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Engaging the private sector in Global Skills Partnerships: exploring the potential of international Business-to-Business approaches

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Engaging the private sector in Global Skills Partnerships: exploring the potential of international Business-to-Business approaches

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Abstract: Global skills partnerships (GSPs), or bilateral labour mobility/migration agreements between country of origin and destination, where the country of origin trains workers in skills needed in both countries, were initially envisioned as public-private endeavours. Various GSPs have since been implemented, albeit mostly in pilot form. These pilot programmes have encountered challenges in engaging employers and the private sector, as well as in sustaining and scaling up the number of participants. To remedy this, this paper asks how private sector actors in comparable settings are operating in terms of training and attracting workers, and if they are leading or managing structures similar to GSPs with other businesses already. The goal of this exercise is to understand how business-to-business (B2B) partnerships may be designed to function well as a GSP, such that it culminates in beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders: not only the businesses involved but also workers themselves, as well as the countries of origin and destination. The paper establishes some important factors and policy levers to keep in mind when designing or regulating a B2B partnership, for audiences ranging from EU policy makers to NGOs, training centres, and businesses considering B2B approaches to GSPs. In Section 2, the paper first highlights the potential involvement of businesses in skills-based migration schemes, pointing to the literature's limited evidence to date on business involvement. To evaluate concrete B2B setups for GSPs, Section 3 outlines a list of criteria. Section 4 conducts a SWOT analysis of various B2B setups. Finally, Section 5 presents implications and concluding observations, including for policy-making and current debates. As an initial thought piece on the advantages and drawbacks of GSPs implemented as B2B setups, this work serves as a springboard for future studies.

Keywords: Global skills partnerships; Training; Skilled migration; EU Talent Partnerships; Multinationals; Training centers; Talent development

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1. Introduction

Global skills partnerships (GSPs),[1] bilateral labour mobility or migration agreements between country of origin and destination, entail that individuals in the origin country are trained in specific skills demanded in both the origin and destination labour markets. The purported aim of these partnerships is that some trainees constitute human capital gain for the origin country, while others migrate to the destination country (e.g. Adhikari et al., 2021 and World Bank, 2023). When first proposed by Clemens (2015), GSPs were envisaged specifically as public-private partnerships, where the parameters and notably the financial contributions towards training in the origin country would be negotiated between governments and private-sector partners. According to Objective 18 of the 2018 United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, global skills partnerships are partnerships for skills development, mobility and circulation. GSPs aim to invest in skills development, facilitate the mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of workers in countries of origin and migrants in the country of destination with a view to preparing trainees for employability in the labour markets of participating states.

Conceptually, the case for GSPs appears compelling: they can respond to labour market and demographic demands in both destination and origin countries, they can cater to priorities in development and economic policy, and the gains accrued in skilled migration partly cross-subsidise skill formation in the origin country (Clemens, 2015). As a policy tool, GSPs leverage the finding that work-related opportunities for emigration can stimulate the acquisition of skills in the origin country, to an extent that outweighs the loss of skills through emigration (Mountford, 1997), which has since been substantiated empirically (e.g. Beine et al., 2008; Abarcar and Theoharides, 2024). Another major argument for GSPs is ensuring migrant worker protections and interests: GSPs are meant to be designed so that migrant worker rights are balanced with private sector aims and protected from unscrupulous interests, whether they be intermediaries or direct employers (Matuszczyk and Bojarczuk, 2024).

In the EU context, GSPs (better known as the EU Talent or Skills Partnerships) have started to move beyond the pilot stage, but remain small scale, as literature and civil society or public reporting has signalled (e.g. OECD, 2018; Rasche, 2021; De Lange, 2024). There is plenty of research attention to GSPs: an interactive dashboard of existing Global Skill Partnerships is made available by the Center for Global Development. A mapping by the Migration Policy Institute for the EU Horizon Project "Global Strategy for Skills" (GS4S) offers a typology of mobility schemes and partnerships (MPI working paper forthcoming). However, the documented examples of GSPs also

[1] We are using "Global skills partnerships" in a general sense. We are not specifically referring to the Global Skills Partnerships model launched at the Global Compact on Migration December 2018 conference, or any pre-existing partnership initiatives in the EU context (i.e., pilot initiatives under the Mobility Partnership Facility MPF, or the European Trust Fund for Africa's THAMM) (Hooper 2018; Ioannides et al., 2024). This examination is, however, meant to inform the current EU Commission initiative Talent Partnership underway and detailed in the later section on EU law and policy trends (Ioannides et al., 2024).

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highlight substantial limitations in practice: GSPs are difficult to bring to scale. In particular, it remains difficult to engage the private sector in these programmes, often led by government (e.g. public employment services or development agencies) or NGOs (Stefanescu, 2020; WEF, 2017). Enfranchising the businesses that might train and recruit migrant workers is central to scaling up GSPs, reaching larger numbers and bringing down the costs per person placed (e.g. EMN, 2022; Siegel and van der Vorst, 2013; Hooper and Sohst, 2024). Apart from funding and sustainability, other factors impeding GSP success include: timelines, as initially these arrangements are time intensive without immediate results; scale, in terms of usually starting small; complexity, in the number of committed stakeholders required; and political constraints (Postel, 2022). Literature and case studies reviewing GSPs to date repeatedly highlight the need for a scalable organisational/legal format, emphasizing the necessity of a consistent regulatory component (e.g. Panizzon and Jurt, 2024; Sauer, 2023).

If GSPs run by public or NGO actors struggle to attract employers, the question arises what employers themselves can do and are already doing to train and attract workers if operating in a global setting. Do they lead and set up or negotiate GSPs – or similar structures – with other businesses? After all, this kind of B2B interaction would be familiar to most potential employers. The public and private sector alike could draw lessons from the B2B formats for creating GSP-like structures, suitable for accommodating specific skills needs in particular sectors and setting parameters in ways that make sense for employers. At the same time, the interests of employers can differ significantly from the interests of migrant workers who participate in the partnership, as well as the interests of policy makers and other stakeholders – including the wider public – in origin and destination countries. This implies the need for a regulatory framework of potential B2B partnerships that reflects the interests of various stakeholders and ensures that key objectives of GSPs are met. In a B2B scenario, public actors (and possibly NGOs) could content themselves with the role of regulators while using the dynamism and the insider knowledge of businesses to create, run and grow GSPs within the regulatory framework.

This paper seeks to explore how B2B partnerships may be designed to function well, such that the behaviour of stakeholders (employers, migrants, training providers, intermediaries, public administration and possibly NGOs) results in beneficial outcomes for all those involved, so considering the country of origin and destination interests, as well as workers' and business interests. We define business here as ranging from multinational enterprises (MNEs) to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local entrepreneurs, also including training institutes that are for-profit or privately owned. With stakeholders' behaviour responding to regulation, a regulatory framework for B2B partnerships can be deduced that would foster well-functioning designs. The paper aims to draw lessons from existing designs that provide meaningful incentives for all sides to participate, moving beyond 'pilot' programmes which could simply be tokenistic.

In doing so, the aim of this paper is to highlight some important factors and policy levers to keep in mind when designing or regulating a B2B partnership. Some especially promising designs and associated regulatory requirements can serve as valuable input for EU policy makers, NGOs, training centres, as well as businesses who are considering B2B approaches to GSPs, in order to

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better engage the potential benefits of GSPs. Our paper also aims to provide input for future studies – performed within the GS4S project as well as beyond – into the pros and cons of GSPs.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 contrasts the potential involvement of businesses in skills-based migration schemes with limited evidence on business involvement thus far. To evaluate concrete B2B setups for GSPs, Section 3 draws up a list of criteria. A SWOT analysis of various B2B setups is performed in Section 4. Implications for policy-making and debates are offered in Section 5.

2. Literature on the role of business in policies and practices related to GSPs

This section considers literature on the role for business in the making of supranational/international labour migration and GSP initiatives and on the potential 'triple win' effects. While there is also extensive research literature on employers in national labour migration policy-making (e.g. Wright, 2017; Cerna, 2016), covering it is beyond the scope of this paper.

The private sector is considered a stakeholder in United Nations (UN) work on migration. The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration promotes a "whole-of-society approach", meaning that broad multi-stakeholder partnerships are to address migration in all its dimensions (UN General Assembly, 2018). The Global Compact advocates for private sector involvement in pre-departure training (objective 3(e)), optimizing skills-matching and analysis of labour market (objective 5, para. 21(c) and (e)). It calls on employers, recruiters, subcontractors and suppliers to build partnerships that promote conditions for decent work and enhance supply chain transparency (objective 6, 22(e)). To this end, the Compact explicitly promotes GSPs that "strengthen training capacities of national authorities and relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions, and foster skills development of workers in countries of origin and migrants in countries of destination with a view to preparing trainees for employability in the labour markets of all participating countries" (objective 18, 34(e)). Interestingly, the Global Compact refers to the Business Mechanism developed in the context of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (UN General Assembly, 2018). This mechanism aims to promote inter-institutional networks and collaborative programmes between the private sector and educational institutions. Although the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) have jointly called for the inclusion of business in decisions on labour mobility policies and regulations, the visibility of the Business Mechanism remains limited (WEF, 2017).

The business case for the private sector to engage in migration policy is clear (WEF, 2017). These interests revolve around lifting practical barriers to accessing talent and skills, such as expediting immigration procedures (Belmonte et al., 2019), and the recognition of qualifications and skills (WEF, 2017; BusinessEurope, 2024). In most high-income countries, the influence of employers in national policy-making on labour migration is key, as **most labour migration programmes start with an employer lobbying** government for more work permits for migrants (Menz, 2009). On the

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making of EU labour migration policies, specifically the EU Blue Card Directive 2021/1883, see for instance law firm and business representative Fragomen (Antoons and Ghimis, 2021).

With reference to the Intra-Corporate Transfer Directive, Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik (2023) explains how the European Commission framed the Directive "as a matter of business needs, international obligations and competitiveness rather than labour migration," creating an environment of what she calls '**quiet politics**'. The practice of quiet politics might also explain the limited research and grey literature on business activities and lobbying in some countries, and especially at the level of supra-national /EU policy-making.

Besides direct lobbying, another way businesses exert influence over migration policy is through their **location decisions**. According to Kunczer et al. (2019), low acceptance of immigrants hampers companies, and policymakers could educate the local communities about the potential benefits of immigration for the local economy, i.e., such politician-policymakers could position themselves as in favor of supporting internationalization and more economic activity. Firms base location decisions, to establish or to leave, on the local policy approach taken. Businesses can use this choice model of 'voice or exit' to influence immigration policies.

In recent years, the European Commissions' **public consultation process has offered more open politics**. In the consultation on the future of EU legal migration, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the EU should introduce rules allowing the admission of third-country workers without a concrete job offer. Also, permitting them to search for a job subject to certain conditions, like the so called 'expression of interest' system used by Australia, Canada and New Zealand, was lauded. According to the consultation report, 60% or 135 responses agreed on this system, and this majority group included company/business organisations, business associations and NGOs (European Commission, 2020). On the topic of the subsequently developed EU Talent Pool (COM(2023) 716) SMEUnited brought forward a position paper and engaged with EP shadow rapporteurs. They welcome the EU Talent Pool and call for its swift implementation to support SME employers to recruit skilled staff in the current labour and skills shortages context. Moreover, and relevant for GSPs, is the call from SMEunited for including apprenticeship offers in the EU Talent Pool (SMEUnited, 2024). BusinessEurope appeared less enthusiastic of an EU 'expression of interest' tool, stressing "the Talent Pool ensures that Member States retain control over the number of admissions and enables them to further utilise EU migration policy in a way that complements other national policies and initiatives" (BusinessEurope, 2024). On the Talent Partnerships, BusinessEurope emphasized the need to "consult with employers that have participated in the Talent Partnerships initiative in order to devise the pass and template in a way that not only sufficiently presents the skills and qualifications obtained, but which does so in a way that is easily understandable for other employers" (Ibid., p. 7). There is nothing tacit about this call from BusinessEurope to consider business interests in EU labour migration policy making.

