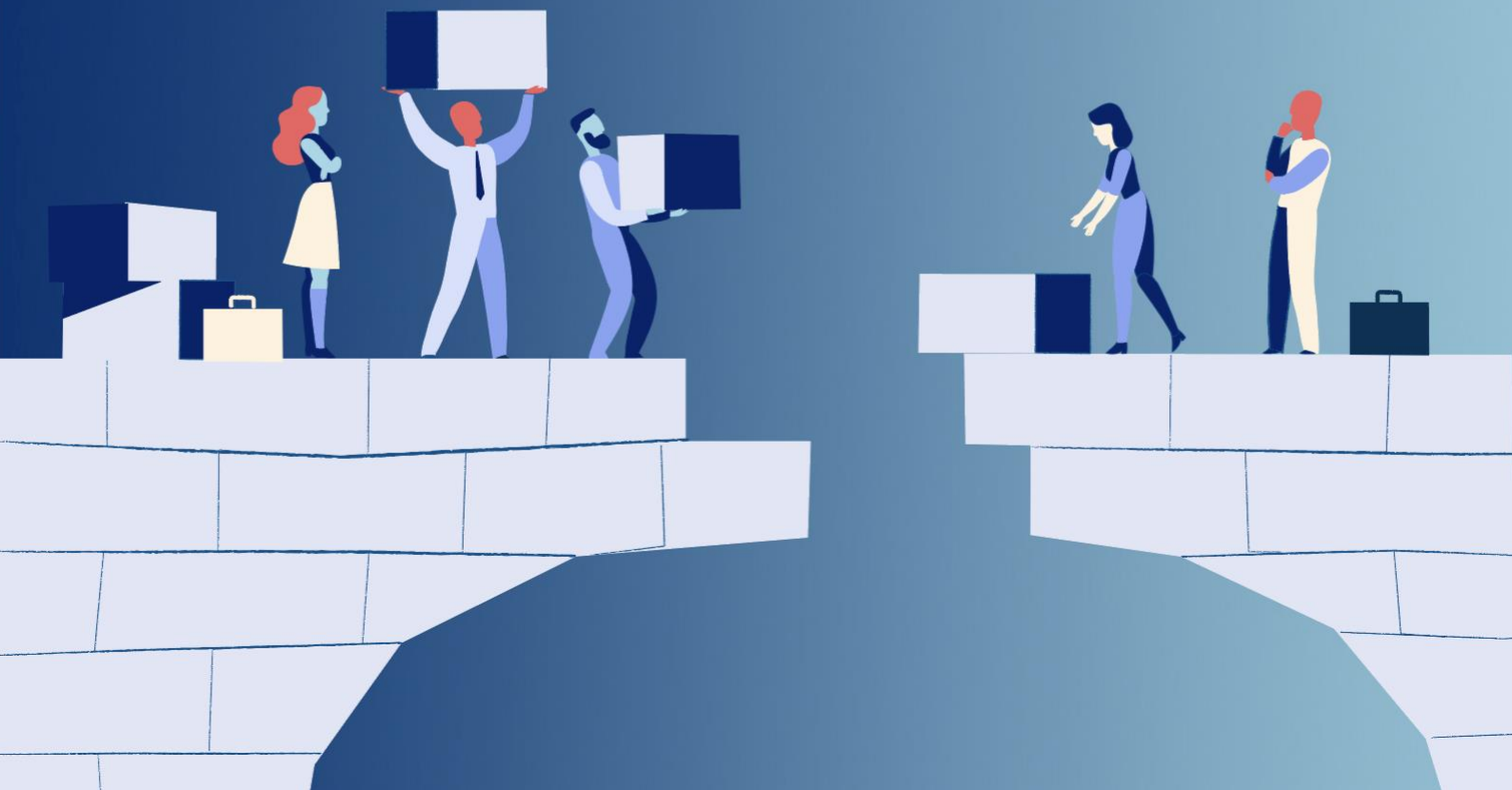


BRIDGING COURSES FOR MIGRANTS TO COMPLEMENT QUALIFICATIONS ACQUIRED IN THIRD COUNTRIES:

APPROACHES AND PRACTICES IN EU MEMBER STATES

EUROPEAN WEBSITE ON INTEGRATION (EWSI)

ANALYSIS



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1. Introduction

Promotion of the competences and skills of migrants is essential to their fast, fair inclusion into the labour market of their host country. As the European Commission outlines in its [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 \(p9\)](#), this can be ensured by facilitating the recognition of qualifications acquired in third countries, promoting their visibility and increasing comparability with European/EU qualifications. This can be carried out in conjunction with offering bridging courses: **such courses support migrants by complementing the education and training they acquired abroad for such purposes as access to practise in a regulated profession, to certain job opportunities, or to training.**

The action plan undertakes to ‘improve the recognition of qualifications acquired in non-EU countries through, inter alia, promoting exchanges between Member States on providing complementary/bridging courses for migrants’ (p9). To promote such exchanges between Member States, an overview of the different national approaches and practices in relation to such courses is needed. The European Commission [Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals](#), adopted in November 2023 as part of the Skills and Talent Mobility Package, signals that bridging courses are a possible solution to enabling access to practise in priority regulated professions.

