



MATCH

HIRING AFRICAN TALENTS



MAKING SKILLS MOBILITY PARTNERSHIPS FAIR, EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE: THE PERSPECTIVE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN EUROPE AND IN AFRICA



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Introduction

The [MATCH project](#) is a 39-month initiative funded by the European Union (EU) that seeks to pilot an innovative labour and skills mobility scheme between four EU member states and two African countries. Launched in January 2020, this project enabled qualified talents from Nigeria and Senegal to complete a job placement in companies in Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands where specific sectorial labour shortages were identified, primarily within the information and communication technology and digitalisation sectors. The project has developed a flexible model that meets the needs of the companies, but which also contributes to the transfer of skills and technical know-how between Europe and Africa. Following a profile screening, talents were matched with said companies. Talents did benefit from trainings to upscale their skills and increase their employability upon return to their home countries. In an effort to empower women and mainstream gender considerations, the project targeted an indicative share of 30% female beneficiaries.

In the framework of the project, meetings with key stakeholders were organised on an annual basis in all the participating countries. The objective of these so-called stakeholders' meetings was to bring the different actors from the public and private sectors involved in labour mobility around the table, keep them abreast of the implementation of the project, share updated information on national strategies regarding labour migration in the sending and receiving countries involved, and discuss with them the different aspects of skills mobility partnerships (SMPs) and potential for future cooperation. In total, 13 stakeholders' meetings (hybrid and online events) took place throughout the duration of the project, involving well over 200 participants from different horizons.¹ Although the format and the number and type of participants varied from one country to another, consultations included representatives of relevant ministries and administrations, as well as social partners, employers' organizations, such as sector federations and chambers of commerce, private recruiters, tech hubs, and migrants' organisations.

The present report provides a bird's-eye view of the main challenges identified and recommendations formulated for future skills mobility partnerships by domestic stakeholders in the six countries participating to the MATCH (Migration of African Talents through Capacity building and Hiring) project.

It summarises the outcome of the stakeholders' meetings from a thematic perspective and covers the following points:

- A background description of the economic and social context in destination and source countries.
- A presentation of innovative mobility initiatives for overcoming skills shortages in destination countries.
- An overview of the key ingredients to make future SMPs effective, fair and sustainable.

¹ In Luxembourg, due to the lack of support from the Luxembourgish authorities and the withdrawal of the national implementing partner (IMS) from the project, there was an early termination of stakeholder engagement activities as of March 2021.

I. Background

The **evolution of the labour market and skills shortages** in Europe are affected by broader policy priorities linked to digitalisation and the [EU's](#) climate-neutral future², as well as by overarching demographic developments. The European population is ageing, as confirmed by the interactive "[Demography of Europe](#)" 2022 edition³. Looking at the 2001–2021 timespan, the share of those aged 80+ almost doubled to 6% of the total population, while the number of people aged 20 to 64 years decreased from 61% in 2001 to 58.9% in 2021. Besides, the natural population change in the EU has been negative since 2014, and the trend is set to continue. For the last six years, respondents to Eurochambres Economic Survey (an annual business survey gathering input from about 55 000 businesses across Europe) have been indicating the lack of skilled workforce as one of the five top challenges that they are facing, and this challenge persisted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, despite lower employment prospects. As the economy is set to recover, albeit at a slower pace than anticipated in early 2022, the challenge for businesses of finding staff with the right skills is likely to increase in the coming years. Against this background, the activation of the domestic labour force through increase of productivity and upskilling remain the preferred options of governments in MATCH destination countries. Nevertheless, studies demonstrate that the activation of the domestic labour force will not be enough in certain key sectors. As demonstrated by the European Commission in its April 2022 Communication on "[Attracting Skills and Talents to the EU](#)", labour mobility is part of the solution to address labour shortages and European economic growth. More specifically:

- According to a [prospective analysis](#) of the workforce challenges in the coming decade and the impact of digitalisation on the Belgian labour market published by Agoria in 2019, **Belgium** is facing a massive and structural lack of workforce in all economic sectors. Whilst efforts are made to reactivate 193 000 domestic workers by 2030, major workforce gaps will remain due to the ageing population and to structural changes in the skills required. Unless the Belgian government takes action, digitalisation and economic dynamics will result in 584 000 unfilled posts in 2030. In Belgium, employment questions are dealt with at regional level, and in all three federal regions (Brussels-Capital, Flanders, and Wallonia), labour migration is seen as one of the solutions and, according to Agoria, the recruitment of third-country nationals could fill up 29 000 vacancies by 2030. In particular, Flanders and the Brussel-Capital Region are also investing in attracting highly qualified professionals from third countries, particularly in the ICT, energy and health sectors. More recently, these regions have also deployed efforts to attract low- and middle-skilled work force for bottleneck professions, particularly in the hospitality, infrastructure, the construction and agri-food industry.
- **Italy** is confronted with an ageing population and skills/labour shortages. Based on the [Excelsior survey](#) results from 2021, implemented by Unioncamere, the pandemic impacted drastically the national economy, leaving the labour market in a dire condition. Demand for ICT specialists has grown exponentially over the past years, and this trend has amplified with the pandemic. Against the background of a subdued employment climate, the skills mismatch grew and in particular with regards to technical profiles and specialized employees. The situation will worsen with the economic recovery, which requires a fast identification and employment of labour force for which there is a

² See also, [The Just Transition Mechanism \(europa.eu\)](#) which is a key tool to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind. It provides targeted support to help mobilize around €55 billion over the period 2021-2027 in the most affected regions, to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the transition.

³ See also European Commission, [The Impact of Demographic Change in a Changing Environment](#), 2023.

structural labour shortage. According to the [Excelsior survey 2022](#), it will be difficult to complete one third of future recruitments and up to 63% in digital profiles in Italy from 2022 onward. As for the skills that will be required in the next five years, 60% will be focused on the green economy, sustainability, energy and transversal, including digital skills. Italian national authorities, and in particular the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, are aware of the need for international talents in different sectors to fill the labour shortages and skills gaps in Italy. Yet, while efforts are ongoing to streamline and simplify entry procedures, the main legal instrument governing labour migration remains the so-called “Decreto Flussi”, a decree on the annual immigration quota for work visas for third-country nationals (TCN) who may enter Italy for employment, self-employment and seasonal work.

- The **Dutch** labour market has suffered from increasing labour shortages since 2017, with the hospitality, service and construction sectors as the most impacted sectors due to a lack of technical/middle-skilled staff. Between 2010 and 2020, the recruitment of highly skilled international talents has increased more than 85% in the Netherlands, and there are over 768 000 international labour migrants working in the country.⁴ Dutch migration policy recognises the country’s aging population and supports labour migration of TCN to different extents depending on the skills level. Permanent labour migration for highly skilled TCN is encouraged by an effective policy framework and number of new initiatives of the government to attract and retain talent. However, the policy framework is much more restrictive in terms of circular migration: stakeholders from the private sector consulted within the framework of the project considered that the association of circular migration with economic growth is less evident. Moreover, public stakeholders in all MATCH destination countries reiterated that the mobility of low- and middle-skilled labour is highly sensitive, perhaps even more than of highly skilled labour. Accordingly, while the increasing international recruitment trend is set to continue in the future, various stakeholders believe that the solutions to labour shortages in the Netherlands can be found within Europe through upskilling, reskilling and employing existing talent pools within the Netherlands or from the wider EU region.
- In **Luxembourg**, in January 2022, 80.8% of the foreign population were citizens of another EU Member State, and 19.2% third-country nationals (TCN).⁵ The overwhelming majority of total job openings (including replacements for vacated jobs) until 2030 will be for high- and medium-level qualification. In the same way, the trades and professions recording the greatest labour shortage are often highly skilled, such as computer engineers or legal experts, along with craft sector trades, such as butchers or electricians.⁶ Importantly, Luxembourg does not have a specific policy, strategic document or model in place that only focusses on TCN. All political documents and public measures are aimed at all foreign nationals without distinction between EU nationals and TCN, including the multi-annual national action plan on integration (PAN Integration) that was approved by the government in 2017. In terms of labour migration policy, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent reduction in employment figures in Luxembourg prompted the government to implement new legislation on new recruitments: when recruiting, the employer