However, the existing knowledge on the role of business in the **design of B2B formats** of GSPs appears limited. One reason could be that relatively few have so far been set up (see MPI working

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paper forthcoming), and where they have been set up, they may often have remained under the radar of researchers and policy experts, perhaps because they are not accompanied by significant publicity, advocacy or (published) project reports of labelled as such. Mobility schemes as part of trade agreements may be a good example of little-known yet effective designs produced in a B2B setting, within a carefully defined regulatory framework (Lavenex et al., 2023).

According to the literature, the private sector maintains a broad and varied scope of **cooperation with governments, donors and international organisations** (Bisong and Knoll, 2020). International organisations and philanthropic actors have involved the private sector in development initiatives for two decades now, including IOM discussions with the private sector as to partnerships beginning in 2005, The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) including the private sector in its GFMD Business Mechanism, and the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Mobility bringing together governments and private sector actors for development (IOM, 2005; GFMD, 2016; WEF, 2017). Cooperation between the private sector and development actors often involves a combination of international development donor organisations, government or public cooperation or incentives and the private sector actor; the public sector is tasked with to the extent such private sector actors should be incentivized and how to maintain equal treatment and avoid market distortion in relation to other private sector actors that do not engage in development initiatives (Bisong and Knoll, 2020).

Another body of literature addresses how business engages with **legal categories of mobility.** At least three alternative legal categories bear relevance to our investigation. First, the "complementary pathway" scheme for international protection beneficiaries surfaces; in recent years, this has come to mean migration channels for international protection beneficiaries not originally designed as international protection, but serving a resettlement purpose (Wagner and Katsiaficas, 2021). An example of the forefront of the most developed labour mobility scheme for this is Talent Beyond Borders, which engages the private sector in connecting talents and skills of refugees in host countries like Jordan or Lebanon with employers in Western countries via a "Talent Catalogue" (Ibid). Secondly, in the EU context, intra-EU posting of third-country national migrant workers is increasingly flagged as a business strategy to address labour shortages. This recruitment model takes away the business incentive to participate in more time-consuming talent or skills partnerships that lack migration facilitating procedures (Lens et al., 2022). Intra-EU posting in the way it operates today, driven by cutting costs and quick wins and not by training people for the benefit of society (country of origin or the country of destination), can hardly be labelled a GSP. Thirdly, another specific legal category worth mentioning is mobility for the purpose of studies or training, which offer different opportunities for skills partnerships. Research shows that for business, the distinction between these legal categories (study, training, full employment) does not always match the design of the B2B partnership, which can lead to presumptions of irregular employment or abuse of migrant students and trainees (De Lange, 2015), possibly deterring business from GSP using vague classifications.

Yet another body of literature investigates **how employers address skills shortages** and whether recruitment from abroad is an option at all (e.g. Ruhs and Anderson 2010). Perhaps it has been too

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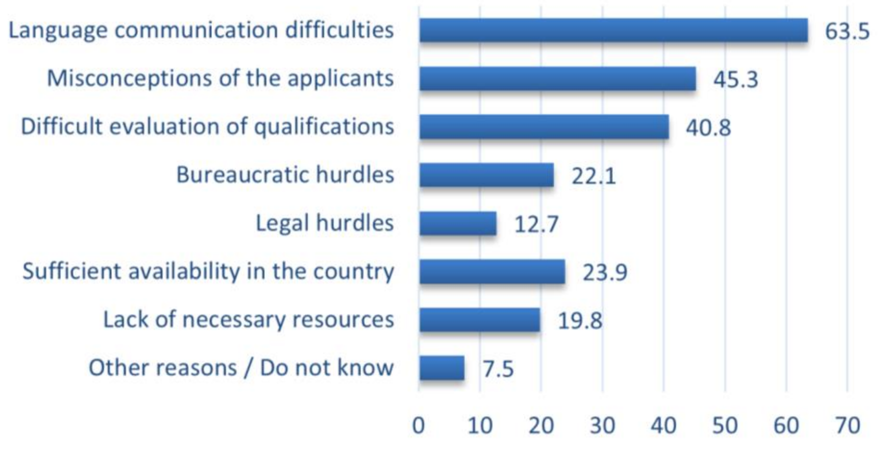
often assumed that employers would readily engage in opportunities for recruiting skilled migrants. Evidence like in Figure 1 on wide-spread issues that employers encounter, which might prevent them from international recruitment altogether, has mostly only emerged recently. Highlighting much the same issues as in Figure 1, Zimmermann (2024) reported that only 6% of firms in Germany actively recruit skilled migrants from abroad, while 36% express a demand for skilled workers but do not engage in recruitment from abroad. Readiness to recruit from abroad appears to increase with firm size, and in particular multi-national enterprises (MNEs) might find this relatively easy, given their experience with cross-border activities and the economies of scale in large recruitment drives. However, the vast majority of employers in EU countries are SMEs and in their case, some issues in Figure 1 might represent high, even insurmountable hurdles.

Figure 1, Panel A. Problems businesses encounter when recruiting from abroad (in %)

Figure 1, Panel B. Reasons given by businesses for not recruiting from abroad (in %)



Note: Results are based on a survey of 7,501 firms in Germany, here translated by the authors. Source: Bertelsmannstiftung (2024), "Fachkräfteengpässe und Zuwanderung aus Unternehmenssicht in Deutschland 2024: Die Bedarfe bleiben hoch", Policy Brief.

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As highlighted in the introduction and critiqued extensively in the literature, especially “triple win” schemes – which aim to benefit migrants, destination countries and countries of origin - can fall prey to destination country interests, and migrant worker rights, livelihood and wellbeing can be negatively impacted by such arrangements (Wickramasekara, 2011; De Lange, 2024). One of the means to supposedly achieve a triple win is if circular migration schemes are used, meaning either that people come temporarily only, or can come and go repeatedly. This allows destination countries to avoid social and economic costs of the workers’ residence; i.e., they are designed so that migrant workers do not “burden” the welfare state of destination (Achermann et al., 2024). The consultancy firm BCG advocates for circularity, arguing for more permits but only for temporary stays as they believe this to be politically more feasible (BCG, 2023). Aspects of GSPs that have met with criticisms are the power asymmetries underlying globalisation inherently impeding fair representation in determining labour migration arrangements both nationally and internationally, particularly for countries from the Global South and migrant workers themselves (Mieres and Kagan, 2022).

Moreover, critical scholarship on GSPs, or labour migration schemes more generally, posits that to date, given lack of systematic evaluations and sufficiently comprehensive and rigorous qualitative or quantitative research, it is difficult to demonstrate the extent to which “triple win” occurs; it particularly emphasizes how migrant interests might be trumped by the interests of host or origin countries (Schneider, 2023). The Philippines might be the only origin country for which a significant overall benefit is well-documented (Abacar and Theoharides, 2024; World Bank, 2023). At the same time, even if anecdotal, some smaller, evidence-based qualitative studies with stakeholder views boast promise these schemes can reap positive benefits for destination country, origin country and migrant worker alike. One example includes the stakeholder interviews conducted by Sauer (2023), involved in transnational skills partnerships between destination Germany and origin countries Georgia, Kosovo[2] and Vietnam. Origin country stakeholders viewed some positive, sustainable aspects of partnerships.

Another example includes the successful Talent Partnership “Digital Explorers” (Ivanović, Boland and De Lange, 2024). It was initiated by the NGO OSMOS, rather than a government in pursuit of its own (international) development agenda, although it has since received ICMPD funding and onboarded government agencies (Ibid). Initially, in 2019, it provided around 15 Nigerian tech talents (out of the pool of 1400) the opportunity to spend a year in Lithuania working for local companies, gaining skills, and advancing their careers. In 2020-2021, a cohort of 15 women Nigerian talents participated in the female track, with several (albeit not the majority) of applicants staying with the destination companies. The ongoing success of Digital Explorers has even resulted in a Lithuanian company opening a local branch in Africa (Ibid). Digital Explorers is now undergoing its second iteration, expanding to include opportunities for 150 Nigerian, Kenyan and Armenian ICT talents in both local and Baltic ICT companies (Ibid). Still, while there are arguments to be made for cases in which interests align, the few examples of this and the small scope of successful schemes reemphasise the need for a scalable organisational and legal format

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[2] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

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for future, upscaled potential. Private sector and B2B examples surface as a natural consideration when attempting to achieve legal organisation and scalability.

Overall, GSPs may have significant potential, even if realising this potential likely depends strongly on the chosen design. In the words of Clemens (2015), such partnerships could "take a dual economic opportunity and turn it into an engine of human capital creation for both origin countries and destination countries," with the added benefit that training in the origin country is normally far less costly than in the destination country. Earlier assessments of temporary labour migration programmes suggest that also GSPs can result in large benefits for migrants, their families and their employers in the destination country (Gibson et al., 2013; Ruhs, 2006). According to EMN (2022), skills mobility partnerships have potential not only as bilateral but also as multilateral programmes at the EU level, for example, provided they are designed and implemented well. As GSPs are often limited to specific occupations or migration corridors, they can also represent a trial phase ahead of more wide-ranging changes in labour migration policy (Hooper, 2021). In the following sections, this paper assesses how specific B2B setups can contribute to realising the potential of GSPs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Criteria used in the assessment

Clearly, to be more successful, novel B2B designs for skills partnerships need to learn from the limitations and challenges of the existing 'conventional' pilot programmes. Most importantly, B2B designs need to generate meaningful benefits and incentives for all actors involved and affected by such new programmes. This includes the need to establish a clear value added of 'cooperative partnership' approach compared to unilateral policy-making and initiatives on labour mobility. In particular, as high-income destination countries are typically the more powerful party in such partnerships, successful B2B skills partnership designs need to create clear benefits for businesses in destination countries that cannot be achieved through, for example, more aggressive lobbying of their own national governments to issue more work permits to fill particular labour and/or skills shortages. Crucially, as labour mobility and migration have become highly politicised issues across many countries around the world, it also needs to be clear why and how B2B skills partnership designs would benefit other stakeholders including local workers and the wider public in destination and origin countries.

Based on this general approach and starting point, we identify and apply the following criteria for assessing the effectiveness of potential setups for global skills partnerships:

A. ***Gain for potential migrants.*** Whether or not potential migrants have an incentive to participate in a GSP is perhaps less obvious than often assumed. Participants can gain from the training they receive and from opportunities to earn higher wages and/or enjoy better working conditions – which would often be when they migrate, but can also be true when remaining at origin. Overall, the expected gain for potential migrants needs to be

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sufficiently high, so that it makes sense to participate given the information at the time, despite uncertainty at that point about the ultimate outcome of participation. The training enters this calculation not only as gateway to future benefits but also as an up-front cost that migrants might or might not be able to afford, in terms of their current ability to pay for additional outlays or in terms of the consequences of delaying earnings. In order to structurally enable potential migrants to safeguard their interests even in unforeseen scenarios, a GSP could involve them at the design stage and elicit their feedback during the implementation (Bauböck and Ruhs, 2022). To this end, some dedicated forum can be created where migrants' voices are heard, although real representation of migrants may be hard to achieve (Mieres and Kagan, 2023).

B. ***Gain for employers.*** Employers in destination countries – and indirectly also the destination countries – can gain when graduates of the training occupy open positions that are otherwise hard to fill, limiting the employer's ability to meet demand (possibly in functions that are essential for society) and to seize opportunities for growth or modernisation. More readily available skilled labour can unlock investment, entrepreneurship, and complementary recruitment of other workers, for example. To the extent that the training graduates do not need to be paid as much as (possibly scarce) workers on the local labour market, employers also gain from relatively cheap labour. On the other hand, employers may often avoid participation when it is unclear whether the gain still outweighs the costs for training and recruitment. Their participation therefore does not simply follow from a certain structural setup but depends on concrete parameters (*inter alia*, prices, delays, obligations). In practice, only a certain *selection* of employers (in destination and origin countries) might have the capabilities to initiate, successfully operate or merely participate in GSPs. An important fault line lies between small and medium-sized enterprises on the one hand, and large firms on the other. However, the divide might also be introduced through explicit or implicit conditions on firms' prior experience, e.g. with international recruitment, cross-border business collaboration, and navigating the legal and institutional framework in a particular country of destination or origin.

