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Labour migration in times of labour shortages

European Migration Network –
OECD joint Study

December 2025

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

This study was prepared on the basis of national contributions from 25 EMN NCPs (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS) collected via a common template developed by the EMN NCPs to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability. The OECD provided supplementary information for countries not part of the EMN. The information contained in this study refers to the situation in the abovementioned EMN Member, Observer, and OECD Countries, from January 2021 up to June 2024.

National contributions were largely based on desk analysis of existing legislation and policy documents, reports, academic literature, internet resources, reports and information from national authorities rather than primary research. Statistics were sourced from Eurostat, national authorities and other (national) databases.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

The study uses the following definitions, which – unless otherwise stated – are based on the EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary.¹

| Term | Definition |
|--|---|
| Employment | The exercise of activities covering whatever form of labour or work regulated under national law or in accordance with established practice for or under the direction and/or supervision of an employer. |
| Ethical recruitment | The International Organization for Migration (IOM) summarises ethical recruitment as hiring workers lawfully and in a fair and transparent manner that respects and protects their dignity and human rights. ² Relevant documents in that regard are conventions such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO): C181-Private Employment Agencies Convention, from 1997, which establishes clear protections for jobseekers (notably, respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, and prohibition of fee charging to jobseekers); and its General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, promoting transparency and fairness for the benefit of both workers and employers. |
| Flows (data) | Flows estimate the number of people moving into and out of the country for employment reasons. ³ |
| Immigration quota | A quota established for and by the country for the entry of immigrants – normally for the purposes of labour migration. |
| Labour market test | Mechanism that aims to ensure that migrant workers are only admitted after employers have unsuccessfully searched for national workers, EU citizens (in EU Member States, this also means European Economic Area (EEA) workers) or legally residing third-country nationals with access to the labour market according to national legislation. |
| Labour migration | Movement of persons from one state to another or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment. |
| Labour shortage | Shortage of a particular type of labour in a particular labour market, which may be said to exist when the number of vacancies has been (or is expected to be) above a level considered to represent 'normal' turnover at the prevailing wages and working conditions for an extended period. |
| Legal pathway | In the EU context, all legal mechanisms and policies that enable lawful migration from a third country to an EU Member State, for both international and humanitarian protection needs and labour market needs. |
| Mobility partnership | A cooperation arrangement based on political declarations, which provides a bilateral framework for dialogue and practical cooperation on a voluntary basis to address migration and mobility issues of mutual concern, primarily with EU neighbourhood countries, including short- and long-term mobility. |
| Regional labour market imbalances | Regional differences of labour demand and supply within a country. ⁴ |
| Seasonal worker | A third-country national who retains their principal place of residence in a third country and stays legally and temporarily in the territory of an EU Member State to carry out an activity that is dependent on the passing of the seasons, under one or more fixed-term work contracts concluded directly between that third-country national and the employer established in that EU Member State. ⁵ |

1 EMN Glossary, *EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary – European Commission* last accessed 17 January 2025.

2 IOM, 'Frequently Asked Questions', <https://iris.iom.int/frequently-asked-questions>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

3 This definition has been created for the purpose of this EMN study.

4 European Labour Authority, 'EURES Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses 2022'. 2022, p. 44, <https://www.ela.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-09/ELA-eures-shortages-surpluses-report-2022.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

5 Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014L0036>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

| Term | Definition |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Shortage occupations | According to the European Labour Authority (ELA), occupations for which employers face a shortage of suitable employees (i.e. the demand for workers with required skills at a specific location is greater than the supply). The ELA further differentiates between ‘severe shortage’ and ‘widespread shortage’. ⁶ |
| Skills shortages | Skills shortages are linked to qualitative labour shortages and refer to situations in which there is a sufficient number of candidates, but none with the specific skill set that the employer is looking for. ⁷ |
| Social dumping | The practice whereby workers are given pay and/or working and living conditions that are sub-standard compared to those specified by law or collective agreements in the relevant labour market, or otherwise prevalent there. |
| Social partners | Bodies representing employers, workers and governments when meeting for the purpose of consultations and negotiations on labour, social and economic practices, policies and legislation. |
| Stocks (data) | Stocks estimate the number of ‘foreign talent’ (see below) born abroad or with a foreign citizenship in the country at a given point in time. ⁸ |
| (Foreign) talent | In this study, following the European Commission’s ‘Proposal on Establishing an EU Talent Pool’, and other documents such as ‘Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU’, ⁹ ‘Skills and Talent Mobility’, ¹⁰ and ‘Talent Partnerships’, ¹¹ talent is understood as an all-encompassing term that refers to the entire range of skills – including low, medium and high – that might be needed by an EU Member State’s labour market. ¹² In this study, foreign talent refers to talent that comes from third countries for employment reasons. |
| Talent Partnerships | Talent Partnerships are part of the comprehensive partnerships between the EU and partner countries and migration management introduced by the Pact on Migration and Asylum. They aim to boost mutually beneficial skills development and international mobility, based on better matching of labour market needs and skills between the EU and partner countries, and are open to all skill levels. |
| Third-country national | Any person who is not a citizen of the EU within the meaning of Article 20(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and who is not a person enjoying the EU right to free movement, as defined in Article 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code). |

6 European Labour Authority (ELA), ‘EURES – Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses 2022’. 2022, p. 8, <https://www.ela.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-03/eures-la-bour-shortages-report-2022.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

7 For an explainer on different concepts referring to skills mismatches, one of which is skills shortages, see International Labour Organisation (ILO). ‘Supplementary notes on skills mismatch’, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/supplementary-notes-skills-mismatch>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

8 This definition has been created for the purpose of this EMN study.

9 European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU’. 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A657%3AFIN&qid=1651223944578>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

10 European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Skills and Talent Mobility’. 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_715_1_EN.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

11 European Commission, ‘Talent Partnerships: Commission Launches New Initiative to Address EU Skills Shortages and Improve Migration Cooperation with Partner Countries’. 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2921, last accessed 11 July 2024.

12 European Commission, ‘Proposal for Establishing an EU Talent Pool’. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellara169ec2f-8469-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF, last accessed 11 July 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



KEY POINTS TO NOTE

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.



SCOPE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study provides an overview of labour migration laws and policies, as well as initiatives and practices of EMN Member Countries and Serbia¹³ targeting third-country nationals between January 2021 and June 2024. It complements the 2024 EMN inform on 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talent into the EU',¹⁴ and explores how EMN Member and Observer Countries,¹⁵ and non-EU OECD Countries, use labour migration to address current labour shortages and prevent future ones.

This includes an update on the context, the main countries of origin and crucial labour migration sectors. It also provides an overview of legislative and policy developments, and an analysis of best practices, lessons learned and challenges with regard to labour migration. Shortage

The study looks at labour shortages and labour migration at all skill levels and includes all third-country nationals moving to an EMN Member or Observer Country for the purpose of employment.



CONTEXT

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.

¹³ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

¹⁴ European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU - EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.

¹⁵ As Serbia is the only EMN Observer Country participating in this study the mention onwards will be EMN Member Countries and Serbia.



LABOUR SHORTAGES: DEBATE AND CONCEPTUALISATION

There is no universally recognised definition of labour shortages. However, EMN Member Countries¹⁶ and Serbia frequently use both ‘labour shortage’ and ‘shortage occupation’ as concepts to describe situations where job vacancies exceed the available supply of workers. Although no formal legal definition exists, 11 EMN Member Countries¹⁷ and Serbia view shortages as an imbalance between supply and demand – measured either through quantitative metrics, such as vacancy rates and applicant-to-vacancy ratios, or via qualitative assessments of skills mismatches – often referring to critical sectors within shortage occupations lists.¹⁸

Within EMN Member Countries and Serbia, labour shortages have emerged as a persistent structural challenge, driven by demographic aging, the aftermath of the COVID-19

pandemic, and evolving sector-specific demands. With domestic labour supplies unable to meet market needs fully, EMN Member Countries have increasingly turned to immigration as a policy instrument. As shown by Eurostat data, five EMN Member Countries¹⁹ issued more than 50% of their residence permits for employment reasons, and 15 EMN Member Countries²⁰ reported that shortages affect sectors at all skill levels.

Public debates on labour migration are multifaceted and vary regionally. Debates are often driven by pressing labour shortages due to demographic developments and significant labour shortages in specific sectors.²¹ In three EMN Member Countries,²² debates have addressed issues such as potential exploitation, integration challenges and the impact on local labour standards.



LABOUR MIGRATION LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

with regard to labour migration policy approaches, 16 EMN Member Countries²³ and Serbia have adopted a primarily demand-driven labour migration approach based on employer-led recruitment, while seven EMN Member Countries use a mixed approach with multiple strategies (such as the demand-driven, occupation-driven and human capital approach).²⁴ Nine EMN Member Countries²⁵ combine multiple strategies to address labour shortages, including points-based systems and frameworks that balance employer needs and sector requirements.

Within these approaches, changes to legal and policy frameworks have been extensive.²⁶ EMN Member Countries have streamlined procedures through digitalisation²⁷ and fast-track procedures.²⁸ Others have revised (some aspects of) their quota systems for example by increasing the quota or made changes regarding categories of workers not falling under quota regulations,²⁹ introduced targeted measures for key sectors³⁰ (such as healthcare, IT, construction and tourism), and have also measures in place to facilitate inclusion of family members in the labour market.³¹ Thirteen EMN Member Countries are planning further legal and policy changes to address

labour shortages through labour migration, although in different directions.³²

Across EMN Member Countries³³ and Serbia, different stakeholders cooperate in policy design and implementation with regard to labour migration. Five EMN Member Countries³⁴ have established dedicated interministerial committees and specialised bodies for strategy oversight.³⁵ In five countries, social partners such as employee representatives formally contribute to developing shortage occupation lists, setting quotas or offering policy input.³⁶ Regional and local authorities play a key role in three countries.³⁷ In some cases, private sector stakeholders are engaged directly.³⁸

With regard to the type of shortages, 13 EMN Member Countries³⁹ and Serbia address a mix of short-term and medium-to-long-term labour shortages, while eight EMN Member Countries⁴⁰ focus specifically on short-term or acute shortages.

Various policy instruments are used to address labour shortages. These include adjustments of labour market tests,⁴¹ shortage occupation lists,⁴² quota systems⁴³ and

16 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SK.

17 BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LV, NL, PL, SK.

18 AT, BE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, SK.

19 HR, LT, MT, PL, SK.

20 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE.

21 AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, FR, IE, LU, LV, SK.

22 AT, EE, IT.

23 AT, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI.

24 BE, BG, DE, ES, FR, HR, SK.

25 BE, BG, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, SK.

26 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE, SK.

27 AT, BE, DE, EE, FR, IE, LT, NL, SE.

28 DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE, SK.

29 AT, CY, CZ, EE, EL, HU, HR, LT, MT, SK (within the context of national visas).

30 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, FR, IE, LT, LU, SK.

31 AT, BE, DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE. In France the spouse of the foreigner holding a “talent” residence permit is automatically issued with a residence permit labelled “*talent famille*” (family of a talent) which gives access to the French labour market.

32 AT, CY, CZ, EE, FI, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, PL, SE.

33 AT, BE (federal, BRU, FL), BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

34 AT, BE, DE, FR, IE.

35 See also EMN/OECD. Designing Migration Strategies, 2025. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2025-03/2024_EMN-OECD_inform_designing_migration_strategies.pdf, last accessed 14 May 2025.

36 AT, BG, CZ, EE, PL, SK.

37 BE, DE, ES.

38 BE, DE, ES.

39 AT, BE, CZ, CY, DE, EE, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, MT, SE.

40 BG, EL, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SK.

41 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE – in specific cases only, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU (in specific cases only), LV, MT, NL, PL, SK, and RS.

42 AT, BE, CZ, DE – in specific cases only, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, SK.

43 AT, CZ, EE, EL, HU, IE, LT, SK.

streamlined procedures,⁴⁴ to facilitate or speed up recruitment.

Twelve EMN Member Countries⁴⁵ and Serbia have a policy strategy and/or institutionalised/coordinated approaches for attracting foreign talent.⁴⁶ These encompass institutionalised approaches, labour shortage assessments and mechanisms for recognising foreign qualifications. The majority of responding EMN Member Countries⁴⁷ have also implemented policies to retain foreign talent, such as streamlining visa and permit processes, and extending permit validity as a strategy to ease the administrative process.

Key legal pathways for work have been refined across EMN Member Countries and Serbia and often address (highly) skilled workers.⁴⁸ EMN Member Countries,

however, also focus on different skill levels to meet immediate, medium-term and long-term labour market needs.⁴⁹

EMN Member Countries monitor and evaluate their labour migration policies by tracking permits, analysing labour market data and gathering stakeholder feedback.⁵⁰ Key lessons learned include the importance of effective data collection, streamlined legal frameworks, flexible permit systems, robust integration measures and ethical recruitment practices to address both short-term and long-term labour shortages.⁵¹ Challenges include complex governance and coordination issues, lengthy legal procedures, integration difficulties (such as housing and language barriers), and persistent labour market obstacles affecting the recruitment, retention or recognition of foreign workers' qualifications.⁵²



PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES FOR ATTRACTING AND RECRUITING FOREIGN TALENT

National practices and initiatives established by EMN Member Countries and Serbia to tackle labour shortages include initiatives to assist recruitment, sector-specific projects, and comprehensive strategies. In the majority of EMN Member Countries, the recruitment of third-country nationals is predominantly driven by employers and private recruitment agencies.⁵³ However, EMN Member Countries and Serbia lead and influence employer and private recruitment-agency efforts to recruit third-country nationals through bilateral agreements with third countries,⁵⁴ quality-assurance measures⁵⁵ (which typically involve checks to ensure compliance with national employment laws governing the hiring of third-country nationals) and advertising initiatives (including online platforms⁵⁶ and job fairs),⁵⁷ while also implementing cost-sharing strategies⁵⁸ to mitigate recruitment agency fees. France, Germany, and Luxembourg reported significant government involvement in recruitment initiatives, such as through direct job placements. Additionally, targeted sector-specific projects and high-level strategies aim to attract workers.⁵⁹

There are significant regional disparities in attracting foreign talent in 14 reporting Countries, largely due to uneven economic development, wage disparities, sector concentration and varying levels of essential services – with major cities drawing the bulk of foreign workers, while rural areas lag behind.⁶⁰ To mitigate these imbalances, nine EMN Member Countries⁶¹ have implemented initiatives such as regional projects, advisory services, government subsidies, targeted policy changes and regional shortage occupation lists, alongside strategic agreements with third countries, to enhance recruitment across the country.

Twelve EMN Member Countries engage to some extent with EU initiatives and instruments on labour migration developed since 2021.⁶² This includes engagement under the Talent Partnerships umbrella in a Team Europe approach as well as through the EU-funded Migration Partnership Facility, and related programmes to advance initiatives that address labour shortages through innovative recruitment, training and circular mobility schemes.

44 AT, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

45 AT, BE, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, MT (under finalisation), NL, PL, and RS.

46 See also EMN -OECD joint inform on Innovative strategies to attract foreign talents, February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-joint-emn-oecd-inform-explores-innovative-strategies-attract-foreign-talent-eu-2025-02-27_en, last accessed 15 May 2025.

47 AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

48 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SK.

49 AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, HU, MT, LT, LV, PL, SE, SK.

50 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, MT, NL, SE, SK.

51 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

52 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

53 BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK, and RS.

54 AT, FR, DE, ES, HR, IT, and RS.

55 AT, BG, DE, HR, IE, NL, PL, SE.

56 EMN Member Countries reporting this in the EMN inform on new and innovative ways to attract foreign talent: AT, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, LT, LV, NL, SI. Additional EMN Member Countries that reported this approach for this study: SE.

57 AT, DE, FI, LU.

58 DE, FI, FR, LV.

59 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU.

60 AT, BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, SE.

61 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, SE.

62 BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, NL, SK.

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY



1.1. INTRODUCTION

Labour shortages in the EU: definition and diagnosis

This study focuses on labour migration policies and practices addressing the labour shortages⁶³ of EMN Member (EU Member States except Denmark) and Observer Countries (NO, GE, MD, UA, ME, AM, RS), as well as non-EU OECD Countries.⁶⁴ The unmet demand for labour in the EU, estimated on the basis of the job vacancy rate, has more than doubled in less than a decade.⁶⁵ The growing **extent of labour shortages** in EMN Member and Observer Countries calls for new and effective policy solutions to be established. All EMN Member Countries are facing similar challenges –albeit to different degrees. This points to labour migration as an important way of addressing labour shortages.

Labour shortages concern **all skill levels** across the different sectors. However, particularly affected are the health and long-term care, hospitality, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and information and communication technology (ICT) sectors.⁶⁶ While overall job vacancy rates capture quantitative labour shortages, qualitative labour shortages⁶⁷ emerge when demand for workers who are qualified for a particular labour market sector, occupation, or have a specific skill level outweighs the supply of those workers.⁶⁸

The European Commission's annual review on employment and social developments (2023)⁶⁹ notes that shortages occur at **all skill levels**, in highly, medium- and low-skilled occupations. Hence, a comprehensive **understanding of talent** is key to address labour shortages and capture the entire range of skills needed by the labour market.⁷⁰

Labour shortages in EMN Member and Observer Countries, and in non-EU OECD Countries, are based on long-standing **issues with the recruitment of workers**, and poor working conditions in specific occupations.⁷¹ However, they are also driven by profound **labour market changes** in the recent past, including progressing **demographic aging**, and the **digital and green transitions**, which demand a workforce with specific, new skillsets.⁷² Labour shortages are also linked to the **market resilience**, which has been seriously put to the test by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Persistent labour and skill shortages can have far-reaching **negative impacts on the economy and society**, from declining quality of (public) services and levels of productivity and innovation and competitiveness, to rising workloads for employed workers.⁷³ As a result, labour shortages can undermine national development plans in areas such as housing and healthcare provision.

63 see also Cedefop, 'Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2025', available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index/labour-skills-shortage-index?country=BE&countryb=EU27#1>, last accessed 14 May 2025.

64 Non-EU OECD Member Countries: Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States; OECD, 'Members and Partners', <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/members-partners.html>, last accessed 15 July 2024; European Migration Network (EMN), 'Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022', July 2023, p. 26, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8bd5962d-ac8a-4b24-af00-2dbdfa559c3e_en?file-name=00_eu_arm2022_report.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024; For the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) see e.g. OECD, 'Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the New Global Environment', Chapter 5, 2023, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e8e5cabe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e8e5cabe-en/section-d1e7251-1a11a03f41>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

65 European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an EU Talent Pool, SWD (2023) 717 final, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/EU/162054/imfname_11310038.pdf, last accessed 10 July 2024.

66 European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an EU Talent Pool, SWD (2023) 717 final, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/EU/162054/imfname_11310038.pdf, last accessed 10 July 2024.

67 Arpaia, A. and A. Halasz, 'Short- and long-run determinants of labour shortages' (2023), *Quarterly Report on the Euro Area*, 22 (1), p.1.

68 Arpaia, A. and A. Halasz, 'Short- and long-run determinants of labour shortages' (2023), *Quarterly Report on the Euro Area*, 22 (1), p.1.; European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe', 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26989&langId=en>, last accessed 10 July 2024.

69 European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023. Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU', p. 47, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26989&langId=en>, last accessed 10 July 2024.

70 For the necessity to redefine talent, see OECD, 'Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the New Global Environment', Chapter 5, 2023, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e8e5cabe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e8e5cabe-en/section-d1e7251-1a11a03f41>, last accessed on 10 July 2024. See also the implications for debating labour migration only in terms of (high) skills in terms of playing into a securitization perspective, as indicated in Amelina, A., & Horvath, K., 'Regimes of Intersection: Facing the Manifold Interplays of Discourses, Institutions, and Inequalities in the Regulation of Migration', (2020), *Migration Letters*, 17(4), 487–497.

71 European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESE) 2023', <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2023/index.html#inline-nav-2>, last accessed 11 July 2024; For the problem of labour shortages and its scope in EMN Observer and non-EU OECD Countries see e.g. OECD, Labour Migration in the Western Balkans: Mapping Patterns, Addressing Challenges and Reaping Benefits, 2022, <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/programme/Labour-Migration-report.pdf>, last accessed on 10 July 2024; EBRD, 'Country Diagnostics', <https://www.ebrd.com/publications/country-diagnostics>, last accessed 10 July 2024.

72 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Transition Report 2023-24', Chapter 3, <https://www.ebrd.com/news/publications/transition-report/transition-report-202324.html>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

73 Ibid.; OECD, 2024, OECD Economic Outlook, December 2024, p. 69 https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-outlook-volume-2024-issue-2_d8814e8b-en/full-report.html, last accessed 17 December 2024.

At the same time, labour shortages can **increase the leverage that workers have**, boosting their bargaining power with employers.⁷⁴ This can result in improved pay levels, working conditions and training opportunities for the existing workforce, provided that there are sufficient profit margins and/or a customer market onto which employers can transfer the resulting costs, or other means available to cover them.⁷⁵

The scope and **underlying drivers of labour shortages** can and do **vary** between different EMN Member and Observer Countries, and non-EU OECD Countries, and they also vary considerably across company types and sectors, as well as regions.⁷⁶ With regard to **regional variances** within EMN Member and Observer Countries, and non-EU OECD Countries, rural, remote and underserved areas are often hit the hardest.⁷⁷

Certain groups are underrepresented in different sectors of the labour market, including women and **migrant residents**.⁷⁸ At the same time, a growing body of research focusing on essential workers points out that migrants are over-represented in some key sectors of the economy, including health, long-term care and food supply.⁷⁹

Future trends in labour shortages

Many occupations currently facing persistent labour shortages – from healthcare, construction, transportation and storage to electrical trades – are projected to also experience **high labour shortages in future**.⁸⁰

Demographic aging remains a core driver of labour shortages in EMN Member and Observer Countries, and non-EU OECD Countries. The EU's working-age population is projected to decline by 57.4 million, while the old-age dependency ratio is expected to increase from 33% to 60% by the year 2100.⁸¹ An aging population will also further increase demand for health and care services, which are sectors already affected by shortages.⁸²

Several factors have the potential to shape shortages in the labour market in EMN Member and Observer

Countries, and non-EU OECD Countries. The **digital transition**⁸³ could, for example, lead to a reduction of labour shortages by increasing productivity for workers. However, it is also fuelling shortages as it creates demand for new skill sets, especially in the ICT sector. The **green transition**⁸⁴ and accompanying initiatives such as the Net Zero Industry Act⁸⁵ aim to stimulate job growth. They will likely increase labour demand, including in occupations that already have shortages – for example, in sectors such as water supply, waste management and electricity. These are key for the green transition but also have the highest proportion of older workers in the EU.⁸⁶

The role of migration

Immigration to the EU from third countries can be an important avenue for addressing labour shortages. The cases, in which immigration is the most appropriate and effective solution, depend on the underlying context-dependent drivers of labour shortages.⁸⁷ When used in a **sustainable way**, labour migration can produce benefits while minimising negative trade-offs. More specifically, labour migration policies complement other policy solutions, such as investing in and training the existing in-country workforce. In addition, the use of labour migration should not suppress other ways to alleviate shortages, such as investments by employers in order to promote innovation and the improvement of employment conditions, i.e. increasing wages.

One of the **core challenges** for labour migration policy is to ensure that migrant workers match the needs of the labour market. Labour market tests, eligibility criteria and shortage occupation lists are **policy tools** that have been widely used for that purpose in EMN Member Countries.⁸⁸

Labour migration policies and initiatives to recruit foreign talent in EMN Member and Observer Countries, and in non-EU OECD Countries, are **competing with initiatives in other countries and regional markets**. EMN Member and Observer Countries' policies and initiatives must therefore work towards achieving a **comparative**

74 European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe – Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU', p.4, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2023/PDFs/2023-esde-executive-summary-en.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

75 Manning, A. 'UK labour shortages and immigration. Looking at the evidence'. London School of Economics, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/09/10/uk-labour-shortages-and-immigration-looking-at-evidence/>, accessed 11 July 2024.

76 Eurofound, 'Measures to tackle labour shortages: Lessons for future policy', Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, p.12, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2023/measures-tackle-labour-shortages-lessons-future-policy>, accessed 19 August 2025.

77 OECD, 'Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the New Global Environment', Chapter 5, 'Attraction and Retention of foreign workers', 2023, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e8e5cabe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e8e5cabe-en#section-d1e7251-1a11a03f41>, accessed 10 July 2024.

78 European Labour Authority (ELA), 'EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2022', p. 9-10, 2023, <https://www.ela.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-09/ELA-eures-shortages-surpluses-report-2022.pdf>, accessed 19 August 2025.

79 Broberg, N., Gonnot, J., Poeschel, F. and M. Ruhs, 'Essential Work, Migrant Labour: What Explains Migrant Employment in European Key Sectors?', 2024, <https://hal.science/hal-04520475/document>, accessed 10 July 2024.

80 European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023. Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU', p. 48, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26989&langId=en>, accessed 10 July 2024; European Commission 'Annexes of SWD717 final, Commission Staff Working Document/Impact Assessment Report/Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an EU Talent Pool', 2023.

81 European Commission, 'COM(2023) 577 final: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX-52023DC0577>, accessed 10 July 2024; Publications Office of the European Union, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023', <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2023/>, accessed 11 July 2024.

82 CEDEFOP, 'Handling change with care: skills for the EU care sector', 2023, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/9185>, accessed 10 July 2024.

83 For shortages in the digital sectors, and skills shortages more broadly see also the running Horizon 2020 project GS4s, <https://www.ru.nl/en/research/research-projects/global-strategy-for-skills-migration-and-development-gs4s>, accessed 10 July 2024.

84 European Commission, 'The Green Deal Industrial Plan', 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_510, last accessed on 10 July 2024.

85 European Commission, 'The Net-Zero Industry Act: Accelerating the transition to climate neutrality', https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/sustainability/net-zero-industry-act_en, last accessed 15 July 2024.

86 European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2023. Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU', p. 55, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26989&langId=en>, last accessed 10 July 2024.

87 Manning, A. 'UK labour shortages and immigration. Looking at the evidence'. London School of Economics, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/09/10/uk-labour-shortages-and-immigration-looking-at-evidence/>, last accessed 11 July 2024. As Manning highlights, labour demand is not static. Increasing labour migration will (on a macro-level) lead to increasing consumption and labour demand, thereby potentially sustaining labour market shortages. Labour migration might potentially also lead to avoiding other necessary adjustment processes. A comprehensive approach hence ideally needs to take several measures in parallel, to prevent labour migration from exacerbating labour shortages in the mid to long run.

