

MIGRANT WOMEN AND SKILLS

PREJUDICE vs. EVIDENCE





WOMEN SPEAKING UP TO DISMANTLE PREJUDICES

Nearly half of world's migrant population are women, 135 million in 2020, or 48%. Yet their skills, experiences and aspirations are often overlooked. Although women represented over 40% of labour migrants globally in 2021, they face multiple obstacles to having their qualifications recognised or upgraded. This results in an underuse of their potential, with negative effects on income, job quality, and career progression.

This leaflet shares findings from the European Training Foundation's (ETF) research *Migrant women as learners: Individual pathways and prospects*. Based on in-depth interviews with 58 women in Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia, it explores migrant women's skills development and use from an individual perspective. Its findings help dispel common stereotypes, such as the idea that migrant women are unskilled or uninterested in learning by showing how many are actively seeking to grow, work, and shape their futures.



PREJUDICE

#1

**MIGRANT WOMEN ARE
PASSIVE, DEPENDENT, AND
WITHOUT INITIATIVE**

✓ **MIGRANT WOMEN SHOW
STRONG AGENCY AND
RESILIENCE**

They actively plan migration as a strategy for growth, often tailoring their education and skills to meet foreign labour market needs, while also building networks and learning on their own.



EVIDENCE

“A person has the right to do whatever they like, and they have the rights for everything. I have this direction – to develop and leave, to find employment in Germany, the programmes and the experience were really useful in that.”

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

“Through the internet, I learned better how to create useful things from discarded items. I was always interested in it somehow, and kept collecting them all my life, jeans that needed to be thrown away, for example, and just creating things from such items.”

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

The women interviewed are active, not passive, in shaping their migration journeys. Many of them, especially younger potential migrants in Tunisia, gain new skills or shift careers to become more attractive to foreign employers. They do not simply react to a lack of opportunities at home; they reshape their professional profiles to align with opportunities abroad. One Georgian migrant described how participating in a migration programme helped her “change the direction” of her life, underlining the transformative, intentional nature of her decision.

Women also prepare themselves informally. Younger generations rely on digital tools and social media to access tutorials, develop new skills, and prepare for life and work abroad. From craft-based recycling to foreign language learning, many women are self-taught, digitally literate, and remarkably proactive.

Also low-skilled seasonal migrants show courage, planning, and optimism. Their adaptability and positive attitude, common across all skill levels, is a key driver of migration success.

PREJUDICE

#2

**MIGRANT WOMEN ARE
UNSKILLED AND UNINTERESTED
IN CAREER GROWTH**

**✓ MANY MIGRANT WOMEN
ACTIVELY IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS
SEEING MIGRATION AS A PATH TO
CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

EVIDENCE



"I can change (country) to discover other cultures and other skills in another country, the objective of emigration is to raise my level and my value, I will emigrate to acquire new skills."

Moroccan potential migrant woman

"You know, I love agriculture, but in addition to being a passion, it is a profitable field... I fully identify with this field, it represents me. Apart from that, I want to work in agriculture there to earn money and save."

Tunisian seasonal migrant woman

"I obtained a foreign training certificate in Spain in the field of agriculture, specifically fruit harvesting."

Moroccan seasonal migrant woman

Migrant women across all categories actively build skills. Many seasonal workers and caregivers may have limited formal education, but they often possess a wide range of informal skills in agriculture, caregiving, food processing, or small-scale entrepreneurship gained through hands-on experience in the family or workplace. Some also receive training abroad while others pursue self-teaching online.

In contrast, potential migrants, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, are often highly educated. Many hold university degrees in fields like law, economics, biology, English literature, or engineering. Others have professional diplomas such as BTS or BTP, or are actively enrolled in

vocational training programmes. These women strategically use migration for career advancement or business creation.

They also actively develop skills through programmes like the one offered by GIZ in Tunisia, which includes intensive language courses, technical vocabulary, and interview preparation and actively seek adult-friendly training that combines theory and practice, both in person or online.