⁴ <https://decisio.nl/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-monitor-internationals-landelijk-mei-2022.pdf>

⁵ https://emnluxembourg.uni.lu/wp-content/uploads/sites/225/2022/06/Annual-Report-on-Migration-and-Asylum-2021_EN.pdf

⁶ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/countries/luxembourg>; <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/luxembourg-sectoral-studies-skills-anticipation>

must prioritise hiring specific categories of employees or former employees who correspond to the required profile. In other words, an employer who wishes to recruit new employees must give (re)hiring priority to the following former employees when they correspond to the required profile (education, skills and experience). An employee dismissed for economic reasons enters in this category. There are no plans in Luxembourg to change the migration policy currently in place.

Developing effective legal migration pathways will require robust information campaigns to inform would-be migrants about the potential benefits of migrating to EU countries (in particular when it comes to strong social and welfare systems including education and health care). Reforms are also needed to fasten the immigration procedures and to **make EU countries more attractive** as countries of destination for foreign talents. Today, countries like Canada and the United States remain the preferred destination for qualified talents and EU countries are poorly positioned in the race for global talents. Nevertheless, promoting legal migration remains difficult in most EU countries at times of political tensions associated with migration and job shortages observed throughout the implementation of the project, making it even more difficult to promote a circular migration scheme like MATCH. Although employers consulted during the MATCH project mentioned consistently that they are aware that they will increasingly need to recruit foreign talents to overcome their workforce gap, many companies are reluctant to do so as the legal and administrative procedures are lengthy, complex and costly. As the on-boarding and retention of foreign talents require robust investments, these employers mentioned that they are reluctant to recruit through projects which promote circular migration as talents would have to reintegrate their home countries at the end of the posting period. Within the specific context of the MATCH project, employers acknowledged that the business sector had overall a negative perception of African talents which is was an additional obstacle in the final completion of recruitments. Countries like Nigeria and Senegal are often associated to vulnerable migration along the Mediterranean route, and highly qualified labour migration from these countries is often not taken into consideration. Despite intensive awareness raising and preparation within the framework of the project, employers tend to have a negative perception of the African labour force. Further to this misconception, there is a general lack of awareness about the quality of the talent pool in sub-Saharan Africa. In general, employers involved in the MATCH project acknowledged that European companies often show a preference for talent pools in other parts of the world (Turkey, Morocco, Philippines, India, the United States, or Brazil for instance), whom they are more familiar with and who are perceived as having similar working cultures and a better potential for integrating into the working culture of companies.

On the African side, both **Nigeria and Senegal** witness high rates of annual population growth (over 2.4% and over 2.6% respectively). According to the information provided respectively by the Public Employment Agency (ANPEJ) in Senegal and by the Federal Ministry for Labour and Employment in Nigeria, both countries are not in the position to absorb the labour force that enters the labour market each year, leading to high unemployment levels as well as migration movements among the skilled and unskilled population, very often through irregular routes. Accordingly, in both Senegal and Nigeria, public authorities are interested in having well-managed migration schemes but also share **concerns about “brain drain” and the exploitation of migrants** in the countries of destination.

- In **Nigeria**, the government has set up some structures and operational mechanisms to effectively manage labour migration such as the National Electronic Labour Exchange (NELEX), an online platform that seeks to provide accurate information for job matching, labour market information/statistics, and regulation of job offers by employers and private employment agencies.

In addition, Migrants Resource Centres provide domestic job seekers, potential labour migrants, and returnees with information on safe migration and employment. A “Recruiters’ License” regime for private employment agencies has been designed to promote fair recruitment and the protection of migrant workers. The government has furthermore developed and adopted the National Policy on Labour Migration to promote good governance of labour migration, protect migrant workers and promote their welfare.