88 European Migration Network (EMN), 'Determining labour shortages and the need for labour migration from third countries in the EU', 2015, [Determining labour shortages and the need for labour migration from third countries in the EU](https://www.emn.europa.eu/en/publications/who-should-be-admitted-as-a-labour-migrant_9c4c10bf-en.html), last accessed 11 July 2024.; Ruhs, M., 'Expanding Legal Labour Migration Pathways to the EU: Will This Time Be Different?' (2020), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) Commentaries, 20 | 95, Rome.; OECD (2014) 'Who should be admitted as a labour migrant?' www.oecd.org/en/publications/who-should-be-admitted-as-a-labour-migrant_9c4c10bf-en.html; OECD 'Managing labour migration: Smart policies to support economic growth' in (2014), International Migration Outlook 2014, doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2014-en

advantage if they are to succeed in this competitive environment.⁸⁹ In this context, attracting foreign talent is not just about admission to the country or the job itself, but also:⁹⁰ sufficient and easy access to information about migration schemes;⁹¹ the availability of affordable housing; the quality of education for children; employment prospects for partners; future career paths for (incoming) migrant workers; migrant protection and labour rights,

ethical recruitment;⁹² and the perception of being welcomed as a foreigner.⁹³ The recognition and validation of qualifications has also repeatedly been identified as a challenge for attracting⁹⁴ foreign workers, and for their labour market integration.⁹⁵ As different actors influence these factors, collaborative approaches that involve governments, employers, social partners and civil society actors could help build ecosystems that attract talent.



1.2. EU LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

Whilst the EU has no competence to determine the volumes of admission of third-country nationals to EU Member States to seek work – whether employed or self-employed – there are several EU legal pathways in place to address **labour migration**.⁹⁶ These legislative measures cover: the conditions of entry and residence for certain categories of migrants, such as **highly qualified workers** (EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883),⁹⁷ **seasonal workers** (Directive 2014/36/EU)⁹⁸ and **intra-corporate transferees** (Directive 2014/66/EU);⁹⁹ the establishment of a **single application procedure for a single permit to work and reside** (Directive (EU) 2024/1233);¹⁰⁰ and rules on **long-term residence** (Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents),¹⁰¹ **family reunification** (Family Reunification Directive (EU) 2003/86/EC),¹⁰² and **students and researchers** (Students and Researchers Directive (EU) 2016/801).¹⁰³

There have also been ongoing discussions at EU level on **improving legal pathways** as important instruments

in the context of addressing labour shortages, but also to prevent irregular employment and labour exploitation.

The European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience calls for a more strategic approach to legal migration, with a focus on attracting and retaining talent to and within the EU more effectively.¹⁰⁴

The Union of Skills which pillars are attracting, developing and retaining top talent to the EU.¹⁰⁵

To this end, the European Commission's 2022 **Communication on Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU**¹⁰⁶ proposed legal, operational and policy initiatives to benefit the EU economy, strengthen cooperation with non-EU countries, and improve long-term migration management.

Other initiatives advanced at EU-level include the following.

- In January 2023, the **Labour Migration Platform** was launched to bring together employment and migration experts from EU Member States, the European

- 89 Angenendt, S., Knapp, N., Kipp, D., 'Germany is Looking for Foreign Labour. How to Make Recruitment Development-Orientated, Sustainable and Fair' (2023), Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023RP03>, last accessed on 11 July 2024. On migrant's rights protection see: ILO, 'Migrant Workers', <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/migrant-workers/lang-en/index.htm>, last accessed 11 July 2024; IOM, 'IRIS Standard Report', <https://iris.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1201/files/documents/IRIS%20Standard%20Report%20.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 90 OECD (2023) 'What is the best country for global talents in the OECD?' www.oecd.org/en/publications/2023/03/what-is-the-best-country-for-global-talents-in-the-oecd_3496c15f.html; Tuccio, M. (2019), 'Measuring and assessing talent attractiveness in OECD countries', OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 229, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b4e677ca-en>; European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU - EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.
- 91 European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Skills and Talent Mobility'. 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_715_1_EN.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024; Future Place Leadership, 'International Talent Map 2023'. 2023, <https://futureplaceleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/international-talent-map-2023.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 92 On the right to change employer in the EU see for instance: De Lange, T., and Falkenhain, M., 'Precarity Prevented or Reinforced? Migrants' Right to Change Employers in the Recast of the EU Single Permit Directive'. 2024, *Frontiers of Sociology*, 8:1267235, <https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1267235>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 93 Future Place Leadership, 'International Talent Map 2023'. 2023, <https://futureplaceleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/international-talent-map-2023.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 94 European Commission, 'Recommendation of 15.11.2023 on the Recognition of Qualifications of Third-Country Nationals', p 5, 2023, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01187cba-6407-4afa-add0-296b29f0dcfa_en?filename=C_2023_7700_1_EN_ACT_part1_v9.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 95 European Migration Network (EMN), 'Labour Market Integration of Third Country Nationals in EU Member States'. 2018, https://www.emn.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/emn-synthesis-report-2019_-labour-market-integration-of-tcn.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 96 Article 79(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 97 Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment (EU Blue Card Directive), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2021/1883/oj>, last accessed 15 July 2024.
- 98 Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/36/oj>, last accessed 15 July 2024.
- 99 Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/66/oj>, last accessed 15 July 2024.
- 100 Directive (EU) 2024/1233 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (recast), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL_202401233, last accessed 9 December 2024. European Parliament, 'Directive 2009/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 providing for minimum standards on sanctions and measures against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/52/oj>, last accessed 15 July 2024.
- 101 Council of the European Union, 'Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/109/oj>, last accessed 15 July 2024.
- 102 Council of the European Union, 'Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 27 September 2003 on the right to family reunification', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/86/oj>, last accessed on 05 February 2025.
- 103 Council of the European Union, 'Council Directive 2016/801/EU of 11 May 2016 on the rights of students and researchers in the European Union', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/801/oj>, last accessed 5 February 2025.
- 104 European Commission, 'European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience'. 2020, p. 9, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0274>, last accessed 11 July 2024.
- 105 European Commission, Union of Skills Investing in people for a competitive European Union, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_en, accessed 30 June 2025.
- 106 The measures entailed in this communication included three pillars: 1. legislative pillar (revision of Single Permit and Long-Term residence Directive), 2. operational pillar (introduction of talent partnerships and talent pool), 3. forward looking measures (long-term care workers, youth mobility, entrepreneurship).

Commission, European social partners and relevant stakeholders to discuss challenges and solutions, help operationalise EU-level initiatives (such as the EU Talent Pool and the EU Talent Partnerships) and support fair working conditions for migrants more broadly.¹⁰⁷

- The **revised EU Blue Card Directive** (2021/1883) had to be transposed into national legislation by November 2023. The EU Blue Card is a combined residence and work permit. The revisions shortened the minimum duration of an employment contract (to six months) and the time period after which a Blue Card holder is allowed to move to another EU Member State. They also put greater emphasis on professional experience, made the required salary threshold more flexible, and set the standard validity of the Blue Card to 24 months.¹⁰⁸
- As part of the **Skills and Talent Mobility package** of November 2023,¹⁰⁹ the European Commission put forward: (1) **a recommendation on a renewed learning mobility framework** (Europe on the Move) aimed at promoting cooperation with third countries, addressing visa and residence challenges for third-country nationals, and leveraging initiatives such as Erasmus+ to attract global talent;¹¹⁰ (2) **a recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals**,¹¹¹ and (3) a proposal on the **EU Talent Pool** – the first EU-wide platform to facilitate international recruitment and provide job opportunities for jobseekers from third countries, residing outside of the EU, and with the skills required to work

in EU-wide shortage occupations at all skill levels.¹¹² Negotiations are ongoing on this proposal.

- The recast of the **Single Permit Directive**, which combines a residence and work permit for workers from third countries, was adopted on 12 April 2024. The modifications expand the rights to change employer and the protection of single permit holders during unemployment and extend the scope of persons entitled to equal treatment and actions against employers acting unlawfully. It enables in-country applications for all holders of residence permits and shortens the deadlines for deciding on applications. EU Member States have two years to implement the changes in national law.¹¹³
- The negotiations for the **recast of the Long-Term Residence Directive** had not been finalised at time of writing this report.¹¹⁴
- The European Commission is implementing **Talent Partnerships** with Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan, with progress for each of them at different stages.¹¹⁵
- In March 2024, the European Commission published an action plan to tackle labour and skills shortages.¹¹⁶

Council Conclusions from November 2024 on 'Labour and skills shortages in the EU: Mobilising untapped labour potential in the European Union' referred to legal migration as being complementary to the harnessing of talent from within the EU to fill labour shortages. They also underlined the need to share knowledge and good practices among EU Member States on the issue of addressing labour and skills shortages.¹¹⁷



1.3. STUDY AIM AND SCOPE

This study explores labour migration laws and policies, as well as initiatives and practices by EMN Member and Observer Countries targeting third-country

nationals between January 2021 and June 2024. The initiatives described in this report complement the findings

107 European Commission, 'Labour Migration: Commission and Member States Advance Cooperation through New Platform'. 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/labour-migration-commission-and-member-states-advance-cooperation-through-new-platform-2023-01-10_en, last accessed 11 July 2024.

108 Article 31 para. 1 Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32021L1883>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

109 The initiatives part of the Skills and Talent Mobility package include: making recruitment from outside the EU easier through the EU Talent Pool; achieving easier and faster recognition of professional qualifications and validation of skills gained in third countries; establishing Talent Partnerships to improve cooperation on talent mobility and skills development with partner countries; facilitating the mobility of learners and staff involved in teaching and training through the "Europe on the Move" initiative; enhancing intra-EU mobility; and promoting legal pathways for migration in partnership with third countries. European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Skills and Talent Mobility'. COM (2023) 715 final, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_715_1_EN.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

110 European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Skills and Talent Mobility'. COM (2023) 715 final, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_715_1_EN.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

111 European Commission, 'Recommendation of 15.11.2023 on the Recognition of Qualifications of Third-Country Nationals'. 2023, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01187cba-6407-4afa-add0-296b29f0dcfa_en?filename=C_2023_7700_1_EN_ACT_part1_v9.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

112 European Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation Establishing an EU Talent Pool'. COM (2023) 716 final, 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/Regulation%20establishing%20an%20EU%20Talent%20Pool_en.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

113 Peers, S., 'Take This Job and Shove It: The Revised EU Law on Non-EU Migrant Workers'. 2023, EU Law Analysis Blog, <https://eulawanalysis.blogspot.com/2023/12/take-this-job-and-shove-it-revised-eu.html>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

114 Fragomen, 'European Union: Revised EU Long-Term Residence Directive Negotiations Cease'. 2024, <https://www.fragomen.com/insights/european-union-revised-eu-long-term-residence-directive-negotiations-cease.html>, last accessed 11 July 2024; European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 'Recast of Directive 2003/109/EC: Status of Third-Country Nationals Who Are Long Term Residents in the EU'. 2024, <https://epthinktank.eu/2024/01/30/recast-of-directive-2003-109-ec-status-of-third-country-nationals-who-are-long-term-residents-in-the-eu-eu-legislation-in-progress/>, last accessed 15 April 2024. Council of the EU, 'Overview of the current legislative proposals under the Hungarian Presidency', <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16121-2024-INIT/en/pdf>, last accessed 19 December 2024.

115 European Commission, 'Commissioner Johansson's Speech at the Online Ministerial Meeting on Talent Partnerships'. 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_6374, last accessed 11 July 2024. In the context of Operationalization of talent partnerships see also the THAMM+ project in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 'THAMM+ Project in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt'. 2024, <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz-2024-en-THAMM-plus.pdf>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

116 European Commission, 'Commission Sets Out Actions to Tackle Labour and Skills Shortages'. 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1507, last accessed 11 July 2024. This plan is a broader plan, not limited or specifically targeted on immigration. The action plan is a follow up to the Val Duchesse Social Partners Summit of January 2024. The Action Plan takes stock of existing initiatives by the EU, Member States and social partners, announces new EU initiatives and calls on Member States and social partners to take further actions.

117 Council of the EU, 'Draft Council Conclusions on labour and skills shortages in the EU: Mobilising untapped labour potential in the European Union – Approval', <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15463-2024-INIT/en/pdf>, last accessed 19 December 2024.

of the 2024 EMN inform on 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talent into the EU'.¹¹⁸

The objectives of the study are as follows.

- Provide relevant **contextual information** (including statistical data) on labour migration policy by **taking stock of the legal pathways** for labour migration, with the aim of assessing and identifying the main countries of origin, as well as the sectors in which labour migration currently plays a key role.
- Provide an **overview** of legislative and policy developments on labour migration between January 2021 and June 2024 that aim to address current labour shortages across all skills sectors and prevent future ones.
- Analyse **practices** that implement new laws and policies, as well as public and private initiatives (as long as they are in cooperation with public actors) to attract and recruit foreign talent.
- Explore which actors are involved in designing and/or implementing labour migration laws and policies, in order to assess whether and how key policy areas and **stakeholders** are considered.
- Identify **good practices, lessons learned and existing challenges**.

This EMN study looks at policies, laws and practices in place from **January 2021 to June 2024**, with a special focus on new developments.¹¹⁹ The **temporal scope** of this study was chosen to overlap with the EMN inform on attracting foreign talent (January 2021 to March 2024), and to incorporate the post-COVID-19 effect, when countries began easing migration restrictions and new labour market developments emerged in the post-pandemic period. Some statistical data (see annex), however, limits

itself to the period from January 2021 to December 2023 due to the availability of data for 2024.

The study covers labour shortages and labour migration **at all skill levels**. It focuses specifically on legislative, policy and practice developments designed and implemented by **national authorities**. However, the study also takes into account cases when responsibility and implementation is shared or delegated to other stakeholders, such as social partners (including employee and employer representatives).

The scope of this EMN study only covers the movement of **third-country (or foreign) nationals** to an EMN Member or Observer Country, or a non-EU OECD Country, for the **purpose of employment**.¹²⁰ This includes **seasonal workers** and other kinds of temporary workers. **The posting of workers and hiring out of labour**¹²¹ are not within the scope of this EMN study.

Third-country nationals already residing in an EMN Member or Observer Country, or a non-EU OECD Country, as well as applicants for and beneficiaries of international/temporary protection residing in the country, are not within the scope of this study either. While the labour market integration of these groups is relevant to the alleviation of labour shortages, the focus of this EMN study is limited to migration from third countries for labour purposes. **Only regular employment** is considered in this study. However, the study does include analysis of legal employment pathways for irregular migrants in shortage occupations, when this is part of the overall labour migration policy strategy and/or a substantial labour migration channel. More information on the illegal employment of third-country nationals is available in an additional EMN study from 2023.¹²² **The scope of this study does not include self-employment** (this aspect was covered in an EMN study in 2019)¹²³ or **international students**.



1.4. KEY QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following key research question: How is labour migration used by EMN Member and Observer Countries, and non-EU OECD Countries, to tackle current labour shortages and prevent future ones?

To answer this question, and to provide the necessary contextual information for its analysis, the following aspects were considered:

- Major labour migration pathways (main countries of origin of foreign workers, and sectors in which labour migration plays a key role);
- Laws and policies in place to address labour shortages and changes since 2021;
- Initiatives and practices implementing laws and policies to attract and recruit foreign talent from third countries;¹²⁴
- National and complementary EU instruments (as included in the Skills and Talent Mobility Package);
- Good practices, lessons learned and existing challenges in using labour migration to tackle labour shortages.

118 European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU - EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.

119 In case no new developments emerged, NCPs were asked to describe the current state irrespectively whether it has been established prior to 2021.

120 For the purpose of analysis, EMN Member and Observer Countries were asked to specify, if their labour migration policies/laws and/or initiatives to attract and recruit talent apply only to third-country nationals or also EU citizens.

121 International hiring-out of labour refers to a situation in which an employer wishes to employ foreign labour for one or more periods of less than 183 days and therefore recruits the foreign personnel through an intermediary established abroad who purports to be the employer and hires the personnel out to the user. See Bourguignon, J., 'International Hiring-out of Labour - A Comprehensive Overview' (2017), *Jura Falconis*, 2017, pp. 103-129.

122 European Migration Network (EMN), 'Illegal Employment of Third-Country Nationals'. Forthcoming.

123 EMN, 'Migratory Pathways for Start-Ups and Innovative Entrepreneurs in the European Union - EMN inform', 2019, https://www.emn.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/emn-synthesis-report-2019_startups.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2024.

124 Limited to complement (and to avoid duplicating) the 2024 inform on foreign talent.

2. OVERVIEW OF LABOUR SHORTAGES: DEBATE AND CONCEPTUALISATION



2.1. DEFINING LABOUR SHORTAGES

There is no recognised international definition of the term labour shortage.¹²⁵ For the purpose of this study, it has been defined as a shortage of a particular type of labour in a particular labour market, with the number of vacancies being (or expected to be) above a normal level for an extended period of time (see full definition in the list of definitions above). Despite lacking a recognised international definition, the term is still frequently used by employment agencies (public and private), as well as policy actors and other stakeholders within EMN Member and Observer Countries. While EMN Member and Observer Countries do not have formal definitions of the phenomenon, nearly all EMN Member Countries¹²⁶ and Serbia reported using both the terms ‘labour shortage’ and ‘shortage occupation’ as **concepts** to describe the limited supply of workers.

Labour shortages

No EMN Member Country or Serbia reported having a formal or legal definition of the term ‘labour shortage’. However, nine EMN Member Countries¹²⁷ reported using the term ‘labour shortages’ in their wider policy and legal context as a **concept** describing a lack of workers – including as a reference to a situation or context in the labour market characterised by a difficulty in filling vacancies. In **Italy**, the concept of labour shortages is used to describe **economic sectors** or **specific professions** where the demand for labour exceeds supply, and companies **struggle to find candidates with the appropriate skills**. In **France**, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee) defines labour shortages as the **proportion of businesses** that report¹²⁸ that they are **limited in their activity** because of a lack of workforce. **Finland** and **Latvia** define labour shortage as a **situation** in which there is simply no labour available for a given job; there is an insufficient number of individuals willing or available to take up employment

opportunities; or employers struggle to find workers with the necessary skills or qualifications for certain positions. The **Netherlands** defines labour shortage as when there are more open vacancies than unemployed people overall. In **Germany**, there is no common and extensive definition of the term labour shortage. Different definitions and operationalisations are used for different purposes. For analytical purposes, the Federal Employment Agency’s statistics captures difficulties in filling vacancies in a yearly conducted indicator-based analysis of skilled labour shortages using several different dimensions. Immigration law refers partly to other concepts.

Two EMN Countries reported preferring other terms to conceptualise the same phenomena. In **Austria**, the term ‘shortage of skilled workers’ is used in public and policy debates on migration rather than ‘labour shortage’, which points towards the country’s focus on skilled immigration in labour migration policy. In the public discourse in **Hungary**, use of the term ‘shortage occupation’ prevails over a clear-cut definition of ‘labour shortage’.

Five EMN Member Countries¹²⁹ also report how they measure labour shortages to support their definitions. The **Netherlands** has a labour market tension indicator,¹³⁰ which calculates shortages in a specific sector by dividing the number of open vacancies (in that sector) by the number of people receiving unemployment benefits with a duration of less than six months. **France** also measures labour shortages based on a labour market tensions indicator¹³¹ and an assessment of ‘adjustment difficulties’ in the labour market (i.e. the labour market’s level of difficulty in adjusting between labour supply and demand).

Shortage occupations

Nine EMN Countries¹³² participating in this study reported using a definition of ‘shortage occupations’ in their wider policy and legal context. This encompasses

125 Handel M.J, Labour shortage what is the problem, Intereconomics, Review of European economic policy, volume 59, n.3, pp 136-142, <https://www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2024/number/3/article/labour-shortages-what-is-the-problem.html>, last accessed 17 January 2025.

126 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SK.

127 BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LV, NL.

128 The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee) conducts quarterly business outlook surveys (European surveys whose framework is defined by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union) to measure the demand for labour by companies that is not met by the working population, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/fichier/4268833/122019_ndc.pdf, p.113

129 DE, FR, NL, PL, SK.

130 The labour market tension indicator (‘Spanningsindicator’) is operated by the Netherlands Employee Insurance Agency (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen, UWV).

131 The indicator is composed of measuring the proportion of recruitment projects anticipated as difficult by employers (50% of the indicator); the ratio between the flow of online job offers (public employment service and job boards) and the flow of category A jobseekers (unemployed, actively seeking work) (30% of the indicator); and the job application clearance rate, which measures the rate at which jobseekers in categories A, B and C (unemployed or in reduced activity, actively seeking work) leave the lists (20% of the indicator).

132 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, NL, PL, SK.

both countries using this definition for (labour) migration purposes, as well as those who use it solely for general labour market policies. In **Austria**, the definition is based on the ratio of jobseekers to vacancies reported to the public employment service. According to the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, this

applicant-to-vacancy ratio has to be used as the basis for the official list of shortage occupations put forward in the Regulation for Skilled Workers.¹³³ As the table below demonstrates, seven of the remaining countries use similar definitions of shortage occupations.

Table 1. Defining the concept of ‘shortage occupation’

| Concept | Reported countries |
|---|---------------------------|
| Supply of jobseekers does not meet demand | AT, FI, SI, SK |
| An occupation with a shortage of skilled workers | HU, PL |
| A specific sector experiences a shortage of available workers to fill open vacancies | FR, NL, SK ¹³⁴ |
| For analytical questions there is no all-encompassing indicator for measuring skilled-labour shortages, instead shortage occupations are measured by a combination of six shortage indicators | DE |

Belgium reported defining ‘shortage occupation’ in two distinct ways: either as a general term used by the public employment services to inform labour market policy and

counselling; or to determine which occupations can be exempted from individual labour market testing (see Box 1).

Box 1. Use of the term ‘shortage occupations’ in Belgium

The public employment services¹³⁵ in Belgium define the shortage occupation lists used to develop labour market policies and individual labour market counselling. The Regional Employment Ministries (REM) then conduct further analyses of these lists to design the shortage occupation list used for migration purposes.

Brussels-Capital Region

The public employment service (Actiris) relies on the labour market analysis of the Brussels Observatory of Employment and Training (‘view.brussels’) to determine which occupations are shortage occupations. ‘View.brussels’ refers to shortage occupations as a **subcategory of critical occupations**. Critical occupations are defined as having job vacancies that are less easily filled due to either: (1) quantitative shortages, with too few candidates available in the labour market; (2) qualitative shortages, when available candidates do not have the right experience or skills; or (3) working conditions that discourage candidates from taking up work. Shortage occupations belong to the first category (i.e. when there is a quantitative shortage, with too few candidates available in the labour market). The Brussels REM uses the same definition of shortage occupations as Actiris.

Flanders

The public employment service (VDAB) defines a shortage occupation as **a job that is always in demand** because an employer has difficulty finding suitable candidates in the local labour market. VDAB uses the same three categories used by Actiris to

define shortage occupations: qualitative, quantitative and working conditions (see above). Similarly, since May 2024, the REM of Flanders has defined shortage occupations as medium-skilled professions for which there is a **structural labour shortage**.

Wallonia

The public employment service (Forem) refers to shortage occupations as a subcategory of critical occupations, in which the number of **jobseekers registered with Forem are insufficient to fill its registered vacancies**. Occupations are considered critical occupations when employers have difficulty filling the vacancy due to qualitative shortages and/or the working conditions. The Wallonia REM refers to shortage occupations as professions on the current list of occupations identified by the minister as having a structural labour shortage.

German-speaking Community

The public employment service (ADG) defines shortage occupations as jobs **with at least five vacancies that have a vacancy rate¹³⁶ below the average** and/or where **the time taken to fill the vacancy was longer than average**. The number of registered jobseekers (potential applicants) in individual occupational categories, and the assessment of ADG placement officers and other labour market experts, are also taken into account. The German-speaking Community REM **does not refer to the term ‘shortage occupation’, and has not established a shortage occupation list** that benefits from a facilitated immigration pathway, and for which individual labour market testing is not required.

¹³³ According to Article(13)(1) of the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals, in the event of longer-term labour supply needs that cannot be met by the potential labour force available in Austria, the Federal Minister for Labour and Economy specifies, by regulation, shortage occupations for the following year in order to safeguard Austria's status as a centre of business and employment. Potential shortage occupations are occupations for which there are no more than 1.5 registered jobseekers for each recorded vacancy, either nationwide or in specific provinces. Occupations with an applicant-to-vacancy ratio of up to 1.8 may be included in certain circumstances

¹³⁴ An occupation having vacant job vacancies for three months or more.

¹³⁵ The competences for labour market policy in Belgium are currently divided between the federal government, the regions and the communities, while the competence for labour migration sits mainly with the regions and the German-speaking Community. Therefore, the regions have their own public employment services (PES), as well as their own Regional Employment Ministries (REMs) competent for labour migration. The PES are: PES Actiris (in the Brussels-Capital Region), PES VDAB (in Flanders), PES Forem (in Wallonia) and PES ADG (in the German-speaking Community).

¹³⁶ Eurostat defines a job vacancy as a paid post that is newly created, unoccupied, or about to become vacant. Eurostat calculates a job vacancy rate (JVR) as follows: $JVR = \frac{\text{number of job vacancies}}{\text{number of occupied posts} + \text{number of job vacancies}} \times 100$: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Job_vacancy_rate_\(JVR\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Job_vacancy_rate_(JVR)) last accessed 11 February 2025.

Fourteen EMN Member Countries¹³⁷ and Serbia report not using a formal definition of ‘shortage occupation’. In **Ireland**, a shortage occupation is identified as ‘skills shortages’, meaning that there is a shortage or an insufficient number of trained/qualified individuals in the domestic market to meet the demand. **Luxembourg** does not have a formal legal definition of shortage occupations either. However, its National Employment Agency (*Agence pour le développement de l’emploi* – ADEM) uses calculations to determine when a profession is considered to be ‘in severe shortage’. A profession is calculated to be in severe shortage if the following conditions were met in the previous year: (1) more than 84 vacant positions were declared to the public employment services (ADEM); and (2) there were less than 0.8 registered jobseekers per reported position, and more than 25% of offers without assigned candidates.¹³⁸ **Sweden** does not have a formal definition of labour shortages, but current assessments of job opportunities and recruitment challenges are provided by the Swedish Public Employment Service, both at the national and regional levels. In addition to current evaluations, a five-year demand forecast for each occupation is also included. In **Serbia**, the existing legal framework does not explicitly define a shortage occupation. However, the latest amendments to the Law on the Employment of Foreigners¹³⁹ stipulate that, depending on the situation in the labour market, the government may exclude foreigners who apply for a residence and work permit within shortage occupations, and other specific occupations and profiles, from the labour market test that would otherwise be required.

