They teach you that you should not lose the speed of your hand at work. I like their style a lot, and perhaps that led me to adopt it for myself, so to speak’ Georgian seasonal migrant

The seasonal migrants interviewed in this study were employed in European countries which have stricter safety protocols and personal protection measures. In this way, **seasonal migrants enhanced their understanding of safety in the work environment.**

Prospects of seasonal migrant women

Seasonal migration implies a short employment period abroad followed by a longer period spent in the origin country. During the period spent abroad seasonal migrants, while utilising their existing skills, acquire new ones. Hence, **it is important to understand how exactly these skills are used upon return and whether these skills are contributing to improved living conditions.** Moreover, it is also important from the policymaker’s perspective to understand whether there are missing skills that the seasonal migrant women need/would like to acquire to make the best of these seasonal employment episodes abroad and find a more stable income-generating activity in their country of origin, close to their family. **Seasonal migration has become a significant phenomenon in all three countries.** It is of paramount importance for policymakers in origin countries and international organisations working in the development field to make the best of the experience and the potential of seasonal migrant workers for the country of origin. This goes beyond financial remittances. However, **interviewed women face challenges in accessing information about available programmes run by state agencies or NGOs, the educational possibilities and the means for identifying those that fit their existing set of skills and aspirations, as well as funding opportunities for starting their own businesses.** Indeed, the migration research suggests that temporary migration can contribute to the structural transformation of lower-income countries by enabling credit-constrained workers to enter into non-agricultural entrepreneurship (Bossavie et al, 2023). This would help not only to improve the living conditions of a single household, but would also contribute to more general country-of-origin development.

Table 5. Mid-term objectives, including training and gainful economic activities

	Georgia	Morocco	Tunisia
Plans	Improved household living conditions Providing education for children Moving for longer period abroad Improved skills Opening a dog shelter	Improved housing conditions Providing education for children Providing extracurricular activities for children Entrepreneurial activities Finding employment outside agriculture sector (employed or self-employed)	Agriculture activity in origin Entrepreneurial activities Seasonal migration Opening a shop/drug store/ pharmacy
Skills willing to acquire	Languages Cooking, Chef Ticket controller on buses Nursing Opening an animal shelter Driving licence Digital skills Financial management/ accounting	Language Financial literacy Digital skills Business literacy Catering training	Accounting Financial literacy Business literacy Training in pedagogy
Priorities and types of training activities	Reachable/proximity Short Practical Interactive Online On job Oriented to adult learners	Reachable/ proximity Short Oriented to income generation Compatibility with family duties	N/A

	Mixed (theory and practice) Skilled educators and trainers Compatibility with family duties Organised/provided by state through local/provincial authorities		
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The vast majority of interviewed women were very satisfied with their seasonal employment abroad, and would like to go again if such a possibility arises. However, **they would like to withdraw from seasonal migration at some point and find gainful employment (or retire) in their own country.** Through the interviews, it is possible to detect country-of-origin specific patterns when it comes to mid-term plans.

‘If any factory could really be opened in Georgia, I would gladly work in it. I really want all of this to be in my country. My family, my children, my husband, we haven’t been seeing each other for years now. We want to have such conditions in Georgia, so that people don’t have to be apart from their families. Children grow up without care, parents are not around, what kind of trauma is that for children? I would be very happy if there were such things in Georgia. Why would we want Europe and go somewhere else?’ Georgian seasonal migrant

Many Georgian migrant women embarked on their journey abroad with the primary motivation of earning income to support their families back home. Lacking formal qualifications, these women learned practical skills on the job, including agriculture, and, through immersion, languages. The exposure to foreign work environments contributed to a myriad of transformative experiences for migrant women. **Their overseas work experience fostered the development of crucial qualities such as confidence, independence, punctuality and a robust work ethic. These experiences played a pivotal role in shaping their personal growth and expanding their world view.** Upon returning to Georgia, they expressed a desire to apply the skills and experiences they had acquired abroad or to acquire a new set of skills which would allow them to have a more stable income in Georgia. Some specific expectations include:

- **Adult-oriented:** There is a need for these trainings courses to be adult-oriented, as many have had no classroom experiences for a long time. They fear they have forgotten everything they learned at school or see exams as an unsurmountable obstacle.
- **Orientation sessions:** There is a need to have an orientation session as many interviewed women would like to be trained and gain new skills. However, they have only a vague idea of how to improve their employment opportunities locally or abroad, as well as the set of skills they need to establish their own business.
- **Advertisements designed to reach the target audience:** Most Georgian seasonal migrants would like to attend training courses. However, they mentioned that these training opportunities should be better advertised, for instance, *via* public transport banners or on social media. There was a request to have training on how to connect with potential employers for seasonal work abroad.
- **Platform to share experiences:** One Georgian seasonal migrant wanted to create an experience sharing project. In particular, she would like to create a website to connect potential employees to intermediate organisations or directly to employers abroad. The website would also have a forum where experienced seasonal workers could share insights and answer the questions of aspiring seasonal workers. In reality this could be organised by national authorities in charge of seasonal migration management.

Interestingly **those with formal middle-level skills (viticulture, manual therapy, healthcare professional) see these seasonal migration experiences as a stepping stone towards longer-term employment abroad.** They are determined to improve their language skills (German) and look for a better job, even if not in the field in which they are trained. Jobs could be in the field of childcare or caring for the elderly, or massages on cruise boats. They think that their age is no obstacle to getting retrained and improving their skills to improve their employment opportunities abroad.

'This helped me a lot, this step, that I went, departed and there was this programme. If this programme wasn't there, these changes wouldn't take place so first of all, this is a positive change – that I changed the direction of my life. Maybe this is not that age, but a person has the right to do whatever they like, and they have the rights for everything. I have this direction – to develop and leave, to find employment in Germany, the programmes and the experience were really useful in that.' Georgian seasonal migrant

For Moroccan seasonal workers, the mid-term life dreams and plans involve a shift away from continual migration to Spain for agricultural work. Their expectations and plans at the family level are deeply rooted in the aspiration for a secure and nurturing environment for family members. Central themes include providing suitable and stable housing for everyone, with individual spaces for each child. Leading a good and virtuous life alongside the family is a core desire. The hope for a better life, especially for children, is a recurring theme, with a focus on their piety and success. The intention to remain close to children and to support their education underscores the commitment to family. Financial stability and improved professional prospects are sought to ensure the family's well-being and to avoid overseas work. Employment for all family members is a common goal, striving to avoid unemployment and achieve overall prosperity.

While **some dream of launching a business, such as a supplies store or a bakery, others want stable employment, seeing entrepreneurship as a path to sustainable income.** However, many acknowledge that it takes more than financial resources to open a grocery shop or bakery. They would need guidance and skills which are currently lacking. **Even those with formal degrees recognise that they do not have practical skills, such as financial, business administration and everything that management of a business project entails.**

Some point out how women manage to spend less than men, and make bigger sacrifices to bring back more financial resources. This confirms what the scholarly literature says: women earn less but have a higher propensity to remit (Le Goff, 2016).

'They (women) may be motivated by the idea of securing their future by working abroad and earning money, with which they can even create their own project here (origin)' Tunisian seasonal migrant

While there is a desire to create a sustainable project back in the origin country, the interviews hint at the potential need for financial education to be part of any pre-departure training as such. This is because, while convinced of the necessity to save, even if working far from their own skills, and convinced, too, that this money can change their lives, there is no clear path to turn money into savings and savings into a project. Some mentioned that sufficient savings might be the result of several trips abroad; and these savings could be leveraged by a bank loan to raise the necessary funds to create their own project.

Returnee caregivers

Returnee caregivers are the second category of migrants interviewed in Georgia: this includes both conventional caregivers and domestic workers. Much like seasonal migrants interviewed in Morocco and Georgia, these women completed at least one migration cycle and were interviewed upon their return. Two main aspects characterise these groups. The first is the employment sector which includes domestic workers and caregivers working in both healthcare institutions and within families. Second, they remain abroad from a few months to a few years: longer than seasonal workers.

The information collated through interviews showcases the diverse skills acquired by migrant women before and during their migration journeys, along with the impact on their decisions, challenges faced, and prospects upon return. **A common theme across these interviews is the importance of skills, both formal and informal, in shaping the migration experiences.** However, **the information provided by the eleven interviewees indicates that the group is not homogeneous.** Indeed, there is more than one subgroup within this category. **The sub-groups differ from each other in terms of: (i) the initial set of skills interviewees had before migration; (ii) the working conditions, skills utilisation and acquisition possibilities during migration; and (iii) skills transfer and future**

plans upon return. Taking this into account for the purpose of analysis, the Georgian returnee caregivers are divided into the following three groups:

- Nurses working in healthcare institutions
- Caregivers working in families
- Domestic workers not involved in elderly care

The discussion in this section will be focused on patterns common to the category, as well as specific to the three sub-groups. Moreover, whenever possible comparison to the category of (Georgian) seasonal workers is provided. Table 6 contains common elements identified for each sub-group across a set of entry categories relevant to the study to facilitate comparison.