- In **Senegal**, the government developed its “Plan Sénégal Emergent” (PSE) that covers the period 2015-2035 and is the country’s economic and social policy reference document. It integrates the national sustainable development targets and deals with migration questions. Senegal has a longstanding migration tradition, and the Senegalese diaspora is considered as an essential development actor of the country. The government is interested in skills transfers, thereby inciting the Senegalese diaspora to return and contribute to the country’s socio-economic development. The diaspora is considered as the 15th region of Senegal and the mobilisation of the Senegalese diaspora is a crucial element of the government’s strategic and operational action plan. It is to be noted that the adoption of a national strategy on labour migration has been severely delayed due to the general elections held in 2022. Nevertheless, Senegal has been implementing a series of labour migration initiatives with countries like Canada, Qatar, and Spain for several years and the institutions have a solid expertise in sourcing talents for employment abroad.

In both countries, the paucity of funds, the poor data record keeping, the lack of internal inter-sectoral coordination amongst different ministries and relevant public institutions – such as the social security agency -, as well as the general absence of a labour market information system make it very difficult for public authorities to assess the domestic labour market and skills potentials, and to effectively match labour demand with the skills available. There is a need for **building capacity** to improve the sourcing of talents to effectively manage labour migration (including the legal framework related to private recruiters, skills forecasting tools, the pre-departure orientation of prospective migrants and the operational framework to support migrants logistically) as well as managing domestic labour market needs with the involvement of different public (like public employment agencies) and private stakeholders (including employers’ organisations).

II. Innovative mobility initiatives for overcoming skills shortages: the IOM model of skills mobility partnerships (SMPs)

Legal migration pathways and labour migration have come at the centre of the policy debate on migration in the European Union. Increasing labour shortages in the EU labour market, the risks of labour exploitation and human rights abuses linked to irregular migration, and the complex legal framework of labour mobility to the EU Member States, are some of the underlying reasons that were discussed within the framework of the annual stakeholders’ meetings. Overall, there was a consensus amongst the stakeholders in Europe and Africa for the need to move forward with a more balanced and holistic approach to labour migration management and several initiatives and models were discussed during the meetings, including the EU Talent Partnerships and the IOM Skills Mobility Partnerships.

The [Talent Partnerships](#) are an initiative described by the European Commission in the Communication on attracting skills and talents of April 2022, which was released as part of the New [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#). This initiative aims at help addressing skills shortages in the EU while strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships on migration with third countries. To achieve this goal, the cross regional cooperation in the field of labour migration should be strengthened and an EU-wide framework for sustainable labour and skills mobility should be developed. Building on the lessons learnt from pilot projects, such as the MATCH project, the European Commission will put forward a number of tailor-made Talent Partnerships with specific key countries (most of them located in Northern Africa and the EU Neighbourhood region) in cooperation with interested Member States and other stakeholders. Although the concept still needs to be fully operationalised, the participants of the MATCH stakeholders' meetings identified the Talent Partnerships as an encouraging prospect which will shape the EU's transition from pilot projects on labour migration to more structured and sustainable pathways.

A useful model that could help operationalise the Talent Partnerships and that was discussed in detail during the stakeholders' meetings is that of [Skills Mobility Partnerships \(SMPs\)](#), which was developed by IOM to place skills development at the heart of mutually beneficial labour mobility pathways for countries of origin and destination. Rooted in Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8 and 10 and expressly called for in Objective 18 of the Global Compact for Migration, SMPs are a flexible tool with a list of key ingredients and pre-requisites that can be included and tailor-made to the specific needs of the employers and the talents, as well as to the context of the participating countries.

