



## Article

# Increasing Refugees' Work and Job Search Self-Efficacy Perceptions by Developing Career Adaptability

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**Abstract:** Today's unstable labor market increasingly requires flexibility and adaptability to cope with the threat of unemployment. Though this threat can cause distress in many people, its negative impact is even more significant on vulnerable workers such as refugees. This study aimed to explore if a career counseling intervention designed for refugees (CCfR) preceded increases in career adaptability and, therefore, perceptions of both work self-efficacy (WSe) and job search self-efficacy (JSSe). The study was conducted in Italy and involved a sample of 233 refugees, who were asked to respond to a questionnaire available in three languages (Italian, French, and English). Data analysis showed that improvement was demonstrated in all the variables considered, namely, career adaptability (composed by concern, control, confidence, and curiosity), WSe, and JSSe. In addition, the increase in career adaptability explained the increase in refugees' WSe and JSSe; at the opposite, only the initial level of curiosity was found to explain the increase in WSe, while JSSe was completely independent from the initial level of the career adaptability.



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**Keywords:** refugees; career adaptability; resettlement success; labor market integration

## 1. Introduction

People who are forced to move for political reasons live in the worst conditions of their hosting countries' labor markets. Their choices are often limited to nonqualified jobs; these workers are low-paid and risk losing their jobs when their companies face difficulty. For these reasons, interventions for refugees that are aimed only at finding a job as soon as possible tend to confirm these adverse effects. Career counseling intervention, if explicitly designed for refugees, can contrast with this phenomenon by providing job opportunities more congruent with their skills, aptitudes, and motivations, thereby favoring a process of both work and social integration. The study presented here aimed to explore whether, after a career counseling intervention focused on this population specifically, refugees' skills and attitudes towards their career changed in the direction of greater professional satisfaction.

### 1.1. Refugees' Labor Market Integration: Challenges and Barriers

The current labor market is unstable and unpredictable, characterized by frequent and complex career transitions that undermine the security and predictability of individuals' career paths (Savickas et al. 2009). In this scenario, the need to possess characteristics such as flexibility and adaptability increases to cope with workers' sense of uncertainty and fear of incurring job loss and, thus, unemployment (Kalleberg 2009; Maggiori et al. 2013). This can cause distress in many people, but can have a significantly greater negative impact on categories of vulnerable workers such as refugees: people who have been forced to leave their countries because of war, persecution, or violence, often related to race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or social affiliation (UNHCR 2018). Both the migration and the reason for which it occurs (i.e., Connor 2010) can constitute traumatic experiences

that can undermine the integrity and efficiency of the individual. After experiencing these situations, refugees find themselves in a new country, often very different from their country of origin, and must cope with the pain that can arise from a sense of rupture in their lives. Usually, this pain is exacerbated by the experience of separation from one's family (Campion 2018) and the interruption of one's career path (Ivlevs and Veliziotis 2018). According to a recent literature review (see Brajda Bruno et al. Forthcoming), refugees have to face many barriers and obstacles: limited knowledge of the host country, bureaucratic issues, discrimination, the highly formalized labor market in Europe, lack of fluency in the host country's language, reliance on social networks composed of individuals from the same ethnic backgrounds (encouraging ethnic niche jobs characterized by low status and low pay), tendency to accept the first available job despite their skills and qualifications, deskilling, and the downgrade from a prestigious professional role in their home country to a low-skilled job in the host country.

Several authors (i.e., Okocha 2007; Yakushko et al. 2008) have discussed the role that career counseling interventions can have in facilitating the integration of refugees into the host country's labor market. These interventions should focus on the concept of career transition (Abrego and Brammer 1992), and career counselors should be aware of the backgrounds of and challenges faced by their beneficiaries in the resettlement process. In order to foster positive adjustment to the new world of work refugees are approaching, career counselors should provide guidance and build plans to address refugees' career transitions (Yakushko et al. 2008).

Thus, the purpose of this article is to present the results of a career counseling intervention implemented in a group of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. The former are individuals who have already had their claims of persecution and personal threats accepted, while the latter are individuals whose claims have not yet been substantiated (Weiss and Tulin 2019). However, in the discussion of this study, the term "refugees" will be used to refer to both without formal distinction, as they are all international migrants who have left their countries out of fear of imminent threats to their well-being (United Nations Refugee Agency 2017).

