



SKILLS FOR FAIR, EFFICIENT LABOUR MIGRATION

RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOR NEW POLICIES AND ACTIONS
THEMATIC REPORT

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PREFACE

The skills of migrant workers present a critical asset for addressing the structural transformations facing contemporary economies and societies globally. This imperative transcends geographical and developmental boundaries. Across regions and contexts, the demand for foreign labour reflects both evolving labour market structures requiring skilled human capital and the demographic realities of ageing populations. The skills sought encompass a broad spectrum – from highly professional qualifications to medium and foundational technical competencies – spanning sectors from advanced manufacturing and digital industries through to agriculture and services.

Better framing labour migration in a mutually beneficial way – generating simultaneous gains for countries of origin, countries of destination and migrants themselves through strategic alignment of skills development, qualifications' recognition and migration governance – offers a sustainable solution to global skills deficits and mismatches. This 'triple-win' paradigm necessitates forward-looking policy frameworks and multi-stakeholder partnerships integrating public authorities, vocational and educational institutions, private sector employers and civil society actors in institutionalised cooperation.

In response to these systemic challenges, the European Union has elevated labour migration and skills development to a central strategic priority in recent years. Key policy instruments – including the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Talent Partnerships initiative, the Talent Pool and the Union of Skills framework – establish integrated approaches to align migration governance, skills systems development and qualification recognition with labour market requirements. In parallel, multiple initiatives from new policy frameworks to pilot-scale accompanying mechanisms for migrants have been undertaken by many partner countries to address the needs of their migration profile, often increasingly articulated around emigration, immigration and return migration flows.

In this policy context, the European Training Foundation (ETF) aims at stimulating reflections while providing evidence and recommendations on how policies can improve sustainable labour migration. To achieve this goal, ETF launched in 2025 a new community of international experts on skills and migration (MIGCOM) under the ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts. MIGCOM is a voluntary network that promotes knowledge exchange and peer learning between researchers, experts and practitioners around the skills and migration nexus.

To foster knowledge co-creation and exchange, MIGCOM invited international experts to share their expertise through a dedicated call for articles between June 2025 and April 2026. Out of the 116 abstracts received, 40 were selected. These 40 authors were invited to submit their articles and then 30 articles were received. Following a process of editing and peer reviews, 19 articles have finally been selected for ETF publication. Eleven articles are included in this Thematic Report while another eight articles are published in a Working Paper. Both publications are available at [Skills and migration | ETF](#).

The dimensions covered by the two publications are complementary, with this publication focusing on the skills' systems perspective, while the Working Paper focuses on labour markets analyses. Altogether the different skills' dimensions of migration have been explored covering aspects related to migration and development, partnerships for labour migration, brain drain and brain gain, female migration, skills' identification and skills' provision.

A variety of methodological approaches have been adopted by the different authors, ranging from qualitative and ethnographic methods to more quantitative and econometric analyses, using diverse data sources the validity of which could not be verified by ETF. Authors combined their analyses with practical recommendations for new/adjusted policies and instruments that policymakers and practitioners may use to improve the developmental benefits of labour migration. However, such cases should not be seen as exhaustive. The relation between skills and what might be termed "virtuous labour migration" may encompass additional dimensions which require extra attention. Further studies are called for to deepen understanding and to improve policy recommendations into the constantly evolving relationship between skills, migration and labour markets.

Geographically, the report has a broad coverage and draws on cases from the European Union (Italy, Germany, Lithuania) and many current ETF partner countries, including in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Türkiye, Eastern Europe (Moldova and Ukraine), Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) and Northern Africa (Morocco), but also South East Asia (Bangladesh) and West Africa (Nigeria and Senegal).

The report is structured into five chapters. It starts with an editorial chapter, "Why the focus on Skills for Fair, Efficient Labour Migration?" which contextualises why skills are key for virtuous labour migration, sets out a conceptual framework and reports key takeaways from the eleven articles. After this introduction, the eleven submitted articles are presented in four chapters, structured into interrelated areas:

- Chapter 2 "Policy Alignment and Skills Partnership Architecture" groups together three articles which identify preconditions for successful labour and skills mobility around robust data and effective partnerships.
- Chapter 3 "Resilience and Adaptation in High-Emigration and Conflict Contexts" brings together another three articles focusing on how to develop resilience and adapt policies in high-emigration and/or fragile conditions such as conflict-affected Ukraine.
- Chapter 4 "Tapping into Return Mobility and Diaspora Expertise" groups three articles focusing on how to use return mobility and diaspora expertise for development and what policies can be put in place for successful results.
- Chapter 5 "New frontiers: Platform economy and skill justice" brings together two articles. One focuses on digital labour markets as a new frontier of tele-migration while the last article demonstrates how migrants' skills are often underutilised because of discriminatory practices.

¹ Throughout this publication, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

This publication is the result of good cooperation and contributions from several international experts under the guidance of ETF. The ETF is very grateful to the authors of the eleven articles, to the editor Mariavittoria Garlappi, and to the peer reviewers Ummuhan Bardak, Terence Hogarth, Sona Kalantaryan, Isilda Mara, Cristina Mereuta, Burulcha Sulaymanova and Maarit Virolainen; and to all those who effectively supported the process including Chiara Fratalia, Roberta Di Monte and Alessandra Massaro.

Last, but not least, words go to the migrant workers to whom this report is dedicated. It is ETF's hope that this study will help to improve their often-difficult professional, and personal, lives through more informed, balanced, and humane policies, and understanding of migration as a shared prosperity.

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2.2 Sustainability of the skills partnerships between the origin and destination countries of migration in Lithuania, Italy and Germany

Vidmantas Tūtlys, Lina Vaitkutė, Ida Kristina Kühn, Andreas Saniter, Francesco Vittori, Paola Dusi, Angelica Progetti, Ivan Toscano

2.2.1 Introduction

Transnational skills and mobility partnerships are aiming “to share the benefits of migration through a modality that is both defined and supported by the involved partners” (European Migration Network, 2022). Skills partnerships can also involve long-term investments from the private actors in human capital (Van de Pas, Hinlopen 2020). The European Commission’s sustainable model of skills mobility partnerships is based on the principles of: 1) the individualisation of skills requirements when supporting the integration of migrant workers by providing individualised training and skills formation for them; 2) complying with sectoral requirements for skills when designing recruitment and training measures; 3) long-term investment in skills formation of the countries involved; and 4) long-term partnerships with a joint approach, sharing the costs and benefits (European Commission, 2020). However, there is a lack of evidence as to how these principles of sustainability are executed and maintained in real cases of skills partnerships, and what the implications are for the migrant workers and stakeholders involved, in the countries of origin and destination. This article seeks to explore the potential of skills partnerships to achieve sustainability, both in the area of skills matching in the labour market, and in the development of migrant workers’ skills.

Considering the above, this study investigates the following research questions:

- How do skills partnerships mitigate skills shortages in destination countries and unemployment in origin countries?
- How do skills partnerships enhance the skills development of migrant workers (in destination countries) and youth (in origin countries)?
- How do skills partnerships align with economic, educational, employment and migration policies?

This article presents an analysis of the three cases of skills partnerships identified when conducting a research study on dealing with skill mismatches in the framework of Horizon Europe research project Skills4Justice (<https://www.skills4justice.eu>).

The research covers three countries of destination (Lithuania, Italy, Germany) and four countries of origin (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Uzbekistan).

The applied research methods used include a literature review, content analysis of the policy documents, and case studies of indicated skills partnerships including interviews and focus groups with involved stakeholders. The article reveals how the selected skills partnerships are targeting the skills shortages of enterprises in the destination countries

and providing solutions for youth unemployment problems in the countries of origin. It considers the training opportunities these skills partnerships create for young people in the countries of origin and how accessible these training opportunities actually are. The research also identifies the sustainability factors and risks of these skills partnerships related to the employment of trained migrant workers. The article also sheds light on how the applied approaches of training and competence assessment contribute to enhancing the skills development of migrant workers and empower them to achieve employment and social integration. Finally, the article discusses how these skills partnerships are aligned with the economic, employment and education policies of the involved countries of origin and destination, and considers implications for the achievement of related policy goals.