C. ***Gain for country of origin.*** Countries of origin can gain from GSPs in several ways, but most are arguably more uncertain than the gains for migrants and employers (as well as destination countries). Skilled graduates of the training can be an important gain – if at least some graduates do not emigrate and instead apply their skills in the country of origin. Skilled emigrants who return after some time abroad may be especially valuable as experts and entrepreneurs – if they return, and not just to retire. Countries of origin can otherwise gain from emigrants' remittances and investments, from rising educational ambitions, slightly reduced unemployment, tax revenue from training centres, and stronger economic links with destination countries. Skill levels in the origin country could rise with skilled returnees, the transfer of know-how, and spill-over effects for local workers. At the same time, there is a risk of losing ambitious, sometimes already skilled individuals who might have created value for the society and the economy of their country of origin, had they not participated in the GSP. Without an overall gain for the country of origin, its

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political leadership and authorities may be indifferent or outright obstructive towards GSPs, which can devaluate any investments in them. Given such "political risk", stakeholders in GSPs could decide against investing in the first place.

D. ***Gain for country of destination***. A gain for employers in the destination country is not necessarily the same as a gain for the country as a whole or for its citizens. Whether or not the GSP responds to skills shortages that are genuinely hard or impossible to fill with local workers, at last in the short run, may be important for this distinction. There are no universal definitions of "skills" and "shortages", and the admission of more migrant workers is often not the only possible response to a perceived skills shortage (see e.g. Ruhs and Anderson, 2010). In principle, potential responses could also include: raising wages, improving working conditions; training of local workers; offshoring and greater mechanisation/ digitalisation of processes of production and service provision. In many cases, some of these options may not apply or be realistic, but the fundamental point remains that immigration is often not the only possible response to a perceived skill shortage. Whether it is the most desirable response is an inherently normative question that depends on how competing interests are evaluated and balanced. Taking a broader perspective, one needs to consider who exactly are the winners and losers of a GSP, and whether the GSP is reasonably transparent and accountable to democratic oversight. Positive effects for the destination country can include fiscal gains through higher tax returns, stimuli for innovation and patents, and/or the resilience of essential sectors such as healthcare (see e.g. Anderson et al., 2021). On the other hand, the domestic supply of skills and incentives for skills acquisition might be affected – businesses might shift significant training capacities abroad, with adverse consequences for some local workers. There is also a risk that GSPs are used for wage dumping, and attempts to counter this through regulation or monitoring could create direct and indirect costs. The larger point here is that the "gains" from a B2B skills partnership for the destination country should not only be considered in terms of economic efficiency effects but also in terms of relevant distributional consequences and any policy priorities the destination country government may have in this regard.

E. ***Value of training***. Can one expect that the training element of the GSP builds real skills that will open up new opportunities for training participants and will likely be applied in practice? With its emphasis on skills, a GSP should include a training element that does not merely serve as selection mechanism, a formality to go through, or a way of extracting fees from potential migrants. The case where the training certifies existing but informal skills may be a borderline case, possibly acceptable even though skills are only validated, not created. A training element without inherent value would not only waste the time of potential migrants and the employers waiting for the graduates. It would also amount to a loss of potential benefits from improved skills, in principle for all stakeholders involved in a GSP. Migrants might discover upon arrival that they have not learnt the skills their new employers expect, which could lead to major disappointments on both sides and jeopardise the GSP. In this context, the difficult issue arises of country-specific qualifications that are a precondition for working in a certain kind of job, notably licenses

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in healthcare, long-term care, transport and construction. Ideally, training in such fields leads to a formal qualification that is recognised in both the country of origin and destination. Alternatively, it is recognised as equivalent after a quick procedure.

F. ***Governance structures and perverse incentives.*** Demand for legal migration opportunities to the EU may be high, and likewise for graduates of certain trainings. Stakeholders involved in GSPs de facto become gatekeepers who decide about participation, graduation, migration and recruitment. Given the potential gains, virtually all parties involved may be willing to pay substantial amounts to ensure they succeed in a GSP, which in turn creates incentives to make success conditional on such payments. Such malpractice is already well-known from some recruitment agencies who exploit migrants (see citations in Section 4). Even without intermediaries, this could similarly happen in a GSP, also targeting employers or training providers. Next, it is conceivable that shell companies are created to formally meet the conditions for a B2B setup while not adhering to the spirit of GSPs, possibly turning it into a mere gateway for entry to the EU. GSPs could also be abused as a source of cheap labour, to avoid paying decent wages. There are many examples of abuses and consequent politicisations of different types of immigration programmes including labour mobility schemes where businesses are central players, such as in intra-company transfer programmes (see, for example, Migration Advisory Committee 2021; Department of Homeland Security 2013). In any case, scandals resulting from the abuse of GSPs could undermine their political support. Therefore, B2B setups of GSPs should not be easy to abuse by anyone involved. Where risks are identified, the prospects for addressing them effectively through regulation need to be considered. If stakeholders in the GSP collectively learn from its implementation, design flaws can be fixed over time. Ex ante, governance structures of GSPs can impose conditions on intermediaries and training providers, but this may have implications for accessibility. While start-ups for example could be best positioned to take up new opportunities for creating GSPs, practical or regulatory requirements (such as prior cross-border activities or "good standing") might render their participation especially unlikely.

3.2. SWOT analysis

Guided by these criteria, the paper carries out a **SWOT analysis** (on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for each potential B2B setup in focus. SWOT analysis is a tool for making choices of a strategic nature, very often but not only in a business context. For example, firms use SWOT analysis to decide on entering a new market, clarify how they differ from competitors, or manage risks. On this background, SWOT analysis can help evaluate potential B2B setups in a structured way, understand their differences and lead to a strategic choice among options. The matrix of a SWOT analysis (see below) collects and visualises the key findings for every setup considered. Its four panels – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (hence SWOT) – go some way towards ensuring a holistic assessment of each setup. The fact that findings for every setup are ultimately classified in these four dimensions introduces a certain comparability across setups and therefore facilitates identifying the most promising setups. The

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dimensions for opportunities and threats can similarly help identify the need and scope for regulation.

In addition, applying SWOT analysis here can mimic to some extent how businesses themselves might approach opportunities to engaging in a GSP, which represents an effort in terms of methodology to avoid the pitfall of lacking employer interest in GSPs. In fact, as SWOT analyses are widely used in business contexts, the vast majority of managers is likely familiar with them, which ideally means that they can relate to the discussion and conclusions in this paper. More generally, given the explicitly interdisciplinary aim of the paper to draw on several strands of literature that have hardly been considered in this context before, the method needs to fit the challenge, but remain easily accessible.

To implement the SWOT analysis, we created an initial literature review and revised the materials before conducting a series of five, hour-long discussion sessions in which we applied the criteria above to each setup, in a theoretical brainstorming exercise. Any points arising in these discussions were then followed up by further literature review or investigation into grey literature. In parallel, discussions were conducted with various researchers and practitioners whose work has been closely related to GSPs or the practical role of business in labour migration (see acknowledgements), to gather insights and discuss hypotheses for the SWOT analysis.

4. Assessment of setups for GSPs

As a kind of benchmark, this section first provides a discussion of the prevailing GSP setup, the Public-Private Partnership (PPP), including a cursory SWOT analysis that uses the evaluation criteria identified in Section 3. Next, we perform such a SWOT analysis of three generic B2B setups: a) Joint ventures (employers from destination and origin countries teaming up); b) In-house solutions (training centre as subsidiary, intra-corporate trainees); c) Setups with intermediaries & training providers (which could be the same firm). While several other setups could also be relevant here, these three setups are inspired by widely used practices in international business contexts. In boxes, we add related real-world examples that illustrate at least some key features of these B2B setups.

4.1.The Public-Private Partnership setup

4.1.1. Strengths and weaknesses of GSPs in the PPP setup

Existing GSPs predominantly take the form of the PPP setup, notwithstanding a wide variety of specific setups in this framework. In a basic setup, the public stakeholder or an NGO operates the GSP, while employers are meant to be clients or beneficiaries of this service. Running the training in the origin country may involve the public stakeholder, an NGO, employers, or all of these. Participants are selected among applicants in the country of origin. After the training, they either move abroad to work for one of the employers involved in the GSP, or they enter the labour market

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of the origin country. As part of the GSP, those who migrated might eventually have to return. Either way, the GSP is meant to also increase the supply of skilled workers in the origin country.

In the EU context, GSPs (better known as EU Talent and Skills Partnerships) have started to move beyond the pilot stage, but remain small, as literature and civil society or public reporting has signalled (e.g. OECD, 2018; Rasche, 2021; De Lange, 2024). In light of policy priorities and European labour market needs, the European Commission soft launched Talent Partnerships in June 2021, framing the scheme as a tool for attracting talent to Europe (Hooper, 2021). The Commission followed up with a Skills and Talent Mobility Package (COM 2023, 715) which includes a Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals (COM EU 2023/7700) and an Action plan to tackle skills shortages under the European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2024a). **EU Talent Partnerships** aim to address skills shortages in the EU and to strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships on migration with third countries. According to the European Commission, Talent Partnerships should become a key part of the EU's relations with partner countries when it comes to managing migration together (European Commission, 2021b). They aim to match the skills of workers from countries outside of the EU with the labour market needs inside the EU. Prior to the actual EU Talent Partnerships, **pilot projects** ICMPD-administered and EU funded were set up to test modalities of cooperation in the area of legal – and in particular labour – migration between the EU and selected countries. Moreover, under its Pact for Skills the European Commission “aims to mobilise employers, education and training providers, and public bodies to create upskilling and reskilling opportunities necessary for their long-term economic success” (European Commission, 2022, p.2).

It must be noted that EU Talent or Skills Partnerships per se do not facilitate legal migration, existing migration policies need to be engaged in case of migration or mobility. Also, EU Talent and Skills Partnerships do not explicitly address policy coherence for development, an EU constitutional obligation laid down in the Article 208(1) of the Treaty of Functioning of the EU (EPRS 2024). A recurring challenge with GSPs is how to ensure the (continued) participation of employers despite substantial costs and sometimes extended waiting times. The recast Single Permit Directive 2024/1223/EU may expedite procedures somewhat, but the recognition of qualifications for instance, remains a national procedure. The 2023 European Commission recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals mentioned above is soft law and cannot enforce improved procedures in that domain.

Strengths. GSPs in a PPP setup can be designed very much along the lines of policy goals while still drawing on private sector expertise and efficiency (however, there is no guarantee that the policy goals are reached). Various NGOs are eager to operate such programmes, investing significant work and using their local contacts. They can overcome resource constraints and help leverage the capabilities and resources of private partners. A broader scope of private actor participation in PPPs can alleviate public funding pressures and provide access to technologies, goods, and services of a higher quality and at potentially lower cost, thus enabling value creation through public–private collaboration (Rangan et al., 2006). EU and national governments can also partner with international development organisations, philanthropic organisations and other

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private actors in varied examples, sometimes with a particular focus including youth unemployment or women empowerment. The THAMM project, which includes targeting youth in North Africa and the participation of women, is a case in point (see Example 1). THAMM and a pilot project by Cedefop (see Example 2) are highlighted here as illustrations, and a more comprehensive list can be found in Hooper and Sohst (2024).

Example 1. The EU-funded THAMM project, investing in local skills education and training

The project "Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa (THAMM)", co-funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) and German and Belgian authorities, alongside collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) began in 2019 (Center for Global Development, 2021). It was designed as a regional program to support partner institutions in North Africa (Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) in creating policies and mechanisms for safe and regular labour migration and mobility, as well as to encourage cooperation and regional exchange between relevant stakeholders in the region. According to descriptive policy documents, initially sectors including electronics and electricity, hospitality and tourism, industrial technical professions were to be targeted (Center for Global Development, 2021). Part of the program entails pilot mobility schemes for youth in the North African countries interested in dual-track vocational training in Germany, or for skilled workers looking for employment in Germany and Belgium (Ibid). The pilot mobility partnership with Belgium and its development agency Enabel, THAMM-Enabel, recently completed in 2024 (Hooper and Sohst, 2024). It initially faced challenges in garnering private sector interest, and required substantial efforts in gaining the cooperation of stakeholders like the Office for Vocational Training and Employment Promotion in Morocco and the public employment service in Belgium's Wallonia region (Ibid.). As of late 2023, original cohorts of Tunisian and Moroccan workers had completed their trainings and the employer matching face had begun; the project evaluation is forthcoming in 2025 (Ibid; Cota, 2024). At its start, the goal for the overall THAMM initiative was 400 beneficiaries (Center for Global Development, 2021). The THAMM project in Germany has since been succeeded by the THAMM plus project.