Migrant women are not static or disengaged from the labour market. They are active learners and, planners in their own development, using migration as a platform for building skills and long-term self-investment in their future.

Migrant women are not static or disengaged from the labour market. They are active learners and, planners in their own development.



**PREJUDICE**

#3

MIGRANT WOMEN IN LOW AND MIDDLE-SKILLED JOBS ARE PASSIVE EARNERS WITHOUT ENTREPRENEURIAL AMBITIONS

✓ MANY WOMEN USE MIGRATION TO GAIN SKILLS TO LAUNCH A BUSINESS AND BECOME FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT

**EVIDENCE**

Entrepreneurial ambition is common among all migrant groups. For seasonal migrants, the idea of using migration as a means to fund a small business is especially prominent. Tunisian women spoke of plans to open pharmacies, shops, or expand farming using remittances, while Moroccan women mentioned aspirations such as starting a bakery or grocery store. Georgian migrants expressed interest in applying improved farming or production techniques learned abroad in their own communities, sometimes even sharing these skills with neighbours.

Returnee caregivers show entrepreneurial spirit, like a Georgian woman who brought

back a new fruit variety from Italy to grow and sell locally. It shows how she turned her migration experience into a business back home.

Among potential migrants, particularly younger Tunisian women preparing for apprenticeships in Germany, many see migration as a way to gain skills for future entrepreneurship. Some train in baking, logistics, or caregiving precisely to start business when they return.

Many women are motivated to start businesses but lack the business training, financial literacy, and institutional support needed to transform savings into successful enterprises.

"I brought the Marabella variety five years ago before going to Italy.

My husband wasn't here at that time, he was in Russia. And I planted it on 400 metres of land. And it should give yield this year, if it sells for a good price, I will plant it on 1,000 more metres.

There are a lot of fruit trees and the sour plums and fruits are growing well, and I'm going to plant them and sell them to restaurants."

Georgian returnee caregiver woman



"They (women) may be motivated by the idea of securing their future by working abroad and earning money, with which they can even create their own project here."

Tunisian seasonal migrant woman

"I would like to introduce their systems locally, at home.

It was a great experience, and it was helpful for me, and I even shared this with relatives, neighbours and (whoever I knew)."

