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UPGRAD

\_ME 2.0

GAME  
OF SKILLS



RESEARCH



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The UpGrad\_Me 2.0 project aims to improve the employability of migrant youth, refugees, newcomers, and asylum seekers in the European Union, through the promotion of career guidance using video games and gamification methodologies. To achieve this goal, organisations from Malta (AMAM), Cyprus (CARDET), Italy (Arciragazzi Portici) and Spain (SSF) have joined forces to carry out different activities. Among these activities, the present research is framed in the first Intellectual Output of the project: "*UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Research*". Through this research, the partnership aim is to discover the main skills and competences associated with the different professional families that can be found in the European labour market. The final objective is to elaborate a simplified classification of professional families, as well as to categorise the skills and competences associated with them, to have a simplified structure that is understandable by young migrant, newcomers, asylum seekers, and refugees. Likewise, this structure will be used to elaborate the next Intellectual Output of the project: "*UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Gamification Experience*". Ultimately, the aim of this research was to identify the most relevant skills and competences associated with each professional family.

In order to achieve these objectives, the consortium had to deal with different conceptual difficulties which are explained below. Firstly, "*what classification should be used to differentiate the occupational families?*", "*what classifications currently exist?*", and "*what are the benefits and limitations of making these classifications?*" On the other hand, "*which competences and skills can be considered as relevant when discriminating between occupational families?*", "*how to ensure that the results can be transferred to all the countries belonging to the European Union and thus guarantee the transferability of knowledge?*" Regarding the firsts questions raised, the consortium decided to make use of the NACE system of classification of economic activities, which

offers a broad and varied framework of professions in the European Union, based on a European approach and the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities of the United Nations (ISIC). This model was discussed and simplified, with the participation of different professionals involved in the project, in order to obtain a simplified table of classifications. Likewise, the competences and skills were also the result of round tables and discussion groups between different professional experts of human resources, labour counsellors, researchers and project technicians, in order to offer a wide range of transversal and specific competences that could be associated with each of the resulting professional families. In relation to the last questions, the answer is more complex. On the one hand, the competences and skills considered key to discriminating between occupational families will depend on the criteria of 83 experts in the labour field (human resources, labour counsellors, employment technicians, etc.), who have actively participated in the research by pointing out the main competences, skills and personality traits associated with each occupational family. This exercise will involve benefits and limitations, as will be seen below. On the other hand, the transferability of the contents will depend on the model used to classify the professional families and, in this sense, we are guaranteeing a common framework in the European Union, by basing the research on the NACE classification system. Secondly, the transferability of the results will depend on their validation by Stakeholder Committees that have been set up in Malta, Italy, Cyprus, and Spain, which will evaluate the results of the research, as well as the resulting Intellectual Outputs. Finally, the transferability of the research results will depend on the validation of the "UpGrad\_Me Gamified Experience", in which 200 young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the different partner countries will have the opportunity to evaluate, not only the final result of the research, but also the model itself, through piloting sessions.

Likewise, as an initial section of the project, qualitative research carried out by each of the member countries of the consortium is offered (State of the Art), which presents the current situation of the country in terms of career guidance, as well as the main guidance resources available. Thus, this research is divided into the following main sections: firstly, "Desk Research: State of the Art" which contains qualitative information on the state of the art of each consortium member country in terms of employment and career guidance; secondly, a "Professional Families: NACE System and UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Model". Thirdly, the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Research" and finally, a section of "Conclusions" that will be useful both for young migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and newcomers, and for practitioners in the career guidance sector. Finally, this last section of conclusions will lay the foundations for the creation and design of the gamified experience of the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" project.

## 2. DESK RESEARCH: STATE OF THE ART

This section provides an overview of the State of the Art of the different countries involved in the project, considering both the differences in employment and the different resources used to promote the employment orientation of young migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the European Union.

Unemployment in Europe is a problem that mainly affects the youth population. While the unemployment rate in countries such as Spain, Cyprus, Italy and Malta is 16%, 6.8%, 9%, and 4.4%; the youth unemployment rate is 39.9%, 20.1%, 29.7%, and 11.6%; respectively. The total percentage of unemployed persons in the European Union is 7.3%, while the unemployment rate of persons under 25 years old is 16.9% (Eurostat, January 2021). Especially vulnerable is the situation of youth migrants, minorities, refugees, and asylum seekers, who usually arrive in Europe when they try avoiding armed conflict, political persecution, climate change or unemployment. It is also important to consider the effects that the current health crisis may have on the labour market and on youth unemployment. In order to promote economic growth and social cohesion, the EU has developed policies to improve the labour environment, through the promotion of labour counselling, which has an important role in the social and employment fields (García-Hernández, 2017). Through job guidance and counselling, young people can discover their professional field, improve their competences, skills, and knowledge, as well as improve their recruitment and selection process for a job position. Many times, youth migrants, minorities, refugees, or asylum seekers do not have the resources to access the labour market, which also hinders their employability. It is therefore a priority to develop projects that encourage entrepreneurship, networking, and the empowerment of young people to promote their access to the labour market.

If we go deeper into the national contexts of the four partner countries of “UpGrad\_Me 2.0”, we can see the differences and similarities.

### Labour situation in general

#### *All countries*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, labour market conditions weakened. The pandemic has affected employment in all the countries in a similar way: loss of jobs, increase of unemployment, more fixed-term contracts, etc. This crisis has particularly affected women, young people, and

foreigners, who face difficulties in accessing the labour market. Malta is the country less affected by this crisis, with the best recuperation rate among the partner countries.

### ***Italy***

In Italy a large gap persists between female and male employment rates. Regarding the youth, the Italian specificity concerns the high percentage of NEETs (relatively young people who are not working nor studying) equal to 23.4% in 2018. There are also huge differences between regions: Northern Italy emerged from the crisis, with results often in line with, if not above the European average, in almost all the indicators considered; on the contrary, the south continues to recede, widening the historic gap between the north and south of the country.