2.2.2 Definition, principles and factors of the sustainability of bottom-up skills partnerships involving migrant workers

Looking into different concepts of skills partnerships, several key features can be distinguished related to the mitigation of skills shortages in the destination countries, and structural unemployment in the countries of origin (European Commission, 2020):

1. Skills partnerships are based on the skills needs and requirements in the economic sectors of the destination countries. Skills needs and shortages in the destination countries, which for different reasons cannot be satisfied by the internal supply of skills in their own labour markets, create interest among employers in these countries to establish skills partnerships with the countries of origin, or at least to take an active part in such partnerships (Acosta et al, 2025; Clemens et al, 2019). From the origin countries' point of view, alignment of skills partnerships with the skills needs of their economies could also be a highly important sustainability factor for these partnerships enabled by reciprocal benefits (Di Salvo, 2022). For example, when a country of origin has a large supply of young people, alignment and orientation of skills partnerships to satisfy coinciding skills needs brings benefits for enterprises in all involved countries. Nevertheless, bottom-up skills partnerships initiated by stakeholders in the destination countries obviously create a high risk of brain drain for the origin countries. Subsequently, the brain drain exacerbates skills shortages in different sectors of economy. When bottom-up skills partnerships are driven and dominated only by the economic interests of labour market actors in the countries involved, these partnerships may overlook the interests and needs of the migrant workers, and contribute to violations of their fundamental human rights.
2. Adopting an individualised/personalised approach to skills formation of students and migrant workers, alongside the enterprise-oriented recruitment of migrant workers and development of human capital after their employment, enables smooth and efficient training and employment processes supported by the coinciding interests of companies and migrant workers (Clemens et al, 2019; Schneider, 2023). For example, the smooth and fair recognition of skills and competencies of migrant workers and students acquired through different pathways in their origin countries

can help reduce the scope and duration of training required for employment, while also mitigating the risks of overqualification and underutilisation of migrant workers' human capital.

3. Long-term investment in skills formation in both the origin and destination countries is one of the key factors supporting the sustainability of skills partnerships. In particular, long-term and sustainable investment in skills formation in origin countries is necessary to ensure that migrant workers achieve the level of work readiness required prior to their departure (Kim, 2018; Lulle et al, 2021). Such investment helps stakeholders reduce training and integration costs, and alleviates social anxiety in the destination countries regarding unskilled and low-skilled immigration. Long-term investment in skills formation in origin countries also delivers key benefits of partnerships for local stakeholders in terms of the availability of adequately skilled workers and expanding access to high-quality education and training opportunities for young people and enterprises (Clemens et al, 2019; Ibourk 2020).
4. Long-term partnerships based on a joint approach and the sharing of costs and benefits are essential as skills formation and development of human capital are continuing, long-term processes which yield returns only over the long-term (Brown et al 2020). For these reasons sustainable skills partnerships require the engagement of partners and stakeholders who share long-term visions and strategies for activities and human resource development. The engagement of corporate/company, sectoral, and national stakeholders is an important factor for effectiveness and sustainability of skills partnerships (Acosta et al, 2025). The institutional diversity of stakeholders engaged in skills partnerships in both the origin and destination countries, and reliance of these partnerships on well-established institutional settings and formats of skills formation, can help mobilise resources and political support for these partnerships (Clemens et al, 2019).

One of the central issues in the design and implementation of partnerships involving the training of migrant workers is the distribution/sharing of responsibilities for investment in skills formation and training of migrant workers among participating stakeholders. According to human capital theory, this distribution of responsibility should be proportional to the received returns of investment in the human capital of the migrant learners and workers (Blair, 2011; Winterton and Cafferkey, 2019). From this perspective, the beneficiaries of investment in skills and the human capital of migrant workers within skills partnerships include employers in the destination country, migrant workers, their families, and education and training providers in both the origin and destination countries.

The transparent and sustainable sharing of responsibility for investment in the employment and training of migrant workers within skills partnerships can reduce the harm of losing skilled workers in origin countries by taking into consideration the interests of stakeholders from those countries. Co-investment in vocational training and skills development in the origin countries generates benefits for these countries by improving local capacities and quality of training provision. This is demonstrated by the skills partnerships cases analysed in this article. Moreover, transparent co-investment in training and skills formation in origin countries also facilitates a positive impact of

migration on investment in human capital for both local and migrant workers in the origin countries (Chowdhury, 2014; Wickham, 2017). In this way, skills partnerships can bring clarity and transparency to the highly chaotic and diverse relationships between employment, migration and human capital development. Skills partnerships provide a clearer structure to the spatial-temporal outcomes of the acquisition, recognition and deployment/utilisation of human capital, including adjustments required when workers return to their countries of origin (Lulle et al 2021). Skills partnerships also support the integration of migrant workers and the quality of their working lives by providing training and work experience for the 'host country's' human capital (Zwysen, 2019)

However, employer-led skills partnerships are primarily focused on the employment of migrant workers in specific jobs and workplaces. This can lead to the narrowing of the scope of skills formation to the functional skills and competences required for particular workplaces, limiting the agency of migrant workers in choosing training, skills development and employment pathways (Kim, 2018). From this perspective, skills partnerships can also be defined as systems of 'institutional' pumps and filters of the migrant human capital, driven by the human resource management and development strategies of enterprises and institutional settings of skills formation and deployment in destination countries (Boeri et al., 2012; Wickham, 2017).

The implications of labour immigration for the local working population are also a highly important consideration in exploring international skills partnerships (Cremers, 2022; Motomura, 2025). One key issue in this context is how skills partnerships affect access to skills formation and employment for the local population, especially socially vulnerable groups, who often experience various obstacles to these opportunities. One central concern is the extent to which migrant workers employed through skills partnerships complement the existing local workforce, including its vulnerable segments.

When skills partnerships are based on mutual investment in the human capital of migrant workers by all stakeholders, they create the space for mutual trust in skills formation and deployment in both the origin and destination countries. Shared investments by stakeholders from both countries create incentives for the long-term orientation of skills partnerships, while facilitating more equal distribution of the gains from these investments in terms of skilled labour for the economies involved. As a result, skills partnerships can contribute to the resolution of tensions between existing international migration frameworks – which deprive origin countries of essential workers, such as nurses and other health professionals – and sustainable development goals, including access to training, and orderly and responsible migration (Thompson and Walton-Roberts 2019).

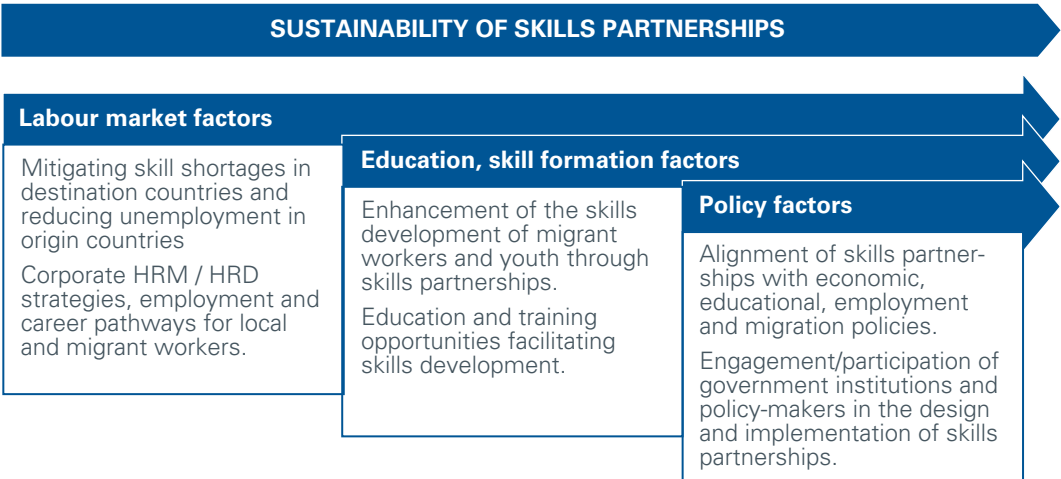
Many skills partnerships targeting the employment of migrant workers include arrangements facilitating the distribution of responsibilities and benefits between stakeholders in the origin and destination countries. Despite this, such skills partnerships still contribute to the global trend of filling labour shortages in wealthier countries with migrants from economically poorer countries (Acosta et al, 2025; Clemens, 2015; Clemens et al, 2019). Selective procedures for the search, recruitment, investment in training, and recognition of migrant worker competencies, reinforce the interests of

companies in retaining migrant workers, as well as the interests of migrant workers in remaining with the companies who trained and employed them. As a result, the process favours retention of migrant workers in destination countries, thus weakening the potential for circular migration to benefit countries of origin.

