



GS4S General EC Policy briefs (D1.3)

Policy brief no. 1

At the intersection of migration, education, development, and trade: 20 concrete policy recommendations for tackling skills shortages in the EU and beyond, based on interdisciplinary evidence

This policy brief is a deliverable of task 1.2 within the Horizon Europe project "Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development" (GS4S).

Authors: Tesseltje de Lange, Pascal Beckers, Ksenija Ivanović and Colleen Boland

Suggested citation (APA): de Lange, T., Beckers, P., Ivanović, K., & Boland, C. (2025). At the intersection of migration, education, development, and trade: 20 concrete policy recommendations for tackling skills shortages in the EU and beyond, based on interdisciplinary evidence. Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development (GS4S). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15534790>



At the intersection of migration, education, development, and trade: 20 concrete policy recommendations for tackling skills shortages in the EU and beyond, based on interdisciplinary evidence

Tesseltje de Lange*, Pascal Beckers**, Colleen Boland*, Ksenija Ivanović**

Executive summary

This policy brief, prepared by coordinators of the 2024-2026 Horizon Europe project “**Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development**” (GS4S),¹ engages with the policy dialogue and responds to the search for precise, comprehensive, effective, and sustainable solutions for skills shortages in Digital, Care and Construction sectors. Halfway into the GS4S project, we draw on interim interdisciplinary evidence and go straight to 20 policy recommendations in areas of **migration, education, development, and trade (or, as the project coins it, “MEDT” policies)**. Building on this structure, we emphasize solutions to skills shortages lie at the intersection of MEDT policies. Our key recommendations highlight the need to (i) expand and improve legal migration pathways to attract and retain talent (ii) invest in skills development and facilitate procedures for recognition of qualifications, (iii) revisit the design, objectives and evaluation of EU Talent Partnerships and (iv) address persistent challenges with data availability. The policy brief is primarily addressed at the **European Commission** (DG EMPL, DG HOME, DG TRADE, DG ENEST, DG ECFIN, DG GROW). However, it is also informative for other audiences: policymakers on the EU, national- and local-levels, scholars, researchers, representatives of civil society organizations, social partners, and industrial associations.

Keywords: European Union, skills shortages, policy recommendations, migration, education, trade, development

Acknowledgments: This policy brief is part of the Horizon Europe project GS4S - Global Strategy for Skills, Migration, and Development (gs4s.eu). The funding from the European Union is gratefully acknowledged. However, the views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, Horizon Europe, or the Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The authors thank all GS4S project members (<https://gs4s.eu/team-2/>) for their invaluable contribution: the policy recommendations we present here are a result of joint research efforts. We thank Belen Zanzuchi from Migration Policy Institute Europe, a member of the GS4S project, for providing detailed feedback. We are grateful to Izabela Grabowska and Vidmantas Tütlys for their reflections on behalf of the sister projects Link4Skills and Skills4Justice, respectively.

* Radboud University, Centre for Migration Law, Montessorilaan 10, 6525HR Nijmegen, The Netherlands, Centre for Migration Law | Radboud University (ru.nl). Email: tesseltje.delange@ru.nl, colleen.boland@ru.nl

** Radboud University, Institute for Management Research, Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, Heyendaalseweg 141, 6525 AJ Nijmegen, The Netherlands, www.ru.nl/en/imr. Emails: pascal.beckers@ru.nl, ksenija.ivanovic@ru.nl

¹ <https://gs4s.eu/>. For more information about the consortium and included perspectives (e.g. those of migrants, businesses, and countries outside of the European Union), please consult the website.