Ten EMN Countries list occupations with shortages on shortage occupations lists.¹⁴⁰ The use of shortage lists gives **Lithuania** a more flexible solution to shortages than a formal or more standardised definition would as it allows distinguishing between low- and high-value occupations with shortages.¹⁴¹ Shortage occupations in Lithuania are understood to be professions that are in high demand but for which local supply consistently falls short, particularly in sectors that are essential for economic stability

and growth. These professions are continuously monitored to align them with Lithuania’s workforce and investment priorities. In **Luxembourg**, the Labour Code¹⁴² stipulates that ADEM publishes a list of occupations in short supply every year. In **Austria**, the national shortage occupation list is announced for each successive year by ministerial decree.

Five EMN countries¹⁴³ have reported creating shortage lists at the regional level. In **Belgium**, all regions update their shortage occupation lists regularly (see Box 1 for more detailed information per region). In the **Slovak Republic**, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family identifies occupations with a shortage of labour and publishes them on its website after the relevant calendar quarter. Since 2019, this list has also included additional shortage occupations for the different provinces. In **Finland**, the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment monitor the labour market situation in their regions and draw up regional work permit policies (regional guidelines for the use of foreign workforce). These regional guidelines list the shortage occupations for which labour market testing is exempted. Regional work permit policies are updated every six months.

In **Spain**, national regulations on third-country nationals establish that the National Employment Service will release a shortage occupation list every three months. **France** does not apply a labour market test for the recruitment of third-country nationals for occupations on the shortage occupations list. **Ireland’s** employment permit system uses two occupation lists: (1) a Critical Skills Occupations List, which includes highly skilled, in-demand shortage occupations that are eligible for the critical skills permit; and (2) an Ineligible Occupations List, which includes occupations that are not eligible for employment permits due to a sufficient supply of Irish and EEA workers. These lists are updated periodically based on labour market conditions. Occupations not included on either list remain eligible for the general employment permit.



2.2. CONTEXT: LABOUR SHORTAGES AND IMMIGRATION

In 2022, **economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic** led to a peak in labour shortages, as the annual job vacancy rate in a majority of EMN Member Countries was higher than the pre-pandemic level in 2019.¹⁴⁴

The labour shortages identified in the occupations with the most widespread shortages¹⁴⁵ have remained high

and are **persistent**, meaning they result from multiple or structural drivers instead of cyclical drivers.¹⁴⁶

While the EU labour market continued to experience significant tightness overall,¹⁴⁷ the highest job vacancy rates in the third quarter of 2024 were observed in the Netherlands (4.3%), Belgium (4.2%) and Austria (3.8%). The lowest rates were found in Romania and Bulgaria (both at 0.8%), and Poland and Spain (both at 0.9%).

137 BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE.

138 Or if less than 0.35 registered jobseekers per declared position and less than 10% of job offers without candidates assigned ADEM, JobInsights.lu <https://app.powerbi.com>, last accessed 11 February 2025.

139 The latest amendments were adopted in July 2023, and their full implementation began on 1 February 2024.

140 AT, BE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, SK.

141 Lithuania places occupations experiencing labour shortages on two different lists: one for general occupations experiencing a shortage of workers and one for occupations considered high value-added professions experiencing a shortage of workers.

142 Article L. 622-4 (5) of the Labour Code

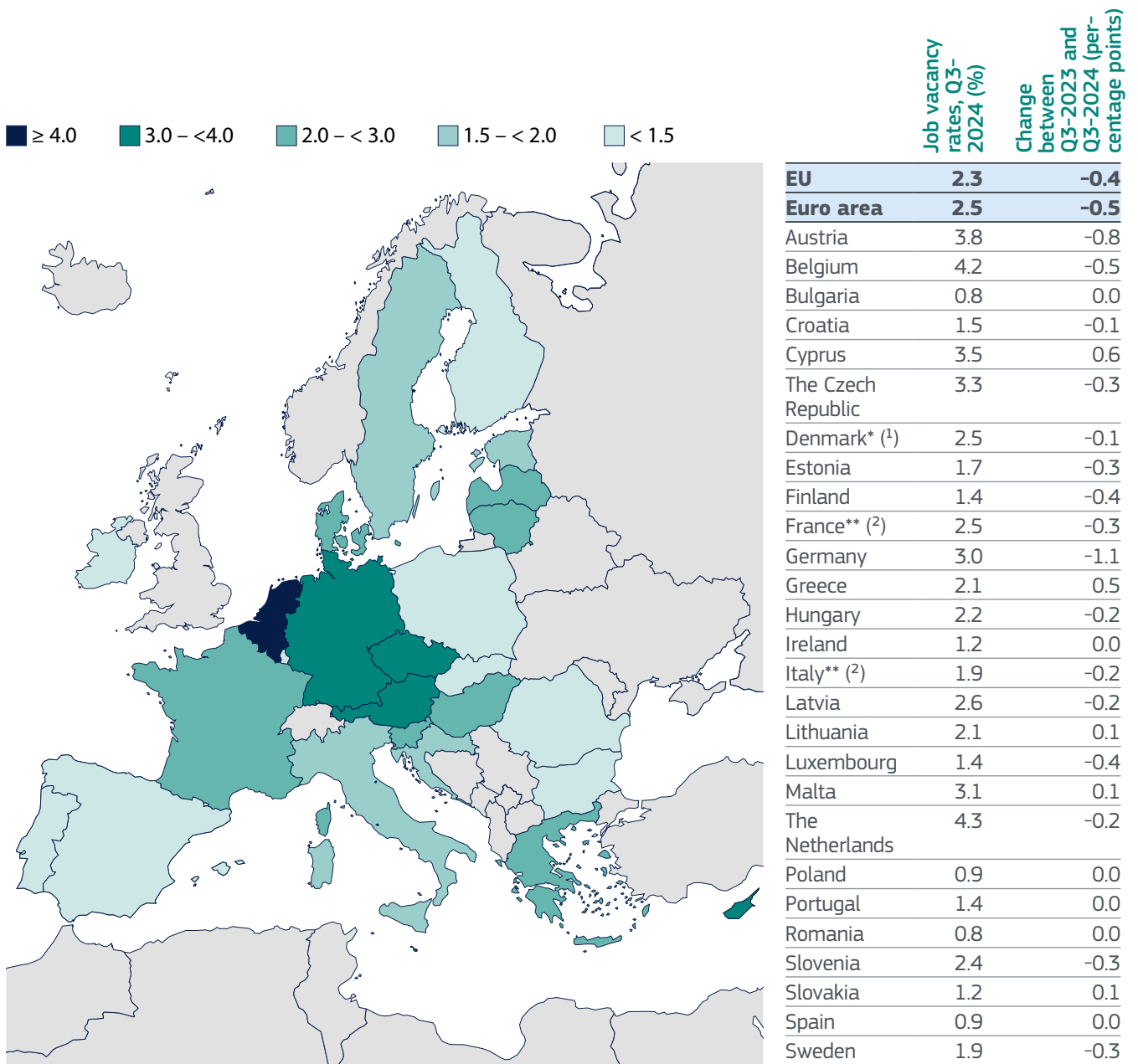
143 BE, EE, FI, FR, SK.

144 Eurostat, Job Vacancy Statistics, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Job_vacancy_statistics#Job_vacancies:_latest_developments, last accessed on 10 July 2024.

145 See definition of widespread shortage in the European Labour Authority (ELA), ‘EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2022’, 2023, last accessed 11 February 2025.

146 European Labour Authority (ELA), ‘EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2022’, <https://www.ela.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-09/ELA-eures-shortages-surpluses-report-2022.pdf>, last accessed 21 February 2025.

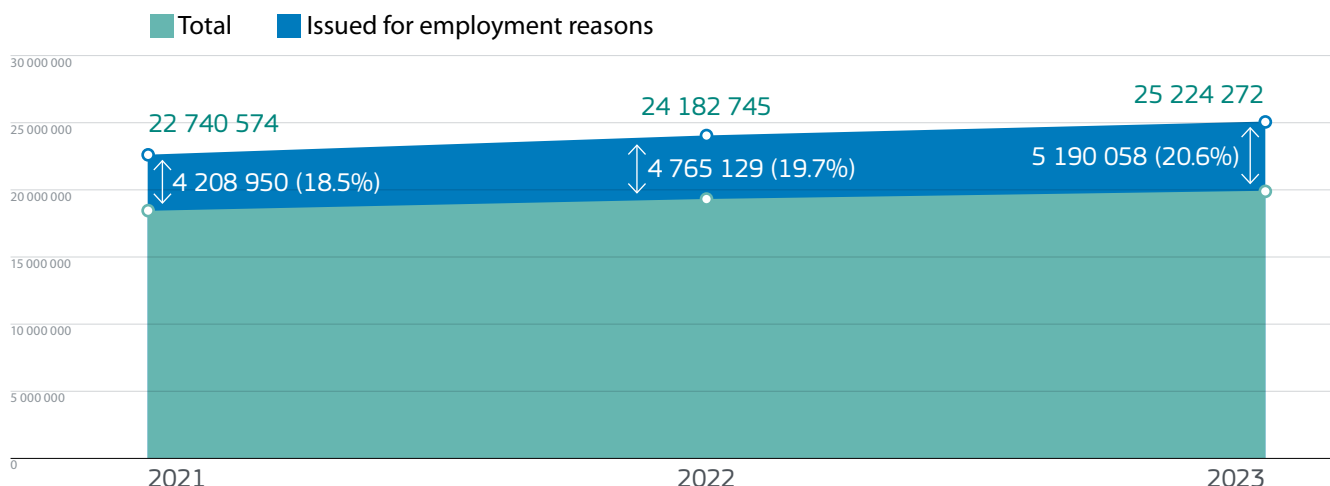
147 Labour market tightness is defined as the number of vacant posts per each unemployed person, European Central Bank, <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/economic-bulletin/articles/2019>, last accessed on 11 February 2025. European Commission, ‘Autumn 2023 Economic Forecast: A modest recovery ahead after a challenging year’, https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/forecasts/2023/autumn/labour_market_tightness_en.pdf, last accessed 17 January 2025.

Figure 1. Quarterly job vacancy rates for the EU, Q3-2024

Source: Eurostat, 'Quarterly job vacancy rates not seasonally adjusted, Q3 2023 - Q3 2024' [jvs_q_nace2].¹⁴⁸

Based on Eurostat data, Figure 2 below illustrates growth in the total number of residence permits issued by the EU-27 between 2021 and 2023, and how many of them were issued for employment reasons.

¹⁴⁸ Note: unadjusted data (neither seasonally adjusted nor calendar adjusted) for NACE Rev. 2 Sections B to S. NACE Rev. 2 Sections B to N. **Public institutions not covered for NACE sections O, P and Q Data retrieved from Eurostat (online data code: jvs_q_nace2) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:T1_Quarterly_job_vacancy_rates_not_seasonally_adjusted_Q3_2023_-_Q3_2024.png last accessed 13 January 2025.

Figure 2. EU-27: Total residence permits issued 2021-2023 (stock)

Source: Eurostat, 'All valid permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship on 31 December of each year' [migr_resvalid].¹⁴⁹

In 2021, **Croatia, Poland and Lithuania** issued the most residence permits for employment reasons. In 2022 and 2023, **Croatia, Malta and Lithuania** topped the list.

Fifteen EMN Member Countries¹⁵⁰ reported that shortages affected sectors at all skill levels. Based on Eurostat data,¹⁵¹ the table below shows the **top 10 sectors** with the highest vacancy rate between 2021 and 2023, across the EU-27. However, it is worth noting that the sectors experiencing the highest vacancy rates differ for each of

the reporting countries. For instance, in the first quarter of 2022, **Belgium** reported an average vacancy rate of 9.5% in administrative and support services, while, for **the Slovak Republic**, this number was only 0.6%. On the other hand, the sector with the third largest vacancy rate (information and communication) demonstrated more similar vacancy rates across countries, ranging between 2% and 4% in 12 out of 27 countries.¹⁵² The most affected sectors by respective country can be found in Annex Table A.2.

Table 2. Top 10 sectors affected by shortage by average vacancy rate 2021-2024 in the EU27

| Sector | 2021 (%) | 2022 (%) | 2023 (%) | 2024 (%) |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; arts, entertainment and recreation; other service activities | 4.0 | 4.8 | 4.3 | 4.0 |
| 2. Services of the business economy | 3.8 | 4.2 | 3.8 | 3.2 |
| 3. Information and communication | 3.7 | 4.6 | 3.8 | 3.2 |
| 4. Professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities | 3.6 | 4.4 | 4.0 | 3.5 |
| 5. Financial and insurance activities | 3.5 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 3.0 |
| 6. Administrative and support service activities | 3.1 | 4.0 | 3.7 | 2.9 |
| 7. Wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities | 2.7 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 2.7 |
| 8. Industry and construction | 2.6 | 3.2 | 2.9 | 2.5 |
| 9. Business economy | 2.4 | 3.0 | 2.8 | 2.4 |
| 10. Professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities | 2.4 | 2.7 | 2.4 | 2.2 |

Source: Eurostat, 'Job vacancy statistics by NACE Rev. 2 activity – quarterly data' (from 2001 onwards) [jvs_q_nace2].¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Data retrieved from Eurostat (online data code: migr_resvalid), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_resvalid__custom_14314330/default/table last accessed 22 April 2025.

¹⁵⁰ AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE.

¹⁵¹ Data retrieved from Eurostat on 19 November 2024 via: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/jvs_q_nace2__custom_14727722/default/table last accessed 13 January 2025.

¹⁵² Based on detailed data retrieved from Eurostat (online data code: jvs_q_nace2), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/jvs_q_nace2__custom_16346014/default/table?lang=en last accessed 22 April 2025.

¹⁵³ Data retrieved from Eurostat (online data code: jvs_q_nace2), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/jvs_q_nace2__custom_16344321/default/table?lang=en last accessed 22 April 2025.



2.3. PUBLIC DEBATES

Across EMN Member and Observer Countries, labour shortages are a focus in the public debates. Seventeen EMN Member Countries and Serbia¹⁵⁴ report having had public discussions or debates on labour migration in the context of labour shortages. In fifteen EMN Member Countries,¹⁵⁵ these debates are driven by pressing labour shortages due to demographic developments and significant labour shortages in specific sectors.

The scope of the debate grew over time in four EMN Member Countries.¹⁵⁶ The debate in **Germany** has intensified since 2021, due to an increasing shortage of skilled labour in certain professions, demographic changes, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In **France**, public debate on this topic has been ongoing since 2021, but, in 2023, it centred particularly around the introduction of new legislation.¹⁵⁷ In **Italy**, the topic of labour migration as a response to gaps in the workforce has been the subject of a wide-ranging public debate since the economic crisis of 2008. The debate includes opinions emphasising the need for greater migration flows to support the economy, as well as concerns linked to the social and economic impact of immigration. The perspectives on immigration in debates about labour shortages differ across stakeholder groups, with employer interest groups focusing more on immigration as a solution to labour shortages than employee interest groups do. This was reported for example by **Austria** (see section 2.3.4).

Debates on policy problems and solutions

Finland and **Malta** reported debates on the challenges of **labour shortages in specific sectors**. In **Malta**, the government, businesses and other stakeholders have discussed the need for foreign workers to fill gaps in key sectors, such as construction, hospitality and healthcare, linked to demographic challenges of an aging population and low birth rates. The debate in **Finland** and **the Netherlands** was partly driven by **demographic change**, with a decreasing share of the population represented by people of working age. In the **Netherlands**, the government's goal was to introduce a more selective and targeted labour migration policy to mitigate the challenges posed by demographic change. The number of working-age people is declining particularly sharply in smaller Finnish municipalities, which has been featured in the news on several occasions.

A key theme in public debates in eleven EMN Member Countries¹⁵⁸ is the need to **increase countries' economic competitiveness and attractiveness for foreign talent**. For example, the **Slovak Republic** reported that, in 2021–2024, various stakeholders, including the media, experts, employers, ministries, trade unions, parliament and the government focused on how the country could expedite the attraction of workforce from abroad. The debate in **Latvia** in 2021 similarly focused on how to boost labour attraction, and what could be done to alleviate labour shortages. In 2022, it centred more on attracting labour and foreign investors, as well as preventing the exploitation of workers. **Austria's** competitiveness in the recruitment of foreign skilled workers and its Red-White-Red (RWR) Card system¹⁵⁹ has been the subject of critical media discussions, with reference to indicators such as the OECD Indicators of Talent Attractiveness,¹⁶⁰ in which Austria scores below average. Similarly, debates in **Germany** focused on how it could position itself as an attractive country for skilled labour migration from third countries, in competition with other industrialised countries. **Lithuania** reported that government representatives have advocated for procedures to be streamlined to align with EU standards, particularly to attract highly skilled foreign workers, to address labour shortages and support economic competitiveness.

Related public debates also touched on **reforming existing – or designing new – policies linked to migration**,¹⁶¹ such as **recognising third-country nationals' skills and qualifications**,¹⁶² and **improving access** to the labour market.¹⁶³ For instance, in **Estonia**, debates regarding labour migration and annual immigration quotas have taken place, with stakeholders favouring an elimination of quotas by sector, by referencing its limitations in resolving quotas filling up too quickly.¹⁶⁴ In the **Brussels-Capital Region**, the Decree proposal on Economic Migration triggered debates in the regional parliament about potential solutions to labour shortages, including opening an immigration pathway for undocumented migrants. One of the priorities in the Coalition Agreement for the legislative period 2018–2023¹⁶⁵ in **Luxembourg** was to adapt the existing strategy¹⁶⁶ to attract, develop and retain talent through sector-specific strategies. This included reviewing and potentially adapting the administrative procedures and conditions for third-country workers to obtain a residence permit. The Government's 2023–2028 Coalition Agreement addresses several issues linked to labour shortages, lists migration-related as well as alternative measures as potential responses to this

154 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, SE, SK, and RS.

155 AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, PL, SK.

156 AT, DE, FR, IT.

157 The proposal for Law No. 2024-42 Controlling Immigration, Improving Integration was introduced in February 2023 by the French government and came into force on 26 January 2024.

158 AT, BE, BG, DE, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, SE, SK.

159 The RWR card enables qualified workers from third countries to immigrate to Austria. It entitles the holder to settle and work for a certain employer or to be self-employed. It is usually issued for 24 months. For more information visit: https://www.bmi.gv.at/312_EN/15/start.aspx.

160 For more information visit: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2019/05/measuring-and-assessing-talent-attractiveness-in-oecd-countries_18c7ed48.html, last accessed 26 November 2024.

161 BE (BRU, FL, WL), DE, EE, ES, IE, LT, LU, LV, PL, SE, SK.

162 AT, BE (BRU, WL), CZ, DE, ES, IT.

163 BE, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV.

164 For more information see 'Allocation of Immigration Quotas Does Not Address the Real Problem', Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (23.10.2024), available here: <https://www.koda.ee/en/news/allocation-immigration-quotas-does-not-address-real-problem>, last accessed 18 March 2025.

165 Luxembourg Government, Coalition agreement 2018–2023, 3 December 2018, p. 17630/131, URL: <https://gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/accord-coalition/2018-2023/Accord-de-coalition-2018-2023.pdf>, last accessed 15 May 2025.

166 Government Council, Résumé des travaux du 8 juillet 2022, Press release, 8 July 2022, URL: https://gouvernement.lu/fr/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2022/07-juillet/08-conseil-gouvernement.html, last accessed 18 March 2025.

challenge and connects the attraction of talent and labour shortages to competitiveness.¹⁶⁷

In **Ireland**, the number of employment permits issued to non-EEA nationals and the conditions attached to them have continued to be the subject of public and governmental debates in recent years. Discussions centre around increasing the flexibility, attractiveness and overall effectiveness of the Irish employment-permit system in addressing labour shortages. Similarly, in **Germany**, the existing bureaucratic hurdles and inefficient procedures for issuing visas, and recognising skills and qualifications, have been particularly criticised. While the return of Lithuanian nationals remains an important objective in **Lithuania**¹⁶⁸ (see the 'Alternatives to labour migration in the public debate' section below), the debates between stakeholders in 2021–2022 included initiatives on how to attract foreign talent to address labour shortages and support economic growth in the country. Key suggestions put forward by business associations were removing barriers for graduates from Lithuanian institutions to enter the job market and reducing wage requirements for high-demand professions (e.g. in IT) to enable businesses to attract talent with more flexible salary options. In **Spain**,¹⁶⁹ the evolving nature of migration and the need to adapt regulations to a changing reality led to a lively debate and new legislation in November 2024, which simplified and streamlined procedures related to foreigner status.

Debates on the risks and challenges of labour migration

Debates reported by eight EMN Member Countries¹⁷⁰ centred on the potential risks and challenges associated with labour migration in the context of labour shortages. The **ethics of recruiting foreign workers** when the jobs available do not correspond to the level of education of the workers being recruited have been discussed in **Finland**. The discussions in **Germany** and **Lithuania** revolved around challenges associated with language acquisition and cultural integration, under the theme of the **integration of third-country national residents**.

In **Belgium**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **the Netherlands** and **Sweden**, discussions centred on **combating the exploitation of foreign workers** and **ensuring decent living and working conditions for labour migrants**. In the **Netherlands**, the public and political debate on labour migration concerns tensions between economic interests, social integration and concerns about abuse and exploitation, combined with added pressure on public facilities and housing. In **Sweden**, reports published on poor working conditions and unequal wages for labour migrants, with a special focus on seasonal workers (such as berry pickers or forestry workers), have brought this issue to the fore. In **Latvia**, labour exploitation remains

the most common form of trafficking in human beings. When there is a high demand for labour, especially in the construction, agriculture, manufacturing and hospitality sectors, the risk of labour exploitation increases.

Alternatives to labour migration in the public debate

Other measures to tackle labour shortages have also been discussed in EMN Member and Observer Countries. In ten EMN Member Countries,¹⁷¹ **upskilling, reskilling, improving skills matching and reactivating the local workforce** to mitigate shortages in the labour market were important topics of discussion. In **Germany** and **Austria**, discussions have explored how to increase the domestic labour force's potential, including by activating under-represented groups in the labour market (e.g. women and older people), and facilitating training and continuing education. The **Netherlands** has looked at measures that stimulate technical and process innovation to: help match labour supply with demand; convince workers to work additional hours and enhance their professional growth/development through, for example, training; and improve the transition from education to the labour market. Debates in **Belgium** have also centred around improving job matching services, offering training and increasing the training capacity of regional public employment services. Additionally, Belgium (Flanders) has introduced subsidies for long-term unemployed individuals who complete training for a shortage occupation profession and secure employment as a result. There are also financial incentives for employers to hire those who have been unemployed for two years. To meet the multilingual needs of the labour market, **Luxembourg's** National Employment Agency (ADEM) initiated a pilot¹⁷² project with the subscription-based language learning software Babbel to make licences available for free to jobseekers who have been registered with ADEM for at least four months.¹⁷³

Six EMN Countries¹⁷⁴ explicitly mentioned the **improvement of wages and working conditions for local workers** as a key element in the public debate on alternatives to labour migration. In the **Netherlands**, initiatives to increase wages and improve working conditions, as well as an over-reliance on flexible work contracts,¹⁷⁵ have been discussed in parliament. The Swedish government has increased the threshold of salary requirements for work permits, with the objective of improving living conditions for third country nationals working in **Sweden**, as well as reducing low-skilled labour migration to **Sweden** in order to fill these positions with unemployed persons already residing in the country. These changes have made it more difficult to recruit from abroad in some sectors and shifted the focus of the debate towards challenges with recruiting highly qualified workers with the right qualifications. Discussions in **Lithuania** called for equal wages for foreign and domestic workers, to prevent

167 Luxembourg Government, Coalition agreement 2023–2028 "Lëtzebuerg fir d'Zukunft stäerken", 16 November 2023. URL : <https://gouvernement.lu/fr/publications/accord-coalition/accord-de-coalition-2023-2028/accord-de-coalition-2023-2028.html>

168 The Lithuanian Government included in its program of 2020 the task of simplifying migration procedures for highly skilled foreigners. This marked a shift from previous migration policies, which primarily focused on encouraging the return of Lithuanian nationals who had emigrated.

169 For more information visit: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2024-24099>

170 BE (Flanders), DE, FI, FR, LT, LV, NL, SE.

171 AT, BE, DE, FI, EE, IE, IT, LU, LV, NL.

172 ADEM has received support and co-financing from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (2021–2027 "investing in the future" program) and the Ministry of Labour for the pilot together with the subscription-based language learning software Babbel.

173 <https://adem.public.lu/content/dam/adem/fr/publications/demandeurs-emploi/formations/20241120-babel.pdf>.

174 AT, BE (BRU, FL), HU, IT, NL, SE.

175 These flexible contracts can cause job insecurities for employees and can discourage long-term employment commitment. Furthermore, many workers in the Netherlands are working part-time (less than 35 hours per week).

exploitation and any adverse effects on the local labour market. In **Belgium** (Wallonia) debates were concerned with how to make sectors and/or occupations more attractive to local workers. In **Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland** and the **Netherlands**, the inclusion in the labour market of migrants who are already in the country has also been discussed. The debate in Ireland has revolved around including non-EEA talent already residing in the country in the labour market and granting spouses and partners of eligible employment-permit holders the right to work without having to acquire a separate permit. Belgium is discussing the activation of asylum seekers, and, in the Netherlands, there has been political consensus on prioritising measures that tap into the pool of (unemployed) migrants already in the country, rather than facilitating the arrival of new labour migrants. Efforts to convince nationals living abroad to return were important in **Ireland, Lithuania** and the **Slovak Republic**.

Stakeholder positions and participation in the debate

Thirteen EMN Countries¹⁷⁶ and Serbia reported that, in general, **business interest groups and/or employers** advocated for the recruitment of foreign talent to be facilitated to meet the need for a greater supply of workers, and for shortage occupation lists to be updated more frequently. In the debates that followed the draft Law for Controlling Immigration, Improving Integration¹⁷⁷ in **France**, employer organisations and business leaders emphasised the fact that the French economy would have a great need for foreign workers over the coming decades.¹⁷⁸ The list of occupations in short supply, which is published annually by the **Luxembourg** National Employment Agency (ADEM), was welcomed by employers. However, the Chamber of Commerce noted that updating this occupation shortage list annually may not be enough to keep up with the dynamic and fast-growing needs of the labour market and could potentially have a negative impact on the country's competitiveness. In **Austria**, the 'applicant-to-vacancy ratio' is often criticised as being too short-sighted as a basis for shortage occupations, and some stakeholders cite planning uncertainties caused by annual changes to the shortage occupation list.

In the **Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania** and the **Netherlands**, **employers and other business stakeholders such as chambers of commerce** highlighted the need for flexible and fast talent-hiring processes, as procedures were often lengthy, costly and time-consuming for the

recruiter. In the Netherlands, advocacy groups have called for simpler hiring specifically for those who do not qualify for 'talent programmes' (e.g. craftsmen), as these currently require a lot of paperwork and labour market tests.