The presence of a public actor in the PPP setup implies that the programme is eligible as a GSP, which may lead to significant preferential treatment in migration procedures (such as exemptions from labour market tests). For employers, this can practically eliminate the risk of problems with legal requirements for labour migration. The sharing of costs and risks between the public and private partners similarly reduces the barrier of entry for employers. Public or NGO involvement might imply a comparatively strong commitment to safeguarding the interests of migrants, the origin country, and the public of the destination country. Transparency, democratic accountability, and equality of access are likely higher than if public actors were not involved. Overall, a PPP could potentially provide a comparatively stable and more long-term environment for a GSP, which would incentivise investment of financial resources, time or efforts from all stakeholders.

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Weaknesses. The very fact that stakeholders from the public/not-for-profit sector need to partner with the private sector also implies important weaknesses. For the partnership to work, stakeholders from potentially quite different work cultures need to collaborate effectively, and coordinating this collaboration requires patient management of a multi-stakeholder process (Stefanescu, 2020). As the success of the GSP partly depends on businesses actively contributing their resources and expertise, for example with regards to local labour demand, management approaches from public stakeholders must not become overbearing or strongly politically driven, which can easily alienate private-sector stakeholders (Quélin et al., 2019). These challenges are further complicated by the complexity of GSPs, perhaps especially in the PPP setup, as various public and private actors are involved at different levels while crucial information such as data on local shortages may be lacking (Rasche, 2021).

Example 2. Cedefop pilot project on intra-EU skills-based mobility of adult refugees

Cedefop is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. In 2022 it concluded a pilot project that offered intra-EU labour mobility opportunities to refugees admitted in Greece to move legally to Portugal based on their skills/qualifications and recipient labour market needs. This initiative had the "potential to provide beneficiaries with access to a livelihood, ease migratory pressures for countries at the EU external borders and satisfy labour market demands in participating EU countries." Cedefop's pilot project revealed the importance of networks, political will, and the necessity to further engage employers in national migration and integration strategies. Employers were hesitant to participate because of the "lack of documentation (particularly for high-skilled workers) and the difficulty in anticipating demand for low-skilled positions were two additional problems raised by employers" (Craescu and Wagner, 2022, p.7). The report found business has a high demand for IT professionals with specific training (e.g. a Bachelor degree in computer science) or practical experience, and advanced knowledge of English or proficiency in the Portuguese language was mandatory. However, the lack of qualifications or experience was less of a problem for lower or mid-level jobs whenever in-house training could be provided (Ibid., p. 23). Moreover, the length of the transfer process, which could take up to 2 months, was considered too long as some companies would need candidates to be available immediately (Ibid., p. 21).

When public/not-for-profit actors are involved, the design and operation of a GSP might pursue a range of aims, which possibly compete or simply become too many, undermining the core mission. For example, public stakeholders in the destination country might view a GSP primarily as a tool for development aid, or might have ulterior motives, including: improving diplomatic relations with the country of origin, facilitating mobility and exchange between countries, fostering economic cooperation, and opening legal pathways as a method to reduce irregular flows and better govern migration (Beirens et al. 2019; Newland and Riester 2018; Schneider, 2023; De Lange, 2024). If so, the mere existence of the GSP might matter to some public stakeholders, much more than the efficient operation of the GSP. Public stakeholders may even be prepared to incur financial losses as long as the GSP serves a function for ulterior motives, while businesses would often be either unwilling or unable to incur such losses.

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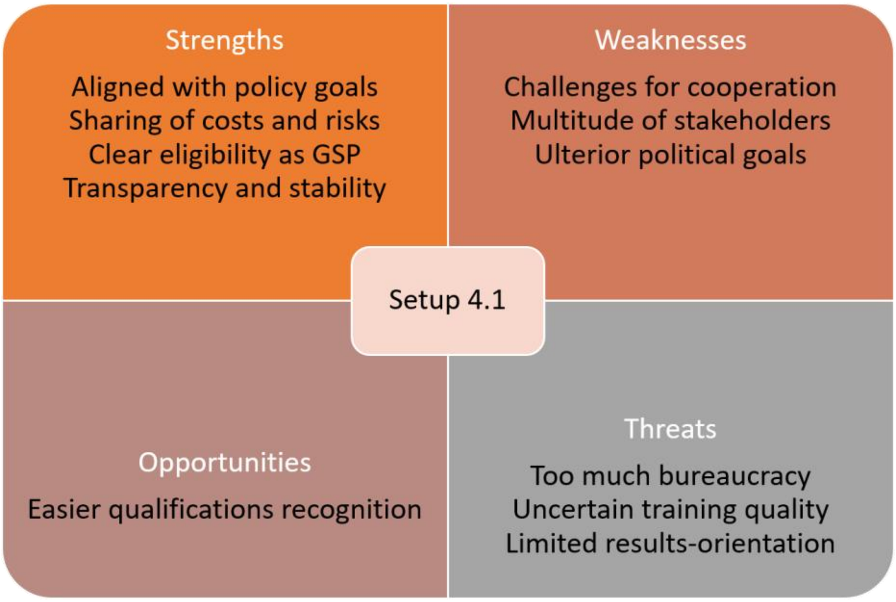
4.1.2. Opportunities and threats of GSPs in the PPP setup

Opportunities. Given the involvement of public stakeholders, a GSP based on a PPP might potentially enjoy easier access to qualifications recognition procedures. For example, the participants in the GSP could benefit from some "recognition partnership", allowing the participant to enter the destination country and start working, with the decision on qualifications recognition taken only ex post (Migration Partnership Facility, 2024). The same might hold for other innovations in migration policy that first arrive in labour migration programmes considered to be especially trustworthy.

Figure 2. SWOT Analysis for a basic PPP setup



Threats. Several threats relate to the capacity of public/not-for-profit stakeholders, in either the destination or the origin country, to perform various functions in a GSP, many of which may have little to do with their own work or training. As pointed out by the World Bank (2020), the public sector often lacks the management capacity to run GSPs through private-sector service providers or to implement results-based contracting, for example. Instead, public stakeholders might, perhaps unwittingly, create structures that result in extensive bureaucracy for employers. With regards to training, McKenzie and Carranza (2024) highlight that public-sector training agencies may focus on the number of participants trained, rather than actual training quality and practical applicability.

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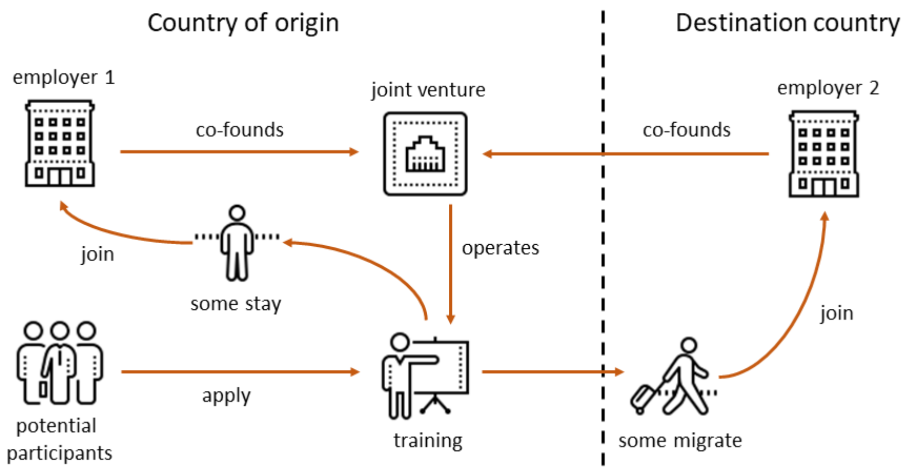
4.2. Joint ventures (employers from destination and origin countries teaming up)

4.2.1. Strengths and weaknesses of a basic setup

In contrast to the PPP setup above, Figure 3 introduces one possible B2B setup of a GSP. An employer from a destination country teams up with an employer from the origin country and they operate a training centre as a joint venture. Either side of the joint venture could also consist of several employers, but intermediaries are not necessarily involved here. Participants in the training are selected among applicants in the country of origin. Following the training, some graduates take up positions with the employer(s) in the destination country while others take up positions with the employer(s) in the country of origin. While we are not aware of an existing GSP in this setup, notably involving a joint venture, key features of this setup are illustrated by Examples 3 and 4.

Figure 3. A basic B2B setup involving a joint venture



Strengths. The flexibility in negotiating a joint venture would allow employers to design the GSPs to fit their particular line of business, desired qualifications and staffing needs. As a result, this setup seems much less likely than public-private partnerships to encounter problems with employer engagement. When the needs of employers change, a joint venture may be re-negotiated, allowing this GSP to adapt adequately and relatively quickly. Such a setup could therefore be advantageous in the context of changing labour market demands and the need for flexible or open schemes according to dynamic sectors. This inherent flexibility reduces the risk that the joint venture could soon become irrelevant, which in turn increases employers' willingness to invest in a joint venture and its training centre, covering various upfront costs and accepting high initial costs per training participant.

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Example 3. Training in civil aviation

International joint ventures for the purpose of training appear to be common in the aviation industry. Before pilots are cleared to fly a specific aircraft, they need to undergo some additional training for this type of aircraft, or for new features of a type they are in principle familiar with. Such training is therefore closely related to the technology of aircraft manufacturers. This has resulted in training-focused joint ventures between aircraft manufacturers and the airline companies seeking to train their pilots. Airbus (2024), for example, announced a joint venture with Air India in 2024 (each owning 50%), located in India's Haryana state just outside the Indira Gandhi airport of New Delhi. Using 10 flight simulators, the training centre is supposed to train around 5,000 pilots on A350 and A320 aircraft over 10 years, according to Airbus (ibid). At the same time, Airbus concluded another partnership with GMR Aero Technic, an Indian company for airframe maintenance, repair and overhaul, in order to offer training in aircraft maintenance engineering in Hyderabad.

Apart from aircraft manufacturers themselves, also firms specialised in training set up this kind of joint ventures. Canadian firm CAE Inc. operates flight training centres in various countries and supplies the flight simulator technology. In 2018, it entered a joint venture with Colombian airline Avianca (each owning 50%) for a training centre in Bogotá (ALN News, 2018). The CEO of Avianca was quoted saying "This new joint venture will significantly increase the number of flight simulators available in Latin America, benefiting not only Avianca but all airlines operating in the region" (ibid). Opened in July 2019, the training centre is meant to reach a training capacity of 2,500 pilots per year, using 7 flight simulators for a range of aircraft types, including Airbus A320 and A330 as well as Boeing B787 (CAE, 2019).

The involvement of the employer from the country of origin might safeguard the interests of gains for the origin country, by hiring some graduates of the training centre for local positions. Since a joint venture is negotiated between all employers involved, the interests of employer(s) in the origin country should normally be reflected in the joint venture. In contrast to other setups, an important stakeholder here has both an interest and some leverage to keep at least some graduates in the country of origin. If these graduates indeed fill positions in shortage occupations, the country of origin might gain significantly beyond the gain of the employer involved – for example by reaching or maintaining a critical mass in some activity, needed for the entry of further firms and workers.

The quality of the training would likely be high, because the employers control it through the joint venture and they stand to gain from training quality through the level of job-readiness of the graduates. The joint venture can also help to spread know-how and generate innovations. Where joint venture partner commitment includes the willingness of a partner to make both resource contributions and short-term sacrifices to attain long-term benefits (Gundlach et al., 1995), joint venture partnerships can enable access to partners' complementary skills to develop new ways of making, selling, and distributing goods and services (Kale et al., 2000). The learning opportunities

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afforded by partnerships are shown to generate value for both joint venture partners and third-party organisations (De Silva et al., 2021).

Example 4. A joint venture between a Dutch and a South African SME

Relevant cases are documented in which collaborations between corporations and local joint venture partners realised social goals in developing countries. Saka-Helmhout et al. (2022) investigate how joint ventures between Dutch firms and firms in developing countries handled projects in Corporate Social Innovation (CSI), analysing 44 projects that were carried out in developing countries from Eastern Europe to Africa and East Asia. These activities were inscribed in a programme financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and operated by Agentschap NL, a government-related agency. The CSI projects were introducing a seed production system into local agriculture or pursued renewable energy sources.

