

# The State of Play of Skills Mobility Partnerships between Africa and Europe

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## Executive Summary

This position paper is developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), within the framework of the project Priority Actions for the AU-ILO-IOM-ECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa (JLMP Priority<sup>1</sup>), to analyse the potential of Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) between Africa and Europe in contributing to the operationalization of the Africa-Europe Partnership for migration mobility. The recommendations of this paper are expected to inform Africa-Europe dialogues on fostering enhanced skills development and regular labour migration and mobility between Africa and Europe, with the aim of reducing skills divides and inequalities, and promoting sustainable development.

At their core, SMPs are an engine for a forward-looking, skill-based development agenda. They are an innovative tool to advance skills development and recognition for economic growth and sustainable development for the collective benefit of countries of origin and destination, and migrant workers. SMPs are usually couched within bilateral or multilateral agreements between States, which construct a roadmap through which skills development can be better managed and organized for the benefit of all Parties. Investing in skills development in origin countries means shoring up the human capital needed to successfully sustain the present knowledge economy. It requires the creation of a significant and readily available pool of skilled workers, which will also benefit the labour market in destination countries. To this end, SMPs can establish a process through which in-demand skills are jointly invested in, recognized, and equitably shared, ushering in landmark cooperation agreements between Africa and Europe in the foreseeable future.

The paper demonstrates the innovative value of SMPs in promoting skills development, labour mobility, and development in several ways: i) SMPs are about making migration work for sustainable development; ii) SMPs adopt a holistic and integrated approach to skills development, labour mobility, and sustainable development; iii) SMPs depart from the conventional approaches of skills development that mostly reflect the interests of countries of destination by considering the development needs of origin countries; iv) SMPs make multi-stakeholder collaboration a central pillar of implementing projects; v) SMPs advance a new policy understanding about the ways in which the skills divide can be significantly reduced through more structural cooperation, targeted at revamping the educational system at all skills levels in countries of origin; and vi) SMPs are committed to long-term skills development projects, creating large pools of skilled workforce in countries of origin to address labour market demands in

both countries of origin and destination. They contribute to global efforts aimed at reducing growing inequalities within and between countries by 2030 as set out in Goal 10 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Investing in a skilled and well-trained workforce is a key factor in increased productivity, competitiveness, and ability to attract more foreign direct investment in countries of origin. For Africa, this will result in well-educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology, and innovation, as stated in Agenda 2063<sup>2</sup>. Equally, countries of destination who invest in this skilled workforce can be in a better position to hire the skilled workforce – either in their labour markets or in their companies active in the countries of origin. Achieving this objective depends largely on the effectiveness of collaboration in the implementation and monitoring of SMPs, something that, to date, has yet to be sufficiently achieved, despite its critical importance for the overall success of such partnerships.

An ideal SMP model must be based on a genuine partnership that promotes structural cooperation between governments in countries of origin and destination for migrant workers. This structural cooperation must include not only States, but employers, trade unions, educational institutions, communities, and active engagement of migrant workers, and be accompanied with reliable financial investments. One proposition in this paper is to use the framework of the current Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs as an instrument to address funding issues.

## I. Introduction

SMPs address the imbalance resulting from traditional approaches to skilled migration, in which, the recruitment of migrant workers, whether government-to-government or spontaneous, paid little attention to skills development, sharing of training costs, or the local labour market needs of origin countries. There was also no assurance that some of the benefits of skill acquisition is transferred to countries of origin through skilled migrants.

SMPs are a policy tool aimed at promoting new skills acquisition for development to the benefit of all involved. Primarily, SMPs are about skills development targeted specifically at decreasing the existing skills divide, thereby reducing the inherent inequality within and among countries. The traditional approach to skilled migration was not always equally advantageous for all parties involved in the venture – with countries of destination reaping the most benefit through acquisition of skilled labour force to meet their labour market needs. By collaborating and investing in new skills development schemes, sharing the costs of training, and increasing the mobility of a new pool of skilled workers, SMPs can benefit the labour markets and development needs of both countries of origin and destination.

