

Cross-border skill mobility partnerships

A handbook of good practices

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Handbook encompasses a selection of good practices regarding cross-border skill mobility partnerships (SMPs), largely based on work conducted under the Link4Skills project, funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme. Illustrating different design approaches through selected examples of good practice, it proposes a contribution for a set of transferable design features and approaches to enhance mutually beneficial skills mobility.

Labor markets globally are undergoing deep structural change, primarily shaped by demographic challenges, technological breakthroughs, digitalization and green transition (World Economic Forum, 2024; OECD, 2026a, 2026b). Many countries face persistent shortages in key sectors such as healthcare, construction and skilled trades, manufacturing, engineering and ICT (ELA, 2026). These challenges reflect not only a shortage of workers but also the mismatch between available skills and the skills required in increasingly evolving labor markets. Critically, as adopted in the broader Link4Skills project, “skill” should be understood not as fixed or intrinsic quality of individuals, but within the context of its use and recognition. The ways in which a skill is recognized, assessed, and utilized within specific institutional, professional, and labor market contexts add value to that skill (see Link4Skills Concept Paper, Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). Accordingly, skill shortages and mismatches are shaped not only by demographic and economic trends, but also by social and economic structures, education and training systems, qualification recognition mechanisms, labour market institutions and migration policies.

A shifting ‘demographic metabolism’ (Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026b), which affects both origin and destination countries in contrasting ways, does little to overcome these structural challenges. In destination countries, particularly across the EU and North America, shrinking working-age populations and increasing dependency ratios are creating skill shortages in essential sectors. In contrast, many origin countries in the Global South, mostly corresponding to low-income countries, are experiencing a ‘demographic dividend’, with growing youth populations which exceeds the labour market’s capacity to absorb it. This leaves many young, often well-educated, workers unemployed or underemployed. This demographic imbalance creates pressure for mobility; however, without appropriate infrastructure, this situation carries the risk of ‘brain drain’ at home or ‘brain waste’ at the destination (see Ankoma, 2026; World Data Lab et al., 2026).

The Rationale for a Migration Skill Corridor Approach

To address these imbalances, policymakers have typically responded with several policy options and a range of complementary mechanisms, including primarily reskilling/upskilling, technological innovation and automation, and international labour migration. Each addresses different dimensions of labour market adjustment; however, each also has limitations. Reskilling and upskilling are essential, but domestic training alone often fails to keep pace with rapid technological shifts. In highly regulated sectors such as healthcare, reskilling cannot provide an immediate solution to current shortage due to the lengthy training periods required for specialists (ELA, 2026). It may not be also cost-effective. While automation and advancement in artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes employer/sector expectations and shifts demands toward highly-skilled workers, it results in labour surpluses in manual or design-oriented occupations like graphic and multimedia designers. It cannot also replace human-centric skills like emotional intelligence, original thinking, or complex decision-making in unpredictable situations (Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). On the other hand, while migration may generally appear to be a quick way of filling labour shortages, traditional international recruitment models often benefit destination countries disproportionately and fail to support long-term workforce sustainability (Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026b).

This is where the migration corridor approach, which also informs the analytical framework of the Link4Skills project, becomes particularly relevant. It reframes international labour mobility as a process of mutually beneficial skills corridors that support long-term development, moving beyond the narrow origin–destination divide. Challenging the traditional one-way push-pull logic and pointing to the importance of historical, socio-economic and institutional factors in shaping migration and skill flows between countries, Link4Skills adopts a constructivist approach to skills. This approach integrates recruitment, training, and qualification recognition processes into a coherent system that links both educational and labor market needs (Triandafyllidou et al., 2024; Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026a). In this context, the rationale for this Handbook is also rooted in the growing recognition of structured migration skills corridors as an emerging policy approach. Illustrated through Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) that are designed to ensure mutual benefit for migrants, employers, and both origin and destination countries with “triple” or -even “quadruple win”- outcomes, migration skills corridors reflect a paradigm shift from recruiting workers to developing and mobilizing skills, while placing special emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration (IOM, 2023b; EMN and OECD, 2022).

Why a Handbook for Good Practices?

The Link4Skills project has carried out a mapping exercise of more than 150 SMPs and related initiatives, including Global Skill Partnerships and Talent Partnerships, which aim to combine skills development, mobility and mutual benefit for destination and origin countries. The inventory produced covers government-to-government partnerships involving 12 countries (Austria, Canada, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, and Ukraine) between 2015 and April 2025, examining initiatives that combine skills training with mobility for some or all participants (<https://corridors.link4skills.eu/partnerships>). This mapping exercise, which led to the development of a Partnership Inventory supported by a comparative analysis (Hohwieler et al., 2026), reveals that Skills Mobility Partnerships go a step further than traditional labour migration approaches in facilitating the fairer movement of skills. However, these initiatives face several challenges that could limit their ability to scale up, ensure sustainability, promote equality and achieve the promised labour market outcomes (Kessler and Katsiaficas, 2026).

Although the Inventory does not evaluate the outcomes or overall effectiveness of the reviewed initiatives, it provides an important basis for understanding the current landscape of SMPs, as well as offering a sort of gap analysis that helps identify what is currently missing in most SMPs. Briefly, portraying the gaps, such as the lack of comprehensive reintegration support (only 17% specifying reintegration support), strictly short-term or return-oriented structure (58%), no specific recognition embedded (71%), and the rarity of targeted underrepresented groups (only 8 out of 156), the mapping (Hohwieler et al., 2026) provides an empirical basis for identifying areas in which future SMPs could be strengthened. The mapping also underscores a critical conclusion of no universal and full-fledged good practice, in line with other studies (Grabowska and Boatemaa-Setrana, 2026) indicating the global landscape remains a ‘patchwork’ of fragmented, small-scale initiatives tailored to highly specific contexts (Katsiaficas and Kessler, 2026; IOM, 2023a; OECD, 2024; EMN and OECD, 2022; Ferro, 2024).

However, these gaps should not be interpreted as meaning that all SMPs should follow a single model. Even successful “blueprints” cannot be simply transplanted, as IOM Recommendations and Guidance on SMPs explicitly recognize this contextual diversity and just intend to come up with a proposed model of a general blueprint (IOM, 2023a). Instead, these patterns together provide an empirical basis for identifying areas of good practice relevance.

Recognizing that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution, this Handbook moves away from the search for a single perfect model. Furthermore, this is not an attempt to rank existing initiatives according to their overall performative outcomes. Rather, the Handbook approaches good practice as a **set of transferable design features and approaches**, while recognizing that their relevance and implementation will depend on the context in which a partnership operates. The sources emphasize that even “well-designed” programmes face structural hurdles (Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026c). In this sense, ‘**good practice**’ does not imply an initiative without limitations or challenges. Rather, it refers **to an initiative that provides a documented example of one or more ‘building blocks’ of success**, or operational components, that effectively address specific challenges. In doing so, policymakers and practitioners can draw lessons for the design or adaptation of future partnerships.

Analytical Framework and Case Selection

Against this background, the Handbook adopts **six ICMPD recommendations** identified in terms of the Link4Skills Inventory as its **primary analytical lens** for identifying specific good practice components across different cases. Kessler and Katsiaficas (2026), in their ICMPD commentary, address six ways to improve the mutual benefits of labour mobility, highlighting how SMPs can be strengthened:

1. comprehensive (re-)integration support
2. flexibility in mobility duration
3. integration of digital mobility
4. better alignment with labour market realities
5. proactive skills development and recognition
6. promotion of inclusive participation

These recommendations are not treated as rigid selection criteria or as a scoring framework. Particular attention was given to initiatives that provide concrete implementation experience. We have selected illustrative cases that together display the diversity of design approaches to SMPs, illustrate innovative design features and generate transferable lessons to future initiatives. The selection also aims to capture variation in partnership design, including differences in sectors, target groups, governance arrangements, mobility pathways and approaches to skills development and labour market matching. By filtering the reviewed initiatives through these six criteria, we provide policymakers with a framework to build modular, effective, and fairer partnerships tailored to their own specific migration corridors.