Contents

1. <i>Introduction</i>	4
2. <i>Evidence and policy recommendations</i>	5
2.1 Migration policies	5
Expanding and improving legal pathways for (labour) migration	5
Attracting and retaining talent	8
The EU and the Western Balkans	9
2.2 Education policies	11
Skills waste and recognition of qualifications	11
Skills development	13
2.3 Development policies	13
2.4 Trade policies	15
3. <i>Conclusion: towards cohesive MEDT policies</i>	15



1. Introduction

This interim policy brief, prepared by coordinators of the 2024-2026 Horizon Europe project “**Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development**” (GS4S),² engages with the policy dialogue and responds to the search for precise, comprehensive, effective, and sustainable solutions for skills shortages in Digital, Care and Construction sectors. In our recommendations, we reflect on labour migration and alternative solutions for addressing skills shortages, including skills development, automation, recognition of qualifications, or global skills partnerships. We draw on interdisciplinary evidence from the first sixteen months of the GS4S project to present 20 policy recommendations. A follow-up to this paper will be published in 2026.

With aging populations and twin (digital and green) transitions, **skills shortages have become an increasingly and widely recognized challenge in the European Union and globally**. In response to this reality and growing concern about the EU’s competitiveness on a global scale, the European Commission announced the new Union of Skills, on March 5th, 2025. We welcome this framework that reiterates the commitment to addressing skills shortages. We also welcome the European Commission’s whole-of-government approach, considering multiple policy fields with, we hope, the intent to de-silo the field. Yet, there is more to be done.

In what follows, we set out to answer the following five questions:

- How should the EU address skills waste and improve the circulation of skills?
- How can legal migration pathways be improved to welcome and retain migrant workers?
- Under which conditions could the EU talent partnerships ‘fly’?
- How does automation relate to labour migration and skills shortages?
- How can the potential EU enlargement with Western-Balkan countries be of relevance to the topic of skills shortages?

We present key findings and **public policy recommendations in the fields of migration, education, development, and trade (or, as the project coins it, “MEDT” policies)**. The MEDT structure is aligned with the GS4S design, aiming to facilitate the integration of research inputs. Still, throughout the policy brief, we emphasize that solutions for skills shortages lie at the intersection of MEDT policies and call for stronger policy cohesion.

The policy brief is primarily addressed at the **European Commission** (DG EMPL, DG HOME, DG TRADE, DG ENEST, DG ECFIN, DG GROW). However, it is also informative for other audiences: policymakers on the EU, national- and local-levels, scholars, researchers, representatives of civil society organizations, social partners, and industrial associations.

² <https://gs4s.eu/>. For more information about the consortium and included perspectives (e.g. those of migrants, businesses, and countries outside of the European Union), please consult the website.



2. Evidence and policy recommendations

2.1 Migration policies

Migration policies can improve in three areas:

- (i) expanding and improving pathways for legal (labour) migration;
- (ii) attracting and retaining migrant workers;
- (iii) the EU and the Western Balkans' cooperation on skilling and labour mobility.

Improving and expanding legal pathways for (labour) migration

Labour migration is an evermore prominent response to skills shortages: its legal aspects are naturally connected to all segments of GS4S research and are thus the first area of policy recommendations we discuss. While our team is developing additional recommendations in this area - in particular with regards to insufficient and unsuccessful implementation of labour migration policies - based on our publications to date:

1. To improve existing legal pathways, the European Commission should propose what we call a **'Skills and Migration Omnibus'** to existing labour migration directives to "attract, train and integrate skilled third-country nationals" (Ghodsi et al., 2025, p. 8; Hooper et al., 2025). This policy recommendation - one of nine we present in a policy brief on labour migration and automation (Ghodsi et al., 2025), is inspired by the Commission's proposals to streamline corporate social responsibility (CSR) rules (Ibid., 2025, p. 8). While our paper is based on the research of automation as a solution to address skills shortages (Tverdostup et al., 2025), we suggest expanding the recommendation. Thus, we propose to the Commission to go beyond the Union of Skills and focus on highly skilled *and* practically skilled migration. We believe new legislation is required to adequately address the skills shortages, as not all skilled workers will be eligible for a Blue Card permit under its current state due to the high qualification requirements and income thresholds. The omnibus legislation should:
 - **Instruct the EU member states, at the least through guidelines, to develop policies to identify shortage occupations at different skill levels**, preferably defined at the EU level (e.g., with data on shortage occupations available through enhanced skills intelligence announced by the Union of Skills). We add that the European Commission might, for instance, define shortage occupations considering the need to secure public services, such as electricity and health care.
 - **Have the EU member states improve their national-level procedures to facilitate (automation- and green technology-related) job-seeking permits** and thereby transition to the job market. The omnibus legislation could implement such a job-seeking permit and facilitate transitions from one permit to the other, including in the case of circular mobility in the directives on students and researchers (2016/801/EU), the Blue Card (2021/1223/EU) and the single permit (2024/1233/EU).
2. The European Commission should take steps to make **better use of its labour migration tools**, improve **coordination of immigration policies in the bloc**, and **expand legal frameworks for**