Austria, Lithuania, Sweden and the Slovak Republic reported the positions taken by employee interest groups in the public debate, included: upholding fair labour standards and protecting foreign workers from exploitation; prioritising workers (including migrant workers) already in the country (through upskilling, reskilling and reactivation); fears about wage reductions for highly skilled workers; and the perceived risks of undermining established national labour-market models and social partner agreements. In **Sweden**, some unions were critical of proposed changes to labour market immigration, where a proposed increased maintenance requirement meant that applicants would need to earn a minimum of 80% of the median salary. They argued that this challenged the Swedish labour-market model in which social partners negotiate labour market conditions. However, other unions were more positive, stating that this was, in fact, a step towards a more regulated labour migration policy that would protect the Swedish labour-market model in the long run.

Six EMN Member Countries reported on the positions taken by **political actors/parties** in the debate on addressing labour shortages through labour migration.¹⁷⁹ In **Germany**, whereas most political parties see the growing need to welcome lower-skilled workers, conservative political parties have expressed concerns that lower-skilled labour migrants might take advantage of the social system instead of working. In **France**, the new exceptional residence admission for people working in shortage occupations¹⁸⁰ has provoked strong reactions: some argue that this would create a 'pull factor' for irregular immigration, while others criticise the measure's limitations in offering residence exclusively to foreign workers in shortage occupations. There is a broad consensus in the **Netherlands** that there should be more inspections and enforcement measures targeted at employers, to reduce the risk of abuse and exploitation.

Austria, Bulgaria, France and Hungary have also referred to the position of public attitudes in destination countries. In **Austria**, according to a 2024 survey conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, 42% of respondents saw a very high or high need to increase Austria's attractiveness as a destination country for qualified workers from abroad.

176 AT, BE (federal), CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, and RS.

177 Law No. 2024-42 Controlling Immigration, Improving Integration (the CIAI law) came into force on 26 January 2024.

178 Estimated at 3.9 million foreign employees by 2050.

179 AT, DE, EE, FI, NL, SE.

180 Based on amendments to the CIAI law introduced in February 2023.

3. LABOUR MIGRATION: LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

This section outlines the legal and policy frameworks for labour migration, looking first at fora for exchange with stakeholders in the policymaking process (section 3.1). It then introduces different policy approaches, including

changes to labour migration frameworks (section 3.2), before outlining legal pathways for work (section 3.3), and the challenges and lessons learned reported by EMN Member Countries and Serbia (section 3.4.).



3.1. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

With regard to **stakeholder involvement**, 17 EMN Member Countries¹⁸¹ and Serbia reported coordinating with different stakeholders on policy design and implementation, including social partners, employers and regional authorities. Seven EMN Member Countries¹⁸² reported government coordination through dedicated interministerial committees and specialised bodies that oversee labour migration strategy and implementation. Social partners, including trade unions and employer associations, play a formal role in developing shortage occupation lists, setting quotas and providing policy input in **Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Luxembourg, and the Slovak Republic**. In **Austria**, a Strategy Committee for third-country national skilled workers, chaired by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy, has met regularly since 2023. One of its key tasks is to implement a nationwide strategy for skilled labour migration. All relevant state departments, institutions, provinces and social partnerships are represented. In the **Czech Republic**, government admission policies and annual quotas are regularly evaluated and discussed with social partners. In **Bulgaria and Luxembourg**, national employer and employee organisations have participated in the development of all legislative proposals and measures linked to facilitating access to the labour market for third-country nationals. In **Germany**, multiple state actors, federal-state working groups and ad-hoc coordination programmes are involved in labour migration policy, including a State Secretary Steering Committee that develops key points for the recruitment of skilled workers and ensures their implementation. Tripartite council meetings with social partners were held in **Lithuania** on the proposed amendments to

the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and, in **Poland**, the draft law on the conditions for allowing foreigners to work in the country was subject to extensive consultations with trade unions, NGOs and employers' organisations.

Regional and local authorities have significant implementation responsibilities, particularly in federal systems in **Belgium, Germany and Spain**. In **Belgium**, the debates in the policymaking process bring together groups of stakeholders, as well as in sectoral roundtables, to address the methodology of drafting shortage occupation lists. In **Spain**, the Tripartite Labour Commission on Immigration is attached to the Secretary of State for Migration, enabling an ongoing dialogue between the General Administration of the State and the most representative trade unions and business organisations for migration management.

In four EMN Member Countries,¹⁸³ private sector stakeholders contribute directly on skill needs through industry associations, business chambers and employer input. For example, in the **Czech Republic**, Chambers of Commerce and entrepreneur associations support government immigration programmes by processing applications for such programmes.

Labour migration as a way to address labour shortages in **Serbia** was the subject of a public debate between employment agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, the Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Employers and individual companies. Three round tables were held in Serbia's largest cities, with stakeholders invited to submit written comments and proposals.

181 AT, BE (federal, BRU, FL), BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, and SK.

182 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE.

183 AT, CZ, EE, IE.



3.2. LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY APPROACHES

Labour migration policy approaches

Receiving countries in the EU and beyond exhibit different labour migration policy approaches, which can be classified as three different models. In **demand-driven** systems (for the majority of those reported), the initiative for migration comes from the employer. Employers select the foreign workers they need within a framework of regulatory parameters designed to safeguard the interests of local workers.¹⁸⁴ Demand-driven systems typically apply labour market tests, have prescribed minimum wages, and are characterised by temporary visas or permits with the option to apply for permanent residence at a later stage. **Occupation-driven** systems provide procedures for individuals with specific occupational qualifications, without necessarily requiring a job offer, which is the case for example in Belgium for the labour immigration pathways for medium- and low skilled employees.¹⁸⁵ Shortage occupation lists, and residence and work permits for certain professions, are typical policy instruments used in this approach. Both of these approaches tend to focus on filling current vacancies. A third **human-capital-driven** approach focuses on who can contribute to a

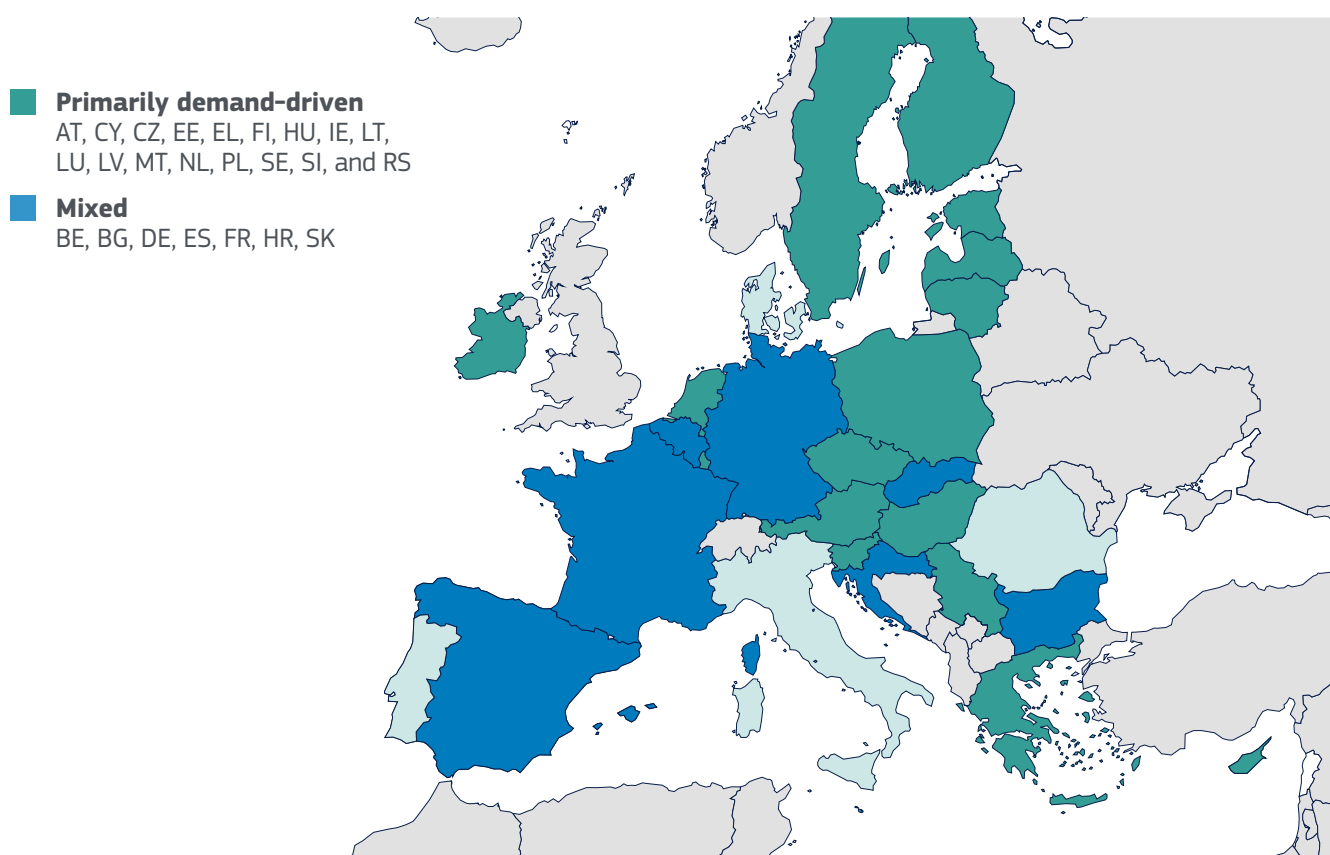
country's economic growth, innovation and development in the long run, elements of which are for example included in Austria's points system for desired skills/qualifications. This approach is neither based on arranged employment driven by employers, nor does it limit admission to specific (shortage) occupations. Instead, it focuses on the skills of the applicant as an asset for the labour market more broadly. Merit-point systems, which award points for desirable characteristics and tend to grant permanent residence to successful candidates from the beginning,¹⁸⁶ are a key policy instrument of such an approach.

Mixed approaches combine components of all three of the approaches above.

Distribution of labour migration policy approaches

Sixteen EMN Member Countries and Serbia have a primarily demand-driven approach with employment based on specific job offers and employer needs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution of labour migration policy approaches



184 Devitt, C. 2024: Comparative labour migration policies in, editor(s) Meardi, Guglielmo, Research Handbook on Migration and Employment, Edward Elgar Publishing, p. 291.

185 Devitt p. 291.

186 See Schneider, J., 'Labor migration schemes, pilot partnerships, and skills mobility initiatives in Germany' (2023), <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/1b03278725f9ff-f007a3b91dc9301135-0050062023/original/230331-Schneider-Background-Paper-FINAL.pdf>, last accessed on 11 July 2024; See also the skills independent visa of Australia: Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, 'Skilled Independent visa (subclass 189)', <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/skilled-independent-189/points-tested>, last accessed 11 July 2024.

Box 2 below shows the demand-driven approach in Austria and the Netherlands.

Box 2. Demand-driven policy approaches

The RWR Card in Austria

A key element of Austria's labour migration system is the RWR Card. With the exception of categories that fall under self-employment, the issuing of a RWR Card requires the worker to have a specific job offer. Employees are initially tied to their employer and must reapply if they want to change employer. The RWR system, and the Austrian labour migration policy more broadly, include elements of the occupation-driven system (shortage occupation lists and a focus on certain professions), as well as the human capital based labour migration system (points system for desired skills/qualifications). However, it can still be clearly classified as a demand-driven system, as access to the Austrian labour market is subject to an employment contract, labour market tests are conducted, and no permanent residence permits are issued from the outset.

The 'recognised sponsor' system in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has an employer-sponsored system, in which companies take the initiative in recruiting foreign workers. Employees are tied to specific employers and, once the government has approved a company as a recognised sponsor, the system facilitates faster processing times for these trusted employers. The system also includes special provisions for highly skilled migrants, demonstrating how a demand driven system can incorporate elements of skill selectivity while maintaining its core employer based approach. In addition, the national scheme for highly skilled migrants is based on certain remuneration levels. Given the level of the salary criteria, in combination with requirement of a "market-conform remuneration", it is assumed that this concerns mainly highly skilled migrants.

Eight EMN Member Countries¹⁸⁷ combine multiple strategies in a mixed approach to addressing labour shortages. **Germany** (see Box 3) reported a new three-pillar model, which incorporates demand-driven elements, experience-based pathways and a points-based system through the Opportunity Card. **Belgium** reported on frameworks that balance employer needs with occupation-specific requirements. The **Slovak Republic** has introduced four categories of national visas since 2022 to create pathways for different types of labour migration.

Box 3. Germany's three-pillar model from 2023

Germany's transition to a three-pillar model combined traditional demand-driven elements with experience recognition and new human-capital-driven elements:

1. A skilled labour pillar for employment-based migration. This includes, for example, the transposition of Directive (EU) 2021/1883 (EU Blue Card Directive) into German law, thereby extending and adapting the EU Blue Card rules. In addition, the list of these bottleneck occupations has been expanded, including managers in production, in the provision of services and veterinarians and dentists.
2. An experience pillar enabling recognition partnerships between employers and prospective skilled workers. Among other things, the so-called recognition partnership between prospective skilled workers and employers was introduced. The experience pillar continues to provide access to the labour market for people who do not have a recognised qualification but do have practical work experience (at least two within the last five years).
3. a potential pillar, using an Opportunity Card with a points system for jobseekers. The Opportunity Card is a hybrid of demand- and human-capital-driven approaches. Skilled workers with a professional or academic qualification that is fully recognised in Germany may enter Germany to look for a job. On the basis of a points system, people without a qualification already recognised in Germany are also permitted to immigrate to look for a job if they have sufficient qualifications. The Opportunity Card is issued for one year and can be extended for up to a further two years with a follow-up Opportunity Card if an employment contract or a binding job offer is available. In addition, the opportunity card also authorises the holder to work 20 hours a week as a part-time job and to undertake a trial period of employment while they are looking for work.

Changes MADE to Legal Frameworks and Labour Migration Policies

Between 2021 and 2024, almost all EMN Member Countries¹⁸⁸ and Serbia reported implementing significant changes in the labour migration field.

As shown in Annex Table A.3.1 these changes included new legislation to attract and retain skilled workers, revised permit systems and other policy changes, such as streamlining application procedures for work permits. For example, **Ireland** enacted the Employment Permits Act 2024, consisting of a comprehensive reform of existing employment permit legislation aimed at achieving a more flexible, efficient and attractive labour immigration system. Germany has implemented a range of changes to its labour migration framework with regard to skilled workers from third countries via the three-pillar model (see Box 3).

Cyprus reformed its Strategy for the Employment of Foreign Labour to address labour shortages by increasing the number of third-country nationals that businesses can employ and simplifying approval procedures.

187 BE, BG, DE, ES, FR, HR, IE, SK.

188 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, SE, SK.

Greece introduced comprehensive changes through its new Migration Code, including an extension of seasonal worker provisions, while retaining employer-led invitations, immigration quotas and labour market tests (determined annually for the entire country).

Most EMN Member Countries¹⁸⁹ and Serbia implemented measures to **simplify procedures** through **digitalisation**,¹⁹⁰ and **fast-tracking**.¹⁹¹ The **Czech Republic** reported suspending labour market tests in regions with low unemployment, whilst **Latvia** is developing a Green Corridor for expedited processing. Croatia digitalised its work permit process to support sectors such as tourism and construction. **Slovenia** has suspended labour market testing for third-country nationals who will be employed in the healthcare and social welfare public sectors. Serbia introduced a fully digitalised application procedure, and a one-stop shop for contacts and processing. Legislative amendments in Finland aim also to streamline residence permit processing, with fast-track options and employer certification. France amended its entry and residence code to grant temporary trainee permits to healthcare professionals in private non-profit establishments and a 'talent' residence permit for key medical and paramedical occupations was introduced, streamlining access to multi-year permits.

Twelve EMN Member Countries¹⁹² maintain comprehensive **labour market needs tests**. For example, in the Czech Republic, regional authorities may suspend the labour market test when local demand exceeds supply, expediting foreign recruitment. **Salary thresholds** remain a key policy instrument, with 14 EMN Member Countries¹⁹³ implementing varied thresholds across different worker categories. For example, in Sweden a new maintenance requirement mandates that work permit applicants earn at least 80% of Sweden's median salary, with the aim to focus on highly skilled labour migration.

Eleven EMN Member Countries¹⁹⁴ revised (some aspects of) their **quota systems**, with approaches ranging from population-based quotas to sector-specific allocations or simply increasing the quotas in line with existing regulations. **Lithuania** introduced the most substantial quota change, moving away from its previous sector-based system by setting a fixed annual quota for foreign workers at 1.4% of its permanent population¹⁹⁵. The **Czech Republic** made notable modifications by expanding quotas for specific nationalities. **Croatia** removed its labour quota system and replaced it with a more flexible, employer-driven system.

Thirteen EMN Member Countries¹⁹⁶ introduced **targeted measures for sectors** such as healthcare, IT, construction and tourism. For example, **Austria** introduced additional changes to facilitate admission to the health sector through revisions of the Health Care and Nursing Act. By

introducing special provisions for healthcare workers and developing targeted programmes for agricultural workers, **France's** approach represents a dual-sector approach to addressing critical shortages.

Eleven EMN Member Countries¹⁹⁷ enhanced or modified their **family reunification provisions or application processes for family members**. Six are newly granting family members immediate access to the labour market.¹⁹⁸

Planned changes to legal frameworks and labour migration policies

Thirteen EMN Member Countries¹⁹⁹ are planning to implement, or are in the process of implementing, changes to their legal frameworks and labour migration policies to address labour shortages (see Annex Table A.3.2.).

Eight EMN Member Countries²⁰⁰ are making efforts to **streamline and simplify application processes** for work permits and residence permits using digital solutions and a one-stop-shop approach, as for example in Estonia. Plans for amendments in the legal framework in Hungary include the aim to streamline processes and reduce the administrative burden in order to improve efficiency in labour migration and employment services, enabling quicker responses to labour shortages.

Lithuania is planning to abolish its Shortage Occupations List and the labour market test in the context of introducing a new fixed quota system for work permits, which was scheduled to enter into force on 1 January 2025. **Ireland** recently approved a project to assess the feasibility of a single permit intended to merge the employment and residence permission systems, which are currently managed in two departments under separate processes. Subject to the outcome of this assessment, implementation of the single application procedure is expected take place over a three-year period.

Policy responses also tackle labour shortages from a skills angle. Five EMN Member Countries²⁰¹ specifically reported the need to attract and retain highly skilled workers – for example, through points-based system or dedicated Committees. Latvia is developing a Green Corridor to attract third country workers aiming at developing a coherent migration policy and ensuring the attractiveness for third-country nationals needed at the labour market. It also aims to speed up document processing and the issuing of residence permits. In the **Czech Republic**, a points system is being discussed as part of the proposed law amendment. The system would award points for qualifications, Czech language skills, previous studies in the Czech Republic, and experience in shortage occupations. If this amendment is adopted and implemented, it would facilitate labour market access for qualified foreigners while benefiting a specific group of employers.²⁰²

189 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, SE, SI, SK.

190 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, NL, SE.

191 DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE, SK.

192 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, NL, PL.

193 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE.

194 AT, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, HR, LT, MT, SK (within the context of national visas).

195 This came into effect only on January 1, 2025, although legal amendments to prepare for the change took place in 2024.

196 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, FR, IE, LT, LU, SK.

197 BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE. In France the spouse of the foreigner holding a "talent" residence permit is automatically issued with a residence permit labelled "talent famille" (family of a talent) which gives access to the French labour market.

198 DE, EE, IE, NL, SE, SK (in the context of national visas). In AT this right already existed for some categories of migrant workers through the RWR Card Plus scheme.

199 AT, CY, CZ, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, PL, SE.

200 AT, DE, EE, HR, HU, IE, LT, PL.

201 CZ, FI, LT, LV.

202 web-archive.oecd.org/2023-09-23/639970-multicriterial-points-based-system-for-managing-labour-migration-to-the-czech-republic.htm



3.3. POLICY INSTRUMENTS ADDRESSING VARIOUS TYPES OF LABOUR SHORTAGES

Types of labour shortages

While twelve EMN Member Countries²⁰³ and Serbia address a mix of short-term and medium- to long-term shortages in the design of their policies, nine EMN Member Countries²⁰⁴ focus on short-term and ad-hoc shortages specifically. For example, **Serbia's** approach involves simplifying administrative procedures for employing foreigners in sectors that are experiencing immediate labour needs.

Austria's regulations and policy instruments integrate both acute and medium- to longer-term labour shortages into policy design. While the country's labour migration instruments (such as annual shortage occupation lists or quotas for seasonal labourers) are tailored to address immediate labour needs, the RWR Card system is intended to attract and retain skilled workers for a longer duration. This is reflected by the two-year validity period of approved cards, and the option to switch to an RWR Card Plus. While **Malta** depends significantly on foreign workers to address immediate gaps in sectors such as construction and hospitality, it also acknowledges the need for medium-term solutions. Malta's National Employment Policy (2021-2030) highlights a strategy to invest in the existing local workforce's skills and education to reduce dependence on foreign labour. **France** takes a multi-pronged approach, targeting acute, medium-term and long-term shortages by using a variety of instruments – such as a regularly updated list of shortage occupations, temporary residence permits for seasonal workers, and initiatives such as the talent scheme – to attract skilled workers for longer-term needs. **Poland** seeks to address long-term labour shortages by proactively identifying professions that are likely to suffer shortages in the long run, and prioritising work permits for foreign workers in those sectors. **Germany's** strategy includes a long-term skilled worker strategy, with measures to counteract the emigration of skilled workers, including facilitating family reunification; making it possible to obtain a settlement permit more quickly; and facilitating naturalisation. There are also medium-term solutions for specific sector shortages, and acute-shortage responses for areas without special qualification requirements. Most EMN Member Countries²⁰⁵ and Serbia report having policies

that prioritise **the domestic workforce** when addressing labour shortages. Key measures include labour market tests, which ensure that employers make genuine efforts to recruit locally before hiring foreign workers; and the requirement to upskill and reskill the domestic workforce through training programmes and educational initiatives. **Ireland's** labour migration policy is explicitly designed as a short- to medium-term measure to address skills shortages. The country maintains a clear position that these measures are not intended as long-term solutions, instead emphasising the parallel upskilling of the domestic workforce. In **Hungary**, the 'negative occupational list' restricts the hiring of migrant workers in occupations for which the minister responsible for employment policy has excluded third-country national workers.

Policy Instruments

EMN Member Countries employ a range of policy instruments to address labour shortages, and some use a combination of instruments rather than relying on just one.

The **sectors most targeted** are agricultural/seasonal work, healthcare, construction, transport and tourism. An emerging trend is the development of specialised procedures for healthcare workers in four reporting countries.²⁰⁶ **Ireland's** introduction of a two-year multi-site permit for non-consultant hospital doctors exemplifies how countries are streamlining administrative processes for critical healthcare roles. This reflects growing recognition that traditional immigration procedures may be too rigid for sectors with particularly acute shortages. Four EMN Member Countries²⁰⁷ have also developed more flexible approaches for **seasonal work**, particularly in agriculture and tourism. For example, when domestic, EEA, Swiss or registered seasonal workers are insufficient to meet temporary labour needs in **Austria**, the Federal Minister for Labour and Economy may, in consultation with Austrian social partners, set quotas for the temporary admission of foreign seasonal and harvest workers in sectors such as tourism, agriculture and forestry. **Greece's** recent expansion of its immigration quota to include tourism workers aims to meet cyclical labour demands in specific sectors.

Table 3 lists the different policy instruments employed.

203 AT, CZ, CY, DE, EE, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, MT, SE.

204 BE, BG, EL, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SK.

205 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SK and RS.

206 IE, HU, FR, SK.

207 AT, EL, ES, FR.

Table 3. Policy instruments

| Policy instruments | EMN Member Countries |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Labour market tests | AT, BE, CY, CZ (exceptions apply), DE (in specific cases only), EE (exceptions apply), EL, ES, FI (exceptions apply), FR, HR (exceptions apply), HU, IE, LT, LU (in specific cases only), LV, MT, NL, PL, ²⁰⁸ SK and RS |
| Shortage occupation lists | AT, BE, DE (in specific cases only), ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, SK |
| Quota systems | AT, CZ, EE, EL, HU, IE, LT, SK |
| Streamlined procedures | AT, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK |
| Other policy measures | AT, DE, EE, LT, NL |

Labour market tests exist in many EMN Member Countries,²⁰⁹ meaning that the availability of national or EU/EEA workers is assessed before a position can be filled with a third-country national. While labour market tests are commonly used, occupations that are on the shortage occupation list,²¹⁰ in specific sectors or highly skilled²¹¹ tend to be exempt from them. **Estonia** exempts specific sectors, such as ICT and start-ups, as well as top specialists, defined as a third-country national with relevant professional training whose Estonian employer provides a salary of at least 1.5 times the latest average gross monthly salary published by Statistics Estonia. In 2024, the **Czech Republic** introduced an exception allowing regional branches of the Labour Office to waive the labour market test in cases of low unemployment, where labour demand significantly exceeds supply. In **Croatia and the Slovak Republic** third-country nationals applying for specific occupations do not need to take a labour market test. Similarly, in **Finland** regional work permit policies list shortage occupations for which the labour market test is automatically passed. Bulgaria, Germany and Sweden do not rely on labour market tests. **Bulgaria** eliminated the requirement for a labour market test for EU Blue Card applicants in 2018. Following a legislative reform in 2021, the requirement was then abolished for all other work permit regimes. In **Germany**, this requirement was largely abolished with the introduction of the Skilled Immigration Act in 2020. However, the Federal Employment Agency retains the right to conduct tests in specific cases. **Sweden** does not employ tests; it is the responsibility of the employers to determine the need for foreign workers in their recruitment.

Comprehensive shortage occupation lists²¹² are a key instrument for identifying occupations facing persistent or acute labour shortages in 12 EMN Member Countries. These lists vary from dedicated lists of occupations in official documentation to research that highlights shortage occupations. In **Finland**, the annually prepared Labour Force Barometer offers an overview of current and future labour market trends, including supply and demand for various occupations, helping to identify shortages. In addition to that, regional guidelines for the use of foreign workforce are updated biannually, listing acute labour shortages in each region. In **Luxembourg**, the Labour Code requires the National Employment Agency (ADEM) to publish an annual list of occupations in short supply.

In addition, ADEM and the Chamber of Commerce began cooperation in April 2024 to analyse labour market trends and identify in-demand skills to address future labour market challenges and shortages. Five EMN Member Countries²¹³ have even more granular approaches. For example, in **Spain**, new regulations foresee regional lists even where there are provincial lists, when duly justified. The list in **Austria** has included regional shortage occupations to cater to the specific needs of labour markets in different provinces. In **Estonia**, a 2016 law amendment enabled the government to create a list of sectors with high labour shortages, although a list has not yet been produced. At the same time the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF) conducts the labour market barometer, which offers a short-term (one-year) estimation of occupational shortages or excesses at the regional level in Estonia based on a qualitative methodology capturing employers' perspectives. The Qualification Authority carries out sectoral and thematic labour need studies and prepares cross-sectoral as well as general forecasts by using OSKA methodology – a mixed-methods approach to allow for thorough statistical forecasting.