Using questionnaires completed by its network of national integration experts across the EU, the Editorial Team of the European Website on Integration (EWSI) produces this analysis **to map the policies and practices that exist in Member States for the provision of bridging courses to third-country national migrants whose skills, qualifications and experiences are not, or are only partially, recognised in the Member State in which they reside.** This analysis identifies the specific objective for which bridging courses are offered or recommended to third-country nationals (access to practise in a regulated profession, access to job opportunities, and/or access to training). **Section 2** provides an overview of availability and accessibility of bridging courses to third-country nationals. It also identifies particularly innovative approaches to bridging course provision, as well as good practices in facilitating professional qualification recognition in **section 2.2**. **Section 3** presents common challenges for migrants in accessing bridging courses and qualification recognition and **section 4** offers conclusions.

EWSI integration experts were required to carry out desk research of approximately two days to complete the analysis questionnaire. **Relevant information was found to be more readily available in some Member States than in others**, and this is demonstrated in the amount of detail given in each of the returned questionnaires. **Limited or no mention of a Member State within a specific section in this analysis does not necessarily indicate a lack of relevant activity: it may be the case that the**



EWSI integration expert of that country was unable to provide an answer due to a lack of access to relevant information or a lack of time in which to do so. Further, while some Member States do have national strategies in place for - for example - nostrification, others are still in the process of developing them, and this is reflected in the available documentation found and questionnaires completed by the experts of those countries. These findings present only available information on what currently exists, and do not expand on plans that a Member State may be developing for the establishment of, for example, qualification recognition services and/or bridging courses. Due to limited capacity of EWSI integration experts in **Ireland** and **Bulgaria**, this paper does not provide information on these two countries. EWSI integration experts in all other Member States were able to carry out the required desk research and complete the analysis questionnaire.

The questionnaire asked EWSI integration experts to differentiate within their responses between provisions for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and recognised refugees, beneficiaries of temporary protection, third-country nationals arriving via family reunification processes, and third-country nationals arriving for economic reasons (via both short- and longer-term permits). Where experts indicated that the same services are accessible to members of all these groups, this paper refers collectively to services for 'third-country nationals'. Where access to a specific course or service differs by group, this is made explicit in the relevant section.



2. Observations and good practices: mapping bridging courses in EU Member States

Member States take a variety of approaches to the promotion of TCN labour market integration, including in relation to the provision of bridging courses - in terms of both how and for whom these courses are made available. **Section 2.1 looks at which Member States provide bridging courses - for which third-country nationals are eligible - for regulated and non-regulated professions across different levels, and whether they form part of skills validation procedures (processes of evaluating and developing skills) to access professional training¹.** Section 2.2 expands on this overview to examine *how* accessible available bridging courses and qualification recognition processes are and to highlight related good practices.

2.1 Availability of bridging courses and qualification recognition services to third-country nationals

2.1.1 Regulated professions

Regulated professions are those for which specific requirements, such as qualifications, provision of a licence, or certificate from a regulatory body, must be met in order to be legally allowed to practise them. Such professions - often those in the health, safety, and social services sectors - and related requirements are outlined in the national legislation of each Member State. At EU level, Directive 2005/36/EC facilitates the free movement of professionals in the internal market by setting the rules for recognition of qualifications for access to a regulated profession in a Member State different from that in which the qualifications were obtained. Member States can decide whether to regulate a particular profession, and Directive 2005/36/EC only applies where a profession is regulated by the Member State.

Although there is much similarity between respective countries' lists of regulated professions, all are different, therefore direct comparison of countries in this regard is not wholly possible. Furthermore, where the same professions *are* regulated across several countries, the organisation of relevant bridging courses within the relevant sectors can vary hugely. The Commission Recommendation on recognition of qualifications of third country nationals recommends that competent authorities can draw on previous recognition decisions and knowledge of previously seen qualifications from third countries in order to design bridging courses that can offer access to practise in regulated professions².

¹ Experts were not asked to assess whether Member States offer bridging courses for which *only* third-country nationals are eligible.

² See Section 43 (d) of Commission Recommendation EU 2023/7700 on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/commission-recommendation-recognition-qualifications-third-country-nationals_en



Which Member States offer bridging courses to achieve equivalence in regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level?