An example from the database of Saka-Helmhout et al. (2022) is Eosta's establishment of a joint venture with an organic citrus growing and packing company in South Africa to produce organic compost. The Dutch SME Eosta B.V. was responsible for cultivating, prepacking, distributing and marketing organic fruits and vegetables. Through a joint venture, it partnered up with South African company SRCC (which owned 49%) that produced and exported organic citrus. The aim of the joint venture was to revitalize the soil used for citrus production through the application of compost generated from organic and other useful waste material. In the process, the partners would employ staff not only seasonally but throughout the year, and replacement of alien vegetation with replanted indigenous vegetation was expected to rebalance the ecosystem. Given the lack of good agricultural practice in producing compost and often low soil fertility in South Africa, the joint venture was able to attract farmers to participate in organic compost production in a three-and-a-half-year long project, launched in 2006. The joint venture partners initially trained pre-screened citrus farmers. They subsequently expanded the training to include a broader range of farmers. By the end of the project, 27 jobs were created at the composting site, 20 jobs at the drop-off facilities, and another 44 indirect jobs. Female employees took up 12 of the new positions. In addition to pay above local standards, employees mainly benefited from being employed throughout the year, attesting to the social impact of the joint venture project.

Weaknesses. The flipside of flexibility in negotiating a joint venture is the potential incongruence with the kind of GSP that the destination country is willing to facilitate, for example through fast-track procedures for immigration and the recognition of foreign qualifications. Every tailor-made joint venture agreement faces some uncertainty whether it is eligible as a GSP, according to public authorities. Published guidelines might err on either side: if they restrict employers' flexibility too strongly, they will undermine a key strength of this setup; if they leave too many possibilities to employers, the risk rises that employers waste their efforts on (preparing) joint ventures that are ultimately not considered GSPs, which could undermine employers' interest in such a setup.

Frequent problems with finding partners for a joint venture, and operating it smoothly, are well documented (e.g. Makino et al., 2007; Beamish and Lupton, 2009). Without intermediaries, the

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employers creating a joint venture will probably need to know each other already (given that some trust is necessary when investing into a joint venture), which effectively limits the range of firms that might engage in such a GSP to those with existing business relations to certain countries of origin likely to get involved. Unless the joint venture is built on a prior long-term cooperation, due diligence on the capabilities and intentions of the partner is often limited to the assets that the partner intends to contribute to the joint venture. Hence, partner mismatch and asymmetric information can lead to opportunistic behaviour. Without the appropriate governance structure, differences in corporate culture, and cultural issues more generally, can adversely affect joint venture efficacy. In short, joint ventures can be associated with significant transaction costs and simultaneously a substantial high risk of disagreements.

4.2.2. Opportunities and threats of more complex setups

Threats. Not least to avoid disagreements, employers in the destination country may be tempted to establish shell companies in the country of origin, with which they then create a joint venture. Essentially, such a joint venture and the associated training would only reflect the interest of employer(s) from the destination country, and it is not clear whether the country of origin would still gain in any way, except through remittances. Similarly, employer(s) from the destination country might leverage legal and financial resources in order to dominate the joint venture, shape the training curriculum and recruit nearly all graduates. Especially in countries of origin where corruption is wide-spread, the same outcome may be reached by bribing the local employer. This potential problem arises all the more strongly when the joint venture partner from the origin country is not an employer but primarily a training provider or some other firm with relatively little interest in hiring graduates.

Opportunities. Public regulators from the destination country could supply a template memorandum of understanding (MoU) for joint ventures that are eligible for facilitated immigration procedures, to reduce uncertainty for the joint venture, avoid disagreements between firms and make this kind of GSP more accessible for SMEs. But such a template could also limit the design flexibility of the joint venture considerably. It is not clear how regulators could facilitate such global skills partnerships with regards to immigration or recognition of qualifications. There could be exemptions in immigration requirements for training centres based on the template MoU. Alternatively, the joint venture could be 'approved' on a case-by-case basis through a formal government decision, taking inspiration from the recognised sponsorship model in the Students & Researchers Directive 2014/801/EU and for employers in the Blue Card Directive 2021/1883/EU.

In order to avoid that employers set up shell companies rather than finding a partner for a joint venture, regulators can impose some eligibility conditions, essentially ensuring that all employers involved are established firms with real activities. While start-ups and very small firms might also fail to meet such conditions, they are also unlikely to recruit numerous graduates. The eligibility conditions could therefore also contribute to ensuring that a substantial share of the graduates is recruited by the joint venture partner in the origin country.

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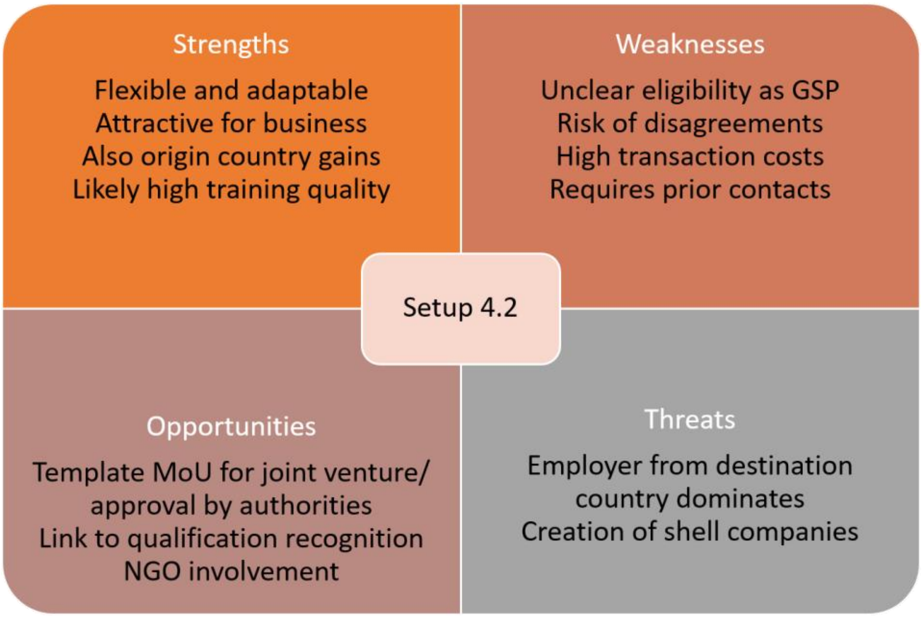
Given that training quality is likely to be high and that employers can adapt it to their particular situation, this kind of GSP could be linked relatively well closely to the specific requirements for the recognition of foreign qualifications. This possibility could reduce the uncertainty whether or not the training in the GSP will lead to recognised qualifications, thereby raising the willingness of employers (and perhaps especially SMEs) to engage in such a GSP.

Figure 4. SWOT analysis for a basic B2B setup involving a joint venture



4.3. In-house solutions (foreign direct investment, training centre as subsidiary, ICT)

We label in-house solutions as GSPs, although that label can be contested. In-house training and mobility can also be seen as just a form of talent management or direct recruitment from abroad. The condition for being considered a GSP would be that some graduates stay in the origin country, or some others return, so that there is also a gain for the country of origin. Intra-corporate transfers (ICT) of trainees could be an easy form of a GSP, although the literature refers to such trainings as Global Talent Management (GTM) (Collings et al, 2019; McDonnell et al, 2010). As an obligation following from EU Trade Agreements (De Lange et al, 2021), the Intra-Corporate Transfer Directive 2014/66/EU offers a temporary residence permit for one year can be issued for intra-corporate traineeships to a third-country national. The trainee has to provide evidence of a university degree and possibly a training agreement, including a description of the training programme, its duration and the conditions in which the trainee employees will be supervised, proving that they will benefit from genuine training and not be used as normal workers (recital 20, Directive 2014/66/EU). Reported use of this legal pathway is however low (only 20 permits

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for the whole EU reported for 2023).[3] Intra-corporate trainees possibly enter under national migration programmes that do not need to be reported to Eurostat.

Because special provisions in migration policies on temporary traineeships are available, in-house solutions come close enough to GSPs to investigate their strengths and weaknesses here. We do flag that there are significant debates and controversies in various countries about the use of intra-company transfers to 'circumvent' some immigration regulations (such as labour market tests) and ICT being used to undercut local workers. Setting the wages of intra-company transferees is often complex, i.e. wages are sometimes partly paid in the origin country and then topped up by allowances for working in destination countries (with those allowances sometimes being tax deductible, hence the controversy; see Migration Advisory Committee, 2015).

In the "in-house" B2B setup for a GSP (Figure 5A), one or more employers from the destination country operate a training centre in the origin country and hire from among the graduates to fill their own positions (Fuchs et al., 2021). Importantly, the training centre is de facto controlled by these employers (e.g. owned as a subsidiary). It may have been acquired or established through foreign direct investment in the country of origin. In contrast with the previous setup in Figure 3, the employers from the destination country here do not need to reach a compromise with another stakeholder. Employers in effect organise the training in-house, albeit in another country. A situation where a MNE has subsidiaries in both the country of origin and the destination country, and transfers trainees between the two, is one variant of this setup (depicted in Figure 5B). In this specific case, trainees are hired and initially trained in one country but then placed in another country as ICT, at least for some time before they might return after the end of their traineeship. Examples 5, 6 and 7 present illustrative cases of such or related setups.

Example 5. The German healthcare sector and universities in the Philippines

In Germany, the foundation Bertelsmann Stiftung had piloted a healthcare sector scheme (2020-2023) in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), two universities in the Philippines, the German Federal Ministry of Health and German University Hospital Bonn as technical partner (Schneider, 2023). First, the Filipino curriculum for the "Bachelor of Nursing" is coupled with German healthcare training curriculum elements, practical training and job-specific German courses. Workshops and intercultural modules also prepare workers for life and employment in Germany, and elements are open to all students (even those who are not seeking to migrate), thus improving quality of teaching and nursing in the Philippines (Ibid). It is financed on a permanent basis via an agency fee, with relatively high costs of €10,000 justified as workers who have arrived are allowed to work as such immediately (Ibid). As of 2023, most participants of the first cohort had already been placed in German nursing homes, with the next cohort beginning their studies (Ibid). It is worth noting that the federally owned GIZ ensures compliance with the fair recruitment standards set by IOM and ILO.

[3] Eurostat dataset migr_resict1_3, https://doi.org/10.2908/MIGR_RESICT1_3, accessed 5 January 2025.

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Example 6. Training seafarers for the Dutch shipping industry

In 2022 the Dutch shipowners' association KVNR and Nova College IJmuiden signed an agreement on providing support to the education program for seafarers. The education program includes a collaboration with the maritime school Palompon Institute of Technology (PIT) and the Netherlands Shipping Training Center (NSTC). Both are located in Palompon in the Philippines. The objective of the program is to train Filipino officers for the Dutch fleet. “Filipino seafarers are very much needed on the Dutch fleet. Especially now that the existing labor market shortage is being further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, it is of great importance that we can give the successful Palompon education program a new boost. With Nova College as an expert partner, we are confidently looking forward to that future,” KVNR director Annet Koster said during the signing ceremony. Nova College aims to support PIT in providing high-quality education and staying connected to developments in the sector (Nova College, 2022).

Example 7. A Swedish multinational

Fashion retail company H&M, headquartered in Sweden, is known for its sustainability and supplier development initiatives. As an MNE that does not own factories, it collaborates with around 605 suppliers, representing more than 1,183 factories that also produce for other brands. In alignment with the International Labor Organization’s Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the company conducts training in areas such as labour rights, workplace conditions, and environmental sustainability. H&M offers training in countries such as Bangladesh, Türkiye and Cambodia, aiming to improve production processes and ensure that suppliers comply with H&M's Code of Conduct, which emphasizes fair wages, safe working conditions, and environmental protection. Employees in production offices work directly with H&M’s suppliers and their factories to form good relations, assess their performance against H&M’s Sustainability Commitment, and support them in making improvements through various programmes and activities. H&M’s renewed Global Framework Agreement extends beyond traditional labour rights, acknowledging the significance of industry-wide collaborations in improving working conditions (Chapman, 2024; H&M Group, 2024).

