



LABOUR MIGRATION IN TIMES OF LABOUR SHORTAGES

EMN FLASH #4 – 2025

BACKGROUND



Labour migration is one strategy for addressing labour shortages in EMN Member and Observer Countries, as well as in OECD Countries. The EU faces labour shortages at all skill levels and across several sectors – including healthcare, construction and ICT – due to recruitment issues and driven by more recent changes such as demographic ageing, the digital and green transitions, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the core challenges is the need to attract, retain and integrate talent from abroad to meet rapidly evolving EU's labour market demands. The EU already provides several legal pathways for labour migration. This framework is reinforced by the Union of Skills, adopted in

March 2025, the EU Skills Agenda, the Skills and Talent Package and the Skills and Mobility Package, which promote strategic initiatives such as the Labour Migration Platform, the proposed EU Talent Pool, with the aim of attracting talent and better aligning migration with labour market needs as well as the Talent Partnerships, mutually beneficial partnerships between the EU and partner countries – open to all skill levels – focusing on skills development and international labour mobility to the EU, as part of a comprehensive approach to migration management.

KEY TRENDS AND FINDINGS



- Labour migration is increasingly recognised as a key strategy to tackle persistent labour shortages across EMN Member and Observer Countries, driven by challenges in recruitment, demographic changes, economic transitions and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- EMN Member Countries and Serbia also highlighted challenges and risks associated with labour migration such as recruiting over-qualified foreigners, language and cultural integration hurdles, heightened risks of exploitation, poor working and living conditions and added pressure on housing and public services.
- Across EMN Member Countries and Serbia labour shortages are often defined as an imbalance between vacancies and available workers – assessed through quantitative metrics and qualitative evaluations of skills mismatches.
- Extensive legal and policy reforms have been implemented since 2021. Many EMN Member Countries combine demand-driven with mixed approaches and have implemented practical changes including digitalisation and fast track procedures to better align migration with labour market needs.
- National practices for attracting and recruiting foreign talent predominantly rely on initiatives led by employers and private recruitment agencies, which include bilateral agreements, quality-assurance measures and diverse advertising strategies.
- EMN Member Countries rely, to some extent, on EU initiatives and instruments on labour migration developed since 2021, such as the EU Talent Partnerships as well as the EU-funded projects under the Migration Partnership Facility supporting the implementation of Talent Partnerships.

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