In **Croatia**, bridging courses are systematically available across all regulated professions for third-country nationals, to facilitate their achievement of equivalence in regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level. In **Czechia, Finland, Germany, Greece** and **Malta**, bridging courses are systematically available to third-country nationals in some regulated professions, while in **Denmark, Italy, Poland, Slovakia** and **Sweden** they are available on an ad-hoc basis in some regulated professions.

Which Member States offer bridging courses to achieve equivalence in regulated professions at upper secondary/vocational level?

In **Croatia, Finland** and **Slovenia**, bridging courses are systematically available across all regulated professions for third-country nationals to facilitate their achievement of equivalence in regulated professions at upper secondary or vocational level. **Czechia** offers bridging courses to recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, beneficiaries of temporary protection, and those third-country nationals who arrived in the country via family reunification processes, but not to those who arrived in the country for economic reasons, while in **Greece** these courses are available to all except beneficiaries of temporary protection. In **Poland**, systematically available courses tend to be those focused on language learning, with a more ad-hoc focus on vocational skills development. **Denmark** and **Slovakia** offer bridging courses to third-country nationals in some regulated professions, and they are available on an ad-hoc basis in some regulated professions in **Austria, Belgium, Germany** and **Spain**.

2.1.2 Non-regulated professions

Which Member States offer bridging courses to achieve equivalence in non-regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level?

In **Poland**, bridging courses in the form of Polish language courses are systematically available across all non-regulated professions for third-country nationals to facilitate their achievement of equivalence in non-regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level. **Finland** offers bridging courses to third-country nationals systematically in some non-regulated professions, while they are available on an ad-hoc basis in some regulated professions in **Czechia, Germany, the Netherlands** and **Sweden**.

Which Member States offer bridging courses within skills validation procedures for mandatory professional training?

In **the Netherlands**, such bridging courses as language or prerequisite courses are used as part of skills validation procedures to enable access for third-country nationals to



mandatory professional training across all non-regulated professions. **Czechia offers these** to recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, beneficiaries of temporary protection, and those third-country nationals who arrived in the country via family reunification processes, but not to those who arrived in the country for economic reasons. Finland offers these courses to third-country nationals systematically in some non-regulated professions, while they are available on an ad-hoc basis in some non-regulated professions in **Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia** and **Sweden**.

Which Member States use bridging courses as part of skills validation procedures to enable access to employment in low-skilled occupations?

In **Croatia** and **Finland**, bridging courses are offered systematically as part of skills validation procedures to enable third-country nationals' access to employment in low-skilled occupations. Again, in **Czechia**, these are not available to those third-country nationals who arrived in the country for economic reasons. In **Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain** and **Sweden** these courses are offered to third-country nationals on an ad-hoc basis, varying across sectors.

2.2 Accessibility of available bridging courses and qualification recognition services and related good practices

This section examines the **accessibility** of bridging courses and qualification recognition services for which third-country nationals are eligible, and the types of support provided by Member State governments to promote or ensure accessibility, including by highlighting good practices in doing so. Comments from EWSI integration experts on the approaches in their own countries are also presented, with evidence secured as far as possible to support any claims.

2.2.1 Regulated professions

Accessibility of bridging courses for equivalence in regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level

In **Germany**, Network IQ – co-funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus) - connects migrants with a large number of opportunities promoting integration through qualification. Examples include:

- 1) To counter the national skilled workers shortage, the 5-month bridging course '[Mission Zukunft Environmental Trades Module](#)' – delivered by the Centre for Energy, Water and Energy Technology (Chamber of Skilled Crafts Hamburg, HWK) trains academically qualified migrants in environmental occupations.



- 2) A [bridge training seminar](#) for social work is available to holders of a foreign degree in the regulated profession of social pedagogy. The training concludes with formal recognition of participants' degrees.
- 3) Healthcare professionals can access [a 6-month bridging programme](#) in order to achieve recognition of previous qualifications obtained abroad and / or professional licensing.

[Find more good practices highlighted by Network IQ here.](#)

In **Belgium**, state-funded language courses are generally available throughout the country - mostly to [B2 level](#) -, either at no charge or for a small fee. Although these courses are open to all (third-country nationals included), and can be used to achieve language equivalence at higher education level, enrolment itself can take months due to high demand. There are no specific, dedicated language courses for third-country nationals to follow in order to achieve equivalence or to access specific skills or qualification processes: applicants in such processes are required to support themselves in submitting relevant documents, taking admission tests and following any additional required courses.

In **Finland**, all third-country nationals are eligible for such bridging courses. In practice, notes the EWSI integration expert there, in some sectors achieving equivalence in this way can be such a long, bureaucratic process that people sometimes choose to move into a field with fewer qualification requirements.