Overall, the Link4Skills Partnership Inventory (identifying the empirical diversity and gaps, alongside other studies that have produced similar findings); the ICMPD six recommendations (providing the core analytical framework), and the selected cases (offering concrete examples of design features in action) have all together formed the basis for this Handbook. By bringing these elements together, the Handbook moves beyond identifying a definitive list of ‘best-performing’ SMPs to offering a toolkit of transferable good practices for fairer and mutually beneficial global skills mobility.

Below, we provide a list of the cases presented in this Handbook. The “primary contribution” identifies the distinctive feature for which each case was selected; however, individual cases may simultaneously illustrate multiple dimensions.

Case	Primary contribution to the Handbook (distinctive feature)
THAMM / THAMM Plus	Corridor governance and labour-market-oriented skills mobility
PAM	Employer engagement and labour-market matching
HabiZu	Skills recognition and vocational adaptation
Triple Win	Integration and post-mobility support
Korean EPS	Flexibility in mobility duration
Digital Explorers – Iraq Edition	Digital and remote mobility
HiH	Inclusive expansion of skilled mobility and potential pathways for displaced talent
GSP Soins (emerging/promising practice)	Adapting dual-track skills partnership model to a regulated sector and new mobility corridor

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II. GOOD PRACTICE SAMPLES

THAMM/THAMM Plus: Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa

(Building Skills Mobility Partnerships at Programme and Corridor Level)

1. The Initiative Overview

THAMM (Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa) and its successor **THAMM Plus** is a regional programme designed to establish safe, regular and mutually beneficial labour migration and mobility channels between North African countries and European destination countries. THAMM approaches labour migration holistically, in terms of both direct labour placement and institutional capacity building.

THAMM is not a single mobility pathway; it operates as an umbrella framework hosting multiple distinct pilot projects. It is funded by the European Union (through EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa) and co-financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). By funding different agencies (GIZ, OFII, Enabel, IOM) to implement specific projects, the THAMM programme offers the possibility of testing different types of skills-migration initiatives, ranging from long-term mobility to apprenticeships, tailored to specific partnerships. The partnerships bring together Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia as North African origin countries with EU destination countries Germany, Belgium, France and Italy (formally integrated into THAMM Plus). Stakeholders at the national levels include partner and destination country authorities (primarily ministries), employers and corporations, labour and trade unions, vocational training institutions, and employment services. Phase I (THAMM) ran from between 2019 and 2023; the successor THAMM Plus is currently operational, launched in 2024, until 2027.

The programme architecture supports different types of initiatives and mobility pathways, tailored to specific corridors, sectors and partner institutions. The projects carried out under the THAMM programme bring together a range of initiatives combining labour-market gaps and skills needs analysis with vocational preparation, recruitment and matching, qualification recognition and institutional capacity-building.

Under the broader THAMM/THAMM Plus umbrella, examples include long-term skilled migration and apprenticeship pathways under the German GIZ component, targeting skilled workers and trainees from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia; circular and seasonal mobility under THAMM-OFII between Tunisia and France, a pathway addressing young professionals and seasonal workers; sector- and occupation-specific mobility pathways such as Morocco-EU lorry and bus driver initiative, Morocco–Italy mechatronics and Tunisia–Italy construction schemes; and skills-development, employment and mobility initiatives such as DEMO between Egypt and Italy.

For the purposes of this Handbook, THAMM/THAMM Plus is treated not as a single mobility scheme, but as a case study at the program level. Unlike the other cases, the THAMM case therefore focuses on the partnership architecture and mechanisms that underpin individual mobility initiatives, rather than assessing all THAMM initiatives as a single uniform model. It demonstrates how a broader programme framework can create the institutional and governance conditions for developing multiple skills mobility pathways.

2. How the Partnership Works

Labor-market matching and corridor development: The programme seeks to develop regular labour migration and mobility pathways that respond labour market needs in Europe with skills and employment potential in participating North African countries. It utilizes labour market data and evidence-based analysis such as findings of ILO-supported skills need assessments and skills mismatch studies; and national thematic forums on mobility, skills, and working conditions. Also, sectors are selected based on quantitative sector analyses, such as the GIZ component by the German BA to match destination shortages against origin labor surpluses.

Skills development and preparation: The THAMM projects, in general, incorporate skills development and vocational preparation into their mobility pathways. Depending on the specific initiative/scheme, this includes language and vocational training, intercultural orientation, visa application facilitation, and support for document translation and qualification recognition. The selected candidates also receive technical certifications. The extent to which training is aligned with destination-country occupational requirements varies across individual pathways.

Pathway and Recognition: Individual THAMM/THAMM Plus projects establish specific mobility pathways between participating countries. These may differ substantially in their design in terms of sector, occupation, duration, recruitment mechanism and training component. Still, the pathways work strictly within existing legal migration frameworks, such as the German Skilled Immigration Act for the German corridor; and for the Italian corridor, the programme utilizes Article 23 of the Italian Consolidated Law on Immigration, which allows non-EU workers who complete pre-departure vocational and language training programs in their home countries enter Italy outside of the standard quota limitations.

The program architecture of THAMM allows structured cooperation between institutions responsible for skills development, qualification recognition, employment and migration. This creates a framework in which mobility is connected to broader skill development and recognition systems rather than functioning solely as an immigration process. For instance, under THAMM Plus GIZ component, this is operationalized through placement agreements (Vermittlungsabsprachen) that allow international skilled workers, under certain conditions, to be recruited, while completing their formal qualification recognition on-the-job. Also, the introduction of the dual-track TVET component ("home" and "away" tracks) into the THAMM Plus aligns curriculum upgrades at vocational centers in origin countries directly with the professional and language standards required for international mobility.

Post-mobility and integration: THAMM/THAMM Plus does not apply a single post-mobility model; it incorporates integration and, in selected circular pathways, reintegration support, varying according to the mobility model. Long-term German pathways emphasize integration into the destination country workplace and wider society, while circular pathways such as THAMM-OFII incorporate return/reinstallation assistance, explicitly promoting return of enhanced skills and technology transfer.

3. Scale and Reach

As an umbrella programme, THAMM/THAMM Plus encompasses multiple country-, sector- and pathway-specific distinct initiatives; a single aggregated beneficiary and/or placement figure across all projects is not publicly available. In terms of institutional and governance reach, the THAMM initiative systematically has built the operational capacity of public employment services, national statistical agencies, and social partners (e.g. associations and trade unions) across Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Operationally, the scale of mobility and training can better be illustrated through some initiatives, exemplifying both large-scale pathways and smaller pilot projects: THAMM GIZ component prepared a total of 455 candidates for migration and, in the end, placed over 300 Tunisians in Germany for apprenticeships and skilled works. THAMM Phase I -OFII track (France-Tunisia), for its initial pilot operations (2022-2025), aimed guiding to 734 first-time migrants toward decent jobs with an expanded framework of targeted 1,500 Tunisians for domestic and foreign training (with half integrating into the European market); although the figures have varied over the years, it can be summed up that 500+ beneficiaries accessed employment in France, and nearly 1000+ people were reached through employability and additional trainings in total. As ongoing initiatives, the Morocco–Italy mechatronics pathway targets the facilitation of the recruitment of 500 Moroccan mechatronics professionals for employment; the Tunisia–Italy construction pathway targets 2,000 workers to be trained and placed over a three-year period.

4. Good-Practice Features

From individual schemes to corridor-based cooperation: The Link4Skills research (Katsiaficas and Kessler, 2026) highlights that most SMPs generally operate as a patchwork of different bilateral initiatives. The research also indicates that Migration Skill Corridors may offer strategic architecture that connects operational bricks of SMPs (see Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026c). THAMM Plus realizes this by redesigning diverse government-to-government (G2G) efforts under the unified policy framework of the EU Talent Partnerships. The first phase of THAMM, highly valuable though, was characterized by administrative complexity due to multiple separate contracts. This shifts the model from temporary, project-based recruitment to a long-term, strategic human capital corridor between North Africa and Europe. Also building decentralized regional partnerships, THAMM Plus actively pairs subnational regions in destination directly with subnational origin regions (e.g., German Niedersachsen with Moroccan regions, Schleswig-Holstein with Tunisian early childhood educators). This helps to ensure local-level business and integration alignment, therefore bridge between national policy frameworks and local market realities, and overall, establish a robust corridor. So, paving the way for sustainable mobility, THAMM/THAMM plus architecture illustrates the value of considering labour mobility as a long-term corridor-building exercise rather than as a series of isolated recruitment projects.