The development of skills partnerships, skills formation and employment of migrant workers largely relies on the institutional and organisational models and approaches of skills formation used in their origin and destination countries (Schneider, 2023). These partnerships draw on the range of institutional and organisational skills formation instruments available in these countries, including: processes and mechanisms for the assessment and recognition of skills, competencies and qualifications; existing practices and instruments of dual apprenticeship and work-based learning; education, training and skills formation infrastructure (e.g. practical training centres); and formal channels of partnership between Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and employers (Acosta et al, 2025).

Referring to the discussion above, it can be presumed that the sustainability of skills partnerships involving migrant workers is determined by the balanced interaction of three major groups of factors: 1) labour market factors, especially the mitigation of skill shortages in destination countries and the reduction of unemployment in origin countries; 2) education and skills formation factors, especially enhancement of the skills development of migrant workers and youth through skills partnerships, and didactic and organisational supportive measures that facilitate skills development; and, 3) policy factors, especially the alignment of skills partnerships with economic, educational, employment and migration policies (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Sustainability factors of skills partnerships



Labour market factors help mitigate skill shortages in migrants' destination countries and reduce unemployment in their origin countries. They also affect corporate human resource management and development strategies, and the employment/career plans of local and migrant workers. Education and skill formation factors refer to the creation of, or improved access to, skills education and training opportunities for migrant workers. Lastly, policy factors include alignment of skills partnerships with economic, educational, employment and migration policies of the engaged countries, as well as engagement of policymakers in the design and implementation of these partnerships.

2.2.3 Research methodology

The selection of skills partnerships for this research is based on criteria derived from the key features of sustainable skills partnerships discussed above:

1. Skills partnership aims to solve the skills shortage in the labour market or economic sector;
2. Skills partnership includes the recruitment and skills formation of migrant workers;
3. Skills partnership involves institutions and/or stakeholders from the origin and destination countries.

A mixed-method research methodology was applied to collect data for the exploration of skills partnerships. The secondary data analysis was undertaken through a literature review and critical content analysis of relevant policy documents. Primary data were collected using qualitative research methods – semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the representatives of stakeholders and bodies involved in selected skills partnerships. Primary data collection and analysis were conducted in Italy and Lithuania. In Germany, skills partnerships were explored exclusively through secondary data analysis, because the available secondary data were sufficient to address the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with labour market stakeholders conducted in Lithuania and Italy contain the following topics: 1) skills mismatches and shortages targeted by the skills partnership and their reasons; 2) key interventions related to skills partnerships and the division of roles between partners; 3) problems and challenges faced in implementing and sustaining skills partnerships. Interviews with migrant workers in Italy cover the following topics: 1) reasons for participation in the training and emigration schemes suggested by partnerships; 2) content and organisation of the training and skills development activities provided; 3) satisfaction with provided training and employment conditions; 4) future career and mobility plans.

Data collection methods were selected depending on the specific conditions and requirements of research participants in each country (Table 7 in Annex), which accounts for the differences in the sets of research methods applied in different countries. In Lithuania, in the period between July and November 2024, interviews were conducted with representatives of international road freight transport associations and road freight transport sector trade unions, as well as human resource managers of road freight

transport companies. In Italy, in the period between September and November 2024, a Focus Group was organised involving VET providers, NGOs, employers' organisations and non-profit associations. Subsequently, between May and July 2025, interviews were conducted with migrant workers hired through the relevant Skills Partnership.

The research data were analysed by applying thematic analysis and, based on the findings, national reports were prepared and used for the comparative analysis.

The following section presents the skills partnerships cases examined in this study.

2.2.4 Cases of skills partnerships

This section introduces the skills partnerships cases by outlining their rationale and targeted problem, indicating the aims, explaining institutional arrangements used in the implementation of skills partnership, and outlining responsibilities and mutual benefits of stakeholders.

The analysed skills partnerships involve four countries of origin of migrants – the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Republic of Tunisia and the Republic of Uzbekistan, and three countries of destination – the Federal Republic of Germany, the Italian Republic and the Republic of Lithuania. The socio-demographic and labour market contexts in both the origin and destination countries generally create favourable conditions for the establishment of sustainable skills partnerships. The labour markets of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Uzbekistan are characterised by comparatively high youth unemployment rates and significant levels of emigration (Table 8 in Annex). Germany, Italy and Lithuania are characterised by high employment rates, low unemployment, significant job vacancy rates and high immigration indicators (Table 9 in Annex). Furthermore, migrant diasporas from the selected origin countries are more or less established in the destination countries (Table 10 in Annex).

Skills partnership between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan

Over recent decades, the international road freight transport sector in Lithuania has experienced highly dynamic growth, with Lithuanian companies taking every significant share of the EU market of these services. In 2023, while most EU countries recorded a decline in the total volume of road freight transport, Lithuania recorded the highest growth (+17.3%) (Official Statistics Portal, 2025). In the first half of 2024, the sector included 6,089 transport companies and entities with the EU licence for goods transport operating more than 82,000 of licensed trucks (Šilobritas, 2024). Notwithstanding the current challenges affecting the development of this sector brought by geopolitical tensions and the EU Mobility Package (which imposes stricter requirements on transport companies regarding the welfare of drivers and mandates regular returns of trucks and drivers to the registration country), a shortage of drivers remains the key challenge for development. The shortage of drivers in road freight transport in Lithuania is expected

to increase from 12% in 2024 to 18% by 2028 (Šilobritis, 2024). The interviewed representatives of road freight companies and sectoral organisations also link the persistent shortage of international road freight drivers to an exponential growth in freight volumes over the past decade. This relationship was noted by a representative of the sectoral employers' association:

"Looking more closely at the labour shortage in the transportation sector, it is obvious that this is related to the extremely rapid, and even disproportionate, unbalanced growth of this sector, when this sector now generates 12-14% of GDP" (Respondent IT1, representative of the sectoral employers' organisation)

From the point of view of employers' organisations, the disproportionately high demand for drivers cannot be met by the shrinking supply of local human resources, making the recruitment of third-country nationals the only feasible solution for sustaining the growth and competitiveness of the sector's enterprises. This is reflected in an interview with a representative of the sectoral employers' organisation:

"According to our calculations, currently about 88,000 international road transport drivers work in Lithuania, of whom only about 10,000 are citizens of Lithuania. This, in our opinion, is a natural situation, because demographic indicators, the size of employed population in the market and changes in labour supply just do not allow for higher numbers. We have 1,400,000 employed persons, therefore 10,000 is about a tenth of the total workforce. When politicians recommend that we should retrain and employ Lithuanian citizens, we ask: should we aim to train and employ every second citizen as a driver?" (Respondent IT2, representative of the sectoral employers' organisation)

This solution to addressing labour shortages conflicts both with national economic policy priorities to attract high-skilled professionals to high-value-added economic sectors as a driver of economic development, and with the conservative and restrictive immigration policy adopted in the context of geopolitical tensions in the neighbourhood. The Russo-Ukrainian war and other geopolitical tensions in eastern Europe and the Middle East have contributed to a turn towards more restrictive immigration policies, especially with regard to origin countries maintaining intensive socioeconomic partnerships and cooperation with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, such as Central and South Asian countries.