Meanwhile, **Germany's** Skilled Immigration Act of 2020 removed the country's list of shortage occupations as a central instrument of labour migration, broadening the German labour market to encompass skilled workers from a wider array of professions. **Hungary** also previously maintained a shortage occupation list but replaced it with a negative occupational list in 2021. As detailed above, the negative list identifies occupations for which hiring guest workers is prohibited. **Ireland** similarly maintains a negative list called the Ineligible Occupations List, which specifies occupations that are deemed ineligible for permits based on evidence of a sufficient supply of Irish and EEA workers. The Ineligible Occupations List is complemented by a second, positive list that highlights critical skill occupations for which there is a shortage of qualified EEA applicants. **Poland** and **Sweden** do not maintain shortage occupation lists as a requirement for labour migration either. In Sweden, the prognosis list published by the Swedish Public Employment Service is similar to a list of shortage occupations but is not used to determine the need for labour migration.

Box 4 outlines examples of shortage occupation list and streamlined recruitment practices in non-EU OECD Countries

208 The labour market test will be replaced by a county-level system that can restrict certain occupations for foreign workers; the bill is now before Parliament (as of 7 March 2025).

209 AT, BE, HR, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, DE (in specific cases only), EL, HU, IE, LT, LU (only for jobs not on the shortage list), LV, MT, NL, PL, SK, and RS.

210 BE, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, SK.

211 BE, EE, ES, FR, IE, NL, PL, SK.

212 AT, BE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, SK.

213 AT, BE, ES, FI, LT.

Box 4. Shortage occupation lists and streamlined recruitment practices in non-EU OECD Countries

In 2023, **Australia** consolidated its shortage occupation lists into the Core Single Occupation List,²¹⁴ which determines eligibility for temporary (Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa) and state/territory-nominated permanent migration. The list, which contains more than 450 occupations, is based on data from surveys, visa grants, census information, vacancies, unemployment rates and training pipelines, as well as public and stakeholder consultations.

In 2019, **Japan** introduced its Specified Skilled Worker Programme (SSWP) to create potentially long-term pathways for migrants with qualifications in relevant sectors, including those most affected by demographic structural changes (such as the nursing sector).²¹⁵ Applicants must pass a skills and language test in one of initially 12 (and since 2023, 16) authorised industries. The programme has two tiers: (1) for lower-skilled workers, allowing a maximum stay of five years without family reunification; and (2) for highly skilled workers, offering a pathway to permanent residency in Japan and the option for family reunification. Specific occupations eligible for the SSWP are identified within each sector.

Since January 2024, **Korea** has been piloting an innovative method of identifying shortage occupations for which work visas can be issued: the Pre-announcement System for Work Visa Issuance. The system applies to low- and medium-skilled workers, with work visa quotas set based on labour supply and demand projections, identifying shortage sectors and determining the number of visas to allocate for each sector. Other factors influencing this analysis include foreign workers' labour market outcomes, the impact of immigration on local employment, and illegal over-stays. For example, current forecasts (2026-2031) indicate shortages across most occupations, particularly in manufacturing and social work, leading to the inclusion of roles such as caregivers, aerospace manufacturers and electrical tower engineers.

The **United Kingdom** has introduced the Skilled Worker Route, a programme based on occupational skill and salary thresholds. Thresholds are determined based on a shortage occupation list developed by the independent Migration Advisory Committee, which also specifies salary levels and any applicable discounts to the general salary requirements.

In the **United States**, the Department of Labor can designate certain occupations (Schedule A) as understaffed with domestic workers, exempting them from the labour market test. Schedule A, unchanged since 1990, includes physical therapists, professional nurses, individuals with exceptional ability in the sciences or arts (including performing arts), and college or university teachers. In 2023, the Department

of Labor sought input on modernising Schedule A through a Request for Information, receiving hundreds of recommendations.

Seven EMN Member Countries reported having **quota systems** for different types of labour migrants.²¹⁶ The **Slovak Republic**, for example, has a quota system for national visas issued to drivers, industrial workers and university graduates. The number of third-country nationals who can settle in **Estonia**, is regulated by the annual immigration quota which cannot exceed 0,1% of the permanent population of Estonia annually. The immigration quota mainly regulates labour and business migration from third countries to Estonia.

The majority of EMN Member Countries²¹⁷ and Serbia reported **streamlined procedures** aimed at expediting the entry of **skilled workers**, particularly in high-demand sectors. These procedures are designed to reduce administrative burdens and make the process more efficient for both employers and employees by utilising common instruments, such as:

- **Fast-track processing systems.** For example, **Finland** has introduced two-week processing for specialists and start-ups. In **Sweden** the Swedish Migration Agency has recently developed a fast track model for the handling of work permit applications. The new model applies to highly qualified workers who apply for a work permit within their field of qualification and includes support to the employers. The aim is that high skilled applicants should receive a decision within 30 days, provided that all requested supporting documents are submitted. Six EMN Member Countries reported using shortage occupation lists to streamline recruitment procedures for third-country nationals, including by abolishing certain requirements for applicants.²¹⁸ In **Latvia**, Cabinet of Ministers define a list of specialties (professions) for which a significant labour shortage is predicted, and third-country nationals may then be invited to work in the country. The list is designed to prevent labour market mismatches in the short and medium term, and to not limit the supply of highly qualified labour in certain professions that are important for the growth of the national economy. The list includes professions such as researchers, for which a significant labour shortage is predicted.

- **Digitalisation**²¹⁹ is a key trend in six EMN Member Countries that involves moving from paper-based systems to online platforms. An example of this is **Austria's** AnNa IT system, which has decreased processing times for RWR Card applications by allowing residence authorities to access and process applications through a digital platform. **Belgium** launched the Single Electronic Platform, "Working in Belgium" in May 2021. It allows employers to electronically file and monitor the status of applications for Single Permits, EU Blue Cards and EU Intracompany Transfer permits. In Ireland, all employment permits are issued in an electronic format since 2022 with the addition of the

214 <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/Documents/core-sol.pdf>

215 Specified Skilled Worker Program (SSW), 'About the Specified Skilled Worker Visa', <https://www.ssw.go.jp/en/about/visa/>, last accessed 29 November 2024; OECD, 'Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Japan 2024', 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0e5a10e3-en>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

216 AT, CZ, EE, EL, HU, LT, SK.

217 AT, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

218 FI, FR, HR, LU, LV, SK.

219 AT, BE, BG, EE, FR, IE.

signature of a senior official on behalf of the Minister, as well as a unique permit number.²²⁰

- **Institutional reorganisation**²²¹ is another area of reform for four countries that have simplified their bureaucratic structures to make processes more efficient. **Germany** has introduced Central Immigration Authorities in some federal states to streamline immigration procedures. Instead of multiple agencies managing different parts of the process, a single body now handles all aspects. The **Slovak Republic** is planning to establish 'one-stop shops' to provide comprehensive support services for highly qualified foreigners and returnees who have previously left the Slovak Republic and sought employment abroad. **Bulgaria** also uses a one-stop shop approach, with a single procedure for submitting, examining, issuing and receiving the documents needed for third-country nationals to access the national labour market. To simplify procedures for employers recruiting foreign workers in **France**, management of the foreign workforce and issuance of work permits was transferred from the Ministry of Labour's foreign workforce services (SMOE) to the Ministry of the Interior (in prefectures) from 1 April 2021.
- **Process simplification**²²² is employed by seven EMN Member Countries to remove unnecessary administrative hurdles and streamlining requirements. For example, since the Employment Permits Act 2024 was passed, **Ireland** has allowed workers with certain permit types to switch employers nine months from the time of first employment without having to apply

for a new permit. Employers can also now complete the labour markets needs test via an advertisement on online platforms. **Finland** and **France** reported integrating administrative reforms within their wider strategies to attract global talent. Finland's Talent Boost programme (2023-2027) combines streamlined residence permit processes with international recruitment efforts. Another example is the '**Spain**, Audiovisual Hub of Europe' plan within the Digital Spain 2025 strategy, which aims to increase audiovisual production by 30% by 2025 and simplifies procedures for foreigners to access labour in the audiovisual sector.

- **Whole-of-government** approaches are also increasingly applied and considered important, as is reflected in **Austria's** cross-government strategy committee for international skilled workers.

Other policy measures have been reported by five EMN Member Countries.²²³ **Estonia's** start-up/scale-up visa programme offers a comprehensive approach combining immigration flexibility with business development support. **Germany's** 'experience pillar' for people without a qualification formally recognised in Germany recognises extensive professional experience as an alternative (see Box 3). Other mentions include the **Netherlands'** recognised sponsor system, offering expedited processing for trusted employers. Three EMN Member Countries²²⁴ have reported innovative approaches targeting specific industry needs, such as **Cyprus'** strategy for attracting foreign companies.



3.4. LEGAL PATHWAYS

Strategic labour migration policies to attract foreign talent

Fourteen EMN Member Countries²²⁵ and Serbia have a policy strategy and/or institutionalised/coordinated approaches to attract foreign talent. These include: involvement of stakeholders; assessment of labour shortages; differentiation between occupational sectors and/or skill levels; facilitation of the recognition of foreign qualifications for shortage occupations/sectors; measures to prevent/mitigate brain drain in countries of origin; safeguards to protect (vulnerable) migrant workers to counterbalance policy measures that expedite/facilitate the admission of workers in shortage occupations/sectors; and agreements with countries of origin. Table 4 provides an overview of these policies for each EMN Member Country, with a detailed description further below.

Six EMN Member Countries²²⁶ have no specific policy for attracting foreign talent. Of these, the **Czech Republic** has reported measures that aim to facilitate labour migration without an overarching policy framework. In the **Slovak Republic**, a series of legislative measures were implemented in response to immediate labour market needs, rather than through a single comprehensive strategy, and are supported by policy frameworks such as the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the National Research, Development and Innovation Strategy 2030, and Magnet for Talent. These all aim to boost the share of highly qualified foreign workers and enhance the overall talent experience through initiatives such as Foreigners' Service Centres (or one-stop shops), subsidised language education and a new information portal. In **Malta**, the government published a new Labour Migration Policy, which was open for public consultation until February 2025.

220 EMN Ireland (2023) Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022: Ireland

221 BG, DE, FR, SK.

222 DE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU.

223 AT, DE, EE, LT, NL.

224 CY, HU, SE.

225 AT, BE, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, MT (being finalised), NL, PL, and RS.

226 BG, CZ, CY, LT, LV, and SK.

Table 4. Labour migration policies to attract foreign talent

| EMN Member Country | Policy in place | Stakeholder involvement | Assessment of labour shortages | Differentiation between occupational sectors and/or skill levels | Facilitation of recognition of foreign qualifications for shortage occupations/sectors | Prevention of brain drain | Safeguards for migrant workers | Agreements with third countries |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Austria | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Belgium | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bulgaria | NO | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ |
| Croatia | YES | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Cyprus | NO | | | | | | | |
| Czech Republic | NO | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Estonia | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Finland | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| France | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Germany | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Greece | YES | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Hungary | YES | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | |
| Ireland | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Latvia | NO | | | | | | | |
| Lithuania | NO | | | | | | | |
| Luxembourg | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Malta | Being finalised | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Netherlands | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Poland | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Slovak Republic | NO | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Slovenia | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| Spain | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sweden | YES | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Serbia | YES | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

Thirteen EMN Member Countries²²⁷ and Serbia either have formal labour-shortage **assessment mechanisms**²²⁸ and/or differentiated approaches based on sectors and/or skill levels.²²⁹ Mechanisms include comprehensive data collection systems with multiple quantitative and qualitative indicators, through specialised institutions, to track labour market dynamics systematically,²³⁰ as well as skills forecasting, sector projections and regularly updated shortage lists to identify labour market needs.²³¹ For example, in **France**, the Research, Studies and Statistics Department (Dares), and the public employment service (*France travail*), use six specific indicators (including hiring intensity, workforce shortage and wage evolution) to measure tensions in the labour market and account for the variety of situations covered by the term ‘shortage occupations’. **Belgium** employs a three-stage analysis combining quantitative data and sector surveys. **Ireland**

uses multiple assessment tools, including two regularly reviewed occupation lists, skills bulletins and expert group reports. **Austria’s** Skilled Workers Barometer complements the applicant-to-vacancy ratio as an indicator, and takes three factors into account: job competition, access to vacancies, and the overall job market. It provides quarterly results on skilled worker shortages at professional level, both nationally and by province. In total, six EMN Member Countries²³² reported multi-level assessment of labour shortages through coordinated employment services and/or (additional) region-specific analyses. For example, **Croatia’s** public employment service assesses shortages at local, regional and national levels.

With regard to differentiation between occupational sectors and/or **skill levels**, 12 EMN Member Countries²³³ reported a policy focus on shortages of (highly) skilled workers. Three²³⁴ reported employing hybrid approaches

227 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, LU, NL, PL.

228 AT, BE, CZ, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, SE.

229 AT, BE, EE, FI, FR, LU, NL, SE.

230 FR, BE, DE, IE.

231 AT, FI, FR, IE.

232 AT, CZ, FR, HR, SE.

233 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, SE.

234 DE, FR, IE.

that combine both skill level requirements and specific sectoral needs.

Nine EMN Member Countries²³⁵ reported **targeted talent-attraction strategies**. For example, **Finland** leverages its Talent Boost programme to improve attractiveness of Finland for foreign talents through comprehensive measures, including implementing a partnership country model for labour migration with the countries specified in the Government Programme. Since 2017, Business France has been operating the Welcome to France website and the Welcome Office, to inform companies about professional mobility for their employees and the recruitment of international talent in **France**. **Sweden** is extending validity periods for highly skilled workers under Directive (EU) 2021/1883 (the EU Blue Card Directive).

Seven EMN Member Countries²³⁶ and Serbia reported developments on **qualification-recognition frameworks**. Austria and France have recently introduced simplified procedures for **qualification recognition**. In France, The ENIC-NARIC Centre²³⁷ is the French contact point for a European network that issues certificates of comparability between foreign and national diplomas thus assisting employers in their evaluation. The procedure for validating the acquired experience²³⁸, established in 2002, allows any person, regardless of their level or status, to obtain a professional certification after one year of relevant experience, with the possibility of additional training. **Serbia** has implemented an electronic processing system, and **Sweden** has aligned its approach with UNESCO conventions on qualification recognition.

Different **sector-specific** recognition systems are in place. **Poland**, for example, focuses on streamlining recognition for healthcare professionals. Six EMN Member Countries²³⁹ maintain limited facilitation for the recognition of qualifications in specific shortage occupations. Employer-led assessment for non-regulated professions is allowed in **Ireland**, and **Austria** is working on a **pre-check register** to enable vocational qualifications acquired abroad to be registered systematically.

Safeguards to protect (vulnerable) migrant workers were explicitly reported by 12 EMN Member Countries²⁴⁰ and Serbia. For example, **Germany** has implemented the Act on the Further Development of Skilled Labour Immigration, which specifically targets labour-exploitation prevention and ensures wage parity between foreign and domestic workers. **Ireland** has established similar protections granting migrant workers equal rights under employment laws. It also maintains a dedicated unit within the Workplace Relations Commission to carry out workplace inspections, operates a labour exploitation helpline, and enforces sector-specific work permit conditions.

Five EMN Member Countries²⁴¹ have incorporated considerations on brain drain into their labour migration

strategies. **Germany's** Skilled Labour Strategy and Triple Win programme are comprehensive approaches in response to brain drain, specifically targeting countries with a worker surplus. **Finland** provides information-based guidance and ethical recruitment practices through partnerships with countries of origin, and **France** addresses brain drain through concerted management agreements and a seasonal residence permit scheme.

In addition, 14 EMN Member Countries²⁴² and Serbia reported different **agreements with countries of origin**. For example, Bulgaria has agreements with Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. **Belgium** has developed comprehensive bilateral partnerships, notably with Morocco and Suriname, establishing structured skills-mobility partnerships that focus on specific sectors such as healthcare, ICT and engineering. **Germany** reported granting temporary labour market access to nationals from the Western Balkans if they had an offer from a German company, among other prerequisites. **Austria** has signed memoranda of understanding, amongst others with Indonesia and the Philippines, and **Serbia** has implemented a simplified procedure for residence and work permits for people of Serbian origin.

Six EMN Member Countries²⁴³ have reported other measures focusing on family mobility and/or the digital realm. **Austria**, for example, provides access to the labour market for family members of RWR Card holders, through the RWR Card Plus scheme. In **France**, the 'Family Talent' (*talent famille*) permit streamlines family mobility for holders of the talent residence permit, and **Sweden** has introduced a talent visa alongside immediate labour market access for family members, while continuing to explore how to refine its approach further. Similar to France and Sweden, **Finland** has also streamlined the residence permit procedure for family members of the third-country national specialists. On 1 June 2022, a fast-track service was introduced for specialists, start-up entrepreneurs and their family members. The aim of the fast-track service is to make the move to Finland quicker and easier for the whole family. **Luxembourg's** updated fiscal regime, which helps, for example, local businesses recruit highly qualified workers from around the world, came into effect on 1 January 2025.

EMN Member Countries use online portals that connect international workers with job opportunities in these countries.²⁴⁴ For example, Luxembourg is planning to launch a new online portal to take into account the needs of different economic sectors (e.g. ICT, space, crafts, start-ups and health), as well as different kinds of talent (e.g. young talent looking for an internship opportunity, or cross-border workers). This portal will greatly facilitate a soft landing for talent identifying Luxembourg as a potential workplace, as well as their onboarding.

235 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, PL, SE, SK.

236 AT, BE, ES, FI, FR, LV, SE.

237 <https://www.france-education-international.fr/expertises/enic-naric?langue=fr>

238 <https://vae.gouv.fr/>

239 AT, BE, FR, DE, IE, SE.

240 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, PL, SE.

241 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR.

242 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, PL.

243 AT, FI, FR, LU, PL, SE.

244 EMN Member Countries reporting this in the EMN inform on new and innovative ways to attract foreign talent: AT, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, LT, LV, NL, SI.

Most important legal pathways for work

Table 5 shows the quantitatively most important legal pathways²⁴⁵ in each EMN Member Country and Serbia and the various skill levels they cover.

Table 5. Most important legal pathways for work in terms of numbers

| EMN Member Country | Pathway name | Low(er)-skilled | Medium-skilled | Highly skilled |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Austria | RWR Card – skilled worker in shortage occupations | | ✓ | |
| | RWR Card – other key workers | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Visa C or D for seasonal workers | ✓ | | |
| | Settlement permit – researcher | | | ✓ |
| Belgium | Labour market test single permit | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Shortage occupation single permit | | ✓ | |
| | Highly skilled worker single permit | | | ✓ |
| | Researchers with guest agreement | | | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card | | | ✓ |
| Bulgaria | Single permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Registration of seasonal workers | ✓ | | |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Registration of posted workers | | | |
| | Intra-corporate transferee | | | |
| Croatia | Temporary stay and work permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Seasonal work permit | ✓ | | |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Digital nomad visa | | | ✓ |
| Cyprus ²⁴⁶ | Single permit for domestic and general employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Single permit for skilled, highly paid employment at companies of foreign interest operating in Cyprus | | | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | |
| Czech Republic | Employee card | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Seasonal work visa (low-skilled) | | ✓ | |
| | Special work visa (low-skilled) | | ✓ | |
| Estonia | Short-term employment registration with visa | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for employment | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for short-term employment | | ✓ | |
| | Digital nomad visa | | | ✓ |
| | Start-up/scale-up programme | | | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | |
| Finland | Residence permit for an employed person (subject to labour market testing) | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Seasonal work ²⁴⁷ | ✓ | | |
| | Specialist | | | ✓ |
| | Researcher | | | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 ²⁴⁸ | | | ✓ |

²⁴⁵ For more detailed information, please refer to the ICMP study on Mapping Legal Pathways to EU Member States – Migration Partner Facility, available at <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/labour-mobility/mapping-legal-pathways-to-eu-member-states>, last accessed 17 February 2025.

²⁴⁶ In August 2024, the Republic of Cyprus transposed the revised Blue Card Directive into national legislation. However, due to the technical upgrades required to support the receipt and issuance of the Blue Card, the submission of the relevant applications only commenced on 7th July 2025. Therefore, no relevant data are currently available for the reporting period of this study.

²⁴⁷ Includes residence permits for seasonal work that are subject to labour market testing and those that are not.

²⁴⁸ Finland has transposed the EU Blue Card Directive, and residence permits are issued based on that. However, the numbers are smaller than those issued for specialists in the national specialists' residence permit category.

| EMN Member Country | Pathway name | Low(er)-skilled | Medium-skilled | Highly skilled |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| France | Residence permit for salaried employees | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Talent residence permit for (highly) qualified workers including the EU Blue Card | | | ✓ |
| | Seasonal multi-year residence permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Talent researcher residence permit | | | ✓ |
| Germany | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 (§ 18g AufenthG) | | | ✓ |
| | Western Balkans Regulation (§ 19c (1) AufenthG) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Skilled worker with academic training (§18b AufenthG) | | | ✓ |
| | Skilled worker with vocational training (§18a AufenthG) | | ✓ | |
| Greece | Dependent employment | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Special purpose employment (e.g. foreign school teachers, executives of strategic investment entities for investment schemes) | | | ✓ |
| | Seasonal employment | ✓ | | |
| | EU Blue Card (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Researcher Directive (EU) 2016/801) | | | ✓ |
| | Digital nomad visa | | | ✓ |
| | Inter-corporate transferees (Directive 2014/66/EU) | | | ✓ |
| Hungary | Guest worker with a residence permit for employment purposes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Guest worker with a guest worker residence permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Guest worker arriving for investment purposes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Hungarian Card | | | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 ²⁴⁹ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ireland | Critical skills employment permit | | | ✓ |
| | General employment permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Intra-company transfer employment permit | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Latvia | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Short-term or long-term visa | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lithuania | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Residence permit for highly qualified employees | | | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for foreign graduates and researchers seeking employment in Lithuania | | | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for foreign lecturers and researchers | | | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence permit for employment | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Temporary residence permit for citizens of selected countries for work or legal activities in Lithuania | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | | | | |
| Luxembourg | Salaried worker | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Intra-corporate transfer | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Researcher | | | ✓ |
| | Self-employed worker | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Malta | Single permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Key Employee Initiative | | | ✓ |
| | Highly Specialised Employment Route | | | ✓ |
| | Intra-corporate transferee permit | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Seasonal employment permit | ✓ | | |
| | | | | |
| Netherlands | Highly skilled migrants (<i>Kennismigrantenregeling</i>) | | | ✓ |
| | Researcher Directive (EU 2016/801) | | | ✓ |
| | Intra-corporate Transferee Directive (2014/66/EU) | | | ✓ |
| | Worker in paid employment (including single permit) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | |

²⁴⁹ In the case of Hungary, its usage was minimal throughout the years (only 18 persons received it in 2022 and 17 in 2023).

| EMN Member Country | Pathway name | Low(er)-skilled | Medium-skilled | Highly skilled |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Poland | Full access to labour market for Ukrainian nationals | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Work permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | Single permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Slovenia | Single permit | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Single permit for seasonal work longer than 90 days | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| Slovak Republic | Temporary residence permit for employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | National visa for highly qualified third-country nationals | | | ✓ |
| | National visa for selected groups of third-country nationals | ✓ | | |
| | National visa for employees in selected industrial jobs | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spain | Temporary residence permit for employment | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Residence permit for highly qualified workers | | | ✓ |
| | Seasonal work (GECCO) | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| Sweden | Residence permit for researchers according to the Swedish Aliens Act (5 b kap. 1 § UtL) | | | ✓ |
| | Ordinary work permit according to chapter 6, section 2, paragraph 1 of the Aliens Act (6 kap. 2 § 1 st UtL) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | EU Blue Card Directive (EU) 2021/1883 | | | ✓ |
| | ICT permit | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Serbia | Issuance of Visa D for employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Residence permit for highly qualified professionals | | | ✓ |
| | Temporary residence based on employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Start-up | | | ✓ |
| | Talent | | | ✓ |
| | Diaspora | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Fifteen EMN Member Countries prioritise **attracting (highly) skilled workers**,²⁵⁰ while thirteen EMN Member Countries and Serbia address various skill levels in line with the needs of their labour markets.²⁵¹

France and **Greece** reported having structured legal pathways for irregular migrants in shortage occupations, while the remaining EMN Member Countries²⁵² that participated in this study and Serbia did not. **France** has an exceptional admission-to-stay procedure (AES), which allows the prefect to grant residence to a foreign national in an irregular situation. This procedure is part of France's overall labour migration strategy and is a significant channel of labour migration, particularly for low-skilled occupations in sectors with labour shortages. In 2023, France issued 11 522 AES residence permits for

economic reasons, representing 21% of the total number of residence permits issued for economic reasons that year. France has also implemented a new regularisation procedure for foreign workers in shortage occupations or geographical areas facing recruitment challenges. This new procedure aims to complete the existing system by strengthening the link between the labour needs identified in certain occupations and geographical areas, and access to residence through work. This procedure is valid until 31 December 2026. Recent legislation in **Greece** established an ad-hoc procedure for granting residence permits to irregular migrants. The legislation is considered part of Greece's overall labour migration policy and aims to fill job vacancies in the Greek labour market. There are no sectoral limitations, and the residence permit is renewable and valid for three years.

250 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SK.

251 AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, FI, HU, LT, LV, MT, PL, SE, SK.

252 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.



3.5. POLICY MONITORING AND GOOD PRACTICES

Monitoring and evaluating labour migration policies

Sixteen EMN Member Countries²⁵³ monitor and evaluate labour migration policies or some elements of them, while six EMN Member Countries²⁵⁴ and Serbia do not.

Seven EMN Member Countries track permits,²⁵⁵ five analyse labour market data²⁵⁶ and eight gather stakeholder feedback²⁵⁷ through various statistical and qualitative methods, to monitor labour market trends. For example, **Estonia** monitors the performance of specific initiatives such as Start-up Estonia and Work in Estonia.

Eight EMN Member Countries have reported **actively seeking feedback** from employers and migrants to assess the effectiveness of their policies, including through employer surveys, consultations with social partners and meetings with government agencies.²⁵⁸ For instance, in **Malta**, the public employment service Jobsplus holds regular meetings with social partners to discuss foreign

labour issues, and **Ireland** organises comprehensive stakeholder consultations with employers, government departments, agencies and trade unions through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (see also Section 3.1).