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

PREJUDICE

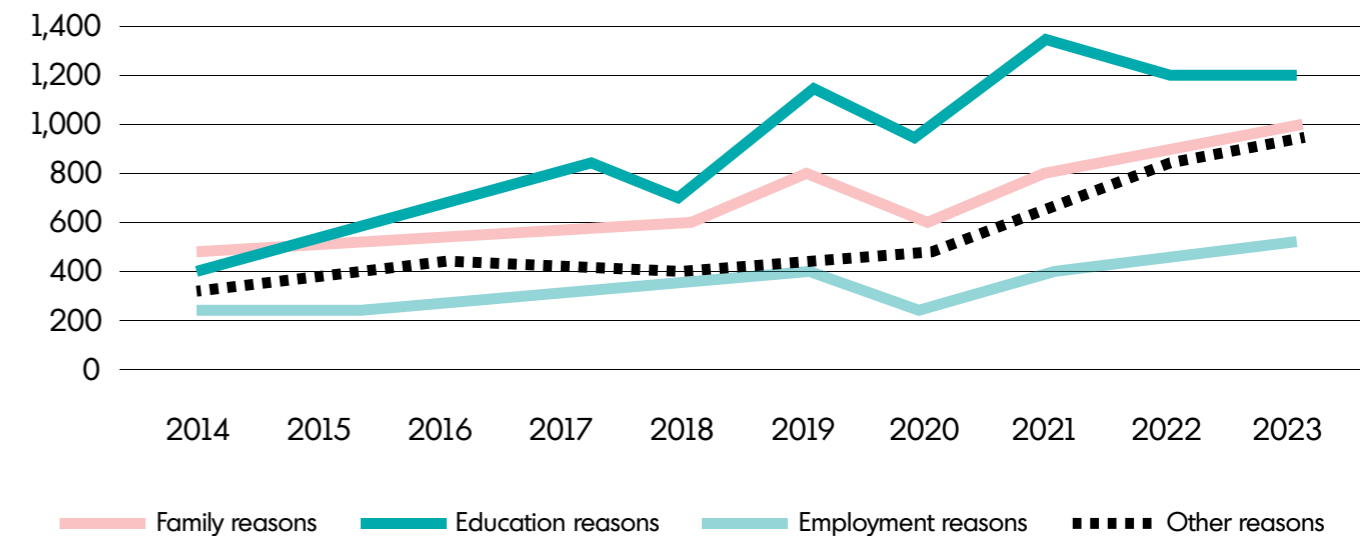
#4

WOMEN MIGRATE FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

✓ WOMEN MIGRATE ALSO TO WORK OR STUDY PURSUING CAREERS OR INVESTING BACK HOME

EVIDENCE

First residence permits issued for women, by reason, EU, 2014 /2023 (thousands)



Source: Eurostat (migr_resfas), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_resfas/default/table?lang=en

Evidence shows that women increasingly migrate for work, not just family, aiming to gain skills, improve status, or earn money to start a business.

In Tunisia, women now migrate mainly for study and careers, not marriage, and even women from rural areas who are often well-educated. In Morocco, many middle-class women migrate independently for better opportunities, with one-third considered highly skilled.

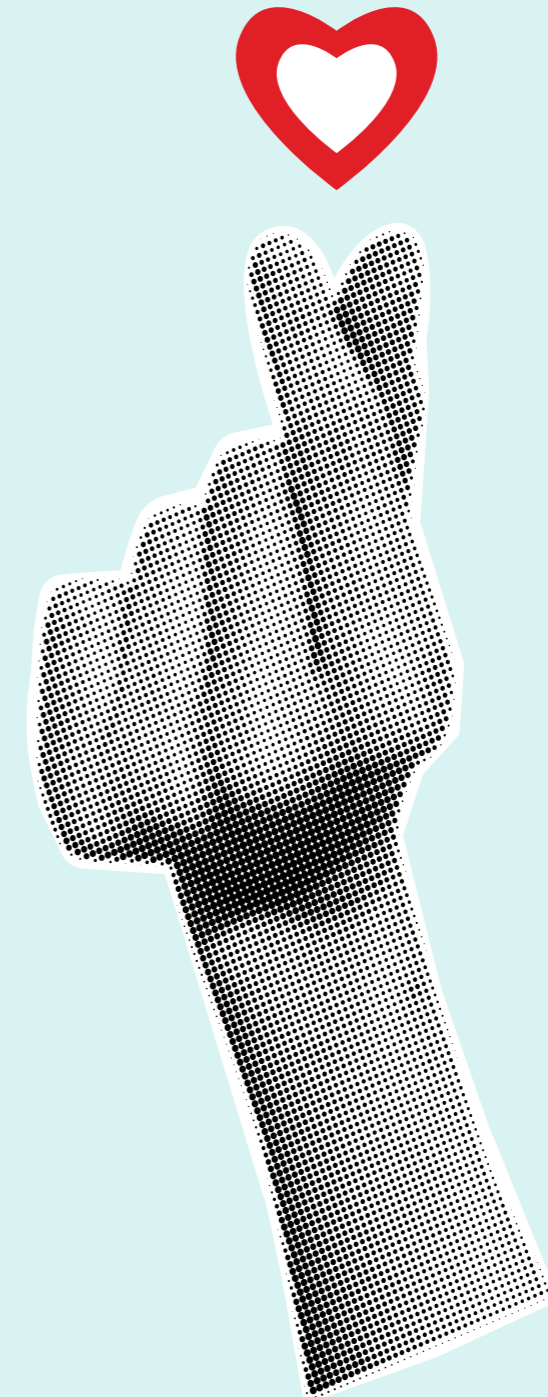
These trends highlight a growing autonomy among migrant women, who now approach migration as a strategic investment in their futures rather than a family-driven necessity.