Nevertheless, enterprises and sectoral organisations are seeking to solve the skilled driver shortage by directly cooperating with migration origin countries, especially in Central Asia. Uzbekistan has experienced dynamic road freight transport sector growth, driven by overall economic growth in recent years leading to a shortage of skilled drivers. Despite the country's large youth population and strong interest in acquiring a driving qualification (unlike the situation in Lithuania), Uzbekistan's VET system lacks the capacity to train drivers for international road freight transport. This situation creates opportunities for cooperation with partners from other countries interested in investing in VET provision in Uzbekistan to address the sector's shortage of skilled workers. The Association of Road Freight Transport of Uzbekistan, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Road Transport

Association (Linava), established a specialised training centre for road freight drivers in Uzbekistan in 2023 (TransInfo, 2022). Lithuanian experts provide training curricula and learning materials, train local teachers, and conduct theoretical and practical training. Lithuanian partners have also provided ICT tools, trucks for training, and other materials, as well as advisory support in developing training facilities according to EU standards. Training drivers according to EU requirements, and issuing the corresponding certificates, at this centre is far less costly than training in EU countries, making it more accessible for local young people. The training course lasts a minimum of two weeks and covers training for ADR (Accord Dangereux Routier), MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act) certificates (provided locally) and Code 95 certificates (issued following an examination in Lithuania). Upon completing training, graduates have a choice of being employed by the local transport company or seeking employment in Lithuania or another EU country. Cooperation agreements with transport sector associations in the EU help prevent cases of exploitation and risks of illegal employment when moving to work in the EU. However, the further operation of this training centre was soon impeded and discontinued by Lithuania's restrictive immigration policy, as well as the high risk of losing EU certified drivers from Uzbekistan to competitors in Germany and other western European countries.

Skills partnership between Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders in developing skills of vulnerable young people in Egypt

The shortage of skilled workers with vocational qualifications in the manufacturing sector in Italy was one of the key reasons for the establishment of this partnership. Another reason was youth unemployment in Egypt, contributing to irregular emigration to European countries. This skills partnership seeks to establish and develop vocational training opportunities in Italian companies for socially vulnerable youth in Egypt, thereby addressing both irregular migration to this EU country and the socio-cultural marginalisation of incoming people.

The partnership involves Italy's national employers' organisation, Confindustria, SBE–VARVIT Spa, the CNOS-FAP federation, and the 'Don Bosco' vocational schools in Cairo and Alexandria (Egypt) in recruiting VET students/graduates, assessing their competencies, arranging apprenticeships in Italian companies and subsequent employment. Thanks to recent regulatory innovations, this opportunity can be implemented even outside the national immigration quota system, in cases where individuals requesting a working visa hold a VET or secondary school diploma that is officially recognised. In fact, the Decreto Legge 10 marzo 2023, n. 20 (converted into Law 5 May 2023, n. 50), also known as the Decreto Cutro, establishes specific provisions for legal entry flows of foreign workers into Italy (Gazzetta Ufficiale Della Repubblica Italiana, 2023). Article 3 of the decree introduces so-called 'extra-quota' channels. These are additional visa quotas reserved for third-country nationals who have completed professionally profiled training programmes and language courses approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. These provisions allow individuals to apply for a work visa even if the initial quota limits have been reached. There are also other active skills

partnerships in place between the Italian Government and foreign countries (Sant Egidio, 2024).

An Italian company helps assess candidates' competencies and arranges apprenticeship courses to address any skills gaps, leading to subsequent employment. The NGO VET providers federation, CNOS-FAP, together with their training centres, take care of the search and recruitment of candidates, evaluation and comparison of their VET curricula and skills portfolios, provision of theoretical training, and pre-and post-arrival guidance for young people from Egypt. The key direct and immediate beneficiaries of this partnership are young students and young adults. As thoroughly discussed during the focus group, Italian companies face significant challenges in securing qualified labour, particularly amid an increasing demand for emerging skills, especially in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. Representatives of Italian employer organisations emphasised the importance of providing training opportunities to migrant workers in their countries of origin. The skills partnership developed by the Don Bosco VET centres located in both Cairo and Alexandria (Egypt), together with the CNOS-FAP federation and Italian enterprises, aims to meet Italy's demand for qualified technicians in the manufacturing and industry sectors. A focus group participant representing an employers' organisation emphasised the benefit of exporting high-quality VET provision to origin countries for the recruitment of skilled workers from these countries:

"The Salesians [founded by Don Bosco] are the most structured. However, that is the point we tried to convey to the Egyptian government; they see Don Bosco as a sort of excellence they strive to emulate. They attempted to do so through FEIG, the Egyptian Confederation of Industry, which has established seven academies with substantial funding across Egypt, inspired by the work of Don Bosco. We have also attempted to establish connections with these academies. It is precisely the Salesians' method that has somehow been accepted and further propagated. It will take more time there; it is not immediate." (IF1, representative of employers' organisation in the focus group)

In interviews, focus group participants from the employers' organisation stressed the importance of disseminating advanced VET provision to third countries to create the space for future skills partnerships. This process is highly complex, time consuming and resource-intensive. Therefore, the benefits of the skills partnership for the skill formation ecosystem and stakeholders in origin countries appear more long-term, focusing on improving the image and attractiveness of VET, as well as addressing youth unemployment issues.

THAMM Plus project (Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa)

The THAMM Plus project (2023-2027) addresses skills shortages faced by German companies – and high youth unemployment rates in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. It aims to counteract irregular migration between northern Africa and Europe by expanding

employment opportunities for young people from northern Africa. Relevant sectors for apprenticeships and skilled workers are electrical trade, plumbing, heating, air conditioning technology, information technology (IT), metal industry and logistics.

The THAMM Plus project focuses on implementing fair and safe recruitment of trainees and skilled workers from Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia in the context of development aid and needs-oriented labour migration between North Africa and Europe. The project also targets sustainability by strengthening local (German) employment authorities so that the developed infrastructure can be maintained after the end of the project (German Agency for International Cooperation; *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, GIZ, 2024a). THAMM Plus is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*, BMW) and co-financed by the EU. GIZ coordinates the project activities in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA).

Egypt is involved through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates (MoFAEEEE); Morocco is represented by the Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills (MIEPEEC) as well as the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies (ANAPEC); and Tunisia participates with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MEFP) and the National Agency for Employment and Self-employment (ANETI) (GIZ, 2024b).

GIZ is responsible for process design and support, e.g. by identifying suitable candidates based on a set of mandatory requirements according to the Skilled Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*, FEG, 2024). Moreover, the organisation provides guidance for companies and assures the fulfilment of employer-related requirements, which aim at securing livelihood and formal integration (visa, recognition of learning achievements) of migrants (the ‘employer pays’ principle). In certain cases, GIZ provides professional development measures for skilled workers.

In its role as project partner, the Federal Employment Agency (BA) coordinates employers’ demands according to the placement of applicants who wish to migrate to Germany for apprenticeship or employment. According to the BA, partner countries benefit from a ‘triple-win’ effect, i.e. improved employment opportunities, better education prospects for labour migrants, and the reduction of skill shortages in the destination countries. Countries of origin would “offer new job prospects and benefit from remittances sent home as trainees and skilled workers, as well as from their new skills and experience” (BA, 2025). The benefit for partner countries is described through long-term implementation of training content in selected apprenticeship programmes at a local level as well as in the development of holistic competence-based assessment measures to enable visualisation of abilities. As another benefit, the BA mentions institutional networks between origin and destination countries, which is not further specified (ibid.).

2.2.5 Findings of comparative analysis of skills partnerships

This section presents the key findings of comparative analysis of the skills partnerships in relation to research questions outlined above.

