The Potential Skilling, Upskilling, and Reskilling Opportunities for the Migration and Mobility of Workers, with a Specific Focus on Gender Aspects of Workers in the Countries of Origin

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Abstract:

This working paper examines the intersection of skilling, reskilling, upskilling and migration in three countries of origin- Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria- offering a comparative analysis of their socio-economic contexts, policy landscapes and skilling initiatives. The analysis highlights commonalities across the countries, such as persistent skills mismatches, gender disparities and inequities in access to skilling programs especially in rural areas. Additionally, barriers including fragmented policies and limited data on labor market outcomes constrain the effectiveness of these existing initiatives. Each country presents unique insights: Egypt's strategic reliance on remittances highlight the significance of migration, yet issues hindering progress include lack of female labor force participation and insufficient coordination across skilling initiatives; Bangladesh made significant progress in vocational training aligned with GCC country labor demand, albeit skills mismatches remain; Nigeria's dynamic digital sector is promising to address global labor market needs, but infrastructure and policy fragmentation remain barriers. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and development agencies. It advocates for aligning skilling programs with labor market needs, promoting inclusivity through gender-sensitive and regionally equitable policies, expanding legal migration pathways and adopting data-driven approaches to enhance program evaluation. Addressing the challenges, the countries of origin can better harness the potential of skilling and migration to support sustainable development, reduce inequalities and strengthen their global competitiveness.

Keywords: Skilling, Upskilling, Reskilling, Development, Gender, Labor Migration, Intersectionality

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1. Introduction

In a time where European Union (EU) countries are faced with the challenge of an aging workforce and a shortage of relevant skills for the rapidly changing labor market, the role of global labor markets together with skilling, upskilling and reskilling cuts across borders (EC, 2021). The migration and mobility of workers hold profound significance in the global labor market, intersecting with socioeconomic, demographic, and political challenges that shape both countries of origin and destination. Based on this momentum and the direction towards placing labor migration at the top of global policy agendas, this working paper examines the potential of skilling, upskilling and reskilling as strategies to enhance migration outcomes, focusing on three countries of origin: Egypt, Bangladesh, and Nigeria while also adding a gender component to the discussion. Through a comparative lens, the paper delves into the unique socio-economic contexts, policy landscapes, challenges and opportunities as well as the gender dimensions shaping skilling initiatives in the identified countries. This topic is a critical area for research and of great relevance at the present because assessing the potential in non-EU countries and the conditions and forms under which skills partnerships succeed can help address shortages, raises innovative recommendations that go beyond migration governance and lie at the junction of migration, education, and development policy fields for the EU and non-EU countries. The gender specific analysis further highlights the importance of embedding inclusivity in policy and program design, fostering more equitable opportunities.

Accordingly, this working paper contributes to the ultimate objectives of Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development (GS4S) project, which are addressing skills shortages in selected sectors (Digital, Care and Construction) and fostering a multi-level policy field of skilling, migration and development and a pathway to a global strategy for skills and a sustainable future of work (Horizon Europe, 2024). This paper makes a contribution by incorporating the experiences of Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria and their knowledge on skills partnerships to develop oriented recommendations. The recommendations serve the goal of GS4S in better informing the European Commission (EC) call for evidence-based research into public and private policies necessary to facilitating addressing future skills needs in a sustainable way and enhancing the efficacy of skilling program in selected non-EU countries and regions geared towards return, retention of skilled workers and attracting skilled workers (Ibid). Moreover, the evidence-based analysis of migration initiatives and trends in this working paper contributes to another key GS4S goal, which is developing new knowledge exploring alternative ways to fill labour shortages at macro and micro levels, juxtaposing local strategies and opportunities for a global strategy of (up)skilling workforce in and partner-shoring work across different selected regions (MENA region, Western Africa and South/South-East Asia) (Ibid).

The selection of non-EU countries is based on the EC's proposed talent partnerships, countries that have historically hosted, or attempted to host, EU legal migration projects (EC, 2021, 2024a). The examination into the countries of origin offers non-Eurocentric perspectives that can more holistically approach sustainable global strategies for skills development. The case studies of Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria come under the research line of the project that is meant to consider the

impacts of reskilling/upskilling on local development of countries of origin. They are not just selected as Commission priority considerations, but also because they can speak to and encompass a wide range of regions, i.e., the Middle East and Northern Africa, South/South-East Asia, and West Africa.

Egypt, as one of the MENA region's main labor-sending countries (David et al., 2019), is a valuable case study due to its ongoing efforts to promote legal migration through initiatives like THAMM, improve migration management, and foster diverse migration patterns both regionally, and internationally to the EU (GIZ, 2024). Its youthful population, strategic geographic location, and transition from a country of origin and destination to transit further justifies its selection as a valuable case study (IOM, 2022). Similarly, **Bangladesh**, with its large workforce, high unemployment rate among university graduates (Asian Development Bank, 2024), and a strong history of labor migration to EU and non-EU countries, presents promising opportunities for developing mutually beneficial EU migration pathways, particularly as these pathways are currently increasing in Italy under circular migration programs (Islam, 2018). Bangladesh is also working towards signing recruitment MoUs with countries in Europe (Ejaz, 2024; Star Digital Report, 2022; UNB, 2022). Finally, **Nigeria's** large, youthful and professional population offers significant potential for reskilling, and upskilling which can aid the EU labor market (Virk et al., 2023; World Bank Group, 2024b), alongside previous efforts to recruit workers to the EU, such as through the MATCH initiative (IOM, 2023). For this reason, it is considered a constructive model, anticipated to help participating EU countries deliver enhanced results and outcomes and to adopt a reverse-engineering approach to skills programs, incorporating the expectations of both local and international employers in the design of tailored skill mobility initiatives. Together, these three countries demonstrate comparative elements in the GS4S sectors of digital, care, and construction, and varied contexts that are crucial to fleshing out the gender and intersectional approach that this work package emphasizes. While the research line as a whole employs a mixed-methods approach, this Working Paper is associated with a task that offers the initial desk research and necessary context in order to further complement empirical evidence gathering on skilling in later tasks.

The integration of the gender aspect in this working paper is motivated by how migration is highly influenced by gender-specific dynamics, which shape both opportunities and vulnerabilities for workers. Each of the three countries demonstrates gender differences in various sectors of employment, as well as in types of migration flows, with women often underrepresented in sectors like the digital sector under consideration in the Global Strategy for Skills (GS4S). Women across Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria face systemic barriers such as limited protection and societal stigma, both at home and abroad. Women in **Egypt** encounter restrictive social norms and limited access to flexible work environments, contributing to their low labor force participation (Constant et al.,2020). Similarly, in **Nigeria**, women are underrepresented in high-growth sectors like ICT and construction and face structural disadvantages in accessing skilling opportunities (Rufai et al., 2019). In **Bangladesh**, while caregiving roles provide opportunities for women migrants, they often experience exploitation, lack of legal protections, and minimal career progression (Community Paramedic Training Institute,

2017). The textile sector (at an intersection with technological growth) emerges here as a prominent sector outside of the GS4S sectors to take into account in surveying skilling initiatives.

This working paper adopts a general methodology, examining each country as an individual case study to clearly draw comparisons between their skilling, reskilling, and upskilling ecosystems and their relation to migration schemes when applicable. A consistent analytical approach was followed for each case, taking into consideration country-specific situations and limitations. Beginning with Egypt in Section 2 of the paper, each case study begins with a breakdown of the historical and current migration trends in the country. Secondary labor market data sources, such as national labor force surveys, were also analyzed to better understand the current status. This is followed by the contextualization of the current socioeconomic and labor market environment to understand the overarching conditions influencing migration strategies. To the extent possible, each case study analyzed this ecosystem in relation to the care, digital, and construction sectors to identify possible skills mismatches. However, due to limited data, the analysis focused on all available skills development programs. Gender-specific trends influencing skilling and migration are then given a particular focus, emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in the policymaking process. With these three subsections in place, each case study then analyzed existing initiatives and policies using a consistent structure to allow comparisons. The agreed-upon elements of assessment included mapping stakeholder types, target groups, and sectors of focus. As each country offered unique skilling landscapes, themes and groupings of initiatives and policies were presented differently, yet all emphasized the most recent strategies aimed for migration, education, preferably education for migration, and development purposes. This assessment serves to identify common stakeholders, themes, challenges, and opportunities for each country. These factors allowed us to draw conclusions regarding the efficiency of existing skilling, upskilling, and reskilling efforts, while highlighting common themes, gaps, and opportunities across the countries of origin. A final subsection concludes by highlighting key challenges while exploring opportunities for future development. The case studies follow a consistent structure to facilitate easy comparisons and provide insights, both individually and collectively, across countries of origin. This, in turn, can help policymakers design and implement strategies that address the evolving needs of developing labor markets. Sections 3 and 4 mirror the structural organization of Section 2, applying the same analytical framework to Bangladesh and Nigeria, respectively.

The current comparative study ultimately contributes to a broader understanding of how countries of origin can harness skilling strategies to address global labor market demands and the challenges delaying progress. On an individual level, the analysis of the three countries in this paper draws valuable lessons about the interplay of migration, skilling, and gender dynamics:

> As a regional leader in migration flows, **Egypt's** reliance on remittances highlights the importance of well-structured skilling programs. However, systemic skills mismatches and limited coordination between stakeholders hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Women remain underrepresented in migration pathways despite evidence that migration

increases their economic participation. Expanding access to skilling programs in rural areas and embedding gender-sensitive approaches in training design are critical steps forward.

With one of the World's highest labor migration rates, **Bangladesh** exemplifies the potential of migration as an economic lifeline. The persistence of skills mismatches, and gender disparities constrain progress. While government programs have expanded access to vocational training, challenges remain in ensuring alignment with global labor market needs. The integration of digital skills and the expansion of targeted support for women could enhance the country's skilling ecosystem.

Despite its challenges with unemployment and poverty, migration patterns in **Nigeria** reveals a significant outflow of skilled workers. Gender disparities and data gaps in skilling initiatives highlight the need for transparent, evidence-based approaches. Programs that focus on entrepreneurship and targeted skilling for women and youth could bridge existing gaps and foster more equitable outcomes.

The research and analysis in this study conclude that the three countries of origin are significant in examining patterns of skills acquisition for migration, as they exemplify how countries of origin equip workers with relevant skills; not only in response to global labor market trends, but also as a strategic mechanism to enhance economic opportunities abroad and address domestic employment challenges. The country-level analysis of **Egypt's** case study concludes that its focus on aligning vocational education with international standards emphasizes the strategic significance of migration as a tool for economic stabilization, with particular focus on remittance flows. Similarly, in **Bangladesh**, skilling initiatives have evolved to meet the demand for both unskilled labor in GCC countries and higher-skilled professionals. **Nigeria**, faces unique challenges in addressing skills mismatches while navigating the complex dynamics of brain drain and workforce capacity building. Across these contexts, the paper shows how targeted skilling interventions can facilitate smoother transitions for migrants and foster economic integration in host countries. These three country contexts are rich in their diversity, with multiple layers of identity and difference, privilege and marginalization, along lines of inter alia culture, race, class, gender, age and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989). However, the current working paper cannot comprehensively flesh out these dynamics in each context, but does its best to link general observations as to intersectional nuances to the overall examination of migration and skilling.

The collective assessment of all three country contexts reveals that aligning programs with labor market demand and addressing structural inequalities will help ensure that the respective workforces are better equipped to meet both local and global challenges, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic development and social cohesion. This can contribute to a more cohesive and impactful skilling and migration strategy in each country, each of which still manifests room for improvement in aligning skilling and migration policies. Finally, while sector dynamics in each country varied, they underlined the gender and intersectional inequalities posing obstacles to labor market equality

against the greater migration and skilling global backdrop. On this note, international cooperation across stakeholders–from international organisations, to receiving country state governments, to private and NGO actors-remains crucial, including in offering viable legal migration pathways and international certifications and recognition. The final section of the paper, Section 5, provides more elaborate conclusions from the cross-case analysis.

2. Case Study: Egypt

2.1. Migration Trends in Egypt

2.1.1. Historical Overview

Egypt is the most populated country in the MENA region, with a population of 117 million people (Worldometer, 2024). Its strategic location within the region makes it a key country of origin, destination, and transit for migrants (IOM, 2022). Since the 1952 Revolution, substantial transformations in the country's political and economic strategies took place, influencing policy making processes, particularly those in the area of migration (Tsourapas, 2019). Before 1952, emigration from Egypt mainly involved students studying abroad, particularly in Europe (France and Britain). However, after the 1952 revolution, the new Government of Egypt (GoE), at the time, began to use emigration as a tool for foreign policy (Ibid). From 1952 to 1970, emigration was largely restricted, with policies aimed at controlling migration, allowing only highly skilled professionals to work temporarily in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries under short-term secondments (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). This approach aimed to demonstrate self-sufficiency to the West and promote Pan-Arabism (Tsourapas, 2019). However, following the 1967 war and the public sector's inability to create enough jobs, the government started to relax these restrictive immigration policies to mitigate rising poverty levels (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024).

A more permissive migration policy was adopted during the early 1970s parallel to the transition to an open-door policy (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). At this time, the government began promoting exit visas for citizens, allowing them to emigrate and return as per the 1971 Constitution (Tsourapas, 2019). Public sector employees were assured they could return to their jobs within a year of resignation under Law No. 73, which was later extended to two years (Tsourapas, 2022). The rise in oil prices following the 1973 war led to increased demand for Egyptian labor in Arab oil-producing countries, given their labor shortages and Egypt's sizable population (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). Consequently, remittances have become since then a crucial source of foreign exchange for the country.

To assess the economic contributions of its migrant population in terms of employment and remittances, the GoE categorized emigrants into "permanent" and "temporary" emigrants under the 1971 Constitution, depending on their destination and the current naturalization policies affecting remittances. "Permanent migrants" are defined as those residing for over 10 years and potentially

eligible for citizenship or permanent residency in their destination country (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). Hence, Egyptian labor migrants in OECD countries fall into this category, as long-term residents can eventually be granted citizenship (Tsourapas, 2022). In contrast, "temporary migrants" refer to Egyptians in GCC and other Arab countries, such as Lebanon and Libya, as they only provide specialized, short-term labor needs and these countries do not grant citizenship rights under local naturalization laws (Ibid).

Broader policies prioritized "permanent migrants" as they were considered of greater importance for Egypt's development compared to those working in GCC and Arab countries (Tsourapas, 2022). The legal framework controlling labor migration in the GCC countries has made permanent residency increasingly challenging, particularly under the Kafala system, which requires companies to obtain sponsorship permits to hire foreign workers. This system also mandates that workers leave upon their employment contract's termination and limit their access to political, social, and economic entitlements within the destination country (El-Assar and Smolny, 2022). As a result, temporary Egyptian emigrants are more likely to return to Egypt and invest in their home country, impacting economic planning and labor market dynamics. This aspect of Egypt's migration strategy aligns with its original aim of encouraging emigration to facilitate the return of skilled Egyptians, thereby boosting national development and reducing brain drain.

Egypt's approach to emigration policies transformed significantly given the size of remittances. What was once seen as a strategy to manage labor market pressures and unemployment became a primary economic mechanism for generating foreign currency and supporting local development (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). In 1981, the Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs (MoSEEEA) was founded, and over time, some of its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Manpower and Employment, which was subsequently renamed the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration in 1996. In 1983, Egypt enacted its first comprehensive emigration law, Law No. 111, aimed at promoting Egyptian emigration (Tsourapas, 2018). However, the emigration landscape was disrupted by geopolitical events. The Gulf Wars triggered an economic recession in the oil industry, causing a decline in oil prices and forcing many Egyptian migrants to return from Kuwait and Iraq (El-Assar and Smolny, 2022). Additionally, Egyptians faced increased competition from low-paid emigrants from East Asian countries during the mid-1980s and early 1990s, which further slowed migration and remittance flows.