The national Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in **Finland** network ([SIMHE](#)) offers activities and consultation services to support highly educated third-country nationals in navigating bridging courses and career options more generally. These services are funded by the country's Ministry of Education and Culture via the strategic funding of higher education institutions. The SIMHE network aims to streamline the identification and recognition of the prior learning of highly educated migrants and facilitate their access to higher education and the Finnish labour market at national and regional levels.

In **Luxembourg**, there is a special procedure for third-country nationals to access regulated professions. The EWSI integration expert gives the example of [the legal sector](#): those with a degree in law must submit several supporting documents as evidence of their skills and experience and pay a small fee in order to access bridging courses in Luxembourg law.

Bridging courses are systematically available in **Malta** in the field of nursing, with nurses from third countries required – since June 2022 – to attend a [non-EU nursing bridging course](#) offered by both the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, a public institution, and the private, fee-paying [IDEA Academy](#). The course, which includes an



intermediate English language module, lasts 6 months and applicants must have already completed a nursing degree. Upon completion, participants are eligible for registration with the Maltese Nursing and Midwifery Council and for further education and Continuous Professional Development courses.

In **Poland**, third-country nationals can access 'adaptive internships' in regulated professions if they have gained qualifications in other EU/EFTA countries, while **Slovakia** offers bridging courses to medical healthcare professionals such as doctors and nurses, as these are considered deficit occupations.

Many universities in **Sweden** offer bridging courses, although it is not mandatory for them to do so. Stockholm University, for example, runs a course in [supplementary education for migrant teachers and preschool teachers](#). Between 2016 and 2021 [their number increased from 5 to 14](#), with the Swedish government changing [the regulation on bridging programmes at universities and university colleges](#) in 2018 in order to enable longer programmes and to make them more accessible to people with a foreign qualification. TCN students must be able to prove a certain level of upper secondary education if they wish to access bridging courses.

Accessibility of bridging courses for equivalence in regulated professions at upper secondary/vocational level

In **Poland**, local job centres offer [support with vocational preparation](#) to people who are unemployed. This support is open to all, including third-country nationals, although the integration expert for Poland notes that there are no specific measures to facilitate their access. In **Spain**, bridging courses to regulated professions at upper secondary/vocational level, where they exist, are mainly provided by private institutions. Their focus and accessibility vary across the country, as does their delivery, due to the fact that in Spain education is regulated at the regional level.

In **Czechia**, [a free 'retraining course'](#) is available nationwide to those displaced from Ukraine who wish to work as teaching assistants, with additional support for learning the Czech language. These courses are implemented with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

In **Malta**, the EU-funded [Training Pays Scheme](#) offers a full refund to participants who successfully complete certain courses and training opportunities that boost skills and lead to formal qualifications.

In Austria:

1) A bridging course is available to those who have completed training in healthcare or nursing in their home country and have received an official notification of recognition (nostrification, supplementary or aptitude tests) as a nursing assistant by the relevant state governor in Austria: [Vinzentinum](#) and [Bildungszentrum Fonds Soziales Wien](#).



2) Since 2022, rapid competence assessments – such as via [ÖIAB](#) - have been offered for those fleeing Ukraine to facilitate their access to education and training as well as to the labour market.

3) The [Austrian Employment Service](#) offers support for those unemployed, including third-country nationals, seeking to build their basic skills for a particular profession or to complete an apprenticeship.

In **Estonia**, governmental agency [Work in Estonia](#) promotes the integration of migrants to the labour market, offering a dedicated support programme to accompanying spouses. The 4-week programme comprises:

1) Training sessions for adjusting to life in Estonia, ‘reinventing’ your career in a new environment, accessing the labour market, learning about business networking and local business culture, and setting up your own company.

2) Networking opportunities with local professionals, HR managers and recruiters

3) Individual career and networking consultations with consultants and programme managers of the Public Employment Service.

In **Germany**, there is a government-run [information portal](#) for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. It shares information and advice on accessing specific professions and securing the necessary qualification recognition in several different languages, and further contact details are provided for certain professions.

2.2.2 Non-regulated professions

Accessibility of bridging courses for equivalence in non-regulated professions at higher education (tertiary) level

In **Austria**, third-country nationals can access [language courses for free](#) up to B1 level, and the Austrian Employment Service offers some financial assistance for further language learning.

In **Germany**, economists with foreign diplomas can access [a 4-month bridging course](#) to provide them with industry-specific knowledge in the national context. The course also offers language learning opportunities and support with securing qualified employment.

