

WP 1.2 – Semi-Structured Interviews with Migrant Workers

Methodology and Outcomes Analysis

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of WP 1.2 to complement the survey and policy repository with in-depth qualitative accounts of migrant workers' experiences. The purpose of the interviews was to explore pathways into work, access to education and training, everyday barriers, awareness of support systems, and future aspirations, providing contextual understanding of how systems operate in practice.

The interviews followed a common Interview Framework (WP 1.2) structured around five analytical pillars: migration and work pathways, education and training access, barriers and everyday challenges, awareness of support and policy, and future aspirations. This ensured comparability across countries while allowing respondents to elaborate freely on their experiences.

The target group consisted of foreign-born migrant workers who arrived within the last ten years and who were working, had recently worked, or were studying while working in low-skilled or entry-level jobs. While the intended age range was 16–30, interviews also included some participants slightly above this range, whose experiences were retained as contextual evidence.

Interviews were conducted through detailed note-taking based on consented conversations of approximately 30–45 minutes. In some cases, interviews were translated into English for analysis. All personal identifiers were removed prior to analysis. The analysis followed a thematic, descriptive approach, organising findings by interview pillar and identifying recurring patterns without quantification or causal inference.

Sample overview

The interview dataset covers three countries and includes a diversity of migration backgrounds, employment situations, and education levels. Respondents include students, employed workers, unemployed jobseekers, and individuals combining multiple jobs. Sectors represented include cleaning, hospitality, care, logistics, construction, education, marketing, IT, and small entrepreneurship.

Across countries, many interviewees entered the labour market through informal channels such as personal recommendations, walking into workplaces, or networking, while formal channels such as public employment services and institutional placements also played a role.

Outcomes analysis by interview pillar

Pillar A – Migration and work pathways

Interviewees commonly describe migration as motivated by education, family reunification, or expectations of better career opportunities. Initial expectations often included the belief that employment would be accessible within a few months, particularly after completing studies or learning the local language. In practice, many experienced longer periods of job searching or entry into low-skilled work unrelated to their education.

Work pathways frequently involved taking any available job to secure income or residence status, with cleaning, hospitality, and care work described as accessible entry points. Several respondents reported multiple job changes or holding more than one job simultaneously. Recruitment channels varied widely, with personal networks, direct approaches to employers, and referrals playing a significant role alongside online applications.

A recurring pattern is the mismatch between educational background and current employment, with respondents describing downward mobility or stalled progression despite relevant qualifications.

Pillar B – Education and training access

Most interviewees reported participation in some form of education or training in the host country, particularly language courses, integration programmes, vocational training, or short certification courses such as hygiene or safety certificates. Awareness of opportunities varied, with some respondents proactively searching for courses, while others relied on public employment services, schools, employers, or peers.

Language emerged as a central feature of training experiences. Courses delivered in English were generally described as manageable, while Finnish or Swedish-language courses were often perceived as demanding but necessary. Several interviewees noted that language learning was prioritised even when it delayed or limited engagement with field-specific training.

Costs and eligibility rules influenced access. Some respondents described free or subsidised courses through public services, while others faced fees or restrictions linked to employment status. Training is often described as beneficial for skills development, but it does not consistently lead to employment in participants' desired fields.

Pillar C – Barriers and everyday challenges

Across interviews, barriers were described as interconnected rather than singular. Language requirements were the most frequently cited challenge, affecting job access, training participation, workplace interaction, and confidence. Work schedules and financial pressure limited the time and energy available for learning, particularly for those combining studies, work, and family responsibilities.

Several respondents highlighted difficulties related to recognition of prior education or experience, either through formal non-recognition or through employer preferences for local credentials and experience. Experiences of fairness at work varied, with some interviewees describing equal treatment and others reporting unequal access to benefits or opportunities.

Mental and emotional strain emerged implicitly, particularly among those facing prolonged unemployment or repeated rejections, even when they were actively applying for jobs or upgrading skills.

Pillar D – Awareness of support and policy

Awareness of formal support programmes varied significantly. Public employment services were the most commonly mentioned source of support, particularly for language training and integration programmes. Knowledge of NGO-led initiatives was uneven, often discovered through personal networks or events rather than systematic outreach.

Several respondents expressed that while support structures exist, they are fragmented, difficult to navigate, or insufficiently tailored to individual backgrounds. Some perceived a gap between policy intentions and lived experience, particularly regarding access to guidance, personalised career planning, and the recognition of skills.

Trust in institutions varied, with some interviewees expressing appreciation for available services and others expressing frustration or uncertainty about whether decision-makers fully understand migrant workers' needs.

Pillar E – Future aspirations

Despite challenges, interviewees consistently articulated clear aspirations for progression. These included working in fields aligned with prior education, advancing within current sectors, pursuing further qualifications, or developing entrepreneurial activities. Many expressed a strong desire to contribute meaningfully to society through stable and skilled employment.

Plans to remain in the host country were often conditional. Some respondents intended to stay long-term, citing safety, family life, or investment in language learning, while others remained open to moving elsewhere if opportunities did not materialise. Desired forms of support included language training, mentoring, internships, clearer career pathways, recognition of qualifications, and more accessible information.

Limitations

The interview sample is qualitative and non-representative. Experiences reflect individual trajectories and perceptions, and findings should be interpreted as illustrative rather than generalisable. Translation and note-based documentation may affect nuance. Nevertheless, the interviews provide rich contextual insight into how systems are experienced in practice.

Role of interviews within WP 1.2

The interviews deepen the survey findings by illustrating how barriers, opportunities, and support mechanisms are navigated over time. They confirm that motivation for progression is strong, while access and system design shape outcomes. Together with the survey and policy mapping, the interviews provide a robust descriptive foundation for structured barrier identification and comparative analysis in subsequent work packages.