### ***Malta***

The economic context in Malta is positive, being the main factor of a very low rate of unemployment (3.3% in February 2020) and an economic growth that has produced a demand of foreign workers. This demand is being covered with a significant influx of EU citizens and Third Country Nationals, who have played a big role in the strong economic growth in Malta, which has one of the highest GDP rates in the EU.

As for the unemployed, there is a notorious difference in the age group, with the 15–24-year-old unemployment rate being much higher than the 25-74 year-old cohort (ie. November 2020 was 11.4% for the 15-24 compared to 4% for the 25-74). In terms of sex, men's unemployment in November was 3.3% and women was 4.1%. These figures are similar to the previous year. Despite the pandemic circumstances, the unemployment rate in Malta remained below the rest of the countries in the euro area.

### ***Cyprus***

The Department of Labor is under the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and is responsible for issues of: employment and labour market, combating discrimination and promoting the principle of equality in the workplace. Additionally, the Department is responsible for providing employment services and filling jobs, protecting special employment groups and monitoring the functioning of the labour market and coordinating the National Employment Policy.

The Department of Labour examines employers' applications for the employment of foreigners and issues in principle approvals for the short-term treatment of labor shortages observed in specific sectors and professions.

The examination of employers' requests for employment of foreigners is based primarily on the lack of possibility to satisfy the specific needs of the employer with the local labour force (Cypriot or European citizens), which is established after a survey of the relevant Department of the Department of Labour.

The main objective of the Department of Labor is to ensure full compliance with the employment criteria of foreign workers in the framework of the smooth functioning of the labor market

including their equal treatment in accordance with the international obligations of the Republic of Cyprus.

Following the recession in 2009, unemployment was at its highest in 2014 following the 2012-13 financial crisis, with 16.1% of the 15+ unemployed, dropping to 7.1% in 2019. This number rose to 7.6% in 2020, where 18.2% of 15-24-year olds were unemployed compared to 6.9% of 25-64 year olds (CyStat, 2020; Table A1). Of the 34,291 unemployed people in Cyprus in 2020, 25,262 or 73.7% were Cypriot, 4,975 or 14.5% were EU Nationals, and 4,055 or 11.8% were non-EU Nationals (CyStat, 2020; Table C4). As a country where approximately a fifth of the GDP, 22.7% in 2019 (KNOEMA, 2020), relies on tourism, Cyprus has been deeply affected by the pandemic and GDP has dropped to -4.5% (Ministry of Finance, 2021). These statistics show that young people are particularly vulnerable to unemployment, although there is no easily available data on MNARs.

### *Spain*

According to its latest publication in December 2020, the “economic crisis” remains the main problem for people surveyed by the CIS, accounting for 42.6%, followed by the health hazards generated by the COVID-19 crisis (38%) and unemployment (28.1%) (CIS, 2021). Unemployment is not only one of the main concerns in Spain, but also a reality. According to the latest data provided by Eurostats, Spain remains the European Union Member State with the highest percentage of unemployment (16.2%), far above the average of the EU-27 (7.6%). This figure is especially high when we focus on youth unemployment, which is 22.4%, compared to 11.9% in the EU.

According to data from the Ministry of Labour (2021), a total of 3.88 million people were unemployed in Spain in December 2020, with over 360,000 jobs destroyed in 2020 since the beginning of the pandemic, and ending six consecutive years of job recovery since the 2008 financial crisis (Ministerio de Trabajo, 2021).

One of the great challenges Spain faces is the unemployment situation. According to the “Sociological Research Center” (CIS, in Spanish), the crisis generated by the COVID-19 has affected families in economic (34.9%) and labour (41.2%) fields.

## Migrants, Newcomers, Asylum Seeker, and Refugees’ (MNAR) labour situation

### *Italy*

In recent years, Italian society has been the fulcrum of different and interconnected migratory processes. Italy is a country of long-standing immigration, although new entries are highly related to family reunification and a limited number are for employment purposes. Many are those with a migrant background (their own or their parents') who acquire Italian citizenship, a phenomenon that in recent years has reached peaks of 150,000 to 200,000 units per year; not to mention the hundreds of thousands of foreign minors born or raised in Italy and still without recognition of citizenship.

## **Malta**

Refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (SP) and beneficiaries of temporary humanitarian protection (THP) are entitled to access the labour market, both as employees and self-employed workers. However, in order to do so, such persons must obtain an employment license issued by the national employment service (Jobsplus) in their own name.

Regarding asylum seekers, they are also granted a working permit through their employer. In practice, employers are frequently discouraged from applying for the permits because of their short-term nature and the administrative burden associated with the application.

According to Jobsplus, employed Asylum Applicants and Beneficiaries of Protection have increased over the past decade in Malta.

At the end of 2019, 91% were males whilst the remaining 9% were females. The majority of these migrants are aged between 30-54 years (60%); followed by 21% of those in the 25-29 age cohort and 18% are aged under 25 years. Migrants aged 30-54 years maintained their highest share.

Apart from this data, there is no specific information available on young MNAR. Information regarding occupation groups is only provided for Third Country Nationals.

The main sectors of employment for migrants are construction, manufacturing, accommodation and food service, in low skilled positions.

To understand the Maltese context, it is important to highlight that the high demand for workers together with the influx of migrants has fueled the informal job market. This means that official data about employment show only part of the picture.

## **Cyprus**

Cyprus in recent years has shown significant improvement in equality and non-discrimination issues by signing international Conventions or protocols to ensure the protection of human rights. Also, the accession of Cyprus to the EU and the harmonization of national law with European law, resulted in the adoption of a legislative framework that provides broad protection against discrimination.

Young MNAR belonging to any legal status still face various challenges. Their access to the fields of employment, education, psychosocial support and medical coverage is limited. This can have a negative effect on their social engagement. In the worst cases, this condition leads to loss of their legal status leading to irregularity. As such, this makes them more vulnerable to further discrimination and social exclusion.