A flexible architecture: THAMM does not impose a single mobility model across all corridors. Rather than restricting partnerships within rigid, one-size-fits-all frameworks, embedding flexibility into the design, budgeting, and legal pathways is effective for several reasons: resilience to external shocks and crises (macroeconomic changes, shifting border policies, even pandemics); adapting to evolving labour market realities; balancing diverse mobility preferences; and moving beyond rigid credentials.

Holistic 360-degree design: THAMM proposes a holistic approach to labour migration, combining technical dimensions such as governance, skills recognition, and data systems with support for labour market integration and employment abroad. In this sense, initiatives in general take a “360-degree approach” covering all aspects of migration, including integration, return and reintegration, as well as aspects connecting migration and development, in some examples, diaspora engagement.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Heterogeneity across corridors and schemes:

Since THAMM/THAMM Plus encompasses multiple projects, sectors and mobility pathways, outcomes and implementation experiences vary considerably. Attempting to apply a single, standardized regional results framework could overlook structural differences between partner countries. Also, what works in one corridor or occupational context cannot be assumed to function in another. This means that blueprints must be structurally adapted rather than a direct replication.

Asymmetrical operationalization of circularity and mutual benefit:

While the broader THAMM program promotes regular and mutually beneficial labour mobility, individual initiatives differ in the extent to which they incorporate return, reintegration, circularity, qualification recognition or longer-term skills development. The umbrella programme therefore should not be treated as evidence that all these elements are present in every THAMM pathway. For instance, the broader program, THAMM Plus, explicitly incorporates circular migration elements and objectives into its fundamental design; however, in terms of its two pilot programmes (Morocco–Italy Mechatronics and Tunisia–Italy Construction schemes), evidence of operational circular migration mechanisms at the schemes remains very limited.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit THAMM/THAMM Plus

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, THAMM/THAMM Plus strongly illustrates:

- **Comprehensive (re)integration support:** A “360-degree approach” covering all aspects of migration, such as integration, return and reintegration. However, these aspects are present to varying degrees across individual schemes rather than uniformly across the broader programme.
- **Better labour-market alignment:** An approach to development-oriented labour mobility, with the rationale strongly informed by labour market needs. Structured G2G recruitment based on joint bilateral market needs assessments and evidence-based analysis has been established.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:** Incorporation of training and skills development into several mobility pathways, with attention to the relationship between skills systems of the origin and destination countries.
- **Promoting more inclusive participation:** Incorporation of rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches into broader mobility and corridor architectures, with particular attention to the structural vulnerabilities of young workers, trainees, and women. (Nevertheless, displaced talents and refugees remain largely overlooked).

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Partnerships for Development-oriented Vocational Training and Labour Migration (PAM) • • • • •

1. The Initiative Overview

PAM is global programme implementing development-oriented migration and mobility models for vocational training and labour migration in several partner countries. The programme was designed to address the German skilled worker shortage while simultaneously strengthening technical and vocational education and training systems (TVET) in partner countries. By building cooperation between government, private sector and civil society, its aim is to establish “Triple Win” partnerships that benefit origin countries, destination country and the migrants itself. The partners jointly develop and implement new ideas for fair migration and safe pathways for trainees and skilled workers.

The PAM programme, which has been run from July 2024 to June 2028, is currently active in partner countries such as Ecuador, Jordan, Viet Nam, Nigeria and India. It is commissioned and funded by the German BMZ. It is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

2. How the Partnership Works

Mobility pathway: The PAM project positions itself to provide legal and safe pathways for the promotion of development-oriented migration. It operates by establishing regular pathways to Germany, through two different paths: apprenticeships and skilled employment.

Labor-market needs and matching: The pilots primarily target sectors such as electronics, metalworking, industrial mechanics and automotive mechatronics, with a particular focus on professions relevant to the green transition. The program pairs German companies and chambers with partner-country vocational centres. It connects employer demand to the vocational training pathway before mobility takes place. GIZ and the Federal Employment Agency (BA) facilitate a transparent selection process and direct employer matching with German companies.

Training and skilling: PAM focuses on strengthening local TVET systems and aligning them with international standards. It works to align vocational training qualifications in partner countries with the demands of private sectors, to facilitate qualification-recognition in Germany, and to develop technical training infrastructure in the partner country. In the Indian pilot, this includes additional technical “bridge courses” to ensure candidates’ skills meet German and international standards for the specific vacancies.

Preparatory and post-arrival phases: Candidates receive German language training and intercultural orientation as well as visa and qualification-recognition support before mobility. Post-arrival support includes assistance with arrival, accommodation and integration. Employers also receive guidance on available support measures on international recruitment, in terms of a modular structure depending on the needs of the employer and the partner country.

3. Scale and Reach

Piloting migration and mobility models between Germany and the partner countries, the project plans to include approximately 400 participants (apprentices and skilled workers), with at least 25% women. A verified figure for individual country track and enterprise belongs to Viet Nam. Accordingly, the first phase of the pilot with one vocational training school in Viet Nam (previously received support to provide ‘Germanstyle’ vocational training) resulted in the placement of 13 people in the mechatronics and electronics (Hooper, 2025).

4. Good-Practice Features

Employer-driven skills and matching: PAM connects employer demand to the vocational training process before mobility takes place, rather than only being involved in recruitment and/or placement phases. GIZ describes, for example, the Jordan model as being geared towards demand from German businesses and their actual trainee requirements rather than a theoretical training model (Raman and Spitz, 2025).	Strengthening TVET: PAM does not envisage a mechanism for basic recruitment of already trained workers. Working with TVET institutions in partner countries PAM improves the quality and international orientation of local vocational training, benefiting the local labour market in origin countries. In its earlier partnership with Viet Nam (2021-2024), the program modified an existing 18-month vocational training in metal processing in Viet Nam to align with the German qualifications system (Acosta, 2025).	Integration of green skills: In the Indian pilot, it is specifically linked to the Indo-German Green Skills Programme (IGGSP). This shows the potential to align mobility with the green transition by focusing on occupations in sustainable sectors.
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5. Challenges and Limitations

Relatively small scale: Although successful, the scale remains limited relative to Germany's overall labour shortages. Furthermore, given the PAM's comprehensive approach with an extensive preparation before mobility, this process requires relatively more resources and time than simpler recruitment methods. In fact, sustainability beyond project funding is not a challenge for PAM itself.

Complexity of skills alignment: Aligning curricula, professional standards and qualification-recognition procedures across different vocational education and training systems is a long-term process that requires ongoing institutional cooperation and coordination.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit PAM

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the PAM Project strongly illustrates:

- **Better alignment with labour-market realities:** Recruitment based on an official analysis to match employer needs with the qualified talents.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:** A well-managed recognition pathway which, in the origin countries, is supported by training that complies with international standards and the standards of the destination country, thereby facilitating the recognition process.
- **Providing comprehensive integration support:** A comprehensive support model, including language training, intercultural training, and assistance with administrative procedures both before and after arrival.

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HabiZu, “Handwerk bietet Zukunft” (Craftsmanship offers a Future)

1. The Initiative Overview

“Handwerk bietet Zukunft” (HabiZu) is a pilot project designed to connect qualified craft workers with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to address labour shortages in Germany’s craft sector. This project enabled qualified craftspeople from Bosnia and Herzegovina to have their professional qualifications recognised in Germany, to take part in German language and technical training, and to find employment in a German craft business. It is implemented by a consortium of public and private partners, including the Central Association of German Crafts (ZDH), the Chambers of Crafts, the Federal Employment Agency (BA/ZAV), and the participating employers. It is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action.

Implemented from 2020 to 2023, the project targeted workers particularly in sanitary, heating and climate technology, electronic/building services, and metal construction in the targeted German regions. It explicitly targeted workers who were unemployed at the time of application and whose period of unemployment had exceeded two years, thereby addressed Bosnian structural unemployment. The project had also a legal rationale, operating as a real-world test of the application of the new labour migration law, the Skilled Immigration Act, which came into force in 2020. As a pilot scheme, it served to identify the bottlenecks in the new legislation by using standard legal channels rather than fast-track procedures.