"They (women) may be motivated by the idea of securing their future by working abroad and earning money, with which they can even create their own project here."

Moroccan potential migrant woman

"I want to work in agriculture there to earn money and save."

Moroccan potential migrant woman





#5

SEASONAL MIGRANT WOMEN ARE UNINTERESTED IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

✓ MOST SEASONAL MIGRANT WOMEN WANT TO LEARN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR PROFESSIONAL AND EVERYDAY LIFE REASONS

Yet, they see it as important for interacting with locals, gaining respect, getting around, networking, and understanding their rights and obligations abroad.

Seasonal migrant women see foreign language as a key for choosing destination, navigating abroad and improving job opportunities both at home and abroad.

A blue rectangular stamp with the word 'EVIDENCE' in white, bold, uppercase letters, tilted slightly upwards to the right.

Seasonal migrant women think that knowledge of a foreign language plays an important role both in defining the destination, their ability to navigate and integrate into the foreign environment and in improving their employment opportunities both abroad and back in the country of origin upon their return.

Georgian seasonal workers, in particular, expressed a strong desire to improve their language skills after their first migration experience, seeing it as a gateway to securing better jobs beyond agriculture.

Furthermore, although seasonal workers often pick up job-specific phrases during short stays abroad, without structured training or opportunities to practice upon return, these skills are often lost.

Migrant women from Georgia and Tunisia indicated that they would welcome formal training to maintain and deepen their language proficiency between migration cycles. This suggests that the barrier is not a lack of interest, but rather a lack of access to training and opportunities that match their specific needs and contexts.

'Where I worked, in Germany, if I'd had a German close to me, I would have learned at least what I needed conversationally. I understand Polish, I can converse'

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

'Yes, when you can interact socially, even with a non-Georgian, even a Georgian, you will find more sources of employment in migration.'

You need both Georgians and non-Georgians to have more sources of employment, not to stop in one place, to find a better job, to aspire for more, and even wherever you aspire to be, to be seen and valued more, and what you need for this is you should be able to communicate with any person.

...It is still very important to know the language, you need to learn the language of the country where you immigrate.'

Georgian seasonal migrant woman

The barrier is not a lack of interest, but rather a lack of access to training and opportunities that match women's specific needs and contexts.





PREJUDICE

#6

**SEASONAL MIGRANT WOMEN
WOULD LIKE TO MIGRATE
PERMANENTLY**

**✓ SOME SEASONAL MIGRANT
WOMEN WOULD LIKE AT SOME
POINT TO FIND GAINFUL
EMPLOYMENT IN THEIR
OWN COUNTRY**

EVIDENCE

While many of the interviewed seasonal migrant women were satisfied with their experiences abroad, they also expressed a clear desire to eventually stop migrating and instead establish economic stability in their home countries. Several interviewees from Morocco and Georgia emphasised their longing to remain close to family and to avoid the repeated emotional and logistical strain of migration. For instance, some Moroccan women viewed seasonal migration as a necessary but temporary means to improve household conditions and support their children's education. Others highlighted the toll that family separation takes, especially on children.

