

IMPROVING MIGRANTS' VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) SKILLS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

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Abstract. With the increase in migration flows worldwide, migrants face various challenges that are determined by social, economic, cultural and political factors. Therefore, in order to ensure social cohesion and economic development in Lithuania, it is very important to create more favourable conditions for the integration of migrants. To achieve this goal, it is recommended to apply a multifaceted approach that includes improving the availability of languages and entrepreneurship education, promoting community engagement initiatives and raising public awareness. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in vocational education and training institutions in order to facilitate the integration of migrants into Lithuanian society. The following research methods were applied: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, quantitative research (questionnaire survey) and statistical data analysis in order to identify factors that promote entrepreneurship that can be used in educational strategies. This method will help to bridge the gap between a comprehensive entrepreneurial environment and the development of an entrepreneurial personality and apply it to migrants in Lithuania. The results of the study will be used in migrant integration strategies in Lithuania, defining factors that promote entrepreneurship through educational platforms, opening small businesses, and those that hinder their entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Migrant integration; entrepreneurship education; vocational education; social cohesion; educational strategies

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic. In 2019-2024, immigration in Lithuania increased significantly, creating both opportunities and challenges for our country. Williamson (2019) emphasizes that migration can have a positive impact on the economy, but requires "urgent and effective solutions to ensure the successful integration of migrants." It is important to recognize that the integration of migrants is not only a social but also an economic process that can have a positive impact on the entire country. By promoting their professional training and improving their learning skills, Lithuania can not only benefit from the benefits of migration, but also contribute to social cohesion. (Castles, 2020).

First, the importance of vocational training for migrants needs to be discussed. Migrants often arrive with a variety of skills and knowledge, but in many cases their qualifications have not been recognized in Lithuania. It is necessary to create appropriate programs that would help migrants adapt their vocational skills, and at the same time develop new skills. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) argue that "migrants can contribute significantly to the local economy, so their vocational training is particularly important." Such programs should focus on entrepreneurship development, as this can provide migrants with the opportunity to become independent and contribute to the local economy.

According to experts, "an entrepreneurial spirit can help migrants better adapt to new living environments and seek new opportunities" (Marbach et al. ,2018). Kumar (2020) emphasizes that entrepreneurship education is important not only in increasing migrants' employability, but also in encouraging their desire to start their own businesses. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on the entire community, as new businesses often stimulate job creation and economic development. On the other hand, it is also necessary to take into account the social dynamics that influence the integration process of migrants. Migrants often face one of the biggest obstacles - cultural differences and language barriers. "When assessing the needs of migrants, it is important to develop programs that cover not only professional, but also social and cultural aspects. Borell (2018) argues that social integration is necessary to manage cultural differences and enable migrants to fully participate in society." (Borell, 2018)

Finally, political systems and economic conditions have a significant impact on migrants' integration. Effective public policies aimed at integrating migrants into the labour market and communities can help reduce discrimination. OECD (2021) research highlights that based on social integration strategies, migrants can adapt more successfully to their new environment. The Lithuanian government and non-governmental organizations can cooperate in developing programs aimed at integrating migrants and promoting their entrepreneurship.

The formulation of the problem of the work. What vocational education and training programs and how do they provide an opportunity for migrants not only to find their place in a new country, but also to contribute to its economic and cultural diversity in Lithuania?

The purpose of the work is to assess the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs in vocational education and adult education institutions, which would facilitate the integration of migrants into the Lithuanian business community. This will allow identifying best practices and recommending strategies for strengthening integration efforts.

The following tasks are required for the study:

1. To examine the context of migrant entrepreneurship in Lithuania;

2. To analyse the development of entrepreneurship education in vocational education and adult education institutions in Lithuania;

3. To examine the challenges and opportunities for migrants in the field of vocational education and training, related to entrepreneurship as a means for further integration of migrants into Lithuanian society.

Research methods of the work: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, quantitative research (questionnaire survey) and statistical data analysis, in order to identify factors promoting entrepreneurship that can be used in educational strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The context of migrant entrepreneurship in Lithuania

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Survey (GEM) 2023, Lithuania has a favourable environment for entrepreneurship. The country's entrepreneurial ecosystem is strong in various areas, including physical, commercial and professional infrastructure, social norms and government support programs for entrepreneurs. However, entrepreneurship education is not sufficiently emphasized in schools (GEM, 2023).