Drivers behind caregiver migration and reasons for return

For caregivers employed in healthcare institutions, the wage differential is the main driver: for the same pay levels they would prefer to work in Georgia. They also point to a strong outflow of healthcare professionals from the country. The recruitment of caregivers working within households and domestic workers takes place through networks of Georgian women abroad. There are also special websites/pages. While **none of the caregivers working within households were offered pre-departure training courses**, they mentioned that **there are individuals who are specialised in informally training them, so that they have a better chance of passing the interview with the hiring family.** Many of those who worked in families had to pay a huge fee, ranging between four and five thousand euros to intermediaries/smugglers to arrange their visas. After visa liberalisation in 2017⁷, Georgian women could go to Europe without a visa, but then they would overstay and would work irregularly. This group of women often works without contracts and with vaguely defined duties, exposing them to exploitation. The irregular status impeded some from opening a bank account, which prevented them from saving more. Health problems, whether their own or of a family member, is the most frequently mentioned reason for returning to Georgia.

According to interviewees, **the absence of an orientation mechanism in high schools and the poor quality and/or absence of vocational education in Georgia do not allow young people to make the right conscious decision when deciding about their future professions.** This leads to a difficult transition from education to the labour market and has created a widespread and protracted skills mismatch in the Georgian labour market, in addition to the one generated by the transition from command to market economy.

Skills and learning pathways of caregivers and domestic workers before migration

The interviews highlight the diversity of skills and backgrounds among migrant women. **These skills include formal education, vocational training (both in healthcare relevant professions and other fields), informal skills acquired from family and community, and language proficiency.** For many respondents, their skills played a pivotal role in their decision to migrate. The relevance of skills to job opportunities abroad significantly influenced their choices. **The previous skills were both important in defining migration choices and for securing the jobs which required skills and experience in the care sector.** For example, on the one hand, medical and caregiving skills facilitated securing opportunities in the care and healthcare sector abroad, on the other, it helped women perform their tasks abroad. Moreover, they learned new skills, which expanded their expertise in the care sector and enabled them to provide more complex and holistic care.

‘Yes, it helped. For example, when I arrived, my lady had a wound on her head and needed to change wound dressings, and I did it. Then, when the masseuse came, she would give me some instructions and I would give some massages to my old lady.’ Georgian returnee caregiver

When queried about equal opportunities for both men and women to engage in training and skills enhancement, many women in Georgia have expressed that, **in terms of accessing education,**

⁷ The decision to transfer Georgia to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirements came into effect on 28 March 2017.

there is minimal disparity between the genders. The key distinction arises from the fact that women often shoulder more household responsibilities, limiting the time available for pursuing training and acquiring new skills. Therefore, the challenge lies not in the accessibility of education but rather in the unequal distribution of household tasks. Addressing this disparity is crucial to ensuring equal access to education for women, as the current scenario restricts their ability to engage in educational pursuits.

Interviewed women report that in Georgia connections or networks are an important factor in finding jobs outside the country, as well as in Georgia itself. Employment gained through a diaspora network abroad remains an adaptation strategy in the absence of connections in Georgia. **Many of our interviewees stated that connections are more important than degrees, skills and knowledge if you want to be successful on the Georgian labour market.**

Skills and qualifications and acquisition of new ones during migration

It is important to distinguish between those who work with elderly people in families and those who work in hospitals because both working conditions and learning possibilities are different.

Those who work in private homes have little exposure to the outside world, so they have little communication and few skills enhancement opportunities outside the household. Matters are quite different for those who work in hospitals. They have numerous opportunities, not least through formal training and exchange with colleagues from whom they can learn new skills and approaches. They also have spare time to build contacts outside the workplace, attend courses and communicate with locals.

Most obstacles seen by Georgian women **in terms of gaining skills** (for instance, language courses with a teacher online) **were related to a lack of free time.** Most working in families were employed 24/7, without the possibility of becoming engaged in any other activity, including related to the acquisition of new skills. Caregiving is traditionally organised solely around the patient's needs, which leads to greater challenges in the caregivers' day-to-day lives, ranging from the physical and social to the personal and emotional. The literature calls for system design that focuses not only on patients but also on caregivers, addressing the burdens that often impair *their* health and wellness (Bedini and Phoenix, 1999; Leong et al. 2001; Chem et al., 2013).

For caregivers and domestic workers, **networks abroad played an important role in turning up jobs.** These women also helped each other by sharing information related to caregiving and integration in the destination country. While there is competition between Georgian caregivers abroad, they realise the benefits of cooperation (sharing an apartment, information about job opportunities, providing temporary shelter). This teaches them how to build relationships with people working in the same field. The diaspora network was particularly important for those who entered the destination country with a tourist visa (or with a biometric passport after 2017), and who looked for employment opportunities either before departure or upon arrival.

Key challenges for integration in destination countries

The interviewees who worked in families mentioned that not everyone can bear being apart from their own family and the heavy workload. **Providing care for the elderly requires significant efforts and, indeed, endurance. It is even more challenging to look after elderly people with cognitive impairments.** Working with Alzheimer's patients turned out to be a 'nightmare' for many Georgian caregivers (both experienced by interviewees and shared by their compatriots); they ended up having psychological problems themselves. Most probably, this is a result of being employed without any specific training in Germany or Georgia which would help them to deal with these cases. This points to the need to develop and implement pre-departure training (even online) that introduces the aspiring caregivers to their future duties, with specific training modules on the types of care they are supposed to provide abroad.

The caregivers working in private homes often do not have regular contacts outside their place of residence (Melchiorre et al, 2022). This is also reflected in our sample. Unlike those working in hospitals, caregivers working in families are more isolated, with communication limited to the person

they take care of or the family members. The interviews revealed that those not living with their employer had to share overcrowded apartments which did not give the migrant worker privacy or their own space to rest or to study.

The challenges related to overcoming cultural differences are a recurrent topic in interviews. However, the experience of being exposed to a different culture and foreign environment seems to have been enriching. In terms of learning, it is important to mention that many caregivers left for employment abroad with certain (often negative) stereotypes about the destination country and the people living in the country. However, **contact and communication with locals and the support provided in difficult situations dispelled these stereotypes and created more realistic and positive ideas of people from other cultural backgrounds.**

Prospects for returnee caregivers and domestic workers

The main objective of employment abroad is to improve the living conditions of the family. This is achieved through the regular transfer of financial remittances. However, there are documented cases where remittances came in terms of non-financial assets such as seeds and plants to expand the agricultural capacity of their farms in Georgia. This makes the return and reintegration more sustainable.

'I brought the Marabella variety five years ago before going to Italy. My husband wasn't here at that time, he was in Russia. And I planted it on 400 meters. And it should give yield this year, if it sells for a good price, I will plant on 1000 more meters. There are a lot of fruit trees and the sour plum and stuff are growing well, and I'm going to plant them and sell to the restaurants.' Georgian returnee caregiver

The interviewees also mentioned that in addition to training opportunities, **it would be useful to create networking opportunities for those who went through training programmes.** These could help in finding employment opportunities, as well as in funding opportunities for those willing to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

'It would be very good to have some events, a meeting of the programmers themselves, on whoever learned what, if their meeting could be arranged and beginners were invited to let them know what is done and how, and who has achieved what and what prospects they have.' Georgian returnee caregiver

Some said that **the examples of returning migrants being supported by the government might convince other Georgians to return, too.** Hence, from the policymaking point of view there is space for a multiplier effect; that is the successful reintegration of one migrant might attract others. However, it is also important to make sure that the **government is prepared to receive more returnees and to organise their reintegration.**

When asked about preferred forms of training **the interviewees highlighted the importance of having training nearby, in part-time mode, working in small groups, as well as having the training split into modules: introductory ones, followed by intermediate and advanced courses.** It was also suggested that the introductory modules should be free of charge or at least subsidised, so that the beneficiary has an opportunity to get in touch with the subject through the introductory module. If she/he is interested and feels comfortable working in the field, then the student will pay for intermediate and advanced modules which also provide a certificate.

The interviewees shared their views about announcements for training. These, it was suggested, **should be posted on certain sites visited by the potential beneficiaries, highlighting the importance of beneficiary-centred design in advertising campaigns.** Moreover, social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram were considered to be most suitable.

'For example, if the Ministry of IDPs is to post it only on their page, no one goes there. The best would probably be if it were on Facebook or Instagram, it would be good. There were too many socially vulnerable and displaced people, if there were additional things for them, programmes.' Georgian returnee caregiver

The young woman who studied and worked in Germany and then returned to work in Georgia in a hospital was disappointed by the level of training provided in the framework of regular qualification improvement programmes in Georgia. She thinks that they are poorly organised, badly structured and are often a formality that has little to do with improving the skills of personnel working in healthcare institutions. The professional level of trainers, she noted, needs to be improved. For instance, they are trained to use a device in the absence of the device itself, which makes the effectiveness of such courses highly questionable.