In the past 10 years (2008 – 2018), based on the asylum Information database, the Republic of Cyprus has granted asylum to 9,769 refugees. Due to the situation in the surrounding countries, a great increase in arrivals has been observed in the last two years. The Asylum Services for 2018 received 6,617 asylum applications. Of these applications, 1,011 individuals were given an international protection status, 191 were granted refugee status, and 154 were unaccompanied minors.

3.5% of the island population consisted of Third Country Nationals (TCN), mainly from Syria and the continent of Africa.

The main challenges we observe are:

- Lack of services provided to migrants and refugees
- NGOs and other organizations must cover the shortcomings and inability of the state to provide sufficient support to migrants & asylum seekers
- A gap in the existing legislation resulting in a lack of a structured integration plan

The access for asylum seekers to the labour market is determined by the decision of the Minister of Labor, Welfare and Social Insurance, in agreement with the Minister of Interior. Asylum seekers may have access to the employment market one month after the date on which they submitted their application for international protection, in the following categories: manufacturing, trade and repairs, farming - agriculture, waste management and other activities: cleaning of buildings and outside areas, distributors of advertising or informative material, food delivery.

A MNAR should be registered as unemployed in the district Labour offices in order to have access to the labor market. One could either ask the assistance of the labour office for job hunting or search for a job by themselves. As soon as an asylum seeker starts working, all the benefits from the social welfare office end.

### *Spain*

Since the decree of the State of Alert in Spain on 14 March 2020, the employment situation, the precariousness, and the economic difficulties; have been accentuated, especially among the young population that is at risk of social inclusion, or in a situation of social exclusion.

The social and labour inclusion of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain is a challenge nowadays. According to the latest data collected by the National Institute of Statistics, there are a total of 5,235,375 foreigners in Spain, compared to 47,329,981 of the total population (INE, 2020). In this sense, the percentage of migrants in the Spanish territory is 11.06%. Most of the migrants living in Spain come from Morocco, Romania, the United Kingdom, Italy and Colombia. In relative values, the highest population growth during 2019 was determined by people from Venezuela (39.8%) in first place, followed by residents of Colombia (31.3%), and Honduras (29.4%). The largest flows of the migrant population are from Latin America, due to cultural issues, as well as the ease of adaptation to the country, due to the knowledge of the Spanish language.

## Career guidance and labour orientation services

### *Italy*

In Italy careers guidance falls under the competence of the Ministry of Labour (adult careers guidance), the Ministry of the University (careers guidance of students at the university), the Ministry of Education (careers guidance of students at primary and secondary schools), the Regions and the Provinces. During advice services, several activities (i.e. role-playing) finalize participant(s) to gain career development skills.

The supplying of careers guidance information focuses on:

- Providing information on vocational and training opportunities that are relevant to the clients' needs.
- Developing a practical data bank to supply information useful to the clients' needs.

The supplying of careers guidance advice focuses on:

- Carrying out a complete, in-depth analysis of the different combinations of factors that influence the decision processes.
- Assisting the client in drawing up a realistic personal action plan to include aims, timescales, courses of action, contacts, and resources.

The main information services are:

- Self-help information services usually delivered through websites (developed by employment offices and careers guidance organizations) or printed materials placed inside employment or careers guidance offices.
- Information interview (*colloquio di accoglienza or colloquio informativo*), usually delivered at a counter or by telephone or email message on a first come, first served basis. The face-to-face or telephone information interview lasts 10-20 minutes.
- Group (small ones also) information sessions (*incontri informativi di gruppo*).

The main advice services are:

- In depth targeted orientation interview, 60mins long (or more) consultations are usually delivered by appointment in a reserved space.
- Balance of competences, several in depth weekly interviews to help an adult to identify a professional target and to develop an action plan.
- Small group sessions and courses, usually addressed to 10-20 people on themes such as job search techniques and/or how to choose a profession

### **Malta**

In Malta, the main providers of career guidance are situated within the state educational institutions and the public employment service. Their role is complimentary, such that educational institutions support students in their course/career choice whilst they are in education.

The National School Support Services of the Ministry for Education is responsible for services offered within state schools for students attending compulsory schooling (till 16 years of age). Their services are offered to students, locals and foreigners (including migrants) alike. A number of career advisors work in each State college and any student who would like to enquire about careers, job opportunities, post-secondary education and about the labour market in general, can request an appointment with the career advisor or guidance teacher within the respective college. Apart from holding one-to-one sessions upon request, Career Advisors and other career guidance practitioners also hold mainstream activities with students across all compulsory schooling years, particularly before students leave compulsory education. The Malta College for Science and Technology (MCAST), is the main vocational college in Malta and offers the service of career guidance and counselling within their Integration Unit.

Jobsplus, the Public Employment Service caters for the needs of those already in employment, the unemployed, young people who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEETs), and adults. Jobsplus started in 2018 a project entitled "Employment Support Services for Migrants" under the Asylum Migration Integration Fund (AMIF). The components of this project are targeted specifically at increasing the employability of migrant job seekers through the provision of professional guidance, other professional support services and the upskilling of migrants. The project aims also to improve employment services for migrants by providing courses in basic Maltese, English for employment, cultural awareness, life skills and work ethics.

The services are available for those migrants who have protection. Asylum seekers are not entitled to them.

There are also some projects targeting career guidance for MNAR, refugees and asylum seekers, but not as many and as disseminated as the previous ones.

### *Cyprus*

An example of a career guidance to young MNAR is the Migrant Information Centers (MiHub) operating across the island which serve as one-stop-shops for services to TCNs and applicants or beneficiaries of international protection, providing them with guidance and advice on housing, access to health, education services, administrative support, and translation and interpretation services. Specialized actions and trainings have also been carried out to develop the knowledge and awareness of employers, teachers, journalists, and public officials in a bid to promote inclusion in all aspects of life in Cyprus.