Between 2011 and 2013, coinciding with the instability in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt faced an influx of refugees, prompting a division of the emigration portfolio between the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of State for Migration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). The Ministry of Manpower focused on finding new markets for Egyptians abroad and facilitating matches with overseas employers, while the Ministry of State handled border control, refugee protection, irregular migration issues, and monitoring the conditions of expatriates (Ibid). The conflict in Syria in 2012 and unrest in East Africa also drove many Sudanese, South Sudanese, Ethiopians, Iraqis, and Yemenis to seek refuge in Egypt, making migration a security issue for the

Ministry of Interior to handle (Ibid). From 2013 onward, Egypt redefined its migration priorities in response to increasing refugee and transit migration. The 2014 Constitution introduced more stringent border control measures and prioritized partnerships with European countries offering financial and technical assistance to mitigate irregular migration to Europe (Ibid). The latest major shift was the introduction of the Anti-Smuggling Law (Law 82/2016) in 2016 on Combating Illegal Migration & Smuggling of Migrants (IOM, 2016). This new law aimed at complementing the anti-trafficking law issued in 2010 and demonstrating Egypts commitment to cooperate with EU countries on migration policies.

Global challenges in 2019, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine-Russian conflict, and global stagflation, triggered another unplanned wave of Egyptian migrant returns, primarily from GCC countries. The uncertain nature of these returns; whether temporary or permanent, made exact returnee numbers difficult to record. This situation compelled the Egyptian government to explore new international job markets and adopt a multi-ministerial approach to migration, involving Education, Technical Education, Manpower, Interior Affairs, and Foreign Affairs (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2024). From this juncture, priorities have also shifted more towards skills and qualifications, especially to the GCC and EU countries.

2.1.2. Data-Based Trends from National Data

I. Analysis from Published Reports

Moving to the analysis of trends in terms of data, the United States ranked first in 2022 as the primary destination for Egyptians who received emigration approval and those who acquired migrant status, accepting 142 individuals (44.8%) (CAPMAS, 2023). Italy followed in second place, hosting 83 Egyptian emigrants, which accounted for 26.2% of the total. Canada came in third, accepting 51 Egyptian migrants (16.1%) (Ibid). The majority of Egyptians who received emigration approval or acquired emigration status were males (80.8%), with the 40 to 44 age group forming the largest segment among those who gained official approval or status (Ibid). This age group made up 18.3% of the total recorded Egyptian emigrant population in 2020. Similar findings were noted in the 2019 data as well. Based on the data from CAPMAS, among those receiving emigration permits and attaining migrant status, educational backgrounds are primarily concentrated in two fields: Business, Administration and Law, and Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction. The analysis also indicates that the likelihood of migration for individuals with higher education is similar to that of those with secondary education. However, both higher-educated and secondary-educated workers are more likely to migrate than those with only primary education. This supports the hypothesis that individuals with higher education levels are generally more inclined to migrate than their less-educated counterparts (El-Assar and Smolny, 2022).

Regarding trends in work permits issued to Egyptians, they showed fluctuating trends, peaking at 1.33 million in 2015 after rising from 1.1 million in 2009, before declining to around 883,000 in 2021

(CAPMAS, 2023). In 2017, Saudi Arabia dominated the work permit landscape, issuing over half of the permits for Egyptian workers. Kuwait followed, accounting for about a fifth of the permits, with Jordan and the UAE also considered significant destinations (CAPMAS, 2019). Among European countries, Italy ranked first in terms of the percentage of work permits issued. In more recent years, Egyptian asylum-seeking migration surged significantly. In 2022, Egyptians comprised about one-fifth of Italy's disembarkations, and European countries received 3,480 asylum applications from Egyptian nationals in the first quarter alone—a staggering 338% increase from the previous year (EUAA, 2022). Italy was the primary destination, receiving 61% of these applications. Other European countries like Greece, France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands also received Egyptian asylum seekers, though in smaller numbers (Ibid). Notably, 95% of these applications were from first-time applicants, with positive first-instance decisions increasing from 13% in 2021 to 24% in 2022, primarily granted under temporary protection statutes (Ibid).

Along with work opportunities and asylum-seeking migration patterns, Egyptians also migrate in search of better educational prospects. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Egyptian migrants can participate in several types of educational missions (CAPMAS, 2019). These include foreign missions aimed at obtaining advanced degrees over a three- to four-year period, scientific missions in which students receive scholarships or sponsorships, study missions funded by foreign grants submitted to the state, and missions for collecting scientific material in pursuit of academic degrees. The highest percentage of emigration in scientific missions was to the United States, Germany, England, and China according to the CAPMAS (Ibid).

II.   Analysis from National Labor Market Surveys

The primary source of data for national surveys in Egypt is the Economic Research Forum (ERF), a regional platform dedicated to advancing high-quality research throughout the Middle East. ERF collaborates with data collectors and works to enhance data accessibility for a broader audience. Ongoing efforts focus on understanding the labor market dynamics in Egypt. In choosing the most relevant dataset for this study, various factors were weighed, including the questionnaire design, the target survey groups, and the data collection method, to ensure the most up-to-date and insightful data was obtained. Several surveys were considered such as the Higher Education Graduates Survey (ERF, 2012), the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) (Population Council, 2014), the Survey of Young People in Informal Urban Areas of Greater Cairo (SYPE-IGC) (Population Council, 2016), the SAHWA Youth Survey (Sanchez-Montijano et al, 2021), and the Labor Force Survey (ERF, 2022). The most comprehensive and relevant to the purpose of the study was the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey (ELMPS), providing insights on migration, skilling, and socioeconomic variables, with a large sample mirroring that of the Egyptian population.

A joint collaboration between the ERF and CAPMAS, the ELMPS is a longitudinal survey that is a staple contributor to research on labor markets and human development in Egypt, and provides a more profound overview on migration trends in Egypt (ODAMI, 2024). Over a period of 30 years, the panel

survey has been conducted six times; one in 1988, 1998, 2006, 2012, 2018, and 2023. Due to their meticulous methodology and comprehensive relevance, both the 2018 and 2023 waves were considered for this working paper. The survey is designed to provide insights into Egyptian labor market trends, as well as attitudes in regards to topics such as education, migration, remittances, skilling, and employment. While it includes both household data and individual data, this working paper focuses on the individual-level reporting. In the 2018 wave, the sample included 61,231 individuals, and in the 2023 wave, the sample included 70,636 individuals. The following lines provide data analysis from the ELMPS, detailing trends among potential migrants and actual migrants.

A. Potential Migrants

Potential migrants defined as all survey respondents who indicated that they are interested in traveling abroad to work/live/study within the next 5 years. The potential migrant pool shrank from 1,153 to 1,024 individuals between 2018 and 2023. This reduction was largely attributed to a 17% decrease in those targeting Arab countries as migration destinations. Conversely, while still a small proportion, potential migrants interested in European countries rose by 28%, indicating an emerging preference for Europe as a migration destination.

The profile of potential migrants primarily consists of individuals working in medium to low-skilled occupations, specifically in agriculture, forestry, fishery, crafts, trades, and industrial machine operations. Also, only 6% of employed potential migrants had participated in skills training programs, potentially due to either perceiving no training need or lacking awareness of available skill development initiatives.

B. Actual migrants

Those who were identified by current household members as current migrants. Based on information provided by households in the ELMPS 2023 wave, the top destination countries for Egyptian migrants were Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait. The two most commonly cited reasons for migration were to work abroad and accompanying a family member, together representing about 97% of the reported cases.

2.1.3. Trends in Irregular Migration

In the first half of 2022, Egyptians were the most detected nationality along the Central Mediterranean route, accounting for 20% of all detections. There were 2,601 reported instances of irregular border crossings by Egyptians between January and April 2022, representing 4% of total detections (EUAA, 2022). This number slightly increased to 2,778 in the same period in 2024 (Frontex, 2024). However, the routes used by Egyptian migrants to enter Europe irregularly shifted significantly. In 2021, 92% of detections at the EU external borders occurred along the Central Mediterranean route, with only 3% and 4% on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes, respectively. By 2024, the Central

Mediterranean route's share dropped to 52%, while the Eastern Mediterranean route rose to 40%, and the Western Balkan route fell to around 1%. (Frontex, 2024). Following several shipwrecks carrying irregular migrants from Egypt to Europe, resulting in numerous deaths, Egypt tightened its sea borders, leading to no reported departures of irregular migrants from Egypt since then (EUAA, 2022). Consequently, many Egyptians began to embark from Libya and Turkey. According to 2022 UNHCR data on Egyptians arriving in Italy by boat, 79% of these migrants were adult men, less than 3% were adult women and accompanied children, and 19% were unaccompanied or separated children (Ibid).

2.2. Macroeconomic and Labor Market Factors Influencing Migration in Egypt

2.2.1. Macroeconomic Overview

Egypt has been struggling with a prolonged foreign currency crisis, exacerbated by global food inflation in 2022 and domestic supply chain disruptions, which have disrupted the foreign exchange market. In response, the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) adopted a flexible exchange rate against the dollar in March 2024 (World Bank, 2024). This shift, combined with off-budget borrowing, has driven the debt-to-GDP ratio to 95.2% as of FY2023 (World Bank, 2024), further escalating interest payments. Consequently, expenditures on human capital development and social protection have been curtailed, falling short of the needs of Egypt's rapidly growing population.

Additionally, Egypt's economic landscape has been progressively deteriorating, with intensifying vulnerabilities stemming from gradual subsidy removals, persistent currency devaluations, and rising inflation (European Union Agency, 2022). The global political climate, particularly the Ukraine-Russian conflict, has further destabilized the economy by disrupting wheat imports and causing a significant 25% increase in bread prices (Ibid). These economic pressures have disproportionately impacted the population, with poverty rates, latest figures as of 2019, standing at 29.7% and expected to be substantially higher today with these factors (World Bank Group, 2022). The economic strain is especially severe for the bottom quintile of the population, who spend approximately 44% of their income on food—compared to just 30% for the top quintiles—making them extra vulnerable to economic shocks (Ibid). The international tensions translating into economic burdens and the uncertain financial state continue to fuel Egyptians towards emigration to seek individual and family economic survival elsewhere, as domestic economic conditions continue to deteriorate (European Union Agency, 2022).

2.2.2. Labor Market Overview

Moving to labor market trends, unemployment continues to be stable at 6.9% (African Development Bank Group, 2024). While Egypt's demographic landscape presents a promising scenario, with working-age individuals comprising over 60% of the total population, this potential is significantly

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undermined by a persistently low labor force participation rate (LFPR), particularly among youth and females, consistently remaining below 50% over the recent period (Awad and Abdel Fattah, 2023). The gender disparity in workforce participation is high, with males at 72% compared to females at a mere 16%—a decline from 23% in 2009 and 18.3% in 2018 (World Bank Open Data, 2024a). Social pressures play a crucial role in this imbalance, as women are often socially discouraged from pursuing paid employment, instead being expected to prioritize household responsibilities.

Egypt confronts significant skills mismatching, prompting the GoE to implement educational and skills-enhancement policies aimed at improving economic productivity and facilitating smoother school-to-work transitions. The unemployment rate among university graduates remains critically high at 46%, largely due to a disconnect between educational attainment and labor market demands (MPED, 2023). This skills mismatch is primarily driven by a paradox where educated youth possess high levels of education that do not align with market needs, which instead looks for medium-skilled and technical workers more than highly-skilled professionals with higher reservation wages. This mismatch is one of the factors playing into the unemployment levels and low LFPR among the working age population (Ibid). Consequently, this systemic skills gap becomes a potent push factor for migration, as young, educated Egyptians find themselves increasingly unable to secure meaningful employment domestically, motivating them to seek opportunities abroad where their educational investments might yield better economic returns and professional recognition.

2.2.3. Skills and Wages Analysis

The impact of skills training on wages is another focus of the working paper. ELMPS 2023 data indicates that, among employed individuals, those who have undergone skills training are about 5% more likely to be satisfied with their wages compared to those who have not (ELMPS, 2024). However, one limitation is that the sample size for individuals who underwent skills training is insufficient, so these figures should be considered indicative rather than conclusive. Accordingly, this analytical dimension is substantiated by secondary research. A study conducted by the Economic Research Forum (ERF) synthesized multiple nationally representative surveys on the Egyptian labor market spanning the period from 2009 to 2019, offering an in-depth examination of relevant trends. The primary data sources included the Egypt Economic Census, the Egypt Labor Force Surveys (LFS) from 2009 to 2019, and the Egypt Labor Market Panel Surveys (ELMPS) of 2012 and 2018. The analysis revealed that, overall, real wages were negatively impacted by inflation during this period (ERF and GIZ, 2023). However, there were heterogeneous effects across occupational categories, as certain blue-collar occupations experienced significant real wage growth. In contrast, many white-collar jobs, characterized by relatively fixed nominal wages experienced real wage contractions due to their inability to adjust to inflationary pressures (Ibid). Additionally, the study identified a positive linear relationship between employment growth and wage growth, indicating that occupations with increasing employment also tend to experience growth in real wages (Ibid). A potential limitation, however, is that the data analyzed is not the most up-to-date, as it covers the period up to 2019.

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect that these trends have likely persisted beyond 2019, given the continued rise in inflation during subsequent years.

Given the overall current macroeconomic and socioeconomic situations, with both low sources of foreign currency, and the low labor force participation rate, leveraging on migration patterns can help mitigate these challenges. Through migration policies, working aged individuals can both increase and improve their skills set in sectors of focus, while also improving domestic economic activity through remittances, allowing for an increase in sources of foreign currency. With the large working aged population and the high unemployment rate, the Egyptian labor force landscape holds high potential to address the current economic concerns.

2.3. Structural Factors Affecting Skilling and Migration in Key Sectors

I. Construction sector

    With a value of USD 50.78, the construction sector in Egypt is one of the most important due to its fast-growing record both from an overall economic standpoint, and in terms of job creation (Mordor Intelligence, 2024a). This has encouraged many sector-specific developments allowing for continued growth with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.39% between 2024-2029 (Ibid).

    However, given the sector's predominantly informal nature, leveraging this growth into strategic labor market reforms proves difficult. The sector faces challenges such as irregular employment, high labor mobility, seasonal contracts, hazardous working conditions, and a lack of social security in the form of insurance (Elsebaei et al., 2022). Together with low and inconsistent wages, these conditions create an overall sense of job insecurity in the sector, which predominantly employs low-skilled and unskilled workers. This results in many blue-collar workers seeking opportunities abroad, specifically in the Gulf region, where salaries are most appealing (Pioneers Recruitment Agency CEO, 2024).

II. ICT Sector

    The ICT sector is Egypt's fastest-growing sector, with continued growth projected at a CAGR of 17.61% between 2024-2029 (Mordor Intelligence, 2024b). To capitalize on this growth and push for better labor market conditions, the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) launched the ICT Sustainable Development Plan, where the GoE is looking to maximize economic growth through the integration of digital technologies across all sectors (Hassan, 2024).

    Despite the sector's growth and the government's efforts, the urban concentration of training and upskilling programs in urban centers, leaves the rural and impoverished regions

underserved and excluded. Along with this, the existing programs are not regularly updated to match global technological advancements, creating skill mismatches for highly-skilled workers internationally (Sika, 2010).

III.   Care Sector

The care sector in Egypt plays a significant role in providing job opportunities, especially for women. Given the mix of low-wages, the poor-quality of the general healthcare ecosystem, there is a societal stigma against care sector workers, particularly nurses.

Egyptian healthcare workers, while technically skilled, lack the soft-skills needed to manage patient care and stress-management. As a result, many private sector firms employ international workers, as opposed to local workers, in an attempt to boost their reputation, leaving many local workers to work in the poorly-maintained public sector. In the period between 2016 and 2018, 5% of the physician workforce migrated due to low-pay, poor working conditions, and lack of growth opportunities (Alsawahli, 2019).

2.4. Gender-Specific Factors Regarding Skilling and Migration in Egypt

I.   Economic Participation and Skilling Disparities

Analyzing the gender aspect of economic participation, female participation remains very low with the female labor force participation continuously decreasing over time, reaching only 16% in 2024 (World Bank Open Data, 2024). This is in comparison to the males' 74% (Ibid). Social pressures exacerbate this difference in participation as women are discouraged to participate in paid labor in efforts to focus on their societal duty of maintaining household responsibilities. The lack of flexible work conditions and integrated child-care services make it difficult for mothers and housewives to balance both formal work and household care. This translates into the lack of a gender-focus in skilling programs which, although may be an aspect in a few initiatives, is not a common practice across. In fact, of the few that do consider gender-based factors, such as minimizing women participant's barriers to entry in the labor market initiatives, they are often last minute add-ons, rather than being considered in the design-phase of the programs, leading to poor execution.