Table 6. Returnee caregivers and domestic workers; skills acquisition and utilisation perspective, by employment type

	Domestic workers /No elderly care	Caregivers working in families	Nurses working in healthcare institutions
Relevance of the skills for migration	No	Yes	Yes
Skills before migration Formal	Tax and social fund accounts, college Art and design (diploma)	Formal training in nursing colleges Experience in healthcare sector Midwife nurse/ Intense therapy nurse Art school (diploma)	Formal training in nursing colleges Experience in healthcare sector Language German /English
Skills before migration Informal and non-formal	Baking for selling (self-taught) Cooking Entrepreneurship Shop assistant Cashier Agricultural skills	Farming Pastry chef (with a certificate)	
Predeparture training / technical	No	No	Yes Yes, organised by employer Yes, organised by NGOs (Caritas) Yes, organised by private institutions
Predeparture training /languages	No	No	Yes, with certificate
Qualification recognition	No	No/Informal acceptance	Yes Yes, partial
Skill underutilisation	Yes	Yes	No
Opportunities to use the existing skills abroad	Limited	Yes	Yes
Opportunities to gain new skills abroad	Limited Cooking Language/conversation level (German, Hebrew) Time management Working in team Communication skills	Limited Language/conversation level	Extensive Training in professional skills with certificates Vocational college degree in Health and patient caregiver Emotional intelligence skills Language/working level/certified

			Communication skills Exposure to multicultural environment
Utilisation of skills gained abroad upon return		Limited Unemployed Retired	Return to old employment Under-utilisation due to imperfect qualification recognition
Training needs/ field	Language skills (English)IT skills/programming Baking (with a certificate) Hairdressing Nail technician Accounting Driving licence Clothes design	Training in nursing and healthcare to update their skills in line with developments in healthcare Baking modern cakes	
Training characteristics	Achievable/ Nearby In person Part time At least three months long Practical Affordable Taught by foreign experts/ trainers		Combination of theory and practice Highly-qualified trainers/ professionals with good communication and pedagogy skills Well-organised Effective In person Interactive

Formal qualification recognition; the round trip

The interviews contain a set of information on the central role played by formal qualification recognition in the framework of cross-border skills utilisation. In particular, the interviews with Georgian returnee caregivers describe two cases relevant for mapping qualification recognition practices and providing evidence useful for policymakers working in the area of skills recognition. They also highlight the importance of aligning national qualification systems to improve cross-border skills utilisation. While drafting the report, Georgia obtained candidate status. There is an urgent need to put more efforts into this domain.⁸

Case 1: A young Georgian woman left for Germany to improve her language skills with the intention of entering medical school. Once in Germany, she learned that she could not enter medical school as she did not have a ‘German *Abitur*’ - the proof of entrance qualification for higher education in Germany. She got enrolled and successfully completed three years of vocational education training, obtaining a ‘health and patient caregiver’ qualification and went on to practice her profession in a clinic for several years. Upon returning to Georgia, she faced challenges in terms of the recognition of her qualifications. In Germany, she was considered a nurse, but in Georgia, due to differences in the education systems and perceptions of caregiving tasks and duties, her qualifications were taken as being lower than a nurse: ‘care staff who helps the nurse’. The partial recognition of her skills had a negative impact, making the woman feel ‘like you’re less than you actually are’. She, however, recognised the important differences between the tasks nurses can perform in Germany and Georgia, which might be the reason for the imperfect qualification recognition.

‘I had been waiting for an answer for about half a year, and it was very difficult for me to think about what would happen and what would come out of it. At first, I was told that it probably wouldn’t be

⁸ On 12 December 2023, The Council approved conclusions on enlargement for the six Western Balkans partners, Türkiye and – for the first time – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Available online at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/12/council-approves-enlargement-conclusions/>. Last accessed 10 February 2024.

equivalent to what I thought, and after about five to six months they gave it to me... They explained that I am a care staff who helps the nurse and is in charge of a patient's hygiene, nutrition, order, and so on, but you have no right to administer medicines, which was my job before. I think there is a huge difference in the systems. In fact, the departments are radically different in Georgia and Germany. The duties of a nurse are also different.' Georgian returnee caregiver

Case 2. The second case relevant for qualification recognition is centred on a middle age woman who accumulated rich professional experience in nursing after graduating from a medical college. While still working in Georgia she got in touch with an organisation that was retraining nurses for future employment in Germany. Then she went through a series of professional retraining courses, both theoretical and practical, during which she updated her knowledge and skills in patient home care. She was offered language courses too and passed the B1 level. Her skills and experiences were mapped to identify and bridge the gaps/differences. Upon arrival in Germany, she (together with other Georgians) was constantly retrained.

Case 3. The caregivers working in families are (in contrast) deprived of any form of formal recognition for their knowledge, skills and efforts. However, they treasure the appreciation they received from the elderly person or his/her family members. The caregivers working in families were particularly proud when the host family/employer would ask them to find someone like them before returning home.

Potential migrants

A crucial precondition for effective migration management is possessing sufficient information regarding the processes of migration, including its drivers, scale and composition (age, gender, education, etc.). However, understanding future migration trends is not a trivial task, as migration forecasting is notoriously difficult and unreliable due to its many and unpredictable drivers (IOM 2016). One alternative way to consider how migration flows may evolve in the future, and hence to design better-informed policies and measures in migration management is to look at the intentions of those who wish to migrate (Belmonte et al, 2017). While these intentions do not necessarily turn into actual moves, they can represent an important part of the decision to migrate (Carling and Schewel, 2017). The most recent wave of the Arab Barometer suggests 27 percent of Moroccan and 37 percent of Tunisian women would like to emigrate. In both countries, the most frequently mentioned reason by women for migration is the economy. However, while in Morocco it is mentioned by almost half of female respondents (48%), in Tunisia it accounts for three-quarters of respondents (73%). Education is the second most popular response: Morocco, 18%; and Tunisia, 8%. The top three most desired destinations for potential migrant women in Morocco are Canada (14%), France (12%) and Italy (12%). The top three most desired destinations for potential migrant women in Tunisia are France (21%), Italy (12%) and Germany (11%).

Table 7 guides the reader through a set of information collected through interviews and allows similarities and differences across the two countries to be detected. In the sample covered in this study, the average age of potential migrants in both countries is 27 years old, indicating a mix of youthful enthusiasm and more mature considerations.

The complex interplay between skills and migration

Potential female migrants interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia have quite different educational backgrounds compared to their peers engaged or willing to be engaged in seasonal employment abroad in the agricultural sector. While the main target of the study is medium and low-skilled female migrants, it is notable that the potential migrant women sampled in both countries have higher levels of education compared to their compatriot seasonal migrants⁹. In both countries a significant number of interviewees have higher education in the social sciences (law, economics), the life sciences (medical biology), the humanities (English literature) and engineering (ICT, mechanical engineering, metallurgy). Others have Higher Technician Certificate (BTS) or Professional Technician

⁹ More detailed info on the sampling approach can be found in country specific 'Report on field work' in the project documents.

Certificate (BTP), unaccredited diplomas, or are still in training. They cover a wide range of specialities including logistics and transport professionals, audio and visual technicians, care assistants, nurses, cooks, confectionary arts, etc.

When looking beyond the level of education, the information collected through interviews paints two very different pictures: there is the role qualifications and skills play in the migration process in Morocco and in Tunisia. For potential migrants in Morocco, skills and formal qualifications shape their determination to migrate and facilitate making it a reality. **Most in addition to formal qualifications have accumulated solid experience and would like to continue their professional career abroad, often within the same field/occupation.** Lack of opportunities for professional growth, wage gaps and lifestyle abroad are among the most frequently mentioned reasons for migration among Moroccan interviewees.

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

While formal qualifications recognition is an important tool for maximising migrants' human capital use abroad, for some professions (for instance, lawyers) the process is particularly complicated. In the interview, **potential migrants consider a degree to be an enabling factor for migration as tertiary education is a necessary condition for destinations relying on a point-based system.**

One of the challenges individuals encounter abroad is related to culturally different environments. In this respect, three out of the eleven potential migrants in Morocco have gained experience and insights from the international context. This contributes to their adaptability and cross-cultural competencies when migrating. The combination of these soft skills in combination with their professional skills increases their chances of successful integration (labour market and social) in the destination countries.

Potential Tunisian migrants interviewed for this study **demonstrate a wide range of highly valuable skills. These, however, are often severely underused in the country of origin which becomes, in itself, a driver of migration.** The lack of opportunities and a few disappointing employment episodes in the origin country can become the reasons for a drastic shift in one person's career trajectory. **In Tunisia the desire to migrate motivates young women to acquire skills and qualifications. Many of them build their CV/professional profile with a sole objective to be attractive to foreign employers.** Among Tunisian interviewees are some who mastered a new profession to increase their chances to migrate.