migration to leverage foreign talent and meet evidenced and emerging needs. While the first two points will be discussed in detail in our upcoming policy brief (Hooper et al., 2025), the latter includes developing additional legal labour migration pathways and adapting immigration (integration) policies, regularizing irregular migrants already in the EU, utilizing labour pathways for displaced talent, and a myriad of other initiatives. For further details, please see (Goldfarb et al., 2024, pp. 7-21). Well-aware that migration policy is a politically sensitive topic in many EU Member States, the commission should try to make a strong case for EU-level coordination of these tools (on which see Hooper et al, 2025).

3. Furthermore, the European Commission **can make significant improvements in the design and implementation of EU Talent Partnerships** - valuable examples of solutions for skills shortages at the intersection of MEDT policies. Precisely, resulting from our research to date (Hooper & Slootjes, 2025; Poeschel et al., 2025), the European Commission should:
 - **Ensure the EU Talent Partnerships help overcome barriers to mobility** (e.g., by visa processing times and fees, consolidating services and information or introducing new procedures for skills recognition) and **offer new legal migration pathways or add-on services**. In other words, while their design focuses on the mobility of skills, the EU Talent Partnerships offer minimal added value in terms of legal migration. At best, their implementation may provide new insights into legal and other barriers faced by migrants and employers. Please see further in Hooper & Slootjes (2025, p. 24).
 - **Reconsider and improve the design of EU Talent Partnerships in at least three ways**. Firstly, these programs should be expanded to **include participants with lower levels of education**: this is a recommendation from our research on mobility schemes (Hooper & Slootjes, 2025) and automation (Ghodsi et al., 2025), the latter showing automation tends to increase employment across education levels - especially of the less skilled workers. Secondly, the EU Talent Partnerships must consider the needs of both partner and EU Member States, but also pay **attention to global labour market needs**; wherever possible, and with a similar objective of improving migrant mobility medium-term, we recommend pursuing training allowing for **internationally recognized accreditation** (Abdel Fattah et al., 2024; Hooper & Slootjes, 2025, p. 23). Thirdly, considering widely recognized challenges around costs, engagement with, and scale of the EU Talent Partnerships, these programs should be reimaged “with a **post-pilot vision in mind and flexibility about what scale could look like, especially as needs evolve**” Hooper & Slootjes, 2025, p. 25). In other words, if these initiatives are more than a tool for migration management (i.e., a carrot to attract and condition participating non-EU countries), they need to be scaled up.
 - **Provide transparent and precise information concerning all objectives and the expected impact** of EU Talent Partnerships to allow for research, evaluation, and accountability. The EU Talent Partnerships are largely dependent on public funding. They are difficult to scale and cost-intensive: the GS4S working paper provides several examples to substantiate the point, evidencing mobility costs amounting to 10-11,000 EUR per person (Ibid.). At the same time, persistent issues with





transparency leave researchers and the public unaware of the objectives (both official and implicit policy objectives, such as cooperation upon return) or the expected impact of these initiatives, which should be addressed urgently. The European Commission should encourage the same standards for similar programs initiated by Member States.

