

**EVIDENCE SUMMARY**  
**May 2023**

# What strategies enhance career development for newcomers?

**While evidence is limited, certain alternative pathways to career development can help improve newcomers' workforce integration.**

- Suggestive evidence shows that vocational training can contribute to workforce integration.
- Suggestive evidence shows that scholastic- and career-focused afterschool programs may improve students' self-reported preparedness to enter the workforce.
- Moderately strong evidence shows that vocational training focused on goal setting does not improve workforce integration.

**Suggestive evidence shows formal and informal language training contribute to workforce integration.**

- Some studies show that merging vocational training and language programs can increase the success rate of newcomers entering the workforce.
- Two studies suggest that there may be a relationship between language training, social capital, and workforce integration.

## **Purpose of this summary**

The purpose of an evidence summary is to provide a synopsis of the best available evidence related to a specific research question. Evidence summaries are designed to assist practitioners in their decision-making about possible interventions. This evidence summary describes the status of current available evidence regarding strategies and interventions used to enhance career development for newcomers. Most studies on career development focus on youth; however, there are a number of studies with adults as the recipients of the intervention. This evidence summary includes both youth and adult programs.

## What is meant by “alternative pathways”?

Alternative pathways refers to non-traditional (non-four-year degree) solutions to provide individuals with limited related training, skills and supports they need to obtain high-paying jobs. This includes technical training, military experience, former work experience, temporary worker agencies, and more.<sup>1</sup>

## What is meant by “social capital”?

Social capital refers to the “potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks.”<sup>2</sup> These memberships can include formal ones such as in civic groups and informal ones such as in friend groups.

## What is meant by “workforce integration”?

Workforce integration is defined as newcomers entering the host country’s labor market.<sup>3</sup>

# What does the evidence show?

**Suggestive evidence shows that vocational training can contribute to workforce integration.**

- The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences offers a **two-year vocational education and training program for refugees who are highly skilled in the applied sciences**. This dual program combines education and work through classroom training and traineeships. (Traineeships involve both on-the-job training and a course relevant to the job and are intended to lead to a more formal apprenticeship.) Diana van Dijk (2021) qualitatively studied this program through interviews with 20 participants. Results show that the students felt positive about the program, indicating that **the combination of classroom training and traineeships with employers resulted in enhanced work capabilities that allowed for integration into their selected field**.
- After conducting an analysis of 83 unemployed refugees in Austria, Renner and Senft (2013) discovered that **refugees who participated in vocational training were more likely to be employed**. In this study, 42 of the participants attended vocational training and 41 did not. The aim of the study was to create a predictor model whereby practitioners could input individualized variables of the clients to determine their risk of unemployment, so they can better support clients on their journey through workforce integration. The following variables were analyzed: 1) collectivist views, 2) mental health symptoms, 3) post-traumatic symptoms, 4) German language skills, 5) perceived social support, 6) self-efficacy, and 7) self-esteem. The results show that **participation in the vocational training course, time in Austria, and duration of work experience significantly contributed to the refugees’ employment status**. The additional variables (collectivist views, mental health symptoms, post-traumatic symptoms, language skills, perceived social support, self-efficacy, and self-esteem) were not significantly correlated with employment outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Navas, S. (2021, September 2). *Beyond universities, the world needs alternative pathways into jobs: Part 1 – why are we investing in this space?* LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/beyond-universities-world-needs-alternative-pathways-jobs-navas/>; Opportunity@Work. (n.d.). *Alternative routes: Recognizing the value of alternative pathways to work*. <https://opportunityatwork.org/key-topics/alternate-pathways/>

<sup>2</sup> Poteyeva, M. (n.d.). Social capital. *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-capital>

<sup>3</sup> Employment and Training Administration. (n.d.). *Immigrant workforce integration initiative*. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/reports/immigrant-workforce-integration-initiative>

## **Suggestive evidence shows that scholastic- and career-focused afterschool and undergraduate programs may improve students' self-reported preparedness to enter the workforce.**