'Since my childhood, I have always been inspired by Germany and the field of mechanics and cars, so this health education would be a gateway to my real dream. I considered this training as an obligatory step to achieve my goal.' Tunisian potential migrant

In the sample of potential migrants interviewed in Tunisia, the number of women with medium level skills is higher. Overall, as was already reported by a (potential) Tunisian seasonal migrant, the skills acquisition process is mainly theoretical and the real learning takes place on the job. The misalignment between the theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms and the practical training is a recurrent theme regardless of the field of study. Yet, there are a number of positive experiences reported, too. Three respondents have skills/experience in healthcare with diverse learning experiences: auxiliary nurses, laboratory technicians with practical experience and internships in hospitals, as well as in volunteering with the Red Cross. **Those trained in the field of logistics and commerce in addition to certifications such as the BTS Logistics and Distribution, supplemented their theoretical knowledge with practical apprenticeships and specialised training in international commerce and multimodal transportation.** The completion of work experience during their training and holding positions in companies helped these individuals to enhance their skills and gain confidence. Four out of ten interviewees pursuing diplomas in cooking and baking are interested in the culinary arts. Their training is usually a blend of theoretical and practical learning. In addition to their formal education, they complement their knowledge through internships in local bakeries, both large and small, as well as by holding positions at hotels. Cooks (together with waiters and bartenders) are among the occupations characterised by persistent labour shortages (EC 2023). **These occupations are also listed among Mismatch Priority Occupations**

(MPO) for which a critical shortage (or surplus) has important implications for the national economy (including strategic sectors) and for education and training (CEDEFOP, 2016).

While some potential migrants have undergone traditional formal education within public schools or universities, others take the initiative to self-teach. In particular, they pursue knowledge through online platforms, websites, and networks, researching and gathering information independently to enhance their skills. Some also opted for non-formal education avenues, including regional education centres and specialist courses. A significant number of potential migrants in both countries gained practical experience through on-the-job training and work-related exposure.

When discussing equal opportunities to access training, Tunisian potential migrant women held diverse opinions. Some believe that the opportunities are equal, while others perceive them as more limited for women. However, **there is interview evidence pointing to unequal access to practical training in professions traditionally considered suitable for men. This turned into a real obstacle when transiting from education to the labour market.**

'I understood that being a woman is a real obstacle in this field, especially in the field. During my internships, when I tried to do something, I was stopped and I was only allowed to observe the men working. ...Likewise, during recruitment competitions, there was always a remark specifying that "this competition is reserved for male candidates only", and this sentence has always remained engraved in my memory.' Tunisian potential migrant

The language skills of potential migrants are discussed below.

The influence of pre-migration skills and knowledge on the migration decision of potential migrants by education level

Enhancing employability abroad stands out as a primary motivation, as migrants seek better career prospects and economic opportunities. **Formal qualifications such as diplomas, certificates and knowledge play a pivotal role in shaping migration decisions among potential migrants. On the one hand, they increase the attractiveness of foreign opportunities for an individual. On the other, they improve the probability of receiving a job offer abroad and enhance the ability to seamlessly integrate into new environments.**

Overseas employment prospects may even define the education paths of individuals who are ready to shape their professional profile to fit the demand of a foreign rather than the local labour market. Moreover, the discrepancy in demand for the same set of skills across borders creates further incentives to look for employment opportunities abroad. For instance, a nursing diploma might prompt migration due to limited job prospects in the home country and high demand for healthcare abroad. The relatively smoother recognition of some qualifications (including those in the healthcare sector) amplifies the impact of these skills on shaping the migration decision, as well as on improving labour market integration prospects abroad. The potential Moroccan migrants share that the importance of having these qualifications is often stressed by friends, colleagues or other acquaintances. These have successfully emigrated (to Germany) and they emphasise that having diplomas and certifications is a key factor in navigating the complex process of migration and adapting to a new professional environment.

In addition, having qualifications helps migrants to access practical experience through training courses and internships. As a result, potential migrants acquire greater responsibility and expand their skills, making them more competitive for employment abroad. For instance, having skills and experience in sectors such as logistics could also be a necessary prerequisite when considering opportunities abroad and often helps in finding financial resources to support migration plans. Moreover, the training and internships sometimes help access funds to support migration plans.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of communication skills for employability. In the case of employment prospects abroad, the strength of communication skills is conditional on destination language proficiency. This acts as a facilitator in the job search, networking, and overall social interaction. In contrast, a lack of language knowledge can become a significant barrier, limiting the information space and contacts with potential employers. This prevents migrants from meeting the minimum criteria for employment and inhibits integration.

Most of the potential migrants interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia have never travelled abroad for work. Yet, those who did consider employment abroad to be both enriching (in terms of skills, knowledge and experience) and empowering.

‘This experience (Arab Emirates) was very useful because it allowed me to have an overview of the work and I was able to invest a lot of skills and learn new ones. It helped me channel a lot of energy because I found that what I was doing was important in the work, so I pushed myself beyond my limits. I discovered things within myself that I could develop and learn from. I discovered an aspect of myself that I really liked because I felt that I was progressing and that I was not doing anything useless in my work. On the contrary, I felt that I was doing a great job and this feeling of responsibility pushed me to give the best of myself.’ Moroccan potential migrant

Pre-departure training and information sessions

As already mentioned in the section discussing the experience of seasonal migrants and returnee caregivers, **pre-departure training plays a crucial role in successful integration in the destination country.** This is even more the case for potential migrants who plan to move abroad for a long period, if not permanently. In this respect, pre-departure training can equip the potential migrants with skills that would facilitate their socio-economic integration in the destination country. The academic literature states that the pre-departure training can, indeed, help an individual in his/her career progress and adaptation to a culturally different environment (Venkataiah, 2022; Setti et al, 2022).

Pre-departure training is not mentioned in any potential migrant interviews in Morocco.

However, while not attached to specific training, many go through various training courses (including language courses discussed below). The objective is to improve their chances of securing employment abroad or to qualify for permanent migration schemes working through point-based systems.

In Tunisia, where the vast majority of interviewed potential migrants were beneficiaries of the GIZ programme, they went through or were still attending a comprehensive pre-departure training programme. This training had three main components.

- **Intensive language courses:** After passing the preliminary phase in which the skills of candidates are assessed against pre-established criteria, the programme beneficiaries are offered a six-month training course to achieve B1 level (Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch). If the required level is achieved by the end of the training course, participants are given another opportunity to pass the exam.
- **Professional vocabulary development:** After reaching B1 German language proficiency, students are provided with training to develop the occupation specific vocabulary by learning terms and phrases used in the workplace.
- **Preparation for interview:** The participants were coached to prepare for the interview with a potential employer. They are instructed on how to remain calm during the interview, to politely respond to the questions. The interviewed women had several interview simulations to gain confidence and arrive at the interview stage in the best possible shape.

‘That being said, they started to prepare me for the interview by preparing German scripts for me to learn, with which I will answer the interview questions that I am going to have with the German employer. I was also coached through simulations.’ Tunisian potential migrant

‘Yes, we did three days of preparation for the interview. It was in the form of simulations with a real German who asked us questions. We had to learn how to introduce ourselves, how to answer certain typical questions, how to talk about our background and our experience, our strengths and weaknesses. If we had shortcomings, (the coach) asked us to improve them. It was only an exercise without evaluation, done to identify our areas of improvement and work on them in order to succeed in our real interview. They even taught us how to manage our body language, our smile, our posture, etc. Currently, I feel ready for the interview.’ Tunisian potential migrant

The experience shared by the potential migrants in Tunisia suggests that the programme is committed to preparing the participants with skills that would help them succeed during the interview with a German employer.

Prospects of potential migrants

The mid-term life dreams and expectations of potential migrants vary widely. Many intend to elevate their social standing through the acquisition of new skills, aiming for personal growth. They see the path towards this goal as being through advancing their career and exploring a migration route, whether through employment or by launching a personal business venture abroad. Potential migrants understand very well that enhancing their skills and qualifications and aligning them with labour market needs abroad is key to increasing their chances of finding employment abroad. This pursuit includes acquiring new skills and mastering foreign languages. It is important to mention that for many the final objective is not only long-term or permanent migration, but also becoming a professional, whether a nurse, logistics expert or cook.

Many potential migrants interviewed in Tunisia were preparing to leave and start their apprenticeship programme in Germany. The participants are provided with a scholarship to cover their food and accommodation related expenses.