Seven EMN Member Countries²⁵⁹ conduct **specific evaluations** and research projects to assess the impact of their policies. For example, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in **Germany** conducted a research project on the development of skilled labour immigration, and the Institute for Employment Research conducted an evaluation of Germany's Western Balkans Regulation. In the **Netherlands**, the Scientific Council for Government Policy published a Working Paper on lessons for labour migration in Dutch healthcare, and the policy research company Regioplan (commissioned by the Ministry of Security and Justice's Research and Documentation Centre (WODC)) published a study on the Netherlands' appeal to highly skilled migrants.



3.6. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned on labour migration policy to reduce labour shortages

Sixteen EMN Member Countries²⁶⁰ reported lessons learned from their labour migration policies and legal pathways, specifically in relation to reducing labour shortages.

Seven EMN Member Countries²⁶¹ provided insights on **refining labour migration policies**, highlighting the importance of data collection, analysis and monitoring to inform policy decisions, and of tracking the effectiveness of labour migration initiatives. **Belgium** underlined the importance of improving the methodology for drafting shortage occupation lists by using diverse data sources and ensuring transparency. For **Hungary** and **Lithuania**, simplifying legal frameworks was decisive. Lithuania illustrated how streamlined immigration procedures and accessible temporary residence permits can significantly enhance migration flows and help meet labour market needs. **Ireland** emphasised the need for flexibility, and to ensure that employment permit systems are regularly reviewed and adjusted, depending on changes in local and EEA-wide labour supply and demand.

The importance of integration measures and policies to **retain** foreign talent is gaining increasing recognition in **Austria**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Sweden** and the **Slovak Republic**. Five EMN Member Countries²⁶² also shared the

insight that it is crucial to focus holistically on the issue of foreign talent in terms of a broad range of stakeholders involved (for example **Finland**). The **Slovak Republic**, for instance, plans to introduce language education and integration measures to support the long-term settlement of foreign talent.

Five EMN Member Countries²⁶³ also mentioned the need to balance facilitating labour migration with the ethical treatment of foreign workers, including measures to prevent exploitation. **Belgium** focuses on establishing robust legal frameworks that protect migrant workers' rights while ensuring that policies remain flexible enough to meet labour market demands. Similarly, **Austria** is exploring the implementation of a quality-assurance mechanism for recruitment from third countries to ensure ethical recruitment practices, especially for agencies operating in third countries, where oversight is often limited.

Policy and legal pathway challenges in labour migration

nineteen EMN Member Countries and Serbia have experienced challenges²⁶⁴ related to labour migration policy, amongst others, **governance and coordination challenges**.²⁶⁵ Such challenges were noted by **Austria** and **Belgium**, where the federal structure and multi-level governance creates complexity and can cause regional disparities. For example, some Austrian provinces have

253 AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, MT, NL, SE, SK.

254 CY, EL, HU, LU, LV, PL.

255 AT, CZ, DE, FI, FR, IE, SK.

256 BE, DE, FI, LT, MT.

257 BE, CZ, BG, DE, FI, HR, SE, SK.

258 BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, IE, MT, SK.

259 CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, NL, SK.

260 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

261 BE, CZ, DE, FR, IE, NL, PL.

262 AT, DE, FI, LT, SK.

263 AT, BE, CZ, DE, FI, LT.

264 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK.

265 AT, BE, FI.

developed their own individual regional recruitment strategies. In addition to this, the federal principle means that, in some cases, the provinces have different laws concerning the recognition of qualifications for occupations where this is a legal requirement (regulated professions), in the care sector for example. In such cases, the province in which the jobseeker wishes to work is responsible for granting recognition of their qualifications. In Belgium, the multi-level governance structure was reported on creating a heavier and complex process due to the different authorities involved combined with limited public information available (in English) for employers and employees regarding legal pathways.²⁶⁶

Challenges in **policy design and legal frameworks**²⁶⁷ also impede effective labour migration management. Challenges in legal pathways for labour migration²⁶⁸ include issues such as complex processes²⁶⁹ and/or lengthy procedures.²⁷⁰ France, for example reported on the administrative procedures for obtaining visas, residence permits and work permits, which are often lengthy and can discourage employers and potential workers from initiating international professional mobility. In Germany, for example, the long waiting times for the issuing of visas, as well as the inadequate administrative system and

infrastructure, represent significant obstacles to labour recruitment.

Lithuania, Luxembourg and the **Slovak Republic** explicitly reported challenges in the **integration** of foreign workers. For example, in Luxembourg, housing shortages are a major problem for all workers, including foreign nationals. In the Slovak Republic, language barriers have been a challenge for newcomers and government employees.

Labour-market-specific issues affect both the recruitment and retention of foreign workers in the Czech Republic, Germany and Malta. For example, in the **Czech Republic** low wages (particularly in certain sectors) and high living costs hinder migrant retention. **Preventing the exploitation and misuse** of migration systems²⁷¹ has also been reported as an issue by Cyprus, the Netherlands, Sweden and Serbia. For **Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Sweden**, retaining skilled workers is a challenge. Hungary specifically noted competition from regional countries and other EU Member States for migrant workers, especially in offering competitive wages. This competition poses a serious obstacle to attracting and retaining foreign talent to ease labour shortages in Hungary. Eight EMN Member Countries²⁷² mentioned that the **recognition of foreign qualifications** is a challenge.



3.7. POLICIES AND GOOD PRACTICES FOR RETAINING FOREIGN TALENT

The majority of EMN Member Countries²⁷³ have implemented policies to retain foreign talent, employing a range of approaches.

■ Facilitating family reunification and social integration

Sweden offers immediate family reunification and spouse labour-market access from day one. **Belgium, Germany, France and Spain** also streamline family reunification processes and provide work permits for spouses to create a welcoming environment for foreign workers and their families. **Austria** provides free labour market access for family members of skilled workers under the RWR Card scheme and focuses on language training. **Finland** enhances retention for example by reinforcing family services such as educational opportunities for children of foreign talent and developing the receptiveness of working life.

Luxembourg ensures free access to the labour market for holders of a family-member residence permit; applicants for international protection, after a six-month waiting period; beneficiaries of a deferment

of removal; and beneficiaries of a suspension of removal. In addition, ADEM and Babel cooperate to improve access to online language courses (see also Section 2.3.4).

■ Incentives to attract and retain talent

Lithuania offers relocation incentives for highly skilled experts and returning expats, and **Croatia** encourages emigrants to return through the *I Choose Croatia* programme. **Cyprus** supports worker retention by removing the limitation on the duration of stay for workers in sectors such as domestic work and agriculture, if their employment permit and residence permit are renewed by their employer. **Luxembourg's** High Committee for the Attraction, Retention and Development of Talent is reviewing the various strategic areas linked to talent attraction and retention, the Government is working on.²⁷⁴ In addition, the **Luxembourg** government is working to increase the number of international schools and offer professional development courses in French and English, to cater inter alia to the needs of

266 See also Weatherburn, Amy. "Working in Europe with a Single Permit: a Golden Ticket or Pie in the Sky?" *Journal of European Migration Studies*, 2023, vol. 12, no. 2, p.458
Position paper de l'Union Wallonne des entreprises, novembre 2023, p. 31.

267 FR, HU, IE, NL.

268 AT, BE, DE, HU, IE, LT, LU, PL, SE, SK.

269 AT, DE, FR, IE, HU, LU.

270 AT, BE, DE, FR, LU, PL, SE, SK.

271 CY, SE, NL, and RS.

272 AT, BE, BG, DE, FR, IE, LU, PL.

273 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE.

274 Ministry of Economy, Première réunion du Haut comité pour l'attraction, la rétention et le développement de talents, Press release, 20 June 2024, https://meco.gouvernement.lu/fr/actualites/gouvernement/%2Bfr%2Bactualites%2Btoutes_actualites%2Bcommuniqu%C3%A9s%2B2024%2B06-juin%2B20-delles-haut-comite.html, last accessed 25 February 2025.

foreign talent residing in Luxembourg and make the country more attractive to this group.²⁷⁵

Simplifying permits and extending validity

Germany facilitates permanent residency for skilled workers via the changes introduced as part of the three-pillar model, **Malta** streamlines renewals for direct employers, and **Sweden** allows indefinite renewals for temporary work permits for acute labour shortages. **Luxembourg** has amended its Immigration Law to extend the validity of the residence permit for finding employment or creating a business from 9 to 12 months.²⁷⁶ **Spain** made changes affecting the renewal of permits, extending their validity from two to four years.

Streamlined processes and a targeted focus

France has digitalised its visa and permit processes; **Ireland** is beginning to assess the implementation of a single permit procedure to integrate the employment and residence permit systems; **Latvia's** Green Corridor plans to expedite document processing; and **Austria's** pre-check register (currently in planning) will simplify qualification recognition. **France also** issues sector-specific residence permits (e.g. for healthcare).

Recruitment, retention, integration and worker safeguards²⁷⁷

Estonia, Finland and **Latvia** offer language training and career support, and **Austria** and **Germany** reported promoting stability through extended residence permits and pathways to permanent residency.

Croatia promotes ethical recruitment through agreements with third countries, and Lithuania works with trade unions to educate workers on their rights.

Collaboration and evidence-based policymaking²⁷⁸

Good practices identified in this field include those of **France** and **Spain**, which involve social partners in policy development; **Finland's** Talent Boost programme, which fosters intergovernmental collaboration; and **Croatia's** partnerships with the Philippines to ensure fair recruitment.

On monitoring and evaluation, the **Czech Republic** monitors migration trends and employer feedback, **Finland** conducts impact assessments, and **Germany** evaluates legislative impacts to refine migration policies.

Box 5 below outlines a good practice from Finland in more detail.

Box 5. The Talent Boost programme in Finland

The intersectoral Talent Boost programme makes it possible to address challenges that a single branch of administration cannot resolve alone. Talent Boost is a well-known brand that inspires participants in the labour migration ecosystem. Launched in 2017 and initially focused on international specialists, the programme's scope has subsequently been expanded to address labour migration more broadly, including labour migration for sectors suffering from shortages.

The three pillars of the Talent Boost programme aim to (i) increase Finland's attractiveness, (ii) establish efficient residence permit processes, and (iii) strengthen Finland's retention power.

The Talent Boost programme's monitoring and reporting model indicates that Finland can strengthen its retention abilities by: supporting **employment and career development**; supporting **spouses and families**; improving the **availability of services**; and strengthening the development of **social relations, inclusion** and the **receptiveness of society**.

275 Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Rentrée 2024/2025, Dossier de presse, 12 September 2024, <https://gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/documents/actualites/2024/09/12-screen-life-balance/dossier-de-presse-rentre-2024-2025.pdf>

Bill 7800 relating to the construction of a high school in Mersch and amending: 1° the amended law of 22 July 2008 creating a high school in Junglinster; 2° the amended law of 13 June 2013 creating a high school in Clervaux; 3° the amended law of 26 February 2016 creating a public international school in Differdange; 4° the amended law of 23 July 2016 creating a national reserve of secondary school teaching staff; 5° the law of 13 July 2018 creating a secondary school in Mondorf-les-Bains; 6° the law of 19 December 2020 concerning the State revenue and expenditure budget for the financial year 2021, Introduced to Parliament on 15 May 2021, <https://wdocs-pub.chd.lu/docs/exped/01119/026/238269.pdf>

Reply to Parliamentary Question 8025, Écoles internationales, 27 June 2023, URL: <https://wdocs-pub.chd.lu/docs/exped/0140/056/280567.pdf>

Government of Luxembourg, Accord de coalition 2023-2028, Press release, 16 November 2023, p. 118, 123, 127, URL: <https://gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/documents/dossier/formation-gouvernement-2023/accord-coalition.pdf> last accessed 25 February 2025.

276 Article 67-4 of the Immigration Law.

277 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, FR, HR, LT, LV.

278 CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR.

4. PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES FOR ATTRACTING AND RECRUITING FOREIGN TALENT

Building on the general overview of approaches to the issue of labour shortages, and the legal and policy frameworks of labour migration provided in sections two and three, this section focuses on national practices and initiatives to address labour shortages. It further examines how public policy in EMN Member and Observer Countries shape – and sometimes lead – recruitment efforts. Actions include agreements with third countries, and quality-assurance and information-sharing initiatives. Taken together, these elements form broader strategies to attract and retain foreign talent. In addition, this section covers

regional disparities when attracting foreign labour, shaped by factors such as economic development and wage levels, and different policy approaches to reduce these disparities. Measures to address these disparities such as dedicated projects, subsidies, advisory services, regional shortage lists, and bilateral agreements will be discussed as well. Lastly, this section provides an overview of initiatives that might be relevant for the purpose of EU level initiatives such as the Talent Pool, Talent Partnerships and the Migration Partnership Facility.



4.1. NATIONAL PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES

This section details national practices and initiatives taken by EMN Member and Observer Countries to tackle labour shortages, such as recruitment initiatives, sector-specific projects and comprehensive strategies. It also includes examples from non-EMN affiliated OECD Countries and the IOM.

National practices and initiatives influencing recruitment

In most EMN Member Countries and Serbia, **efforts to recruit third-country nationals are primarily led by employers and private recruitment agencies**, rather than by public bodies.²⁷⁹ Only France, Germany and Luxembourg reported significant government involvement. In **Germany**, the former Federal Labour Office held a monopoly on job placement until 1994, and while a large private employment market has since emerged, the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) continues to play an important role.

EMN Member and Observer Countries, however, **lead and influence employer and private recruitment agency efforts to recruit third-country nationals through**: (1) agreements with third countries; (2) quality-assurance measures; (3) advertising vacancies; and (4) practical guidelines.

Seven EMN Member Countries and Serbia have **agreements in place with third countries** that impact the recruitment of third-country nationals in different ways.²⁸⁰ For instance, **Austria**,²⁸¹ **Croatia**,²⁸² and **Finland**²⁸³ have

signed Memoranda of Understanding with third countries aimed at facilitating the movement of workers to their own labour markets by promoting employment opportunities in Austria, Croatia and Finland. **Italy** is currently enhancing bilateral cooperation on migration through agreements with third countries that establish worker quotas for specific periods of time.²⁸⁴ Meanwhile, **Serbia** facilitates recruitment through its participation in the Open Balkans Initiative. Agreements in place between Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia since 2021 allow nationals of those countries free access to all three labour markets. Box 6 highlights the role of agreements in France and Germany, where national authorities take an active role in recruitment efforts overall.

Box 6. The role of agreements with third countries in recruiting medium- and low-skilled third-country nationals in France and Germany

In **France**, national recruitment efforts to attract third-country national workers to certain medium- and low-skilled occupations focus on bilateral agreements on concerted management. Concerted management agreements (ACG) have been signed with eight countries to optimise the mutual benefits of labour migration. France incorporates tailored shortage occupation lists into specific agreements with third countries. For these occupations, the usual requirement to prioritise the hiring of local or EU workers is waived. Notable examples include the Senegalese and Tunisian agreements,

²⁷⁹ BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK, and RS.

²⁸⁰ AT, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, and RS.

²⁸¹ Albania, Brazil, Indonesia, Kosovo and the Philippines. As part of the 2023 Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between Austria and India - India also a pilot country.

²⁸² The Philippines.

²⁸³ A declaration of intent and a memorandum of understanding has been signed with India. The plan is to sign MoUs with Vietnam and the Philippines.

²⁸⁴ Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ghana, India, Ivory Coast, Kyrgyzstan, Santo Domingo, Sri Lanka, Tunisia.

which allow a set number of foreign workers to fill medium- and low-skilled vacancies. Another agreement with Georgia grants one-year renewable residence permits for 50 listed professions, exempting approved contracts from the employment situation rule, which prioritises local or EU workers.

With regard to **efforts to hire seasonal workers**, the French Office for Immigration and Integration (*Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration* – OFII) maintains close relationships with the Tunisian and Moroccan authorities and consular posts as part of the agreements with these countries. The OFII also monitors, as far as possible, the return to country of origin of seasonal employees. These agreements do not provide specific lists or identification mechanisms for occupations. The recruitment procedure in these countries results from agreements between employers' federations, the Moroccan National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (*Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences* – ANAPEC), and the Tunisian National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (*Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant* – ANETI).

The French National Federation of Agricultural Holders' Unions (*Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles* – FNSA) has also signed three partnership agreements, including one with Tunisia's ANETI. Since February 2024, it has also implemented the My Agricultural Seasonal Workers (*Mes Saisonniers Agricoles*) initiative, which centralises and organises the recruitment of seasonal workers from outside the EU, ensuring their placement with agricultural employers.

In **Germany, agreements with third countries also play a role**, particularly in recruiting nursing professionals and, to a lesser extent, seasonal agricultural workers. For seasonal agricultural workers, agreements with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova allow companies to request either anonymous placements or specific workers by name, up to eight weeks before employment begins. Building on the agreements on the recruitment of skilled workers, the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* – BA) and International and Specialised Services (*Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung* – ZAV) also carry out programmes and projects for selected occupational groups, often in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation (*Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* – GIZ). Projects include pilot projects focused on testing processes for the recruitment of third-country nationals. The “Triple Win” programme is an example of a recruitment initiative that has been permanently established. Under the programme, partner administrations in countries of origin organise application

procedures locally, supported by GIZ, while ZAV evaluates candidates' qualifications through interviews and proposes suitable applicants to German employers for final selection.²⁸⁵

Seven EMN Member Countries reported measures in place²⁸⁶ **to ensure the quality of recruitment of third-country nationals by private actors**, and Austria is planning to introduce measures, too. These checks typically focus on ensuring that employers and private recruitment agencies adhere to national employment laws governing the hiring of third-country nationals. For example, **Germany** and **Latvia** require that communication during the recruitment process, and the employment contract itself, are in a language the third-country national understands. **Bulgaria** and **Poland** conduct regular inspections of recruitment agencies and employers' recruitment processes to ensure that they comply with legal requirements for employing third-country nationals. In **Austria** stakeholders are currently considering introducing the IOM's International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) certification mechanism (see Box 7).

Box 7. The IOM's IRIS ethical recruitment certification

The IOM's IRIS initiative promotes ethical recruitment in cross-border labour migration to create a fair process for migrant workers, employers, recruitment agencies, and countries of origin and destination.²⁸⁷ This voluntary certification process evaluates recruitment agencies' compliance with the IRIS Standard, and international human rights and employment laws. To become certified, agencies must demonstrate that their management systems align with the IRIS Standard, which includes five key elements: policies and procedures; communication; skills and training; monitoring; and governance, along with continuous improvement. Toolkits on how to implement the IRIS Standard in practice are available to stakeholders, to complement the certification.

Of the twelve EMN Member Countries that complement recruitment efforts, all 12 use **websites**²⁸⁸ **and five utilise events**²⁸⁹ **to advertise vacancies and/or provide relevant information**. The EMN inform on New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talent in the EU demonstrated that websites for prospective job applicants from third countries, and employers seeking foreign talent, are commonly used to advertise vacancies and offer practical guidance on settling in the respective EMN Member Country.²⁹⁰ **Finland, Germany and Luxembourg** reported sharing information on job vacancies and workers' rights through organising job fairs and recruitment days either in their countries (Luxembourg) or in the third country (Finland, Germany). **Estonia** and **Latvia** have been or are working towards a one-stop shops through which public authorities working in migration will

285 GIZ, 'Sustainable Recruitment of Nurses (Triple Win)', <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/41533.html>, last accessed 6 December 2024.

286 BG, DE, HR, IE, NL, PL, SE.

287 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'About IRIS', <https://iris.iom.int/about-us>, last accessed 13 May 2025.

288 EMN Member Countries reported this in the EMN inform on new and innovative ways to attract foreign talent: AT, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, SI. Additional EMN Member Countries that reported this approach for this study: SE.

289 AT, DE, EE, FI, LU.

290 EMN Member Countries reported this in the EMN inform on new and innovative ways to attract foreign talent: AT, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, LT, LV, NL, SI. Additional EMN Member Countries that reported this approach for this study: SE. European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU - EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.

provide comprehensive support in a single location (such as residence permit processing, tax and labour law advice, job search support and employment guidance).

Different strategies are applied to **distribute the costs of recruitment**,²⁹¹ including the following.

- **Limitations on recruitment agency fees:** In **Finland**, recruitment and employment agency fees are illegal, ensuring there is no burden on workers. In **Germany**, regulations cap jobseeker placement costs at €2 000 and ensure that they are paid only after an employment contract is concluded.
- **Costs shared between employer and third-country national:** **France** and **Latvia** run a shared-cost model, splitting the costs of recruitment between the employer and the third-country national. In **Germany**, participants in state placement projects generally do not have to pay placement fees. However, exceptions include the Triple Win project,²⁹² which requires Vietnamese workers to make a minimal contribution to cover language course fees, while employers cover the remaining costs.
- **Costs shared between employer and state:** In **Germany**, cost sharing is organised differently in state placement projects. In some cases, employers bear (a proportion of) the costs, while some projects are subsidised by the state. The Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) provides free information, counselling and placement services, including applicant recruitment and pre-selection abroad, to both applicants and employers. However, in the Triple Win nurse recruitment programme, employers cover all costs, including translation, interpretation, travel and qualification recognition.

Strategies to ensure that **recruitment from abroad complements, rather than replaces, other essential measures to address labour shortages** were reported by six EMN Member Countries.²⁹³ In **Finland**, **Germany** and **Latvia**, the employment and retention of local staff is a priority in strategic documents, with hiring third-country nationals a secondary consideration. In Germany, efforts are supported by initiatives such as: domestic training and study programmes in sectors facing skill shortages; and collaboration with social partners to create more future-proof, inclusive and healthier workplaces. A range of measures in the German care sector aim to attract new carers, retain them, and bring former carers back to the profession by improving working conditions.

The **main national stakeholders** cooperating with employers and private recruitment agencies to promote recruitment of third-country nationals are:

- National agencies²⁹⁴ (e.g. Austrian Business Agency, CzechInvest, Work in Estonia, Business Finland);
- National employment authorities;²⁹⁵
- Competent migration authorities;²⁹⁶
- Ministries relevant to the recruiting sector (e.g. national health authorities);²⁹⁷
- Consular authorities/embassies (of third countries involved in bilateral agreements);²⁹⁸
- The Ministry of Finance (due to governance of the relevant tax regime);²⁹⁹
- Dedicated bodies at national authorities (e.g. the Luxembourg High Committee for the Attraction, Retention and Development of Talent).³⁰⁰

Box 8. Dedicated national actors in Germany with key responsibilities for recruiting third-country nationals

Germany has dedicated national actors with specific responsibilities for recruiting third-country nationals. The International and Specialised Services (*Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung* – ZAV) are responsible for advising international applicants on living and working in Germany, recording profiles of qualified candidates, recruiting skilled workers from specific third countries under placement agreements, and facilitating recruitment events, while supporting employers in the selection process. The German Agency for Health and Care Professionals (*Deutsche Fachkräfteagentur für Gesundheits- und Pflegeberufe* – DeFa), established in 2019 and financed by the Federal Ministry of Health (*Bundesministerium für Gesundheit* – BMG), supports hospitals, care facilities and placement agencies in recruiting foreign nursing staff by facilitating and expediting application procedures.

Other national practices and initiatives to attract workers from third countries

Seven EMN Member Countries reported **other initiatives to attract medium- and low-skilled workers from third countries**.³⁰¹ These efforts, which complement the innovative approaches to attracting foreign talent outlined in the dedicated EMN inform,³⁰² include the following:

- **Sector-specific projects** to fill labour shortages.³⁰³ For example, in **Finland**, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (*Työterveyslaitos*) runs a project

291 FI, FR, DE, LV.

292 GIZ, 'Triple Win Programme: Vietnamese Nursing Professionals', <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/80962.html>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

293 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, LV.

294 AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR.

295 DE, LU, LV.

296 FR, LV.

297 DE.

298 FR.

299 LU.

300 LU.

301 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU.

302 European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU - EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.

303 BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU.

called Recruiting from Abroad and Employee Retention in the Healthcare and Social Services Sector,³⁰⁴ which promotes the capability of the healthcare and social services sector to support the inclusion and integration of employees recruited from abroad into the work community. In **Luxembourg**, the Viticulture Table (*Wäibaudesch*) project was introduced as part of the government's commitment to simplify administrative procedures for hiring seasonal and casual workers – primarily in speciality crops and viticulture – to help mitigate the persisting labour shortages. The project aims to optimise the connection between job candidates and agricultural, wine, and horticultural businesses. For example, it shall be possible to hire applicants for international protection without a prior labour market test.³⁰⁵

■ **Comprehensive high-level strategies** that provide a framework for multiple approaches for multiple or targeted sectors.³⁰⁶ In **Austria** (the International Skilled Workers Initiative) and **Finland** (Discover Finland), high-level strategies frame and shape initiatives that facilitate employment in multiple sectors, particularly those that are prioritised or have high demand. In **Luxembourg**, the National Health Plan³⁰⁷ addresses, among other things, the issue of labour shortages in the healthcare sector. It proposes the external recruitment of talent and professionals while mobilising internal potential, making professions more attractive, and adapting training, working conditions and valorisation.³⁰⁸



4.2. REGIONAL PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES

This section explores regional disparities that EMN Member and Observer Countries face in attracting foreign talent and highlights the measures in place to mitigate imbalances.

Regional disparities in attracting foreign talent

Fourteen EMN Member Countries reported challenges with **regional disparities within their own countries in attracting foreign talent**.³⁰⁹ However, six EMN Member Countries³¹⁰ indicated that this was not a concern due to their small size, while Bulgaria and Serbia³¹¹ reported that they did not collect information on this.

The EMN Member Countries that identified regional disparities in attracting foreign talent viewed these as being primarily influenced by differences in economic development and wage levels; the geographic concentration of certain sectors; the availability and cost of essential services; and different policy approaches.

One of the main reasons for regional imbalances in attracting labour migrants is **uneven economic development** across regions.³¹² Most third-country nationals gravitate toward the capitals and surrounding areas of EMN Member Countries, which are typically more economically developed and/or provide diasporic networks.³¹³ In **Ireland**, larger cities – primarily Dublin, which accounts for 50% of all permits – attract more labour migrants due to their employment opportunities and the improved availability of services such as healthcare, education and transport. Conversely, some rural areas tend to receive fewer applications for permits, largely due to lower levels

of investment, fewer services, a weaker industrial presence and slower economic development.

Wage disparities are also cited as contributing to regional differences in attracting third-country nationals in Germany and Estonia. This issue is particularly evident in **Germany**, where foreign talent is needed in the eastern federal states. However, most third-country nationals gravitate toward the western federal states due to a variety of intersecting factors, such as wage disparity as well as overall unemployment rates. In **Estonia**, employers have highlighted this challenge and proposed a regional wage requirement to address the imbalance.