It is important to note that the point of departure for SMPs is not solely the promotion of mobility. Rather, it is about skills development for mobility and development. It is also about the recognition of previously acquired skills, earned degrees, and qualifications, through the harmonization of educational standards. SMPs gradually transform education and learning systems in countries of origin, improving the quality of the training curriculum for sectors that local labour markets and the labour markets in countries of destination require, while anticipating future skills needs<sup>3</sup>. Building skills by itself, without creating adequate job opportunities and improving working conditions in countries of origin, is neither sustainable nor effective as a qualified workforce unable to find employment soon becomes frustrated. For this reason, skills development should go hand in hand with larger economic and labour-market-enabling conditions that allow workers to thrive.

Formalized multi-stakeholder collaboration and strategic partnerships between countries of origin and destination are a significant precept of SMPs. SMPs are thus usually formulated as bilateral or multilateral agreements that provide a cooperation framework that better links migration, training, and education. While there are, indeed, different forms and modalities of SMPs, their common goal is skills development through joint initiatives and a whole-of-stakeholders approach. Within this, the private sector, in addition to education institutions, national and

international development actors and migrant workers, play a central role in creating partnerships with the potential for scale-up.

This position paper examines the extent to which current mobility schemes between Africa and Europe facilitate skills development, regular labour mobility, job creation, and employment opportunities for migrant workers. Specifically, it explains how SMPs could promote skills development with the potential to address the skills shortages and labour-market needs of destination countries while also contributing to origin countries' development through combating unemployment, remittances, capacity development, and skills transfer. The paper further examines actions taken in such partnerships to ensure that migrant workers in both the formal and informal sectors enjoy safe and secure working environments, access skills development opportunities, and the portability of social protection, and mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.

The analysis is benchmarked on five characteristics developed by IOM that underpin SMPs agreements:

- (i) formalized state cooperation;
- (ii) multi-stakeholder involvement;
- (iii) training;
- (iv) skills recognition; and
- (v) migration/mobility<sup>4</sup>.

In assessing the operational effectiveness and sustainability of SMPs, the paper uses eight (8) essential criteria: a) long- and mid-term planning; b) multi-stakeholder approach and policy coherence; c) data for evidence-based policy; d) local development and job creation; e) skills classification and recognition at the national level and beyond; f) address the social aspects of employment and mobility; g) incorporate migration considerations; and h) cost reduction and sharing. The study that informs this position paper adopted a broader methodological framework of data collection and analysis through desk research, a literature review, and interviews with several selected stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and beneficiaries of different kinds of skills mobility projects.

## II. Context

The SMP concept was adopted in 2018 by Heads of State and Governments at the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). It is envisioned as a tool which can effectively link migration and skills development for the mutual benefit of origin and destination countries, as well as for migrant workers and communities. SMPs

are designed to mitigate the imbalance resulting from traditional approaches to skilled migration, which tend to disproportionately benefit labour markets and employers in destination countries at the cost of migrant workers and their origin countries. SMPs can revolutionize how skills mobility is organized in the future:

- i. SMPs support the combining of skills development with the recognition of previously earned degrees and acquired skills and qualifications. Past bilateral labour agreements have primarily been concluded to regulate the migration of low-skilled migrants and offered basic pre-departure training for migrants. Consequently, the mobility of the bulk of highly skilled migrants took place outside government-to-government agreements.
- ii. In SMPs, the partnership is central to the process of collaboration, which stipulates cost-sharing on skills needs assessment, development, training, and matchmaking between the countries of origin and destination. The aim is to ensure that some of the benefits gained from the acquired skills and practical experiences accrue to the countries of origin in the form of brain gain creating a win-win situation for all stakeholders.
- iii. SMPs emphasize mutual benefits for all stakeholders involved. When implemented effectively, SMPs can provide benefits to migrant workers' countries of origin by increasing the potential pool of readily available skills; and to their countries of destination, by providing access to in-demand skills; and to the migrants themselves, by making it possible for them to acquire new skills and market them widely.