'My migration project consists of following a three-year training course with a scholarship of 1,200 euros per month, or 900 euros net. As for accommodation, it is taken care of by (organiser in Tunisia). That is to say, he will be responsible for finding us accommodation, but it is up to us to pay for it from our purse. In any case, the cost of accommodation will not exceed 200 euros, and it will be located just 800 meters from the clinic.' Tunisian potential migrant

The main difference between potential migrants interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia is related to intentions surrounding their return. **Potential migrants in Morocco see returning to Morocco and developing their own project or at least managing one from abroad as the final objective of their migration project.** In contrast, **Tunisian migrants do not intend to return.** These two prevailing strategies have very different consequences for the development of origin countries. **In the case of Morocco, the temporary loss of talent is expected to be compensated when migrants return with improved skills and financial resources to invest in the homeland. In this respect, they can be considered development agents for Morocco. The departure of young Tunisian women can, in contrast, be associated with the possibility of accessing international networks.**

Table 7. Skills and qualifications of potential migrants by country of origin, acquisition channel, utilisation and needs

Information category	Morocco	Tunisia
Formal skills and qualifications before migration	Physics (Bachelor's degree) Lawyer specialised in civil and private law (Bachelor's degree) ICT professional (tertiary education) Certificates in IT skills (short courses) Paramedical nurse assistant Staging and ceremonial arts (foreign qualifications, France) Digital marketing training (foreign qualifications, Turkey) Sound technician (the institution is not accredited) Agricultural skills	Medical biology (student ongoing) Mechanics and metallurgy (Bachelor's and Master's degree) Experimental Sciences diploma Professional caregiving (training diploma, private institution) BTS or BTP in logistics and distribution BTS or BTP in culinary/confectionery art Human rights training (certificate) Soft skills development training (certificate)
Acquisition channels/ methods	Higher education institutions Regional education centres Self-learning On-the-job	Higher education institutions Private training centres On-the-job

Informal and non-formal skills before migration	Hospitality sector professional Marketing Social media management Communication	Culinary Confectionery
Acquisition channels/ methods	Formal training not followed by certificate (hospitality sector) On-the-job Self-taught	Self-teaching Online training courses or videos on social media platforms (e.g., YouTube)
Predeparture training	None	Comprehensive training which includes language training courses, occupation-specific vocabulary development, coaching/interview simulation to gain confidence and improve the chances to receive a job offer as a result of the interview.
Training needs before departure	Language skills Upgrading skills with the latest advancements in one's profession/field IT skills Communication skills Interviewing skills Commerce	Language training with focus on professional vocabulary development Upgrading skills with the latest advancements in one's profession/field Professional training in the field of employment abroad (culinary, confectionery art)
Training modes	Intense over a short period Leading to a certificate Mixed Face to face On-the-job	Mixed

Foreign language skills: acquisition, use and role

Foreign language skills are a central element of all interviews included in this study regardless of migrant category, country of origin and the socio-demographic characteristics of interviewees. Foreign language skills play a crucial role in shaping migration decisions towards successful integration. The ability to communicate effectively in a language other than one's native tongue can open up opportunities and influence the overall experience of living and working in a new country. Moreover, the knowledge of a destination country's language allows migrants to better communicate with potential employers, reducing uncertainty about the potential employee's knowledge and skills. Finally, migration itself provides an opportunity to acquire and improve foreign language skills. [Table 8](#) summarises information collected through interviews (by migrant category) and is developed to facilitate the reading of this section.

Seasonal migrants

The vast majority of seasonal workers had no destination language skills before departure. For most of them, it was not a necessary condition to secure seasonal employment in the agricultural sector abroad. Yet, **they all acknowledge the importance of language skills to interact with locals, be more accepted and valued by supervisors, to get around, as well as to expand networks.** It is also helpful to understand one's rights and obligations abroad. Seasonal workers in agriculture manage to learn some phrases during their short stay abroad. However, due to a lack of practice upon return, they forget what they have learned by the next episode of seasonal migration.

Some Georgian seasonal workers after an employment experience abroad are determined to improve their language skills by attending formal training and looking for better and longer-term employment

opportunities abroad. They consider strong language skills for the desired destination country as a **necessary condition for securing a job outside the agricultural sector**.

Table 8. Foreign language skills from acquisition to utilisation through migration cycle, by migrant category

	Seasonal workers	Returnee caregivers and domestic workers	Potential migrants
Language skills before migration	None or limited knowledge of destination language (German, Spanish, French) Others not relevant for destination (Russian, English, German, Turkish)	None or limited for those working in families Intermediate/advanced for those working in healthcare institutions (German) Others not relevant for destination (Russian, Turkish)	Strong/advanced (3-4 languages) (English, French, German, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Turkish)
Acquisition process before migration	Formal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> schooling language courses Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure self-learning TV/movies 	Mostly none Formal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> schooling private training organised by employers or foreign agencies 	Formal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> schooling language courses private language training courses pre-departure language training courses organised by foreign agencies (e.g., GIZ) Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure, self-learning TV/movies following professional courses online in EN/FR
Role/significance before migration	Accessing information about the destination country Increases competitiveness /the chances to be selected from the pool of candidates Finding employment outside the agricultural sector	Securing employment abroad	Becoming attractive candidate for employers abroad
Language skills during migration	Basic/phrases specific to occupation	Basic/Conversation Advanced	Advanced
Acquisition process during migration	Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure to native speakers 	Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in family setting TV/movies Formal (private training organised by employers)	Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure to native speakers
Role/significance during migration	Communication with colleagues and supervisors Moving around Independently Building networks	Communication with colleagues	Better chances of passing the interview with the employer Successful socio-economic integration Better career prospects
Language skills after migration	Loss due to non-use Basic/progressing	Basic/Conversation Advanced	N/A
Acquisition process after migration	Formal	Not detected	N/A

Role/significance after migration	Looking for better, long term employment opportunities outside agriculture sector	Not detected	N/A
Identified training needs	Pre-departure training courses Post-return training courses (in between seasonal migration episodes)	Pre-departure training courses	Pre-departure training courses

Returnee caregivers

Unlike seasonal workers, returnee caregivers and domestic workers spend incomparably longer periods abroad, from a few months to more than a decade. The **place and nature of their employment define the level of language skills required to secure employment abroad and further acquisition while abroad**; these also affect how they acquire the language. The caregivers employed in healthcare **institutions were required to demonstrate an advanced (B2) level of language skills**. They were also trained up by the demands of future employers, both in their origin country and on arrival to be able to communicate with colleagues, supervisors and patients. Caregivers and domestic workers faced **softer language skill requirements**. The potential employees were more interested in the skills required to take care of the elderly (nursing, caregiving, dealing with chores around the house). This group of migrants had limited exposure to improving their language skills due to communication being limited to the families who employed them.

Potential migrants

Potential migrants have long-term objectives in mind when planning their migration journey. These include securing employment and seamless socio-integration in the destination country. Learning the language of destination countries is a necessary condition for the realisation of these objectives. **Potential migrant women interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia have strong language skills** especially when compared with their compatriots involved in seasonal agricultural work abroad. **Many speak three to four foreign languages and work very hard to further improve their language skills**.

Potential migrants interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia exhibit varied language acquisition methods, influenced by their individual circumstances. **Some individuals develop language skills through formal education, participating in classes and consistent daily usage**. Despite limited exposure, **online** resources serve as valuable tools. Some migrants, especially those planning to migrate through permanent migration schemes to the USA, Canada or Australia undergo intensive language training. GIZ included knowledge of German as a mandatory for employment in Germany.

Main findings and policy recommendations

The analysis suggests that **migration is perceived as a positive experience by most female migrants** (whether seasonal agriculture workers or those with longer engagement abroad). It is seen as a means for fulfilling future academic and professional career aspirations. It is clear that low and middle-skilled migrant women possess a wide range of skills and experience acquired through formal education, on-the-job training

and self-teaching as well as informal learning in family and local community set-ups. The skills, formal qualifications, and experience possessed by migrants before migration influence the migration decision and define its nature (seasonal/circular, temporary, permanent), status (regular vs irregular) and employment type abroad (high vs low occupation, regular vs irregular employment). They also define the new skills acquired and experience during migration. Finally, the set of skills with which migrants return, in combination with more training in the origin countries, as well as financial resources earned abroad, can make the return sustainable through gainful employment, whether through qualitatively better employment compared to the job before migration or self-employment/entrepreneurship. Taking into account the role played by the governments and other stakeholders in origin and destination countries in skills acquisition and use, it is of paramount importance that policymakers work towards designing policies and measures to enhance the human capital of low and middle-skilled migrants and maximise its potential for countries of origin and destination and for migrants themselves. The section below provides a compilation of policy-relevant findings identified through the previous section and country reports, following the logic of the three research questions of this study, and offers policy recommendations.

Answers to the research questions

Q1. What are the specific skills and qualifications of the low-medium skilled women migrants (academic skills, technical skills, transversal skills) and how have they been acquired?

1.1 What skills and qualifications did migrant women have before their first migration experience?

The analysis reveals that **the skills and qualifications of interviewed women vary significantly both across and within countries of origin and migrant categories**. The formal skills and qualifications spectrum ranges from low (illiterate or elementary level), reaching the middle (vocational education and training in nursing, massage therapy, pharmacy assistance, styling, culinary, logistics and etc) and high level (bachelor's and master's degree in life and social sciences, engineering, etc.). Informal skills are even more diverse, including agricultural skills (farming, crop production, husbandry, poultry), food processing (ice-cream production operator, artisan cheese producer, baker), textile and garment production (embroidering, weaving), retail (shop assistant, cashier), hospitality sector (tourist guide, waitress, chambermaid), other service sectors (call centre operator, secretarial skills), and entrepreneurial activities (running grocery shops, pastry shops, bars). These skills were acquired either within the family or community or in the workplace.