The SMP model relies on formalised bilateral (or regional) interstate cooperation and focuses on multi-sided and multi-stakeholder partnerships between labour migration entities in origin and destination countries. Importantly, it also places the **skills development at the heart of the mobility schemes**. The SMP approach benefits talents as they gain skills thanks to trainings and work experiences in different countries. In practice, the training component might take different modalities: some stakeholders will ask for on-the-job training in the country of destination, while others will prefer pre-employment trainings in the countries of origin. In addition, a strong engagement with the private sector, including employers, from the outset of the scheme, is key to ensure appropriate skills matching. Broader onboarding strategies and social inclusion policies, including through pre-employment training programmes targeting both employers and prospective migrant workers, foster the successful integration of the migrant worker among the workforce in the destination country.

SMPs can strongly contribute to the development of countries of origin as well as to the economic growth of countries of destination and embody the meaning of orderly management of migration for the benefit of all⁷:

- For countries of origin, labour mobility represents an effective avenue for easing unemployment pressures in the local economy, contributing to the migrant workers' upskilling and improvement of career prospects, and potentially supporting domestic development through remittances, capacity building and potential foreign investment made by the companies involved. Additionally, upon return to countries of origin, migrant workers can also play an important role through the transfer of acquired knowledge as they bring back skills, experience and entrepreneurship abilities. Sustainable return and reintegration policies must be implemented in order to avoid that skills and

⁷See Global Center for Development and World Bank, "[A Global Skill Partnership in Information, Communications, and Technology \(ICT\) between Nigeria and Europe](#)", June 2021; World Bank, "[Expanding Legal Pathways from Nigeria to Europe: From Brain Drain to Brain Gain](#)", 2021; MPI, "[What We Know About Circular Migration and Enhanced Mobility](#)", 2007.

experienced acquired in the destination country end up not being transferable to employment in the country of origin.

- From the perspective of countries of destination, SMPs are part of a broader strategy to address structural labour shortages. SMPs consider all skills levels and focus on promoting mutually beneficial labour migration pathways.

During the presentations made at the stakeholders' meetings, it was acknowledged that, reflecting on the outcome of the MATCH project, there is a need for a more structural approach to skills mobility partnerships beyond specific projects. The need to take a more operational approach tailor made to specific economic contexts was also raised multiple times and the key recommendations are discussed in the next paragraph.

III. The operationalisation of SMPs: some lessons learned from the MATCH project

With view to the structural labour shortages that companies in the participating EU countries are facing, the European stakeholders of the MATCH project called for the development of comprehensive policies and legal frameworks that would tackle these structural workforce challenges. From the African stakeholders' perspective, the SMPs should be more balanced and take into consideration their development needs. During their discussions, the stakeholders acknowledged diverging views and identified a series of possible solutions to the challenges they face. These solutions should be addressed *inter alia* through the essential components of successful SPMs listed below.

3.1. Enhancing skills anticipation in countries of origin and destination

To address possible skills mismatches between African talents and European employers, future SMPs should include an **inception phase with a detailed ex-ante analysis of the quality of the labour supply in countries of origin** including consideration for respective skill shortages. This phase should be complemented with respective national labour market assessments in countries of destination to better match available skills with labour market gaps. All stakeholders acknowledged the need for enhancing the knowledge base regarding sectoral and occupational shortages at national and regional levels, including through more reliable forecasting systems. **Consulting private recruiters and employers' organisations** at an early stage of the process is essential to design SMPs in a demand-driven and market-responsive manner based on clearly identified needs and priorities. Besides, clear labour mobility strategies and implementation mechanisms should facilitate the process from the identification of the initial labour/skills need over the identification of the adequate talent and the mobility process to the onboarding in the hosting company.

To ensure that labour mobility schemes are beneficial to both countries of destination and countries of origin, **data management information systems and foresight analysis tools** should be set up and/or further developed in countries of origin with the support of EU experts. Reflecting upon the lessons learned in the MATCH project, the role of Public Employment Services in building capacities in the origin and destination countries should be further promoted. Closer cooperation between EU and African educational and training institutions should be fostered with the objective of enhancing the training capacities of the

African counterparts. Skills forecasting should also be integrated into the mechanisms to allow public authorities to gain an insight into future labour market trends. To ensure that sustainable development is fostered and its benefits are seized by all partners, it is crucial to target sectors common sectors where labour shortages have been identified. Data management also needs to be improved by means of an increased interoperability of the different databases and better analytical capacities of public authorities in charge of managing these databases.