II.   Gendered Trends in Migration

The absence of women from Egypt in migration studies, as well as their underrepresentation in the migration process, contrasts with the growing focus of women in international migration research. Salih highlights that only about 2-5% of women from this country migrate for economic reasons, while the majority do so for marriage or family reunification (Salih 2011). This is further supported by the 2023 ELMPS survey, which showed that the top migration pull-factor for over 50% of Egyptian women, is the pursuit of completing their pilgrimage. This is followed by a need to accompany family

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members at 26% (ELMPS, 2024). However, evidence suggests that once these women migrate, they are twice as likely to be employed compared to those who remain in the country, which is seen as a form of empowerment. In this context, understanding the barriers to women's migration, promoting their mobility, and exploring how this could increase their economic participation is crucial for achieving true economic empowerment; helping women secure financial independence and greater bargaining power

III.   Gender Specific Challenges in Migration

Research on both international and internal migration among Egyptians has highlighted how mobility has the opportunity to enhance men's economic participation. With this in mind, the exclusion of women from migration and the limitations on their mobility may help explain their restricted labor force participation. Furthermore, when women are involved in migratory processes, it often leads to greater empowerment in household decision-making (Assaad, 2010).

IV.   Opportunities for Gender-Inclusive Development

With no skilling initiatives targeted towards women, and existing initiatives providing minimal to no focus on gender-specific needs, gender inclusion is generally seen as an afterthought rather than a fully embedded focus in the overall labor-development landscape. By implementing this on a policy-level that trickles down to general initiatives and training programs, Egypt can maximize female participation and allow for more investment in their development. This will maximize economic opportunities for women in terms of both skills developments and, potentially, migration participation.

2.5. Policy and Strategic Initiatives Analysis

2.5.1. National Policies

Egypt's policy framework for skills development and migration is moulded by various government bodies, strategies, and initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth through improved employability and labor mobility. These policies are designed to align skills development with labor market demands and facilitate effective migration management. However, the degree of alignment of these policies with a unified national strategy, varies. Table 1 below provides a systematic overview of Egypt's policies regarding skilling, migration, and the intersection of skills development with the labor market. Challenges identified are based on impact evaluations conducted to assess the effectiveness of policies. A more detailed discussion of these three policy categories follows in this section.

Table 1. Egyptian Policy Mapping

Type of Policy	Title	Year/Period	Aim	Challenges
Skilling	**National Plan for Decent Work**	2022-2025	Improving job quality, reducing indecent labor practices, and fair wages.	Sectoral application
	Digital Egypt Strategy	2020	Upgrade the digital landscape of Egypt and expand the IT sector to keep pace with global advancements.	Minimal inclusion of rural communities and cybersecurity
	Technical Education Reform Policy	2018	To modernize the Technical and Vocational Education System and update the curriculum to ensure relevance to labor market needs.	Scalability across Egypt
Migration	**National Strategy for Migration**	2016-2026	A comprehensive strategy to manage migration, maximize benefits from migration, protect Egyptian migrants abroad, and promote the reintegration of returnees.	Addressing the root causes of irregular migration
	National Strategy for Combating Illegal Migration	2016-2026	Promote legal migration pathways and protection, with a particular focus on vulnerable migrants.	Enforcement gaps
Labor Market	**National Employment Strategy**	2024	To minimize unemployment and skills mismatching by addressing the current needs and predicting the future needs of the labor market.	Implementation issues due to constant timeline changes
	Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women	2019-2024	To increase labor force participation of women in Egypt, Jordan, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories by removing barriers to entry, promoting protective laws, and ensuring collaboration between the private and public sectors.	*Project evaluation not yet published*

	National Strategy for Women's Empowerment 2030	**2017**	To enhance women's participation in the workforce, promote gender equality, and ensure women's access to leadership roles.	Cultural norms and gender pay gaps
	Labor Law No. 23 of 2003	**2003**	Governance of employment relations regarding employee/employer rights in terms of: contracts, foreign employment, hours of work and benefits.	No gender-specific framework or wage enforcement

I.   On Skilling

The main goal is to reform the technical and vocational education system in efforts to bridge the gap between educational results and labor market needs. The **Technical Education Reform Policy** and the **Digital Egypt Strategy** (MCIT, 2024) focus on equipping the workforce with updated skills, particularly digital skills, to keep pace with the evolving needs of both the local and global economy. However, these efforts overlook Egypt's broader economic development goals, indicating a need for coordinated input across government entities.

II.   On Migration

Regarding Migration, Egypt is focused on the development of legal pathways while minimizing the proportion of irregular migrants, as seen in the **National Strategy for Combating Illegal Migration (2016-2026)** (NCCPIM&TIP, 2016) and various **Bilateral Labor Agreements.** Through collaborative efforts and with relevant countries of destination, along with a set legal system, the aim is to promote safe and organized migration. However, this is developed without considering the importance of skills development; a key factor for ensuring efficient implementation.

III.   On Skilling for Migration

Currently, there are no policies that explicitly connect skilling efforts with migration strategies. While initiatives focus on pre-departure preparation and the recognition of skills qualifications, they are implemented as separate objectives, with limited cooperation between MoETE and MoM; the two ministries responsible for skilling development and migration management. This lack of integration highlights a missed opportunity to use skills development as a means to promote and facilitate legal migration.

In Egypt, policy making tends to be influenced by exogenous factors such as bilateral agreements or donor requirements, rather than driven by a unified long-term strategy. However, the policy mapping indicates that there is some evidence-driven focus on certain sectors such as technical and vocational education and ICT, as seen in the **Digital Egypt Strategy** (MCIT, 2024) and **Technical Education Reform Policy.** This is due to their ability to foster economic development and improve employability on both a local and global scale. Conversely, sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and manufacturing, lack labor market data, which hampers the ability to make data-driven policy reforms. These sectors rely on general studies rather than sector-specific data, limiting the ability to create relevant, targeted skilling and migration policies.

With regards to stakeholders, the mapping reflects a complex network of stakeholders across multiple governmental levels. The primary governmental stakeholders include the Ministry of Manpower, which oversees labor regulations and employment policies, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Migration, and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs, which manages migration-related policies.. The Ministry of Education and Technical Education, along with TVET Egypt, plays a crucial role in skills development through technical and vocational training programs. Other key stakeholders include the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), and the Ministry of Social Solidarity. However, there is no clearly defined arrangement between the multiple stakeholders. The absence of a unified coordinating body, coupled with fragmented policies across ministries, reflects the lack of an organized framework regarding skilling and migration. This fragmentation may result in inefficiencies, repeated initiatives, and gaps in policy coverage; all of which may minimize the effectiveness of these national strategies.

2.5.2. Strategic Initiatives

The ecosystem of skills development and migration initiatives in Egypt is one that is elaborate yet fragmented, involving multiple entities at both national and international levels. The main focus of the initiatives is to develop the local workforce's skills, thereby supporting local sustainable development and promoting labor migration and mobility. Each initiative targets their own demographics and serves to address various purposes; whether this be to improve local job matching or to encourage legal migration. The degree to which these initiatives align with the goals of national skills development strategies and migration goals varies, with some hosting a clear and articulated vision and structure, and others remaining less defined in their strategic objectives. The selection of initiatives for the analysis prioritized those that captured a comprehensive range of dimensions concerning efforts in Egypt to upskill or reskill the workforce and facilitate migration. Accordingly, the analysis concentrated on initiatives launched from 2010 onward, as well as those initiated prior to 2010 but remaining active post 2010. Furthermore, systems and educational centers established before 2010 that continue to operate were also incorporated into the scope of the study.

 The identified initiatives fall into the below categories:

I. Upgrading the Skills of Egyptians

This group of initiatives focus on developing and strengthening Egyptians' technical and vocational skills to improve job matching both locally and globally. This primary focus is generally on youth entering the workforce, which implicitly supports migration as they acquire skills that align with the needs of the global economy. The **TVET reform and vocational program** (TVET Egypt, 2024), with the involvement of programs such as **DonBosco** (Donbosco, 2024) and various government bodies, highlights a concentrated effort to reduce the ongoing skills mismatch in Egypt.

II. Training and Education for Migration Purposes

Initiatives in this category are focused on providing the workforce with skills demanded globally for the specific purpose of fostering migration. Initiatives such as **the nursing training for placement in Germany** (Horus Development, 2024) explicitly link skills development to meet the needs of a foreign country's labor market. This category clearly emphasizes the objective of linking skilling initiatives for the sole purpose of migration, with strong coordination from both local and global entities.

III. Promoting Circular Migration Pathways

Initiatives such as the **Y-MED program** (IOM, 2024), are strategic partnerships that allow for the exchange of skills and human capital to provide mutually beneficial outcomes to participating states. They are designed to promote temporary migration, with participants transferring their enhanced learnings upon their return. These initiatives balance migration and skills development in a strategic effort to both effectively manage workforce exports while stimulating local workforce enhancements.

IV. Improving Mechanisms for Skills Assessment, Certification, Validation and Recognition for Egyptians Workers

This category of initiatives are key to ensuring Egyptians' skills and qualifications are recognized both locally and internationally. They aim to align skills enhancements with international standards to promote labor mobility. This alignment reflects a strong effort to ensure that the Egyptian workforces' skills and qualifications are both credible and portable. Key initiatives in this category include the **THAMM initiative** (GIZ, 2024) and the **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** (ETF, 2021).

V. Fostering Labor Migration Management Capacities:

Initiatives fostering labor management capacities, such as **IMIS initiative** (Ceschi et al., 2005), focus on improving governmental institutions' ability to effectively manage labor migration. These initiatives play a vital role in developing the infrastructure and policy frameworks necessary to facilitate migration flows. The effectiveness of these programs largely depends on the coordination among various government agencies and international partners, emphasizing the need for a cohesive strategy in migration management.

VI.   Agreements and MOUs Signed Between Egypt and Other Countries:

Formal agreements establish the foundation for organized migration pathways and skills development. These agreements play a vital role in aligning the objectives of both Egypt and destination countries, ensuring effective management of labor mobility. However, challenges often arise during the implementation phase, particularly in terms of coordinating efforts and fine-tuning systems for skill validation and certification.

Table 2 below provides a profound overview of the initiatives used for the analysis by initiative category.

Table 2. Egyptian Initiatives Mapping

Type of Initiative	Title	Year/Period	Aim	Target Demographic	Target Sector
Solely for upgrading the skills of Egyptians	**'Tafra' (Breakthrough) Project**	Since 2023	Deliver vocational training to 6,400 irregular workers residing in alternative-housing neighborhoods	• Irregular Youth Workers	• Sewing • Health Care • Nursery Supervisions • Cell-Phone Maintenance • Surveillance Cameras • AC • Satellite Dish and Receivers
	Vocational Skills Development in Egypt	2021-2026	To enhance the quality and provision of dual vocational education and training (VET)	• 70,000 15-19 year-old students (of which 20,000 are women) • Disadvantaged regions • Successfully completed 9th grade	• Agriculture • Tourism & Hospitality • Construction • Ready-Made Garments

	Thousands for Skilled Workers for a New Egypt	2012-2014	To give extensive training courses	• Youth	• Painting • Masonry • Tiling • Scaffolding • Installation • Plant Mechanics for Sanitary • Heating • Air Conditioning Technology
	TVET Reforms	2006-2015	Supports reforming the TVET governance model, as well as updating TVET curricula and school-to-work transition reforms	-	• Vocational Sectors
Training and education for migration purposes	**Education and Training for Youth in Fayoum Governorate**	2010-2013	Enhance their employability and competitiveness in the tourism sector at local, national and international level.	• Youth who have potential for irregular migration.	• Tourism
	Carelend Egypt (Company)	Since 2004	Carelend specialises in the training, qualification, and appointment of graduates from Egyptian nursing colleges and institutes to serve the needs of the German labor market.	• Graduates from Egyptian nursing colleges	• Nursing
Promoting circular migration pathways	**NET-Work You**	2024-2027	Establish a pioneering and sustainable model of circular and skilled labour mobility between Italy and Egypt by offering a traineeship opportunity to 100 young Egyptians in the region of Apulia, Southern Italy.	• 40 recent graduates • 60 agricultural workers or technicians from rural Egyptian regions	• Green Economy • Digitalization • Agriculture
	MOBILISE	2023-2027	Train 120 participants with a three-month internship/training programme in the Netherlands	• 120 students/ young workers seeking (self-) employment in the horticulture field	• Agriculture

	Y-MED	Since 2018	Develop skills through a six-month internship program in Italy	• Nile University Graduates	• ICT • Mechanical Engineering
Mechanisms for assessment, certification, validation and recognition of Egyptians' skills and qualifications	**Towards a Holistic Approach to Labor Migration Governance and Labor Mobility in North Africa (THAMM)**	2019-2023	Foster mutually beneficial labor migration and mobility by improving mechanisms for assessment, certification, validation, and recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications	-	-
Labor migration management capacities	**Migration Partnership Facility (MPF)**	2020-2024	To strengthen cooperation between EU member states and partner countries across a broad range of migration-related themes aligned to the New Pact on Migration & Asylum	-	-
	Integrated Migration Information System (IMIS)	Since 2001	Build a technical tool that supports the emigration section within the MoME, including a website for matching potential migrants with employers abroad and a web portal for Egyptian expatriates.	-	-
Agreements and MOUs signed between Egypt and other countries	**Bilateral Labor Agreements**	Ongoing	Facilitate labor migration management with countries, especially in the Gulf region, ensuring fair working conditions but facing enforcement challenges in countries with weaker labor laws.	*Depends on the agreement*	*Depends on the agreement*

Focusing specifically on the European Union's (EU) very recent efforts, the EU and Egypt are advancing their collaboration towards a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership (EC, 2024b). As part of this partnership, the EU has proposed a €7.4 billion financial and investment support package for Egypt for the period 2024–2027 (Ibid). Two of the five priorities outlined in this partnership are directly related to skills development and migration (Ibid). The pillar on migration and mobility underscores comprehensive cooperation, including combating human smuggling and trafficking,

strengthening border management, addressing the root causes of irregular migration, and facilitating pathways for legal migration (Ibid). Meanwhile, the pillar on skills emphasizes joint work on education and training, with a particular focus on expanding exchanges through Erasmus+. It also aims to strengthen collaboration in research and innovation, supported by Egypt's accession to Horizon Europe and Creative Europe programs (Ibid).

Egypt's initiative mapping highlights key trends in the design of programs related to skills development and migration, specifically in terms of target profiles, geographic reach, and stakeholder coordination. These factors play a critical role in understanding the effectiveness and alignment of Egypt's skilling, reskilling, and upskilling efforts. A key trend across is continuous focus on youth demographics as the target profile. Many programs clearly state their intent to aid young workers with the technical and vocational skills needed to enhance their employability both locally and internationally. The focus on youth aligns both with Egypt's general demographic profile, and highlights a strategic effort to coordinate the workforce's skill qualifications with the overarching needs of the labor market. However, this hyperfocus on the youth leaves certain demographic profiles, such as existing workers looking to upskill or reskill, overlooked. Additionally, the geographic distribution of initiatives are skewed towards urban regions, particularly in Cairo, which serves as the main governorate for a majority of the programs. This urban concentration leaves many rural communities underserved and overlooked, highlighting a gap in the degree of inclusivity of these programs; on a geographic and demographic level.

Another critical layer in the initiatives mapping is stakeholder coordination. The extent at which stakeholder coordination is effectively managed varied. Programs like THAMM and the TVET reform initiatives exemplify these efforts, clearing outlining the role and input of the multi-stakeholder projects, where technical partners, international entities, and government bodies effectively collaborate to achieve a unified objective. However, challenges remain in total government alignment and implementation.

Initiatives specifically aimed at promoting migration stand out as particularly significant in the mapping. Programs such as Y-MED and THAMM focus on facilitating legal pathways for labor mobility, enhancing management frameworks, and ensuring international recognition of the Egyptian workforce's skill qualifications. These initiatives align with Egypt's goal of linking skilling efforts to labor mobility, ensuring that local initiatives meet the demands of the international labor market. In this context, they reflect a strategic effort to leverage migration as a key pathway toward achieving the state's broader economic development objectives.