Accessibility of bridging courses for equivalence in non-regulated professions at upper secondary/vocational level

In **Denmark**, [job centres can offer short ‘upgrading’ courses](#) to improve third-country nationals’ access to employment by consolidating their existing professional skills. A person previously trained in IT, for example, might be offered a course to familiarise them with the ways in which Microsoft programmes are used in certain sectors in Denmark.



Accessibility of bridging courses within skills validation procedures for mandatory professional training

In **Czechia**, [labour office branches](#) offer some accredited bridging courses under the Active Employment Policy programme. These focus on the development of certain competences or skills such as digital literacy, business basics, and the Czech language, and can be useful as an introduction to regulated professions. Their completion is not mandatory to gain access to mandatory professional training, rather they are accessible if required.

Examples of these courses in **Czechia** include the “Accounting and tax preparation” course, available in the Labour Office’s database of retraining courses, which can be useful preparation for the regulated “tax consultancy” profession (where the recognition body, the Chamber of Patent Attorneys, organises [exam preparation courses](#)), and the Labour Office’s [general professional Czech language courses for foreigners](#), offered at 3 levels.

For recognised refugees in **Czechia**, courses can be funded by the state integration programme or upon registration with the labour office under the Active Employment Policy programme. For beneficiaries of temporary protection and third-country nationals who arrived in **Czechia** via the family reunification programme, courses are free of charge upon registration with the labour office under the Active Employment Policy programme. Third-country nationals who arrived in **Czechia** for economic reasons must access and pay for these courses themselves, as third-country nationals with this type of residence permit cannot register with the labour office.

Language courses are [free for everyone](#) in **Denmark**, including third-country nationals.

In **Denmark**, recognised refugees and those who arrived via family reunification processes are automatically enrolled in an [integration programme](#), which includes an assessment of their readiness to enter the labour market. Following this assessment, some individuals are offered bridging courses to qualify them for employment in certain sectors.

The only requirement for accessing mandatory professional training in **Italy** is to hold a middle-school diploma. Third-country nationals are usually offered state support in obtaining this diploma through provision of language and educational courses. Overall, bridging courses are not systematically used as skills validation procedures, rather tailored training is used on an ad-hoc basis within sectors following employment.

In **Latvia**, bridging courses are not integrated into the skills validation procedure, but third-country nationals are eligible for fee-paying courses at various institutions which might further their skills and qualification level in certain sectors. Newly arrived refugees are entitled to a [free Latvian language course](#) of 120 hours. In general, third-country nationals have access to basic Latvian language learning via AMIF-funded courses which



are intended to promote general social integration, rather than to enable access to mandatory professional training. Specific Latvian language courses have also been made available for those beneficiaries of temporary protection who are doctors displaced from Ukraine.

In **Lithuania**, the Public Employment Service offers [Lithuanian language courses](#). Although not specifically designed as bridging courses or used as part of any skills validation procedure they are open to all, including third-country nationals, who have permission to stay in the country for at least one year. The courses are fully funded, and unemployed participants are offered a stipend.

In **Malta**, the [International School for Foundation Studies](#) at the University of Malta offers a one-year bridging course to applicants who present a high school certificate issued overseas and who have studied within an education system that is not comparable to the Maltese system (in terms of curriculum and years of study). third-country nationals can follow a bridging course in humanities, business studies, tourism, science (physics and chemistry), engineering and ICT, medical and dental sciences, and health sciences (occupational therapy, nursing, podiatry, and applied food and nutritional sciences).

Poland offers (industrial) Polish language courses to third-country nationals registered with local labour offices as unemployed or job seeking, [financed by the national Labour Fund](#).

Slovakia offers systematic add-on education, preparatory qualification and language courses to TCN healthcare professionals, as these individuals are highly in demand. For other professions, such as in the restaurant and digital sectors, some free [preparatory vocational training](#) is offered on an ad-hoc basis in collaboration with labour offices.

Third-country nationals have access to bridging courses as part of the introduction programme offered by the [Public Employment Service](#) in **Sweden**. In **Finland**, Finnish, Swedish and English language courses are available for free, again provided by the [SIMHE](#) services, to those unemployed third-country nationals who participate in integration services.

Accessibility of bridging courses as part of skills validation procedures to enable access to employment in low-skilled occupations

In **the Netherlands**, as well as free language courses, third-country nationals are offered a civic integration course which can include preparation support for employment in low-skilled occupations.

In **Spain**, such bridging courses are usually privately provided to third-country nationals on an ad-hoc basis, varying by sector and geographical region.



Third-country nationals in **Sweden** do have access to bridging courses as part of skills validation procedures to enable access to employment in low-skilled occupations, via the introduction programme offered by the [Public Employment Service](#). The programme is available to all third-country nationals aged 20 – 65, except beneficiaries of temporary protection.