In the meantime (the sourcing of talents could be improved and diversified by using a **web of human resources and recruitment service providers** including private recruiters (under the condition that ethical recruitment takes place and that migrant workers labour and human rights are protected along the migration processes) as well as specialised service providers that could support with the testing of specific professional qualifications and skills.

3.2. Raising awareness about SMPs and the potential of African talent pools

In general terms, smaller and medium sized European employers consulted within the framework of the project were not familiar with the option and aware of the potential of international recruitment as a way to fulfil their labour shortages. In addition, the practical aspects and the administrative and legal framework of the recruitment of TCN are quite unclear and/or unknown for these companies, including in particular SMEs, and only a few of them have a diversity and inclusion policy in place. Employers' organisations and public employment agencies which partnered with the MATCH project are just now starting to explore and promote the possibility of labour migration, although still to a limited extent and very often in the context of specific projects only.

It is therefore important to invest in **continuous awareness raising efforts towards the private sector** in order to stimulate the companies' interest in SMPs as well their familiarity with the practical and legal dimensions of international recruitment. According to the employers organisations that were consulted within the framework of the project, the interest of employers could be raised by developing and promoting flexible mobility initiatives that meet their quickly evolving economic needs and that allow for a combination of physical relocation and remote work. Moreover, SMPs could offer opportunities for business development through scoping missions. In other words, the private sector could be involved from the outset when designing new SMPs, and all skills levels and working modalities could be considered, in line with employers' and workers' needs.

In addition to the above, employers tend to have a negative perception of some foreign talent pools, including in particular the African labour force, and have a low level of awareness about the quality of the latter. Potential employers would benefit from **detailed information about the quality of the labour supply**, particularly when new talent pool countries come into play. From a more specific perspective, within the context of MATCH, the stakeholders underlined the necessity to reframe the discourse on migration, particularly on labour migration, and to create greater awareness for both the private and public sectors toward African talent pools. The description and promotion of Africa as a valuable talent pool with qualified people was considered by the stakeholders as key to move away from the "low skilled refugee" perception. As awareness for African talents increases, businesses should be motivated to look for new talents outside of their usual comfort zones and further integrate diversity and inclusion into their company policies.

3.3. Streamlining and easing the legal and administrative procedures linked to the recruitment of foreign talents

The main objectives of the Single Permit Directive⁸ are to establish a single application procedure for a combined work and residence permit and guarantee a common set of rights for eligible TCNs, based on equal treatment with nationals of the Member State that grants the single permit. The proposed recast of the Single Permit Directive, adopted on 27 April 2022, which was accompanied by an impact assessment, aims to streamline the application procedure and make it more effective. It enables applicants to apply for permits from both non-EU countries and Member States.

This proposed reform is much needed as all stakeholders in MATCH destination countries agreed that the current system needs to be reformed to be applicable to all skills levels and to create a “fast-track” system for employers allowing to reduce the administrative requirements. The system of recognised sponsorship ([erkend referent](#)) currently available in the Netherlands was identified as a best practice. This status enables companies to apply for work and residence permits for their employees through a simplified procedure whereby companies will have to submit the necessary administrative documents only once. This system means that companies with a recognised sponsorship status do not need to complete the administrative steps for each follow up application, which makes the immigration process faster and smoother for both employers and foreign workers as it relies on very minimal document requirements. Decision making is highly transparent and properly prepared applications are rarely denied. The Dutch Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (IND) strives to decide within 2 weeks. To qualify for recognised sponsorship, companies must demonstrate solvency and reliability, which in turn is the basis for a trust relationship with the Dutch government.

