

Innovation in Africa-Europe Relations beyond Covid-19: Labour migration and skills development in the Covid-19 recovery

Event Summary Wednesday 5 May 13:00 BST / 14:00 CET

Key messages

- Labour migration schemes are essential for inclusive development within and between Africa and Europe post Covid-19.
- While innovative pilot projects continue to provide a sound basis for broader partnerships between countries of origin and destination, these new approaches must become accepted as business as usual. This community can build a cohesive body of evidence to achieve this.
- We need sector-specific approaches, from the digital industry to more traditional sectors such as health and agriculture, and we need to link skills development and trade for better economic outcomes.
- Embracing more circular migration and breaking through the skills silos, so that all skill levels are placed on a continuum, will enhance developmental benefits as well as institutional relationships between Africa and Europe.

Session Overviews

Opening Plenary

- In the post-Covid recovery, we must avoid reverting to the status quo of previous work on migration, and instead create a call for action.
- To move beyond perceptions of pilot initiatives as 'good but small', we need to meaningfully evaluate and measure progress, starting with a conceptual framework and pillars for intervention based on efficiency, equity, and externality.
- Covid-19 has engendered new migration regulatory regimes and demands for different skills in changing labour markets. The African Union is developing labour migration frameworks at regional and country level, as well as engaging in a continental dialogue on migration and mobility with the EU, and bilaterally with the UK Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).
- African countries and the continent can and should position themselves for labour markets in a changed, more digitized post-Covid world, where new forms of circular migration are embraced by government and private actors. This requires Africans to become not only needed but wanted and cherished workers in Europe and elsewhere.
- Skills development must be linked with trade, sector development, and specific areas of AU-EU cooperation, and all skills levels placed on a continuum of training, apprenticeship, work placement, and continuous professional development.

Exploring labour market trends and policy priorities in the Covid-19 recovery context

- Critical need for a stronger focus on opening new migration pathways for low and medium-skilled migration. Recognition of how difficult this is given the challenges across the EU in finding consensus even on high-skilled migration aspects.
- Skills wastage, due to mismatch of skills and lack of recognition of migrants' qualifications, remains a (now well recognised) challenge. More progress in this area is overdue.

- Caution required when debates on irregular migration are mixed with arguments for expanding legal pathways. This can backfire and needs to be carefully handled.
- We are missing opportunities to build alliances with the business community, in sectors where there is clear demand for workers and agreement that not enough is being done to expand legal pathways. More could be done to encourage a more vocal stance by private sector actors across the EU.
- We should not forget other migration routes such as from Africa to the Gulf and Middle East, where there are major protection concerns arising, particularly as a result of the pandemic.
- We should continue to engage with trade unions and those who critique skills and mobility programmes. The fairness of these programmes remains an issue in some cases. A focus on decent work must remain central to our work.
- Ultimately investment in skills is a fundamental concern and one that goes beyond migration policy and governance questions. Investments in TVET systems, apprenticeships and formal education systems are critical. These investments, that deliver benefits for those who will move or stay at home, are essential for wider developmental objectives.

Learning from experiences of talent partnerships, temporary migration programmes and other skills and mobility models

- Skills and mobility partnerships pilot initiatives should adopt a multi-stakeholder and data driven approach. Donors must budget for sufficient time, flexibility and coordination, and all actors must understand and communicate the aims and goals of skills partnerships for them to add value.
- Migration is global: we need to build trust across actors, sectors and countries, and break down silos between policy areas (e.g. education policy vs migration policy).
- We cannot underestimate the importance of skills matching, retention and recognition. While digital skills will be especially important in the post-Covid recovery and beyond (especially in professions traditionally less reliant on them e.g. agriculture/construction), soft skills must be considered equal to technical skills.
- The private sector plays a key role, particularly for skills mobility, training and education.
- Skills partnerships are very complex and challenging, even with good intentions on both sides. Timing is therefore key, as country priorities can swiftly change.
- Capacity development is often politically sensitive but must nevertheless be prioritised, on all sides.
- We need to collectively agree what our end goal is (e.g. harmonizing skills and qualifications across countries or the EU and AU) and how we can then turn talent partnerships into this overall goal.

Closing Plenary

- This community can lead the way to bring these experiences together: we need a working body of evidence that this entire community shares.
- We need to create more conversations at the sectoral level to break through skills silos of high- or low-skilled and/or high- or low-income. The 2020 public backlash to only high-skilled visas being issued in the UK healthcare sector is a tangible example of moving away from abstract skills categorisations towards what this means at a sectoral level.
- New avenues for change and opportunities for engagement are opening up in this space, so we can try new strategies. In the UK for example, visa policies are now

being integrated into development policy as a centrepiece of the UK's development offer.

Annex

Links shared by participants

- **ADEPT** [Talent partnerships: Balancing African and European needs](#)
- **ADEPT** [Talent Partnerships: What's diaspora got to do with it?](#)
- **Arnold Bergstraesser Institut**: [Transnational Skills Partnerships between Ghana and North Rhine-Westphalia | Arnold Bergstraesser Institute \(arnold-bergstraesser.de\)](#)
- **CGD and LaMP**: [Event on Building Migration Pathways at All Levels: Encouraging a Skills Mix](#), May 11
- **CGD**: [The EU Migration Pact: Putting Talent Partnerships into Practice](#)
- **ECDPM**: [Mapping private sector engagement along the migration cycle](#)
- **Greens/EFA**: [The Crucial Role of Third-Country Migrants in the European Union Position Paper](#)
- **ICMPD**: [Partnerships for Mobility at the Crossroads: Lessons Learnt From 18 Months of Implementation of EU Pilot Projects on Legal Migration](#)
- **ILO**: [Skills Partnerships on Migration in the Western African & Central African regions Report](#)
- **ILO** [The role of social partners in skills development, recognition and matching for migrant workers. A contribution to the Global Skills Partnership Working Paper](#)
- **IOM**: [Labour Mobility and Skills in Response, Recovery and Post Covid-19 Pandemic Policy Brief](#)
- **NOVAFRICA**: [How has COVID-19 affected the intention to migrate via the backway to Europe and to a neighboring African country? Survey evidence and a salience experiment in The Gambia](#)
- **ODI / Robert Bosch Foundation**: Stronger together: a new agenda for Africa and Europe in 2021 in [English](#) and [German](#)
- **ODI / Robert Bosch Foundation**: [Harnessing migration for climate action - an untapped opportunity?](#)

The event "Innovation in Africa-Europe Relations beyond Covid-19: Labour migration and skills development in the Covid-19 recovery" was organised by ODI and the Robert Bosch Stiftung, in partnership with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Open Society Foundations.