The career counseling intervention designed for refugees (CCfR) takes the perspective of the career construction theory (Savickas 2005), at the center of which is the concept of career adaptability, defined as "the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions" (Savickas 1997, p. 254).

Given that empirical evidence has shown that experiences such as resettlement, unemployment, and the job search can trigger personal coping resources to achieve successful integration into the labor market, we explored the role of career adaptability (Savickas 2005) in increasing job search self-efficacy (JSSe) (Saks and Ashforth 1999; Tolentino et al. 2019) and work self-efficacy (WSe) (Loeb et al. 2016), factors determining a successful labor market integration.

### 1.2. Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is how individuals build their careers (Savickas 2005) and is a construct that includes dimensions of resource management, problem solving, and coping strategies (i.e., aptitudes for concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas and Porfeli 2012). Savickas and Porfeli (2012) argue that adaptability resources can be activated to cope with life and career challenges, such as career transitions or work traumas. The relationship between job insecurity, career adaptability, and both general and occupational well-being was investigated, and results showed that, regardless of job conditions, adaptability resources were positively associated with both general and occupational well-being (Maggiori et al. 2013; Lodi et al. 2020). Other studies have investigated refugees' career adaptability (see Campion 2018; Ramakrishnan et al. 2018; Wehrle et al. 2019). Findings showed that career adaptability plays a crucial role in the resettlement process by enabling the activation of internal resources required to modify expectations and implement adap-

tive coping strategies to deal with resettlement (Campion 2018). We also have to assume that career construction theory cannot ignore contextual variables (Wehrle et al. 2019). It is essential to consider that the obstacles and barriers refugees experience in the resettlement process can, on the one hand, undermine their senses of control and confidence and can, on the other hand, trigger the deployment of career adaptability resources (Savickas and Porfeli 2012; Wehrle et al. 2019). Furthermore, through self-regulation, refugees intervened in their thoughts and emotions and optimistically reflected on what they could achieve in the future: this skill, along with the acceptance of responsibility for their actions, supported them in taking control and making decisions and boosted their confidence (Wehrle et al. 2019). In conclusion, findings suggest that career adaptability in refugees seems to be positively related to the creation of social connections, which are used in the job search and promote a sense of belonging, life satisfaction (Campion 2018), control, and confidence (Wehrle et al. 2019).

### 1.3. JSSe

A job search is defined as “a purposive, volitional pattern of action that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal” (Kanfer et al. 2001, p. 838). JSSe, on the other hand, represents the perception of one’s own competence to engage in a job search and obtain employment (Tolentino et al. 2019). JSSe is one of the most studied individual factors predicting job search intensity, job search effort, and reemployment (Kanfer et al. 2001; Brown et al. 2006). Possessing solid JSSe could be even more critical for refugees seeking employment in the host country. They are often unfamiliar with how and what it takes to find work in their new environments (Pajic et al. 2018). Deep social and cultural differences can cause refugees to be subjected to discrimination and stereotyping by the native population, which can lead to perceptions of cultural mismatch, which, along with bureaucratic barriers, could negatively affect refugees’ job search efforts (Pajic et al. 2018). Conceptualizing refugees’ adaptive readiness in terms of psychological capital can be considered an antecedent of JSSe as it impacts career adaptability (Pajic et al. 2018). Psychological capital refers to a general, positive outlook on life and includes four elements: self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al. 2007). It has been shown that individuals who possess these characteristics are more confident in achieving their goals and place more trust in their engagement of a job search in the host country: they tend to view administrative barriers as transitory impediments capable of triggering fighting responses instead of being a hindrance to JSSe, whereas perceiving strong social barriers (i.e., difficulty adapting to the host country’s values and culture) seems to cause feelings of misfit between a person and the environment, “weakening the positive self-regulatory mechanisms related to psychological capital” (Pajic et al. 2018, p. 169).

