

Piloting skills mobility: Lessons learned from the MATCH project and the way forward

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) welcomes you to the conference on **Skills Mobility Partnerships**. The event will be centred on disseminating the **main outcomes and lessons learned from the MATCH project**, a pilot project funded by the European Union (EU). The project aims at providing job opportunities to African talents in four EU Member States - Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg or the Netherlands. Senegal and Nigeria are the two partner countries in Africa, offering a surplus of qualified professionals. In addition to the job placements, the MATCH project also implemented complementary activities such as skills development, capacity building and knowledge sharing between the participating EU and African countries in order to ensure that this labour mobility initiative is fully beneficial to the migrants and the participating countries.

Background

Legal migration pathways, and **labour migration** more in particular, 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.

Following the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the European Commission launched the Talent Partnerships in the Communication on attracting skills and talents to the EU in April 2022. This initiative will help addressing skills shortages in the EU while strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships on migration with third countries. In order 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. Although the concept still needs to be fully operationalized, **Talent Partnerships** represent an encouraging prospect which will shape the EU's transition from pilot projects on labour migration to more structured and sustainable pathways.

Through formalized bilateral (or regional) interstate cooperation, **IOM's Skills Mobility Partnership (SMP) model** can offer a useful model. The SMP model 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 skills mobility schemes**. The SMP approach benefits talents as they gain skills thanks to trainings and work experiences in different countries. From the experience of the MATCH project we know that there is a need for a strong engagement of the private sector from the outset of the scheme. This is also key to ensure appropriate skills matching. Over the past years, all MATCH destination countries have significantly improved their legal and administrative procedures. Yet, as acknowledged by many stakeholders and experts, much remains to be done to ensure the full success of the SMPs and to strengthen the attractiveness of EU countries. Competent stakeholders at national level should take additional steps to address employers' concerns related to the excessive delays and bureaucratic procedures in place for the granting of residence and work permits of talents at all skills level. In some cases, the recognition of the migrants' qualifications remains too rigid and leads to systemic barriers for access to qualified employed. Restrictive recognition of skills and diplomas also prevents meaningful skills development. More generally, labour migration schemes need to be linked to broader onboarding strategies and social inclusion policies, including through pre-employment training programmes targeting both employers and prospective migrant workers.

Finally, Skills Mobility Partnerships (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 all. 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 hosting companies. 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. From the perspective of countries of destination, **SMPs are part of a broader strategy to address structural labour shortages by exploring unknown talent pools**. Yet, to be successful, SMPs and other labour mobility schemes must consider migrant workers at all skills levels and focus on promoting mutually beneficial labour migration pathways. Next to the benefits previously mentioned, the departure of talents brings along challenges related to their socioeconomic reintegration upon return. Sustainable return and reintegration policies must be implemented in order to avoid that skills and experienced acquired in the destination country end up not being transferable to employment in the country of origin.



Objectives of the conference

The organising partners wish to disseminate the lessons learnt from the MATCH project and have a discussion around the **views and strategies to build successful SMPs for the benefit of all parties involved**: origin and destination countries, talents, and employers. The event will gather stakeholders and representatives of the private and the public sector from the destination and origin countries having participated in the MATCH project.

The event will be opened by high-level welcoming remarks outlining the political importance of legal pathways to develop orderly and managed migration between EU Member States and third countries. In order to set the scene, the first session of the conference will consist of an exchange between a representative from the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission and governmental representatives from Nigeria and Senegal concerning the creation of sustainable and long-lasting EU Talent Partnerships.

After a coffee break, the MATCH project manager will discuss the main outcomes and lessons learnt from putting labour mobility into practice. This will be followed by the contributions of the project implementing partners from both the countries of origin and destination, who will unpack the lessons learnt through a panel discussion focused on the topic of stakeholder involvement and labour market needs. The second part of the event will feature the testimonies and perspectives from the private sector on how to build successful SMPs beyond the MATCH project. In particular, the speakers will present the role of employers from the EU perspective as well as the experiences of sourcing and attracting African talents.



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