Furthermore, MNEs train suppliers in their value chains as a means to upgrade products, processes, functions and/or sectors (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2012). MNE subsidiaries can be elevated to the role of a lead firm in decision making in the global value chain through their on-the-ground experience, hence knowledge of and commitment to the market (e.g., Forsgren, 2017). As they search for business opportunities, they tend to invest in business relationships, coordinate activities between stakeholders and extend relationships based on prior learning experiences (Forsgren et al., 2005). These dynamics lend subsidiaries an important role in the process of integrating local value chains into global value chains. Although subsidiaries generally prefer to work selectively with a few capable suppliers that meet international standards (Nadvi,

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2008; Giuliani et al., 2005), they are motivated for different reasons to integrate small suppliers. For instance, in cases of labor-intensive activities with only limited economies of scale or in the absence of scale-dualism, i.e., in settings dominated by small producers as in the case of guavas in Mexico, sourcing from small producers is inevitable (Maertens and Swinnen, 2015). Subsidiaries' investments in local value chains in return for the 'acquisition of the business partner's capabilities' forge close business relationships and enhance subsidiaries' embeddedness in these chains (Forsgren, 2017: 128). As subsidiaries gain control of an independent resource base in destination countries, they can strengthen their position within the multinational (Zhang et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019).

Figure 5A. A basic B2B setup with in-house training

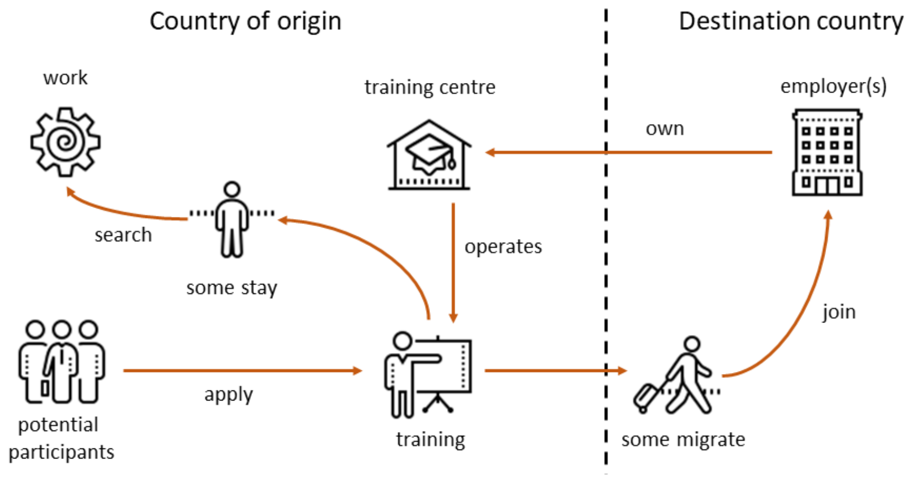
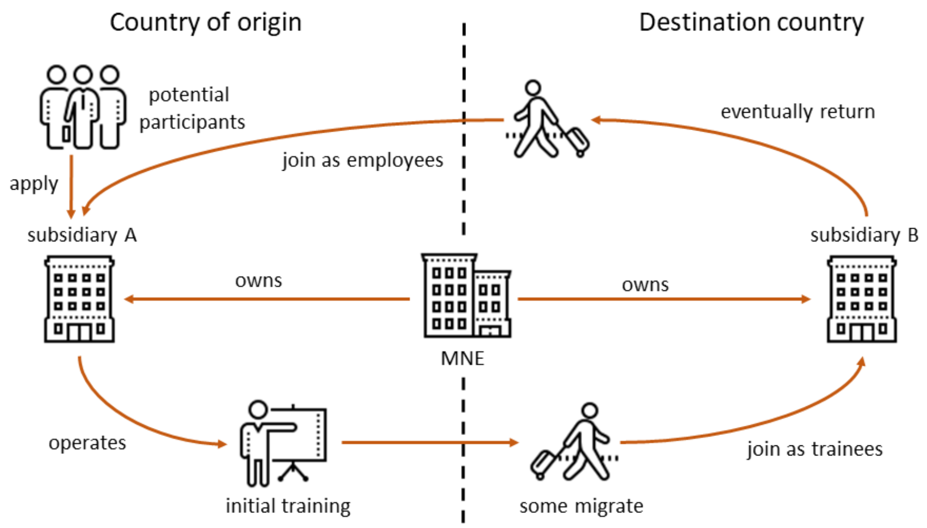


Figure 5B. A basic B2B setup with intra-corporate transfers



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4.3.1. Strengths and weaknesses of a basic setup

Strengths. For MNE or employers from destination countries, this could be an especially attractive setup that generates interest in GSPs among comparatively many employers. After all, employers might ultimately prefer to train people in-house to ensure that training is tailored to them and meets their standards. Training quality should normally be high (but see also Threats below) because employers benefit from more job-ready graduates, and since employers are in control of the training, they have every opportunity to ensure high training quality.

Disagreements might be rare in this setup because it neither involves other employers (at most a different subsidiary of the same MNE) nor intermediaries. This may create more possibilities for consortia of employers from the destination country to jointly operate and finance a single training centre, thereby sharing the costs, the risks, and the paperwork involved. For example, two employers from different sectors but from the same region might team up for and operate a training centre that caters to both employers. An agreement between these employers would suffice here, without the need to find two corresponding local employers (as in the previous setup).

Weaknesses. It is not clear how the origin country gains in such a setup, except through remittances. In order to gain from the presence of trained graduates, some graduates would have to stay in the origin country, or would have to return eventually to bring their skills and experience to bear in the origin country. However, employers from the destination country might often want to hire all graduates of their training centre, and to retain them as long as possible (especially in a shortage occupation). The vast majority of graduates might similarly prefer accepting a job abroad and build a career there. Therefore, the extent of graduates staying or returning could be very small, unless a substantial extent is a pre-condition for the GSP in the first place.

If this setup does not somehow ensure wider benefits from skill formation, its graduates might not be eligible for preferential treatment in immigration procedures (as it does not meet the policy goals of public actors in the destination country) and might not receive the necessary political and administrative support from public authorities in the country of origin. This introduces “political risk” for employers, i.e. their investments in the training centre may be lost due to a lack of (sustained) co-operation from public authorities on operational licenses etc. Such a risk may prevent employers from making any (further) investments at all.

The setup requires significant investments, not only in a training centre but also in capacities to deal with authorities and practical challenges in the country of origin, as well as with authorities in the destination country over questions of immigration procedures. Such investments and capacities may be out of reach for SMEs. Even larger employers might only be able to engage in such a GSP when they have prior contacts to an origin country. Together, these factors might limit the potential interest from employers significantly. Such a GSP may even be accused of serving first and foremost the interests of large corporations, with no tangible benefits for the wider economy, little transparency and potentially limited accountability to democratic oversight.

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4.3.2. Opportunities and threats of more complex setups

Opportunities. It may be possible to ensure that sufficiently many graduates of the training stay or eventually return to work in the origin country, such that tangible gains result for the origin country. Some graduates might simply prefer staying for various reasons, which would be reinforced by improved job prospects in the origin country. While research largely focuses on decisions to migrate, there is empirical evidence as to reasons for why individuals participating in the training program would not have migration aspirations and instead chose to remain sedentary, included but not limited to place attachment and roots in community ("location-specific insider advantages"), as well as psychological costs (Clark et al., 2015; Lun et al., 2013).

To increase the group that stays, the training centre could simply be required to reserve a certain share of places for participants who will not be recruited for positions in the destination country (like housing developers can be required to construct some 15% as social housing). To meet this quota, applicants could be selected that are likely to prefer staying. Alternatively, the selection of those recruited for jobs abroad may be based on merit. For example, after a first stage of the training, a merit-based selection could divide participants into those who continue to a second stage (and ultimately migrate) and those who receive some qualification for the first stage but otherwise need rely on their own job search (which does not guarantee that they will not migrate, too). NGOs or international organisations may be involved to monitor that the GSP does not result in the migration of virtually every graduate. As another option, a local internship can be made a compulsory part of the training. These internships can open up local opportunities to graduates and could make staying significantly more likely (as shown for international students in OECD, 2016).

Return from the destination country, even if initially contractually foreseen, may be very hard to implement, as both the employer in the destination country and the trained migrant may have strong incentives to continue their employment relation indefinitely. Given the gains involved (especially in shortage occupations), employers may be prepared to pay substantial fines in order to avoid adhering to a contractual return obligation (possibly risking continued access to the programme). However, ICT transfers, including of trainees, consist of temporary secondment. To secure return of the intra-corporate trainees, the Directive requires that the business provides evidence, as part of the assignment letter, that the third-country national will be able to transfer back to an entity belonging to the same group and established in a third country at the end of the assignment (recital 19, Directive 2014/66/EU).

As illustrated by case of H&M (Example 7 above), another opportunity in this B2B setup is compliance with corporate social responsibility standards. Setting up training in local value chains of business partners not only increases quality of the product, it can also prevent cases of forced labour and eventual product bans under the new EU Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour.

Threats. The setups in Figures 5A and 5B give the employer(s) from the destination country considerable freedom and involves few other stakeholders. This situation may be abused to

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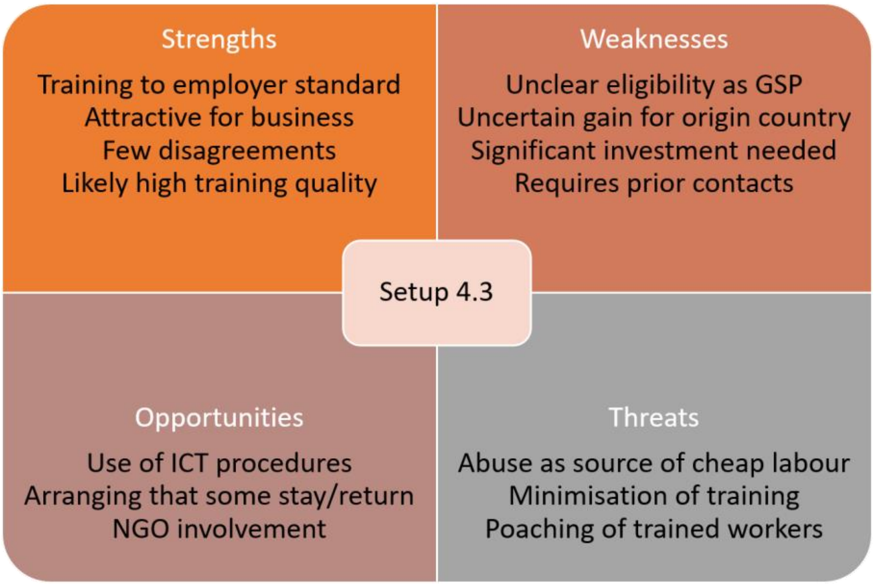
operate something that looks like a GSP but only serves to fill unqualified jobs in destination countries (e.g. call centres), often with bad working conditions, or to bring in "cheap labour" at lower wages, effectively undercutting local workers. Specifically, trainees posted as ICTs can formally remain employed in the country of origin. While the EU Directive on ICTs (2014/66/EU) requires that their wages be comparable to prevailing wages in the destination country, loopholes can remain (e.g. Migration Advisory Committee, 2015). Ensuing scandals could undermine political and public support for GSPs more generally. With regards to poor working conditions, the European Commission has proposed a Directive improving and enforcing working conditions for trainees and combatting regular employment relationships disguised as traineeships (COM(2024)132, "Traineeships Directive"). Moreover, to this end a Council recommendation has been proposed on a reinforced Quality Framework for Traineeships (COM(2024 133). If migrants do not yet qualify for a residence permit as worker, they arrive on a traineeship residence permit (e.g. under article 13 Directive 2016/801/EU).