- Wille and Alston-Mills (2017) studied a unique course at Michigan State University that provided intensive support and **career preparation for migrant-farmworker students** through engagement with their College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and its diverse majors. To facilitate higher graduation rates, the university employs a stringent support system for the program participants, including program-specific dorms, a multi-session orientation program, individualized academic counselors, financial aid assistance, health and safety counseling, social events, and regular communication between professors, staff, students, and parents. Researchers **evaluated three class cohorts** through a pre-course and post-course survey that analyzed their understanding of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources along with the support systems the University has in place for them. Between the pre- and post-course survey, there was a large increase in the number of students that gained exposure to the diverse departments within the College. **Seventy-five percent of students indicated they felt prepared to choose a major and career in the post-course survey, compared to only 34% in the pre-course survey.** Additionally, 73% of respondents finished the course with a 3.0 GPA or higher. In the years after the implementation of this course, **33% of students at the University declared a major within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources**, compared to only 17% before the course was implemented, indicating students had an interest in obtaining an agricultural career after graduation.
- From 2013 to 2018, Skuza (2019) conducted an evaluation of a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) program for youth in the Somali diaspora living in Minnesota. The program encouraged the students to meet twice a week over 33 weeks during the school year. During the club sessions, which were facilitated in both English and Somali, the **youth engaged in STEAM activities, homework help, and leadership training.** Each summer, the youth participated in a University of Minnesota immersion program where they learned about student life, explored academic interests, and identified steps toward college readiness. The evaluation of the program included a pre- and post-program survey of the youth participants, 25 of whom participated in both surveys. **The surveys were designed to analyze the participants' perceptions of their workforce and higher educational preparedness.** Additionally, the surveys were combined with attendance records to determine if attendance was a contributing factor to success. **Results show there was an 8% increase in scores for workforce development and a 10% increase in scores for educational development.** While 64% of participants showed an increase in scores, some did show a decrease in scores. The average attendance rate was 46%, with a minimum rate of 2% and a maximum rate of 68%. The attendance rate was a primary predictor of interest in the program; however, **attendance did not have significant impacts on the program's overall success.** In summary, **results show that the STEAM program showed no significant change in the youth's achievements.**

## **Suggestive evidence shows that formal and informal language training contribute to workforce integration.**

- Quan-Baffour and Johnson (2022) analyzed the **importance of literacy to employment opportunities** among refugees in South Africa. They defined literacy as the ability to read, speak, and understand the host country's native language (in this case, English and the local languages of each province). The researchers conducted a qualitative study that used interviews, observations, and focus groups with 100 interlocutors. **Results show that host language literacy is crucial to the sustainability of refugee-owned small businesses.** Most refugees indicated they learned English and the local South African languages through informal methods and that learning both languages was crucial to their success as a small business owner. Interestingly,

most refugees also indicated an interest in formal language classes but stressed the complications of having to leave their small business to attend a formal class.

- **Salerno and Kibler (2015) studied a vocational training program in the southern United States. The participating students attended high school in the mornings and intensive English classes and vocational training programs in the afternoons.** The intensive language courses were separate from the vocational training and were designed to increase understanding and engagement in the English-language vocational training programs. For this study, eight students participated in semi-structured interviews conducted in their native language. **The results show that the students had mixed feelings about the vocational training:** Some had a marked interest in the subjects, while others participated only because it was required. They were rarely engaged in the coursework, and some students indicated they felt bored during the training. **Some said this was because they didn't enjoy the subject or because they didn't understand the teacher due to language barriers.** The students who showed an interest in the class were the ones who were successful at the coursework.
- Using data from two measurement surveys, **Maue, Diehl, and Schumann (2021) studied the impact of a pre-vocational training program on newcomer employment in Germany.** They surveyed 333 pre-vocational training participants both during the training and one year after completion. **These pre-vocational training programs for new refugees are the primary means of learning German,** developing an understanding of the German educational system, and creating longer-term vocational training goals. These programs also offer refugees an opportunity to build necessary social capital. The goal for refugees completing the pre-vocational training program is to attend regular vocational training that will lead to a certificate and apprenticeship (both of which are required to enter the workforce in Germany). **Results show that 47% of participants transitioned to regular vocational training,** and 37% repeated the pre-vocational training program. **Most frequently, migrants repeated the program to increase their language acquisition. It appears that German language skills and social capital are most influential for transitioning to the next stage of education.**