Mitigating skills shortages in destination countries and unemployment in origin countries through skills partnerships

Skills partnership between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan targeted shortages in international road freight drivers in both countries, albeit for different reasons. In Lithuania, the occupation lacks attractiveness among young people and there is a shortage of available candidates, while in Uzbekistan capacities of VET providers to deliver relevant training and qualifications are insufficient (TransInfo, 2022). Therefore, this partnership strongly focused on meeting the skills needs of road transport enterprises, with the training content and agenda driven by employers. Training at the established training centre was provided by trainers from the companies and followed apprenticeship principles, leading to the acquisition of qualifications recognised in the EU. This training centre was expected to supply a sufficient number of drivers with EU-compliant qualifications for transport companies in both countries, i.e. high supply of potential trainees. This partnership aimed to create a pool of skilled drivers in Uzbekistan who could work for enterprises of both countries.

The skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian stakeholders explicitly targets the training and employment of young people from Egypt facing employment difficulties in their country. The partnership involves adjusting curricula between employers in Italy and VET providers in Egypt. The Italian companies provide work-based learning whose content is based on the comparison and analysis of the skill profiles of Egyptian VET students and the skill requirements/profiles of companies. The skills partnership aims to enhance the professional skills of incoming VET graduates from Egypt, while also providing opportunities for career advancement within the company and improving living conditions. The sustainability of this partnership is enhanced by the attractiveness of the training and employment opportunities at Italian companies for the VET graduates from Egypt in the context of challenging labour market conditions for young people in Egypt in recent years. On-the-job training of Egyptian workers during their internship year ensures complete acquisition of the skills required by the company. Given the strong demand for labour, many participants are likely to consider the opportunity of remaining in Italy with a regular employment contract once the paid internship period is over. However, it will be necessary to verify, after the first year, how many trainees are retained by the participating companies.

Several interviewees openly stated that, given the favourable working, living, and inclusion conditions offered by the company hosting training internship, they have an intention to stay and work in Italy beyond the expiration of this initial employment contract:

“Until now I will stay here [...] I decided this when I had arrived here. 2-3 months have passed... I’ve made this decision...” (Respondent I_1, migrant worker)

“Yes, but when I have a family (at this point we asked if he had a girlfriend) she lives in Egypt, and you need a lot of money to live.” (Respondent I_2, migrant worker)

This shows the desire of migrant workers to reunite with their family members once they obtain a formal employment contract that is more stable and better paid than the initial internship position in the company. The participants of these internship schemes undergo continuous assessment throughout the internship period, followed by a final on-the-job evaluation. The final assessment serves as the basis for the company’s proposal to offer continued employment to those who have successfully met the required performance and skill standards.

In the case of the partnership of the THAMM Plus project in Germany, approximately 10% of the population of the origin countries live abroad, aiming to improve their employment prospects, either due to high population growth or the misfit of many professional qualifications and needs in their home countries’ labour markets (GIZ, 2024b). The North African partner countries involved in this project are expected to benefit from knowledge transfer by returning migrants and the commitment of the diaspora (ibid.). Partnerships with German employers, which might serve to create sustainable qualification and labour mobility pathways between the countries, should lead to a “development- and needs-oriented migration governance in the long term” (GIZ, 2024b). The key opportunity for origin countries within this partnership lies in the provision of safe, regular and clear perspectives, and guidance support for migrant workers.

Moreover, the training curricula developed through this partnership contribute to the provision of high-quality vocational education and training (VET) for future migrants and individuals seeking to enter the local labour market. Germany has a long-standing tradition of involving multiple partners in (dual) VET and has the potential to support institutions in partner countries to better coordinate labour market needs and training structures. A holistic, and not purely competency-based, (in the Anglo Saxonian understanding) assessment of learning strengthens the trust of both the German employers and local enterprises in the origin countries in qualifications awarded to migrant workers. This, in turn, fosters their employment in Germany, as well as in the origin countries. In this way the project also improves the image of VET in the migration origin countries.

Enhancement of the skills development of migrant workers and youth through skills partnerships. Didactic and organisational support facilitating skills development

In the case of skills partnerships between the road freight transport sectors of Lithuania and Uzbekistan, key didactic approaches in training migrant candidates from Uzbekistan by road freight transport companies include initial theoretical and basic practical training at the training centre in the origin country. This is followed by on-the-job training upon

arrival in Lithuania, and subsequent assessment of competences and awarding of certificates. Companies apply on-the-job training to integrate new drivers from third countries. Such training takes place exclusively within the company and ends with an assessment of competencies.

“We have developed our own apprenticeship in the company for the training of drivers, transport managers, forwarders and other employees. We apply this system to both ‘local’ employees and foreigners who want to get a job in the company. Training begins with theoretical training and at this stage, third-country nationals who have passed the preliminary selection study in their own countries using distance learning tools. After this stage, candidates who arrive at the company perform various auxiliary tasks and learn to work in an assisted mode in the company’s garages and office departments. In the third stage, they move on to practical training in driving a truck. The entire training programme and material is prepared by the company. Competencies are also assessed in the company itself.” (Respondent IT3, HR management specialist of the road freight transport company)

In order to ensure the sustainability of training, and employment of third-country nationals, as well as the rational use of resources, theoretical training takes place in the origin country – and only after this stage does the candidate arrive in Lithuania to continue practical training in a transport company.

“Based on the experience of such apprenticeships, for the sustainable employment of third-country nationals in transport companies, it is important to properly organise their high-quality preparation for work, when theoretical training is carried out in the countries of origin, the training material is prepared in the Lithuanian company, and the training is also carried out by representatives of the Lithuanian company. After passing the theoretical exam, successful candidates can arrive in Lithuania, where practical training continues in the workplace and competences are assessed in the company. Only after passing these stages should candidates receive work permits and sign employment contracts.” (Respondent IT4, HR management specialist of the road freight transport company)

This work-based learning of the migrant workers in the road freight transport companies usually covers only the essential professional competences and is not comprehensive in terms of volume, as it is quoted by a HR manager:

“In our training centres, the candidate is initially checked, and his/her competences are assessed. Later, the candidate is trained, aiming to provide the missing competences needed to work in the EU, if his/her competence deficit is small. We do not teach from scratch, we are not a school for basic knowledge, but a competence development centre.” (Respondent IT6, HR manager of the road freight transport company)

In the case of skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders, high quality training opportunities are also created and provided to prospective migrant

workers in their home countries. The Salesian Federation of VET centres, having established and opened VET centres recognised by both the Egyptian and Italian governments⁹, through this Skills Partnership, has consolidated the training provision already available in Egypt for young students and adults, offering the opportunity to complete their training process with an advanced training experience with the Italian partner. One of the distinguishing features of this applied didactic approach is the strong emphasis on individualised support tailored to specific skills needs and requirements of the potential migrant workers. Each migrant trainee is accompanied throughout their training process by a tutor (a work colleague) who guides them in acquiring the necessary skills to perform job tasks independently, as noted by one of the interviewed workers:

“Yes, yes, I learned a lot from my boss [...] Sometimes I work alone, sometimes I have to work with him [...] Yes, because the machine is not small [...] it has a screen for the machine, a normal thing (.) like software for the machine [...] It is not the same in Egypt ... But I did a similar job, I was assembling the ovens, the machine (here) is bigger.” (Respondent I3, migrant worker)

Participating Italian companies focus not only on the development of professional skills, but also on the acquisition of transversal skills needed for easier integration into the local socio-cultural context (North-East Italy). To support this process, companies provide room and board for teachers and instructors training these skills in the areas surrounding the workplace. Although the attention to skills development is central to the structure of the skills partnership, enterprises also take care of creating training-supportive living infrastructure and conditions for migrant trainees. This includes the provision of shared housing and easy access to the city centre, such as rail transport, and communications, allowing trainees to move independently, and get to know and experience the area around their internship, as reported by interviewed workers:

“All Egyptians, Serbs, Croats [...] all foreigners who are here do not pay anything.” (Respondent I4, migrant worker)

“I eat in the company canteen. I do not pay anything, just something only on the two days of the week [when they do not work].” (Respondent I6, migrant worker)

In the case of the THAMM Plus project implemented in Germany, the choice of the organisational and didactic approaches in training migrant workers is strongly influenced by the requirements of the federal legislation on labour immigration. The evaluation report of the THAMM project, which was a pre-cursor of the THAMM Plus project implemented in 2019-2023, stated the positive effects of this project in creating clear migration pathways, which fit to the regulations of the German law (the Skilled Immigration Act) and are adopted within THAMM Plus. The reported effects of the THAMM project on competence development of involved migrants were less evident. At the same time, policy-makers were reported to have “displayed a notable shift in attitude, recognising the importance of integrating labour migration considerations into national employment strategies and vocational training programmes” (ILO, 2024). As a consequence, THAMM

⁹ <https://donboscocairo.org/about-us/history/> Retrieved 09.10.2025.