In conclusion, the analysis of the target groups, geographic focus, and stakeholder coordination reveals a layered but developing ecosystem of skilling initiatives in Egypt. While there is evident progress in aligning skills development with migration objectives, significant gaps remain in terms of demographic inclusivity, regional reach, and integrated governance. Addressing these gaps will

require a more coordinated approach that prioritizes marginalized groups, expands geographic reach and embeds gender perspectives more thoroughly across all initiatives.

2.6. Challenges and Opportunities for Future Developments

Egypt's actions in developing skilling, reskilling, and upskilling programs highlights several challenges that, with the right adjustments, could lead to more sustainable development and support migration and trade. These challenges are evident in the design, implementation, and impact assessment phases. However, with the right adjustments in inclusivity, scalability, partnerships, and transparent goal coordination, Egypt can fully maximize its investments in human capital and achieve better labor market outcomes, both locally, and abroad.

2.6.1. Challenges in Skills Development and Migration

1. Limited Coordination Between Entities:
   An evident challenge in the effectiveness of the training programs stems from collaboration inefficiencies between stakeholders involved. While there is positive coordination in the development of the programs, responsibilities are often unclear, follow-up is inconsistent, and there is no clear ownership of program upkeep. This highlights the need for more robust coordination mechanisms to ensure that initiatives are not only well-conceived but also properly managed and sustained over longer periods.

2. Minimal Long-Term Scalability Plans:
   When it comes to effectiveness, a key challenge that is seen across initiatives is the lack of scalability. Many programs are designed to last between 2-5 years with no transparent learnings highlighted to the public. This limits the ability to expand the benefits to a larger population, and minimizes the potential for widespread improvements in migration-related skills development.

3. Lack of Awareness and Participation:
   The number of individuals served through training programs remains minimal given low participation rates. Although this may in-part be due to a limitation of resources, it can also be attributed to a potential lack of awareness individuals have to the benefits of these skilling programs. Through the ELMPS survey, we learn that of the potential population considering migration, less than 3% have undergone training programs to enhance their skills (OAMDI, 2024).

4. Limited Accessibility:
   The initiatives show a lack of focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as experienced professionals seeking reskilling for migration. While programs like NET-Work You address rural and underdeveloped areas, their impact is limited. The urban-centric

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approach leaves rural populations with fewer opportunities for quality training, further emphasizing regional disparities. Additionally, rural initiatives tend to focus on the agricultural sector, which may not align with the aspirations of youth; both those who want to work locally or with the goal to emigrate. This narrow focus highlights a gap in inclusivity, potentially hindering broader development goals and leaving certain groups underserved.

5. Minimal Impact Analysis:
   Upon researching the existing training programs, data on impact or effectiveness remains limited. This hinders the public's ability to understand the effectiveness of such training programs. In-line with the previously listed challenges, the lack of impact-analysis limits the possibility of encouraging further participation, and limits information sharing between entities – a step which may lead to positive improvements and future scalability.

2.6.2. Opportunities for Future Development

Steps can be taken by the GoE to improve future developments in skilling programs, ensuring positive outcomes and enhancing the country's overall migration landscape. Key opportunities include:

1. Establish a Coordinating Entity:
   Establishing a specialized inter-ministerial task force or coordinating entity could facilitate an alignment of objectives among the ministries engaged in skilling and migration. This group would ensure that policies are complementary, minimize duplication, and foster a cohesive, unified strategy.

2. Develop a Unified National Strategy for Skilling and Migration:
   Developing a unified strategy for skills development and migration management would help minimize gaps in the current policy portfolio. This strategy should be relevant both locally and internationally, with a clear framework for implementation across government entities and external stakeholders.

3. Strengthen Evidence-Based Data Use and Collection:
   To ensure the implementation of policies and initiatives driven by evidence-based needs, the quality and availability of labor market data must be improved. Establishing a centralized resource to track key indicators (such as employment trends, skills mismatches, and migration patterns) would provide the insights necessary for effective policymaking.

4. Encourage Strengthened Private-Public Sector Coordination:
   Involving the private sector in skills development and migration management can provide unique, but necessary insights to the policymaking process. Fostering partnerships between

government, industry, and international entities would better align skilling programs with labor market needs.

5. Embed Gender and Regional Equity in Policy Design:
   To promote inclusive growth, it is crucial to integrate frameworks that tackle gender and regional disparities in access to skills development and migration opportunities. This could involve setting clear objectives for female participation in training programs, providing safe and accessible childcare services to facilitate mobility, and expanding initiatives in regions that are underserved.

While Egypt made notable progress in developing frameworks for skills development and migration management, the lack of unification and strategic coherence remains a significant challenge. To address this, a more coordinated approach is needed; one that leverages data and fosters collaboration among stakeholders. This would improve the impact of policies and ensure greater alignment with Egypt's broader economic and social objectives.

3. Case Study: Bangladesh

3.1. Migration Trends in Bangladesh

3.1.1. Historical Overview

The history of migration from Bangladesh dates back to the 18th century, initially driven by political factors such as colonial rule. Over time, migration evolved as a response to shifting economic and global labor market dynamics. Since the 1960s, economic drivers have taken precedence, with large-scale emigration catalyzed by the oil boom in the GCC countries during the 1970s (Riaz and Rahman, 2016). This surge in demand for labor coincided with Bangladesh's independence in 1971, as labor migration became a key strategy to address domestic challenges such as unemployment and poverty (Ibid).

Labor migration remains the dominant form of migration from Bangladesh. In 2023 alone, 1.2 million workers were deployed abroad, marking a record high. These workers predominantly migrate to the Middle East (GCC countries), Southeast Asia, and increasingly to Southern and Eastern Europe (Khan, 2019). The demand for Bangladeshi workers spans sectors such as construction, domestic services, manufacturing, and hospitality. While approximately 50% of these migrants are unskilled, there is a growing trend of migration for higher-skilled positions, particularly to the Gulf States and Malaysia (Siddiqui, 2024).

As migration flows increased, their geographic scope expanded beyond the Middle East. By the 1980s, irregular migration routes to Europe gained prominence, particularly to Italy, driven by the presence of established Bangladeshi communities, legal amnesties, and family reunification policies (Rahman

and Kabir, 2012). Migration to Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe has also grown in recent years, reflecting the global diversification of labor demand.

As migration flows increased, their geographic scope expanded beyond the Middle East. By the 1980s, irregular migration routes to Europe gained prominence, particularly to Italy, driven by the presence of established Bangladeshi communities, legal amnesties, and family reunification policies (Islam, 2018). Irregular migration, where individuals enter countries on visit visas and seek employment without legal status, remains a growing trend, particularly in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Estimates suggest that between 300,000 and 500,000 Bangladeshis may be living in undocumented situations worldwide (Sohel et al., 2024).

Educational migration has also gained traction, driven by the pursuit of better-quality education and enhanced career prospects. In 2023, approximately 120,000 Bangladeshi students were enrolled in higher education institutions abroad, primarily in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Germany (Islam, 2024). This trend reflects a growing aspiration for global academic credentials and professional opportunities. However, educational migration often contributes to a "brain drain," as many students opt to remain abroad after graduation, particularly in fields like IT, medicine, and engineering, where domestic opportunities may be limited (Ibid).

Beyond labor and educational migration, climate-induced migration has emerged as a pressing concern for Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world (Sakapaji, 2023). Frequent natural disasters such as cyclones, flooding, and river erosion have displaced millions, forcing them to move internally to urban centers like Dhaka and Chattogram (Uddin, 2024). An estimated 10 million people have been displaced by climate-induced disasters over the past decade (Zaman, 2018). While some individuals seek refuge in neighboring countries, international climate migration remains largely informal, with no legal protections or humanitarian frameworks in place to support these populations.

3.1.2. Data-Based Trends from National Data

This section offers insights based on national data provided by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. However, it is difficult to gain insights from these data and surveys, as they are not published regularly and not always accessible; this limitation is emphasized here.

I.   Analysis from Published Reports

To provide context, over 16 million Bangladeshis have been deployed for overseas employment through official channels since 1976 (Islam, 2007). Migration flows have increased exponentially over the decades, with 0.72 million workers migrating in the 1980s, 1.94 million in the 1990s, and over 10.1

million during the first two decades of the 2000s—a 281% increase compared to the previous two decades (Ibid).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary but significant disruption to international labor migration in 2020. However, the Government of Bangladesh took swift measures to restore migration flows, deploying over 3 million workers between 2021 and 2023, an 85% increase compared to the pre-pandemic period (2018–2020) (BMET, 2024a).

The Middle East remains the primary destination for Bangladeshi workers, with 80% of migrants deployed to Arab countries since 1976. Other Middle Eastern countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, collectively host 3% of Bangladeshi workers, with a significant proportion being women employed in caregiving and domestic roles (Star Business Report, 2023). Southeast Asia is the second-largest destination region, hosting 16% of Bangladeshi migrant workers (World Bank, 2018).

Beyond these regions, 4% of Bangladeshi workers have been employed in 168 other countries worldwide. Europe, particularly Southern and Eastern Europe, has emerged as a notable destination. Italy remains the second-largest home for the Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe after the United Kingdom, with most migration occurring through irregular channels since the 1980s (Morad, 2024). In recent years, agreements under Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have facilitated legal migration to East European countries like Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Greece (Ejaz, 2024; Star Digital Report, 2022; UNB, 2022).

II.   Analysis from National Labor Market Surveys

The Government of Bangladesh's Bureau of Statistics (BBS) is a primary source of data for national labor market surveys. However, unlike the Egyptian case, insights are limited regarding migration. Migration data has been provided by the BBS in conjunction with IOM in 2020 and available labor market survey statistics do not provide insight into migration patterns (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021). For this reason, migration is detailed here using international data sources and secondary sources; potential migration is assessed via BBS reports and secondary data sources.

A.   Potential migrants

According to a BBS Labor Statistics report from 2018, labor force participation rate is broken down into 80.5% male and 36.% female, with employment by sector including 40.6% agriculture, 20.4% industry, and 39% service industry. The youth unemployment rate is 10.1% among males and 16.8% among females (BBS, 2018). According to a 2020 IOM survey, potential migrants planning to travel to Europe and the Americas or Asia and the Pacific were more likely to hold a secondary school degree or above, with 67% of those to Europe and the Americas holding this level and 51% of potential

migrants to Asia and Pacific holding this level (IOM, 2020). Meanwhile, less than 25% of potential migrants to the Middle East and Africa had completed secondary education (Ibid).

B. Actual migrants

The BBS Labor Force Survey does not offer insights into actual migration. IOM data indicates that as of 2020, there were 7.40 million Bangladeshi living abroad, or almost 5% of the total Bangladeshi population, with 83,583 of those refugees and asylum-seekers (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021). According to UNDESA 2020 data on international migrant stock, the percentage of women vs. men is roughly equal, albeit the percentage of men slightly greater (UNDESA, 2025).

3.1.3. Trends in Irregular Migration

Trends in irregular migration are drawn from a 2020 IOM report on a questionnaire distributed to approximately 11,500 migrants over the period 2019-2020. It detailed how prior to migrating, 40% of respondents explained they were unemployed. Fifty-three percent of unemployed, Bangladeshi potential migrants were regular potential migrants, while the other 47% were irregular. One of the key findings was that whether irregular or regular, most migrants shared common characteristics, including age or how much they paid to facilitators for their journey, although men were more likely than women to be irregular migrants. Citing employment as an issue, out of both irregular and regular respondents, 91% percent of potential migrants would consider staying in Bangladesh.

3.2. Macroeconomic and Labor Market Factors Influencing Migration in Bangladesh

3.2.1. Macroeconomic Overview

Bangladesh is still recovering economically from COVID-19, with conditions worsening in FY23 as inflation increased and real GDP growth slowed substantially to 5.8% in FY23 from 7.1% in FY22 (and is projected to continue to decrease), due to lessened private consumption and investment (World Bank, 2024). Consumer purchasing power is also on the decline (Ibid). The World Bank indicates that economic diversification and integration into Global Value Chains (GVCs) is required to improve resilience, with necessary reforms including a strengthened framework for Foreign Direct Investment (World Bank, 2024). Government revenue as a share of GDP in FY23 was 8.2% GDP, one of the lowest in the world, also well behind peers (Ibid). This is important as international migration is interrelated with taxation, inequality and welfare; emigration of workers can imply lost fiscal revenues, or remittances can contribute to increased tax collection, if managed properly (Ibid). The World Bank prescribes public investments in energy, transportation, municipal infrastructure, and human capital development, which are constricted due to low levels of government revenues (thus necessitating reforms to increase domestic revenue) (World Bank, 2024).

3.2.2. Labor Market Overview

Bangladesh's labor market is marked by persistent structural challenges, including slow job creation, skill mismatches, high unemployment, and significant underemployment (Asian Development Bank, 2024). These factors serve as key socioeconomic drivers of migration, compelling many individuals to seek better opportunities abroad.

Bangladesh's population dynamics also play a significant role in fueling migration. The country experiences a high rate of labor force growth, with nearly two million people entering the labor market annually (World Bank, 2021). While this demographic trend offers potential for economic growth, the lack of sufficient domestic employment opportunities results in a surplus labor force (Ibid). Migration serves as a release valve, alleviating domestic labor market pressures and providing opportunities for economic advancement abroad.

Bangladesh's labor market faces persistent challenges in job creation and wage growth, which are major push factors for migration. The country's working-age population has been growing steadily, with over 108 million individuals aged 15–64 in 2022, accounting for 65.63% of the total population (Hasan, 2023). The domestic economy, on the other hand, has been unable to generate adequate employment opportunities to absorb the burgeoning labor market.

Between 2016 and 2020, Bangladesh created only 1.2 million jobs annually, far short of the 2.2 million jobs required to accommodate the nearly two million individuals entering the labor market each year (General Economics Division, 2020). This significant gap has left many workers, especially youth, unemployed or underemployed. The situation is particularly dire for women, who comprise only 35% of the employed labor force, highlighting persistent gender disparities in labor market access (World Bank, 2021).

Youth unemployment remains a critical issue, with approximately 12.4% of individuals aged 15–24 unemployed (World Bank, 2024). The problem is compounded by a significant skills mismatch in the labor market. While Bangladesh has made strides in expanding vocational and technical education, producing 689,745 vocational graduates and training 1.8 million youths in 2023 alone, many of these individuals struggle to secure employment due to the disconnect between the skills taught and the needs of employers, both locally and globally (Mehrab, 2023).

The skills gap remains a formidable barrier to progress, despite the growth in educational institutions and training programs. While the number of graduates continues to rise, the skills they acquire often do not align with labor market demands. This disconnect has exacerbated youth unemployment and raised concerns about the employability of vocational and technical education graduates. A lack of reliable data on the employability of these individuals, coupled with the absence of a robust mechanism to connect skilled workers with international labor markets, highlights the persistent

challenges. The misalignment of skills with employer needs underscores the urgency of reforms to bridge these gaps and improve labor market outcomes.

This skills mismatch is a pervasive issue across various sectors. For instance, the agriculture sector, which still employs 40% of the workforce, has seen a decline in its contribution to GDP and remains dominated by informal employment (85%), often lacking social security and job stability (Asian Development Bank, 2023; Mujeri, 2020). The Ready-Made Garments (RMG), a key source of formal employment, provides opportunities mainly for women but struggles to meet the aspirations of the broader labor force (Matsuura and Teng, 2020). Emerging sectors like ICT, healthcare, and construction present growing opportunities but face significant shortages of skilled labor, leaving many young people without suitable jobs.

Beyond unemployment, underemployment affects 13.8 million workers, with the highest rates in the service sector (54.3%), followed by agriculture (30.6%) and industry (24.1%) (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2019; Biswas et al., 2021). This underutilization of labor highlights inefficiencies in the domestic economy and contributes to the perception of migration as a more reliable pathway to financial stability and professional growth. In this context, migration emerges as a rational economic choice for many Bangladeshis. With limited prospects for decent work at home, nearly 800,000 citizens migrate abroad annually, particularly to GCC Countries and Southeast Asia (GFEMS, 2019). These migrant workers not only secure better employment opportunities but also contribute significantly to the national economy through remittances, which accounted for 4.56 % of GDP in 2022 (Bangladesh Bank, 2022). Over the past 5 years, from 2019 to 2023, Bangladeshi migrant workers sent USD 105,406.05 million (BMET, 2024b), a significant contribution to the country's GDP, increasing foreign currency reserves, and boosting the country's overall socio-economic development. Remittances sent by Bangladeshi migrant workers were 7.11 times higher than the net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the last five years (2019 – 2023) and 4.5 times higher than the amount of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) that Bangladesh received during 2018 – 2022 (Bangladesh Bank, 2023; CEIC, 2022). Migrants' remittances generate trickle-down benefits for the socio-economic development of migrant households and local economies in addition to its contribution to the national macroeconomy.