4. **Furthermore**, with challenges of EU Talent Partnerships in mind, we recommend that the European Commission **consider the potential of B2B designs of GSPs** to address skills shortages and overcome challenges associated with traditional public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Text Box 1). In relation to this, key recommendations include:
- **Defining standards** that, when met, imply **recognition of a setup as a GSP**.
 - As an additional measure, based on existing standards but also recommendations for improvement,³ **the European Commission should develop guidelines concerning ethical practices and recruitment** to be implemented on all GSPs, including PPPs such as EU Talent Partnerships and B2B setups. We further recommend developing transparent and precise mechanisms and procedures for **monitoring and evaluation of the ethical dimension** in all GSPs, together with involved stakeholders and international organizations, or NGOs. The latter actors could play a role in monitoring and facilitating GSPs.
 - **Establish a point of support for migrant workers who participate in EU Talent Partnerships and all Global Skills Partnerships (GSPs)** organized in collaboration with public or private entities based in the EU (Poeschel et al., 2025).

³ We discuss these in a recent GS4S contribution (Boland et al., forthcoming) to “*Global Migration Skill Flow: A Manifesto for Balanced Mobility*.” The manifesto is currently being prepared for publication by Routledge, as part of our sister project Link4Skills.



Text Box 1. Brainstorming the potential of B2B GSPs to address skills shortages in the EU and globally

GS4S examined potential scenarios for various **business-to-business (B2B) global skills partnerships** and compared them to the traditional PPP setup (e.g., see Figures 1 and 2) (Poeschel et al., 2025). The B2B options analyzed included joint ventures, setups including in-house training, or setups based on an intra-corporate transfer (ICT). The paper argues how B2B setups could be attractive to employers (especially regional consortia), positioned to more flexibly adapt to labour market needs, and help address challenges of Talent Partnerships and other GSPs. At the same time, questions persist in contemplating B2B arrangements, including: (i) how to safeguard interests of migrant workers and countries of origin, (ii) ensuring recognition of B2B setups as global skills partnerships, (iii) addressing legal barriers to international recruitment or (iv) tackling the often-controversial use of intermediaries, which smaller businesses would likely have to engage.

Figure 1. SWOT Analysis for a basic PPP setup



Figure 2. SWOT analysis for a basic B2B setup involving a joint venture



Source: adapted from (Poeschel et al., 2025).

Attracting and retaining talent

As said, the current labour market shortages are not member state specific, thus the European Commission should **highlight and communicate the demand for specific occupations in the EU** to support employers in their endeavour of effectively attracting skilled migrants. Moreover, as highlighted by GS4S research in the Western Balkans, skills shortages in the EU influence migration



aspirations (if present, they encourage emigration), while skills shortages at home are an incentive to stay (Beckers et al., 2024). Considering these findings:

5. The European Commission should provide up-to-date (links to) data on sectoral and occupational labour shortages through the **EU Immigration Portal**. The Commission can use its enforcement instruments to push the Member States to accessibly flag such data in vacancy portals (e.g., those created by public employment agencies) and other applicable platforms. With necessary agreements in place, Member States could share shortage data with partner countries, encouraging improved matching of employment opportunities and skills. Similarly, the European Commission should encourage the Member States to update the data in the EU Immigration Portal more regularly. Shortage data can be shared, for example, via a link to such data made available by other EU bodies (e.g. the Cedefop tool on skills intelligence on the demand in the EU Member States); we emphasize that *“it may take a long time before the Talent Pool is operational, while this data can be linked now without requiring new legislation”* (Ghodsi et al., 2024, pp. 14-15).
6. In the context of **Global Skills Partnerships (GSPs)** to attract talent, the EU, including its delegations abroad, must maintain close **contact with the private sector** to improve program design and identify skilling needs in participating countries. Insufficient or challenging private sector engagement with GSP schemes to date indicates that initiatives like the EU Talent Partnerships encounter difficulty in fully leveraging the private sector, which greatly hinders their scalability. Such outcomes suggest that a closer dialogue with the private sector is necessary to address concerns (likely differing per sector or type of enterprise) and ensure effective design of EU Talent Partnerships and similar programs.
7. **The European Commission should support the development of regional job vacancy statistics, particularly in non-EU countries.** The benefit is twofold. First, the data helps improve understanding of skills shortages and better identify common interests for (global skills partnerships between EU Member States and non-EU countries. High-quality data sourced from online job adverts can provide insights into the changing nature and locality of skills shortages by extracting details on e.g. job function, required level of education and training, employer characteristics (economic sector, size and location). Second, if openly available, such regionally-specific skills shortages databases would also be highly valuable for potential labour migrants to base their migration decisions on. In a GS4S working paper on locating shortages in migrants’ origin countries, Poeschel looks deeper into this topic (2024b).