According to Eurostat (Eurostat, 2021), at the end of 2021, there were 2,700 companies run by migrants in Lithuania. Of these, 89% were self-employed (2,400), while only 11% of companies (300 companies) employed other people. The entrepreneurship rate among migrants was recorded at 4%, which is half the rate among Lithuanian citizens (8%). The largest number of companies run by non-EU entrepreneurs came from Belarus (492), Russia (472) and the United Kingdom (309). (Eurostat, 2023)

Lithuania actively pursues policies aimed at attracting foreign entrepreneurs and facilitating their business establishment in the country, for example, the Startup Visa Lithuania program offers a simplified entry process to the Lithuanian startup ecosystem for innovative non-EU entrepreneurs. (Startup Lithuania, 2021) This visa allows applicants to apply for a temporary residence permit for one year, which can be extended for a total of five years if the startup secures at least EUR 30,000 in investment since its inception. Eligible migrant entrepreneurs must establish their business within 120 days of receiving the temporary residence permit (GEM, 2023). In Lithuania, non-EU migrants who wish to work independently can choose one of two forms of self-employment:

- Individual self-employment, which requires an individual activity certificate;
- Self-employment, which requires a business certificate.

From 2021, migrants will be able to obtain the status of Lithuanian e-resident and e-signature without a residence permit. This e-resident status allows foreigners to establish companies online, manage bank accounts, file tax returns and use various other administrative, public or commercial remote services. However, financing a business and the fear of failure are significant, without knowledge of Lithuanian culture, business environment and language. Therefore, a training period is needed to develop entrepreneurship. (GEM, 2023).

Development of entrepreneurship education in Lithuania

Lithuania is one of the first EU countries to implement entrepreneurship education strategies in primary and secondary education (OECD, 2015). The importance of entrepreneurship education was first recognized in the Lithuanian National Education Strategy approved in 2003. This strategy emphasizes the need to focus on entrepreneurship and financial management at all levels of school education, with the aim of ensuring that every gymnasium student acquires the basics of economic literacy. This initiative gave rise to two specific strategies:

- 1) "Economic Literacy and Entrepreneurship Education" (2004) and,
- 2) "National Youth Entrepreneurship Education and Promotion Programme 2008-2012", which aim to focus more on entrepreneurship and financial management at all levels of education (OECD, 2022).

The Lithuanian Entrepreneurship Education Strategy 2014-2024 The aim of the action plan is to provide actions that would promote a consistent growth in the level of entrepreneurship in the country, by creating a consistent and continuous entrepreneurship education system, creating an environment conducive to business creation and development, and improving the accessibility of public services to entrepreneurs. This plan also pays great attention to improving the perception of entrepreneurship among the public, especially among certain groups and different regions.

In Lithuania, entrepreneurship education is integrated into primary education through compulsory subjects such as social and natural sciences (Cedefop, 2023). This approach is unique compared to many other countries, which follow a cross-curricular perspective, emphasizing entrepreneurial skills in all subjects. In secondary school, "Economics and Entrepreneurship Education" is a compulsory subject in grades 9 and 10, and entrepreneurship is also integrated into other core subjects, including social sciences, mathematics and technology. In upper secondary education, entrepreneurship continues to be integrated into compulsory subjects, but can also be chosen as an optional subject. A number of secondary schools cooperate with Junior Achievement Lithuania (JAL), a non-profit organization that aims to develop a free-market mentality, entrepreneurship and leadership skills in young people. The programmes developed by Junior Achievement Lithuania (2023) are tailored to specific local needs and circumstances. Furthermore, these programmes are provided free of charge to students. Junior Achievement Lithuania (JAL) operates in 40% of secondary schools and offers a variety of financial literacy, career development and entrepreneurship programs that strengthen students' creative thinking, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Evaluation results show that graduates of JAL programs are better prepared for the job market and are more likely to start their own businesses (European Commission, 2022).