### 1.4. WSe

WSe is workers’ perception of their ability to successfully complete their job-related tasks (Loeb et al. 2016). This definition reflects the trend of research in work contexts to associate WSe with a single, cognitive dimension (Loeb 2016). However, it is possible to distinguish four dimensions of self-efficacy at work: occupational, self-oriented emotional, other-oriented emotional, and social (Loeb et al. 2016). While few studies in the literature are specifically focused on WSe, many others have applied the construct of general self-efficacy in organizational contexts, theorized by Bandura (2001). In general, the level of an individual’s self-efficacy influences personal performance; people who believe they are competent to perform a task are more likely to be successful, because high self-efficacy enables persistence in coping with stressful situations (Salanova et al. 2002), mitigating the adverse effects of work-related stressors, preserving well-being, and promoting job satisfaction (Jex and Bliese 1999; Judge and Bono 2001).

In contrast, people who believe they are unable to perform a task will be less successful (Bandura 1977) and it has been shown that this is equally true for work performance as elsewhere (Stajkovic and Luthans 1998). Furthermore, low levels of self-efficacy are

correlated with stress and depressive symptoms at work (Regehr et al. 2003) and burnout (Guglielmi et al. 2012).

Few studies have explored the construct of self-efficacy in refugees, and no studies on WSe were found for this target group. One study (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2013) investigated the impact refugees' experiences had on efficacy beliefs and contribution to resettlement. Significant sources of self-efficacy beliefs are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences obtained through observation of social role models (particularly those perceived as like oneself), social persuasion, and psychological assessment of the individual's abilities by a professional (Bandura 1977). Results from the study showed that positive experiences after resettlement could potentially improve self-efficacy and long-term outcomes (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2013).

In addition to this, vicarious experiences gained from social models can influence efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1977). This means that, for refugees in resettlement, compatriots with similar backgrounds who successfully learned the host country's language, obtained housing, joined social networks, and obtained meaningful work provided a model of success (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2013). By transferring knowledge, skills, and successful strategies (Bandura 1977), positive role models can stimulate newcomers to acquire new skills and motivate them to persevere when they encounter adversity. Conversely, interfacing with compatriots who had negative experiences during resettlement can undermine trust, motivation, and the desire to learn (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2013).

Thus, given that solid efficacy beliefs can predict coping behavior and health functioning in the work context, one of the purposes of the study presented in this paper is to explore WSe in refugees involved in our proposed career counseling intervention.

### 1.5. Aim and Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate if participants' perceptions of career adaptability, WSe, and JSSe increase after a CCfR, as well as examine the effect of career adaptability's growth, not its baseline, on the increase of the remaining two variables. More precisely, the study aimed to explore if:

- (1) After CCfR intervention, participants report higher career adaptability than before;
- (2) After CCfR intervention, participants report higher WSe than before;
- (3) After CCfR intervention, participants report higher JSSe than before;
- (4) The increase in both WSe and JSSe is independent of the starting level of the career adaptability;
- (5) The increase in both WSe and JSSe is explained by the increase in the career adaptability.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Three hundred eighty-eight refugees and asylum seekers participated in the career counseling interventions. For the purposes of this research, the term "refugees" will be used in presenting the study to refer to both without formal distinction. Participants were divided into 50 groups ranging from 6 to 10 members. Due to the specificity of the refugees' population in Italy, the sample was mostly composed of males (82.2%) and the qualification was limited to primary or middle school (75.6%). Not having sufficient variability, these variables will not be considered in the data analyses. Age ranged between 18 to 56 years old, mostly concentrated between 20 to 30 years old (71.6%). Participants originated from Africa and Asia; Pakistan (23.3%) and Nigeria (22.2%) were the countries more represented, followed by Mali (7.3%), Senegal (6.9%), Gambia (6.2%), and Guinea (5.1%). As 155 of them abandoned or were moved to a different shelter and had no opportunity to compile the questionnaire at the end of the intervention, data analyses will be conducted on a sample of 233 refugees.

Though we tried to compose a control group, this study did not include one for two reasons. First, it was challenging to build a control group: all the refugees available to the project partners were necessarily involved in the experimental group, and the different

institutions we tried to apply did not give us their willingness, due to the limitations imposed by the host context. The second reason is that it would be difficult for the control group to have the same characteristics as the experimental group, so the comparison would have been weak in any case.