Plus continues with the elaboration of skills development structures according to needs in migration processes. The German Skilled Immigration Act provides three labour migration pathways, i.e. through recognition of skills, apprenticeships and professional experience – and is based on a chance-card. To use these options, planned legal migration to Germany needs to refer to one of these legal pathways. Planning of legal migration is implemented through attaining core requirements within the country of origin, including language courses, further education courses, and intercultural training as preparation before the migration process (GIZ, 2024a). The THAMM Plus project starts with strengthening employability at an individual level. Partner institutions from the countries of origin and Germany develop measures together for those who are interested in migration to improve job chances in the domestic market or abroad. These measures include technical qualifications, language courses and soft skills training with the focus on intercultural understanding to strengthen migration opportunities on an individual level.

Alignment of skills partnerships with economic, educational, employment and migration policies

In the case of skills partnerships between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan, the weak alignment of this partnership with the national policies of the destination country is a crucial factor of its unsustainability. While formally this initiative fits within the national economic development policy for sustaining and fostering development of the important and dynamically growing economic sector, alignment with the educational, employment and, especially, migration policies is much weaker. Public vocational education and training has not been involved in this partnership, because the after-arrival training of migrants was provided by the companies, and the partnership did not foresee any educational interventions for the development of transversal skills for socio-cultural integration of the trainees (considered as not necessary due to short periods of stay in the country of destination). The monopolisation of training for road freight transport drivers by company-based training centres limits access to this training for other local learners and jobseekers. The opportunities for local residents to obtain a driver's qualification are greatly limited by the concentration of vocational training and qualification examinations in this area by private business structures, thus significantly increasing costs for learners. This is well illustrated by the following statement of a trade union representative in an interview:

"In addition, training to obtain a driver's qualification is now largely privatised. Once there was an opportunity to study for free to obtain the DE driver category (I myself received additional categories through the Employment Service courses). Now, in order to acquire this category you need to contact companies, the exam costs 5,000 EUR at private training centres. In addition, employers require practical experience. All this further reduces the attractiveness and accessibility of the profession for local residents." (Respondent IT7, representative of the sectoral trade union).

However, the biggest obstacle for the training and employment of third country nationals is the conflict of these skills partnerships with the conservative and restrictive immigration policy, which is not in favour of the employment of middle-and-low skilled migrant workers, especially from the former Soviet Union regions (except war refugees from Ukraine). Employers' organisations consider this conflict as a strategic obstacle for the development of the sector. From the point of view of the employers' organisation representative, the overly restrictive national immigration policy, while legitimately prioritising national security, also contradicts EU immigration policy trends favouring sustainable economic immigration:

"In this area (the employment of third-country nationals), there is a clear incompatibility of the political agenda between the EU goals and the goals of Lithuania's national policy. (...) There is a great lack of clear national policy and guidelines on this issue – what does Lithuania, as a state, strive for? Now we are investing in the employment of third-country nationals, the EU is implementing cooperation initiatives with these countries, such as migration and skills pacts, but Lithuania's political agenda is working in the opposite direction. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claim that we do not need human resources from Central Asia, we do not need to bring in Russian-speaking people, although not all countries in Central Asia have Russian as the dominant language, for example, in Tajikistan. We understand this perfectly well; we understand the reasons for such position (national security). But what is the alternative? Where, in which countries should we invest in the search and attraction of human resources? Which countries would be safe for Lithuania in terms of finding workforce? We do not hear a clear answer to these questions."
(Respondent IT2, representative of the sectoral employers' organisation).

The skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders is in line with the provisions of the *Decreto-Legge n. 20/2023 (Decreto Cutro)*, which promotes extra-quota entry channels for migrant workers trained through programmes recognised by the Italian Ministry of Labour. The partnership focuses on aligning training and recruitment pathways with the specific skill needs of the manufacturing and mechanical components sectors. The Salesian training centres in Cairo and Alexandria design and deliver pre-departure vocational and language training that aligns with Italian labour market standards, ensuring that participants acquire competencies directly relevant to the needs of the Italian companies. The involvement of national policy bodies of the origin and destination countries in the design and implementation of the skills partnership also significantly contributes to its sustainability. The skills partnership entails close cooperation between the Salesian vocational training institutions in Egypt and their Italian counterparts, with coordination and oversight provided by national authorities in both countries. The collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Labour, the Embassy of Italy in Cairo, and Confindustria, as the representative body of Italian industry, supports the alignment of training profiles with national industrial priorities and the recognition of programmes under the Decreto Cutro framework. This multi-actor governance model ensures that recruitment, training, and integration processes are coherent, transparent and conducive to long-term regular migration and sustainable labour mobility pathways.

The THAMM Plus project executed in Germany pursues “a holistic approach to migration for work and vocational training” (GIZ, 2024b). The alignment of this project with the policies of the destination and origin countries is based on pursuing a ‘triple-win’ effect (for migrant worker, country of origin and destination country). The core goal of THAMM, as well as THAMM Plus, is to introduce fair and safe migration pathways. This goal was evaluated positively for THAMM (ILO, 2024) and is followed up in the THAMM Plus project. The clear focus on selected industries, in contrast to an across-the-board-approach, provides a realistic frame for the development of the sector-specific identification of job requirements and education programmes to meet the needs of local companies and companies abroad. Both projects have raised awareness in the partner countries of labour-related migration as (one) promising solution for reducing irregular migration, and have led to the developing of emerging structures to facilitate migration. The successful introduction of skill-based and sector-specific assessments would also help facilitate migration efforts as it eases recruitment. To date, institutions in the partner countries are building structures to enable legal migration. As procedures continue to be established, North African countries may gain greater confidence to demand more space or support for local VET infrastructure to mitigate brain-drain. Cross-country agreements, following Clemens (2015), may view such ambitions as a sign of the growing maturity of a healthy skills partnership and further strengthen cooperation.

2.2.6 Discussion and conclusion

A comparison of the selected cases of skills partnerships according to the suggested research questions (see Table 11 in Annex) leads to several insights into the implementation and development of skills partnerships that involve migration.

The extent to which skills partnerships focus on addressing skills shortages can shape how they enhance and develop the skills of migrant workers, and how they align with policy and legal frameworks. The skills partnership between employers’ bodies of road freight transport in Lithuania and Uzbekistan seeks mainly to solve skills shortages in the enterprises of both countries, while strictly following only corporate interests. This implies a rather narrow focus on providing training in professional competencies leading to the award of a vocational qualification, largely leaving behind the provision of transversal skills and personal development needed for the sociocultural integration of migrant learners. This narrow focus on the interests of companies also implies exclusive involvement of employers’ bodies and enterprises in both origin and destination countries in implementing the skills partnership, but excludes policy-makers and other social partners. This significantly contributes to the misalignment of the skills partnership with national policies on education, employment and migration, provoking subsequent challenges in ensuring the partnership’s continuity and sustainability. In contrast, the other two skills partnerships explicitly target broader goals which reflect both corporate and societal interests. The skills partnerships implemented by the Italian and German stakeholders explicitly target broader goals related to public, socioeconomic issues in the countries of origin, such as youth unemployment and the low quality of accessible

skills formation. These partnerships also aim to train and recruit the excessive (surplus) workforce of the origin countries.