It is acknowledged that the Lithuanian vocational education training (VET) system needs to be improved. (Cedefop, 2023, Tikkanenn et al, 2024) This action plan focuses on workplace learning initiatives, including apprenticeship models. Franczak et al. (2011) highlight that entrepreneurship education and cultural studies systems are relatively underdeveloped in the Lithuanian VET system. The low level of implementation represents a gap in the current educational structure that could be exploited to improve students' learning outcomes (Psifidou, & Pevec Grm, S. (2021). As Cedefop (2023) argues, a stronger integration of work-based learning into the VET system can significantly enrich entrepreneurship education. (Antera, 2021, Buligina, Sloka, (2022). Work-based learning provides students with a practical, hands-on approach that allows them to directly experience business practices, management skills and operational aspects related to business management. (Psifidou, Pevec, 2021). Such an experiential learning system enables students to better understand entrepreneurship, as they can learn not only theoretical concepts, but also how to apply them in real-world scenarios. Furthermore, this active learning approach to entrepreneurship education can improve the career guidance of migrants. By participating in a work environment, VET students can better reveal their interests and abilities, thus becoming familiar with a variety of career paths that match their skills and aspirations. This exposure can help them identify entrepreneurial opportunities or specific sectors in which they could excel after graduation.

In Lithuania, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is responsible for overseeing entrepreneurship and innovation education outside the formal education sector. This is primarily implemented through Junior Achievement, which is the lead organisation in this field. Junior Achievement adapts international practices to local conditions, fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship through various initiatives. These include enterprise programmes that allow students to run their own businesses under simplified requirements, as well as simulations, summer camps and innovation camps. Support for youth entrepreneurship is strengthened by several business associations that provide a range of services, including mentoring, business consultancy, seminars and internships, to help young people acquire the necessary skills and establish connections in industry. Among the most prominent organisations are the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists and the Confederation of Business Employers.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was chosen to conduct a quantitative study. The survey method was chosen for several main reasons: it is the least time- and cost-intensive method that allows collecting information from a large number of respondents, as well as from a wider group of respondents, thus, finding out the opinion of the general public on a certain issue (Bacon-Shone, 2022). This method is widely used in practice precisely when there are no other research methods, which indicates its reliability and popularity. A survey is a data collection method when people's opinions, intentions and preferences are found out using a pre-prepared set of questions, i.e. a questionnaire (Sreejesh & Mohapatra, Sanjay, 2014). The results of the survey method are expressed in numbers and percentages. After statistical calculations, all the results are presented graphically. In quantitative research, it is important to describe what is objective and real and try to explain it.

Based on the analysis of theoretical literature, questions were formulated for the quantitative study that aimed to clarify the respondents' attitude to the purpose and objectives of the study. After conducting a literature review, a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was prepared for this study. The questionnaire for the quantitative study consisted of closed-ended questions (questions with multiple-choice answers, questions with multiple-choice answers and matrix questions with a Likert scale), which allowed respondents to express their opinions. 214 respondents were selected for the quantitative study by random non-probability sampling, the error rate was 6.7% (calculated according to the Pinot formula). Target group: Vilnius city and district residents aged 18-50, with migrant status, studying at the Vilnius Gabrielė-Petkevičaitė Bitė Adult Training Center (<https://www.gpbite.eu/>) The quantitative study was conducted in September 2024 in Vilnius, Lithuania, on-site and remotely. Participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, and their verbal consent for the interview and questionnaire survey was obtained. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.

RESULTS

Identifying the educational needs of adult migrants

These results can be explained by an imbalance in the educational provision for ethnic minority groups and "new" immigrants. As the statistical analysis shows, despite the increasing number of immigrants, who are considered to be the 'new' audience for adult education initiatives, language courses and teaching materials have been developed with the needs of minority groups in mind. There is a clear need for materials aimed at adult migrants to develop reading, listening, speaking and pronunciation skills. As adult migrants also need training, especially as learning the local language is a prerequisite for the successful integration of migrants, a new challenge arises. Educational measures for adult migrants need to be developed and implemented by qualified professionals.