The flow of remittances acts as a lifeline for many families, enabling improved access to education, healthcare, and higher living standards (Bangladesh Bank, 2017). However, this reliance on external labor markets also underscores the structural weaknesses in the domestic economy, particularly its inability to create enough high-quality jobs to meet the needs of its growing population (Falore et al., 2017).

3.2.3. Skills and Wage Analysis

As part of the overall context regarding the Bangladeshi labor market situation, research on Bangladesh indicates that minimum wages might not reflect adjustments for inflations, and that low wages and the current structural issues with the labor market could be ameliorated by government efforts to strengthen educational and labor market institutions, aligning curriculum with labor demand, offering internships and on-the-job trainings and promoting lifelong learning and continuous skills development (Ahmad, 2023). As with other case studies like Nigeria, studies also argue that training in technological skills so that workers may effectively integrate with automated processes could lead to higher wages and better employment prospects (Ibid).

3.3. Structural Factors Affecting Skilling and Migration in Key Sectors

I.   Construction Sector

Bangladesh's construction sector plays a significant role in the country's economic growth, contributing 6.41% to the GDP in 2023 and employing 5.44% of the workforce (Sharmin and Das, 2024). The government has recognized its importance in the 8th Five-Year Plan (2020–2025) (General Economics Division, 2020), prioritizing it as a key growth industry. The sector is expected to need around 9 million workers by 2030. However, a significant skills gap persists, as only 30-35% of workers are skilled, and 93.55% lack formal training (Sharmin and Das, 2024). The sector's inability to meet labor demands with adequately trained personnel has led to a significant outflow of workers to international construction markets, particularly in the Middle East.

II. ICT Sector

The ICT sector is a growing industry in Bangladesh, contributing around 1.28% to the country's GDP in 2022 (Billah, 2023). It has a significant growth employing around 0.3 million people of which roughly 50% are IT professionals (Hossain, 2022).

Despite its growth, with a projected doubling in demand for IT personnel to 0.44 million by 2025, the sector faces a 40% shortage of skilled professionals (Inspira Advisory, 2023). Despite producing approximately 10,000 IT graduates annually, many lack the practical skills required by the industry. This mismatch drives the migration of IT professionals to countries with more developed tech ecosystems, where they can find better job opportunities (Ibid).

III.   Care Sector

The care sector in Bangladesh is predominantly informal, with many workers lacking formal training. Women make up a significant portion of the care sector work, employed as nurses, caregivers, and community health workers; however, they often contend with lower wages, job insecurity, and poor working conditions (Community Paramedic Training Institute, 2017).

Bangladesh faces acute shortages of healthcare professionals, with only 1,780 nurses graduating annually and a significant gap in specialized fields (World Bank Open Data, 2021). This shortage not only affects the domestic healthcare system but also fuels migration, as trained nurses and caregivers seek better pay and working conditions abroad.

3.4. Gender-Specific Factors Regarding Skilling and Migration in Bangladesh

Gender dynamics significantly influence skilling and migration in Bangladesh, with socioeconomic factors and sociocultural expectations shaping women's decision-making as to mobility, as well as limiting access to training domestically. Although women account for a lesser proportion of Bangladeshi migrants, their numbers have grown significantly since restrictions on female migration were lifted in the early 2000s. From 2004 to 2017, the number of women migrating annually rose from approximately 1,259 to 121,925, reflecting a 260% increase (Shamim, 2018). However, women still represent only 12.08 % of total migrant workforce in 2017 (Shamim, 2018), primarily employed in low-skilled caregiving and domestic roles in the GCC countries, Jordan and Lebanon. These roles expose them to exploitation, unsafe working conditions and a lack of legal protections, necessitating targeted policy interventions to address these vulnerabilities.

I.   Issues in Access to Skilling

Women in Bangladesh face considerable challenges in accessing vocational training programs. Social restrictions on mobility often prevent women from traveling to urban centers, where most training facilities are concentrated. In 2014, only 16% of women accessed public training programs, reflecting the unequal opportunities available to them (Asian Development Bank, 2016). This gap is further exacerbated in rural areas, where infrastructure limitations restrict access to digital and technical training. For instance, only 16% of young women possess basic digital skills, primarily due to limited internet access in rural areas (Bidisha, 2023).

II.   Cultural Norms as a Barrier to Women's Employment in Given Sectors

Traditional societal expectations and patriarchal norms further discourage women from pursuing training in high-demand technical fields like ICT and construction. Instead, they are often confined to lower-paying, traditionally female-dominated roles, limiting their ability to migrate for skilled employment. Programs targeting women, such as the government's caregiver training initiatives in

collaboration with Hong Kong and Japan, offer some hope for expanding women's opportunities, but these efforts remain in their infancy (IOM, 2017).

III.   Regional Disparities with Intersectional Consequences

Regional disparities in training access disproportionately impact women in areas like Rangpur, which has high demand for vocational training but limited program availability. Urban centers like Dhaka and Chittagong dominate training access, further marginalizing rural women and indigenous communities. Women who do participate in skilling programs are often funneled into roles aligned with societal norms as to gender identity and expectations, such as caregiving, leaving sectors like ICT and construction largely male-dominated.

While labor migration from Bangladesh is overwhelmingly male, female participation has increased since restrictions on women migrating for work were lifted in the early 2000s. From 2004 to 2013, an average of 18,962 women migrated annually, a figure that rose to 90,987 per year between 2013 and 2023, marking a 260% increase (Islam, 2015).

Despite this progress, women account for just 5.86% of all migrant workers in 2023 (BMET, 2024a). They predominantly migrate for low-skilled domestic work or caregiving roles in Gulf countries and other regions like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE (Asian Development Bank, 2016). These roles, while offering economic opportunities, often come with heightened vulnerabilities, including abuse, exploitation, and unsafe working conditions (IOM, 2009). Limited legal protections exacerbate these risks, often leading to premature returns.

IV.   Gendered Migration Patterns and Expectations Related to Mobility

The feminization of employment in certain sectors in Bangladesh relates also to the cultural and gender ideologies in the country (Evertsen, K. F., & van der Geest, K. (2020) Cultural and societal norms place significant barriers on women pursuing higher education abroad. Male students dominate educational migration, particularly in fields like engineering, medicine, and business, to destinations such as the United States, UK, and Australia (Siddqui and Jasim, 2022). In contrast, women face familial pressures, safety concerns, and financial constraints, limiting their ability to access global academic opportunities (Belanger and Rahman, 2013).

Women migrants often face societal stigma, especially if they return prematurely due to exploitation or abuse (Evertsen and van der Geest, 2020). Even successful women migrants encounter negative perceptions, as traditional norms discourage women from seeking independence through migration (Ibid). This narrative deters many young and educated women, particularly from middle-class families, from pursuing international migration (Belanger and Rahman, 2013).

Gender ideologies and patriarchal cultural paradigms frequently dictate women's mobility and decision-making power regarding migration, requiring male guardianship or consent (Evertsen and van der Geest, 2020). These restrictions undermine women's autonomy and limit their access to safe and dignified migration opportunities. Men, on the other hand, face societal expectations to fulfill the role of primary earner, which can constrain their choices and lead to financial stress when working in low-wage roles abroad (Islam, 2012).

V.   A Solution in the Potential for Skilling Initiatives to Address Gender Inequality

Targeted initiatives, such as flexible training schedules and childcare support, could encourage greater participation of women in vocational programs. Programs offering pathways into non-traditional sectors like ICT, advanced manufacturing, and construction could help address gender disparities in skilling and migration.

The government's initiatives to send skilled women as caregivers to Hong Kong and Japan demonstrate the potential for success in reducing negative narratives (Ministry of Finance, 2018). Highlighting such positive outcomes can help combat stigma and encourage broader participation of women in migration.

Strengthening legal frameworks to protect women migrants from abuse and exploitation within neoliberal frameworks is critical. Ensuring fair treatment in employment contracts and expanding labor agreements to include gender-sensitive provisions could significantly improve the migration experience for women.

Improving women's access to digital training, especially in rural areas, can prepare them for higher-paying, tech-driven roles. By addressing gaps in infrastructure and internet access, Bangladesh can empower women to participate more fully in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

3.5. Policy and Strategic Initiatives Analysis

The Government of Bangladesh has established various initiatives, including training around 65,000 young professionals annually in ICT-related fields and setting up specialized labs across the country. Yet, industry leaders and investors still report a shortage of job-ready professionals (Hossain, 2022). The Government of Bangladesh has launched several skills development initiatives—including SEIP, STEP, SICIP, Nursing and Caregiving training, and the Technical Training Program (TTC) — which showed a strong commitment to strengthening vocational skills for both local and international job markets. These programs have achieved meaningful progress by broadening access to vocational education and reaching targeted groups like youth, women, and disadvantaged communities.

This section reviews the key policies and strategic initiatives that Bangladesh has implemented to support skilling for migration, including international partnerships and national programs. The

analysis addresses National Policies on Education and Skilling, as well as National Policies on Migration, and explains the gap or siloing of policy when it comes to skilling for migration. It begins with a table mapping out the relevant policies.

3.5.1. National Policies

Table 3. Bangladesh Policy Mapping

Type of Policy	Title	Year/Period	Aim	Challenges
Skilling	**National Skill Development Policy**	2022	- Promote training collaboration among various actors including re-skilling, up-skilling, and apprenticeships. - Ensure the skills development system coordinates demand and supply. - Provide opportunities to all, including women, rural inhabitants, disadvantaged youth, and persons with disabilities.	- Shortage of qualified trainers; inadequate facilities. - Poor alignment between public, private, and NGOs. - Not meeting domestic/global demand. - Lacking 4IR skills, automation, and digital technologies. - Lack of industry collaboration - Monitoring deficiencies.
	The National Action Plan for Skills Development	2022-2027	- Enhancing institutional efficiency and transparency. - Aligning training for domestic and overseas labor market demands, future needs (industry 4.0); promoting Competency-Based Training & Assessments (CBT&A), quality, lifelong learning, up/reskilling; fostering access to marginalized, industry roles and public-private partnerships.	Inadequate funding and support for implementing large-scale programs and quality improvement initiatives.

	National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) Act	2018	• To oversee and coordinate national skill development efforts, improve workforce skills, and address industry needs.	• Limited sector coordination, inadequate infrastructure, lack of skilled trainers, funding gaps.
Education	**National Education Policy**	2010	• To ensure inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for all, while fostering patriotism, moral values, and development-oriented skills.	• Absence of effective implementation • Misalignment education with market demand. • Lacks uniform curriculum for global standards. • High dropout rates and low enrollment.
Migration	**Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA)**	2013	• To promote opportunities for overseas employment and establish a safe and fair system of migration, and to ensure the rights and welfare of migrant workers and members of their families.	• Oversight provisions in OEMA 2013 are not detailed enough. • Pre-departure checks are few and incomplete. • Not covering worker rights in overseas employment via informal channels.
	Overseas Employment and Expatriates' Welfare Policy	2016	• To provide a comprehensive labour migration framework with a particular focus on the protection of migrant workers.	• Gaps in enforcing regulations. • Weak coordination public and recruitment agencies, countries.
	Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA)	2012	• Prevent human trafficking, protect victims, and ensure safe migration. The act also aims to address the transnational organized crimes related to human trafficking.	• Limited cooperation and collaboration of police, judiciary, etc. • No clear reporting mechanisms. • Non-use of modern technologies. • Infrastructure/resources lacking.
Skilling	**8th Five-Year Plan**	2020-2025	• Achieve economic growth, significantly reduce poverty, create employment opportunities, and	• Generating sufficient employment opportunities to match population

			foster development; addressing COVID-19 impact, climate change; rectifying Least Developed Country (LDC) status.	growth and tackle youth unemployment. • Weak institutional capacity.

I. On Skilling and Education

Bangladesh has made efforts to integrate vocational training into its education system through policies like the **National Education Policy 2010**, which introduced pre-vocational training at early education levels and created a tiered certification system for skill levels (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, data shows regional disparities persist, with urban youth participating more actively than their rural counterparts. For instance, Dhaka (9.9%) and Chittagong (8.4%) report the highest proportions of trained workers, while regions like Rangpur (5.8%) lag behind despite having the highest demand for training (30%) (Asian Development Bank, 2016). This suggests that existing infrastructure is insufficient to meet regional needs.

The National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2011 and its revised version in **2020** emphasize creating a coordinated, competency-based training system (Ministry of Education, 2011; National Skills Development Authority, 2020a). These policies established **the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF)** and promoted partnerships with industries to address the skills mismatch (National Skills Development Authority, 2020b). **The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) Act 2018** institutionalized these efforts, streamlining training programs and fostering collaboration between training providers and industries (Rahman, 2019).

To prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the revised NSDP (2020) highlighted the importance of flexible and digital competency-based training (National Skills Development Authority, 2020a). It introduced initiatives to develop skills in green technologies and digital transformation, focusing on inclusivity for underserved communities and migrants. The accompanying **National Action Plan (2022–2027),** yet to be approved, prioritizes these goals. Financial barriers disproportionately affect rural and low-income populations, restricting access to these high-demand skills, particularly in regions like Rangpur and among older and less-educated demographics (National Skills Development Authority, 2022).

The lack of alignment with the specific needs of destination countries limits the success of vocational training in improving migration outcomes. A study by SANEM highlights that although trained migrants are more likely to find employment abroad, mismatches in skills often lead to underemployment (SANEM, 2021).

II.   On Migration

The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 (Parliament of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh, 2013)and its revised version in **2023**, and the **Overseas Employment and Expatriates' Welfare Policy 2016** provide frameworks to promote safe and dignified migration (Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, 2019). Key provisions include transparent licensing of recruitment agencies, monitoring employment contracts, and bilateral agreements with destination countries to ensure fair treatment of workers.

Despite these policies, the absence of internationally recognized certifications hampers migrants' ability to secure higher-paying roles abroad, limiting their economic mobility. Studies reveal that migrants with accredited skills earn 20–30% more than those without, emphasizing the need for globally recognized qualifications (Bidisha, 2023).

Migration policies recognize economic motivations as a primary driver of migration but often fail to address the financial and societal barriers women face. Only 30% of vocational training participants are women, and those who migrate tend to work in lower-paying sectors like domestic work, while men secure higher-paying roles in construction or ICT (Nurunnabi, 2021). Flexible training schedules, childcare support, and gender-focused outreach campaigns are essential for addressing this disparity.

The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA) 2012 combats exploitative recruitment practices by defining forced labor and servitude as forms of trafficking (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2012). The Act enforces strict penalties to deter trafficking and safeguards workers from deceptive practices.

The 8th Five-Year Plan (2020–2025) aligns migration governance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) (General Economics Division, 2020). It promotes orderly migration through targeted action plans developed by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

III.   On Skilling for Migration

While the following section points to a few initiatives that target skilling for migration, at the policy level, most skilling initiatives are not directly linked to migration policies.

3.5.2. Strategic Initiatives

In the case of Bangladesh, 13 initiatives were mapped. However, a key limitation is that MoUs or bilateral agreements are not included in this mapping. While some agreements are currently under discussion or in preliminary stages—such as those with Germany and Greece—it remains unclear whether they incorporate a mobility component, and they primarily appear to focus on the textile sector (The Daily Star, 2022; Business Standard, 2024). It is also noteworthy that many of these programs do not have evaluations, which limit the analysis. Moreover, there is repeated targeting of youth and women, albeit with different aims. Categories of analysis included: upgrading Bangladeshi skills for the domestic market; an emphasis on TVET for the local labor and development; fostering labor market inclusion for sustainability and development goals; upgrading Bangladeshi skills for the global market (or both domestic and global); and certifying for the care sector, particularly for the global market.