## 2.2. ESPoR Career Counseling Intervention

We have adopted the ESPoR model for this study. ESPoR stands for European Skills Portfolio for Refugees, and it is a project financed by the European Community by means of the Italian Minister of the Internal. The model consists of a CCfR intervention composed of two face-to-face interviews of one hour and nine group meetings of three hours (see Table 1 for details). This lasts around two months and ends with the delivery of a skills portfolio to each participant. It is based on autobiographical narration that is free and aimed at the refugee in the first phase and structured and addressed to operators and potential employers in the second phase. It does not seek to support refugees in finding a job or directly develop job search skills and self-efficacy perceptions. Instead, it increases professional self-awareness and knowledge of the host country labor market and supports the refugees in defining professional objectives that are congruent with both their features and those of the new context, thereby equipping them to face the challenges and counter the barriers described at the beginning of this paper.

**Table 1.** Scales' psychometrics.

Scale	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alfa				
					Pre	Post	IT	EN	FR
CA Concern	3.52	1.00	−0.431	−0.697	0.887	0.852	0.893	0.760	0.838
CA Control	3.93	0.89	−0.881	0.148	0.810	0.886	0.876	0.701	0.713
CA Curiosity	3.59	0.96	−0.468	−0.635	0.859	0.890	0.879	0.853	0.831
CA Confidence	3.94	0.88	−1.019	0.678	0.849	0.879	0.878	0.752	0.809
Work Self–efficacy	3.92	0.82	−1.073	0.678	0.936	0.939	0.945	0.894	0.886
Job Search Self–efficacy	3.62	0.82	−0.623	−0.246	0.926	0.948	0.944	0.896	0.898

M and SD values refer to the average of both measurement time points.

The first three activities, a face-to-face interview and two group meetings, were dedicated to storytelling, or crafting narratives of the refugees' own careers. Looking at their careers from the outside can help refugees become more mindful, connect with the past, and look toward a more satisfactory future. Three group meetings were dedicated to increasing the self-awareness of refugees' own hard and soft skills. Looking at a complete and well-structured portfolio can make the refugees more confident in dealing with challenges, obstacles, and problems that may threaten one's professional goals. Two group meetings were dedicated to the Italian training system and the labor market. A better understanding of the real opportunities provided by the hosting country can increase the refugees' curiosity to explore the environment and possible scenarios for future careers. The last face-to-face interview was dedicated to discussing the drafting of a document containing the portfolio and the professional objective chosen by the person. Looking at their own professionalism, down on paper, can make the refugees feel the future is manageable and perceive that they have control and responsibility for shaping their careers.

All the activities cited here should also affect the refugees' WSe, stimulating their perception of being more prepared to face a new labor market than they had thought in advance. Moreover, the group meeting dedicated to the mock interview can develop a sense of being (or becoming) ready to face a job interview effectively. In this study, the interventions were conducted by social workers, experts in welcoming refugees, who participated in five days of live training in career counseling of refugees, the ESPoR model, and distance coaching. A detailed manual of the intervention can be downloaded for free in English, French, Italian, and Spanish from the website [www.refujob.eu](http://www.refujob.eu) (accessed on 26 December 2021).

The groups were composed of refugees of the same gender and mother tongue and of similar levels of Italian language proficiency. For some groups, made up of refugees who had recently arrived in Italy, the intervention was carried out in English or French. The material used, such as cards, forms, and procedures, was also provided in the language used by the specific group. For this reason, the level of mastery of the language used is considered to have had little or no impact on the effectiveness of the intervention.

### 2.3. Procedures

Refugees participated in the intervention between October 2019 and March 2021. They were conducted in person before the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 epidemic and when restrictions were reduced. Five of them were interrupted and resumed after three months. One week before and after the intervention, the social workers were asked to administer the same questionnaire, a paper–pencil version that gave the refugees the opportunity to choose between the three languages; 75.3% were compiled in Italian; 16.1% in English; and 8.7% in French.