**Moderate evidence shows that vocational training focused on goal setting does not improve workforce integration.**

- Yoon et al. (2019) studied 61 newcomers in Canada whom they divided into two groups: a control group and a treatment group. The control group received typical employment services at local career centers. The treatment group had full access to those career centers and also participated in a two-week career development training program offered in Arabic and English by a bilingual facilitator. **The program included lessons on developing goals and identifying strengths and interests.** The treatment group also engaged with five local employers to help them define their workplace values and envision the Canadian work environment. Results show that nine months after the treatment program, 61% of the individuals in the treatment group were employed in comparison to 62% of individuals in the control group. **This indicates there is no significant difference in employment outcomes between the two groups.** Additionally, there is no significant difference in the types of work conducted, as **both groups typically had entry-level positions.** The most interesting note is that those who participated in the treatment group had significantly higher work engagement and were in a more hopeful career state than those from the control group. This could potentially indicate greater long-term employment with the company.

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## **What are the implications for practice and research?**

## **Consider offering language training programs in conjunction with vocational training programs.**

- Evidence suggests that a mixture of language training and vocational training is crucial to workforce integration. Refugee populations often have limited host-language skills, which makes integration into the workforce difficult.
- Rather than delaying vocational training and apprenticeship programs, offering dual programs with a language component could be an effective strategy.
- Offering vocational training programs at various host-language skill levels has been a successful strategy in some cases. This helps assure program facilitators the material is being understood and creates an environment for newcomers to feel more confident and increase their abilities.
- It may also be beneficial to offer language courses as a prerequisite to vocational training.

## **Engage newcomers in activities in which they are skilled and interested.**

- Newcomers bring a variety of skills and interests to their new countries. It is important to discuss what work they did previously and what work they are interested in pursuing in their new country, and to encourage continued education in that field. Engaging refugees in training programs that are interesting and fulfilling to them may improve immediate workforce integration and long-term employment success.
- Many alternative pathways to career development for newcomer youth focus on helping the youth gain a better understanding of what they are interested in. When youth identify career goals, providers can advise on a path toward achieving them and help provide the necessary supports such as tutoring and financial planning services.

## **More research is needed to identify best practices with adults.**

- Only one study (Yoon et al., 2019) applied rigorous methods. This indicates that more research is needed to identify best practices for improving workforce integration among adult newcomers.

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# **How did we identify evidence for this summary?**

## **Included Studies**

The Switchboard evidence database includes the following types of studies, categorized by the strength of their evidence:

### **Strong Evidence**

**Meta-analyses:** systematic analyses of sets of existing evaluations of similar programs

**Systematic reviews:** syntheses of the best available evidence on specific research questions that use narrative synthesis focused on evaluations of the impacts of at least one specific policy, program, or intervention

## Moderate Evidence

Published individual **impact evaluations** using randomized controlled trials (RCTs/C-RCTs), natural experiments, quasi-experimental techniques such as difference-in-difference (DID), instrumental variables (IV), regression discontinuity design (RDD), and propensity score matching (PSM) or other forms of synthetic matching, as well as fixed effects techniques with interaction terms

## Suggestive Evidence

Published studies using methods including non-systematic literature review, uncontrolled before and after tests, post-test only, interrupted time series (ITS), cross-sectional regressions, longitudinal panels, cohort and case-controls, and purely qualitative techniques

## Excluded Studies

The Switchboard evidence database excludes case studies, unpublished suggestive research, opinion papers, descriptive studies, and unpublished literature reviews.