One more example is the International Office for Migration in Cyprus, which provides three key services (IOM Cyprus, 2020):

- Assisted voluntary return and reintegration
- Relocation, resettlement, and family reunification
- Integration, access to services and public awareness to counter the rise in xenophobia and discrimination

### *Spain*

In order to minimise the impact of unemployment on the general population and especially on young people, there are so-called "Common Portfolio Services of the National Employment System (SNE)" in Spain. One of the main objectives of the SNE is to determine and update a Common Portfolio of Services to be provided by the Public Employment Services, in order to guarantee access to a free and public employment service, under equal conditions, throughout the national territory (SEPE, 2021). In this way, the aim of the Common Portfolio Services is to help people to find a job that matches their professional profile, as well as to guarantee that employers will hire professionals who meet the needs of the labour market. This Portfolio is made up of, among others, professional guidance services:

"The professional guidance service is a comprehensive service whose aim is to inform, diagnose the individual situation of the job seeker, advise, motivate and accompany in the labour transitions, from the educational field to the working world, as well as between the various situations of unemployment and employment that may arise throughout working life" (Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Government of Spain 2015). Among others, this professional guidance service offers activities such as (a) Individualised diagnosis and preparation of a professional profile; (b) design of a personalised route to employment; (c) personalised support in the development of the route and fulfilment of the activity commitment; (d) additional advice and technical support; (e.) additional information and advice, and (f) support for the management of labour mobility.

### 3. PROFESSIONAL FAMILIES: NACE SYSTEM AND UPGRAD\_ME 2.0 MODEL

The NACE classification system offers a range of professions differentiated into branches or occupational families that can help us to classify the different jobs in the European Union. NACE is the "Statistical Classification of Economic activities in the European Community" and is the subject of legislation at the European Union level, which imposes the use of the classification uniformly within all the Member States (European Commission, 2008).

The UpGrad\_Me 2.0 consortium has considered the NACE system to define the different professional families presented in the research, as well as in the rest of the Intellectual Outputs of the project, based on the Second Revision of the Manual (Rev.2), presented by Eurostats in 2006. Specifically, according to the system, a classification of professional families is established in 21 categories, ranging from the letter "A" to "U". The titles of these occupational families are summarised below: *"Agriculture, forestry and fishing"; "Mining and quarrying"; "Manufacturing"; "Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply"; "Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities"; "Construction"; "Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorbikes"; "Transportation and storage"; "Accommodation and food service activities"; "Information and communication"; "Financial and insurance activities"; "Real estate activities"; "Professional, scientific and technical activities"; "Administrative and support service activities"; "Public administration and defence; compulsory social security"; "Education"; "Human health and social work activities"; "Arts, entertainment and recreation"; "Other service activities"; "Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use"; "Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies".*

This classification table, although it is very complete and allows to discriminate between the professional families well, offers a very specific and complex panorama to differentiate by young people, even more, in the case of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In this sense, in order to further simplify the classification, the project consortium carried out consultancy work with a multidisciplinary team dedicated to career guidance and human resources in order to define a simplified table of occupational families. After qualitative assessment and regular meetings, the consortium concluded that a simplified classification could be as follows: *"Agriculture, Livestock farming & fishing"; "Social services and health"; "Construction"; "Production and manufacturing"; "Transportation and storage; sales & communication"; "Accommodation and food services"; "Technical and scientific"; "Office work"; "Art, entertainment and recreation".*

| Changes from NACE System Rev.2 to UpGrad_Me 2.0 Model   |   |
|---|---|
| NACE System   | UpGrad_Me 2.0 Model                                 |
| <i>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</i>  | <b>Agriculture, Livestock Farming &amp; fishing</b> |
| <i>Mining and quarrying</i>   | <b>Production and manufacturing</b>                 |
| <i>Manufacturing</i>  |   |
| <i>Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply</i>  |   |
| <i>Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities</i>  |   |
| <i>Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles</i>   |   |
| <i>Construction</i>   | <b>Construction</b>                                 |
| <i>Transportation and storage</i>   | <b>Transportation and Storage</b>                   |
| <i>I Accommodation and food service activities</i>  | <b>Accommodation and food services</b>              |
| <i>Information and communication</i>  | <b>Sales &amp; Communication</b>                    |
| <i>Financial and insurance activities</i>   | <b>Office Work</b>                                  |
| <i>Administrative and support service activities</i>  |   |
| <i>Public administration and defence; compulsory social security</i>  |   |
| <i>Professional, scientific, and technical activities</i>   | <b>Technical and Scientific</b>                     |
| <i>Education</i>  | <b>Social Services and Health</b>                   |
| <i>Human health and social work activities</i>  |   |
| <i>Arts, entertainment, and recreation</i>  | <b>Arts, entertainment, and recreation</b>          |
| <i>Real estate activities</i>   | <b>Non-included categories</b>                      |
| <i>Other service activities</i>   |   |
| <i>Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use</i> |   |
| <i>Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies.</i>   |   |

**Table 1. Differences between the UpGrad\_Me 2.0 classification model and the NACE Rev.2 system. Table prepared by the authors. Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community" (Eurostats. European Commission, 2008).**

As can be seen in the table, differences were established in the different occupational families, mainly, different categories were joined into one, to simplify the model, taking into account the difficulties of understanding and the lack of knowledge about the different occupational families of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the European Union. With this criterion, it was agreed to include the NACE families "Mining and quarrying", "Manufacturing", "Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply", "Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation

*activities", "Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorbikes"; in a single occupational family which was named "Production and manufacturing". The occupational families defined according to the NACE System as "Financial and insurance activities", "Administrative and support service activities", "Public administration and defence; compulsory social security"; were included in the same occupational category, which was named "Office Work". Likewise, "Education" and "Human health and social work activities" were included in the same category called "Social Services and Health". As can be seen in the table, the categories "Real estate activities", "Other services activities", "Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use" and "Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies" were not included as it was considered that could be grouped in any other category created in the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" Model. The remaining categories defined by the NACE classification system remained the same, or with slight modifications. These were as follows: "Agriculture, Livestock Farming and Fishing"; "Construction"; "Transportation and Storage"; "Accommodation and food services"; "Sales & Communication"; "Technical and scientific", "Arts, entertainment, and recreation".*

## 4. UPGRAD\_ME 2.0 RESEARCH

### METHOD

#### Participants

The research involved 83 subjects, professionals in the field of career guidance, human resources, and related disciplines. We assume that this profile has the necessary experience and knowledge to adequately answer the different questions that were specified during the research. The research participants were located in Malta (n= 21), Cyprus (n=21), Italy (n=20) and Spain (n=21). Data were collected during the months of November 2020 and January 2021.