### 2.4. Measures

Refugees answered the following scales on a Likert scale ranging from 1–Not at all to 5–Completely, and showed good psychometrics (see Table 1 for details).

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas and Porfeli 2012) was chosen to measure how people cope with change and transitions. We used the short form, consisting of 12 items: three for each of the four component scales. Concern consists of being mindful, connecting with the past, and projecting positively toward designing one’s vocational future (i.e., item 3, “becoming aware of the educational and vocational choices that I must make”). Control refers to the tendency to think that the future is partly manageable; thus, it reflects perceived control over one’s professional future and personal responsibility for shaping one’s career (i.e., item 4, “making decisions by myself”). Curiosity represents the desire to explore the environment, selves, and possible scenarios for one’s professional future, acquiring information about oneself and the world around (i.e., item 7, “looking for opportunities to grow as a person”). Confidence is self-efficacy in one’s ability to deal with challenges, obstacles, and problems that threaten one’s professional and career goals (i.e., item 10, “taking care to do things well”). Thanks to previous research published in scientific journals, it was possible to retrieve the French (Johnston et al. 2013) and English (Porfeli and Savickas 2012) versions in addition to the Italian version (Soresi et al. 2012).

The Perceived Job Search Self-Efficacy Scale (Farnese et al. 2007a) is a monofactorial scale composed of 12 items. It was utilized to detect people’s efficacy beliefs about the various activities involved in looking for a job. The scale includes, for example, item 6, “select the job offers best suited to my skills,” and item 8, “catch new opportunities in the labor market.”

The Perceived Work Self-Efficacy Scale (Farnese et al. 2007b) consists of ten items and was utilized to measure people’s efficacy beliefs concerning future and current work. For example, the scale includes item 3, “work with people of different ages and experiences,” and item 10, “reach the goals that have been assigned to me.”

These last two scales were translated using the back-translation method to ensure as much content overlap as possible between the versions in the three languages. While the variables considered (career adaptability, WSe, and JSSe) are operationalized within the instruments through the items, their change was operationalized by calculating the difference between their post-intervention value and their pre-intervention value.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

All the statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS 26. Pre- and post-intervention differences were tested with Student’s t-test for paired samples. Effect size has been tested with Cohen’s d index (large if >0.80; medium if between 0.51 and 0.80; small if between 0.21 and 0.50). The effects of career adaptability at predicting the growth of WSe

and JSSE were tested with a block-wise linear regression, testing and comparing three models differentiating for the independent variables, which were: for Model 1, only the pre-intervention values for the four dimensions of career adaptability; for Model 2, the differences between post- and pre-intervention values of the four dimensions of career adaptability; for Model 3, both the pre-intervention values and the differences between the post- and pre-intervention values of the four dimensions of career adaptability. The R2 differences between Model 3 and the other two models were tested by means of the R2 change statistics provided by inserting the variables of only Model 1 or 2 as first block and all the variables as second block. Correlations between variables, separately for pre- and post-intervention values, are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Bivariate correlations between variables.

	CA Concern	CA Control	CA Curiosity	CA Confidence	WSe	JSSE
CA Concern		0.467 ***	0.759 ***	0.603 ***	0.640 ***	0.809 ***
CA Control	0.680 ***		0.540 ***	0.715 ***	0.728 ***	0.623 ***
CA Curiosity	0.748 ***	0.733 ***		0.691 ***	0.674 ***	0.824 ***
CA Confidence	0.768 ***	0.829 ***	0.836 ***		0.818 ***	0.735 ***
Work Self-efficacy	0.760 ***	0.817 ***	0.818 ***	0.886 ***		0.789 ***
Job Search Self-efficacy	0.799 ***	0.783 ***	0.860 ***	0.870 ***	0.893 ***	

The upper side reports the correlations of data gathered in the pre-intervention. The lower side reports the correlations of data gathered in the post-intervention. \*\*\*  $p < 0.000$ .

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Refugees' Career Adaptability, WSe, and JSSE Increase after the CCfR

The data analysis has shown that all the variables considered significantly increased after the intervention (Table 3). The effect size of the post- and pre-intervention differences was large for concern, curiosity, and JSSE, and medium for control, confidence, and WSe.