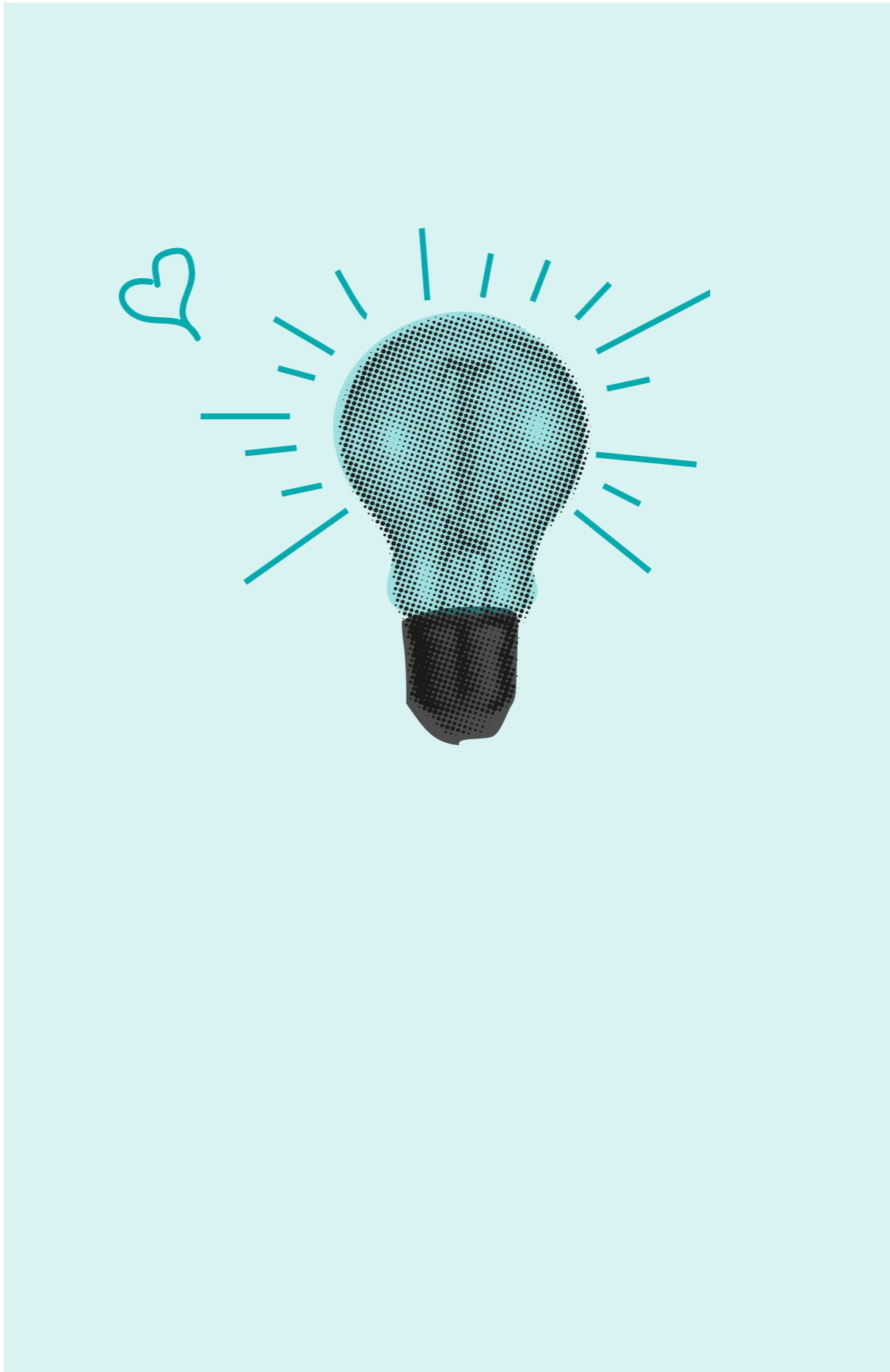
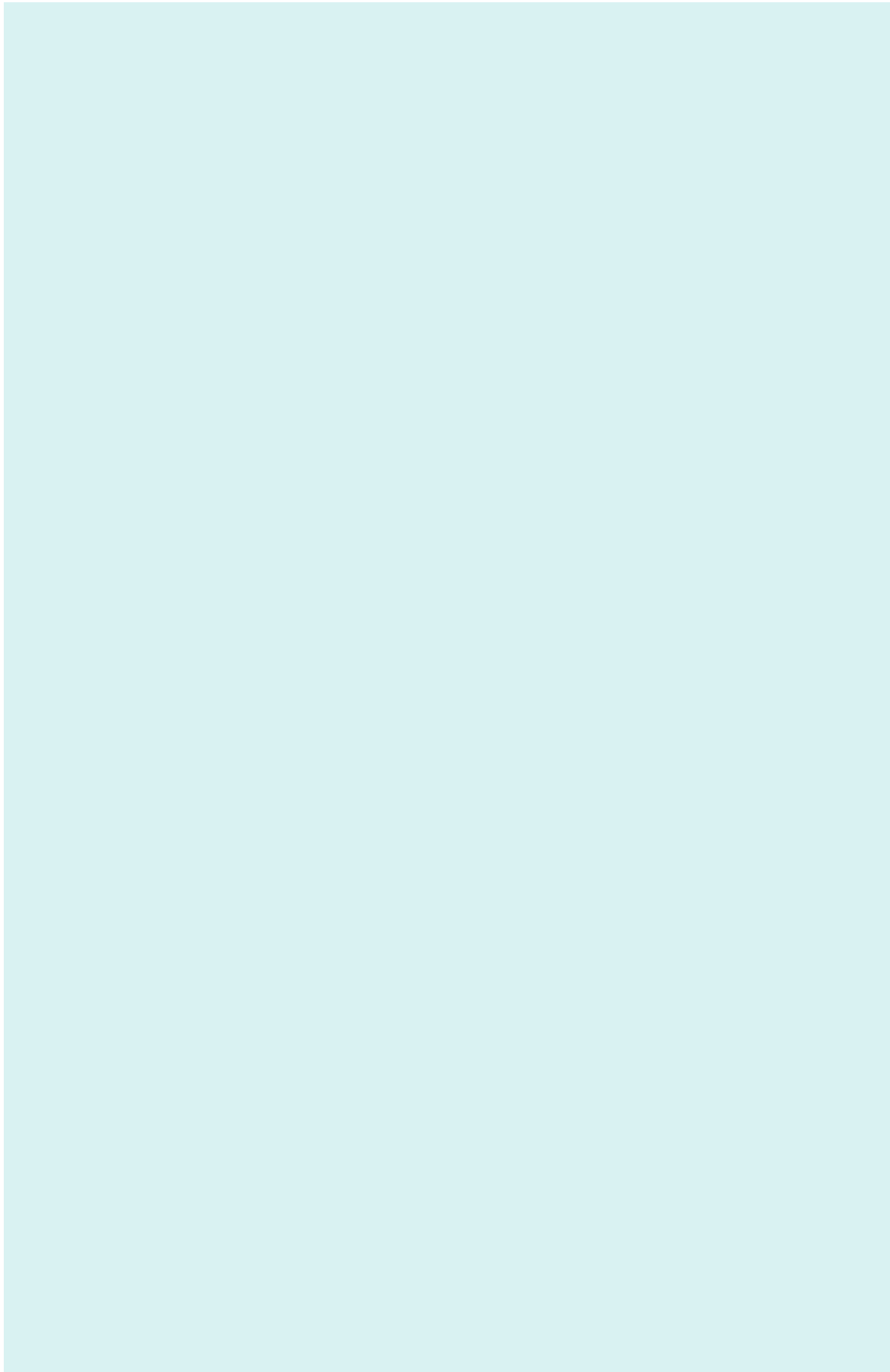
Moreover, aspirations to start small businesses or engage in local employment were recurrent, but hindered by a lack of information, financial literacy, or access to training opportunities. These insights suggest that contrary to the assumption of a permanent migration drive, many seasonal migrant women see migration as a stepping stone rather than a destination, and hope to reintegrate into their communities once economic conditions allow.

'If any factory could really be opened in Georgia, I would gladly work in it. I really want all of this to be in my country. My family, my children, my husband, we haven't been seeing each other for years now. We want to have such conditions in Georgia, so that people don't have to be apart from their families.

Children grow up without care, parents are not around, what kind of trauma is that for children? I would be very happy if there were such things in Georgia. Why would we want Europe and go somewhere else?'


Georgian seasonal migrant woman









European Training Foundation

 www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/skills_and_migration

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