Work-based learning is a central approach for skills formation in the selected skills partnerships. Again, the potential of this approach in these partnerships is largely defined by the scope of its application. In the case of the skills partnership between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan, work-based learning is applied into company/sector-based training and leads to the award of a vocational qualification. Work-based learning is limited to satisfying the skills needs of enterprises in the destination country. The narrow scope of training provision limits its impact for the learners and societies of the countries involved, while at the same time compromising the sustainability of its provision. The skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders provides work-based learning in Italian companies in addition to participants' previous training in VET schools in their origin country. It also enriches work-based learning with the development of socio-cultural skills for integration in the destination country. This combination significantly expands educational impact for the migrant learners. The most ambitious scope in this area is demonstrated by the THAMM Plus project, which seeks to apply the dual VET approach to enable the employability of migrants in various sectors of the economy, as well as improve VET provision and its image in the origin countries.

Recognition of the skills and qualifications of migrant workers is one of the central elements of skills formation and employment in all the selected skills partnerships. The recognition of skills and qualifications within the skills partnership also requires a mutual trust in these skills and qualifications by the stakeholders. In the case of the skills partnership between road freight transport stakeholders from Lithuania and Uzbekistan, the development of such trust is alleviated by their orientation towards the provision of an international (cross-border) EU qualification for road freight drivers. In the case of the skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders and the THAMO Plus project, trust in the recognition of skills and qualifications is created via an inter-country comparison of VET curricula from both the origin and destination countries when planning and implementing training.

The skills partnership run by stakeholders from Lithuania and Uzbekistan lacked coherence with public policies, because they were designed and implemented without the involvement of policy-makers and civil society. The skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian stakeholders strictly follows the policies and legal regulations of the destination country, whereas the partnerships implemented by the stakeholders from Germany seek to create the potential for capacity building in skills formation, employment and migration policy institutions in the countries of origin. The latter two skills partnerships also apply multi-agent governance approaches, which ensures important political and societal support for their implementation and continuity.

One of the most challenging impacts of the skills partnerships that were analysed, is to facilitate skills formation that would benefit the countries of origin. Circular migration in these cases is not supported by the enterprises involved and, indeed, the migrant workers themselves, as they seek maximum return on their investments in human

capital. However, participation of the state/governmental agencies from the origin and destination countries in a skills partnership (like GIZ in the case of the THAMM Plus project) at least makes this intention explicit and creates the space for the introduction of the different measures and actions that enhance mutual benefits (triple win) from the skills development of migrant workers.

Several limitations can be identified in this research study. First, the comparison includes only three cases of skills partnerships involving migration. Second, the object and scope of research are more focused on the broad sets of 'macro-level' factors of sustainability of skills partnerships clustered around the matching of demand and supply of skills, skills formation and training, as well as policy-alignment. This research does not cover financial sustainability of skills partnerships, protection of the rights of engaged stakeholders and migrant workers, or dealing with public discourse on their implementation. In addition, engagement of migrant workers in the empirical study is limited due to difficulties in accessing this research population.

2.2.7 Recommendations for policies and practice

Orientation of skills partnerships to mitigate skills shortages in the destination country and unemployment in the country of origin

What works?

Reciprocal consideration of skill-matching needs in both origin and destination countries. Special attention should be given to how skills partnerships can help solve labour shortages in destination countries while dealing with issues of structural unemployment in origin countries.

What does not work?

Focusing skills partnerships narrowly on immediate skills needs in a specific sector or occupational area can lead to very limited and narrow stakeholder engagement in their design and implementation, putting their sustainability at significant risk.

What improvements could be made?

When seeking sustainable skills partnerships focused on the skills development and employment of migrant workers, it is important to consider the compliance of these partnerships with public interest and public good in both origin and destination countries. Compliance with private or corporate interests can be sufficient for initial steps of the design of skills partnerships, but their implementation and sustainability require reference to public interest and good, such as preventing or addressing unemployment, poverty, exclusion or irregular migration. This requires developing constructive and open dialogue between stakeholders from origin and destination countries in the design of skills partnerships, paying special attention to the engagement of stakeholders from origin countries, providing them with necessary capacities and support.

The establishment of mutual trust between the parties engaged in skills partnerships (including migrant workers) regarding the skills, competencies and qualifications of migrant workers, is one of the key factors affecting skills partnership sustainability. Comparison of VET curricula, standards and qualifications of the origin and destination countries is an essential starting point for planning migrant worker training in skills partnerships. In these processes, the use and development of international and multi-country comparability instruments – regional qualifications frameworks, international qualifications, multi-country professional profiles – could help facilitate the comparison and establishment of mutual trust in skills and qualifications between the engaged parties and countries.

Enhancement of the skills development of migrant workers and youth

What works?

The cases analysed reveal the effectiveness of a combination of individualised schemes of work-based learning, language education, and the development of transversal competencies and inter-cultural communication skills, while providing possibilities for the recognition of prior learning in origin countries. Providing structured training courses that target the employability of learners in relevant economic sectors (e.g. by integrating work-based learning in enterprises with the development of transversal skills and inter-cultural communication abilities) is also effective.

What does not work?

Narrowly focusing migrant workers' training on developing occupational and professional skills and competencies helps to reduce immediate costs related to implementing skills partnerships. However, it also limits the capacities and scope of migrant workers who need successful and sustainable labour market integration. At the same time, it makes these workers highly dependent on employers, especially when the skills partnership only provides company-based training.

What improvements could be made?

The sustainability of skills partnerships, especially their impact on the employment and socio-cultural integration of migrant workers, requires supplementing work-based learning with the development of the transversal skills necessary for sociocultural integration. The selected skills partnerships between Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders and the THAMM Plus project show that the development of migrant workers' transversal skills can be effectively integrated with work-based learning. The culture of enterprise and sociocultural context of work processes can support the development of different transversal competences necessary for work and the social inclusion of migrant workers.

Alignment with economic, educational, employment and migration policies

What works?

Skills partnership sustainability can be achieved by applying a multi-actor governance model along with the participation of policy institutions and civil society stakeholders. This ensures the coherence of necessary recruitment, training and integration processes with policy priorities and requirements of both origin and destination countries.

What does not work?

Sustainability of skills partnerships can be compromised by downplaying or ignoring the policy context of their implementation, and by not involving policy-makers in their design and implementation.

What improvements could be made?

The recommendation is to strengthen the participation and engagement of policy stakeholders from origin countries in the design and implementation of skills partnerships. This should include investment in building their capacities. At present, such intentions are only clearly evident in the THAMM Plus project partnership.

2.2.8 Acknowledgement

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ANNEX

Table 7: Research population

Countries	Data collecting methods	Research population	
		Identification	Characteristics
Lithuania	Semi structured interviews (face-to-face and online) – 10	IT1, IT2	Representatives of a road freight transport organisation
		IT3, IT4, IT5, IT6	Human resource managers of a road freight transport company
		IT7	Representative of the road freight transport trade union
		IT8	Representative of the national trade union organisation
		IT9, IT10	Manager of a small and medium road freight transport company
Italy	Focus group	IF1	Representative of the national employers' organisation
		IF2	Representative of the employers' organisation, social cooperative
		IF3, IF4	Representatives of the national labour market intermediaries
		IF5, IF6, IF7	Representatives of public/regional VET providers
		IF8	Representative of the NGO working in the integration of migrants
	Semi-structured interviews - 9	I_1	Migrant worker, male, 27 years of age, car mechanic, country of origin- Egypt
		I_2	Migrant worker, male, 22 years of age, welder, country of origin- Egypt
		I_3	Migrant worker, male, 27 years of age, turner, country of origin- Egypt
		I_4	Migrant worker, male, 27 years of age, turning and boring machine operator, country of origin- Egypt
		I_5	Migrant worker, male, 28 years of age, mechatronic technician, country of origin- Egypt
		I_6	Migrant worker, male, 19 years of age, turner, country of origin- Egypt

Countries	Data collecting methods	Research population	
		Identification	Characteristics
		I_7	Migrant worker, male, 24 years of age, CNC operator, country of origin- Egypt
		I_8	Migrant worker, male, 24 years of age, mechanical engineering technician, country of origin- Egypt
		I_9	Migrant worker, male, 25 years of age, maintenance worker, country of origin- Egypt