**Table 3.** Statistic significance and effect size of the differences between post- and pre-administration.

Scale	N	Pre		Post		Mean Diff. <sup>(1)</sup>	Cohen's d
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
CA Concern	228	3.19	1.078	3.99	0.693	0.795 ***	0.88
CA Control	229	3.70	1.029	4.29	0.644	0.588 ***	0.69
CA Curiosity	227	3.28	0.997	4.03	0.722	0.751 ***	0.86
CA Confidence	226	3.70	1.066	4.26	0.623	0.555 ***	0.64
Work Self-efficacy	232	3.66	0.969	4.22	0.538	0.559 ***	0.72
Job Search Self-efficacy	230	3.35	0.909	4.04	0.574	0.689 ***	0.91

<sup>(1)</sup> Positive values mean that they have increased after the intervention. \*\*\*  $p < 0.000$ .

#### 3.2. WSe and JSSE Growth Is Independent of the Starting Level of Career Adaptability

In regard to research question four: only the starting level of a single dimension of career adaptability explained WSe growth, while JSSE was completely independent. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, if we refer to Model 1, which considers only the initial level of career adaptability, three scales over four were statistically significant, indicating that those with lower initial levels of career adaptability showed greater increases in both WSe and JSSE. If we refer to Model 3, which, in addition, considers the growth of career adaptability, the situation changes: only the initial level of curiosity ( $\beta = 0.235$ ), and only for WSe, was shown to be statistically significant. R2 of WSe increased by 0.170, from 0.649 in Model 1 to 0.819 in Model 3 ( $F \text{ change}(4, 214) = 20.367, p < 0.000$ ). R2 of JSSE increased by 0.213, from 0.609 in Model 1 to 0.822 in Model 3 ( $F \text{ change}(4, 214) = 63.710, p < 0.000$ ).

**Table 4.** Role of career adaptability baseline and increase in explaining WSe.

	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sign.
Model 1			
CA Concern baseline	−0.196	−3.122	0.002
CA Control baseline	−0.268	−3.512	0.001
CA Curiosity baseline	0.064	0.893	0.373
CA Confidence baseline	−0.472	−5.499	0.000
Model 2			
C.A. Concern increase	0.153	3.466	0.001
CA Control increase	0.328	6.081	0.000
C.A. Curiosity increase	0.086	1.674	0.096
CA Confidence increase	0.425	6.755	0.000
Model 3			
CA Concern baseline	−0.093	−1.317	0.189
CA Control baseline	−0.131	−1.753	0.081
CA Curiosity baseline	0.235	3.060	0.002
CA Confidence baseline	−0.161	−1.744	0.083
C.A. Concern increase	0.107	1.576	0.116
CA Control increase	0.219	3.024	0.003
C.A. Curiosity increase	0.249	3.394	0.001
CA Confidence increase	0.290	3.186	0.002

**Table 5.** Role of career adaptability baseline and increase in explaining JSSe.

	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sign.
Model 1			
CA Concern baseline	−0.325	−4.898	0.000
CA Control baseline	−0.112	−1.396	0.164
CA Curiosity baseline	−0.194	−2.546	0.012
CA Confidence baseline	−0.244	−2.695	0.008
Model 2			
C.A. Concern increase	0.333	7.753	0.000
CA Control increase	0.156	3.006	0.003
C.A. Curiosity increase	0.323	6.479	0.000
CA Confidence increase	0.213	3.508	0.001
Model 3			
CA Concern baseline	−0.106	−1.515	0.131
CA Control baseline	−0.076	−1.017	0.310
CA Curiosity baseline	0.101	1.324	0.187
CA Confidence baseline	−0.007	−0.077	0.938
C.A. Concern increase	0.264	3.909	0.000
CA Control increase	0.096	1.340	0.182
C.A. Curiosity increase	0.387	5.310	0.000
CA Confidence increase	0.204	2.255	0.025

### 3.3. The Increase in Career Adaptability Explains the Growth of Both WSe and JSSe

As addressed in research question five, career adaptability explained the increases in both WSe and JSSe. R2 of WSe increased by only 0.014, from 0.805 in Model 2 to 0.819 in Model 3 ( $F$  change(4, 214) = 4.146,  $p < 0.003$ ), while it was 0.822 for JSSe in Model 3, not increasing significantly from Model 2. WSe's growth was explained by the increases in confidence ( $\beta = 0.290$ ), curiosity ( $\beta = 0.249$ ), and control ( $\beta = 0.219$ ). JSSe's growth was explained by the increases in curiosity ( $\beta = 0.387$ ), concern ( $\beta = 0.264$ ), and confidence ( $\beta = 0.204$ ).