Operational measures should be taken to establish a **quick and transparent processing of work permit applications**, with well trained, approachable immigration officers, and clearly defined decision-making guidelines. Although efforts have been made in all EU countries participating to the MATCH project, additional efforts were considered necessary to implement or significantly extend the digital immigration filing systems. The latter would enable application filings through an e-government platform that also serves as an interface between authorities, employers and the applicant for status updates, correspondence between the parties and for obtaining approvals as well as further government communication. Another key recommendation formulated by stakeholders is to optimize the visa application process and review the current visa programmes to make them fit to facilitate labour migration from third countries.

Companies could benefit from **centralised assistance services, for instance “one-stop shops”**, which could provide information and support for all operational aspects of international recruitment – in terms of talent sourcing, but also the practical matters such as visas, salaries, skills matching and onboarding. The Dutch model of [“expat desks”](#) (which provides a comprehensive set of legal as well as practical information about the onboarding of foreign employees) was identified as a best practice that should be replicated in other EU countries.

⁸ Directive 2011/98/EU of 13 December 2011 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State.

3.4. Strengthening skills recognition and skills development

The skills validation system was identified by stakeholders in the three EU countries as a challenge, together with a difficult formal qualifications' recognition process (when in place). EU companies often rely heavily on validating CVs and using their own custom-designed skills tests. Measuring a candidate's skills based on the CV is not always accurate as informal education is common among jobseekers from Africa. These shortcomings and practices lead to mismatches in terms of jobs and qualifications/capacities. As a result, foreign talents risk being placed in positions that do not correspond to their training or level of qualification.

The **recognition and validation of competences and skills** is an inherent element of SMPs. In addition to the need to fast-track recognition of diplomas, there is clearly room for improvement regarding the validation of skills and prior learning. Simplified and fast-track systems could be pre-agreed on a bilateral basis between the country of origin and the country of destination. This enhanced cooperation would considerably ease the recruitment process which sometimes can last from a few weeks to months. It would also help to ensure that employers in the destination countries understand and relate to the training standards in the origin countries.

Furthermore, talents in the countries of origin should be in the position to acquire new skills and competences needed on the European labour market, as well as for their reintegration prospects. To achieve this, an enhanced cooperation on the education side between countries of origin and countries of destination should be foreseen. The **skills development component of the SMPs** should be co-designed and implemented with the employers to ensure that the training curriculum meet their expectations. Whenever feasible, skills development could take place remotely whilst the application for the work permit is still pending. In addition to hard skills, SMPs should also focus on and promote the development of soft skills and pre-departure orientation, as examined more in detail in the next sub-section.

3.5. Increase the attractiveness of the EU countries and employers

The need to increase the attractiveness of EU countries and employers is an important lesson learned from the MATCH project. Throughout the recruitment procedure, between 10 and 15% of the candidates who initially applied for employment within the framework of the MATCH project withdrew from the selection process or rejected a final offer as the offers did not meet their expectations and/or they had better employment opportunities elsewhere (most often with companies based in Canada or in the USA), especially in terms of remuneration and in relation to social security and pension rights. Although it will be difficult to align remuneration levels, more incentives and support on the integration of foreign workers could be established.

In order to increase the attractiveness of employment opportunities in the EU, it is essential to develop **adequate onboarding and integration measures** to ensure the soft landing of talents in their new country. For the onboarding of foreign talents to be successful, companies as well as talents themselves need to be prepared. For TCN, pre-departure orientation needs to be foreseen, including language courses, cultural orientation and soft skills for the working place. Upon arrival, mentoring could be foreseen to accompany new staff. Where feasible, and provided that robust capacity building programs are developed, diaspora organisations could be associated to the roll-out of **mentoring programmes**. For companies, training on diversity and inclusion would be helpful, as well as awareness raising among the company staff about

diversity management at the work place. In all destination countries, stakeholders insisted on the need to develop adequate housing programmes. In the case of Belgium, there is also a need to reform the existing legal framework to better develop co-housing systems or alternative housing options.