A review of research at national level revealed a wider range of barriers to integration related to migrants' education. For example, studies examining the socio-economic circumstances of refugees have shown that the social environment in which refugees cope with everyday challenges plays a key role in their integration. Language barriers often limit refugees' access to skilled, well-paid jobs, forcing them into unskilled, low-paid work. Other studies on

refugee integration (Andersson, Köpsén, (2015), Žibas (2014)) confirm the importance of language as an integration factor. It has been stressed that language proficiency is not only a prerequisite for employment, but also for access to the health sector, housing and social support. It is regrettable that, in addition to those already mentioned, there are additional challenges to the integration of migrants. Žydžiūnaitė (2012) identifies the lack of a comprehensive settlement policy, limited social programme and limited access to medical services as the main factors contributing to poverty and insecurity among refugees. In addition, the absence of political and public discourse has politicised the concept of refugee, fuelling hostility between refugees and the wider society. Fragmented, sporadic and temporary assistance is provided to refugees as a result of inconsistent efforts by non-profit organisations.

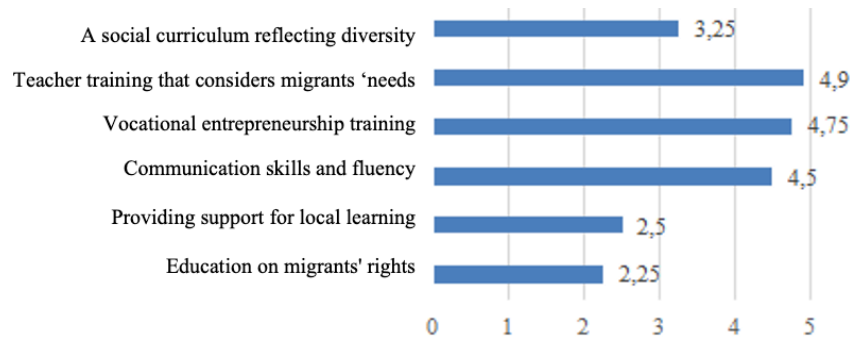


Figure 1. Education needs of migrants in Lithuania

The results show that effective communication skills (4.5 out of 5) and vocational entrepreneurship training (4.75 out of 5) are very important, suggesting that strengthening these areas could significantly facilitate the integration of migrants into the local community. Teacher training should reflect the needs of migrants (4.9), and curriculum development should reflect the need for educational institutions to adapt to changing demographics, as this can increase understanding and social cohesion (Andersson, Kopsen, 2015, Antera, 2021). Legal rights education (2.25) and support in the local language were scored relatively lower, suggesting a reassessment of how these areas are promoted and implemented to meet the practical aspirations of migrants. The above barriers can be illustrated by the types of social resources available to immigrants. For example, immigrants tend to turn to their employers or specialised institutions for help with language learning, recognition of qualifications and further education or training. It should be noted that these services, with the exception of the recognition of qualifications, are not provided by public institutions or employers, but by non-governmental organisations.

Identifying opportunities for entrepreneurship education for adult migrants

A holistic approach to integration seems to prevail, looking beyond academic and vocational training to the importance of social and cultural understanding, stressing the need for a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the different aspects of the migrant experience.

The study also looks at the needs for supporting migrant entrepreneurship in Lithuania.

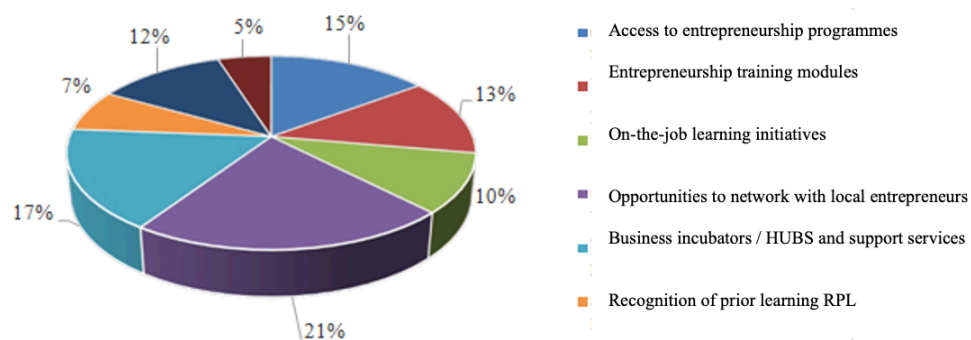


Figure 2. Entrepreneurship needs of migrants in Lithuania.