In **Denmark**, recognised refugees and reunified family members can access [IGU](#): a 2-year basic education programme designed to offer work and upskilling opportunities to those whose qualifications do not yet meet the requirements of the Danish labour market. The programme – regularly renewed since 2016 - combines periods at school with language classes and work experience. Participation results in a diploma and – where necessary - access to unemployment benefits.



3. Common challenges for migrants in accessing bridging courses and qualification recognition

Although many Member States offer bridging courses for which third-country nationals are in theory eligible, it is sometimes the case that these courses are not effectively accessible to them. This section presents feedback from EWSI integration experts on specific challenges in their Member State. Commonly, experts had only anecdotal evidence to support the challenges identified, gathered by virtue of their own engagement with third-country nationals and the systems that support them. As far as possible, online sources have been provided to strengthen their claims.

3.1 Lack of national approach to provision of bridging courses and qualification recognition

EWSI integration experts broadly found that there is no systematic organisation of bridging courses at the national level in Member States, whether with reference to regulated or non-regulated professions or to residence status held. In general, bridging courses were found to be more commonly organised at the regional level or, where they are available nationally, to be organised within specific sectors only. Specific challenges were highlighted in **Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden.**

Regarding bridging courses and qualification recognition in **Austria**, although relevant services do exist, there is no nation-wide approach to programmes, procedures or implementation. The EWSI integration expert there notes that the country sees different levels of government and other stakeholders involved in a complicated system of recognition, with many gaps and ad-hoc solutions.

In **Belgium**, bridging courses are not a mainstream practice and remain at the discretion of independent institutions (such as those providing education and training at the local or regional level). The [recognition of qualifications and skills from abroad](#) is carried out at the local and regional levels, by the relevant local French, Flemish or Germany-speaking authority.

The EWSI integration expert for **Croatia** [cites research conducted by the Croatian Red Cross and Centre for Peace Research \(CPS\)](#) to highlight the country's lack of national approach to language learning – including the discontinuation of an [AMIF-funded language programme](#) for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and asylum seekers - referencing a lack of continuity and adaptability across language courses available to third-country nationals.

According to the relevant EWSI integration expert, **Finland** also takes a fragmented approach: available bridging courses can vary by region and in quality and accessibility.



Further, organisations and [sectors](#) may identify and recognise prior learning experiences [differently](#).

In **Greece**, although a legal framework for bridging courses exists via the [national strategy for integration](#), the EWSI integration expert there notes that it has not yet been fully implemented. Measures exist in lower-skilled occupations such as those in agriculture, as well as in the tourism sector, but there is less support available in terms of equivalence measures for those wishing to continue work in high-skilled (non-) regulated professions. A few short-term programmes exist to support third-country nationals in finding jobs that match their skills / qualifications, although these are often implemented by [civil society organisations](#) and only run for a short time (commonly due to the discontinuation of funding).

There is no nationwide skills validation system in **Hungary**, either. The validation of skills, knowledge and competences acquired through non-formal/informal learning falls under the responsibility of either individual employers or the institutions that mediate between employers and employees (e.g. recruitment agencies and NGOs). Educational courses and instructional programmes that prepare participants for a particular job function or trade do exist at the national level but are [only provided in Hungarian](#), and are therefore inaccessible to many third-country nationals who are otherwise eligible.

In **Italy**, according to the EWSI integration expert there, adult education and professional/vocational training for both nationals and non-nationals is not yet fully developed at the national level, and there is not yet a national approach to TCN skills validation.

In **Estonia**, there are no bridging courses available to third-country nationals apart from general Estonian language courses; nor is there a system of providing bridging courses in **Latvia**. Bridging courses in Latvia are not seen as part of the skills validation procedure and, notes the country's EWSI integration expert, the national migrant integration approach does not place emphasis on facilitating TCN access to higher skilled jobs.

In **Malta**, bridging courses are only systematically provided in [the nursing sector](#). In **Romania**, there are no bridging courses provided for in law, while in **Slovakia** – with the exception of those targeting [healthcare professionals](#) – bridging courses tend to be provided on an ad-hoc basis.

In **Spain**, as mentioned, there is no nation-wide system of providing bridging courses. General limited assistance (such as advice, translation, and economic support) is provided to recognised refugees and beneficiaries of temporary protection during their time in the national reception system, but there is no specific assistance given to third-country nationals when it comes to skills validation or the recognition of formal qualifications.