2. How the Partnership Works

Labour-market needs and matching:

The project focused on three specific occupations where there is a labour shortage in three specific German regions: (1) sanitary, heating, and air conditioning (Potsdam); (2) electronics for energy and building technology (Koblenz); and (3) metal construction (Munich/Upper Bavaria). Selection and recruitment took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina; eligibility prioritized those unemployed for more than two years.

Mobility pathway and modality: The project envisaged long-term integration into labour market rather than circularity. Participants enter Germany under the Skilled Immigration Act. Unlike many skills mobility partnerships struggling with visa delays, the Link4Skills field study (Ref to Link4Skills relevant study) reveals the facilitation of visa processing, without fast-track procedures, through the advance coordination with the German diplomatic mission in Bosnia, as there were no accelerated visa processes per se.

Pre-departure phase: The selection process includes a virtual or in-person selection process in Bosnia, followed by an intensive B1-level German language course in Sarajevo. Candidates receive monthly financial support for living costs. The process also involves applying for professional recognition, interviewing with employer and securing a job offer before departure. For departure, participants receive support with their visa applications and all required documentation.

Post-arrival phase: Adaptation training (Anpassungsqualifizierung) was a core component to bridge the mainly theoretical Bosnian vocational education with the practical part required by German craft employers. The adaptation training is workplace-based, mostly directly within the hosting company during everyday work with a rarely complemented by inter-company courses. The adaptation qualification (recognition) is highly individual, a tailored qualification plan. Before a company decides to enter into a contract with a skilled worker, it is informed about that worker's individual adaptation training plan. Also, to support integration process, further German language training up to B2 level, where needed, runs parallel to the technical adaptation.

3. Scale and Reach

The aim of the project was to recruit at least 120 qualified professionals from Bosnia and Herzegovina for the three specific above-mentioned occupational fields to integrate them into the German market for the long term. 588 specific inquiries were received by the employment agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany. Of these, 132 applicants were eligible meeting the criteria. Of the eligible applicants, 105 were invited to interviews, and as a result, a total of 40 individuals were accepted into the project and completed vocational qualifications across three targeted shortage trades (see Hohwieler, 2026).

4. Good-Practice Features

A SME-focused model: HabiZu was specifically designed to support SMEs, that lack the resources or limited capacity to recruit skilled workers internationally on their own.

Recognition linked directly to skills adaptation: Participants undertake individual adaptation qualification after arrival, combining theoretical knowledge with practical on-the-job training at a hosting company as well as inter-company courses if needed.

Local coordinator support: The participants were supported by designated contact persons at the Chamber of Skilled Crafts throughout their integration period. The support included the first few months at the company, finding accommodation and opening a bank or online account, as well as assistance to get German driving license.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Limited scale and low participation: Despite initial interest, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the scope of the project, and the actual number of participants was lower than planned during the design phase. In total, 40 participants benefited from the project. The Link4Skills field study (Hohwieler, 2026) also points to limited interest among potential employers and workers.

Long-term integration, but no reintegration component: The model offers great supports for integration at destination (in Germany) but has no specific reintegration supports for participants returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such its mutual-benefit potential is weak.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit HabiZu

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the HabiZu Project strongly illustrates:

- **Better alignment with labour-market realities:**
Recruitment in response to identified shortages in specific skilled trades and linked to concrete employer demand.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:**
Qualification recognition combined with language training, technical preparation and individual adaptation training.
- **Providing comprehensive integration support:**
Integration, designed not merely as a post-arrival add-on, but as a process that extends throughout the mobility pathway. It remained connected to skills development and workplace adaptation after arrival.

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The Triple Win Programme

1. The Initiative Overview

Triple Win is a programme for fair and sustainable recruitment of foreign nurses for the German healthcare and nursing sector. It is a structured G2G initiative. The Triple Win programme has been designed to respond to dual labour-market situation in which Germany has an acute shortage of nursing staff, while partner countries have a surplus of qualified nurses struggling to find suitable employment at their domestic market.

The Triple Win has been implemented jointly by the Central Placement Office for International and Specialist Workers (ZAV) of the German Federal Employment Agency (BA) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, German Society for International Cooperation) since 2013. The placement and recruitment are conducted on the basis of the agreements between German ZAV and the employment agencies in partner countries. Current partner (origin) countries are Philippines, Tunisia, Indonesia and India (states of Kerala and Telangana).

2. How the Partnership Works

Labour-market needs and matching:

The recruitment aims to address the shortage of nurses in Germany and is linked to the requirements of employers in the healthcare sector. The German BA identifies labour demand among participating hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities and facilitates the matching of employers with candidates. The employment agencies of the partner countries are closely involved in the process. They provide information to prospective applicants, publish job advertisements and support the application process. Selection interviews are conducted in the partner country for the purpose of ensuring that suitable candidates come to Germany (Berg, 2025).

Pre-departure phase: Candidates receive pre-departure German language training (up to level B1) and preparatory orientation. The orientation includes a one-day orientation course to prepare candidates for everyday life and work (administrative procedures) in Germany. German employers cover the expenses for the placement, the language course and trip to Germany.

Mobility pathway and modality:

The Triple Win provides a structured labour mobility pathway linking nurses from participating partner countries with German healthcare employers. The mobility is long-term and settlement oriented. The Programme applies for the labour-market approval and visa and initiates the recognition process by sending the necessary documents. The timeframes vary depending on the employer's requirements and the qualifications of the nursing staff at the time of selection. The Federal Employment Agency estimates that entry into the country typically takes place within 6-12 months (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-b).

Post-mobility phase: Post-mobility support is primarily integration-oriented and concerned with professional recognition rather than return and reintegration. The Triple Win supports onboarding, integration, language qualification up to B2, professional qualification through adaptation course or knowledge test until the issuance of the recognition certificate. Employers are responsible for workplace onboarding and integration. Care workers can continue German-language training up to B2 level.

3. Scale and Reach

As of 2026 – after 13 years of operation – the programme has placed more than 8,000 care workers and over 600 trainees from partner countries in over 400 health care and nursing facilities in Germany. In terms of physical arrivals, over 6,000 of them have already arrived in the country since 2013 (Berg, 2025).

4. Good-Practice Features

Ethical recruitment standards: It is widely recognized that the Triple Win incorporate fair, transparent and sustainable recruitment. It uses bilateral labour agreements to provide a regulated pathway for workers who seeks employment in Germany. The programme's design helps to avoid financial risks and hidden costs associated with recruitment and ensures that worker rights and fair wages are embedded.

Pre-mobility preparation: Language training and professional preparation are integrated into the pathway. Bridges between Germany and the nursing staff are built in the country of origin. Evaluation reports indicate high rates of employer satisfaction (Zanzuchi, 2025).

Integration beyond arrival: Whilst many initiatives focus solely on initial job placement, the Triple Win incorporates a range of design features aimed at supporting the long-term professional and social integration of nurses in Germany. Nurses can actually practice at their qualified level, thereby avoiding a likely brain waste. It provides support for relocation and qualification recognition services. Offering visa facilitation and pathways to permanent residency for those who wish to stay, the program ensures long-term integration rather than seasonal migration.

Institutionalized/sustainable infrastructure: Operational since 2013, unlike short-term pilot projects, the Triple Win has relatively institutionalized and therefore sustainable partnership model.

5. Challenges and Limitations:

The “Guest Worker” analogy: The Triple Win is well-organized with pre-departure preparation, trainings, contracts, and return plans. Critics argue (Grabowska and Boatemaa Setrana, 2026) that despite having well-organized structure, the program, at its core, still resembles a labour mobility scheme where migrants are invited to fill temporary labour gaps but their long-term societal inclusion is weak. Accordingly, a real development-focused corridor must differ from a modern guest worker scheme in terms of offering migrants opportunities to take control their own future. However, many skilled migration corridors today, including the Triple Win, face criticism pointing to the fact that migrants are not fully included into society and often expected to return home, without long-term rights or security.

Scale-demand balance: Although mostly regarded as a best practice for mobility schemes, the programme is still considered remaining relatively small-scale (over 8000 placements since 2013) compared to the demand in health sector in Germany. To meet the demand, it is estimated that Germany will need at least 150,000 additional nurses by 2040 (Berg, 2025).