Types of initiatives:

I. Upgrading Bangladeshi Skills for Domestic Market

    One category of skilling includes upgrading Bangladeshi skills for the domestic market, where youth and women can constitute key target demographics. NGO programs such as the **YES Centre** (YSPA, 2021) and **Skills to Succeed (S2S)** have focused on empowering women and youth by providing leadership training and job placement support (Save the Children, 2021). For instance, the YES Centre trained 400 youths (60% women) in leadership and poverty alleviation, while S2S secured ICT and BPO sector employment for out-of-school youth (YSPA, 2021).

    Programs like the **Skills for Industry Competitiveness** and **Innovation Program (SICIP)** target emerging industries such as ICT, energy, and agriculture (SICIP, 2022). SICIP also emphasizes inclusivity by prioritizing women and disadvantaged groups, addressing gaps in technical and digital skills. However, its broad scope risks diluting effectiveness across sectors.

    Similarly, the **Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP)** aimed to develop skills in sectors like IT and healthcare but struggled with outdated curricula and funding discontinuity (SEIP, 2022).

II. An Emphasis on TVET for the Local Labor Market

    Government programs such as the **Technical Training Program (TTC)** and **Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP)** have expanded training opportunities (Khan, 2019; World Bank, 2013). TTCs enrolled 1.2 million participants in 2021 through 95 Technical Training Centers

and partnerships with 400 private institutions. However, rural areas remain underserved, and a key challenge remains the mismatch between training and job market demands, as only 25% of TVET graduates secure relevant employment. Financial barriers further exclude low-income groups, with rural youth 2.5 times less likely to access training compared to urban counterparts.

III. Fostering Labor Market Inclusion with Development and Sustainability Goals

Several programs aim at labor market inclusion as part of greater sustainability goals in feeding global supply chains. There is a particular emphasis on the textile industry, with an emphasis on women (not a GS4S focus sector but a very salient one in the Bangladeshi example). Many are driven by a combination of non-profit, international organization or philanthropic organizations in combination with public sector involvement.

NGO-led programs like **ProGRESS** (ILO, 2022) and **Sudokkho** (Swiss Contact, 2015a) have targeted specific industries, including the RMG and construction sectors, improving technical skills and productivity. However, their reliance on donor funding raises concerns about long-term sustainability.

Initiatives such as **B-SkillFUL** (Swiss Contact, 2015b) and **Uttoron** (Swiss Contact, 2016) have leveraged international and private-sector partnerships to offer vocational training in sectors like healthcare and agro-processing. These collaborations have broadened access and relevance, equipping participants with modern skills.

Data from Bangladesh's Labor Force Survey (2013) highlights stark disparities: urban areas like Dhaka and Chittagong dominate training participation, while regions like Rangpur, with the highest demand, lack adequate infrastructure. Addressing these disparities through targeted investments in underserved areas is critical for equitable development.

IV. Upgrading Bangladeshi Skills for Global Market (or Combined Domestic and Global)

In terms of skills programs for migration, the **Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP)** successfully trained 850,000 disadvantaged youths, using stipends to increase access (World Bank, 2013). Its aim included better employment opportunities for the Bangladesh labor force, in both local and overseas job markets, skills development and vocational education have to be aligned with the market demand. However, it lacked a strong focus on quality and practical training, limiting its long-term impact.

V. Certifying for care sector, particularly targeting the global market

The nursing and caregiving training initiatives focus on marginalized groups, particularly women, by partnering with international bodies like the American Caregiver Association. These initiatives address sectoral needs in healthcare and ICT but face challenges with resource allocation and curriculum relevance.

The government has developed 165 curricula for nursing and caregiving training, partnering with institutions like the **American Caregiver Association (ACA)** to provide international-standard certifications. These efforts address the demand for skilled healthcare workers domestically and internationally.

Table 4 provides a more detailed look at Bangladesh initiatives by category.

Table 4. Bangladesh Initiatives Mapping

Type of Initiative	Title	Year/Period	Aim	Target Demographic	Target Sector
Upgrading Bangladeshi Skills for Domestic Market	**Skills for Industry Competitiveness and Innovation Program (SICIP)**	2024-2029	The program aims to: increase the technology-oriented skilled workforce across emerging and priority sectors; Promote inclusive skilling and upskilling for disadvantaged. Incentivize industry–university partnerships Foster skills for climate-resilient processes and green technologies	• Women and disadvantaged groups	• Readymade Garment and Textile • Construction • ICT • Light • Engineering • Leather and Footwear • Ship Building • Tourism, • Transport • Agro Processing • Nursing & Care-giving • Energy
	Skills to Succeed (S2S)	2014-Ongoing	To secure employment for out-of-school youth in ICT and BPO sectors.	• Out-of-school youth (23,151 youth trained in Employability skills)	• ICT • BPO (business process outsourcing)

	Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP)	2014-Ongoing	To impart market responsive, job focused and inclusive training for the male and female aged 15 and over.	• Youth and job seekers	• Textile • Construction • IT • Engineering • Leather and Footwear • Ship Building • Hospitality • Agro Processing • Transport • Care
	YES Centre (Youth Empowerment through Skills in Bangladesh)	2016-2018	Empower youth, especially girls and young women, by strengthening skills and voices for economic self-reliance and leadership in poverty alleviation	• 400 youth (60% girls; young women, ages 15–22) with minimum of class nine education; indirect beneficiaries: 2,430 family members	• Youth received life skills • Market driven skills • ICT skills
An Emphasis on TVET for the Local Labor and Development	**Technical Training Program (TTC)**	Ongoing	To equip individuals with employable skills to meet the demands of local and global job markets, create a skilled workforce, and prepare them for success in their future workplaces.	• General population • Rural youth	• Technical vocational education and training
Fostering labor Market Inclusion with Development and Sustainability Goals	**Promoting Green Growth in The Ready-Made Garments Sector Through Skills (PROGRESS)**	2022-2027	Aims at development of inclusive, environmentally responsible, and competitive RMG sector in Bangladesh to offer productive, well paid, secured, and decent jobs, including globally.	• Workers in RMG and construction	• RMG • Construction

	B-SkillFUL (Building Skills for Unemployed and Underemployed Labour)	2015-2024	Aims to improve well-being of poor and disadvantaged by increasing access to the labour market and increasing income, protecting labour rights.	• SME workers	• SME sector
	Sudokkho (Skills and Employment Programme of Bangladesh)	2015-2020	Aims at establishing integrated and market-driven skills training systems in Bangladesh through private-sector investment in TVET.	• Disadvantaged youth, particularly women	• RMG • Construction
Upgrading Bangladeshi Skills for Global Market (or Combined Domestic and Global)	**Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP)**	2010-2017	Aims to improve the quality, relevance and efficiency of TVET to increase employability of tech graduates at home and abroad to reduce poverty and improve quality of life.	• Disadvantaged youths and students	• Various sectors, particularly education and ICT
Certifying for Care Sector, Particularly Targeting the Global Market	**Government of Bangladesh and American Caregiver Association (ACA)**	Ongoing	Partnership to develop skilled healthcare workers and provide international certifications.	• Women	• Care

Bangladesh's initiative mapping highlights several patterns, including skills mismatch, challenges in sustainability, gender inequalities and short-term perspectives. To begin, despite evidence of these widespread training programs, the mismatch between training curricula and labor market needs persists. While vocational training programs have increased, many fail to align with global labor market requirements, leading to underemployment abroad. The lack of internationally recognized accreditation further restricts career progression for migrants, keeping them in low-wage cycles.

As highlighted in the typification of those initiatives geared toward sustainability and development, many initiatives rely on donor funding, making them vulnerable to discontinuity. Programs like

Sudokkho and STEP have achieved significant short-term results but face challenges scaling up or sustaining efforts without external support.

Moreover, while several programs prioritize women's participation, societal and workplace barriers, such as discrimination and harassment, continue to limit their access to decent employment opportunities. Even after successfully completing a training, they may only be able to enter lower-paying sectors, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies and program designs.

Finally, few programs provide ongoing career counseling or mentorship post-training, leaving graduates unprepared to navigate job retention and career progression challenges.

3.6. Challenges and Opportunities for Future Developments

Bangladesh faces a multifaceted set of challenges in its efforts to develop a robust skills development ecosystem and leverage it for improved migration outcomes. These challenges are significant spanning mismatched training, accessibility gaps, quality issues, and resource constraints. However, by leveraging opportunities such as international accreditation, infrastructure investment, and digital skills integration, the country can transform its workforce development system and create pathways for sustainable, well-paying jobs domestically and abroad.

3.6.1. Challenges in Skills Development and Migration

1. Gaps Between Skills Curricula and Labor Market Needs:
   One of the most significant challenges is the persistent disconnect between the skills imparted by training programs and the actual needs of the labor market. Outdated curricula, insufficient practical training, and limited collaboration between training institutions and industries exacerbate this issue. A World Bank tracer study revealed that 47% of TVET graduates were unemployed two years after completing their training, underscoring the inadequacy of current training systems in preparing workers for employment (Dar et al., 2007).

2. Unequal Access to Trainings:
   Access to training remains uneven, particularly for rural populations, women, and disadvantaged groups. Although the government has established 110 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) and plans to expand this network, rural youth face barriers such as travel distances and the lack of affordable housing near training centers (Chakma and Biswas, 2024). Data shows that rural youth are 2.5 times less likely to receive skills training than their urban counterparts, pushing them into low-skilled and informal migration pathways prone to exploitation (Ibid).

3. Limitations in TVET Training:

The quality of vocational and technical education remains inconsistent due to outdated equipment, inadequate infrastructure, and poorly trained instructors. Financial constraints further limit the ability of training institutions to modernize their programs and expand their capacity. Public TVET institutions often struggle to deliver market-relevant skills, leaving many graduates underemployed or unemployed (Dar et al., 2009).

Bangladeshi workers face limited opportunities for career advancement and higher-paying jobs in global markets due to the absence of internationally recognized certifications. Studies indicate that migrants with certified skills earn 20–30% more than those without, emphasizing the need for accredited training programs to improve income and mobility (Bidisha, 2023).

Vocational and technical education suffers from low social esteem, discouraging youth enrollment. This stigma, coupled with a lack of awareness about the benefits of vocational training for migration, contributes to the ongoing skills gap in industries like ICT and construction.

4. Climate Vulnerability impeding Progress:
   Bangladesh's climate vulnerability exacerbates financial constraints for families in disaster-prone areas, restricting their access to high-quality training programs (Uddin, 2024). This perpetuates cycles of low-skilled migration and poverty, particularly for families affected by floods, droughts, and other climate-related hazards.

5. Difficulties in implementation and Integration with the Digital Transition:
   While digital skills and emerging technologies are critical for competing in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the integration of these competencies into training programs remains limited. A lack of resources, infrastructure, and personnel trained in digital and green technologies hampers the development of a future-ready workforce.

3.6.2. Opportunities for Future Development

Despite these barriers and impediments in skilling for migration, the Bangladeshi case presents several opportunities, detailed here

1. Improving Collaboration Between Stakeholders:
   Strengthening partnerships between training institutions and industries offers a critical opportunity to address the mismatch between training and labor market demands. Industry collaboration can guide curriculum development, ensuring that training programs remain relevant and responsive to domestic and international job markets.

   As part of this, improving coordination among stakeholders and utilizing comprehensive labor market data can make skills development more targeted and efficient. Data-driven policies

can guide resource allocation and curriculum design to align with both domestic and international market demands.

2. Streamlining Certifications for Global Engagement:
   Introducing globally recognized certifications across training programs can improve the competitiveness of Bangladeshi workers in global markets. Accredited training would enable workers to access higher-paying jobs and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, particularly in high-demand sectors like healthcare, IT, and construction.

3. Addressing Infrastructure and Technological Deficiencies:
   Upgrading infrastructure, modernizing equipment, and enhancing instructor training can significantly improve the quality of vocational education. Investments in public TVET institutions can help bridge the skills gap, reduce underemployment, and enhance employability.

4. Tackling the Digital Transition:
   Integrating digital competencies and green technologies into training programs can prepare the workforce for emerging sectors aligned with the 4IR. Competency-based training systems focused on IT, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing can ensure Bangladesh's labor force remains competitive in global markets.

5. Addressing Inequalities in Access to Skilling:
   Expanding access to training for rural and marginalized groups can promote equity and reduce reliance on informal migration pathways. Addressing barriers such as housing and affordability can help rural youth and women participate in high-quality training programs, enabling them to access safer and better-paying jobs.

   Awareness campaigns that highlight the benefits of vocational education and training for migration can shift societal attitudes. Showcasing success stories and creating incentives for enrollment in TVET programs can attract more youth to these pathways, addressing the skills gap in critical industries.

4. **Case Study: Nigeria**

4.1. Migration Trends in Nigeria

4.1.1. Historical Overview

Migration, both internal and international, has long been a defining feature of Nigeria's labor dynamics, deeply rooted in the country's socio-economic history and cultural contexts. In the post-independence period, migration patterns were largely shaped by economic aspirations, with many

Nigerians seeking opportunities in countries such as the UK, USA, and Canada (Ipole, 2018). Historical events, such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1971) and ongoing Boko Haram insurgencies, have also driven substantial internal displacement and international migration (Arhin-Sam, 2019). The oil boom of the 1970s reversed this trend temporarily, attracting skilled professionals back to Nigeria to benefit from economic prosperity (Adepoju, 2021). However, subsequent economic downturns in the 1980s and 1990s, alongside political instability, triggered significant outflows of skilled labor—a phenomenon commonly referred to as "brain drain" (Adepoju, 2021). Key sectors affected included healthcare and engineering, with professionals seeking better opportunities and improved living conditions abroad (Agbonkhese, 2023).

Economic reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s, coupled with increased globalization, further accelerated outward migration as Nigerians pursued better educational and employment opportunities overseas (Agbonkhese, 2023). Today, Nigeria ranks among the largest sources of emigrants in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2023). Preferred destinations include traditional choices like the USA, UK, and Canada, as well as other African countries such as South Africa and Ghana. Notably, Nigerians in the USA are one of the most highly educated immigrant groups, excelling in fields like healthcare, engineering, and IT (Pew Research Center, 2022). In the UK, healthcare and education continue to be key migration sectors for Nigerian professionals (Odoemene and Osuji, 2015).

4.1.2. Data-Based Trends from National Data

    I.   Analysis from Published Reports

Various reports contribute to an understanding of Nigeria's migration trends, albeit national level data sources were found less accessible[1] in observing trends than data sets from UNDESA, IOM or Eurostat, all of which were examined or analysed in a recent European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) report (JRC, 2024). For this reason, international data is referenced in this analysis.

In Northern Africa, the primary destination country for Nigerian emigrants is Sudan, with migrants totalling 18,285 as of 2019. Regarding European destinations, the distribution of Nigerian migrants is concentrated across several countries: The United Kingdom (205,698), Italy (80,235), Germany (44,015), Spain (29,204), and Ireland (24,036). In North America, the United States hosts the largest Nigerian emigrant population with 309,699 individuals, followed by Canada with 45,188, collectively representing the highest concentration of Nigerian migrants in this region. From 1990 to 2019, migration to Europe and North America has significantly increased, while migration to Northern Africa has decreased (UNDESA, 2025). The number of female migrants is not significantly different

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[1] While there is a Nigerian Bureau of Statistics site that lists a migration data section, the website is often down, and it was difficult to confirm data with contacts at the Bureau before publication of this paper.

from the number of male migrants, where in 2020, with approximately 0.71 million male migrants, the number of female migrants has recorded 0.6 million (Ibid).

II.   Analysis from National Labor Market Surveys

Main surveys relevant to the analysis include the National Labor Force Survey (NLFS) and General Household Survey (GHS) (NBS 2023a; NBS 2023c). Sampling methods of these surveys include random sampling, ensuring representative coverage of urban and rural areas; tens of thousands of households are included (Ibid). The National Labor Force survey collects data on employment, unemployment, and other characteristics of the labour force, with quarterly estimates of the main labour force (Ibid). While these surveys do not provide much insights into migration, they offer insights into the conditions of the labor market that would influence aspirations to migrate.

According to the Q2 of the 2024 NFLS, Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) among the working-age population recorded 79.5%; however, informal employment remained high at 93%. Unemployment in urban areas was significantly higher than in rural areas, and the percentage of youth not involved in education, training or employment was at 12.5%, with a greater proportion of females represented than males (Ibid). The NFLS shows that in Q2 of 2023, the unemployment rate reached 4.3%, with a slightly higher rate among the youth aged (15-24 years) reaching 6.5% (Ibid).