Adverse labour market conditions related to low demand for the skills and qualifications possessed by interviewed potential migrant women make them look for employment abroad. In Georgia, in contrast, due to the transition from a command to a market economy, many found that their skills were not adapted to the new reality. In the absence of an education system (also designed to serve command economy needs) that could retrain them to fit the new labour market reality, many look for employment in European countries in low-skill occupations such as caregiving, domestic work and seasonal work in the agricultural sector. The absence of a well-functioning VET system in Georgia is a recurring theme in interviews conducted with Georgian women.

There is a wide discrepancy observed in terms of language skills. **The level of education is positively associated with foreign language skills, as most women gained their language proficiency through formal education.** While no Moroccan seasonal worker spoke the destination language or any other foreign language, Georgian and (potential) Tunisian seasonal workers spoke some widely-understood foreign languages such as Spanish, French, Russian and English. For seasonal workers, the destination language was not a necessary condition for employment. However, for caregivers and nurses working in healthcare institutions abroad, language proficiency was a necessary condition to securing an overseas contract. Potential migrants in Morocco and Tunisia see proficiency in their destination language, together with their professional skills, as a bridge to lead them to their desired job abroad. They spare no efforts in mastering language skills while searching for a potential employer.

Most seasonal workers and returnee caregivers are satisfied with their migration experience. The level of satisfaction is higher among low-skilled seasonal migrants in the agricultural sector as they perform the same job as in their origin country but with better conditions (better pay, fewer working hours, better overall organisation). **With few exceptions, nobody was looking to move abroad permanently. Rather they wanted to find gainful employment in their origin town or village, which would allow them to stay close to their families.**

1.2 What skills and qualifications were acquired during the migration trajectory?

Migration is an enriching experience which provides an opportunity to acquire new skills: professional, practical and soft skills, and foreign language skills. However, **the type of skills and the opportunities to acquire them depend on the duration of migration and the employment type/nature abroad.** Interviewed women report that employment abroad gave them a chance to acquire a set of skills: those they learned while working on farms, with the employer family, or in a healthcare institution, or related to time management and work ethics in a foreign and culturally diverse environment. In this study, the two groups with migration experience are seasonal migrants and returnee caregivers.

Seasonal migration is characterised by a narrow set of tasks, a short duration of stay abroad, and high work intensity. Hence, it provides limited opportunities to use existing skills and to obtain new ones. However, even within this limited period, many manage to enhance their expertise in farming practices, improving their abilities and exposing themselves to unfamiliar situations. Upon arrival at their destination, **most seasonal workers went through training during which they learned the duties and tasks they needed to perform, as well as any techniques for optimising work and making the best out of their time spent on the farm.** The duration of this training could vary from a few hours to several days. Moreover, while training would not necessarily result in new skills, in some cases a certificate was issued. Gaining foreign experience itself helps to secure another seasonal employment opportunity abroad. **Even those with previous experiences in agriculture learned new skills relevant to large-scale agricultural production such as sorting, weighing and pre-packaging, using machinery for crop treatment, and using personal protection items (for instance, iron gloves).** Some worked with different crops, which broadened their expertise within the agricultural sector. Opportunities related to new knowledge acquired during migration encompass the development of efficient work habits and improved cross-cultural communication skills. Many Georgian women mentioned that seasonal employment abroad helped them to value and better manage their time. In addition, they developed skills in managing income, expenses and family finances. The seasonal migrants interviewed in this study were employed in European countries with stricter safety protocols and personal protection measures.

When looking at the skills acquired by the women interviewed **under the returnee caregiver category, it is important to distinguish between those who work with elderly people in families and those who work in hospitals, because both the working conditions and the learning possibilities are different.** Those who work in houses have little exposure to the outside world. They have little communication and few skills enhancement opportunities outside the household. Matters are quite different for those who work in a hospital. They are retrained before departure and have numerous opportunities in the destination country, not least through formal training and exchanges with colleagues from whom they can learn new skills and approaches. They also have spare time to build contacts outside the workplace, attend courses and communicate with locals.

The exposure to foreign work environments contributed to a myriad of transformative experiences for migrant women. **Their overseas work experience fostered the development of crucial qualities such as confidence, independence, punctuality and a robust work ethic.** These experiences played a pivotal role in shaping their personal growth and expanding their world view. Upon returning to Georgia and Morocco, they expressed a desire to apply the skills and experiences they had acquired abroad or to acquire a new set of skills which would allow them to have a more stable income at home.

1.3 If and to what extent - and through which channels (formal/informal), are low-medium skilled migrants informed about re-skilling/upskilling opportunities in countries of origin?

Overall, the interviewed women demonstrated **limited awareness about re-skilling/upskilling opportunities in countries of origin.** Most of the interviewed women face challenges in accessing information about available programmes run by state agencies or NGOs, the set of educational possibilities and the means to identify those that fit their existing set of skills and aspirations, as well as funding opportunities for starting their own business. Only a few (in Georgia) were aware of the training opportunities financed by the European Union. When asked about the optimal channels to be used to reach potential beneficiaries, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram or ads on public transport were mentioned as being most suitable. They advised against publishing this type of information on the official websites of state institutions as these are not visited.

Q2. To what extent are the skills and qualifications acquired useful for migration purposes?

2.1 What skills and qualifications are most useful to maximise the benefits of migration?

The interviews highlight the diversity of skills, qualifications and backgrounds among migrant women. **These skills and qualifications include formal education, vocational training (both in healthcare relevant professions and other fields), informal skills acquired from family and community, and language proficiency.** For many respondents, their skills and qualifications played a **pivotal role** in their decision to migrate. Skills and qualifications were important, both in defining the migration choice and securing jobs which required skills and experience. For example, on the one hand, medical and caregiving skills facilitated securing opportunities in the care and healthcare sector abroad; on the other hand, they helped women perform their tasks abroad. When looking at the experience of potential migrants interviewed in Tunisia and Morocco it is possible to notice the complex interplay between skills, qualification and migration. **On the one hand, skills and qualifications (especially those in high demand abroad) coupled with the wage difference become facilitators in the migration process. On the other, the intention to migrate (often driven by limited labour market possibilities locally) encourages young women to actively acquire skills and qualifications in demand abroad.** In Tunisia, some potential migrants change their profession and invest time and financial resources to succeed in their migration project.

The potential migrants acknowledge the fact that it is likely they will not be able to practise their profession abroad. However, they do not consider their qualifications completely wasted, as for those aspiring to reach countries with a point-based system, having a bachelor's degree is a minimum condition to meet.

Regarding the importance of skills and knowledge in migration decisions, **most seasonal migrants interviewed in Morocco and Georgia point to their experience in the agricultural sector as being fundamental.** It provides relevant skills for agricultural work abroad, making the transition easier. As previously mentioned, they learned these skills in an informal setting at different stages of their life. They also mention in interviews that having those skills made it possible to find a job in the agriculture sector and also defined their choice in terms of the employment sector they chose abroad. They all think that having experience in the agricultural sector facilitated their task performance abroad, and if they had not had those skills they would not have gone.

Tunisian women with experience in agriculture consider that previous experience and informal skills played a crucial role both in opting for seasonal work in the agricultural sector abroad and in

successfully managing tasks. They think that working in that same sector in the origin country helped the potential employer (recruiters) reach them; they would not otherwise have been considered for this type of job. Among those interviewed in Tunisia, the most promising/likely candidate to travel abroad was one who intended to work in a hotel in France with which the hotel where she is currently employed in Tunisia collaborates. And here, too the previous experience and skills determine both the probability of seasonal migration plans and define the employment sector/occupation.

Regardless of the type of job performed abroad and the duration of stay all interviewed women consider that knowing the destination language (or at least an internationally spoken language) is extremely important. It helps to communicate with colleagues, supervisors, and locals outside the workplace, facilitates access to services and helps understanding of one's rights and obligations abroad.

2.2 How are these skills and qualifications used or not used to optimise the current migration experience?

The interviewed women state that their skills related to cleaning, cooking, baking (even those carried out at a professional level in origin countries) or household chores, in general, were not used for paid activities abroad. But these skills are what make the women's experience easier (compared to men).

Women are used to organising their everyday life outside work, which gives them an advantage over men who are not used to performing these types of activities.

The skills possessed before migration often serve as a basis for building new ones. For instance, most seasonal migrants in the agricultural sector had agricultural skills before they left for overseas employment. This helped them secure employment abroad and facilitated gaining new skills in the same field. Moreover, upon return, **some actively use the newly acquired skills/techniques on their own farm and share this knowledge with their network.** Also, the potential seasonal migrants in Tunisia mention that the choice of the agricultural sector is made by their skills and experience in this sector. However, they see seasonal migration as an opportunity to enhance their skills and invest themselves, together with financial resources to expand their farm. Similarly, caregivers say that their professional skills and long experience were key to securing employment abroad.

It was mentioned by interviewees that speaking a foreign language was useful to navigate in a foreign environment. First, it expands the possibilities for communication. For instance, speaking English, Turkish or Russian helped Georgian seasonal workers to communicate with their supervisors or colleagues as well as outside the workplace. Second, speaking a foreign language is an aid in acquiring and practising a new one.

2.3 In which specific areas are skills and qualifications used and prove useful: personal well-being, social inclusion, finding a job, professional career advancement, or other?