Source: drafted by the authors

Table 8: Labour market and emigration in the analysed origin countries

Migration origin countries involved in the analysed skills partnerships	Unemployment rate, share of total workforce	Youth unemployment rates, share of the total workforce, 2024	Total number of emigrants in mid-2024
Egypt	6.8 (2023)	18.7	4.8 million
Morocco	11.8 (2022)	22.1	<u>3.6 million</u>
Tunisia	15.1 (2023)	40.1	715.2 thousand
Uzbekistan	5.3 (2020)	10.9	2.1 million

Sources: Youth unemployment share of the total workforce 2024, ILO Modelled Estimates database (ILOEST), International Labour Organization (ILO), uri: iloestat.ilo.org/data/bulk, publisher: ILOSTAT, type: external database, date accessed: 7 January 2025

World Bank Group Data <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=TN>

International Organization for Migration. The Global Migration Data Portal:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2024&cm49=860

https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2024&cm49=818

https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2024&cm49=788

https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2024&cm49=504

Table 9: Employment, unemployment, job vacancy and immigration in the analysed destination countries (2024)

Migration destination countries	Employment rate, %	Unemployment rate, share of the total workforce, %	Job vacancy rate, %	Net migration, total volume
Germany	81.3	3.4	3.2	36,954
Italy	67.1	6.5	2.1	95,246
Lithuania	79.2	7.1	2.0	9,448

Sources:

Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/une_rt_a/default/table?lang=en

Macrotrends <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/deu/germany/net-migration>

Macrotrends <https://www.macrotrends.net/datasets/global-metrics/countries/ita/italy/net-migration>

Migracijos Departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vidaus reikalų ministerijos (2025) Migracijos metraštis 2024. <https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1750415196/1330/MM%202024%20LT.pdf>

Table 10: Immigrants from analysed origin countries in the destination countries (2024)

Population of the citizens of Uzbekistan in Lithuania	Population of the citizens of Egypt in Italy	Population of the citizens of Tunisia in Germany	Population of the citizens of Morocco in Germany
9,773	161,551	58,260	102,925

Sources:

Migracijos Departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vidaus reikalų ministerijos (2025) Migracijos metraštis 2024. <https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1750415196/1330/MM%202024%20LT.pdf>

Statista Foreign population in Italy as of 2024, by leading country of origin. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/613795/foreign-residents-italy-by-country-of-origin/#:~:text=As%20of%202024%2C%20Romanians%20were%20Italy's%20largest,living%20in%20Italy%20during%20the%20period%20considered>

Statista. Anzahl der Ausländer aus Tunesien in Deutschland von 2011 bis 2024

https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/560540/umfrage/in-deutschland-lebende-tunesier/?st_source=ai_mode

Statista Anzahl der Ausländer aus Marokko in Deutschland von 2011 bis 2024. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/558677/umfrage/in-deutschland-lebende-marokkaner/>

Table 11: Summary of the analysis of the skills partnerships

Explored features of the skills partnerships	Skills partnership between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan	Skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders	THAMM Plus project (Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa)
Orientation of skills partnerships to the mitigation of skills shortages in the destination country and unemployment in the country of origin	Aimed to solve the shortage of road freight transport drivers by training and employing migrant workers in cooperation with sectoral employers' bodies from the country of destination. The focus is on dealing with skills shortages of companies in both the origin and destination countries.	Skills partnership explicitly combines the aim to mitigate skills shortages in the destination country with the intentions to alleviate the problems of structural youth unemployment in Egypt, which contributes to irregular emigration.	Skills partnership seeks to develop sustainable migration pathways and to foster the quality of skills formation in countries of origin through provision of high-quality VET in the origin countries with their consistently high rates of youth emigration.
Enhancement of skills development for the migrant workers and the youth	Strong focus on the provision of the professional competences needed for work by providing the basic competencies in the country of origin and developing these competences with on-the-job training in the destination country.	Consolidation of the vocational training offer for learners in the origin country with an advanced apprenticeship experience at the Italian enterprise. Individualised attention to the skills needs and requirements of the potential migrant workers by providing each learner with a tutor (a work colleague) who guides them in work-based learning. Attention to the development of transversal skills for easier integration into the local socio-cultural fabric.	Applied skills development structures follow three labour migration pathways foreseen by the German legislation: through recognition of skills, apprenticeships, and professional experience. Strong focus on pre-departure education in the country of origin, including language courses, further education courses and intercultural training. Strengthening the employability of candidates at an individual level in both origin and destination country, including training for technical qualifications, language courses and training of intercultural understanding.

Explored features of the skills partnerships	Skills partnership between the road freight transport associations of Lithuania and Uzbekistan	Skills partnership between the Italian and Egyptian VET stakeholders	THAMM Plus project (Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa)
Alignment with economic, educational, employment and migration policies	Misalignment with national policies due to narrow orientation to the skills needs of business and failure to involve policy-makers, public providers of skills formation and social partners in the skills partnership. Negative implications for sustainability of skills partnership.	Strong alignment of the skills partnership with the legal framework of the destination country. Applying multi-actor governance model ensuring coherence and transparency of involved recruitment, training, and integration processes.	Seeking the ‘triple-win-effect’ (for migrant workers, destination country and country of origin). Long-term aim of fostering fair and safe migration pathways. Development of education offers that fit both the needs of domestic companies as well as companies in the countries of origin. Building up structures and capacities in the origin countries to enable legal migration.

Source: drafted by the authors

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ACRONYMS

2SLS	Two-Stage Least Squares
ADR	Accord européen relatif au transport international des marchandises Dangereuses par Route (European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road)
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMT	Amazon Mechanical Turk
ANAPEC	National Agency for Employment and Skills (Morocco)
ANSD	National Agency for Statistics and Demography
APA	American Psychological Association
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Integration
BA	Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Federal Agency of Employment, Germany)
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRD	Bureau for Diaspora Relations
CA	Central Asia
CCME	Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Professional Training
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
DDI	Diaspora Direct Investment
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
DMD	Diaspora, Migration and Development
DMS	State Migration Service of Ukraine
DPE	Digital Platform Employment

EC	European Commission
EE	Eastern Europe
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupation
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
EU	European Union
EU17	Group of 17 EU and EFTA countries covered by the Eurostat pilot survey on Digital Platform Employment
EUDiF	EU Global Diaspora Facility
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FY	Fiscal Year
GAMM	Global Approach to Migration and Mobility
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFEMS	Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GS4S	Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development
GSP	Global Skill Partnership
GVC	Global Value Chains
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IO	International organisation

IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities
IT	Information Technology
IV	Instrumental Variable
KIHS	Kyrgyz Integrated Household Survey
KII	Key Informant Interview
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LISA	Longitudinal Integrated Database for Health Insurance
MDCMRE	Ministry of Moroccans Living Abroad
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIGCOM	Migration and Competitiveness
MoEWOE	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBKR	National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSC KR	National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic
NSDA	National Skills Development Authority
NSDP	National Skills Development Policy
NSDS	National Skills Development System
NSE	Non-Standard Employment
NSIA	National Migration and Asylum Strategy
NTVQF	National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework
ODA	Overseas Development Aid

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKUP	Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARE 1+1	Programme for Attracting Remittances into the Economy
PCD	Policy Coherence for Development
PKSF	Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation
PSHTA	Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act
PW	Platform Work
RMG	Ready-Made Garments
RQ	Research Question
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEET	South Eastern Europe and Turkey
SEIP	Skills for Employment Investment Program
SEMED	Southern and Eastern Mediterranean
SICIP	Skills for Industry Competitiveness and Innovation Program
SMP	Skills Mobility Partnerships
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
THAMM	Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa
TTC	Technical Training Centre
TÜBİTAK	Scientific and Technical Research Council of Türkiye
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WB	Western Balkans
WIIW	Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies
YÖK	Turkish Council of Higher Education
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities



European Training Foundation



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