The focus is likely to be on networking opportunities (mentoring programmes) with local businesses (21%) and access to entrepreneurship training programmes (15%), reflecting the importance of networking and formal education in the entrepreneurial journey. Business incubators and access to finance (17%) are also very important, but slightly below networking in terms of perceived importance. Recognition of prior learning may be less important than the more immediate needs and resources required to start a business.

The study mentions the main aspects of this system and how migrants can benefit from it. The existing Lithuanian vocational training system offers a variety of programmes, tailored to different qualifications and specifically designed for immigrants. These initiatives prioritise language assistance, which is provided in many institutions to help non-Lithuanian speakers and facilitate their participation in these training programmes. However, there is a lack of entrepreneurial studies that could equip migrants with essential business skills. Vocational training institutions could also provide targeted entrepreneurship courses covering key areas such as business planning, financial management,

marketing and the legal framework relevant to Lithuania. Many programmes include hands-on learning opportunities, allowing participants to tackle real projects while gaining practical entrepreneurial experience. These programmes promote networking opportunities with local businesses, which helps migrants to connect with potential employers and partners. In addition, some institutions may offer mentoring programmes where experienced entrepreneurs guide aspiring migrants, share valuable insights into the local business environment and offer on-the-job learning initiatives.

Assessing the potential of entrepreneurship education in VET centres

Some VET centres work together with business incubators, which could provide important support for start-ups, including office space, administrative assistance and access to finance. As the existing Startup Visa programme, a new talent attraction scheme that provides innovative entrepreneurs from outside the European Union (EU) with a simplified entry process into the Lithuanian startup ecosystem, has not fully met the government's expectations (Psifidou & Pevec (2021)). Thus, migrants can also benefit from advisory services on business plan development, financial support and understanding local market dynamics.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) system allows migrants to have their previous skills assessed and recognised, thus facilitating their entry into VET programmes without unnecessary retraining. In addition, the European Union funds a range of programmes that provide migrants with vocational training and entrepreneurial support, grants and scholarships to ease the financial burden.

To accommodate different timetables, many VET institutions have introduced distance learning opportunities to enhance competences in digital VET and allow migrants to learn while combining work and personal responsibilities. In addition, some programmes include cultural training focusing on Lithuanian customs, networking community business practices and community engagement, which are essential for successful entrepreneurship. Involvement in local community initiatives through vocational training would also help migrants to better understand the market and cooperate effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Lithuania's entrepreneurial environment, as highlighted in the Global Entrepreneurship Survey (2023), is favourable, with strong infrastructure and government support. However, there is room for improvement in entrepreneurship education in schools. At the end of 2021, there were 2,700 businesses in Lithuania run by migrants, most of them self-employed (89%). Migrants had a lower level of entrepreneurship than Lithuanian nationals (4% compared to 8%). Migrant entrepreneurs, especially from Belarus, Russia and the UK, are actively encouraged through policies such as the Startup Visa Programme, which provides a simplified entry procedure for non-EU entrepreneurs seeking to set up start-ups. Non-EU migrants in Lithuania have the opportunity to engage in individual self-employment or entrepreneurship. From 2021, migrants can also obtain a Lithuanian e-Residency, which allows them to run an online business without a residence permit.

2. At the end of 2022, there were a significant number of non-EU migrants living in Lithuania, the majority of whom were of working age. In response to labour shortages, the government has revised its migration policy to create pathways for entrepreneurial migrants through the Startup Visa Programme, which provides simplified opportunities for skilled non-EU entrepreneurs. In addition, the VET system provides valuable resources for migrants to help them develop entrepreneurial skills and improve their integration into the local business environment.

3. The study found that effective communication skills and entrepreneurial training are key factors in facilitating the integration of migrants into the Lithuanian market. Vocational training institutions need to adapt their curricula to better support migrants by offering entrepreneurial practices. The study highlights networking, mentoring, digital learning in the workplace and access to entrepreneurial training programmes that recognise prior learning as key elements in meeting migrants' entrepreneurial needs. While the Lithuanian vocational education and training system offers language support and various programmes for migrants, there is a lack of entrepreneurial-oriented courses that provide migrants with essential business skills.

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