3.2 Procedural obstacles and delays in recognition of qualifications and validation of skills

Several EWSI integration experts highlighted difficulties within the qualification recognition/equivalence systems in their country. These include procedural delays, a lack of perceived equivalence or acceptance of foreign qualifications, and a lack of support or alternative options for those displaced by war who are unable to access proof of their educational or professional qualifications. Relevant issues were described by integration experts in **Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.**

The EWSI country expert for **Belgium** reports that qualification recognition procedure, although usually expected to take between [several weeks and several months](#), can take years and may require several trips to a person's country of origin to secure the necessary documents – something which is not always possible. In **Germany**, too, although most applications for qualification recognition are processed within the statutory three-month time-frame (especially in regulated professions), and there is [an expedited procedure](#) available in case employers are involved, the recognition process [can take a long time](#) if an individual is unable to provide certain documents or if additional qualification analysis needs to be carried out. Delays are also noted by experts in **Luxembourg** (where cases can take as long as nine months) and **Malta**. Malta has no standard process for recognising certificates, operating on a case-by-case basis. The relevant EWSI integration expert notes that recognised refugees in particular experience difficulties here.

In **Spain**, implementation gaps and administrative barriers to the recognition of formal qualification and skills can drastically increase waiting times in some sectors, often beyond 12 months. In psychology professions, for example, the equivalence process can take [as long as 26 months](#). In the most extreme cases in the dentistry sector, some say they have waited as long as [seven years](#). Services also vary across different professional sectors, as well as across regions (where different regulatory frameworks apply), and in terms of educational institutions.

In **Croatia** there is a system in place to recognise the medical diplomas of beneficiaries of temporary protection, however [the process currently takes 2 years](#), with many applicants taking up lower-skilled jobs – in the hospitality sector, for example – while they wait.

In **Cyprus**, when formal qualifications are not available, there is no procedure that accepts alternative documents or methods of assessment. At the same time, according to the EWSI integration expert for Cyprus, bridging courses are not readily available.

In **Czechia**, according to the relevant EWSI integration expert, the [National Register of Qualifications](#) is rather unclear and fragmented, with over 300 professions regulated. There are also approximately 30 recognition authorities, which each follow different practices. Moreover, the country's labour offices are not consistent in the provision of



retraining and qualification courses to migrants. Third-country nationals navigating the nostrification process also face certain language and financial barriers.

In **Italy**, there is a lack of support for third-country nationals in accessing the bridging courses that exist, and heavily bureaucratic procedures lead to delays and difficulties in securing qualification recognition.

In **Poland**, there are often complicated, expensive, and time-consuming processes for the nostrification of certificates and the validation of skills for regulated professions, while in **Portugal** academic and professional recognition processes can be bureaucratic, time-consuming and expensive, despite – for foreign degrees and diplomas - a stated [maximum time limit of 90 days](#). The EWSI integration expert for Portugal adds that this often dissuades third-country nationals from starting these procedures at all.

Although in **Slovakia** the integration infrastructure has significantly improved since the arrival of beneficiaries of temporary protection displaced from Ukraine, bridging courses are not accessible to third-country nationals or indeed available at all in some regions. In **Slovenia**, administrative procedures also tend to be complicated: skills validation systems are generally effective, but less so for third-country nationals, according to the EWSI integration expert there.

In **Sweden**, many universities offer bridging courses, but this is not mandatory and their overall number remains limited. A major problem, notes the EWSI integration expert for Sweden, is the general requirement to have completed upper-secondary education in Sweden in order to access university studies, even in cases where students have already completed their studies to the same level in another country.

3.3 Language barriers and limited access to language courses

Key language-related challenges affecting TCN access to bridging courses include:

- a lack of support for learning sector-specific language and terminology;
- the restriction of language course availability to only those with certain types of residence status;
- limited state support for course enrolment and completion.

EWSI integration experts in **Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia** confirmed that these countries all offer some form of language course accessible to third-country nationals, with certain obstacles.

In **Croatia**, the centralised national employment service rarely organises language and upskilling courses, and those that do exist are mostly aimed at recognised refugees.



[Beneficiaries of temporary protection can access more language support](#), but there are significant delays in qualification recognition processes.

In **Hungary**, according to the EWSI integration expert there, third-country nationals who do not speak Hungarian and/or do not have appropriate documentation of their qualifications may start out in low-skilled jobs and find themselves unable to progress to higher skilled employment due to a lack of accessible support.

In **Italy**, [public introductory language courses](#) often focus on specific employment-related terminology to better equip refugees and other third-country nationals for future employment in the country. According to the EWSI integration expert for Italy, training courses for specific occupations and sectors there tend not to include modules addressing the concrete training needs of migrants.

In **Luxembourg**, while there are many (free) language courses available, migrants are often required to show knowledge in more than one local language when seeking employment, which can create barriers.

In **Portugal**, a public language class cannot run unless a minimum number of participants is met, and in **Slovenia**, although language courses are provided, the relevant EWSI integration expert notes that they are often too short in duration to be sufficient.