The EU and the Western Balkans

8. The European Commission should improve the **integration of the Western Balkans in European value chains** to encourage industrial development, innovation, and quality of jobs in the region, and support the EU accession process. This recommendation, in line with the EU’s strategic autonomy agenda, would likely *“incentivize multinational enterprises (MNEs) to invest more in the region”* (Ghodsi et al., 2024, p. 10). In our policy brief on the Western Balkans, we highlight that the key to greater integration is regulatory convergence between



- regions; we furthermore propose policies such as a ‘Patent Box’ - offering tax credits to MNEs that innovate and receive grants on their patents in the Western Balkans (Ibid., 2024, p. 10).
9. The European Commission should also **enhance the economic integration** of the Western Balkan countries with the EU’s single market **before accession** through the **free movement of services and workers** (Ibid., 2024, pp. 12-13). This approach, already presented in the context of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans would facilitate and increase circular mobility (i.e., mobility back and forth) of workers in the EU and the Western Balkans to the potential benefit of both regions.
 10. Alongside broader efforts to facilitate mobility and remove legal barriers to migration, **EU Talent Partnerships** (see Section 2.3) **could be extended to the Western Balkan region to address skills shortages in key sectors and occupations systematically**. Because of their relatively small population size and a trajectory toward EU membership, the Western Balkan countries could significantly benefit from well-designed (see above) EU Talent Partnerships (Ghodsi et al., 2024).
 11. The European Union should support Western Balkan countries in strengthening statistical data concerning migration (emigration and circular migration in particular) and **developing tools (barometers, studies, matching portals) for monitoring and communicating labour market needs** (Ibid.). Better matching of talent and jobs is vital both in and between regions. In this line, the European Commission should also lead the implementation of a data ‘bridge’ in this migration corridor (Ibid.).





GS4S references on migration policies:

1. Beckers, P., Ghodsi, M., Ivanović, K., Leitner, S., Poeschel, F., & Sabouniha, A. (2024). Skills-oriented migration in the Western Balkans: Linking workers' migration aspirations to skill shortages in destination and origin countries. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14163620>
2. Ghodsi, M., Ivanović, K., Leitner, S., Beckers, P., & T. De Lange. (2024). The impact of migration to the EU on labour shortages in the Western Balkans: Policy implications. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.29350.95049>
3. Ghodsi, M., Tverdostup, M., & de Lange, T. (2025). Migration or Automation? Recommendations for How to Better Navigate Labour Shortages in the EU. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15114793>
4. Goldfarb, A., Slootjes, J., & Zanzuchi, B. (2025). Efforts to Tackle Skill Shortages Across Policy Domains – Reflections from Migration, Education, and Development Policies. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15261535>
5. Hooper, K., & Slootjes, J. (2025). What role can mobility schemes play in addressing skills shortages in Europe? <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14959232>
6. Hooper, K., T. De Lange., & Slootjes, J. (forthcoming). How can legal migration policies help tackle Europe's looming skills crisis? Migration Policy Institute.
7. Poeschel, F. (2024a). Database on vacancies in selected non-EU countries [Dataset]. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14072278>
8. Poeschel, F. (2024b). Locating Shortages in Migrants' Origin Countries: A Big Data Approach. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14071928>
9. Poeschel, F., Boland, C., de Lange, T., Ruhs, M., & Saka-Helmhout, A. (2025). Engaging the private sector in Global Skills Partnerships: Exploring the potential of international Business-to-Business approaches. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14764638>
10. Tverdostup, M., Ghodsi, M., & Leitner, S. (2025). Migration vs. automation as an answer to labour shortages: Firm-level analysis for Austria. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15115025>