Dependence on sustained institutional agreements: The government-to-government model depends on sustained institutional cooperation between public authorities in origin and destination countries. For cases where public institutions have limited capacity or institutional structure is limited, establishing such migration corridor may be more difficult.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit The Triple Win

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the Triple Win strongly illustrates:

- **Integration support:** Strong focus on pre-departure integration and orientation, and post-arrival integration.
- **Alignment with labour market realities:** Recruitment directly linked to labour demand.
- **Skill recognition:** Formal recognition of professional qualification.

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The Korean Employment Permit System (Korean EPS)

1. The Initiative Overview

The Korean Employment Permit System (EPS) is a G2G labour migration program for low-skilled foreign workers. It has been operational since 2004 and implemented through bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with 17 partner countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam). Originally designed as a temporary short-term rotation scheme (mandated return after three years), the EPS has evolved into a more flexible model for mid-to-long-term mobility. The system currently allows for long-term mobility for up to nearly ten years.

The Korean EPS is designed to fill labour shortages in low-skilled, labour-intensive industries. Small and medium-sized enterprises in South Korea are permitted to employ foreign workers through the E-9 visa program in five key sectors, which are manufacturing, construction, agriculture and livestock, fishery, and service industries.

2. How the Partnership Works

Labour-market needs and matching: The Korean EPS is a demand-driven system that allows Korean employers to recruit foreign workers when they are unable to fill vacancies through local recruitment. The system does not operate through unrestricted individual recruitment. It is a government-regulated corridor, where the Korean Foreign Workforce Policy Committee under the Prime Minister's Office sets an annual quota for each sector and for each country participating in the EPS. Employers who wish to hire foreign workers must first apply for domestic job seeker employment. If they are unable to recruit the desired domestic workforce, they apply for a foreign employment permit at the competent employment support center. Once an employer is found eligible, the employment center provides a shortlist of foreign jobseekers, and the employer selects a worker from this list. This creates a formal matching mechanism.

Pre-departure and post-arrival phase: Pre-departure preparation includes language preparation, health screening, employment matching, contractual arrangements and administrative preparation for migration. Participants receive basic training before arriving in Korea (EPS-TOPIK Korean-language test) and orientation on workplace rights, and contracts. Once a worker is selected from the official list, a standard labour contract is concluded. Following the issuance of an Employment Permit Certificate, the employer or agency obtains a visa issuance certificate from the Immigration Office under the Ministry of Justice. While pre-departure orientation is required, a 16-hour mandatory employment training also take place immediately upon arrival in Korea.

Mobility pathway and modality: EPS provides temporary labour mobility pathway. Foreign workers enter South Korea with a non-professional employment (E-9) visa. At the time of its design, the short-term rotation of migrant workers with a duration of stay limited to three years and with envisaged return was a priority. However, since the COVID pandemic, the policy has shifted away from the earlier requirement to return after three years towards a system allowing workers to remain for up to nearly ten years. Under the E-9 visa, workers can initially stay for up to five years, with the possibility of a further extension of almost five years. Moving towards a more flexible system, the current EPS also allows foreign workers change their visa status from a low-skilled (E-9 visa) to (semi-)skilled (E-7 visa) by passing a skills test, following optional vocational training and at least one year with the same employer.

Post-mobility phase: The EPS includes the “Happy Return Program”, which provides vocational training (e.g., welding, IT) and recruitment services to help those returning from Korea find jobs in Korean companies operating in their home countries. EPS centres in sending countries support returning workers by facilitating networks, organising briefings and events, and thereby providing guidance on skills utilisation, entrepreneurship, and reintegration opportunities. Also, Korean companies in the sending countries are encouraged to hire returning EPS workers (Huss, 2026). Furthermore, the “Sincere Worker” re-entry program (reformed in October 2021) facilitates circularity by offering an easier way to return to South Korea with a faster re-entry to the same employer. This program allows skilled workers to leave South Korea for only one month (reduced from three months) and, provided they have completed their full four years and ten months in the same sector, to return to the same employer and sector without having to retake the EPS-TOPIK exam.

3. Scale and Reach

As of January 2024, in 20 years of operation, the Korean EPS had registered 1.44 million workers and 370,000 businesses, with nearly 2.79 million employment permits issued cumulatively since the system’s established. In the Philippines–Korea corridor alone, more than 84,000 Filipino workers were deployed by August 2024 (see Huss, 2026).

4. Good-Practice Features

Exclusion of private intermediaries:

Through G2G arrangements, the EPS eliminated the high brokerage fees and corruption associated with its predecessor, the Industrial Trainee Scheme (ITS). Under the ITS, private recruitment agencies in the origin countries responsible for the selection of industrial trainees were frequently criticised for charging migrants high fees and for being involved in corruption (ILO, 2021; (Huss, 2026). In its place, the EPS has established a simplified and consolidated foreign labour admissions system and eliminate corruption by ensuring fair, transparent and ethical recruitment. Also, the EPS introduced a transparent cost limit, significantly reducing the financial burden on migrants compared to private recruitment channels.

Standardised employment and worker protection:

The EPS uses a standard employment contract and guarantees the same rights under national labour laws, such as minimum wage and insurance.

Flexibility in mobility duration and status conversion:

The extension of the E-9 visa to nearly ten years provides temporal flexibility for employers to keep experienced workers. Also, probable transition between E-9 (low-skilled) to E-7 visa (semi-skilled) provides status flexibility, together enabling a longer-term stay in Korea.

Digitalisation of recruitment and job matching:

The digital infrastructure of the EPS significantly increased the speed and transparency of the matching process. The system uses online platforms and multilingual digital tools for applications, job matching and services for migrant workers and employers. The ILO describes the EPS digital platform as a promising example of state-facilitated digital technology platform, highlighting its potential to increase transparency, efficiency, and reduce immigration costs (ILO, 2021).

5. Challenges and Limitations

Inefficient blind matching and de-skilling risk:

The stakeholder interviews conducted within the Link4Skills reveals that since the government handles matching without direct interaction between the employer and worker, the matching is assessed ineffective (Huss, 2026). In fact, the skills level of EPS workers exceeds the skills level necessary for the required tasks; this creates a risk for de-skilling.

Vulnerability due to employer-tied visas:

Migrant workers under the EPS are tied to their initial employer can create certain dependencies and vulnerabilities. For example, visa renewal, with a few exceptions, is contingent upon continuous employment at the same workplace; this highlights the dependence and vulnerability of EPS employees to their employers. Also, up to three voluntary employer changes can be requested with the employer's consent; this can create exploitative dependencies.

Low training participation for post-mobility:

In terms of re-integration support and as part of Happy Return Program, Korea's Human Resources Development (HRD) offers courses provided by several Korean vocational institutes in various areas. However, it is reported that very few workers, in practice, utilize the Sunday vocational courses because they often work extremely long hours, leaving little time for training (Huss, 2026).

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit The Korean EPS

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the Korean EPS strongly illustrates:

- **Introducing flexibility in mobility duration:**
Example of a shift from a three-year rotation to a long-term stay model (up to 10 years), allowing migrants and employers to establish stable, long-term relationships.
- **More comprehensive (re)integration support:**
Link the temporary migration cycle to local development of origin countries through the Happy Return Program.
- **Alignment with labour market realities:**
Highly responsive to destination country needs, specifically targeting the small businesses that face acute labour shortages.

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Digital Explorers – Iraq Edition

1. The Initiative Overview

The Digital Explorers - Iraq Edition is a mobility partnership designed to create an enabling environment for digital talent development and to build a strong skills enhancement between Lithuania and Iraq (including Kurdish Region of Iraq). It is an innovative version of the previous Digital Explorers programs, in response to the undocumented migration crisis of the early 2020s, driven by high youth unemployment. The initiative aims to provide safer livelihood alternatives through digital transformation and inclusion in the global workforce.

