

## LEGAL MIGRATION AND ITS SKILLS DIMENSION

Bolstered by the EU Global Approach to Migration for attracting skilled migrants, this policy briefing discusses whether and in which way migration and skills could be beneficial for both receiving and sending countries, as well as the migrants themselves. It draws on the outcomes of an ETF project designed to highlight the dynamic interaction between the migration process and skills development through five case studies. Two countries with traditional emigration patterns (Egypt and Tunisia) and three Eastern European transition countries with relatively new migration flows (Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) were analysed. The findings summarised below provide valuable policy lessons for both decision makers and practitioners in the fields of education, employment and labour migration. The key message is that labour migration can be turned into a 'virtuous circle' with considerably greater benefits for all parties, but it needs to be better managed and more attention must be given to the skills dimension ●



### CIRCULAR MIGRATION AND LABOUR MOBILITY ARE KEY

Migration and how best to manage it is a topic that has been moving up the policy agenda of the EU for some time. Faced with an ageing population, possible labour and skill shortages and the need to compete for high-skilled migrants with countries such as the US, Canada and Australia, the EU has become more receptive to the idea of legally recruiting labour migrants in line with the Lisbon objectives and the EU 2020 strategy. As one of the most favoured destinations for immigrants in the world, the EU's more proactive approach to legal migration for employment purposes is balanced by the increasing importance given to the potential contribution that migration can make to development and the mutual benefits for both sending and receiving countries, particularly

through returning migrants, diasporas, remittances and temporary migration as a remedy for brain drain.

The EC Communication on circular migration and mobility partnerships between the EU and third countries opens the way for new forms of temporary legal migration schemes to facilitate labour mobility. This also applies to new directive proposals, in particular the one concerning the 'Blue Card' immigration system for highly skilled migrants, indicating the gradual policy change towards circular migration (temporary and selective immigration based on the needs of the European labour market). The first mobility partnership launched between the EU and the Republic of Moldova is a recent case in point. Keeping the balance between three areas (promoting mobility

and legal migration, optimising the link between migration and development, and preventing and combating illegal immigration), the mobility partnership is the main strategic, comprehensive and long-term cooperation framework for migration management with third countries. Within this context, the process of 'skills-matching' between migrant workers and jobs abroad is key for efficient labour mobility, and tools that make migrants' skills more transparent and facilitate the recognition of their qualifications are becoming important issues for both the EU and the partner countries. As a result, the interaction of migration with skills development and labour markets is an important topic for the ETF ●

*This policy briefing is about legal migration for economic purposes. The term 'skill' is defined as the ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to perform complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills) and/or people (interpersonal skills). In the ETF survey, formal education indicators defined by the ISCED 97 classification are used to measure the skills levels of migrants. 'Qualification' on the other hand, refers to a formal assessment and validation process when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. It is an official recognition of the value of learning outcomes (mostly obtained in the form of a certificate, diploma or degree) in the labour market and in education and training.*

# INFORM

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ETF PROJECT

The ETF Migration and Skills project was implemented between 2006 and 2008 to analyse the education and skills levels of migrants from five countries: Albania, Egypt, the Republic of Moldova, Tunisia and Ukraine. It included desk research, fact-finding missions, field surveys and data analysis, with a minimum of 2,000 respondents per country (1,000 potential migrants and 1,000 returning migrants).

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews at respondents' houses with structured questionnaires targeting potential and returning migrants covering three education levels (low: ISCED 1-2, medium: ISCED 3-4 and high: ISCED 5-6). For the purposes of the survey, a 'potential migrant' was anyone aged 18-40, living in his/her country at the time of the interview and claiming that he/she was 'seriously thinking of leaving abroad to live and work'. A 'returning migrant' was defined as anybody who had left the country aged 18 or over, lived and worked abroad continuously for at least six months, and returned more than three months and less than ten years before the interview.

### KEY FINDINGS

Data revealed a limited use of migrants' potential in receiving countries ranging from Europe to Russia and the Gulf, mainly due to an under-use of migrants' skills and qualifications, low employment rates (low-skilled, females) and an overall weak management of labour migration. Indeed, the improvement of migrants' living standards was generally dependent on individual initiatives, with little involvement of relevant authorities.

Although the education levels of migrants are spread across all levels of education, recent outflows show an increasing trend towards medium and high-skilled migration (around 35% of emigrants from Egypt, Tunisia and Ukraine are high skilled). Despite this however, qualification levels often do not reflect the type of jobs held abroad, with most migrants being overqualified for the unskilled jobs they take. This can

be interpreted as brain loss, or brain waste, not only for migrants but also for sending and receiving countries. This is particularly the case for migrants from new sending countries (Albania, the Republic of Moldova and partially Ukraine), while a relatively better matching is noted among Egyptians and Tunisians. The latter was ensured mainly through legal channels of labour migration between the countries, but the established migrant networks in host countries also seem to be an important facilitating factor.