#### Measurement instruments

Participants individually answered individually the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" questionnaire, which is described below:

*"UpGrad\_Me 2.0" questionnaire: this questionnaire aims to collect the different professional competences and skills, in 10 different professional families. The questionnaire includes a first section with the following socio-demographic variables: (1) Age, (2) Profession, and (3) Country. Subsequently, 10 differentiated sections were created according to each resulting professional family. These were: "Agriculture, Livestock Farming & Fishing", "Social Services and Health", "Construction", "Production and Manufacturing", "Transportation and Storage", "Sales and Communication", "Accommodation & Food Services", "Technical & Scientific Activities", "Office Work" and "Art, Entertainment, and recreation". Each of these sections included a list of competencies, skills, and personal traits, which the subject could select according to whether agreed – or not – that these variables belonged to the corresponding occupational family. It is worth mentioning that this questionnaire has been constructed for the specific implementation of the project and, consequently, does not have associated standards of validity and reliability. The competences, skills and personal traits included are set out below.*

List of competences, skills and personal traits included in the UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Questionnaire

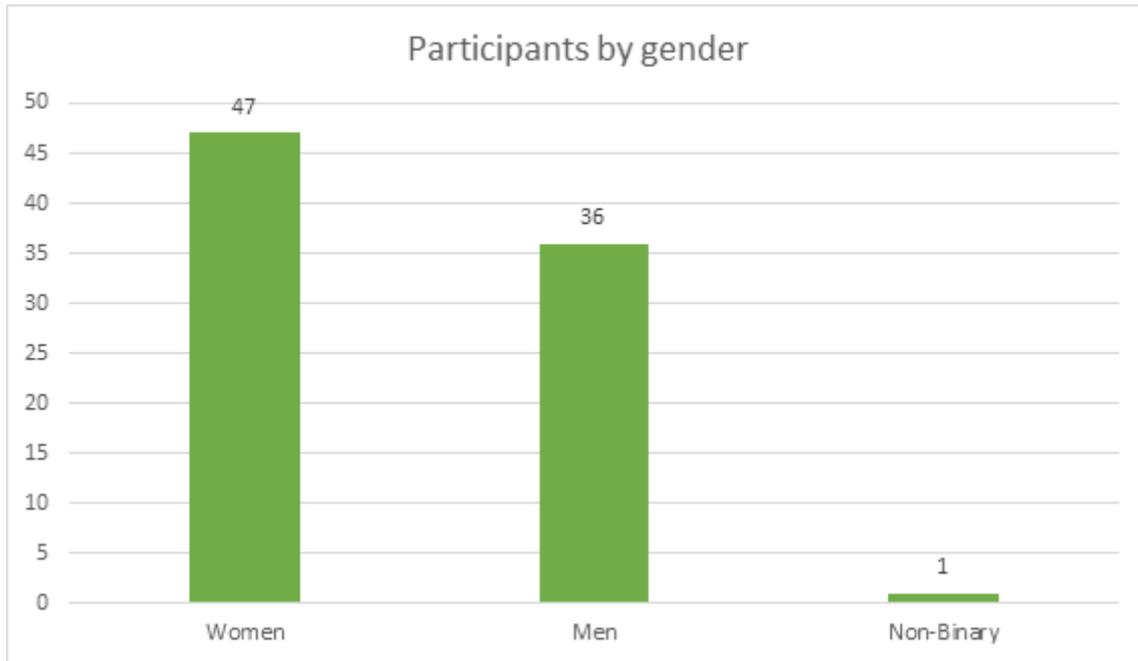
- Critical thinking
- Leadership
- Teamworking
- Strategic thinking
- Problem solving
- Negotiation abilities
- Results oriented
- Client/user oriented
- Resistance to adversity
- Interpersonal Communication
- Influence
- Analysis capacity
- Decision making
- Openness and cognitive adaptation
- Direction
- Planning
- Organization
- Tolerance to frustration
- Adaptability
- Numerical analysis
- Commitment
- Delegation
- Autonomy
- adaptability to change
- organizational awareness
- Commitment to institutional values
- Continuous learning
- Search of information
- Technical capacity
- IT skills
- Active listening
- Empathy
- Oral skills
- Written communication
- Social skills
- Kinetical skills
- Creativity
- Pro-activity
- Initiative
- Motivation
- Positivity
- Self-control and emotional stability
- Self-confidence

### Procedure

The data collection of the participants was carried out between November 2020 and January 2021. Firstly, an internal meeting was held with the persons responsible of the coordination of the research in Malta, Cyprus, Italy and Spain in order to define the different occupational families according to the NACE European classification system. Professionals in the field of human resources, career guidance and related professions were involved in the development of a simplified model based on ecological validity criteria in the framework of the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" project (the resulting system can be found in the "Professional Families Research" section of this paper). On the other hand, a Spanish team of professionals selected the different skills, transversal and specific competences, and personal traits that could cover the whole range of professions. Once the questionnaire had been drawn up, it was conducted to professionals in the field of human resources, employment counsellors, employment project technicians and related professions, who selected the main competences, skills, and personal features that they considered to be associated with each professional family, through "check-list" procedure. Finally, the data collected were analysed using the Excel statistical programme.

## RESULTS

In terms of gender, most of the participants were women: 47 women compared to 36 men and 1 person considered to be of non-binary gender (see table 2). As can be seen in graphics, the average age of the participants who took part in the research was 37.71 years. The mean age of the female research participants was 38.57, the mean age of the male research participants was 36.44. As for the country of origin, 25.3% of the sample was Spanish (21 subjects), Maltese (21), Cypriot (21) and 24.1% were of Italian (20).