Regional disparities in labour migration can also stem from the **specific industries that attract foreign talent and the geographical concentration of these sectors in certain areas**, as reported by six EMN Member Countries.³¹⁴ In **France**, while certain sectors face labour shortages nationwide, some region-specific industries, such as gardening and viticulture, experience acute challenges in agricultural regions such as Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Brittany. This contrasts with regions such as Île-de-France (Paris), which is home to a diverse mix of numerous economic sectors. It accounts for 22% of the employment of third-country nationals' country-wide but typically faces fewer labour shortages. In comparison, the share of immigrants employed in France is significantly lower in Nouvelle-Aquitaine (6%) and Brittany (4%).

In **Ireland** and **Croatia**, the **availability and affordability of services and infrastructure**, such as housing and childcare, are also cited as factors which contribute to regional imbalances.

304 Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (TTL), 'Recruiting from Abroad and Employee Retention in the Healthcare and Social Services Sector', <https://www.ttl.fi/en/research/projects/recruiting-from-abroad-and-employee-retention-in-the-healthcare-and-social-services-sector>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

305 Luxembourg government, 'Simplification des procédures administratives pour l'embauche de travailleurs saisonniers: les conclusions du «Wäibaudesch»', 11 July 2024, https://gouvernement.lu/fr/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2024/07-juillet/11-hansen-mischo-waibaudesch.html, last accessed on 12 February 2025.

306 AT, FI, LU.

307 Luxembourg Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Security, 'Plan National Santé', 30 June 2023, <https://sante.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/p/plan-national-sante-2023/minsante-rapport-plan-national-sante.pdf>, last accessed 12 February 2025.

308 Luxembourg Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Security, 'Plan National Santé', 30 June 2023, pp. 5, 35, 40, <https://sante.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/p/plan-national-sante-2023/minsante-rapport-plan-national-sante.pdf>, last accessed 12 February 2025.

309 AT, BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, SE.

310 CY, CZ, LU, MT, NL, SK.

311 BG and RS.

312 BE, BG (although BG could not confirm the existence of regional disparities, it acknowledged that this factor could contribute to them), DE, ES, HR, IE, LT, LV, PL.

313 AT, BE, BG (although BG could not confirm the existence of regional disparities, it acknowledged that this factor could contribute to them), DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, LT, LV, PL.

314 AT, BE, BG (although BG could not confirm the existence of regional disparities, it acknowledged that this factor could contribute to them), FR, HR, IE.

In **Belgium**, different policy approaches taken by regions can influence regional disparities. Policies in the Brussels-capital region, Wallonia and the German-speaking Community focus on improving employability, retraining workers and reintegrating the long-term unemployed. All regions apply a ‘concentric model’ for labour migration, prioritising recruitment from local, national, and EEA labour markets before turning to third-country nationals. However, higher rates of labour shortages and lower unemployment rates lead Flanders to prioritise the attraction of foreign workers. Flanders issues the highest number of initial work permits across the regions and, in May 2024, introduced additional admissibility conditions to reinforce the concentric model—placing greater emphasis on employers’ efforts to recruit within the Belgian and EEA labour market before hiring from outside.³¹⁵

Initiatives to mitigate regional disparities in labour migration to address labour shortages

Nine of the EMN Member Countries that reported regional imbalances in the attraction of third-country nationals also reported employing measures to mitigate this challenge.³¹⁶ **Hungary, Latvia and Poland** report that, despite challenges in achieving regionally balanced labour migration, no specifically targeted measures are in place to address the issue. **Hungary and Latvia** address these issues through broader initiatives against regional inequality, which, while not specifically focused on labour migration, may still have an impact on it.

Six EMN Member Countries **make use of regional projects** – structured efforts that are either fully or partially funded at regional level to achieve specific outcomes.³¹⁷ **Ireland** is part of the Regional Innovation Valleys initiative under the European Commission’s New European Innovation Agenda and has had several regions designated as Regional Innovation Valleys. Through this project, regions can leverage investment and opportunities for collaboration with other European regions to drive economic growth and foster innovation. In **Sweden**, regions are very active in initiating projects to mitigate labour shortages at regional level. For example, ‘Switch to Sweden’ is an initiative by the Linköping Science Park that connects international academics with Swedish tech companies, through innovative matchmaking tools and support services.³¹⁸ Another example is the North Sweden Green Deal that promotes sustainable development in Northern

Sweden by supporting innovative projects to create further opportunities in the region.³¹⁹

Five EMN Member Countries provide **regional support and advisory services** to reduce disparities in labour migration flows.³²⁰ These usually are either regionally run ‘welcome centres’³²¹ or online resources.³²² In **Austria**, several provinces set up their own centres to provide consultations and support services, such as the Carinthian International Centre,³²³ Expat Service Vorarlberg,³²⁴ and Club International (CINT) in Graz.³²⁵ Similarly, in **Finland**, regional Talent Hubs such as the Talent Coastline³²⁶ in Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia, provide tailored, customer-focused services to connect businesses with international talent. In **Sweden**, the Move to Gothenburg³²⁷ and International Citizen Lund³²⁸ websites are examples of how online resources provide support and advice on how to move to the region (e.g. how to set up a business, lists of vacancies), and how to settle there (e.g. advisory services).

In **Ireland** government subsidies help regional and federal authorities attract more labour migrants and address workforce shortages. Project Ireland 2040 outlines strategic investments aimed at achieving balanced regional development across social, economic and cultural sectors. In **Germany**, some federal states offer financial subsidies to companies to support recruitment efforts in regions with lower levels of labour migration and greater labour shortages. In **Croatia**, government authorities and employers’ associations advocate for comparable investments to attract foreign workers to less-developed areas by improving housing and local infrastructure. This strategy is supported by self-employment initiatives such as the ‘I Choose Croatia’ campaign. The campaign, which is subsidised by the Croatian Employment Service, aims to revitalise underdeveloped areas by attracting Croatian diaspora members from countries such as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. It promotes new businesses, channelling additional income to local governments for infrastructure development, and addressing regional imbalances.³²⁹

Belgium, Croatia and Sweden, implemented policy changes to tackle regional disparities in labour migration. In Croatia, policy changes were implemented to streamline regional administrative and bureaucratic processes, ensuring the timely issuance of work permits for third-country nationals to address acute labour shortages. In Sweden, the government published the Strategy for Northern

315 Flanders issues the highest number of initial work permits across the regions and, in May 2024, introduced additional admissibility conditions to reinforce the concentric model—placing greater emphasis on employers’ efforts to recruit within the Belgian and EEA labour market before hiring from outside.

316 AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, SE.

317 BE, DE, FR, HR, IE, SE.

318 Linköping Science Park, ‘Switch to Sweden’, <https://linkopingsciencepark.se/switch-to-sweden/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

319 Utveckla Norrbotten, ‘North Sweden Green Deal’, <https://utvecklanorrbotten.se/projektstod/north-sweden-green-deal-projektbeskrivning/north-sweden-green-deal/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

320 AT, FI, DE, LT, SE.

321 AT, FI, DE, LT, SE.

322 AT, DE, SE.

323 CIC Network, ‘Home Page’, <https://www.cic-network.at/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

324 Expat Centre Vienna, ‘Home Page’, <https://www.expats.at/de/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

325 CINT (Carinthian International Centre), ‘Home Page’, <https://www.cint.at/en/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

326 Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, ‘Talent Coastline’, <https://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/talent-coastline/talent-coastline-etusivu>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

327 Move to Gothenburg, ‘Home Page’, <https://www.movetogothenburg.com/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

328 International Citizen Hub, ‘Home Page’, <https://internationalcitizenhub.com/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

329 Government of the Republic of Croatia – Central State Office for Croats Abroad, ‘The Scheme “I Choose Croatia – Return to the Republic of Croatia” Has Been Extended for the Users from Seven Overseas Countries with Croatian Diaspora: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Canada, New Zealand and the USA’, <https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/the-scheme-i-choose-croatia-return-to-the-republic-of-croatia-has-been-extended-for-the-users-from-7-seven-overseas-countries-with-croatian-diaspora-argentina-australia-brazil-chile-canada-new-zealand/6241>, last accessed 26 March 2025.

Sweden³³⁰ in 2024, outlining plans to strengthen regional competitiveness, attract talent and develop key sectors.

In **Austria** and **France**, regional authorities have established agreements with third countries to promote migration to specific regions. In Austria, Burgenland and Upper Austria have recruitment agreements with the Philippines and India, while Tyrol, Carinthia and Salzburg have similar agreements specifically for recruiting care workers from Columbia. In France, a protocol was signed in 2020 between the Prefecture of Haute-Corse, the French national migration authorities, and the Moroccan authorities, enabling 902 Moroccan seasonal workers to

help clementine growers save their harvest during labour shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four EMN Member Countries³³¹ also reported regional shortage occupation lists to address imbalances and identify priority sectors for intervention. For example, in Austria these lists have been in place since 2019, whilst French regions have drafted their own shortage occupation lists since 2008, for which the labour market test does not apply. Furthermore, in the French Normandy region, a tool called *Métiers en tension* was developed by local and national authorities to assess and report on recruitment challenges in the local labour market, although it does not specifically target foreign talent.³³²



4.3. USE OF EU LABOUR MIGRATION INSTRUMENTS TO ATTRACT FOREIGN TALENT

This section examines the extent to which EMN Member Countries rely on EU initiatives instruments on labour migration developed since 2021 – such as Talent Partnerships, the Migration Partnership Facility (see section 1.2) – to advance their initiatives. It builds on the [dedicated EMN inform](#), which highlights initiatives reported to be innovative that are supported by these and other EU funding sources.³³³

Twelve EMN Member Countries reported having participated in EU instruments on labour mobility.³³⁴ Between January 2021 and December 2023, 10 EMN Member Countries³³⁵ reported engaging to varying degrees with the **EU Talent Partnerships**, with Ireland in discussions to participate. Seven³³⁶ of these reported being participating countries in the scheme (sometimes only for a limited number of countries, such as France with Morocco and Tunisia), whilst five³³⁷ others were taking part as observers for all or some partner countries. For example, **France** has a project with Tunisia focused on technical job training and labour mobility in the plastics industry, called ProMob PlastSkills (Professional Mobility in the Plastics Industry by Reskilling and Upskilling Trainings for Tunisian Talents).³³⁸ This project, involving Polyvia Formation, the Tunisian Plastics Manufacturers Association and Tunisian public education bodies, aims to train 800 individuals, 40%–60% of whom are expected to work in France.³³⁹ **France** has developed a policy aimed at contributing to France's economic attractiveness by facilitating the issuance of 'talent' permits to qualified or renowned foreign nationals, as well as to their spouses and children. In 2024, France issued 57 950 'talent' permits for economic reasons, including 19,330 first permits. By way of comparison, 42,550 permits (including 12,308 first permits)

were issued in 2021, an increase of 36% in the number of permits issued between 2021 and 2024. As part of EU Talent Partnerships, four EMN Member Countries also participate in the multinational EU –funded THAMM and THAMM Plus programmes, which aim to facilitate safe, orderly and regular labour migration between North Africa and Europe (see Box 9 below).³⁴⁰

Box 9. THAMM and THAMM Plus: Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa

THAMM Plus is a multinational/regional programme operating under the EU Talent Partnership initiative, funded by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation – Global Europe, with additional funding partners depending on the country of implementation, including support from the IOM and ILO.

In **Belgium**, the THAMM project (2020–2024) aimed to contribute to improving the governance of labour migration and the protection of migrant workers from Morocco and Tunisia. It was implemented by the Belgian development agency (*Enabel*). The project introduced an innovative mobility scheme based on partnership, skills development and employment opportunities in both origin and host countries. It focused on knowledge transfer, with pilot initiatives that included training 300 young people in Morocco and Tunisia – 30 of whom went on to work in Belgium and around 120 found placements in their country of origin.

330 Government Offices of Sweden, 'Strategi för nyindustrialiseringen och samhällsomvandlingen i Norrbottens och Västerbottens län', June 2024, <https://www.regeringen.se/information/material/2024/06/strategi-for-nyindustrialiseringen-och-samhällsomvandlingen-i-norrbottens-och-vaesterbottens-lan/>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

331 AT, ES, FI, FR.

332 Nouvelle Vie Professionnelle, 'Liste des métiers en tension', <https://www.nouvelleviepro.fr/liste-metiers-en-tension>, last accessed 28 November 2024.

333 European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU – EMN inform', February 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3815a1dd-02e9-43ef-932e-f461eb7bc8e4_en?filename=2025_EMN-OECD_inform_attracting_foreign_talent.pdf, last accessed 8 April 2025.

334 BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, NL, SK.

335 BE, DE, EL, ES, FI, IT, LU, MT, NL, SE.

336 BE, DE, EL, ES, FR (for Morocco and Tunisia), IT, SE.

337 FI, FR (Egypt), LU (only for Tunisia), MT, NL (Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia).

338 Migration Partnership Facility, 'ProMob PlastSkills – Professional Mobility in the Plastics Industry by Reskilling and Upskilling Trainings for Tunisian Talents', April 2024, <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/59-promob-plastskills---professional-mobility-in-the-plastics-industry-by-reskilling-and-upskilling-trainings-for-tunisian-talents/preview>, last accessed on 8 April 2025.

339 Migration Partnership Facility, 'PROMOB-PLASTSKILLS – Professional Mobility in the Plastics Industry by Reskilling and Upskilling Trainings for Tunisian Talents', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/59-promob-plastskills---professional-mobility-in-the-plastics-industry-by-reskilling-and-upskilling-trainings-for-tunisian-talents/preview>, last accessed on 5 February 2025.

340 BE, DE, FR, IT.

In **Germany**, the THAMM project received co-funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung* – BMZ), and implementation support from the German Agency for International Cooperation (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* – GIZ). Through THAMM, over 450 migrants from North Africa were placed in Germany for vocational training or employment, after undergoing intensive pre-departure preparation.

In **France**, the THAMM project, launched in 2021, focused on facilitating legal labour migration pathways with Tunisia. The project is developed and implemented by the French Office for Immigration and Integration (*Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration* – OFII); it included seasonal and 'young professional' contracts requiring migrants to return to Tunisia at the end of their contract. The project also enhanced employability, provided migration-related information, and established secure mobility schemes that benefited both migrants and all stakeholders involved.

In **Italy**, the THAMM Plus programme was launched in January 2024 with the support of the Ministry of Interior and will run until December 2026. Implemented by the IOM, it aims to address labour market shortages in Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna through mobility schemes involving 500 workers from Morocco's mechatronics sector, as well as 2 000 workers from Tunisia's construction sector to be employed nationwide in Italy.

Five EMN Member Countries reported using the EU-funded **Migration Partnership Facility**, an initiative closely aligned with the objectives of the Talent Partnerships.³⁴¹

- **Three EMN Member Countries**³⁴² participated in the Skilled Driver Mobility for Europe (**SDM4EU**) project between June and April 2025. This project sought to address the acute shortage of professional drivers in the EU by facilitating the mobility of skilled drivers from Egypt, Bangladesh, Morocco, Pakistan and Tunisia.³⁴³
- **Ireland and Luxembourg** participated in the Enabling European Private Sector-Driven Labour Mobility Schemes for Nigerian Technical Professionals (**Nigerian TechPro4Europe**) project between April

2023 and December 2024. The project addressed recruitment challenges for international talent from Nigeria through networking, a mentorship programme and knowledge-sharing to benefit European and Nigerian private sectors, policymakers and educational institutions.³⁴⁴

- A four-year project (**MOBILISE**, 2023-2027) was launched by the Maastricht School of Management. This project developed a **circular talent -development programme between the Netherlands, Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia. The aim is to strengthen climate-smart agriculture** through a multi-stakeholder approach in the horticulture sector.³⁴⁵
- **Belgium** launched a 30 -months (October 2021 – September 2024) circular mobility scheme with Senegal (**PEM-WECCO**). The scheme supported knowledge exchange, provided short-term migration opportunities for business purposes, supported the capacity-building of Senegalese entrepreneurs, and promoted sustainable economic partnerships, while it strengthened trust between public and private actors.³⁴⁶
- **Spain** developed two circular mobility scheme projects with Morocco. **MOVE_GREEN**³⁴⁷ (2021-2024) supported networking opportunities and professional qualifications for young Moroccan talent seeking to work in the renewable energy and green economy sector. **WAFIRA**³⁴⁸ (2021-2025) promoted the socioeconomic reintegration of female Moroccan seasonal workers, by providing them with the necessary skills and financial means to launch their own income generating activities (IGAs) upon return to their rural communities of origin.

Five EMN Member Countries highlighted **other projects supported by EU and international funding** that have contributed, or are contributing, to addressing labour shortages by enhancing labour migration efforts.³⁴⁹ Between January 2020 and April 2023, three EMN Member Countries participated in the AMIF-funded project Migration of African Talents through Capacity Building and Hiring (**MATCH**), implemented by the IOM.³⁵⁰ The project aimed to connect skilled professionals from Nigeria and Senegal with European companies struggling to fill positions due to labour market shortages. MATCH facilitated the collection of 657 CVs, pre-selecting 378 candidates for 118 vacancies across 29 companies.

341 BE, ES, IE, LU, NL.

342 ES, IE, LU.

343 Migration Partnership Facility, 'Skilled Driver Mobility for Europe (SDM4EU)', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/64-skilled-driver-mobility-for-europe-sdm4eu/preview>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

344 Migration Partnership Facility, 'Enabling European Private Sector-Driven Labour Mobility Schemes for Nigerian Technical Professionals (Nigerian TechPro4Europe)', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/58-enabling-european-private-sector-driven-labour-mobility-schemes-for-nigerian-technical-professionals-nigerian-tech-pro4europe/preview>, last accessed 5 February 2025.

345 MOBILISE Project, 'Home Page', <https://mobilise-project.mailchimpsites.com/>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

346 Migration Partnership Facility, 'Pilot Project for Business Mobility Between Belgium and Senegal (PEM)', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/27-pilot-project-for-business-mobility-between-belgium-and-senegal-pem>, last accessed 29 November 2024.

347 Migration Partnership Facility, '(E)Co-development for innovation and employment in green and circular economy between Andalusia and Morocco (move-green)', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/26-e-co-development-for-innovation-and-employment-in-green-and-circular-economy-between-andalusia-and-morocco-move-green/preview>, last accessed 4 March 2025.

348 Migration Partnership Facility, 'Women As Financially Independent Rural Actors', <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/34-wafira-women-as-financially-independent-rural-actors/preview>, last accessed 4 March 2025.

349 AT, BE, IT, LU, NL.

350 BE, IT, LU.

Box 10. Skills Mobility Partnerships

The IOM's Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) consist of bilateral and multilateral agreements that promote skills development and skills-based mobility for the benefit of all stakeholders. SMPs act as platforms for cooperation, enabling countries of origin and destination to invest in employee training for both labour markets in the spirit of partnership.

In **Austria**, following research on the feasibility of SMPs,³⁵¹ the IOM plans to launch the EU-funded EAGLE SMP project in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Chancellery as the Migration Partnership Facility project under a wider Talent Partnership umbrella. The project aims to foster economic cooperation and strengthen regular migration pathways between Egypt and Austria by mobilising Egypt's labour potential through targeted skills development. Its focus is on technical training in metal technology, modern welding for the transport sector, and language courses. A total of 125 individuals are to be trained, with 100 expected to work in Austria. Graduates and companies will receive extensive pre- and post-migration support, including integration and onboarding strategies, intercultural training and resources to ease adaptation to the new workplace and society.

In **Belgium**, several SMPs are being implemented by the Belgian development agency (*Enabel*) and the IOM. The Belgian Federation of Care Organisations (*Zorgnet*), the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding* – VDAB), and Chinta (a non-profit organisation focused on ethical recruitment in the healthcare sector with Suriname) are working together to establish an SMP with Suriname, focused on the healthcare sector. This SMP aims to build a reliable pool of Dutch-speaking healthcare workers for temporary or permanent roles in Belgian hospitals and homes for the elderly. In exchange, Belgian healthcare employers will provide financial and technical support, including capacity building in Suriname and training in Belgium.

Seven EMN Member Countries reported not using EU labour migration instruments developed since 2021 to advance national labour migration initiatives.³⁵²

351 Ebner, P., M. Moorthy Kloss, and A. Spiegelheld, 'Skills-Mobilitätspartnerschaften in Österreich' (2023), Internationale Organisation für Migration (IOM), https://austria.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11281/files/RML/skills_mobilitaetspartnerschaften_iom_at.pdf, last accessed 29 November 2024.

352 BG, CY, FI, LT, MT, PL, SE.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides an overview of labour migration laws and policies, as well as initiatives and practices implemented by EMN Member and Observer Countries targeting third-country nationals between January 2021 and June 2024. It explores legislative and policy developments, identifies main countries of origin of labour migrants to EMN Member and Observer countries and sectors most affected by labour shortages, highlights best practices, lessons learned, and ongoing challenges in the field of labour migration. Covering all skill levels, the study includes third-country nationals migrating to EMN Member or Observer Countries for employment purposes and provides insights from non-EU OECD Countries for a comparative perspective. It complements the 2024 EMN inform on 'New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talent into the EU' and examines how labour migration is being used to address current labour shortages and prevent future ones.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the study.

- **Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition, labour shortages continue to be a persistent and complex challenge.**

While the terminology used to describe labour shortages varies across EMN Member and Observer Countries, the EU labour market continued to experience significant tightness across the study period. Most EMN Member Countries have reported that vacancy rates have remained consistently higher than pre-COVID-19 levels, exacerbated by the economic recovery from the pandemic and specific demands within certain sectors.

- **EMN Member and Observer Countries increasingly acknowledge labour migration as an important strategy for addressing persistent labour shortages, which have been intensified by demographic aging and the specific demands of various sectors.**

Between 2021 and 2023, EMN Member Countries issued an increasing number of residence permits for employment purposes. This rise reflects a growing recognition of the need for foreign workers to fill critical sector gaps, which is also echoed in national public debates on the evolving and differing perspectives on the role of labour migration in addressing labour market shortages across most EMN Member Countries. Stakeholder groups vary in their views on labour migration management, with for instance discussions in some countries emphasising upskilling, reskilling, improving skills matching, and reactivating the local workforce as important strategies to mitigate these shortages.

- **Labour migration policies are developed with a variety of stakeholders, with employers often taking a leading role in recruitment.**

Labour migration initiatives and policymaking involve a variety of public and private stakeholders. These include ministries responsible for economic, social, labour and migration issues, as well as local and regional authorities and social partners. Private sector stakeholders – which often take a leading role, especially in recruitment efforts – include employers and employer federations.

- **Labour migration legal and policy frameworks and practical initiatives have undergone significant evolution, incorporating demand-driven, multi-tiered approaches at regional, national and EU levels to address labour shortages.**

Most EMN Member Countries have reported significant changes to their legal frameworks in the field of labour migration, and have adopted evolving, demand-driven policy approaches and practical changes (such as digitalisation and fast-track procedures). Many EMN Member Countries are planning revisions of these frameworks.

- **Evolving policy and legal frameworks address sector-specific needs amidst high vacancy rates.**

While the sectors with the highest vacancy rates vary, they predominantly include administrative and support services, accommodation and food services, professional and technical activities, construction, and wholesale and retail trade. These frequently align with the sectors most targeted by evolving policy and legal initiatives introduced by EMN Member Countries: agriculture/seasonal work, healthcare, construction, transport and tourism, with an emerging trend observed in the development of specialised procedures for healthcare workers.

- **In most EMN Member and Observer Countries, labour migration recruitment is predominantly led by employers and private recruitment agencies, although some national authorities influence these efforts through regulatory and supportive measures.**

In most EMN Member and Observer Countries, private entities primarily lead recruitment efforts, with only France, Germany, and Luxembourg reporting initiatives driven by national authorities. However, EMN Member and Observer Countries implement a variety of other measures at national level to influence the recruitment

of third-country nationals to address labour shortages. These measures include negotiating targeted agreements with third countries, implementing quality-assurance measures, advertising positions and providing practical guidelines.

■ **Challenges such as complex governance structures, lengthy legal processes and integration barriers remain.**

Challenges limiting the effectiveness of labour migration initiatives, include governance and coordination issues, particularly where federal structures and diverse stakeholders are involved in both practical implementation and the development of policy and legal

frameworks. Further barriers arise from the design of legal migration pathways, which are often complex and lengthy, as well as challenges in integration and administration, such as language barriers, housing shortages, and negative public attitudes. Labour market conditions, exploitation risks, and difficulties in recognising foreign qualifications also affect the recruitment, retention, and fair treatment of migrant workers.