The evidence provided by the interviews suggests that **having skills and experience helps migrant women feel confident they will successfully manage the tasks abroad.** The interviewees who were employed in seasonal work in agriculture often mentioned that they knew everything they were asked to do abroad. In some cases, even over a very short period, they managed to demonstrate their skills and their ability to work independently so that after some time they were trusted by supervisors and were not closely followed any more.

Caregivers working in hospitals abroad mention that while they were trained before being recruited, they were very proud of the fact that their foreign trainers and later also foreign colleagues valued their skills and experience. The caregivers working in families, thanks to their professional skills, managed to provide care to patients with complex health issues and were very much appreciated by family members. Because of these skills, they were later recommended to other families looking for a caregiver. Hence, their skills helped them to find employment abroad, but also secure uninterrupted employment over time.

Speaking **the language of the destination country increased, according to interviewees, the value of the employee in the eyes of the employer – they were seen differently.** It also helped migrants to better understand duties, receive feedback and perform tasks in line with expectations.

Q3. What skills and qualifications are still missing to support the migration experience?

3.1 What skills and qualifications would still be needed to improve the migration experience?

The interviews point to a set of skills and qualifications that are missing or that need to be enhanced to improve the migration experience.

Pre-departure training plays a crucial role in empowering migrants with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt successfully to a new country. It enhances their overall preparedness and promotes a smoother transition to the new environment. However, the interviews indicate that a notable proportion of **seasonal migrant women did not undergo** formal pre-departure training before embarking on their work migration, although some mention that had there been the possibility, they would have willingly taken such a course. Rather than comprehensive training sessions specific to the tasks to be performed abroad, several interviewees mentioned attending basic information meetings. These provided mostly limited insights into the nature of their jobs and the conditions they might encounter abroad.

While **none of the caregivers working in households or domestic workers were offered pre-departure training courses**, they mentioned that there are individuals who are specialised in informally training them, so that they have a better chance of passing the interview with the hiring family. However, most of them work without contracts and with vaguely defined duties, something which exposes them to exploitation. Knowing one's duties and obligations, as well as how to execute one's rights, would help reduce exploitation. This gap can be addressed by offering the potential migrants a training module on rights and obligations, as well as cultural features of destination countries.

The only group of interviewees who went or were going through comprehensive pre-departure training were the beneficiaries of the programme managed by GIZ. According to information provided by the beneficiaries, the programme offers an extensive language course, followed by an occupation-specific language module. Moreover, the participants are coached to prepare for the interview with their potential employer.

It might be thought that seasonal migrants would not need comprehensive training due to the limited time spent abroad. However, this is not the case as for many of them it is their first trip abroad. Moreover, some had taken up to thirteen trips, overall spending more than two/three years altogether. Pre-departure training, at least the first time, could make their stay abroad more comfortable and help them get their bearings abroad, including when it comes to accessing services such as public transport, post office, money transfer, hospitals etc.

Skills indicated by women to improve their migration experience include:

Language skills: Seasonal workers in agriculture manage to learn some phrases during their short stay abroad. Some were offered language training in Spain, though the language of instruction was Spanish. This limits comprehension, especially for those who have never learnt a foreign language or those whose level of education is limited to basic literacy. These language training courses were focused on work-related vocabulary. However, due to a lack of practice upon return, migrants easily forget what they have learned by the next episode of seasonal migration. In this respect, there is a lot of space for policy making: **language training in the pre-departure training package, and the development of post/return training modules to maintain or even further develop language skills, especially for those who are planning to engage in seasonal work abroad again.**

Digital skills: Many potential Tunisian seasonal migrants talk of financial constraints as the main obstacle to attending courses and gaining new skills. However, none of them mentioned resources

available free of charge online. Perhaps there is a need for training in digital skills, **with the objective of introducing them to learning resources available online.**

Interviewing skills: Many interviewees have little understanding or experience in interacting with the employer or interviewer. Interview preparation courses **prove to be essential not only for practical day-to-day interactions, but also to excel at job interviews, a crucial stage in the migration process.** The Georgian returnee caregivers shared their experience of being privately trained to improve their performance when interviewed by families in the destination country.

Capacity for climate change adaptation: Many seasonal migrants mentioned that one of the reasons for opting for seasonal employment is the decreasing productivity of their agriculture activities due to adverse weather events related to climate change, such as drought in Morocco and Tunisia or hail in Georgia. It is important to develop skills that **enable these women to organise their agricultural activities using climate change adaptation approaches and tools.** This might include investing the money earned in water efficient irrigation systems, hail nets or to buy insurance against harvest loss due to adverse weather events.

Soft skills: A lack of emphasis on soft skills in academic curricula in origin countries can impede effective communication and integration in the new environment. Weak self-confidence and problems at school may result in migrants doubting their own abilities. This may deter them from staying on the path they have chosen. Among soft skills, the most important are **communication and time management.**

Practical skills: The disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical skills: one primary concern is the limited **practical application of the knowledge gained through diplomas and certifications.** Many potential migrants find that the theoretical knowledge acquired in their home countries does not readily translate into the practical skills required locally or in their place of destination.

Preparedness/skills to work and live with cognitively impaired patients: Providing care to the elderly requires significant effort and, indeed, endurance. It is even more challenging to look after elderly people with cognitive impairments. Working with Alzheimer patients turned out to be a 'nightmare' for many Georgian caregivers (both experienced by interviewees and shared by their compatriots) and they ended up suffering from psychological problems themselves. Most probably, this is a result of being employed to work with cognitively-impaired individuals without any specific training in Germany or Georgia which would help them to deal with these cases. There is a need to develop and implement pre-departure training (even online). **This would introduce aspiring caregivers to their future duties, with specific training modules on the types of care they are supposed to provide abroad.**

Business/entrepreneurial skills: The vast majority of the interviewed women were very satisfied with their experience abroad, and would like to go again if such a possibility arises. However, they would like to withdraw themselves from migration at some point, and find gainful employment (or retire) in their own country. Yet, only few have understanding about how to use the financial resources derived from overseas employment into skills that could provide gainful employment in the origin country, or establish a business activity. Orientation by professionals in the skills assessment and development domain is crucial. Also, those willing to open a microbusiness often lack the **confidence and financial resources, but also basic business skills to run a shop or other entrepreneurial activity.**

Financial literacy: Female migrants have a higher propensity to save compared to their male peers. However, they lack the financial literacy to effectively manage these resources beyond improving housing conditions, providing education to children or covering household expenses, such as, for example, to use resources as collateral while asking for a loan. Some reported having problems opening a bank account abroad or having little understanding of which organisations to approach to look for financing for their business projects. Among potential Tunisian seasonal migrants, many also express a desire to save the money they earn abroad to fund future projects. Even those with formal degrees recognise that they do not have practical skills, such as in **finance, business administration, and everything that managing a business project involves.** A few state that they could explore obtaining bank loans if migration turns out not to be a viable option.

Improvements in business literacy: At professional level, there are various aspirations, but all are centred around professional growth and personal fulfilment. While some dream of launching businesses, such as a supplies store or a bakery, others want stable employment, seeing **entrepreneurship as a path to a sustainable income**. However, many acknowledge that it takes more than financial resources to open a grocery shop or bakery. They would need guidance and skills which they currently lack. Moreover, the interviewees express hesitance about taking out loans as they fear they would not be able to pay them back.

3.2 What training modalities would be the best fit to acquire new skills and qualifications?

Many seasonal workers and returnee caregivers, especially the relatively young ones, expressed a desire to apply the skills and experiences they had acquired abroad, as well as to acquire a new set of skills which would allow them to have a more stable income. The intention was to withdraw from migration. The list of preferences listed below reflects the recurrent features of training modalities that migrant women consider to be optimal.

Adult-oriented: There is a need for this training to be adult-oriented, as many have not had the classroom experience for a long time. They fear they have forgotten everything they learned at school or see exams as an insurmountable obstacle.

Orientation sessions: There is a need to have an orientation session as many interviewed women would like to be trained and to gain new skills. However, they have only a vague idea of how they can improve their employment opportunities locally or abroad, as well as the set of skills they need to establish their own business.

Advertisements designed to reach the target audience: Most Georgian seasonal migrants would like to attend training courses. However, they mentioned that these training opportunities should be **better advertised**, for instance *via* public transport adverts or on social media. There was a request to have a training course on how to connect with potential employers for seasonal work abroad.

Engagement of kinship institutions. As many low-skilled seasonal migrants see mosques as an institution where they overcame illiteracy, it might be important to have them engaged with training. Migrant women feel these are traditional places where they gained their formal education.

Networking opportunities: The interviewees also mentioned that in addition to training opportunities, it would be useful to create networking opportunities for those who go on training programmes. These could help in finding employment opportunities, as well as funding opportunities for those willing to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Training modalities: When asked about preferred training modalities the interviewees highlighted the importance of having training **nearby, in part-time mode, in small groups, as well as having the training split into modules:** an introductory one, followed by intermediate and advanced courses. It was also suggested that the introductory modules should be free or at least subsidised, so that the beneficiary has an opportunity to get in touch with the subject through the introduction module. If she/he sees herself interested and comfortable working in the field, then the student will pay for intermediate and advanced modules, which also provide a certificate. It was considered important to improve training quality. This training should be in line with the highest international standards, and in addition to theoretical knowledge equip the beneficiaries with practical skills.