A.   Potential Migrants

While these data do not capture migration, it could explain the outcomes of a recent survey conducted by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics indicating seeking job opportunities as the primary reason for migration aspiration (31.4%), followed by studying (25.8%) (JRC, 2024). Given the above statistics on informal work, for many professionals, migration remains an attractive option, particularly in industries with limited domestic prospects (Ipole, 2018). Young professionals frequently seek opportunities in sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology (Afolayan et al., 2022). The global demand for digital skills has opened up new pathways for Nigerian tech professionals, many of whom now work for international companies remotely without leaving the country (Agbonkhese, 2023). Similarly, student migration continues to grow, with thousands of Nigerians enrolling in foreign universities annually (UNESCO, 2023).

B.   Actual Migrants

National labor surveys do not directly capture data on actual migrants. However, it is important to emphasize that, beyond evident labor migration, a significant component of migration from Nigeria includes student and professional mobility. Over 20,000 Nigerian students are currently enrolled in universities in Canada and the UK (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Healthcare workers, particularly middle-level professionals, have been recruited in large numbers by the UK's National Health Service (NHS); where

between 2008 and 2021, over 36 thousand Nigerian doctors migrated to the UK (Ileyemi and John, 2024).

4.1.3. Trends in Irregular Migration

It should be noted that, according to IOM, a substantial percentage of aspiring Nigerian migrants consider irregular routes (JRC, 2024). During the so-called "migration crisis" from 2016-2017, Nigerian irregular crossings on the land Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) made up 21% (with 37,554 crossings) and 15% (with 18,163 crossings) of all of CMR crossings in 2016 and 2017 respectively (Frontex, 2024). At the same time, the number of documented Frontex irregular border crossings have been decreasing overall since that period, and there were 1877 crossings in the year 2023 (JRC, 2024; Frontex, 2024). It is noteworthy that the literature has characterized irregular emigration of women workers as "a survival strategy" to escape poverty (Ayuba 2018).

4.2. Macroeconomic and Labor Market Factors Influencing Migration in Nigeria

4.2.1 Macroeconomic Overview

Nigeria has witnessed a significant rise in poverty levels over recent years. Between 2018 and 2024, the percentage of Nigerians living below the national poverty line increased from 40% to 56% (World Bank, 2024). This poverty is unevenly distributed, with Southern states generally faring better than their Northern counterparts, where poverty is deeply entrenched (Salihu, 2024). Despite being one of Africa's largest economies, with a GDP of approximately $450 billion (Gbolahan, 2023), Nigeria faces profound socio economic challenges. The economy is relatively diversified—oil accounts for less than 10% of GDP—but the oil sector remains critical, contributing 75% of export revenues and 50% of government revenues (African Development Bank Group, 2023).

The country struggles with a lack of transparency in monetary and foreign exchange policies, rising inflation, mounting debt, and slow economic growth. These issues have exacerbated poverty and heightened social fragility (World Bank Group, 2024b). While reforms implemented in May 2023, such as the market-based pricing of gasoline and monetary policy adjustments, have been praised by international development actors, uncertainties surrounding political transitions and high inflation have created resistance to these policies (World Bank Group, 2024b).

Infrastructure deficiencies further complicate socioeconomic development, particularly in rural areas, where unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate learning facilities impede access to modern education and skills training programs (Ipole, 2018). Funding shortages exacerbate these issues; public and private investments in skills development remain insufficient, particularly in disadvantaged regions (Ezeani, 2019). Over-reliance on international donors for funding

has undermined the sustainability of skilling programs, as donor priorities often shift (Williamson and Rodd, 2016).

In Nigeria, several sectors, including agriculture, care, digital, and construction, present significant opportunities for economic growth and development. However, realizing this potential requires robust skilling, reskilling, and upskilling programs. For instance, agriculture, a major contributor to Nigeria's GDP, remains underdeveloped due to outdated practices. Modernizing the sector through reskilling in smart farming techniques could enhance productivity and improve food security (Lokpobiri, 2019). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the pre-existing need for a stronger healthcare workforce. Upskilling healthcare workers to meet international standards is essential to improving health outcomes in Nigeria (Salihu, 2024; Miteva, 2024).

Efforts to reduce reliance on the oil sector and diversify Nigeria's economy have heightened the importance of skills development in non-oil sectors. Introducing tech-driven solutions in agriculture, construction, and healthcare can significantly boost productivity. Skilling programs aligned with labor market needs could reduce unemployment and underemployment, particularly by targeting youth and underrepresented groups (Ipole, 2018; Lokpobiri, 2019; Virk et al., 2023). These initiatives also empower entrepreneurs to launch and scale small and medium enterprises (SMEs), contributing to national development.

Nigeria's technology ecosystem has expanded significantly in response to global digital transitions and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Agbonkhese, 2023). The digital sector comes forward as salient both for skilling domestically and abroad. Moreover, the construction sector is one of the fastest-growing industries, vital for infrastructure development and economic growth. Skilling programs in modern construction techniques, sustainable building practices, and project management are critical to meeting the sector's labor demands while ensuring productivity and high-quality infrastructure (Oladinrin et al., 2012).

4.2.2. Labor Market Overview

Nigeria's labor market reflects structural challenges, as described in the earlier section on national surveys. A significant portion of the workforce—78%—is employed in low-productivity sectors such as agriculture and non-tradable services (NBS, 2023b). The country's goods and services exports account for only 10.7% of GDP, the lowest among middle-African countries (NBS, 2023b). Youth, in particular, face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and the labor market remains highly informal, with many workers engaged in low-productivity jobs that fail to align with their qualifications or aspirations (Virk et al., 2023; World Bank Group, 2024b). The transition from agricultural to service sector employment has not improved productivity or earnings, and wage jobs remain scarce, making it challenging to escape poverty (World Bank Group, 2024b). Women face additional barriers to labor market participation and are often confined to low-paying roles, perpetuating cycles of poverty (World Bank Group, 202b).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the labor market challenges, leading to job losses in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and transportation (Virk et al., 2023). Opportunities have emerged in digital and care sectors, which face acute shortages of skilled professionals (Ipole, 2018; Lokpobiri, 2019; Virk et al., 2023). Despite these growth areas, inadequate reskilling and upskilling opportunities prevent workers from adapting to evolving job requirements in fast-paced industries such as digital, care, and renewable energy. This can also be attributed to educational disparities. Literacy and school enrollment rates are higher in Southern regions, particularly Lagos, compared to the North, where security challenges and cultural factors hinder educational attainment (Virk et al., 2023). Access to training programs is similarly uneven, with many Northern regions lacking both formal and informal training opportunities. The disconnect between institutional training and industry demands has resulted in a persistent mismatch between graduate skills and labor market requirements, further fueling unemployment and underemployment (Muo, 2016). Finally, healthcare infrastructure mirrors regional inequalities. Rural areas often lack adequate medical facilities and personnel, leaving many without reliable healthcare services (Miteva, 2024).

4.2.3. Skills and Wage Analysis

Continued research indicates poor wages as a key motivation for skilled worker emigration, particularly with non competitive wages in health and education (Ajoseh et al., 2024). Scholarship argues that minimum wage policies represent a political exercise rather than economic consideration, and highlight skilled professionals' struggle with cost-of-living, particularly in urban areas. Current minimum wage is inadequate to sustain a household (Elegbede et. al, 2024).

4.3. Structural Factors Affecting Skilling and Migration in Key Sectors

In addition to the structural factors highlighted in the macroeconomic and labor market overview (particularly economic policies, education and healthcare access), a main structural factor impacting construction, ICT and care emerges in Nigeria's reliance on the oil sector and difficulty in transition.

I.   Construction and ICT Sectors

Diversification is essential to improving the overall situation. The introduction of tech-driven solutions in construction has the potential to significantly raise productivity. Skilling programs aligned with market needs can help reduce unemployment and low productivity by preparing youth and other underemployed groups for jobs in high-demand sectors including digital and energy (related to the GS4S construction sector) (Ipole, 2018; Lokpobiri, 2019; Virk et al., 2023).

Gender, sociocultural, and ethnic disparities, particularly in underserved regions, also exacerbate challenges in the three sectors, as gendered differences remain, not least of all in

construction and ICT (Rufai et al., 2019). Indeed, important to note is how women in Nigeria face unique challenges in accessing skills development opportunities, as demonstrated in how they remain underrepresented in polytechnical universities (Akor et al., 2015). Various sociocultural norms, a gendered legal framework, and limited access to financial resources disproportionately affect women's participation in skilling programs (Bako and Syed, 2018). This gender disparity is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where educational and vocational training opportunities are further limited (Ibid).

II.   Care Sectors

Here, migration trends reflect gender-specific factors affecting the care sector; women are more likely to migrate for care-related jobs in sectors such as healthcare and education (Odoemene and Osuji, 2015). Addressing gender-specific barriers and expectations in different fields (detailed in section five) requires targeted interventions, including gender-sensitive skilling programs and policies that promote women's labor market inclusion.

4.4. Gender Specific Analysis Regarding Skilling and Migration in Nigeria

A key aspect of Nigeria's skilling and migration landscape is the influence of gender disparities and intersectional differences. Women remain significantly underrepresented in sectors such as digital and construction while being more prominently represented in vocational programs like healthcare and teaching. Migration patterns further reflect these disparities, with women more likely to migrate for skilled healthcare roles or family reunification purposes. Regional socioeconomic and sociocultural disparities emphasize the necessity of tailoring programs to better address the needs of women, youth, rural communities, and displaced persons.

The socioeconomic disparities between men and women in Nigeria are deeply rooted in sociocultural and legal norms, shaped by the country's pluralistic nature. With over 300 ethnic groups and diverse religious, historical, and cultural backgrounds (Adegbami and Uche, 2015), gender roles are often dictated by patriarchal paradigms. These norms frequently exclude women from the paid labor force and limit their participation in international migration (Tuki, 2024). In Northern Nigeria, sociocultural norms and infrastructural challenges significantly restrict women's access to training programs and skilling opportunities, further entrenching regional inequalities.

I.   Gender Difference as a barrier in Skilling and Migration

Women face additional barriers, including limited access to technology, insufficient financial resources, and gender-biased legal frameworks, which hinder their participation in technical and vocational education, particularly in polytechnic universities (Akor et al., 2015; Bako and Syed, 2018). Migration trends also highlight gender-specific patterns, with women disproportionately represented in care-related sectors such as healthcare and education (Odoemene and Osuji, 2015). Addressing

these barriers requires comprehensive, gender-sensitive skilling programs and policies aimed at promoting women's inclusion in the labor market.

II.   Addressing Gender Difference in Future Skilling Migration and Development

Several steps can be taken to address these gender disparities. Expanding gender-specific initiatives such as the **Tech4Dev Women Techsters Fellowship** and adopting quotas for female participation, as seen in **NITDA's digital skills initiatives**, are effective strategies for breaking down barriers to entry in underrepresented fields. Mentorship programs involving successful female professionals in technology can also play a transformative role. By mentoring young women, particularly from underserved areas, these programs can provide guidance, support, and real-world insights into high-demand industries.

Community advocacy campaigns can further enhance these efforts by challenging and reshaping societal perceptions of women's roles in the workforce. Such campaigns should engage local leaders, community influencers, and NGOs to create supportive environments where women are encouraged to pursue careers in technology, construction, and other traditionally male-dominated sectors. Collaborating with community stakeholders can help build trust and foster a dialogue about cultural norms, enabling greater participation of women in skilling programs and migration pathways.

III.   Intersectional Difference and Ethnic Disparity as a Challenge to Pursuing Labor Market Equality

While gender disparities are a focal point, intersectional differences, including ethnic disparities, also play a significant role in shaping access to skilling and migration opportunities. Nigeria's ethnic diversity, combined with existing socioeconomic inequities, influences migration dynamics and the state of skilling initiatives. However, none of the programs analyzed specifically targeted ethnic minorities, and there is a notable lack of national policies addressing ethnic disparities in skilling and migration (Adegbami and Uche, 2015).

It is argued that the absence of such targeted interventions contributes to the socioeconomic challenges faced by minority groups and reflects broader systemic issues. Future research and advocacy should aim to identify how these dynamics inform skilling and migration patterns in Nigeria, providing a foundation for inclusive and equitable policy development.

4.5. Policy and Strategic Initiatives Analysis

4.5.1. National Policies

Nigeria's migration and skilling landscape are shaped by a range of policies, initiatives, and challenges. These policies seek to foster economic growth through improved employability. designed to align

skills development with labor market demands and facilitate effective migration management. A unified national strategy is lacking, however, and skilling and migration are not necessarily directly linked. Table 5 below provides a summarized overview of select Nigerian policies regarding skilling, migration, and the intersection of skills development with the labor market, particularly as pertains to the GS4S sectors. Challenges are identified based on impact assessments. The total policies mapped are not displayed on this table, but the most relevant are presented.

Table 5. Nigerian Policy Mapping

Type of Policy	Title	Year	Aim	Challenges
Skilling	**National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Skills Acquisition Program**	2007	• Enhancing digital literacy and fostering IT development across Nigeria.	• Difficult to ensure effective collaboration and engagement with stakeholders.
Migration	**National Migration Policy**	2015	• A framework for leveraging migration for national development, addressing issues such as labor migration, diaspora engagement, and migrant rights	• Weak Implementation;limited coordination, funding, and institutional capacity. • Irregular Migration: Persistent issues like human trafficking and unsafe migration
	National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP)	2014	• Aims to Promote good governance in labor migration; protect migrant workers and their welfare; optimize developmental benefits of labor migration.	• Limited resources and coordination among agencies. • Data management challenges.
Labor Market	**National Youth Employment Action Plan**	2021	• Aims to address youth employment with four objectives of: employability via skills	• Implementation difficulties • Limited resources and coordination

		and competencies to meet market demands; promoting entrepreneurship and job creation; ensuring equal opportunity.		among relevant agencies. • Data Management Challenges
	National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy	2013	• Aims to: provide skilled manpower for national development; enhance the employability of youths and adults; promote sustainable economic growth through skills	• Inadequate Funding • Negative Perception: TVET is often viewed as a last resort, leading to low enrollment.

I.   On Skilling

The National Skills Policy, implemented by the Federal Ministry of Education, emphasizes harmonizing technical and vocational education to meet labor market demands. Stakeholders, including the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and private-sector partners, focus on aligning curricula with industry standards and fostering public-private partnerships, particularly in digital and construction sectors (World Bank, 2015). Secondary vocational education, part of **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**, plays a vital role in skilling for industries like manufacturing, construction, and hospitality (Akinyoade, 2019).

II.   On Migration

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) is responsible for border control and legal migration pathways; and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FMFA), which negotiates bilateral labor agreements and safeguards Nigerians' rights abroad. **The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI)** addresses migration governance holistically, including diaspora engagement and the resettlement of returnees (Ochogwu and Babatunde, 2023). In brief, policies focus largely on regulating emigration and supporting Nigerian citizens abroad, representing a disconnect between skills development and migration policies.

III.   On Skilling for Migration

In short, skilling for migration is not cohesively addressed by various government stakeholders or policies, although other international development actors, private enterprise and NGOs may address this goal in tandem with public collaboration. At the same time, it is worth noting

that several pilot, EU-funded mobility schemes present opportunities for government actors and policies to embrace skilling for migration. Examples include the ongoing **Digital Explorers project** for ICT professionals, or **Nigerian TechPro4Europe**, which seeks to promote mobility for Nigerian professionals in the construction and manufacturing sectors (JRC, 2024).

Nigerian skills development policies largely focus on aligning educational outcomes with industry needs. Despite efforts to reduce reliance on the oil sector, introduce tech/driven solutions to construction and healthcare, align with labor market needs and encourage entrepreneurship, several challenges persist. Infrastructure gaps, including unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate facilities, hinder program delivery, especially in rural areas. Funding shortages, often exacerbated by dependency on international donors, limit the sustainability and reach of initiatives. Additionally, mismatches between training and industry needs, lack of continuous learning opportunities, and gender-specific barriers further undermine skilling efforts (Ezeani, 2019; Williamson and Rodd, 2016).