*Graphic 1. Number of participants by gender.*

### PROFESSIONAL FAMILIES

#### 1. AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK FARMING & FISHING

The “Agriculture, livestock farming and fishing” professional family was defined as follows: The agriculture is the set of economic and technical activities related to the treatment of the ground and the cultivation of land for food production. It comprises a whole set of human actions that transform the natural environment. Livestock farming consists of the management and exploitation of domesticated animals for production purposes. Fishing is defined as that activity carried out to extract fish. It can be done in continental or marine waters. This category includes the following activities/professions: Farming, Livestock farming. Gardening, Fishing”.

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants: Teamworking and Problem solving (both chosen by 77.6% of the people surveyed); Planning (74.1%), Organization (64.7%), Resistance to adversity (61.2%), Adaptability

(58.8%), Decision Making (57.6%), Motivation (57.6%), Tolerance to frustration (54.1%), Positivity (49.4%)

On the other hand, those competences, skills and characteristics that were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with the vocational family “Agriculture, livestock farming & fishing” were: IT skills, Commitment to Institutional values and Influence (5.9%), Written communication (9.4%), Active listening (12.9%), Numerical analysis (14.1%), Delegation (14.1%), Empathy (16.5%), Direction (17.6%), Oral skills (18.8%) and Openness (18.8%).

## **2. SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH**

The “Social services and health” professional family was defined as follows: *“This category includes professions oriented to provide care, treatment and support to the people, which includes physical, social, educational and psychological interventions. There are also included professions oriented to promote the health of animals. This category includes the following activities/professions: Education (teachers and educators), Doctors, nurses, careers; Psychologists and social workers”.*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants: Empathy (92.9%), Team working (84.7%), Problem solving (82.4%), Social skills (83.5%), Critical thinking (77.6%), Motivation (76.5%), Oral skills (76.5%), Interpersonal communication (74.1%), Self-control and emotional stability (74.1%), Active listening (74.1%).

On the other hand, those competences, skills and characteristics that were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family were: Numerical analysis (22.4%), Kinetic skills (24.7%), IT skills (28.2%), Delegation (28.2%), Direction (35.3%), Technical capacity (41.2%), Commitment to institutional values (42.4%), Organizational awareness (43.5%), Resistance to adversity (43.5%), Influence (44.7%) and Autonomy (44.7%).

## **3. CONSTRUCTION**

The “Construction” professional family was defined as follows: *“Construction refers to those activities related to building or making something, especially building, bridges, among others. This category includes the following activities: Residential buildings and Nonresidential buildings”*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were to a larger extent selected by the participants, as being associated with this professional family: Teamworking (84.7%), Problem solving (78.8%), Planning (65.9%), Organization (65.9%), Technical capacity (57.6%), Decision making (52.9%), Leadership (50.6%), Results oriented (50.6%), Kinetic skills (45.9%), Tolerance to frustration (45.9%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: Commitment to institutional values (11.8%), Influence (12.9%), Openness and cognitive adaptation (12.9%), Search of information

(17.6%), It skills (18.8%), Oral skills (20%), Written communication (20%), Active listening (22.4%), Numerical analysis (22.4%), Organizational awareness (23.5%).

#### **4. PRODUCTION AND MANUFACTURING**

The “Production and manufacturing” professional family was defined as follows: *“Production and manufacturing refer to industrial processes, fabrication or production as a set of operations needed to modify the characteristics of raw materials. These actions are carried out in the field of industry. In this section, activities related to the motor’s reparation are included. This category includes the following activities: Production and operation in manufacturing industry; Electricity & gas generation and distribution. Air conditioning supply; Water and waste management services; Oil, gas and mines; Repair of motors and vehicles”.*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were to a larger extent selected by the participants, as being associated with the “Production and manufacturing” professional family: Teamworking (82.4%), Problem solving (77.6%), Planning (71.8%), Technical capacity (69.4%), Results oriented (68.2%), Organization (67.1%), Decision making (58.8%), Analysis capacity (56.5%), IT skills (54.1%) and Leadership (51.8%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: Empathy (15.3%), Influence (20%), Active listening (21.2%), Openness (22.4%), Self-control and emotional stability (24.7%), Negotiation abilities (25.9%), Commitment to institutional values (27.1%), Delegation (27.1%), Commitment (28.2%), Social skills (29.4%).

#### **5. TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE**

The “Transportation and storage” professional family was defined as follows: *“The transportation and storage services sector focuses on transport services provided to clients for hire and reward. This category includes the following activities: Land transport and transport via pipelines, Water transport, Air transport, Warehousing and support activities for transportation, Postal and courier activities, Drives, Logistics, Storage services”.*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants as being associated with this professional family: Teamworking (72.9%), Problem solving (72.9%), Planning (67.1%), Organization (67.1%), Technical capacity (61.2%), Results oriented (52.9%), Client/user oriented (50.6%), Decision making (50.6%), Motivation (50.6%), Initiative (45.59%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: Influence (18.8%), Openness and cognitive adaptation (20%), Empathy (20%), Commitment to institutional values (22.4%), Continuous learning (22.4%), Active listening (22.4%), Delegation (24.7%), Search of information (24.7%), Numerical analysis (28.2%), IT skills (28.2%).

## 6. SALES & COMMUNICATION

The “Sales and communication” professional family was defined as follows: *“Communication and sales are two fundamental business units in different sectors. Sales and communication include all activities needed to provide a client or company with a product or service in exchange for money, as well as the different activities to provide information to the final user or client. This category includes the following activities: Wholesale, Retail Sales, Marketing and advertising, Community Managers, Information and communications technology, Speakers, Retailers, Real estate activities, Journalists and social media experts”.*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants as being associated with the “Sales and communication” professional family: Social Skills (was voted for by 84.7% of those polled), “Team working” (78.8%), Oral Skills (77.6%), “Client/user oriented” (77.6%), “Problem Solving” (74.1%), “Negotiation abilities” (74.1%), “Interpersonal Communication” (74.1%), “Positivity” (69.4%), “Critical thinking” (69.4%), “Creativity” (68.2%), “Organization” (65.9%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: “Kinetic Skills” (20%), “Delegation” (34.1%), “Commitment to institutional values” (37.6%), “Resistance to adversity” (37.6%), “Direction” (38.8%), “Numerical Analysis (41.2%)” “Technical capacity” (42.4%), “Organizational awareness” (44.7%), “Autonomy” (45.9%), “Continuous learning” (45.9%).