The point of departure of SMPs is to promote skills development that leads to better development outcomes both in countries of origin and destination. There is an urgent and immense global need for a skilled workforce and this demand will continue in the future. SMPs emphasize that skills development should be a joint investment and equally beneficial in terms of development and progress for all.

These accumulated effects mean that adopting SMPs as a policy instrument makes it possible not only to create a level playing field among participating countries, but also to address a host of other crucial issues within the framework of the partnership. For instance, SMPs take into consideration that collaborating countries are expected to ensure that migrant workers enjoy safe and secure working environments in both the formal and informal sectors, have access to and portability of social protection, as well as mutual recognition of their

skills and qualifications. Another significance of SMPs as a policy tool is that they strengthen youth employability by expanding vocational education and training, mobility, apprenticeships, and other work-based career guidance. They also better address skills mismatches, academic mobility, skills recognition, and quality assurance, as laid out in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025.

The SMPs concept/model could inspire Europe's Talent Partnerships<sup>5</sup>, which are also seeking to combine skills development with mobility, by offering capacity-building assistance to partner countries in the areas of labour market/skills intelligence, vocational education and training, integration of returning migrants, diaspora mobilization, etc. Whereas Talent Partnerships aim to engage partner countries strategically on broader migration management matters while addressing the labour and skills needed in the labour markets of EU countries, migration management is not a priority for SMPs per se. The point of departure for SMPs is to promote skills development that leads to better development outcomes both in countries of origin and destination.

It can be stated that there is still an immense need for skilled workforces globally and this situation is set to continue as labour scarcity is becoming more apparent everywhere. For this reason, SMPs emphasize the need for joint investment in skills development that fosters development and progress to the benefit of all stakeholders. This is with the understanding that developing and boosting required skills that improve employability in local labour markets in countries of origin will, ultimately, make migration a choice rather than a necessity.

It is important to note here that SMPs are not an entirely new phenomenon. They are built upon existing global frameworks geared to making migration contribute towards sustainable development, an idea that has been a focus of discussion at different policy levels for many years. SMPs have the potential to realize several the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>6</sup> in many countries by 2030, particularly, goal 4 (on quality education, including lifelong learning), goal 8 (on employment, decent work, and economic growth), and goal 10 (on reducing inequalities). SMPs are most relevant to achieving goal 10 as skills development can make a tangible difference in terms of reducing skills divides and inequalities within and between countries. In addition, SMPs can advance some of the core objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)<sup>7</sup>, namely, objective 5, which aims to enhance the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration; and objective 18, which calls for the international community to establish Global Skills Partnerships (GSP) for investment in skills development and the facilitation of mutual



recognition of skills, qualifications, and competencies across countries.

Moreover, SMPs bolster the comprehensive framework of the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, which was a landmark development in the partnership between Europe and Africa<sup>8</sup>.

The Alliance was launched in 2018 to strengthen economic and trade relations between Africa and Europe through sustainable investment and job creation. It aims to further enhance the mobility of students, staff, and academics, and to expand vocational education and training with a focus on those sectors with the highest potential for job opportunities for youth. SMPs also contribute to the goals of several African Union and European Union (AU-EU) Declarations on migration and human mobility, including: the Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development (2006)<sup>9</sup>, the Political Declaration of the Valletta Action Plan (2015)<sup>10</sup>; and the 2020 Continent-to-Continent Meeting, which have all made notable recommendations focusing on labour migration and human mobility<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, SMPs also contribute to the Africa-EU Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment established under the umbrella of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (2007), which focus on creating more and better jobs in Africa and the better management of migration flows. The key objective of this partnership is to achieve more economic productivity and better jobs in Africa, for youth and women, in line with the 'Decent Work for all' Agenda. SMPs further bolster the Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030)<sup>12</sup>, which emphasizes that well-managed migration holds benefits for both origin and destination countries. Finally, SMPs can support the operationalization of the Strategic Framework and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (2020-2030) of the AU-ILO-IOM Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa (JLMP)<sup>13</sup>.