## Search Protocol

Studies included in the database focused on high-income or upper middle-income countries, including but not limited to the United States. Studies included must have been published since 2012. To identify evidence, we searched the following websites and databases using the following population, methodology, and target outcome terms:

| Websites and Databases            | Population Terms                   | Methodology Terms  | Target Outcome Terms                           |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Anthropology Plus                 | refugee                            | evaluation         | “post-secondary education”                     |
| Social Science Premium Collection | OR<br>immigrant                    | OR<br>impact       | OR<br>“higher education”                       |
| IBI/INFORM Collection             | OR<br>“unaccompanied minor”        | OR<br>program      | OR<br>vocational                               |
| ERIC                              | OR<br>asylee                       | OR<br>intervention | OR<br>college                                  |
| APA PsychNet                      | OR<br>“temporary protected status” | OR<br>policy       | OR<br>“career development”                     |
| Education Source                  | OR<br>“victims of traffick*”       | OR<br>project      | OR<br>“technical training”                     |
| SocIndex                          | OR<br>“traffick* victims”          | train*             | OR<br>“entrepreneurship”                       |
|                                   | OR<br>T-Visa                       | OR<br>therapy      | OR<br>“alternative career training”            |
|                                   | OR<br>U-Visa                       | OR<br>treatment    | OR<br>OR                                       |
|                                   | OR<br>Cuban                        | OR<br>counseling   | “industry recognized credential/certification” |
|                                   | OR<br>Haitian                      | OR<br>workshop     | OR<br>“work based learning”                    |
|                                   |                                    | review             | OR                                             |

|  |                 |                                        |                                                                           |
|--|-----------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | OR<br>Amerasian | OR<br>meta-analysis<br>OR<br>synthesis | “on the job training”<br>OR<br>“apprenticeship and<br>pre-apprenticeship” |
|--|-----------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|

For databases or websites that permitted only basic searches, free-text terms and limited term combinations were selected out of the lists above, and all resultant studies were reviewed for relevance. Conversely, for databases or websites with advanced search capability, we made use of relevant available filters. All search terms were searched in the title and abstract fields only in order to exclude studies that made only passing mention of the topic under consideration.

After initial screening, Switchboard evidence mapping is prioritized as follows: First priority is given to meta-analyses and systematic reviews, followed by individual impact evaluations when no meta-analyses or systematic reviews are available. Evaluations that are rated as impact evidence are considered before those rated as suggestive, with the latter only being included for outcomes where no evidence is available from the former.

## Studies Included

Database and website searching identified 1,061 studies. Of these, 999 were determined to be irrelevant to this search. Sixty-three full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Fifty-four full-text articles were excluded due to not meeting one or more of the inclusion criteria pertaining to resettlement country, year of publication, population, methodology, or target problem. Eight studies were eligible for inclusion. They are listed below, with hyperlinks to the abstracts or full text (when available).

### Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews

None

### Impact Evaluations

Yoon, H. J., Bailey, N., Amundson, N., Niles, S. (2019). The effect of a career development programme based on the Hope-Action Theory: Hope to work for refugees in British Colombia. *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 47(1), 6–19. [Abstract](#)

## Suggestive Studies

Maue, E., Diehl, C., Schumann, S. (2021). Young refugees in prevocational preparation classes: Who is moving on to the next step? *Journal for Educational Research Online*, 13(1), 105–127. [Full Text](#)

Quan-Baffour, K., & Johnson, L. (2022). Literacy matters in sustainable livelihood development among refugee adults in South Africa. *Reading and Writing*, 13(1), 1–10. [Abstract](#)

Renner, W., & Senft, B. (2013). Predictors of unemployment in refugees. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 41(20), 263–270. [Abstract](#)

Salerno, A., & Kibler, A. (2015, June). Vocational training for adolescent English language learners in newcomer programs: Opportunities or isolation? *TESOL Journal*, 6(2), 201–224. [Abstract](#)

Skuz, J. (2019). Teens in the Somali diaspora: An evaluative program study. *Journal of Youth Development*, 14(2), 153–165. [Full Text](#)

van Dijk, D. (2021). Working toward aspirations: How higher education learning-working trajectories for refugees in the Netherlands support work-related capabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 14(2), 917–929. [Abstract](#)

Wille, C., & Alston-Mills, B. (2017). Academic preparedness and exposure to agriculture and natural resources majors and careers for migrant farmworker college students through customized classroom instruction. *The International Journal of Diversity in Education*, 17(3), 917–929. [Abstract](#)