## 7. ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES

The “Accommodation and food services” professional family was defined as follows: *“The accommodation and food services sector is part of the leisure and hospitality supersector. The Accommodation and Food Services sector comprises establishments providing customers with lodging and/or preparing meals, snacks, and beverages for immediate consumption. This category includes the following activities: Hospitality services: hotels, bars and restaurants, Household employment, Cleaning services”.*

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants as being associated with “Accommodation and food services” professional family: “Client/user oriented” (84.7%), “Teamworking” (74.1%), “Problem solving” (68.2%), “Motivation” (67.1%), “Positivity” (64.7%), “Social skills” (63.5%), “Organisation” (60%), “Initiative” (58.8%), “Autonomy” (55.3%), “Self-control and emotional stability”

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: “Numerical Analysis” (11.8%), “Search of information” (17.6%), “Analysis capacity” (18.8%), “IT Skills” (20%), “Continuous learning” (21.2%), “Influence” (22.4%), “Commitment to institutional values” (22.4%), “Delegation” (23.5%), “Critical thinking” (25.9%), “Direction” (27.1%)

## **8. TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC**

The “Technical and scientific” professional family was defined as follows: “This category includes all those activities related to research, consulting, legal and accounting activities; as well as veterinary activities. This category includes the following activities: Legal and accounting activities, Activities of head office, management consultancy activities, Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing, Scientific research and development, Advertising and market research, Other professional, scientific and technical activities, IT experts”.

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants as being associated with “Technical and scientific” professional family”: Strategic Thinking (83.5%), “Problem solving” (83.5%), “Critical thinking” (82.4%), “Planning” (77.6%), “Organization” (76.5%), “Analysis capacity” (72.9%), “IT Skills” (70.6%), “Continuous learning” (70.6%), “Teamworking” (69.4%), “Technical capacity” (68.2%), “numerical analysis” (64.7%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: “Kinetic skills”(22.4%), “Delegation” (23.5%), “Empathy” (32.9%), “Commitment to institutional values” (34.1%), “Commitment” (37.6%), “Organisational awareness” (38.8%), “Self-control and emotional stability” (38.8%), “Active listening” (38.8%), “Negotiation abilities” (41.2%), “Client/user oriented” (42.4%).

## **9. OFFICE WORK**

The “Office work” professional family was defined as follows: “Office work refers to all labour and economic activities that can be performed in an office context, excluding those activities included in the category of “sales and communication”, as well as the activities included in the “Technical and scientific activities”. This category includes the following activities: Financial services: Bank and insurance, Clerical support workers, Public employees: administration, defense and social security, International organizations, Human Resources Technicians”.

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were most frequently selected by the participants as being associated with “Office work” professional family: “Teamworking” (88,2%), “Problem solving” (84.7%), “Written communication” (80%), “Organisation” (78.8%), “Planning” (74.1%), “Negotiation abilities” (71.8%), “Interpersonal Communication” (71.8%), “Social skills” (71.8%), “Result oriented” (69.4%), “IT Skills” (67.1%).

On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: “Kinetic skills” (16.5%), “Creativity” (32.9%), “Pro-activity” (34.1%), “Delegation” (40%), “Resistance to adversity” (42.4%), “Influence” (43.5%), “Commitment” (44.7%), “Numerical analysis” (45.9%), “Openness and cognitive adaptation” (48.2%), “Active listening” (48.2%).

## **10. ART, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION**

The “Art, entertainment and recreation” professional family was defined as follows: “this category includes activities aimed at promoting the cultural and artistic development, entertainment and recreation of the client or end user. This category includes the following activities: musician, actors, performing arts, plastic arts, directors, producers, make-up artists, hairdressers, sound technicians, camera technicians”.

The following professional competences, skills and characteristics were to a larger extent selected by the participants, as being more associated with the “Art, entertainment and recreation” professional family: “Creativity” (89.4%), “Motivation” (77.6%), “Positivity” (77.6%), “Initiative” (68.2%), “Self-confidence” (67.1%), “Empathy” (62.4%), “Social skills” (61.2%), “Pro-activity” (60%), “Interpersonal communication” (58.8%), “Planning” (56.5%), “Adaptability” (55.3%), “Oral skills” (55.3%). On the other hand, the following competences, skills and characteristics were voted to a lesser extent as being associated with this vocational family: “Numerical analysis” (10.6%), “Commitment to institutional values” (15.3%), “Delegation” (15.3%), “Organizational awareness” (23.5%), “Analysis capacity” (23.5%), “IT Skills” (25.9%), “Search of information” (29.4%), “Written communication” (32.9%), “Negotiation abilities” (32.9%), “Technical capacity” (32.9%).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Through this research, the “UpGrad\_Me 2.0” consortium has carried out a review of the employment situation of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain, Italy, Malta and Cyprus, taking into account the different national resources to promote employability and favour the employment orientation processes of this target group. This review concludes that there is a need to promote projects and models that allow young migrants to be offered attractive alternatives so that they can access their first formal employment. The first step is necessarily based on knowledge of the different options available on the labour market in the European Union. For this reason, the consortium of the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" project has carried out a revision of the NACE classification system, which allows a detailed differentiation of the economic activities in the European Union.