2.2 Education policies

Regarding education policies, we highlight improvements in:

- (i) Skills waste and recognition of qualifications
- (ii) Skills development

Skills waste and recognition of qualifications

The GS4S study on the overeducation of immigrants (from both the EU and third countries) in the European Union found that for foreign-educated migrants, the risk of overeducation increases until after 15–19 years in the host country; they are disproportionately overeducated compared to the 'native'





population and 85.5% of this gap is unexplained (Dalmonte et al., 2024).⁴ That is, job-skill alignment is not automatically improved by long-term integration: other factors, “such as barriers to recognizing foreign qualifications, language difficulties, and limited access to career advancement opportunities in host countries” are at play (Dalmonte et al., 2024, p. 41).

To address the significant skills waste in the EU:

12. The European Commission, together with the Member States, should create a more efficient and clearer pathway for skill validation of migrant workers (from the EU and third countries) **by establishing a standardized EU framework to recognize foreign qualifications and work experience, as well as by facilitating recognition procedures** (Dalmonte et al., 2024; Goldfarb et al., 2025). In addition to facilitating recognition of foreign educational qualifications, paying attention to **qualifications earned outside of formal education systems is extremely important**. Information about relevant authorities responsible for recognizing each type of qualification should be made more explicit. We highlight that this recommendation is backed by further GS4S resources (Poeschel et al., 2025; Abdel Fattah et al., 2024), benefiting from an interdisciplinary approach.
13. The European Commission should **further invest in skills development and promote easing local language requirements for migrant workers**. Training is acknowledged as a foundational pillar of the EU’s response to labour shortages and the needs of the digital and green transitions. The Member States should be encouraged to provide incentives (e.g. subsidies upon completion) for employers offering forward-looking skilling opportunities for workers across skill levels, and particularly so in shortage occupations and sectors (see also no. 16-17). GS4S research has indicated that language requirements present a significant barrier for many qualified migrant workers: in some cases, local language requirements are high even if English is the working language. We thus strongly advocate for the easing of language requirements, when possible, which could include (i) their revision and removal wherever possible or (ii) more flexibility concerning the timeline for developing language skills e.g. by creating facilitating structures for businesses to strategically cooperate on sectoral (English language) standards across EU borders.
14. **The European Commission should encourage and develop early-career job placement programs to ensure a good match between candidates and employment opportunities**. GS4S research shows that overcoming a situation of overeducation is very challenging, especially for immigrants. Therefore, such circumstances should be prevented (Dalmonte et al., 2024).
15. The European Commission should **facilitate “research of institutional and structural factors that contribute to the persistence of overeducation among immigrants”** (Ibid., p.42). These factors, for example, include migration (and integration) policies, recognition of qualifications and prior experience, or the role of employers in fostering (or not) skills waste (Ibid.). As part

⁴ This working paper is connected to an interactive dashboard of skill waste in Europe (Frattini & Giorgini, 2024). The dashboard allows the users to examine the extent of overeducation of EU/third-country immigrants and 'natives,' per EU country.



of this recommendation, we encourage the European Commission to support the **development of longitudinal data**. Longitudinal data would allow for studying why overeducation occurs and how it evolves (Dalmonte et al., 2024, p. 41).

Skills development

16. The EU would do well to create **guidelines for effective and well-targeted re-/upskilling initiatives**, taking into consideration shortage occupations. To do this, it is necessary to understand what kind of training would be effective and in demand. Such guidelines could come with the recommended omnibus legislation.
17. Resulting from our research on the Western Balkans, we encourage the EU to develop **(more) Erasmus+ vocational education and training (VET) programs** that promote cooperation between industries in the EU (see point 13) and in both the **Western Balkans and the EU**, fostering skills development and knowledge sharing. This could help train a mutually beneficial workforce to be engaged in cross-border exchanges. (Ghodsi et al., 2024, p. 13). Our recommendation can be extended to cooperation with other regions, such as the MENA. GS4S is investigating this for Nigeria, Egypt and Bangladesh.