## 4. Discussion

This study aimed to test if, after a CCfR, refugees' career adaptability increased, growing participants' perceptions of both WSe and JSSe. Concerning the first three research



questions, the study showed an improvement in all the variables considered, namely career adaptability (including the dimensions of concern, control, confidence, and curiosity), WSe, and JSSe.

Since we did not have a control group, we cannot say with certainty that the variables' increase at the end of the intervention was due to the intervention itself or to the refugees' growing familiarity with the labor market and its rules. However, the increase was obtained in only two months, during which most participants' opportunities to receive training and find work were very limited or absent because of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that the CCfR may indeed have played a role in determining, at least partially, these changes.

The effect size of the differences between post- and pre-intervention values was large for concern, curiosity, and JSSe. Elements of the initial CCfR that focused on the storytelling of refugees' own careers could have allowed them to review some perceived obstacles in their work experiences, strengthening the intent to turn such concerns into career plans to pursue (Wehrle et al. 2019). The CCfR's efforts to increase refugees' knowledge of the Italian labor market could have fostered a more significant curiosity to explore existing training and employment opportunities in the area. A specific meeting dedicated to the mock interview aimed, in part, to increase refugees' skills in facing a job interview; however, its primary purpose was to show participants that, with consistent self-awareness and specific training, they are likely to be effective in convincing a potential employer. The large effect size between pre- and post-intervention detected for the JSSe could be due to this initiative, eliciting "preparatory job search behaviors" of acquiring information on the job search and identifying potential paths during the planning phase of the job search (Blau 1994).

The effect size of the differences between post- and pre-intervention values was medium for control, confidence, and WSe. The sense of accompaniment and support given by attending the CCfR may have promoted a "can-do-attitude" (Wehrle et al. 2019, p. 121). Optimism and feelings of gratitude characterize this approach, allowing participants to increase their perception of control and confidence (Wehrle et al. 2019) and, consequently, their perception that they will be effective at the jobs they find.

The present study also demonstrated the role of increasing career adaptability in explaining the increase of WSe and JSSe. Previously, no studies had directly investigated the relationship between career adaptability and WSe in refugees. Others (i.e., Stajkovic and Luthans 1998; Salanova et al. 2002; Chen et al. 2004) had merely applied the construct of general self-efficacy theorized by Bandura (2001) to organizational contexts. Our study showed that, in our sample, 82% of the growth in the level of WSe was explained by the preceding increase in confidence, curiosity, and control. It is likely that the confidence increase—defined as perceived self-efficacy in dealing with obstacles that threaten one's career goals (Savickas and Porfeli 2012)—promotes the perception of being able to approach work-related tasks (Bandura 1977; Chen et al. 2004). Similarly, the curiosity increase may contribute to the development of refugees' openness to explore possible job positions and the multiple tasks they may perform at work; seen through an agentic perspective (Bandura 2001), increased control could result in reliance on one's agency in building one's career.

The 82% of JSSe growth was explained by increased curiosity, concern, and confidence. This is not surprising, considering that increased curiosity, expressed as openness to explore current job opportunities (Savickas and Porfeli 2012), implies a greater probability of engaging in the job search. Exercising this practice could help develop familiarity with the job search process, encouraging the enhancement of JSSe. Similarly, the development of concern and confidence is associated with increased levels of JSSe. As shown by previous studies (see Pajic et al. 2018), career adaptability strengthens JSSe; more adaptable people are better prepared for a job search (concern) and are typically more self-confident (confidence).