3.3 What opportunities do migrant women see for their skills development and recognition in all phases of their migration trajectory?

Interestingly, those with formal middle-level skills (viticulture, manual therapy, healthcare professional) **see these seasonal migration experiences as a stepping stone towards longer-term employment abroad**. They are determined to improve their language skills (German) and look for a better job, even if not in the field in which they trained. Jobs might be, for instance, in the field of childcare or elderly care, or massage on cruise boats. They do not think that their age is an obstacle to getting retrained and improving their skills to improve their employment opportunities abroad.

The interviews contain little information on formal qualification recognition. Yet, there is evidence of recognition leading to employment in sectors interviewed women worked in before migrating and there are big gains as they are well-paid. **Many potential migrants see qualification recognition as a secondary (or at least less immediate) goal and are more focused on securing an employment contract in any field.** The few cases where interviewed women went through the process of recognition of formal qualifications were associated with a narrow set of qualifications (nurses, caregivers, logistics and distribution professionals and cooks) and one particular destination – Germany. This might indicate that demand and labour shortages in destination countries for certain skills can become a driver for state-level engagement to facilitate and coordinate otherwise bureaucratically complex procedures related to formal qualifications recognition.

Policy recommendations

The interviews conducted with migrant women in Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia provided a rich set of information which was analysed in the previous sections. This analysis provides answers to the three research questions and enables the detection of recurrent patterns specific to a particular country of origin or migrant category. These offer the perspective of migrant women on which issues related to migrants' skills and qualification should be prioritised. **The policy recommendations presented hereafter embody the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of women who were actively interviewed.** The insights garnered from these interviews offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by migrant women in various contexts, ensuring that the resulting recommendations are not detached or theoretical, but rather deeply rooted in the realities and aspirations expressed by the women themselves. However, taking into account the fact that interviews were conducted with a small and not statistically representative sample, the policy recommendations listed below are not intended to be prescriptive mandates; rather, **they are presented as thoughtful suggestions.**

The policy recommendations are grouped by category distinguishing between **Information (I), Training (T) and Support measures (S).**

Table 9 below is a guide to the relevance of each recommendation for the six 'country of origin - migrant category' groups.

Information

Enhancing the Information Landscape on Available Training Opportunities: Raise awareness about institutions, as well as associations and cooperatives offering **employment and skills assistance** to guide migrants towards suitable opportunities. Follow the beneficiary-centred design of the advertisement campaigns, using social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram as suitable means to reach the target audience. Government endorsement for training programmes (after checking their quality) would encourage migrants to participate and enhance their employability.

Training

Comprehensive Pre-Departure Training: Develop and implement comprehensive pre-departure training programmes for migrant women, focusing on **language proficiency, job expectations, financial literacy, cultural adaptation, worker rights, digital skills and practical matters.** In addition, it is desirable that in addition to the general module, the pre-departure training contain **country of destination-specific modules.** The training programmes should be tailored to the specific professional profile of potential migrants. Programmes of this type can significantly enhance their preparedness for integration into a foreign environment. Collaboration with relevant government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations is needed to design standardised training modules. While face-to-face training sessions are more effective, they are not necessarily accessible to those living in remote areas or with long working hours. Hence, it is important to have materials available **online** to make them accessible to everyone.

Language Proficiency Programmes: Establish language proficiency courses tailored to the destination country's language requirements, **with a focus on occupation-specific vocabulary.**

Offering a mix of classroom instruction and immersive practice facilitates effective communication and integration. The provision of in-class and online learning possibilities is worth pushing for. While language proficiency is not a necessary condition for recruitment for seasonal work in agriculture, during their stay abroad seasonal migrants do learn some basic phrases. However, they tend to forget them upon return. It is important to include language training in the pre-departure training package even for seasonal migrants and to develop post/return training modules to maintain or even further develop language skills. This is especially so for those who plan to engage in seasonal work abroad again.

Sector-Specific Skills Enhancement: Enhance the capacity of VET institutions, and reinforce their collaboration with industry partners to shift from a supply to a **demand-driven model** and offer skill enhancement programmes in sectors with high demand in the origin country (to enhance employability locally, as well as upon return) and abroad (to improve the recruitment and integration prospects of those aspiring to migrate). Working with educational institutions and industries to offer work **internships** bridges the void between theory and practical experience. Adjusting the curriculum to fuse theoretical knowledge with practical applications, and extending periods of practical training to provide more hands-on experience ultimately leads to better employment readiness.

Tailored Programmes for Women: Develop training programmes that consider the **unique needs and responsibilities of migrant women**, including family dynamics and caregiving roles (half-day, online, in places easily reachable by public transport).

T - Hybrid Training Formats: Recognise the flexibility and accessibility of online courses, which accommodate diverse schedules and locations. Implement hybrid training formats that **blend online and in-person sessions (near homes)** and include practical experiences, accommodating domestic responsibilities while ensuring effective learning outcomes.

Soft Skills Development: Design training programmes that focus on enhancing soft skills like **communication, teamwork, time management and adaptability**. These skills not only contribute to personal development but also boost employability, job performance and successful integration abroad. These training programmes can be part of the pre-departure training.

Financial Accessibility of Training Courses: Ensure affordability and accessibility of training programmes for migrant women, offering subsidised or free training options to mitigate financial barriers. One possible solution would be to have the training split into modules starting from an introductory one, followed by intermediate and advanced ones. In this case, the introductory modules should be free or at least subsidised so that the beneficiary has an opportunity to get in touch with the subject through the introduction module. If she finds herself interested and feels comfortable working in the field, then she can pay for intermediate and advanced modules, which also provide a certificate.

Entrepreneurship Training and Financial Support: Establish entrepreneurship training programmes that equip migrant women with the skills needed **to start and manage small businesses upon return**. Facilitate access to micro-finance and business financing to support women's entrepreneurial ventures. Create regional training centres to reduce the need for travel and increase accessibility.

Support measures

Skills and Qualifications Recognition: Advocate for **mutual recognition agreements** between countries to ensure that qualifications acquired in the home country are recognised and valued abroad. Similarly, ensure the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad to encourage return and effective reintegration in home countries. Develop accessible mechanisms for **assessing and validating skills gained through informal education, on-the-job and community-based learning – including micro credentials recognition**.

Psychosocial Support: Recognise the **emotional challenges** faced by migrant women abroad and upon return; providing psycho-social support services to help them navigate the overseas employment period and the reintegration process.

Networking Opportunities: Create platforms for returned or migrant women working abroad to connect, share experiences and build professional networks, fostering mutual support and knowledge exchange. The platform could also have a forum where more experienced seasonal workers could share insights and answer questions from aspiring seasonal workers.

Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship programmes connecting returning migrant women with experienced professionals in the field in which they plan to work / build their businesses, providing guidance, advice, and a support network. Mentorship programmes with industry professionals would allow (returnee) migrants to receive practical guidance and insights. Seasonal migrants often seek mentors for guidance; they hope for support from various entities, including **associations, authorities and philanthropic individuals, to foster their endeavours.**

Professional Orientation Session: Offering the returnee migrants professional orientation which aims at identifying their skills and **mapping them into their career ambitions** to understand their training needs.

Job Matching and Employment Support: Collaborate with employment agencies to facilitate job matching based on acquired skills and qualifications, enhancing the use of women's expertise. Expand the network of job centres and online platforms **to link job seekers to suitable opportunities.** For potential migrants, it is important to raise awareness regarding the benefits of international workshops and seminars related to industries when it comes to exposure to global trends and best practices. Ensure gender equality to expand employment possibilities for everyone (especially in occupations where men are traditionally employed).

Table 9. Policy recommendation by relevance to country of origin and migrant group

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

	Networking Opportunities				X		
	Mentorship Programmes				X	X	X
	Professional Orientation Session	X	X	X	X		
	Job Matching and Employment Support				X		

Note: GEO – Georgia, MAR-Morocco, TUN- Tunisia

This policy recommendation belongs to the Support Measures category too.

These recommendations aim to address the challenges and opportunities highlighted in the interviews with migrant women in three countries of origin.

By focusing on pre-departure training, skills enhancement, language proficiency, entrepreneurship support and tailored programmes, stakeholders such as public institutions, civil society organisations, European and international donors can collectively work towards enhancing the skills utilisation, economic empowerment and overall well-being of migrant women in both host and origin countries.

ACRONYMS

ANAEPC	Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences/ National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills
BTP	Professional Technician Certificate
BTS	Higher Technician Certificate
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/German Development Agency
ILO	International Labour Organization
LEPL	Livelihood Agency
LLL	Life-Long Learning
MPO	Mismatch Priority Occupations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
THAMM	Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa
VET	Vocational Education and Teaching
WECF	Women Engage for a Common Future
UNDESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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