GS4S references on education policies:

1. Abdel Fattah, D., Micheal Botros, J., Gaber, N., & Boland, C. (2024). *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*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14523918>
2. Dalmonte, A., Frattini, T., & Giorgini, S. (2024). *The Overeducation of Immigrants in Europe*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14071464>
3. Frattini, T., & Giorgini, S. (2024). *Interactive Dashboard: Skill Waste Across EU Member States*. Global Strategy for Skills, Migration and Development (GS4S). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14072628>
4. Ghodsi, M., Ivanović, K., Leitner, S., Beckers, P., & T. De Lange. (2024). *The impact of migration to the EU on labour shortages in the Western Balkans: Policy implications*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.29350.95049>
5. Goldfarb, A., Slootjes, J., & Zanzuchi, B. (2025). *Efforts to Tackle Skill Shortages Across Policy Domains - Reflections from Migration, Education, and Development Policies*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15261535>
6. Poeschel, F., Boland, C., de Lange, T., Ruhs, M., & Saka-Helmhout, A. (2025). *Engaging the private sector in Global Skills Partnerships: Exploring the potential of international Business-to-Business approaches*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14764638>





2.3 Development policies

According to article 208 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU, “the Union development cooperation policy shall have as its primary objective the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty. The Union shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries.”

Our research to date leads to two important messages around development, and in particular international cooperation:

18. The European Commission should **(i) support the skilling and upskilling of workers in partner countries and (ii) enhance labour migration governance and infrastructure in partner countries to facilitate mobility** (Goldfarb et al., 2025, pp. 35-44). We refer the reader to this working paper for further details.
19. More broadly, the European Commission should take **significant steps to acknowledge and support the interests and needs of partner countries**. Such cooperation is welcome (Abdel Fattah et al., 2024), but insufficient (De Lange, 2024). As a recent study by GS4S researchers for the European Parliamentary Research Services (EPRS) illustrates, falling short in this respect are the EU Talent Partnerships. While these programs promise skills development to the benefit of all involved, they also serve broader migration management objectives, for instance, impacting the selection of partner countries. From a policy coherence for development perspective, a choice of sector to develop skills for would depend on the third countries' demography, educational landscape, and labour market, potential surplus of workforce, skilling options, and the presence of proper re-integration programmes for returnees (De Lange, 2024). In the absence of such re-integration programmes there is a risk of brain waste upon return. We discuss the EU Talent Partnerships and learn from a wide array of mobility schemes in Hooper & Slootjes (2025).

Finally:

20. **Policy coherence (and coordination) for development is welcomed – and lacking.** We echo the analysis and recommendations from the EPRS [report](#) assessing policy coherence for development across EU internal and external policies. Furthermore, a call for greater coordination and coherence of policies is an overarching message of the GS4S project: we repeatedly note that a patchwork of uncoordinated policies across domains and branches/levels of government is a significant obstacle to addressing skills shortages; the status quo encourages skills waste. The EU Talent Partnerships could become a positive example of policy coherence, showing how skilling, labour migration, and development policies (on both domestic and international levels) work together to address skills shortages in the EU and beyond.