The last result that deserves to be highlighted is that only the initial positive level of curiosity increased the refugees' self-efficacy perception, and only for WSe. This result is important for two reasons: first, initial levels of career adaptability have very little impact on improving refugees' career choices. Thus, it is possible to achieve results by

implementing CCfR with any refugee. The second reason is that curiosity seems to be the most important capacity, producing positive effects both when it is developed and when refugees already possess it.

This study also has some limitations. First, the intervention occurred between October 2019 and March 2021, right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to restrictions in Italy, this meant that activities were often interrupted and then restarted after some time. It caused some intervention dropouts because some refugees were no longer traceable after the interruption periods or had been moved to a different shelter and had no opportunity to complete the questionnaire at the end of the intervention. The sample had a high degree of homogeneity regarding gender, age, and education level, reducing the generalizability of our results to other sociodemographic groups of refugees. A control group would have been challenging to compose, especially for the primary objective of valid comparison, since the refugees who would have composed it would hardly have had the same characteristics as the experimental group. As mentioned above, the lack of a control group does not allow us to determine the extent to which the changes recorded after the intervention are due to CCfR, and this constitutes a further limitation of the study. The measuring of WSe was not related to a specific job, and given that helping refugees consider a wider range of jobs was an objective of the intervention, it is possible that in the questionnaire's second administration, carried out at the end of the intervention, the refugees may have responded to the WSe items by thinking of a completely different job than the one considered at the time of the first administration. Thus, the fact that the two measures of WSe could be based on different "imagined jobs" represents a further limitation of the study. Additionally, not all the refugees shared an optimal level of literacy. On the other hand, it is likely that, in circumstances not affected by external barriers and after considering the limitations of the data gathering, the CCfR could be even more effective in the ways suggested by this study.

Further studies should consider measuring the consistency of the effects of the CCfR over time and the moderating role of the experts' skills and other supports in facing the labor market.

## 5. Conclusions

The difficulties that push refugees to leave their home countries, their families, and their jobs do not end once they arrive in a host country, where these people must face a reality that is often very different from what they expected. Thus, while the social networks in which refugees are integrated assist them in fulfilling a need to belong and experience greater life satisfaction, these same networks act as a barrier to quality reemployment and higher-paying jobs. For this reason, programs such as CCfR could promote resettlement quality by offering activities that promote better career adaptability.

Despite the limits of this study, due to the specific target population and the COVID-19 pandemic (which led to enormous limitations on job placement and work experience), all the abilities and perceptions considered here have improved, suggesting that, at least in part, this could be due to the intervention. The data demonstrates an increase in refugees' career adaptability and perception of self-efficacy both at work and in the job search. These findings are significant because the commitment and willingness to revise low-quality choices are closely related to how capable refugees feel to manage their careers, cope with the labor market, and perform the job search processes.

For this reason, it appears important to invest in working on career design to promote the kind of mature and competent planning that helps people recognize and enhance their characteristics in a specific context, namely, the labor market of the host nation. That increasing the ability to adapt one's career choices to a new context can improve the perception of self-efficacy in both work and job search may be explained by the ability to promote the willingness to:

- Persevere by adopting an optimistic attitude and feelings of gratitude, demonstrating concern in one's career;

- Rely on one's performance in the process of seeking employment and building one's career, exercising a perceived sense of control;
- Develop a more complete and adequate understanding of one's characteristics and resources as well as the structure and state of the labor market, activating curiosity;
- Feel capable both to face the challenges and obstacles that threaten one's professional goals and to plan a path for building one's career, demonstrating confidence in one's abilities.

Given that career adaptability is an important resource that can support employability (Savickas 2011), the ability to get and keep an initial job and the ability to manage further career transitions in the labor market (Hillage and Pollard 1998), we hope that more and more programs like the CCfR will be tested to support refugees in the process of building and rebuilding their career paths.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to the topic of the study, which was not likely to upset or disturb participants who signed the informed consent and were free to abandon the research at every moment, and data are stored without any personal information eliminating the risk of possible disclosures or reporting obligations.

**Informed Consent Statement:** The participants provided informed written consent to publish, though no personal and/or identifiable information has been published.

**Data Availability Statement:** All data generated or analyzed during this study during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical reasons.

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