The NACE classification system offers a wide range of economic activities, which is a useful tool for business or governmental sectors within the European Union, but not at all for young migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers with no previous experience in the labour market of the European Community, let alone the host country. The project consortium carried out a simplification of the NACE system used by Eurostat (European Commission, 2008). As mentioned, this model is very comprehensive and complex, with a total of 21 occupational families, so a simplification was carried out for this questionnaire. Simplifying and reducing the number of occupational families to 10 entails methodological difficulties, as it means grouping very diverse professions under the same category, which could lead to a generalisation that reduces the precision of the analysis. However, this method has been chosen in order to provide a simplified framework for young people with no professional experience.

This classification is conceived as a first approximation for young migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as a preliminary step for them to self-reflect on their competences, on the sectors that may interest them and in which they could fit on the basis of the competences they already have or those they would like to develop, in order to subsequently, with the help of employment counsellors, explore the range of activities that fall within these professional families. It is important to point out that the simplification of the NACE System works well, it makes the system more user friendly. When building the gamification experience, we must keep in mind that we are referring to the competences needed to perform a job, not the ones related to the sector of activity of the company, ie. you may work in a sales position in a manufacturing company so you need the skills associated to the sales position

Some of the limitations that we can draw from the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" model of classification of occupational families is that many of the defined economic activities could be included in different categories. Among them, the category with the greatest difficulties in discriminating

occupational families is "Office Work", since many of the office activities may also include economic activities related to "Sales & Communication", "Technical and Scientific" or "Social Services and Health". Similarly, the occupational category "Production and Manufacturing" encompasses up to four occupational categories previously defined by the NACE classification system, in its second revision: "Manufacturing", "Electricity, gas, steam and conditioning supply", "Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities", "Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorbikes". This suggests that the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" model limits the ability to discriminate between occupational families, unlike the NACE Rev.2 system. These limitations must be considered in the framework of the present research, as well as in the development of the following Intellectual Outputs of the project. Nevertheless, the classification model presented here also offers an advantage for a simplified first approximation of occupational families in Europe, especially when it comes to providing career guidance to young people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with no previous experience in this field.

After analyzing the answers given by the participants in the survey, it can be seen that the competences "Problem solving" and "Teamworking" appear in 9 of the 10 professional families in 1st, 2nd or 3rd place (table, Annex 1). The results suggest that the respondents consider these competences to be quite cross-cutting. Of the 10 occupational families, the only occupational family in whose top 10 associated competences the competences mentioned do not appear is "Art, Entertainment and Recreation".

These competences, together with others, are sometimes referred to as *core skills*, *basic skills* or *soft skills* and constitute the cornerstone of a person's personal development. They can be used for a multitude of occupations and professional tasks and not only that, they are also constantly put into practice outside the labour market<sup>1</sup>.

In relation to the research procedure, participants were asked to select those competences, skills or traits that they considered could be related to the professional families in question in the form of a "check list". Asking the sample to rank the different competences, skills and traits from most to least relevant would have allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the differences and would have provided a model that favoured greater discrimination between occupational families. However, this procedure would have been costly for the sample, as a total of 42 items would have had to be ordered, which is a great effort.

### **Stakeholders Feedback**

It is important to mention that the "UpGrad\_Me 2.0" consortium has engaged with national Stakeholder Committees to offer a global perspective on the research results. In this sense, more than 31 people from 12 countries have been involved: both professionals who work with young people daily, as well as members of the organisations that are not formally involved in the project, and young people. A total of 4 Committees have been formed, established in each member country of the consortium (Spain, Italy, Malta, and Cyprus). The main conclusions reached by all the countries are specified below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/how-boost-soft-skills-recognition>

Regarding the “UpGrad\_Me 2.0 Model”: creating a simplified model based on the “NACE system”, is *“surely less confusing for the readers, especially if English is not a first or second language for them. From a linguistic perspective, it could be easier to understand. Some examples of possible jobs would surely help the reader understand what each category represents.”* The different Stakeholder Committee members agreed that the ten categories are accurate enough and easy to understand. Also, they don't exclude any sector to avoid labelling, which is quite common when it comes to migrants. Other members of the Stakeholders Committee concludes that some categories are too simplistic or over generalised, and this should be taken into account when providing information to professionals or youth migrants (e.g., *“Production and Manufacturing”, “Social Services & Health” or “Agriculture, Livestock Farming & Fishing”*). One solution could be to *“divide these professionals’ families into different subcategories”*. Also, they pointed out that there are some professional categories that have been overlooked, such as *“baby sitting”, “IT Professions” or “Security Services”*.

On the other hand, according to the feedback of the different Stakeholders Committee members, there are economic activities that do not require official recognition of skills, and are traditionally carried out by women (occupations related to home care, care of people, childcare; among others). For future research, it is recommended to consider a gender-based approach in order to identify professions that may be traditionally related to women or men.

The different members of the Stakeholders Committee (SC) agreed that the skills associated with each professional family are relevant to the professional categories established by the “UpGrad\_Me 2.0” model. However, they also conclude that there are qualitative elements that have not been mentioned during the research, as it is limited only to the analysis of quantitative data. In this sense, different members mentioned, on the one hand, that some skills such as *“written communication”* and *“negotiation skills”* should also be included in the *“Arts and Entertainment”* category of skills as they are relevant. On the other hand, some members mentioned that *“sales and communication”* category do not include *“IT skills”* in the results of the research; and this is required for most of the sales positions, as the professionals of this sector should have knowledge related to *“software”*. The different members of the SC also agreed on the fact that *“Problem solving”* and *“Team Working”* are core skills (*soft skills*) as they cut across different occupations and professions.

People from different SC concluded that the research is too extensive for young people as well as for professionals. In this sense, it is recommended to produce simplified versions of the research, to share the report results in a shorter version using infographics, making it more accessible to the public.

Finally, different SC members explained that the language barrier commonly creates employment and integration issues for MNAR. This topic has not been considered during the “UpGrad\_Me 2.0” research. However, it is recommended to take into account the gaps produced by language as well as other cultural issues. For future research and projects, it is recommended to facilitate an approach based on language limitations, as a key element to guarantee success during the process of integration and social and labour inclusion of youth migrants, newcomers, asylum seekers, and refugees in the European Union.

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