Figure 6. SWOT analysis for a basic B2B setup with in-house training



Another potential threat is legal uncertainty. According to Hotrec, representative of Hospitality businesses in Europe (Hotrec, 2024) find that legal uncertainty over who is what type of trainee is a serious threat to skilling third-country nationals in the EU as destination, possibly incentivizing businesses to train their future workers in the country of origin (under local, possibly lesser circumstances). A further threat concerns the quality of the training. Employers might find that high-quality training in the origin country is hardly worth the trouble and minimise its duration to recruit participants as soon as possible and train them on the job. This could happen especially if it is possible to immigrate to the destination country before the full qualification of the training

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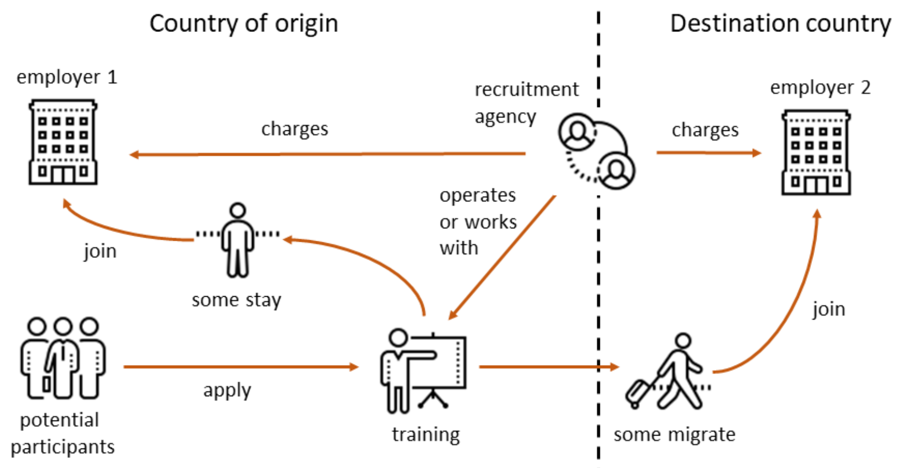
has been reached. Then the training centre would just serve as a "front" for mere recruitment, possibly also poaching of already qualified workers from the origin country. Also in this context, a local presence of an NGO or an international organisation might assume a role of oversight to avoid abuse. In addition to this role, such local partners could facilitate contacts to public authorities etc. Indeed, non-state actors including NGOs or IOs, are gaining traction in global labour migration governance, and there are case studies of initiatives that incorporate NGOs and IOs into labour migration partnerships in a regulatory or third-party capacity looking out for interests beyond corporate profit (Pittman, 2016).

4.4. Setups with intermediaries and training providers

Our third model concerns a variety of setups with intermediaries and training providers who offer services to employers with respect to recruitment, training, and red tape involved in migration procedures or the recognition of qualifications (Figure 7). While such services as well as the training are sometimes offered by public entities free of charge (see practice example), it is assumed here that all service providers charge employers. Employers from both the country of origin and destination might be clients of these intermediaries and training providers, so that graduates of the training might also be recruited for jobs in the origin country. Examples 8-11 offer insights for such setups from relevant cases in practice.

Figure 7. A basic B2B setup with intermediaries



The literature on intermediaries points to the lack of evidence on dimensions of how such actors facilitate or engage with skilled migration: the broad range of skilled migrant intermediaries, how intermediaries shape destination reputations among skilled migrants, or how the reputations of destinations among skilled migrants impact intermediary activity remain understudied (Harvey

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et al., 2017). Skilled migrant intermediaries, also referred to as employment brokers in some disciplines, are one side in what the ILO defines as a 'triangular employment relationship,' where an intermediary engages directly with the migrant instead of the employer (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2017; Harvey et al., 2017). By contrast, the more extensive literature on temporary migration and recruitment agencies (or intermediaries) in the context of unskilled migration (particularly for domestic care and agricultural work) highlights how these intermediaries often exploit migrant labour (Jones, 2014; Marchetti et al., 2021). Regardless of migrant worker skill level, there is academic consensus that intermediary influence and numbers have grown (Harvey et al., 2017; Jones, 2014; Muranaka, 2022).

The Labor Mobility Partnerships initiative (LaMP), an NGO focused on pragmatic solutions to make international labour mobility safer and more effective, emphasises that a "quality mobility industry" is needed for responsible recruitment and to scale up labour mobility (Smith and Cepla, 2020). It argues that undesirable outcomes mainly reflect unintended side-effects of poorly designed and monitored systems for labour migration, rather than inherently unethical service providers. In EU policy, the role of such intermediaries is so far not regulated. In EU Talent Partnerships, NGOs or training providers are often unexperienced in providing such services, yet set out to deliver those services, for free. In the evaluation of THAMM (see Example 1 above), participating employers were asked if they would use the programme again. Most confirmed this and expressed a willingness to pay, depending on the programme's offer (Cota, 2024). Importantly, employers said they would recruit again within the programme – attempting international recruitment without comparable support was seen as too onerous in terms of administrative requirements.

Example 8: The MATCH project for highly-skilled Nigerians and Senegalese

The 36-month EU-funded MATCH project is a case where an international organisation acted as third party, seeking to match highly skilled individuals in Nigeria and Senegal (largely highly-skilled candidates in IT) with private companies' skill needs in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In the case of the Netherlands, IOM was responsible for the listed stages (Adhikari et al., 2021). However, the employer is responsible for the final selection of candidates. As of 2021, 18 recruitments had taken place (IOM, 2021). Private sector perspectives from the MATCH project included: companies were often unfamiliar with domestic procedure to apply for available permits (the Single Permit) and there was a common assumption it was a long and costly procedure; there was no mechanism to penalize a talent if they opted to break the contract with their employer and go to another company; issues of tax authorities and double taxation; hybrid mobility was preferred to circular mobility schemes to meet the reality of fluctuating labour market dynamics (IOM, 2021).

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Example 9: A German agency for international healthcare professionals

The German healthcare sector has state led programs (Triple Win Programme) as well as private sector recruitment from outside the EU. Both healthcare institutions and recruitment agencies can apply for support with procedures (visas, recognition of professional qualifications, residence and work permits) from the public Deutsche Fachkräfteagentur für Gesundheits- und Pflegeberufe (DeFa). DeFA is funded by the Federal Ministry of Health, with partners including the German Competence Center for International Professionals in Health and Health Care (DKF). The DeFa ensures that employers and their recruitment partners work according to internationally recognized ethical guidelines and quality standards. They may, but this is not obligatory, apply for a quality certification for fair recruitment. Recruitment through a private actor is less costly than the government led programs, making the private route more attractive for care institutions (Böcker, 2023).

Example 10: Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) recruiting refugees

TBB is an example of a business run project recruiting refugees for skilled migration schemes across borders. One of their key goals is that private sector is driving the solution. TBB hope hundreds of businesses globally will adjust their international talent acquisition strategies to include forcibly displaced people and will be supporting the skilled visas of refugees on a regular basis. They say they are "transforming skilled migration systems for refugees by removing barriers, creating new opportunities, and rewriting the story of displacement" (TBB, 2023). Their theory of change "rests on a core idea: refugees aren't a burden to be shared; they are people with talent and aspirations - assets that can make a positive contribution to companies and communities around the world when given the chance to move internationally for work" (Ibid). TBB developed an open-source Talent Catalog with more than 50,000 displaced people registered by 2023. Countries participating from the start are Australia, Canada and the UK, later joined by Italy and Germany. TBB designs mobility pilots to enable businesses to recruit from the Talent Catalog. The gain for employers and destination countries is that more than 100 businesses have recruited displaced talent through their programs, resulting in more than 1,000 people securing solutions to their displacement. Partners include UNHCR, IOM and law firm Fragomen. TBB focus on employers hiring multiple workers (either as a cohort or on a rolling basis). Their work relies on gifts from foundations, corporate partners, governments, UN agencies, and individuals. TBB is also involved in EC-funded initiatives in several EU states.

TBB aims to have skilled admissions programmes for refugees and other forcibly displaced people in at least 27 countries, to provide legal migration pathways. They hope to match at least an additional 2,400 refugees with job opportunities over the next five years (resulting in durable solutions for 4,000-7,000 displaced people including dependents). The Canadian company TCMH assessed the training and experience of applicants in Kenya and found that the curriculum had an enhanced level of training compared to that of domestic candidates (TBB, 2023).

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4.4.1. Strengths and weaknesses of a basic setup

Strengths. Experienced and certified intermediaries in the field of labour mobility and training have built networks that they can rely on when recruiting and training in countries of origin. Individual employers from the destination country often neither have existing networks of this kind nor do they necessarily have the capacity to create them. This could be due to language barriers, lacking experience with a given country of origin, lack of staff resources that could be dedicated to building networks, lack of intercultural competence, fear of scams, etc. (e.g. Belmonte et al., 2019). In the logic of division of labour, employers may be very willing to outsource training and recruitment activities to trustworthy service providers who have specialised in these activities, in the given country of origin. Several anecdotes of hospitals trying to establish their own channels of communication to potential recruits end with them giving up and turning to service providers. It appears that contacting potential recruits is only a small part of the challenge, which also includes quality control of the recruitment, extensively dealing with administration, preparing onboarding etc. Depending on the country of origin in question, these tasks may be challenging even for HR professionals, let alone other staff in the destination country.

In addition, intermediaries may allow employers from the destination country to (partly) avoid several risks. One is the risk of non-compliance with migration regulation, which could subject them to severe sanctions. Another risk arises with the interpretation of an unknown formal qualification that the candidate holds. A third risk concerns last-minute failure of the recruitment effort. Recruitment agencies with pre-selected candidates may be perceived as more reliable than individually contacted candidates, and as a stabilising factor more generally – making it less likely that the recruit backs out last minute or absconds soon after taking up a role with the employer. Moreover, the selection of origin countries by intermediaries is driven by availability of workforce with required skills or available for training and not, as in the case of a PPP, by ulterior motives.

Employers from the origin country face far fewer problems – in their case, it is a local recruitment. Through trained recruits, they might benefit from relatively high training standards, compared to local alternatives. At the same time, they may be able to recruit without paying high fees to the recruitment agency, hiring directly from the training centre or targeting those graduates wishing to stay, for example. These dynamics could result in some flow of training graduates into the local labour market, potentially with wider benefits for the country of origin.

Weaknesses. The same reasons that can make service providers especially relevant here – their specialisation, knowledge and experience – also implies an asymmetry with employers who lack this. It may therefore be hard for employers to evaluate the quality of the services they receive, even though they likely have a strong interest in receiving a high level of quality. A recruitment agency may be mainly interested in placing candidates rather than in high-quality training. Some time may pass before mutual trust has been built. While employers from destination countries may have to accept some risk that training quality is lower than expected, employers from the origin country may have more local knowledge to hold service providers to account. Despite such

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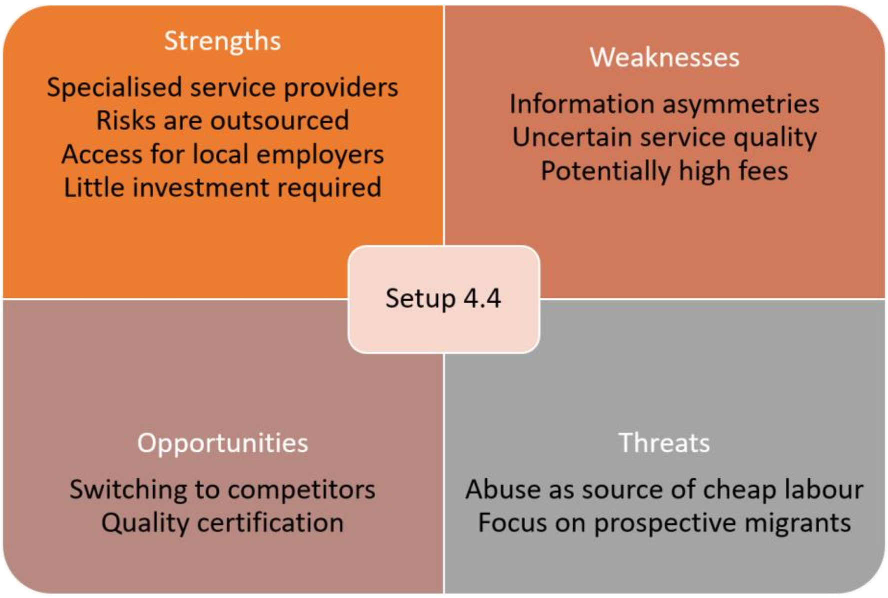
issues with quality control, employers often pay substantial amounts for these services. On the other hand, significant investments into own training and recruitment capacities are not needed.