4.5.2. Strategic Initiatives

Mapping of skilling initiatives in Nigeria identified 27 programs, with 13 primarily led by federal or state governments, often in collaboration with international organizations and private-sector stakeholders. These programs span various sectors and target diverse groups, particularly youth and women, in urban and rural areas. Youth, particularly those aged 18–35, show higher participation in skilling programs, especially in urban areas. Migration aspirations are often linked to advanced technical training in fields such as software development and engineering. Gender-targeted initiatives aim to address women's lower participation rates in skilled labor and migration. Programs have positively impacted income levels and socio-economic mobility, particularly for low-income households, with international certifications playing a crucial role in facilitating migration to destinations like the US and Europe (Lohr, 2019).

There are some interesting takeaways as to skilling and migration initiatives in light of this mapping. Before fleshing these out, it is a useful context to examine sociodemographic and socioeconomic patterns in the analysis. Firstly, in terms of training participation, the data demonstrates that participation in training is higher among young people aged 18-35, in urban rather than rural locations. Moreover, migration aspirations are higher among those who have undergone advanced technical training, particularly in fields like software development and engineering. In terms of gender, many programs target women specifically due to their lower participation rates in both skilled labor and migration. Higher education levels correlate with increased migration and improved outcomes from skilling programs. Skilling programs have shown a positive impact on income, particularly for participants from low-income households. Migration and participation in skilling programs often lead to improved socio-economic mobility. Finally in terms of actual migration taking place, this is more likely among individuals who have received internationally recognized certifications or are placed through global companies (further described below in the case of Andela).

In short, the overarching objective of Nigeria's skilling and reskilling initiatives is to close the skills gap, reduce unemployment, and equip the workforce for the demands of a rapidly changing economy. Implementation strategies include blended learning as well as mentorships and internships.

With this context, however, many skilling programs lack data on their outcomes, against a backdrop of limited national level comprehensive data and indicators related to labor and migration in the first instance. It is difficult to provide insights into the state of skilling, reskilling and upskilling for migration and the domestic market with limited information as to program outcomes. However, other main trends are highlighted here.

Types of Initiatives:

Out of the 27 programs identified, the vast majority were related to skilling for development. Some initiatives are arguably directed at skilling Nigerians (primarily youth) for global labor market demands, and one was linked to cross-border cooperation with the UK, but did not necessarily entail a mobility aspect. For the purposes of the scope of the paper, only selected initiatives are included in Table Six.. They relate to the following categories:

I.   Upgrading Nigerian ICT Skills for Domestic Market

There is such an emphasis on the digital sector it merits its own category. An example includes some programs under the **NITDA Skills Acquisition Program policy framework**, aimed at addressing the digital gap by providing coding, cybersecurity, and software development training. Target groups include unemployed youth and women, information technology students, and tech entrepreneurs. It is funded by NITDA and private sector companies like Microsoft. Training takes an online and regional hub (in-person) format (Digital Transformation Centre, Nigeria, 2024). While over 50,000 participants are trained annually, 30% of participants go on to employment in the digital sector. It is noted that rural youth without internet access remain a difficult population to target (Ibid).

II. Upgrading Nigerian Skills for Global Market (or Combined Domestic and Global)

While not exclusive to Nigeria, **Andela** trains African software developers, with a focus on youth between ages 18-30 and primarily from Nigeria, who have recently graduated in computer science or related fields. It partners with tech companies including Microsoft, Google and Meta, which help fund the program and hire graduates as remote employees. Only 1% of applicants (100,000 since 2014) are selected for the program, and have higher completion rates, with over 1,100 engineers and most placed in top-tier global companies in US and Europe (Lohr, 2019).

III.   Fostering Entrepreneurship for Development

There are concerted efforts to foster entrepreneurship, particularly by multistakeholder civil society and international organization efforts. An example includes the **FATE Foundation** and its various programs, which provide mentoring, training and access to network and funding opportunities, for aspiring and early-stage entrepreneurs, with specific programming for women and youth. Funded by international and local donors, it is still expanding today, by 2016 it had already reached 5,000 businesses and 100,000 (Fate Foundation, 2024).

IV.   Certifying Skills for Nigerians for Domestic and Global Market

For example, the program **Skills Development for Youth Employment (SKYE)** illustrates an initiative that offers certification in order to align with industry standards and better position Nigerian youth. Promoting need-based Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and youth employment in Nigeria is a good example of how the Nigerian government collaborated with companies like **SLOT Systems** to provide practical ICT skills for youth, and simultaneously standardized qualifications (GIZ, 2022). Its outcomes have included establishing standardized qualifications for over 120 technical centers, increased alignment with industry standards by 70% (Ibid). However, persistent gaps remain in rural access due to infrastructure challenges (Ibid.).

V.   Fostering Women's Labor Market Inclusion for Development

The low participation of women in the labor market is manifested in many initiatives aimed for women's skilling. **Tech4Dev** is aimed at women aged 16 to 45 across Africa and closing gender gaps in technology via positioning women to pursue careers in tech or to become tech entrepreneurs. Partners include Microsoft, the Lagos state government, and other international partners. The program entails mentorship and internship opportunities with tech companies. In the class of 2024, over 2,000 women and girls were admitted, with 1,600 Nigerian participants. Historically, 80% of the participants complete the full program, which includes six months of training followed by a six-month internship or incubation period. The program reports that eight out of every ten graduates secure tech related jobs or internships (Tech4Dev, 2024).

VI.   Training and Education for Youth Development

While this could be considered a blanket category including category one, the emphasis on youth employment and development merits its own category. For example, **N-Power** is a sub-component of the **National Social Investment Program (NSIP)**, which seeks to reduce unemployment by training youth and increasing employability across various industries, via targeting youth (primarily between the ages of 18 and 35) and unemployed graduates. Around

40% of participants transitioned into permanent employment or entrepreneurship, and the program has limited reach in rural areas due to infrastructural challenges (Eyanuku et al., 2023).

In this categorization, there is a notable lack of MOUs or bilateral agreements with countries of destination (JRC, 2024).

Table 6. Nigerian Initiatives Mapping

Type of Initiative	Title	Year/Period	Aim	Target Demographic	Target Sector
Upgrading Nigerian ICT Skills for Domestic Market	**Scaling Digital Agriculture Innovations Through Start-Ups (SAIS)**	2019 – Ongoing	To accelerate start-ups' innovative ideas and scalable solutions, driving sustainable African development.	• Agri-tech startups	Digital
Upgrading Nigerian Skills for Global Market (or Combined Domestic and Global)	**Lagos State Code Lagos Initiative**	2020 – Ongoing	To develop a skilled workforce in the tech sector within Lagos State.	• Youths in Lagos	Digital
	Lafarge Africa Technical Skills Development Initiative	2010 – Ongoing	To offer vocational training in construction trades to youth, enhancing their employability.	• Nigerian youths 18-35	Construction
Fostering Entrepreneurship for Development	**Digital Nigeria Program**	2020 – Ongoing	To promote digital literacy and skills development among Nigerians.	• Youths in digital space	Digital
	Nigeria Innovation Program	2019 – Ongoing	To foster innovation, startups, and promote collaboration with UK tech.	• Tech startups • Entrepreneurs • Developers	Digital
	Startup Nigeria	2019 - 2020	To foster entrepreneurship with support to early-stage startups in scaling.	• Early-stage startups across various sectors particularly in technology	Digital

Certifying Skills of Nigerians for Domestic and Global Market	**Julius Berger Nigeria Vocational Training Centre**	2010 – Ongoing	To provide vocational training in construction and offer placement opportunities within Julius Berger.	• Construction Workers	Construction
Fostering Women's Labor Market Inclusion for Development	**Tech4Dev Women Techsters Fellowship Program**	2014 – Ongoing	To empower African girls and women in digital, deep tech and tech soft skills.	• Girls & Women	Digital
	HACEY's Safe Motherhood Programme	2007 – Ongoing	To reduce maternal and neonatal mortality with quality maternal care access and education.	• Pregnant women, especially in rural and underserved communities	Care
Training and Education for Youth Development	**Jobberman Upskilling**	2019 – Ongoing	To bridge skills gap between job seekers and employer needs.	• Youth	Digital

4.6. Challenges and Opportunities for Future Development

The digital and entrepreneurial sectors in Nigeria highlight the immense potential of skilling programs to address both domestic and global labor market demands. However, significant challenges, including infrastructural limitations, funding gaps, and gender disparities, hinder progress and call for targeted interventions. Aligning skilling policies with migration frameworks and labor market demands presents an opportunity to prepare Nigeria's workforce for future needs while contributing to economic diversification and poverty reduction.

4.6.1. Challenges in Skills Development and Migration

1. Addressing Highly Skilled Emigration:
   The persistent emigration of highly skilled individuals is among the key challenges facing Nigeria. Despite efforts to align skilling programs with local labor market needs, a significant proportion of Nigeria's most advanced talent continues to migrate abroad in pursuit of better opportunities. This trend is compounded by mitigated unemployment rates that fail to address underlying wage disparities, particularly among skilled youth (Virk et al., 2023).

2. Infrastructure:

Inadequate infrastructure that hampers the delivery of skilling programs, especially for migration. The lack of reliable power supply and poor internet connectivity is particularly detrimental to digital skills training, a sector critical for global labor market integration. These issues are most acute in underserved and remote regions, where a digital divide restricts workers' ability to acquire skills necessary for international employment.

3. National Policy Framework Fragmentation:

Within Nigeria's national policy framework, skilling, upskilling, and migration initiatives often operate in silos, with minimal coordination between agencies and organizations. The absence of a centralized strategy or harmonized approach leads to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and a lack of alignment between training programs and the specific needs of international labor markets. This lack of integration reduces the effectiveness of skilling programs in equipping workers with market-relevant skills and exacerbates the inefficiencies in multistakeholder collaboration. The scattered dialogue across policy silos and ministries hinders the development of streamlined pathways for migration and limits the potential of Nigeria's skilling initiatives.

4.6.2. Opportunities for Future Development

1. Align Skilling Programs with Market Needs:

Policies must focus on aligning skilling initiatives with emerging market demands, particularly in sectors like digital technology and renewable energy (part of the GS4S construction sector). This alignment will ensure that skilling programs translate into sustainable local employment while also preparing the workforce to meet global labor market demands. Public-private partnerships and collaboration with global employers and industry experts can ensure that training content aligns with real-world demands. Identifying high-demand sectors and continuously adapting curricula to evolving industry needs will maximize the employability of program graduates.

2. Leveraging Data-Driven Decision-Making to Shape Skilling Initiatives:

The approach adopted by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) demonstrates the potential of using industry analysis and post-program data collection to guide training programs. By tracking outcomes such as employment rates, income levels, and entrepreneurial ventures, stakeholders can continuously evaluate and refine their initiatives. Expanding this evidence-based strategy across all programs could include:
   - Recording real-time labor market data to anticipate skill shortages and emerging demands.

- Collecting post-training data on employment success, salary progression, and entrepreneurial activity.
- Continuously updating curricula and teaching methodologies to remain agile and aligned with market conditions.

3. Support Entrepreneurship and Vocational Training:
   Programs should incorporate robust entrepreneurship support, particularly in agriculture and vocational fields, to address the specific socioeconomic context of Nigeria. Supporting entrepreneurs in these sectors can help generate local employment opportunities and reduce unemployment.

4. Expand Legal Migration Pathways:
   Expanding legal migration channels for skilled labor is essential to reduce irregular migration and its associated risks. Legal pathways would also enable Nigeria to leverage diaspora contributions through remittances and knowledge transfer, fostering both economic and social development.

5. Enhance Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration - Particularly Related to Migration:
   Coordinated efforts between national stakeholders and international partners are critical. Skilling programs should integrate pathways to both local employment and regulated migration opportunities. For instance, pre-departure training for international employment and stronger collaboration with destination countries can help align migration policies with labor market needs.

6. Address Gender and Intersectional Disparities:
   Any skilling and migration policy must explicitly recognize and address gender and intersectional inequalities. Regional disparities, as well as ethnic and sociocultural dynamics, must be accounted for to ensure that policies are inclusive and equitable. Tailored initiatives targeting marginalized groups, including women and ethnic minorities, are vital for rectifying systemic disadvantages. adopting strategies to encourage participation in skilling programs from underserved groups, including rural populations and women, could improve the reach and equity of these initiatives.

5. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria reveals both shared challenges and unique dynamics in leveraging skilling as a strategy for migration and economic development. A recurring theme across the three countries is the misalignment between training programs and labor market demands, both domestically and internationally. In all three cases, systemic challenges, including funding gaps, infrastructural limitations and limited international certification, hinder the effectiveness of skilling initiatives.

All three countries struggle with persistent skills mismatches, where training programs fail to align with the specific needs of domestic and international labor markets. This disconnect restricts employability and reinforces cycles of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among youth. Gender disparities are another common challenge, with systemic barriers preventing women from accessing skilling initiatives and migration opportunities. The urban-centric focus of training programs leaves rural populations underserved, exacerbating regional inequalities and limiting opportunities for marginalized communities. A lack of comprehensive labor market data and evaluation mechanisms further hampers the ability to design evidence-based policies and assess the effectiveness of existing initiatives.

Despite the shared challenges, the unique socio-economic and policy contexts of each country offer valuable insights. Egypt's migration policies highlight a strong reliance on remittance flows, yet low female labor force participation and fragmented skilling initiatives hinder broader development objectives. Bangladesh has demonstrated robust efforts in vocational training with remittances forming a critical pillar of its economy. However, the lack of alignment with global accreditation standards and persistent skills mismatches constrain the upward mobility of Bangladeshi migrants. Nigeria, with its dynamic digital sector, has shown promise through the adopted initiatives, which connect professionals with global markets. Challenges, such as infrastructural shortages, high youth unemployment, and weak policy coherence limit the scalability and inclusivity of these programs. All three countries illustrate the potential for improved wages and mitigating informal work.

Addressing both unique and specific challenges requires concerted efforts across multiple sectors. For policymakers, integrating skilling and migration strategies into cohesive national frameworks is necessary, as evidenced by the lack of aligned policies in all three country case studies. These strategies should align training programs with both domestic and international labor market demands while expanding legal migration pathways through bilateral labor agreements. Promoting inclusivity needs to be a core focus, with gender-sensitive and regionally equitable policies ensuring broader access to skilling opportunities.

Educational institutions also have a pivotal role to play. Updating training curricula to reflect needs of emerging sectors is essential. Greater emphasis on practical skills and global standards can enhance employability. Expanding access to underprivileged rural areas will help address geographic disparities that remain inseparable from other aspects of intersectional difference, while stronger partnerships with industry stakeholders can ensure demand-driven training programs that foster employability.

Data-driven approaches to enhance program evaluation are necessary, ensuring that skilling initiatives are informed by evidence and designed for scalability. In all three cases, lessons from both embattled and promising initiatives are missing in scant program evaluations. Funding gender-inclusive projects that address barriers will further promote equitable participation. Multilateral

collaboration with governments and private-sector is critical to harmonizing efforts and creating integrated solutions for skills development and labor mobility. This means that European receiving countries must offer greater cooperation on education and skills recognition and qualifications, if truly in pursuit of a global skills strategy.

Addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities, Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria can harness the potential of skilling the manpower to drive sustainable development. Guided investments in human capital together with inclusive and well-coordinated policies will allow these countries to meet local demand for quality labor force but will also meet global labor market demands, reducing inequalities and strengthening their global competitiveness. The economic challenges identified in the three countries have crippled investments (local and international) as one of the main driving factors. Employers are attracted to where factors of production are available and efficient. While rich in quantity, the three countries have identified skills mismatch as one of the main labor market challenges, where the skills owned are not in match with the skills in demand. Therefore, empowering the manpower with the globally recognised skills will allow a better matching with the needs of the local and foreign investors, locally, and will also increase the matching with the global demand. This will contribute directly and indirectly to the economic development of the origin countries.

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The Potential Skilling, Upskilling, and Reskilling Opportunities for the Migration and Mobility of Workers, with a Specific Focus on Gender Aspects of Workers in the Countries of Origin

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GS4S seeks to better understand global skills shortages in selected sectors (Digital, Care and Construction) and strengthens evidence-based and multi-level policies on labour migration governance. The project provides new knowledge on alternative and equitable ways for addressing skills shortages in six regions (EU, EEA, Western Balkan, Middle East and Northern Africa, West Africa, and South/South-East Asia).

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