Funded by the EU through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), it was implemented by VšĮ OSMOS Global Partnerships (Lithuania). The initial run of the project took place between September 2023 and June 2025. This pilot phase focused on a six-month intensive remote training in data analytics provided by the Lithuanian EdTech startup to test virtual labour mobility. Due to the absence of diplomatic representation in Iraq and no streamlined Schengen visa processing arrangement, in-person engagement remained limited and a mobility component absent. It was based on three pillar structures, which are skills assessment and enhancement (through remote training), digital education (focusing on academic collaboration and curriculum enhancement) and G2G knowledge exchange (supporting policy dialogues and institutional capacity building in data governance field).

Following the conclusion of the first pilot, the second iteration (2025 onwards) was developed to build on its initial success. The 2025 iteration leverages the foundation to introduce physical mobility offering an Applied Informatics Master study programme in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University or relocation and soft-landing support. However, the assessment of the Handbook just focuses on its first iteration. The second iteration has recently started, and its implementation and outcomes are not yet sufficiently developed for assessment.

2. How the Partnership Works

Labour-market needs and matching:

The project focuses on the development of Iraq's emerging digital talent and the needs of ICT employers. It seeks to strengthen links between Iraqi and Lithuanian ICT sectors. In the project, due to structural reasons, skills development is associated with labour-market matching. The structural constraints forced the project to focus on virtual labor mobility, where skills development (remote data analytics training) was directly tied to matching participants with both local and remote employers.

Digital Education: This pillar focused on academic collaboration and curriculum enhancement at Iraqi higher education institutions such as Sulaimani Polytechnic University (SPU) and the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH).

Selection and Training: Following local needs and partnership landscape assessments with ten stakeholders, the Action Team in partnership with Five One Labs (Erbil-based) and Turing College (Vilnius-based) selected 20 young Iraqi data analysts for a six-months long skills development programme. The selection process, which followed a preliminary event in Erbil aimed at introducing the candidates, consisted of an assessment of technical skills and interviews. Within the first six months after the training, several program graduates were hired by companies like Toyota Iraq and the Centre for Applied Research and Development (Lithuania) as full-time employees and interns. One also had opportunity for promotion at work (Sirikupt et al., 2025b).

Knowledge exchanges: The partnership also incorporated entrepreneurship support and knowledge exchange between institutions. In collaboration with a local entrepreneurship support centre, Five One Labs, regular community events were organized in Baghdad, Erbil, and Sulaimaniyah, fostering strong connections among participants.

3. Scale and Reach

As part of the project, 20 young Iraqis benefitted from a six-month data analytics online course delivered in partnership with Lithuanian EdTech startup Turin College and a local entrepreneurship support hub Five One Labs, and 85% of them (17 participants) successfully completed the training.

4. Good-Practice Features

Applying digital mobility: Although relatively uncommon, it demonstrates the potential for “digital mobility”, that allows talent to connect with employers in destination country without physical relocation.

Academic and institutional alignment: A major success is the curriculum review and partnership between Lithuanian and Iraqi universities (Vytautas Magnus University and Sulaimani Polytechnic University), aimed at ensuring that local education meets international ICT standards.

Career Acceleration: The program facilitated career acceleration, based on the evidence of rapid employment and career progression following the training, including new full-time jobs and promotion.

G2G policy dialogue: The program created new space for dialogue. The knowledge exchange events served as a good introduction to Lithuania’s best practices in the field of public data management and laid the foundations for ongoing cooperation. Also, it facilitated field visits for Iraqi officials to Lithuania to study best practices and enabled the establishment of a wide-ranging network.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Visa and diplomatic bottlenecks: The absence of a Lithuanian diplomatic presence in Iraq was initially a primary constraint that made physical mobility impossible during the project’s first phase. However, this structural bottleneck, at the same time, served as the primary feature for the project’s defining good practice, which is the innovative way of labor mobility. The structural barriers transformed the project into a valuable example of flexible model with digital mobility.

Digital illiteracy: Despite the high potential of the tech sector, digital illiteracy remains a widespread problem in Iraq. It is reported that the level of digital literacy was estimated at nearly 82% of the population in 2023, and there is a significant geographical imbalance in digital skills between rural areas and urban centers (Sirikupt et al., 2025).

Mismatch between expectations and participant profiles: The program was initially designed on the assumption that most participants would be students eager to enter the data analytics field. However, it is still an emerging sector in Iraq, and many companies do not yet have dedicated data department or fully grasp its strategic importance. Thus, interest among students was lower than expected. Most of the applicants were experienced professionals seeking to broaden their skills rather than the ones entry-level positions.

Small Scale: Like many pilot projects, it remained small-scale, involving only 20 beneficiaries from Iraq.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit Digital Explorers – Iraq Edition

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the Digital Explorers – Iraq Edition strongly illustrates:

- **Incorporating digital and remote mobility:**
An example of using remote work as a flexible and cost-effective way for destination countries to access talent from origin countries when structural barriers to relocation persist. It could also help to retain talent even after participants return home.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:**
Improvement of mutual benefits by co-designing curricula and linking training directly to internationally recognized digital credentials valued in labour markets of destination country.

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Hand in Hand International Talents (HiH)

1. The Initiative Overview

Hand in Hand for International Talents (HiH) is a German pilot project designed to develop and test an integrated process for recruiting qualified workers from third countries into German enterprises. It brings companies and qualified professionals together since early 2020 (for some countries active rollout or cohort recruitments expanding into 2021 though). The project is currently active in India (with a focus on Kerala and Telangana), Brazil, and Vietnam (with the Philippines as an eventual partner). In Germany (as the destination), it is running for interested companies in the pilot regions of Rostock, Reutlingen, Lübeck, Düsseldorf and Erfurt.

It is an initiative jointly implemented by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and DIHK Service GmbH and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. It operates through close cooperation between regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry (IHKs) in Germany and Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs). HiH recruits skilled workers for IHK-certified companies in Germany in the following professional groups: electronics, metal working and mechatronics, IT and hotel and catering industry (chefs).

The second funding phase started in February 2024 and runs until the end of 2027.

2. How the Partnership Works

Labour-market needs and matching: The project prioritises occupations and sectors facing labour shortages, including electrical engineering, metalworking, mechatronics, IT, and hospitality/cookery professions. Two implementing organizations, DIHK Service GmbH and the German BA work hand in hand internationally to bring qualified professionals to Germany. Regional chambers and employment agencies attract interested companies and support them in integrating immigrant skilled workers into their company; AHKs support the applicant selection, the recognition process and the organization of linguistic and intercultural preparation in the project countries. Employers are directly involved in candidate selection. Suitable candidates are introduced to German companies through digital interviews. Participants are expected to hold a state-recognised vocational qualification and relevant work experience is an advantage.

Pre-departure phase: The project offers German-language training up to certified B1-level in the home country (also up to Level B2 after arrival); and supports the recognition of professional qualification and gives assistance with visa and entry.

Mobility pathway and modality: HiH provides long-term labour-mobility pathway. It connects foreign skilled workers and German companies (SMEs) via the Skilled Immigration Act. The project considers the entire process of skilled worker immigration, from recruitment in partner countries, contacting interested employers, moving through the process of qualification recognition and visa procedures, to the integration of skilled workers into the German workplace and society. The project is designed to follow the principles of fair migration. In this regard, project participation, job placement, and support services are free of charge; while the project covers B1 language training and exams, certificate recognition, visa applications, and document translation costs.

Post-arrival phase: HiH provides support in finding accommodation and bureaucratic procedures in Germany. Notably, if required, necessary professional qualification course to achieve full equivalence of the vocational qualification is provided. This indicates that recognition procedures run parallel to language acquisition and employment. As German professional qualifications differ from those in home country, it is possible to receive only partial recognition. In such case, workers complete "adaptation training" while already working and receiving a salary in Germany.

3. Scale and Reach

The project is still ongoing; the official website reports over 90 supported companies and 24 chambers of commerce involved in the project, with no specific participant figure. German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), with a reference to DIHK Service GmbH (2024), states that “in the HiH programme, 103 skilled workers from third countries were placed with companies in Germany during the first four-year pilot phase” (BAMF and EMN, 2025).