4.4.2. Opportunities and threats of more complex setups

Threats. A has been observed in the context of low-skilled migration, migrants are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by intermediaries, which can include very bad working conditions, wage theft, disrespecting worker rights such as the minimum wage etc. (e.g. Palumbo, 2024). Scandals caused by such behaviour can quickly erode public and political support for GSPs involving intermediaries. However, malpractices might often not even be reported and could persist for years, as migrants fear the repercussions of insisting on their rights or do not know how to enforce them.

It is also possible that recruitment agencies and training providers focus too much on employers in destination countries, from whom they might receive higher fees. This could undermine a benefit in terms of skill formation for the origin country. As a remedy, service providers may be mandated to serve the local labour market with a certain minimum quota of their capacities. However, a specific "track" for local labour market might also flourish, attracting participants based on a reputation gained through placements with well-known employers abroad.

Figure 8. SWOT analysis for a basic B2B setup with intermediaries and training providers



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Opportunities. Competition between various service providers provides important opportunities to obtain a high quality of training and recruitment services. The service providers normally cannot disappoint clients too often without eventually losing them. Migrants can often personally hold intermediaries or training providers to account, or through their social network in the country of origin. Public regulators in both the country of origin and destination can enforce minimum standards for service providers through public or private certifications. For example, the Philippines only allow certified recruiters to recruit nurses. The quality of training might also be assured through global standards, notably in IT where software companies certify online whether participants are proficient in using their products. Even when a formal qualification is not required, it might make sense to fix some well-defined, certifiable standard as the training level to be reached, as this would make it more difficult to deliver low training quality without being detected.

Example 11: The Tent Partnership for labour market integration of refugees

The Tent Partnership for Refugees is an intermediary that works globally with multinationals to connect refugees to jobs. It mobilises companies to recruit, train and mentor work-authorised refugees to integrate them into the labor market. It also works with the UN Human Rights Council to develop hiring guides to help companies recruit refugee talent and produce policy changes to enable refugee employment at national levels. The Tent Partnership for Refugees has a focus on long-term economic integration rather than philanthropy, striving to ensure that refugees are financially independent by having them trained and hired and with access to finance and insurance.

In 2019, executives and CEOs of 15 leading companies in the Netherlands announced a series of commitments to support refugees. Pledges were made at the first-ever Dutch Business Summit on Refugees hosted by the Tent Partnership together with Accenture, Rabobank and Unilever, to hire refugees, support refugee entrepreneurs and better serve refugee customers. The Summit aimed to reflect on how Dutch companies could better utilise the skills, talents and knowledge of the more than 100,000 refugees in the Netherlands. At the Second Dutch Business Summit on Refugees, companies pledged to hire, train, mentor, and provide employment services for nearly 22,000 refugees. For instance, ABN AMRO committed to hiring 80 refugees by 2021 as part of its Reboot programme, set up by the Diversity and Inclusion Consultant in collaboration with staff from business lines. The aim was to connect refugees to full time employment, while addressing ABN AMRO's challenge of finding skilled employees for a variety of roles. ABN AMRO met its target of hiring 80 refugees, ultimately gave permanent jobs to 45 refugees and invested in extensive coaching (Tent Partnership, 2022).

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5. Discussion and implications for policy debates

5.1.Global Skills Partnerships and business

The SWOT analysis of four potential setups brought across a myriad of factors for businesses to consider, with diverse and varying case study examples by way of illustration. To some extent, the context-specific nature of this reflects how the pilot stage of global skills partnerships has been leveraged to examine different approaches to migrant selection and recruitment, as well as the inclusion of different stakeholders (Hooper and Sohst, 2024). The criteria we applied included gain for potential migrants, gain for employers, gain for country of origin, gain for country of destination, whether the training constitutes as valuable, and the governance structure. Here, we highlight some main takeaways for consideration from the business and regulatory perspective, both according to each potential setup, as well as overall.

We begin with the PPP setup as the blueprint, and indeed weaknesses underline the rationale behind why the paper should examine alternatives to this setup. Such weaknesses include difficulty in scaling-up, the reluctance or ambivalence of the private sector in participating, more bureaucratic impediments than necessary, a disconnect between market needs given competing political interests, the complexity of such initiatives, low quality training programs, and the successful cooperation between the public and private sector in the first instance. On the other hand, strengths include preferential treatment in migration procedures, sharing of costs and risks (including via the involvement of philanthropic and international development actors). Not least, it boasts rights protections, transparency, accountability, and equality of access that can be afforded by public involvement.

Then, the first B2B setup contemplated cases of joint ventures, with employers from destination and origin countries collaborating. Strengths to keep in mind include that the flexibility in negotiating its design would allow for tailoring to specific lines of businesses, sought qualifications and staffing priorities. It could thus remain more flexible in dynamic sectors and reduce risk, increasing employer willingness to invest. Moreover, the employer in the country of origin safeguards maintaining talent there, and training quality is ensured given both companies' vested interest in the readiness of graduates. At the same time, weaknesses can include whether the destination country recognizes and facilitates migration procedures, and the documented difficulty with finding joint venture partners, which entails a reliance on pre/existing partnerships. The significant transaction costs lead to risk of disagreements. With all of this in mind, the key question we identify lies in preventing participants are trained solely for the destination country; we propose the origin country government could impose training fees only for those intending to emigrate. We also argue there is an opportunity for public regulators in the destination country to provide template memoranda of understanding in order to facilitate immigration procedures, reduce uncertainty and anticipate partner disagreements.

Secondly, we map out in-house solutions, including foreign direct investment, the training centre as a subsidiary and intra-corporate trainees. Here, the strengths included that employers from

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destination countries would be incentivised, as the in-house training could be appropriately tailored and meet their requirements, with the potential for training quality to be high. Disagreements could also be mitigated as it eliminates employers from the origin country and intermediaries, and thus destination country employers could more easily jointly operate and share costs and risk. However, weaknesses signalled included that gains for the origin country remained unclear. We proposed a potential solution of a pre-condition for the GSP including a requirement for a percentage of graduates to remain at origin. Again, the cooperation with public authorities surfaces, not only on in terms of preferential immigration procedures, but also in terms of political and administrative support (i.e., operational licenses). The significant startup cost and investment remains another obstacle. Undercutting local workers via lower wages for the migrant workers, a controversial aspect of ICT, is also possible. Along this line, the greater threat is that the setup could be abused in terms of the origin country employer as main stakeholder, potentially filling unqualified jobs in destination countries with poor conditions. We point out potential solutions related to the proposed Traineeships Directive. Moreover, we highlight the opportunities of mechanisms to ensure that graduates remain in the origin country, and outline several possibilities in this regard, including quotas, merit-based selection and local internships.

Finally, we look at involving intermediaries and training providers. The main strength we envision in involving such intermediaries is gaining the trust of and reducing the risk for employers. Moreover, migrants or their networks can hold agencies to account. Weaknesses include an overwhelming interest in placements rather than quality trainings. There is also a possibility that employers in the origin country may ultimately not benefit. Here, we consider return work clauses in contracts, but see in practice examples in the EU that this can be evaded, or in the case of the UK, migrants might be de-incentivized in the first instance if not presented with options to remain.

An overall observation is that B2B GSPs could be more flexible than PPPs and faster to react to labour demand from important sectors in destination countries, and could thus become a key tool in improving their resilience. After all, the health sector seems to be one of the sectors at the forefront of B2B GSPs. We argue that the SWOT analysis can begin a wider discussion that allows businesses or private actors to select the considerations we outline according to their specific contexts and needs. To some extent (depending on the size of the businesses) this even sidesteps the scalability issue in a more ambitious, traditional global skills partnership setup—precisely due to the context-specific nature of the endeavour. This also relates to our observations below on the relevance of regional players. Moreover, there is potential for global skills partnerships to select the intermediaries or recruiters involved to secure ethical practice – in the interest of all involved. IOM and ILO, which have already elaborated a series of ethical safeguards for skills mobility partnerships, could be engaged in the country of origin or destination as a third party (IOM, 2023 and ILO, 2024).

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5.2. Policy implications for the EU level

Given the reluctance of business to participate in EU driven partnerships, the concrete EU policy contexts this paper addresses concern the wider regulatory infrastructure at play. This includes, but is not limited to, policies: regarding migration, education and labour markets, development and trade (the GS4S acronym MEDT policies). In doing so, we cater to the de-siloed division of tasks within the von der Leyen Commission that took office in December 2024. In the 2024-2029 policy cycle, GSPs can carry relevance for various Commissioners, notably those for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, for People, Skills and Preparedness, for Internal Affairs and Migration as well as the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, overseeing the implementation of the SME and competitiveness check (European Commission, 2024b).

In the paper's background context and literature review, we outlined several EU mechanisms and instruments relevant in this thought exercise, including the EU Talent Pool Regulation (COM(2023) 716), Proposal on EU Traineeships Directive (COM(2024)132), the EC's Skills and Talent Mobility Package (COM (2023) 715) (with its Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals [C/2023/7700 final]), the European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2024a), and EU Industrial Policy (European Commission, 2024b). At a minimum, in further developing these legal and non-legal instruments, the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council should consider the factors highlighted in our Section 3, and later applied in Section 4. They could inform important developments going forward in potential B2B schemes.

Despite the relevance for various EU policies, EU institutional structures for developing talent partnerships and mobility schemes with third countries are lacking. Talent partnerships are currently tested with third countries willing to cooperate in controlling and preventing illegal migration to the EU. This carrot and stick strategy cannot result in well-designed and mutually beneficial programmes. The Commission could instead open up possibilities for talent partnerships to third countries that, from an employment perspective, are more attractive to the EU. Core elements of a more institutionalised approach to attracting talent could be a better understanding of current and future labour needs, an active role of the EU Delegations and a stronger relationship with the private sector. GS4S research into EU Member State obligations under EU trade agreements can potentially bring forward legal obligations in this respect, for which the European Commission can hold the Member States accountable.

This paper has flagged the issues with the recognition of foreign qualification – in the context of EU Talent Partnerships, this concerns non-EU qualifications. In occupations like IT, such issues might rarely arise (also thanks to globally recognised certificates issued by software producers), although the Portuguese employers used it as an argument to refuse refugees from Greece in the Cedefop experiment discussed. Recognition of qualifications is pervasive for example in nursing, old-age care, and truck-driving and shipping. Whenever certain qualifications or licenses decide the eligibility for jobs in the destination country, the training in GSPs would ideally already confer

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a qualification recognised in the destination country. For EU Talent Partnerships, this might mean that an EU-based training provider or certifier must be involved (as is the case in the example of the Dutch shipping industry), and such requirements need to be transparent for businesses engaged in setting up a GSP. In other cases, the training in GSPs can only award qualifications that are essentially worthless in the destination country, unless a formal recognition procedure establishes some kind of (partial) equivalence with recognised qualifications. Foreseeable problems with the recognition could strongly reduce the willingness of employers to engage in GSPs, especially of SMEs and start-ups that lack expertise on recognition requirements (see e.g. ICMPD, 2024). Efforts to scale up GSPs, through B2B setups or otherwise, therefore constitute another reason to try and better streamline the national or sectoral procedures for qualifications recognition, as is also the gist of the 2023 EC Recommendation, making them less involved, shorter, and their outcomes more predictable and potentially transferable across countries (e.g. EU countries).

Finally, we note the relevance of the above for regional players. Especially where there is little room to manoeuvre under national labour migration policies, GSPs can offer smaller scale businesses, such as the SMEUnion members, the tools to design highly targeted partnerships, adapted to the needs to the specific region. To this end, business from different sectors but connected through the region might team up to create a programme that would be out of reach for a regional player alone. Locations for the trainings centre(s) can be chosen accordingly, notably in partner cities or regions in the origin country. This also makes it a potential tool to foster structural change in regions with declining industries or where livelihoods are adversely affected by climate change. Ultimately, indeed, this concluding observation underlines the patterns and points stressed throughout this work, noting the importance of tailoring design and seeking cohesion among the multi-faceted interests of diverse stakeholders in an exercise that can evade the mistakes and pitfalls of a top-down approach.

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Working paper no 5

Engaging the private sector in Global Skills Partnerships: exploring the potential of international Business-to-Business approaches

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