Romanian language training for foreigners does not provide the vocabulary necessary for accessing the labour market or completing vocational training, according to the EWSI integration expert for **Romania**. The expert further notes that there is insufficient cooperation between professional and educational regulatory bodies in terms of mandatory language knowledge and the procedures for accessing certain sectors and professions.

3.4 Lack of information on available bridging courses

A challenge highlighted by EWSI integration experts in **Belgium, Lithuania** and **Slovakia** is that even when bridging course options are available to third-country nationals, many individuals who would be eligible do not realise that they can access them.

In **Belgium**, writes the EWSI integration expert there, the decentralised model of governance complicates procedures in that they are very different across regions, with information seen as 'unreadable': it is often provided via complex, inaccessible language unfamiliar to newcomers. [NGOs](#) in some cases work to simplify the information and explain the options available to third-country nationals, but these services are limited.

In **Lithuania**, although there is some information available regarding recognition of qualifications, it is mostly provided only in Lithuanian and is rarely comprehensible to those who are not already aware of how the system works. Similarly in **Slovakia**, the EWSI integration expert there notes that information on bridging courses and



qualification recognition is hardly accessible to locals, let alone to third-country nationals.

3.5 Unaffordability of bridging courses

In **Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, and Finland**, EWSI integration experts highlighted issues relating to the cost of (optional) bridging courses where they are not subsidised by the state. Even when such courses are available and they have the relevant professional expertise from their previous employment, for example, many third-country nationals who are already struggling to cover the cost of basic needs find themselves unable to afford the cost of those courses that would be most helpful to them. It is often easier for individuals in such situations to opt for low-skilled employment, which will see them remunerated more quickly in the short term even if it does not promote or ensure their labour market success in the longer term.

3.6 Other notable challenges related to bridging courses and qualification recognition

The EWSI integration expert for **Germany** notes that there is [a lack of teachers](#) there to provide employment skills training and language courses for third-country nationals.

In **the Netherlands**, recognised refugees are offered retraining support and can benefit from taking relevant courses until the age of 35. Some older individuals with diplomas in certain fields – such as pharmacy or engineering – can exceptionally access these courses too, but the age requirement leaves many older people without qualifications in these fields – in both regulated and non-regulation professions – ineligible for retraining support or in the position of having to seek out other such support on their own to ensure the recognition of their qualifications.

In **Sweden**, bridging courses – along with a number of other introduction programmes including employment training, validation of competencies and work experience – are generally not available to beneficiaries of temporary protection: specifically, these individuals do not have access to the national introduction programme, youth employment programme, or the job and development programme.

In **Denmark**, approximately half of all highly educated foreigners [work in low-skilled jobs](#), as employment assistance prioritises finding employment quickly rather than waiting for qualification-appropriate opportunities.

In **France**, complicated bureaucratic requirements for accessing [recognition procedures](#) similarly dissuade some third-country nationals from seeking high-skilled employment.



4. Conclusion

Questionnaire feedback and examples of good practices shared by EWSI integration experts in their desk research on this topic clearly demonstrate that bridging courses are understood and used differently across Member States. Generally, Member States were found not to have a comprehensive approach to provision of bridging courses at the national level, although in some – **Germany** and **Sweden**, for example – state actors collaborate effectively with institutions to provide a large number of bridging opportunities.

Feedback also demonstrated not only the importance of these courses – as well as of recognition processes – for third-country nationals but also the importance of facilitating access to them. As several experts pointed out in their responses to questions on challenges, insufficiently accessible bridging courses and lengthy qualification recognition processes can result in slower labour market integration of third-country nationals. In this context, several experts emphasised the issue of so-called ‘brain waste’, i.e. persons working below their level of skills and qualifications.

While many common challenges have been identified which merit further attention, such as the lack of national approach in many Member States, procedural obstacles and delays, limited available information on bridging course options, and instances of unaffordability, many good practice examples have also been identified. These include the various types of bridging support available to healthcare professionals from third countries in **Austria, Croatia, Germany, and Malta**, free language learning support in **Austria, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania** and **Poland** (as well as some form of access to language learning in the majority of other Member States), programmes that specifically target recognised refugees in **Czechia, Denmark** and **the Netherlands**, initiatives designed to facilitate labour market access for third-country nationals in **Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany** and **Sweden**, and many more. Further promotion and discussion of these could be useful, involving integration and recognition specialists from Member States as well as relevant institutions and training providers. Such exchanges could promote the replication and expansion of good practices, wherever possible, across Member States, foster cooperation between the different actors, and contribute to the faster and more sustainable labour market inclusion of third-country nationals.