4. Good-Practice Features

Promoting inclusive mobility for medium-skilled cohorts: Link4Skills (Joshi et al., 2026) considers this promising because it opens migration opportunities to medium-skilled groups that have previously received less attention in skilled migration policies. Such a recent corridor increasingly shaped by recruitment of various migration sectors (occupations) opens avenues for skilling and migration across social hierarchies and socio-economic discrepancies and, thereby, prevents the reproduction of structural or regional inequalities. This inclusive reach is practically achieved through strategic workforce planning that extends state-led recruitment beyond traditional high-skilled STEM fields into vocational fields such as electronics, mechatronics and automation, metalworking, IT and hospitality and catering.

Integrated pathways linking skill development and migration: HiH serves as an example where recognition procedures run parallel to language acquisition, enabling candidates to progress toward full professional status while already embedded in employment or training contexts. Link4Skills (Joshi et al., 2026) associates this with shorter effective migration timelines, lower uncertainty for employers, and improved retention prospects.

Potential refugee labour pathways/leveraging existing infrastructure: The Link4Skills Inventory reveals an important fact that none of the 150+ mapped SMPs in the Inventory has specifically been addressed individuals with protection needs. Although HiH itself is not primarily a refugee mobility scheme, ICMPD identifies HiH among initiatives whose processes offer an opportunity to proactively reach displaced talent (Katsiaficas and Visuality, 2023). It describes the project (alongside THAMM and Triple Win nurses), as a pilot connecting foreign skilled workers with German SMEs via the Skilled Immigration Act and notes that its approach could be relevant for expanding labour pathways. Its existing framework offers ready-to-use, compatible recruitment, matching, and language preparation infrastructures. The existing recruitment and matching infrastructure can potentially be extended to displaced/refugee talent. Instead of building separate, costly refugee-only pathways from scratch, policymakers can introduce adaptations or flexibilities to proven frameworks like HiH. In this sense, HiH illustrates how an existing skilled-migration infrastructure could potentially be adapted to promote more inclusive participation and reach displaced talent.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Limited scale and resource intensity:

Like many pilot initiatives, HiH remains relatively small-scale compared with overall labour demand. While these programs offer attractive opportunities for its participants, they also require considerable institutional and financial resources which raises questions about the scalability and cost-effectiveness (Joshi et al., 2026).

- **Language barrier:** Language proficiency remains a significant bottleneck in the India–Germany mobility pathway. During Link4Skills field study (Joshi et al., 2026), stakeholders reported requirement for German-language preparation adds time and cost to the recruitment process. However, the number of candidates failing their final exams is steadily increasing; this situation causes many ‘talented’ individuals in the India–Germany corridor stranded between migration aspirations and labour-market realities.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit HiH

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the HiH Project strongly illustrates:

- **Promotion of more inclusive participation:** Its existing recruitment and matching infrastructure can potentially be extended to displaced/refugee talent.
- **Alignment with labour-market realities (Labour-market responsiveness):** Occupation/sector-specific recruitment aligned with workforce needs. By expanding recruitment of skilled worker to include vocational fields, HiH aligns migration with the most severe shortages in the technical and craft sectors.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:** An integrated recognition pathway in which recognition procedures run parallel to language acquisition and employment.

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The Global Skills Partnership Serving Talents in the Care Sector (GSP Soins)

1. The Initiative Overview

GSP Soins (Global Skills Partnership serving talents in the care sector) is an ongoing pilot project aiming to establish a sustainable and innovative mobility partnership between Belgium and Morocco in the care sector. It is an EU-funded initiative, funded through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF); and it is implemented by Enabel (the Belgian Development Agency), involving key national partners from Belgium and Morocco as well as private sector and international and diplomatic partners. It combines technical, language and soft-skills training, mobility preparation, and institutional capacity-building to create an ethical labour mobility pathway responding to labour market needs in both countries.

Running from October 2024 to June 2027, the project officially launched with a workshop in April 2025. Although it is an early-stage project, GSP Soins is included in this Handbook as an emerging/promising practice due to its design which adapts the Global Skill Partnership (GSP) model to a highly regulated, high-demand sector, i.e. care sector. The initiative follows the GSP model, which links skill development in the origin country with labour mobility and seeks mutual benefits rather than one-way recruitment. This approach does not regard Morocco as the sole source of the labour to address the labour shortage in Belgium; it seeks to strengthen Morocco's training and employment systems while creating opportunities for legal mobility to Belgium. In essence, it is a feasibility study illustrating how the "home and away" dual-track GSP model can be successfully applied to the healthcare and care sector.

Following the Triple Win program which represents a well-established Germany-centred model for health-sector recruitment, GSP Soins extends the GSP approach to a Belgium–Morocco corridor. It therefore illustrates the potential for adapting the model to different destination country contexts, rather than simply replicating established mobility pathways.

2. How the Partnership Works

Target sectors and partnership design: GSP Soins is structured around a participatory, co-design approach, unlike the traditional state-led programs where the rules, sectors, and quotas are set unilaterally by the destination state. GSP targets the highly demanded professionals in the personal care and healthcare sectors. Given the complexity of the healthcare sector and highly regulated nature of the related professions, the project initially focused on assessing under which conditions a mobility scheme in the care sector could be mutually beneficial for both countries and feasible within the existing legal framework on migration. So, the project uses consultative processes involving public and private stakeholders. For instance, a launch workshop, held in 2025 with the presence of a variety of stakeholders from public and private, included discussions of the challenges and opportunities related to healthcare and priorities to strengthen the partnership between the stakeholders. Experiences and lessons learned from previous mobility schemes were also shared.

Dual-track approach and skill development: The project applies “home” and “away” tracks of the GSP model. The mobility pathway is designed to upgrade local Moroccan care infrastructures, facilitate regular mobility in accordance with ethical principles, and successfully integrate Moroccan care talents into Belgium’s regional labor markets. GSP Soins aims to train 185 Moroccan participants in total. At least 65 talents will be offered a work opportunity and support in relocating to Belgium (the “away track”), following language, cultural, and technical preparations; the remaining participants who do not migrate, will directly be inserted into Morocco’s domestic care and health sectors to increase local human capital (the “home track”).

Mapping for preparation and mobility: Specific training (technical, soft-skills and language) courses, logistical support and orientation will be organized to provide participants reliable information on mobility and to assist them in successfully integrating into the country. Because care professions are highly regulated, the partnership requires addressing professional requirements, skills and qualification recognition, training standards and the legal conditions for labour-market entry. So, the project design includes an assessment of the legal and administrative, ethical, financial and operational feasibility to the target sector.

3. Scale and Reach

The project aims to support 185 Moroccan participants in their national or international career plans and provide them with technical, soft-skills and language training. It also aims to support at least 65 of them in relocating to Belgium to take up employment opportunities.

4. Good-Practice Features

Adapting the GSP model to a highly regulated sector: Although it is still an early stage of its implementation, GSP Soins is important to examine how skills development and mobility can work in a sector characterized by professional regulation, qualification requirements and substantial workforce shortages. Through traditional labour migration, migrant care workers to enter a regulated profession in a destination country must struggle with complex procedures which could also lead to de-skilling or brain waste. Regardless of its eventual success, GSP Soins offers a good practice example of an integrated and coordinated pathway design, providing a useful model for testing how such an architecture can work in a highly regulated sector.

Designing for mutual benefits and balancing skills needs across the corridor: As Link4Skills stresses (Triandafyllidou et al, 2024), the development and functioning of migration skill corridors are shaped by institutional structures, migration infrastructures, and migration management regimes at both ends of the corridor. GSP Soins, in its design, goes beyond a one-sided labour recruitment approach to cover the labour shortage in the destination country in favour of an intentionally designed, reciprocal framework. The project aims both to respond Belgium's care sector labour needs and strengthen Morocco's training and employment infrastructure.

Mitigating brain drain: By applying "home and away" dual-track GSP model to the health-care and care sector, GSP Soins addresses the critical ethical challenge of skilled migration, which is the brain drain. Rather than just acquiring talent (brain drain), the project ensures that destination countries can upgrade origin-country local training infrastructure while ethically filling their own demographic gaps by recruiting foreign labor force.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Emerging practice rather than established model: The project is still under development, the current analysis primarily concerns program design, stakeholder consultation and feasibility; the outcomes are not yet available. It is therefore presented as a promising model from which early design lessons can be drawn, rather than as a proven success. Its value can be seen as an experimental blueprint for the EU's broader Talent Partnerships; but the project's long-term scalability, cost-effectiveness, and regional certification processes remain to be empirically proven.