### MAKING THE MOST OF SKILLS

The fact that migrants' skills were often not put to good use was especially true for Albanians and Moldovans working in the EU. Over 55% of all migrants to the EU found only unskilled work and only 7.2% worked as managers or professionals. Moreover, educated women did worse than educated men: e.g. 80% of Moldovan women with university degrees found only unskilled jobs, compared to 60% of Moldovan men with degrees. The reasons for under-utilising migrants' skills may include the nature of the demand for labour in receiving countries (mainly in agriculture, construction and domestic work); the lack of or inefficient implementation of bilateral agreements to manage migration flows; problems related to the transparency and quality of education systems in sending countries and the lack of recognition of qualifications in receiving countries. The findings also show that Canada, the US and Australia are still the most attractive destinations for high-skilled migrants, and this could have consequences for the competitiveness of the EU in the long-term.

In terms of preparation for migration, more than a third of potential migrants expressed an interest in training before they left (50% in the case of Albanians), with language and vocational training as the most popular options. However in practice, this training is rarely available and people do not make use of it even



when it is; only 5% of returned migrants had undertaken any form of pre-departure training. Although not many migrants expressed the intention to follow training abroad, 28% of Tunisians, 16.5% of Albanians and 12.4% of Ukrainians still expected it.

When it comes to return, the survey shows that most migrants use informal channels to organise their return. Only a small proportion of the returning migrants interviewed had heard of government programmes offering incentives to return and even fewer – just 1% – had benefited from such schemes. The exception was Tunisia where the government has made special efforts to maintain links with its diaspora and encourage people to return.

### RETURNING HOME

Returnees reported that skills acquired abroad and work experience had a positive impact on their employability on their return. Nearly 90% of those employed as professionals abroad worked in good quality jobs after returning home compared to less than 60% of people who worked in unskilled occupations. Around 35% of returnees had similar jobs when they went back as they had held while abroad. Compared to new sending countries, the traditional skilled migration flows from Egypt and Tunisia to the Gulf

seem to be better at creating virtuous circles: many migrants had worked in commerce and petty trade (preferred by returning migrants who set up their own businesses). Entrepreneur (employer and self-employed) potential among returnees is higher in Egypt (36%), Tunisia (30%) and Albania (38%). The findings show that entrepreneurial activities were linked to migrants' general experience while abroad rather than the specific skills acquired there. In fact, 61% of migrants reported their most useful experience as coming into contact with new places and ways of doing things, while 35% of migrants valued the skills acquired on the job as the second most helpful experience.

## MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

Returning migrants can contribute to local development by rejoining the workforce or becoming entrepreneurs if certain conditions are met. The findings show that migrants need to have spent enough time abroad to have accumulated sufficient skills and financial capital, but are still of an age where they are willing to undertake new projects on their return. On average, Tunisians and Egyptians spent more than ten years abroad, while Albanians, Moldovans and Ukrainians spend two or three years. The return is likely to be more beneficial for the home country when people choose to return rather than being forced to do so. Home countries can benefit more

from the return of skilled migrants than unskilled ones so long as local conditions allow them to make good use of their skills on their return. The findings mostly confirm the opposite where these conditions were not met. For instance, most reasons given for return were either negative – one fifth of Tunisians and Albanians reported they had been 'sent away by the authorities' – or neutral such as family reasons. In fact, 50% of the returning migrants in Albania and Moldova plan to migrate again. Only a very small minority of migrants reported that they had returned for positive reasons such as to start a business or having saved enough money for a new life ●

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A WIN-WIN-WIN SOLUTION

The UNDP 2009 Human Development Report claims that migration can expand human choices in terms of income, access to services and participation, but opportunities vary according to people's skill levels. This indicates that a 'win-win-win' situation is possible if a 'virtuous circle' is created for the benefit of all (sending and receiving countries as well as migrants themselves) through better management of labour migration and its skills dimension. In broad terms, such virtuous circles would involve:

- (i) *Sending countries addressing the skills shortages of the receiving country's labour market.* This would require labour market needs and education system outcomes to be transparent on both sides, and a quality assured certification system in sending countries including a skills assessment and clear mechanisms for the recognition of migrants' qualifications in receiving countries. The process starts with quality education and training (e.g. curricula, teachers, schools) that matches the needs of labour markets and ensures the transparency of the skills acquired. Through better management of labour migration, receiving countries can meet their immediate labour and skill shortages and get the exact profiles they need. The outcome would be beneficial migration leading to higher employment and productivity in receiving countries.
- (ii) *The use of the know-how and experience of returnees for labour market integration and contribution to local business development.* This would require mechanisms to validate informal/non-formal learning to recognise skills learnt abroad, and a conducive business environment including incentives and entrepreneurial training to encourage returnees to start their own businesses. For the validation of non- and informal learning, certification should be based on widely used occupational standards. Existing schemes for the recognition and accreditation of experience could be used in the absence of more structured processes. Additional incentives for education reforms and quality improvements could be created by receiving countries setting quality requirements for migrants' skills. The outcome would be beneficial to migration through the better use of savings and skills learnt abroad by returnees and improved education systems in sending countries.
- (iii) *The availability and accessibility of information on labour migration, including support services for potential and returning migrants.* Freely and widely available information on the migration process, including labour market and skill needs, living conditions, standards and incentives and reintegration arrangements at home, is crucial. This would require programmes to support potential migrants and returnees throughout the different phases and the opening of channels for circular migration. The potential role of the public employment services in sending countries and the European Job Mobility Portal (EURES) could be explored in this process. The outcome would be beneficial for migrants by increasing their chances of success and decreasing abusive incidents ●



## BENEFITTING FROM EU DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The Stockholm Programme (2010-14) proposes flexible immigration policies for long-term EU economic development and increased coherence between migration policies and other areas such as development, trade, employment, health and education. Efforts to promote mobility and migration are increasingly linked to the promotion of opportunities for decent and productive work and improved livelihoods in third countries in order to minimise brain drain. For better labour matching, coherent policies and better assessment of the skills needs in European labour markets are needed. For example, the EU 2020 strategy and a recent report on 'New Skills for New Jobs' refer to the use of migration potential by taking into account future global competition for talent and possible labour shortages in some occupations. The reports propose the effective management of migrant human capital by recognising and improving skills and managing labour inflows in line with skills needs and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Although developments like the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), New Skills for New Jobs and the EU 2020 strategy are designed for EU countries, they could have an external dimension in line with increasing temporary and/or circular migration flows between the EU and its neighbourhood.

The EQF, for example, could serve as a reference point for making qualifications portable by linking to national qualification systems.

### MAKING USE OF EU TOOLS

Such EU developments should be explored in terms of the skills-matching dimension of migration management. As legal labour migration can have mutual benefits for the EU and partner countries, these developments may provide inspiration for the education and employment systems of sending countries. They could be used for better migration management. Migration is increasingly circular with different phases, and the education and skills dimension must be considered for the whole population of sending countries. Transparent and quality education that responds to labour market needs leads to success in both domestic and international labour markets. Thus sending countries need to better equip potential migrants with the right skills, pro-actively encourage expatriates to return and become entrepreneurs, and create conducive environments for the more productive use of their skills, knowledge and savings at home. Returnees who currently find the skills and knowledge they have acquired have no formal currency at home should have the possibility to benefit more from their experience ●

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Employment and skills must be put at the heart of migration policy to ensure efficient labour mobility and all round success. The ETF does not promote migration per se, but supports the development of partner countries by helping to create virtuous circles in migration. Negative public opinion on migration both in sending (e.g. brain drain) and receiving countries (e.g. job loss, crime, violence) needs to be overcome by emphasising the positive aspects. Migrants' skills and their assessment, certification, transparency and recognition have proved to be important for improved labour matching. Both sending and receiving countries must do more to ensure the transparency of migrants' skills and the recognition of their qualifications. Measures may include pilot actions to enable bilateral recognition of qualifications in priority sectors such as construction, agriculture or nursing. However, care must be taken that these actions do not remain isolated examples, but act as forerunners for a more systemic approach to making the most of migration. By turning the migration process into a virtuous circle, benefits can be considerably greater for all parties ●

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

- Cedefop (2008) *Terminology of European Education and Training Policy*, Luxembourg
- EC Communications: Policy plan on legal migration (COM(2005) 669 final, 21.12.2005); Global approach to migration one year on: towards a comprehensive European migration policy (COM(2006) 735 final, 30.11.2006); Migration and development: some concrete orientations, (COM(2005) 390 final, 01.09.2005); Circular migration and mobility partnerships between the EU and third countries (COM (2007) 248 final, 16.05.2007); Consultation on the future "EU-2020" Strategy (COM (2009)647 final, 24.11.2009)
- ETF country reports on each of the countries involved in the survey: [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)
- ETF/World Bank (2010) *Migration and Skills: The Experience of Migrant Workers from Albania, Egypt, Moldova and Tunisia*
- Green Paper on an EU approach to managing economic migration (COM(2004) 811 final, 11.01.2005)
- <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>
- [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/vocational\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html)
- Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, New York, 2009
- Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the EU and the Republic of Moldova and Action Fiche, 05.06.2008
- *New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now*, European Commission, February 2010.
- [www.workpermit.com/news/2007-10-23/europe/european-union-blue-card-scheme-unveiled-in-strasbourg-franco-frattini.htm](http://www.workpermit.com/news/2007-10-23/europe/european-union-blue-card-scheme-unveiled-in-strasbourg-franco-frattini.htm)



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