GS4S references on development policies:

1. Abdel Fattah, D., Micheal Botros, J., Gaber, N., & Boland, C. (2024). *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*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14523918>
2. European Parliament: Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, Ioannides, I., Eisele, K., Lanzano, C., Tondel, F., & De Lange, T. (2024). *Assessing policy coherence for development across EU internal and external policies: a call for action: ex-post evaluation*, European Parliament. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/814975>
3. Goldfarb, A., Slootjes, J., & Zanzuchi, B. (2025). *Efforts to Tackle Skill Shortages Across Policy Domains – Reflections from Migration, Education, and Development Policies*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15261535>
4. Hooper, K., & Slootjes, J. (2025). *What role can mobility schemes play in addressing skills shortages in Europe?* <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14959232>

2.4 Trade policies

In addition to policies in the fields of migration, education, and development, trade policies can play an important role in tackling skills shortages by facilitating the (short-term) mobility of skilled workers. One innovative way to achieve this is to include such mobility provisions in multilateral trade agreements. Within GS4S, researchers from the University of Geneva are currently coding mobility provisions included in trade agreements signed by the EU, EFTA, and UK between 1960 and 2023, with the aim to:

- **Understand** (i) mobility-related content applying to EU/EFTA member states in key texts of trade agreements and (ii) country-specific provisions or rather reservations regarding the mobility of natural persons in the annexes or schedules of trade agreements
- **Support** (i) **national authorities** towards cooperation with third countries in areas of skills and qualifications recognition, (ii) **businesses** navigating recruitment and recognition of qualifications for third-country nationals and (iii) **the European Commission**, particularly in future negotiations and targeted enforcement, where national authorities do not live up to the binding international norms agreed on in the trade agreements.

GS4S will develop policy recommendations in this policy area and its potential intersection with migration, education and development.

3. Conclusion: towards cohesive MEDT policies

This policy brief offers 20 concrete policy recommendations for addressing skills shortages, prepared for the European Commission and based on interdisciplinary, mid-term findings of the Horizon





Europe project “Global Strategy for Skills, Migration, and Development” (GS4S). We focus on the fields of public policy related to migration, education, development, and trade (MEDT). In these concluding remarks, we highlight three key takeaways for addressing skills shortages:

- To avoid scattered and ineffective mechanisms, procedures, and initiatives, it is **essential to improve coordination across MEDT policy areas and policy levels** (International, EU, regional, national): **solutions for skills shortages lie at the intersections**.
- Enhancing cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses, is essential to better design, coordinate, and choose responses to skills shortages (e.g., ‘traditional’ labour migration, EU Talent Partnerships, automation, reskilling, and upskilling). Possible negative effects of non-cooperation are especially evident in the example of Talent Partnerships, which are prioritized yet difficult to scale up. Improved cooperation would also lead to greater impact and more awareness.
- On a similar note, **developing evidence** concerning current and upcoming initiatives is vital for effective decision-making: in this policy brief, we highlighted numerous improvements to support data quality (e.g., on labour shortages) and research.

In 2025 and 2026, the GS4S project will continue to explore alternatives for addressing skills shortages in Europe and beyond. At the time of writing, we are completing surveys with employers in Europe to understand their strategies for tackling skills shortages and investigating labour mobility provisions in trade agreements. We are learning from natural experiments that affected labour migration to the EU, preparing practical tools for policymaking, and exploring skills development in Egypt, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. Finally, we are learning from (potential) migrants: what are their views on professional and skilling opportunities in the EU?

Find out more about our research on the project [website](#), and stay tuned.

Bonus box. GS4S synergizes with Link4Skills and Skills4Justice, our sister projects.

Did you know that HEU GS4S actively collaborates with two sister projects – **Link4Skills** and **Skills4Justice**? In line with our policy recommendations concerning coherence and coordination, we leverage synergies and advocate together for evidence-based policies to address the skills shortages. Together, we:

- Offer rich insights, **aligning a strong focus on migration policy with skills development strategies**. Alongside interim recommendations from GS4S (above) and Link4Skills ([policy brief](#)), Skills4Justice provides innovative solutions and expertise in fields such as recognition of qualifications (upcoming).
- **Combine interdisciplinary insights with AI tools** (heart of the Link4Skills project),
- **Focus** on prioritization of **fair and ethical global skills flows** alongside an emphasis on **sustainability in migration partnerships**.

We look forward to continuing the conversation.



About GS4S

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).

www.gs4s.eu



Funded by
The European Union