At the bilateral/country level, it is essential to develop labour migration agreements between source and destination countries aligned with the principles of relevant international conventions with the aim to **protect migrant workers and guarantee their human and labour rights**. Importantly, such labour migration agreements should also clearly regulate the portability of social rights, in particular access to social security and pension schemes.

3.6. Maximising the impact and the sustainability of SMPs

When it comes to setting up and implementing current and future SMPs, a **multi-stakeholder approach** - including the public institutions, the private sector, the social partners and the migrant communities - would be necessary, given the complexity of this endeavour. The social dialogue between all the stakeholders involved is essential to build a consensus amongst social partners.

To maximise the sustainability of the SMPs, stakeholders both in Africa and in Europe reiterated the need to develop **different types of legal pathways** (such as educational pathways, complementary pathways for persons in need of international protection, labour pathways) to further develop opportunities for foreign talents to enter or to stay legally in Europe. Educational pathways play a critical role in the development of a qualified labour force. Stakeholders in Nigeria and in Senegal stressed that a very small number of students do benefit from Erasmus+ programmes and there is a need to further develop international student mobility programmes.

To the question of how to **make SMPs sustainable** and create win-win situations for all sides, the stakeholders in all participating countries overall agreed that there is a need to look beyond the economic interests of labour migration and apply a holistic approach in which the wider – social – integration aspect is taken into account. To ensure that labour mobility schemes are beneficial to both countries of destination and countries of origin, **data management information systems and foresight analysis tools** should be set up in countries of origin with the support of EU experts. To help the development of an in-depth expertise, series of thematic workshops should be complemented by scoping missions and field visits to the EU. Knowledge transfer should be improved through a series of training of trainers to support the dissemination of knowledge and skills. Trainings should reach out to stakeholders based outside of the capital cities.

Connections between countries of origin and countries of destination could be facilitated through **diaspora communities** which can play an important role in connecting employers with talents and in building networks of alumni. Within the framework of MATCH alumni networks have played a key role in disseminating job vacancies and the majority of the talents successfully recruited through the project had the opportunity to study abroad.

Finally, **additional services are needed to make SMPs attractive and to support employers and talents on the longer run**. Trainings aiming at operationalising diversity and inclusion strategies should be further developed (and be available on a structural basis) to help employers better integrate foreign talents in the workplace. Similar to what is currently available in the Netherlands, networks of expat desks and one-stop

shops must be developed in destination countries to assist employers at all the stages of the recruitment and migration process.

Conclusions

As transforming labour markets, shifting workforce demographics and the growing mobility of workers urge new skills and labour requirements, more than ever there is a need for a global approach to labour migration. While labour migration is not a new phenomenon, it has not always been to the benefit of all involved parties, that is migrants, states, employers, training and education institutions and communities. Considering this, the design of SMPs should move away from a perspective centred on the countries of destination. A new balance has to be found so that the benefits of labour migration for sustainable development can be seized by all parties.

The MATCH stakeholders' meetings have revealed that there is still a good amount of work to be done on both sides – destination countries and source countries – in different fields. In the destination countries, a greater awareness about the potential of the work force from Africa needs to be created among businesses and the wider society for African talents. As awareness for African talents increases, businesses may explore new partnerships, engage in more flexible ways of employment (like remote work for instance) integrating diversity into their company policies. When designing new SMPs, the private sector (employer representative organisations) needs to be involved from the outset, and all skills levels should be considered, in line with employers' skills needs.

Public authorities in destination countries need to contribute to the process with clear legal frameworks, and optimized labour migration procedures. The development of labour market foresight tools is crucial to allow source and destination countries develop prospective analysis of their domestic labour market and ensure that labour migration ultimately contributes to sustainable development for all parties. Source and destination countries also need to involve the private sector in the development of labour migration policies, to make sure that relevant labour market needs are met.

The MATCH project has put talents and skills at the heart of its labour migration path, and the building blocks of its methodology could serve as an inspiration for the development of future SMPs.

The MATCH project is
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