ANNEX: STATISTICAL DATA ON LABOUR MIGRATION

Table A1.1. First employment residence permits flows in EMN Countries 2021 to 2023, including residence permits issued for employment reasons

| Country | Total 2021 | | | Issued for employment reasons 2021 | | | Total 2022 | | | Issued for employment reasons 2022 | | | Total 2023 | | | Issues for employment reasons 2023 | | |
|---------------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------|----------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------|----------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total |
| Austria | 26 857 | 21 035 | 47 892 | 2 414 | 1 521 | 3 935 | 31 290 | 23 968 | 55 258 | 3 370 | 2 067 | 5 437 | 35 461 | 27 429 | 62 890 | 4 776 | 2 390 | 7 166 |
| Belgium | 31 064 | 32 440 | 63 504 | 4 087 | 2 160 | 6 247 | 33 987 | 34 535 | 68 522 | 5 491 | 2 653 | 8 144 | 37 809 | 36 557 | 74 366 | 5 960 | 2 671 | 8 631 |
| Bulgaria | 6 847 | 4 937 | 11 784 | 2 042 | 473 | 2 515 | 9 260 | 6 579 | 15 839 | 3 642 | 979 | 4 621 | 11 707 | 7 668 | 19 375 | 5 284 | 1 182 | 6 466 |
| Croatia | 29 307 | 4 273 | 33 580 | 27 895 | 2 161 | 30 056 | 47 690 | 9 640 | 57 330 | 46 124 | 7 347 | 53 471 | 68 128 | 13 218 | 81 347 | 66 466 | 11 074 | 77 541 |
| Cyprus | 10 251 | 11 939 | 22 190 | 3 524 | 6 276 | 9 800 | 19 570 | 19 346 | 38 917 | 10 455 | 8 766 | 19 221 | 16 701 | 17 993 | 34 694 | 8 418 | 8 456 | 16 874 |
| Czech Republic | 44 781 | 29 613 | 74 395 | 29 860 | 11 732 | 41 592 | 30 753 | 23 056 | 53 809 | 17 400 | 7 192 | 24 592 | 25 001 | 18 791 | 43 792 | 9 894 | 3 794 | 13 688 |
| Estonia | 3 734 | 2 815 | 6 549 | 1 942 | 348 | 2 290 | 4 846 | 3 579 | 8 425 | 2 008 | 333 | 2 341 | 5 820 | 2 639 | 8 459 | 1 771 | 294 | 2 065 |
| Finland | 19 297 | 15 024 | 34 327 | 8 835 | 3 448 | 12 286 | 27 849 | 21 923 | 49 774 | 12 700 | 4 915 | 17 616 | 29 312 | 24 865 | 54 178 | 10 548 | 4 862 | 15 410 |
| France | 148 963 | 138 216 | 287 179 | 29 495 | 8 565 | 38 060 | 166 168 | 160 780 | 326 948 | 41 774 | 13 473 | 55 247 | 170 876 | 164 198 | 335 074 | 43 294 | 14 927 | 58 221 |
| Germany | 267 109 | 243 552 | 511 147 | 37 413 | 22 896 | 60 365 | 334 916 | 296 637 | 632 187 | 65 460 | 31 421 | 96 974 | 322 471 | 263 079 | 586 144 | 61 296 | 29 670 | 91 095 |
| Greece | 26 029 | 21 560 | 47 589 | 1 457 | 736 | 2 193 | 33 868 | 25 021 | 58 889 | 4 057 | 1 592 | 5 649 | 45 807 | 25 114 | 70 921 | 10 346 | 1 492 | 11 838 |
| Hungary | 35 868 | 22 247 | 58 115 | 26 616 | 12 344 | 38 960 | 40 036 | 28 636 | 68 672 | 29 655 | 17 717 | 47 372 | 48 702 | 28 777 | 77 479 | 37 179 | 16 363 | 53 542 |
| Ireland | 17 190 | 17 745 | 34 935 | 4 082 | 3 927 | 8 009 | 43 290 | 42 489 | 85 793 | 10 855 | 8 646 | 19 502 | 44 215 | 44 362 | 88 595 | 12 724 | 11 192 | 23 918 |
| Italy | 125 369 | 115 054 | 274 095 | 27 024 | 23 573 | 50 597 | 165 326 | 133 538 | 337 788 | 41 013 | 25 778 | 66 791 | 251 513 | 138 029 | 389 542 | 27 531 | 10 572 | 38 103 |
| Latvia | 5 755 | 2 383 | 8 138 | 3 335 | 350 | 3 685 | 6 169 | 2 621 | 8 790 | 3 163 | 386 | 3 549 | 7 395 | 2 798 | 10 193 | 3 450 | 388 | 3 838 |
| Lithuania | 17 521 | 3 456 | 20 977 | 15 106 | 833 | 15 939 | 24 886 | 6 347 | 31 233 | 20 401 | 1 946 | 22 347 | 50 058 | 6 015 | 56 073 | 45 066 | 1 854 | 46 920 |
| Luxembourg | 3 440 | 3 636 | 7 076 | 1 246 | 672 | 1 918 | 4 655 | 4 590 | 9 245 | 2 076 | 1 128 | 3 204 | 4 786 | 4 954 | 9 740 | 1 956 | 1 195 | 3 151 |
| Malta | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| The Netherlands | 51 747 | 54 124 | 105 879 | 14 389 | 6 376 | 20 769 | 68 832 | 68 359 | 137 200 | 21 802 | 10 319 | 32 123 | 65 211 | 66 559 | 131 785 | 18 592 | 8 845 | 27 439 |
| Poland | 619 269 | 347 897 | 967 215 | 533 606 | 256 418 | 790 070 | 451 225 | 249 031 | 700 264 | 330 145 | 117 078 | 447 225 | 378 344 | 264 437 | 642 789 | 280 144 | 147 016 | 427 162 |
| Portugal | 45 961 | 38 844 | 84 805 | 26 601 | 12 058 | 38 659 | 60 473 | 48 211 | 108 684 | 37 642 | 15 552 | 53 194 | 75 537 | 60 370 | 135 907 | 41 316 | 13 845 | 55 161 |
| Romania | 21 147 | 7 103 | 28 250 | 16 211 | 1 800 | 18 011 | 33 147 | 9 060 | 42 207 | 27 444 | 3 635 | 31 079 | 45 103 | 11 817 | 56 920 | 39 017 | 5 645 | 44 662 |
| The Slovak Republic | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Slovenia | 20 163 | 6 936 | 27 099 | 16 885 | 1 042 | 17 927 | 23 873 | 8 908 | 32 781 | 20 020 | 2 497 | 22 517 | 22 363 | 9 492 | 31 855 | 17 960 | 2 754 | 20 714 |
| Spain | 177 980 | 193 793 | 371 773 | 48 405 | 39 714 | 88 119 | 223 803 | 231 750 | 455 553 | 78 654 | 61 380 | 140 034 | 270 275 | 278 422 | 548 697 | 73 223 | 55 621 | 128 844 |
| Sweden | 43 806 | 39 406 | 83 212 | 16 866 | 4 249 | 21 115 | 44 705 | 40 083 | 84 788 | 19 144 | 4 938 | 24 082 | 38 513 | 38 205 | 76 718 | 14 994 | 4 130 | 19 124 |

Source: Eurostat, [migr_resfas](#) Note: only EU Member States data are included, data for Serbia is not part of the presentation.

Table A1.2. First employment residence permit stocks in EMN Countries 2021-2023, including % issued for employment reasons

| Country | 2021 | | | 2022 | | | 2023 | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Total | Issued for employment reasons | Issued for employment reasons (%) | Total | Issued for employment reasons | Issued for employment reasons (%) | Total | Issued for employment reasons | Issued for employment reasons (%) |
| Austria | 509 579 | 8 913 | 1.75% | 525 849 | 11 881 | 2.26% | 535 496 | 14 921 | 2.79% |
| Belgium | 492 888 | 42 718 | 9.44% | 504 457 | 45 920 | 9.10% | 517 711 | 48 864 | 9.44% |
| Bulgaria | 89 706 | 9 779 | 14.42% | 91 525 | 11 937 | 13.04% | 109 758 | 15 822 | 14.42% |
| Croatia | 70 337 | 47 223 | 77.39% | 88 929 | 64 488 | 72.52% | 112 428 | 87 012 | 77.39% |
| Cyprus | 93 922 | 31 104 | 36.32% | 118 864 | 41 121 | 34.59% | 132 735 | 48 208 | 36.32% |
| Czech Republic | 430 687 | 123 015 | 26.10% | 445 317 | 125 159 | 28.11% | 450 024 | 117 460 | 26.10% |
| Estonia | 188 762 | 8 714 | 5.16% | 190 909 | 9 769 | 5.12% | 192 250 | 9 917 | 5.16% |
| Finland | 168 612 | 37 120 | 25.92% | 195 762 | 49 149 | 25.11% | 234 076 | 60 667 | 25.92% |
| France | 3 723 760 | 284 779 | 9.58% | 3 927 206 | 337 069 | 8.58% | 4 105 100 | 393 204 | 9.58% |
| Germany | 5 021 637 | 338 022 | 8.65% | 5 497 026 | 433 933 | 7.89% | 5 724 832 | 495 372 | 8.65% |
| Greece | 713 522 | 106 188 | 19.52% | 589 655 | 105 283 | 17.86% | 608 567 | 118 810 | 19.52% |
| Hungary | 225 155 | 94 837 | 48.87% | 219 880 | 114 558 | 52.10% | 218 601 | 106 836 | 48.87% |
| Ireland | 169 687 | 45 409 | 29.48% | 234 057 | 62 200 | 26.57% | 289 432 | 85 317 | 29.48% |
| Italy | 3 561 177 | 1 493 893 | 42.44% | 3 838 651 | 1 642 200 | 42.78% | 3 730 915 | 1 583 500 | 42.44% |
| Latvia | 277 217 | 10 362 | 4.07% | 267 350 | 10 063 | 3.76% | 258 850 | 10 539 | 4.07% |
| Lithuania | 95 724 | 62 392 | 73.30% | 127 330 | 86 812 | 68.18% | 167 132 | 122 515 | 73.30% |
| Luxembourg | 51 032 | 9 841 | 23.28% | 54 572 | 12 140 | 22.25% | 58 815 | 13 695 | 23.28% |
| Malta | 61 885 | 38 173 | 70.09% | 89 000 | 61 077 | 68.63% | 112 892 | 79 128 | 70.09% |
| The Netherlands | 760 739 | 119 777 | 18.71% | 780 198 | 140 837 | 18.05% | 822 662 | 153 950 | 18.71% |
| Poland | 954 551 | 634 255 | 61.21% | 967 066 | 547 143 | 56.58% | 1 088 590 | 666 330 | 61.21% |
| Portugal | 529 718 | 134 637 | 35.04% | 568 146 | 181 593 | 31.96% | 642 710 | 225 237 | 35.04% |
| Romania | 92 049 | 30 514 | 52.14% | 115 558 | 51 038 | 44.17% | 143 276 | 74 698 | 52.14% |
| The Slovak Republic | 107 684 | 59 927 | 58.36% | 120 625 | 69 310 | 57.46% | 132 372 | 77 254 | 58.36% |
| Slovenia | 180 709 | 56 038 | 29.12% | 194 926 | 60 849 | 31.22% | 208 115 | 60 613 | 29.12% |
| Spain | 3 443 580 | 284 364 | 8.26% | 3 619 762 | 391 180 | 10.81% | 3 823 572 | 417 265 | 10.91% |
| Sweden | 514 458 | 65 007 | 15.72% | 472 472 | 68 673 | 14.53% | 449 475 | 70 650 | 15.72% |

Source: Eurostat, [migr_resvalid](#) Note: only EU Member States data are included, data for Serbia is not part of the presentation.

Table A.2. Sectors most affected by shortages in EMN Countries³⁵³

| Sector | Countries most affected by shortages in respective sector |
|---|--|
| A. Agriculture, forestry and fishing | Cyprus, France, Greece |
| C. High-tech manufacturing; industry; industry/manufacturing; manufacturing | Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Slovak Republic |
| F. Construction; skilled trades professions | Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy |
| G. Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; trade; wholesale and retail trade | Austria, Czech Republic, France |
| H. Professional drivers; service sector (mainly transport services); transportation and storage | Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Germany, Slovak Republic |
| I. Accommodation and food service activities; hospitality; tourism | Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy |
| J. Information and communication; information and communication technology (ICT); IT; IT professions | Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovak Republic |
| K. Financial and insurance activities | Luxembourg |
| M. Business services; corporate support services; engineering; professional, scientific and technical activities | Belgium, France, Luxembourg |
| N. Administrative and support service activities; administrative and support service | Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary |
| O. Compulsory social security; public administration and defence | Latvia |
| P. Education; nursery school teachers | Estonia, Finland, Germany |
| Q. Care services; health and personal care; human health and social work activities; medical professions; nursing professions; social care; social work | Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovak Republic |
| S. Other service activities | France |

Note: This table is organised by NACE Rev. 2 classification.

353 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK.

ANNEX: LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Table A.3.1. Labour migration framework reforms

| EMN Member Country | Summary of key legal and policy changes |
|---------------------------|--|
| Austria | RWR Card reforms, including: easing the eligibility criteria; establishing an RWR service centre; facilitating the admission of third-country nationals in certain shortage sectors such as health, public transport and IT; liberalising private employment services, making it possible for recruitment agencies to operate in third countries; implementing an International Skilled Workers Initiative with selected focus countries; establishing new bilateral agreements with countries such as the Philippines and India to facilitate worker recruitment; establishing a strategy committee for international skilled workers, with the aim of increasing the number of RWR and Blue Cards and reducing processing times for applications; and increasing quotas for seasonal employment. |
| Belgium | In the Brussels region, a new decree introduced a shortage-occupation single permit and set out the procedure and requirements for the labour market test (effective from 1 October 2024). In Flanders, a decree refined both permit types (effective from 1 May 2024). The German-speaking Community issued two decrees: one reworking audit rules and administrative fines (effective from 1 July 2023); and another partially implementing Directive 2021/1883 for the EU Blue Card (effective from 1 January 2024). In Wallonia, a decree clarified the distinction between the two permit types and their procedures (effective from 1 September 2024). |
| Bulgaria | Bulgaria introduced relief for seasonal employment, posted workers, intra-corporate transfers, researchers, students, trainees and freelancers, easing labour market access for third-country nationals across all qualification levels. The reforms include: a 'one-stop-shop' administrative service, established in 2021; ongoing incorporation of Directive (EU) 2021/1883 to simplify entry for highly qualified workers; and a draft law approved in March 2024 pending National Assembly discussion. |
| Croatia | Croatia has replaced its fixed annual quota for non-EU workers in 2021, with a flexible, demand-driven approach, and digitalised its work permit process to support sectors such as tourism and construction, while increasingly sourcing talent from non-EU nations. The Croatian Parliament adopted Amendments on the Aliens Act on 21 February 2025 to be implemented from 15 of March 2025, allowing third-country nationals to: change employers without a new permit; extend permit durations from one to three years; and improve access to employment services, aligning with broader EU standards. |
| Cyprus | In February 2023, the Strategy for the Employment of Foreign Labour was revised to address labour shortages by increasing the number of third-country nationals that businesses can employ and simplifying approval procedures. |
| The Czech Republic | In 2024, the Czech Republic allowed regional authorities to suspend the labour market test when local demand exceeds supply, expediting foreign recruitment. Free labour market access now extends to nationals of Australia, Japan, Canada, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and Israel, while migration programmes target Southeast Asia, with a new Indonesian programme approved. A revised EU law interpretation now permits foreign nationals with single, intra-corporate or research permits to register as jobseekers and claim unemployment benefits if their employment ends. In 2023, long-stay seasonal work visas were extended from six to nine months, with seasonal work now also covering construction. |
| Estonia | Amendments to the Aliens Act were introduced in 2022 and were widely welcomed by employers. They included: lowering the salary criterion for top specialists (from twice to 1.5 times the average salary); expanding the start-up programme to scale-ups; introducing a new short-term employment residence permit; and simplifying entry for those fleeing the war in Ukraine, exempting them from some requirements and setting a reduced salary threshold (0.8 times the average) to remove bureaucratic barriers and fill critical labour gaps. |
| Finland | Between 2021 and 2024, Finland introduced extensive reforms to address labour migration and shortages, including: enhanced labour market indicators; the Labour Market Roadmap; updated Talent Boost and Work in Finland initiatives; and legislative amendments to streamline residence permit processing, with fast-track options and employer certification. Future amendments will extend work-based permits so far issued as sector-specific to sectors facing genuine labour shortages at national level. |

| EMN Member Country | Summary of key legal and policy changes |
|------------------------|--|
| France | <p>Three main changes have been introduced:</p> <p>(1) In 2021, an order was issued to update and extend the list of shortage occupations. The list was further expanded in 2024 to include agricultural roles, enabling agricultural businesses to recruit foreign workers without employment-related restrictions.</p> <p>(2) In 2024, through the CIAI law, a new exceptional admission procedure was introduced for foreign nationals who had previously worked illegally in shortage occupations or regions.</p> <p>(3) In 2022, France amended its entry and residence code to grant temporary trainee permits to healthcare professionals in private non-profit establishments. In 2024, a 'talent' residence permit for key medical and paramedical occupations was introduced by the new law, streamlining access to multi-year permits.</p> |
| Germany | <p>Germany has implemented a range of changes to its labour migration framework to address shortages and retain and attract skilled workers from third countries. Key measures include a new skilled labour strategy based on a three-pillar model (skilled labour, experience and potential), featuring: lower salary thresholds for the EU Blue Card; expanded entry options (including contingent short-term employment and enhanced recognition partnerships); improved family reunification for skilled workers; and an extended Western Balkans regulation.</p> |
| Greece | <p>The new Migration Code (Law 5038/2023) replaces the old framework while retaining employer-led invitations, immigration quotas and labour market tests – now determined annually for the entire country based on European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classifications rather than by region. Additionally, seasonal work provisions have been expanded to include tourism, agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry, supported by memoranda of understanding with Bangladesh and Egypt, and consultations with India and Vietnam.</p> |
| Hungary | <p>Hungary's new Guest Worker Law, in effect since 2024, streamlines the application process by issuing work-related residence permits for both guest workers and highly skilled workers through a single procedure. The reforms: replace the former shortage-occupation list with a negative occupational list; tighten immigration rules by tying permits to specific employment and enforcing immediate revocation if employment ends; and uphold stringent security and eligibility checks to ensure that only those whose presence benefits Hungarian society are allowed to reside long term.</p> |
| Ireland | <p>The Employment Permits Act 2024 consolidates, updates and improves previous legislation, and creates a more agile system that can respond flexibly to changing labour market needs. The act: enables workers on general or critical skills permits to change employers after nine months; introduces a pilot seasonal employment permit (in 2025); revises the labour market needs test; and grants the minister greater flexibility in setting employment conditions, such as accommodation and training. Ireland conducted a review of remuneration thresholds and introduced a number of increases for certain permit types and sectors (notably in healthcare.) Ireland also ensures regular updates to occupational lists, most recently providing eligibility to the fisheries sectors. The issuance of electronic permits with a unique permit number commenced in 2020, and a new IT processing system is underway.</p> |
| Latvia | <p>In 2016, Latvia set up an Employment Council to coordinate labour market reforms. This was transformed into the Human Capital Development Council in 2023 to assess market conditions, produce forecasts and set strategic human-capital objectives, with advisory input from major business and trade union representatives in 2024.</p> |
| Lithuania | <p>Since 2022, Lithuania has simplified its temporary residence permit process for employment by: reducing the employer commitment from one year to six months; abolishing the labour market test for highly qualified workers; and introducing a quota system for third-country nationals in shortage occupations (with applications now processed abroad via VFS Global, and national employment visas phased out). Further reforms since July 2023 require employers to: demonstrate genuine business activity; enforce stricter compliance and revocation rules; tighten work eligibility for certain groups (e.g. Ukrainians without temporary protection).</p> |
| Luxembourg | <p>In 2023, legislative changes introduced an annual list of shortage occupations and abolished the labour market test for the occupations listed, while streamlining the process for other occupations to expedite employer certification. Free market access was also granted for family member permit holders, international protection applicants (after six months), and beneficiaries of removal, deferment or suspension. The validity of residence permits for jobseekers or business start-ups has been extended from nine months to 12 to support talent attraction and retention.</p> |
| Malta | <p>In 2023, the Maltese government implemented reforms to streamline the processing of work permits for third-country nationals. These changes aimed to expedite the processing time for permits and ensure that employers hiring foreign workers have a justifiable need for them.</p> |
| The Netherlands | <p>No legal and/or policy changes related to labour shortages have been made to the labour migration framework since 2021. However, in 2021, the Dutch government launched a pilot to help attract essential staff for start-ups, seeking to improve the conditions for hiring talent for a certain (innovative and promising) segment of the economy. In 2023, after a ruling by the Dutch Council of State, the requirement for asylum seekers only to work a maximum of 24 weeks in a 52-week period has been abolished. This policy change may have an impact on labour shortages, even though the main motivation was to enforce (EU) law and labour rights for individual asylum seekers.</p> |
| Poland | <p>Nationals of certain Eastern European countries are granted simplified conditions of access to the Polish labour market. From February 2022, Ukrainians were granted full access to the labour market under temporary protection rules. From January 2022, citizens of Armenia, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine could work for 24 months (instead of six) on the basis of a simplified notification procedure.</p> |

| EMN Member Country | Summary of key legal and policy changes |
|----------------------------|--|
| Slovenia | Amendments to the Employment, Self-employment and Work of Foreigners Act in 2023 aim to facilitate employment and address staff shortages. Foreigners changing jobs or holding multiple jobs now require only the Employment Service's consent, and the health and social services sectors are exempt. International protection applicants may have free access to the labour market three months after submitting an application. The Act on Measures to Optimise Administrative Procedures was enacted in 2024, to reduce administrative burdens for residence permits and allow employment for legally residing foreigners prior to obtaining their first single permit, on the basis of a certificate of a submitted application and consent of the Employment Service of Slovenia to the issuance of the single permit. However, this measure was temporary and only available until the end of 2024. |
| Sweden | In 2022, Sweden introduced a talent visa, enabling advanced degree holders to enter the country to look for work or explore business opportunities – provided that they have sufficient funds, valid comprehensive health insurance, and can transition to a work permit once employed without leaving Sweden. Additionally, from 2023, a new maintenance requirement mandates that work permit applicants earn at least 80% of Sweden's median salary. The aim is to reduce labour migration in professions with low wages and education requirements and to focus the system on highly skilled labour migration. |
| The Slovak Republic | Comprehensive reforms have streamlined the temporary residence and national visa processes for third-country nationals. They have focused on addressing labour shortages through simplified administrative procedures; increased quotas for key professions (such as drivers and industrial workers); and targeted measures for highly qualified and relocated employees. Key changes include enhanced employer cooperation; significant adjustments to the Blue Card system (e.g. lower salary thresholds, reduced contract lengths and extended validity); and regulations that expand eligibility and expedite entry into the labour market, including via the national visa system. |
| Spain | New regulations for third-country nationals were approved on 20 November 2024, after previous reforms in 2022. The duration of permits for low- and medium-skilled workers was extended from two years to four, introducing increased flexibility by allowing a change of employer if needed. For seasonal activities, changes in some labour contracts made it possible for these workers to obtain a four-year permit in one single procedure. As for highly skilled workers, digital nomads were included in national regulations. |
| Serbia | Amendments to the Law on Employment of Foreigners have introduced a single residence-work permit and a unified administrative process – fully digitalised via a web portal – to streamline the hiring of foreigners. This new, flexible approach replaces multiple steps with one integrated administrative procedure for both temporary residence and work. |

Table A.3.2. Planned legal and policy changes

| EMN Member Country | Summary of planned legal and policy changes |
|-----------------------|---|
| Austria | Before the National Council elections in September 2024, the government announced further digitalisation plans for the residence and settlement system. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy is also developing a pre-check register to enable vocational qualifications in shortage occupations acquired abroad to be recorded systematically. |
| Croatia | The Croatian Parliament adopted amendments to the Aliens Act on 21 February 2025, to be implemented from 15 March 2025. The amendments extended the validity of stay-and-work permits to three years based on contract length; and simplified the process of changing roles in deficit occupations with the same employer, as well as switching employers after one year. Additional reforms were aimed at reducing the administrative burden on employers, aligning with labour market needs and reducing shortages. |
| Cyprus | A revised Strategy for the Employment of Foreign Labour now addresses approval volumes, foreign labour mobility and more flexible approval processes at business level. As of 1 August 2024, the revised Blue Card Directive (EU Directive 2021/1883) has been transposed into national law. |
| Czech Republic | A points-based preferential migration system is proposed to facilitate market entry for foreigners who meet the criteria for qualifications, Czech language skills, local studies and experience in shortage professions (among other things), benefiting both employers and targeted migrant groups. |
| Estonia | There is ongoing debate about raising Estonia's immigration quota (from 1 303 per year to potentially 2 600 under normal conditions, or even 3 900 with strong economic growth), with proposals being made for sector-specific quotas and set salary requirements. A draft amendment to the Aliens Act aims to streamline application processes using digital solutions and a one-stop-shop approach, attracting more foreign labour without addressing labour shortages directly. |
| Finland | The Government Programme highlights a national skilled labour shortage – particularly in health and social services – and considers labour migration to be a key complementary solution. A legislative proposal submitted on 17 October 2024 clarifies the impact of unemployment on the validity of work-based permits. The same proposal aims to allow holders of residence permits for an employed person to work in all government-designated shortage sectors without a new permit, with sectors defined annually by decree. In addition, a salary threshold of 1600 euros per month is applied since January 2025 for residence permits for an employed person. |
| Hungary | Amendments to the legal framework for employment and labour migration are being made through the 100/2021 Government Decree on Employment-Promoting Services and Subsidies, streamlining processes and reducing the administrative burden. The policy shift aims to improve efficiency in labour migration and employment services, enabling quicker responses to labour shortages. |

EMN Member**Country Summary of planned legal and policy changes**

Ireland Ireland passed the Employment Permit Act 2024, consolidating, updating and improving the Irish employment permit system. Changes include: a new seasonal workers permit for non-EEA nationals, to be launched in 2025; indexation and increases of minimum annual remuneration thresholds for permit holders; and the option for certain workers to change employers after nine months. Additionally, Ireland approved a project to assess the implementation of a single permit system for both employment and residence permissions. The single permit scheme aims to boost international competitiveness, with phased implementation planned over three years following a positive recommendation from an interdepartmental working group in May 2024.

Latvia Latvia is developing a Green Corridor to attract third-country workers with the aim of implementing a sound and coherent immigration policy, and ensuring quick and easy access to third-country labour that is important for the Latvian economy, while also controlling security risks. The Green Corridor is designed to speed up document processing and the issuing of residence permits.

Lithuania Amendments adopted on 20 June 2024 established that, from 2025, Lithuania would apply a fixed annual quota for foreign workers (capped at 1.4% of permanent residents based on the previous year's data) and abolish the Shortage Occupations List and labour market test. The quota size will be set by the Minister of Social Security and Labour in coordination with the Minister of the Interior. From 2025, new language-service requirements for businesses will be implemented, effective from 2026

Malta Reforms aim to better align migration with the actual needs of the labour market and address several key challenges, such as the oversupply of workers in certain sectors.

Poland A draft law on the conditions for employing foreigners in Poland is currently under legislative review. In addition, the new 2025-2030 migration strategy, 'To Regain Control, Ensure Security', prioritises the activation of Polish nationals to address labour shortages, rather than increasing foreign migration.

Sweden In February 2024, a Government Inquiry proposed a salary requirement for labour immigrants—set at the median salary level—with an exemption for those in shortage sectors where salaries need only meet collective agreement standards. The proposals are currently under review by government offices.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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EMN LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-migration-network>

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Croatia emn.gov.hr/

Cyprus www.emncyprus.mip.gov.cy

The Czech Republic www.emncz.eu/

Estonia www.emn.ee/

Finland emn.fi/en/

France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2

Germany www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/EMN/emn-node.html

Greece <https://migration.gov.gr/emn/>

Hungary www.emnhungary.hu/en

Ireland www.emn.ie/

Italy www.emnitalyncp.it/

Latvia www.emn.lv

Lithuania www.emn.lt/

Luxembourg emnluxembourg.uni.lu/

Malta emn.gov.mt/

The Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl/

Poland www.gov.pl/web/european-migration-network

Portugal rem.sef.pt/en/

Romania www.mai.gov.ro/

Spain www.emnspain.gob.es/en/home

The Slovak Republic www.emn.sk/en

Slovenia emnslovenia.si

Sweden www.emnsweden.se/

Norway www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/european-migration-network---norway#

Georgia migration.commission.ge/

The Republic of Moldova bma.gov.md/en

Ukraine dmsu.gov.ua/en-home.html

Montenegro www.gov.me/mup

Armenia migration.am/?lang=en

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The Republic of North Macedonia <https://mvr.gov.mk/>

Albania