- **Highly regulated sector:** Healthcare sector is subject to complex professional and qualification requirements. For this reason, the project may face a more challenging regulatory environment than mobility schemes targeting less regulated occupations.

- **Limited evidence on (re)integration:**
- The project is still at an early stage
- and there is not sufficient operational
- evidence to assess how post-arrival
- integration in Belgium or, if so, reinte-
- gration in Morocco will be supported
- in practice.

Strategic Alignment for Mutual Benefit GSP Soins

In terms of strengthening the mutual benefits of labour mobility, the GSP Soins strongly illustrates:

- **Better labour-market alignment:** A participatory design focused on care sector needs in both Belgium and Morocco, illustrating how a partnership can proactively respond to structural labour shortages and build a mutually responsive, binational talent corridor rather than relying on ad hoc recruitment.
- **Enhancing skills development and recognition:** A model for skills development and recognition by strengthening Morocco's training system while aligning skills with the requirements in Belgian healthcare.

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III. CONCLUSION: Synthesis of Findings

The cases collectively demonstrate what makes a skills mobility partnership more mutually beneficial, while also showing that no single case performs equally well across all dimensions. The lessons learned, good practices, and ongoing challenges are organized below around four synthesis findings.

1. A paradigm shift in international labour mobility and partnership architecture

A synthesis of the findings across the selected case studies reveals a shift in international labour mobility from traditional temporary labour migration programs to extending well beyond the matching of workers with vacancies. Migration skills corridors and skills mobility partnerships are prone to establish cross-border skills and mobility ecosystem. Rather than relying on static, existing domestic labour pool, the architecture of these partnerships facilitates human capital development for both domestic and international markets, either by investing in the vocational education and training systems of the origin countries or by co-designing training programs that match the specific labour demands of destination countries.

2. Skills development, matching and recognition pathways for sustainable mobility

Across the cases, skills are regarded as a fundamental mechanism by which mobility can create mutual benefits. Adaption and recognition of existing qualifications is important to ensure that skills can be transferred across borders. The failure to recognize qualifications obtained abroad is one of the main causes of “brain waste” and leaving skilled professionals underemployment. The case studies highlight a variety of solutions to this bottleneck. For instance, in HiH, recognition procedures run parallel to language acquisition; to some extent in similar way, Triple Win integrates language preparation with the recognition pathway across the pre- and post-arrival stages. Korean EPS completely bypasses formal skills recognition because it targets low-skilled workers; instead, it relies on pre-departure language exam and basic pre-departure trainings on workplace expectations.

3. Addressing different stages of mobility - Ensuring the whole migration cycle

The cases indicate considerable variation in how partnerships address the different stages of mobility. Triple Win and THAMM programs employ a 360-degree model to cover the migration cycle. Korean EPS uses time-bound stays and circularity as active policy instruments. The Digital Explorers (Iraq Edition) effectively tested a “mobility alternative”, bypassing physical relocation by delivering intensive online training; therefore, it challenges the traditional assumption that skills mobility occurs through physical relocation.

Still, ensuring the whole migration cycle remains a persistent weakness in the partnership architecture, with regard to return, reintegration support and the operationalization of circular mobility. This is not surprising, given that the Link4Skills Inventory highlights that only 42% of mapped SMPs explicitly include integration support, often limited strictly to basic pre-departure language training; and that reintegration support is specified in only 17% of mapped SMPs. Parallel to this, among the selected cases, very few utilize reintegration and/or circularity, but in limited context. In THAMM Plus, an advanced model though, return and reintegration aspects are present to varying degrees across individual schemes rather than uniformly across the broader programme. Furthermore, although its fundamental design explicitly incorporates elements and objectives of circular migration, concrete examples of circular migration in practice remain quite limited. Korean EPS implements a mandatory rotation system supported by the “Happy Return Programme”; however, in practice, its impact is limited due to long working hours, very few workers have time to participate in the program.

4. Least developed dimension: Scale of initiatives and addressing displaced talent

The cases also highlight an important gap. While SMPs aspire to support more balanced and equitable global talent channels, comparative findings display the small scale of these initiatives and at times also the significant investment into these schemes that does not translate into stronger uptake. In addition, the reviewed cases ignore the potential of displaced skilled workers. The cases demonstrate such inclusion has not yet become systematically embedded across the existing skills-mobility landscape. HiH may serve as a good example though, highlighting the potential to expand skilled labour mobility for individuals in need of international protection.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Map the migration corridor before the recruitment target

- Identify the labour market and skills needs of both parties (origin and destination) before designing a mobility pathway and assess and map existing legal migration pathways before designing skills curricula or setting recruitment targets.

Mapping existing legal pathways for mobility and aligning the stages of mobility with the actual visa procedures and entry requirements along the bilateral migration route ensures that skills are effectively translated into mobility opportunities.

2. Institutionalize collaborative design and cut down red tape

- Embed a multi-party policy dialogue into the SMP design, where origin and destination countries jointly design migration schemes and, social partners (including trade unions, employers' organizations, and civil society) and migrants are formally integrated to ensure pathway designs reflect the actual realities.
- Collaborate with authorities at origin and destination to cut down red-tape and streamline administrative processes (e.g. visas, skills recognition, housing and registration with local authorities)

Incorporating a multi-party policy dialogue into the design of a SMP help to transform the initiative from a one-sided and top-down recruitment mechanism into a resilient, co-governed, and equitable transnational infrastructure.

3. Incorporate skill development into the mobility pathway

- Consider skills development not just as a prerequisite for migration, but as a fundamental component of mobility.

Training may include skills development before departure, vocational training, language preparation, adaptation after arrival, or continuous learning in the workplace. Wherever possible, the technical and vocational skills developed for the purpose of mobility should be designed to benefit the country of origin for domestic human capital formation as well. Rather than functioning as traditional recruitment of already-qualified workers, SMPs should serve as catalysts for broader human capital development.

4. Address skill recognition into the pathway from the outset

- Frame qualification recognition beyond a standard bureaucratic or technical task and incorporate it into the mobility pathway from the very beginning.

Partnerships should identify differences between the qualification systems of the origin and destination countries at an early stage and establish realistic pathways for recognition or additional training. It is important to prevent “brain waste” and underemployment. Running qualification recognition in parallel with pre-departure language acquisition and workplace matching will also help reducing uncertainty and shorten the migration timeline. Flexible legal frameworks that allow qualification recognition link practical on-the-job training can also be beneficial.

5. Create a whole mobility cycle design

- Integrate soft and hard skills training and qualification recognition, support workplace and destination country integration and, where relevant, formulate return/reintegration from the outset.

Language preparation, recognition, workplace integration and post-mobility support are integral parts of a successful and mutually beneficial mobility pathway. Flexible duration of stay to strike balance circularity goals and retaining talent can also be complimentary in designing circularity. Reintegration, if relevant, should also be an integral part of the mobility cycle from the very beginning. Pre-return guidance, entrepreneurship mentoring, and job-matching initiatives with local firms or international companies in the origin country can help ensure that skills acquired abroad are also utilized at the local level.

6. Incorporate intersectional inclusion into the design from the outset

- Make inclusion of disadvantaged groups like women, youth and displaced talent, a core design principle from the outset, rather than an issue addressed later in implementation.

During the design phase, gender, age, socioeconomic barriers, and, specifically as the most neglected groups, disabled, displaced or refugee talents should be taken into account. Inclusive participation is not only about who is recruited, but also about who has access to training, recognition, and mobility opportunities.

About the Link4Skills project

Link4Skills is an EU-funded research and project addressing the global challenge of skill shortages and mismatches through innovative, sustainable solutions that foster fair skill utilization and exchange across continents.

Focusing on Europe, Africa, Asia, and America, the project seeks to bridge the gap between skill supply and demand by facilitating re/up-skilling, promoting automation, and encouraging migration as policy options.

Link4Skills is creating an inclusive, participatory policy decision-making environment by integrating a diverse range of stakeholders, including EU decision-makers, inter-governmental institutions, national and subnational decision-makers, employers organizations, employees organizations, and civic society co-development institutions.

Project Coordinator: Professor Izabela Grabowski

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This document is available for download at <http://link4skills.eu>

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