SMPs promote multi-dimensional cooperation between States. Such close government-level cooperation is essential for driving investment in skills formation and boosting human capital and development in countries of both origin and destination. This is based on the understanding that skills development through SMPs is demand-driven skills-based migration, constructed to respond to the labour-market needs of the participating countries on an equal footing. It is therefore important that cooperating countries agree in advance on the priority sectors in which skills development should take place.

### III. Overview of Skills Mobility Partnerships

SMPs are a framework formulated to correct the imbalance of traditional approaches to skilled migration, alongside promoting mobility. In the past, the recruitment of migrant workers—whether government-to-government or spontaneously—paid little attention to skills development, sharing training costs, or local labour market needs in origin countries. There was also no assurance that some of the benefits of skill acquisition are transferred to origin countries through skilled migrants. They are intended to “link skill formation and skilled migration for the mutual benefit of origin countries, destination countries and migrants”<sup>14</sup>.

There are different types of SMPs with different forms and modalities, depending on the topic, focus, scope, and context of each case. They also differ in terms of their overall objectives, the nature of partnership, stakeholder involvement, and financing instruments, as well as duration. SMPs cover diverse areas, ranging from non-tertiary level skills to higher education. Moreover, many SMPs promote student mobility programmes, cooperation between training and educational institutions, dual certification, and apprenticeship and internship programmes.

SMP agreements allow skills training to take place in either the country of origin or destination. However, the benefits are likely to be bigger and costs are lower when skills training and development take place in the country of origin, especially if the reformed training programmes are accessible to the population at large. Still more can be gained if balance is found between skills development with the need to ensure that dignified employment is available for the qualified workforce in general. This skills training allows the domestic labour market to retain a significant number of qualified beneficiaries, who are needed to sustain the long-term growth of the local economy. Strengthening the skills base and increasing the potential skills pool in the country of origin leads to higher productivity and competitiveness, attracting badly needed foreign direct investment to the domestic economy. To do this, however, countries must invest in an internationally recognized curriculum for the population at large and not only train a select number of beneficiaries. A limited investment in skills development explains the relatively high per capita costs of the pilot mobility schemes currently implemented. This is one of the challenges to be considered while moving from the pilot phase of SMPs to more sustainable programmes. As articulated by a practitioner coordinating one of the pilot mobility schemes:

“The current mobility schemes do not promote structural cooperation between origin and host countries governments for full-fledged skills development programmes that can make a difference in the long run. To do that will therefore require a transfer of considerable resources to the countries of origin for an extended period. This is a commitment that goes beyond the pilot mobility schemes which are designed to promote more labour mobility than skills development at the moment.”<sup>15</sup>

Other challenges identified in the mobility scheme pilot phase include: a lack of long- and mid-term vision and planning; insufficient coordination and cooperation between countries; a need to satisfy a diverse range of stakeholders within countries; and limited development in the country of origin at this time. An SMPs’ approach, on the other hand, will strengthen the skills dimension of labour migration, help to reduce skills shortages, and support the development and recognition of skills and qualifications, it also supports the structures that facilitate cross-border skills mobility, e.g., by fostering alignment of skills classifications and mutual recognition of qualifications, among others. This includes mapping skills assessment procedures, certification standards and equivalences, labour market trends, and data collection systems, etc.

There are various mobility schemes facilitating current mobility pathways. They comprise both old and new pilot schemes, such as the EU MS under the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF), the EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, MATCH projects, and the EU Talent Partnerships, among others. These mobility pathways are often used by different categories of persons, including students, researchers, higher academic professionals, business entrepreneurs, and those with family in Europe. They are also used by high-, medium- and low-skilled migrant workers whenever it is possible. However, in terms of employment opportunities, it is highly skilled migrants that tend to benefit more from the current mobility pathways.

SMPs ensure that contracting countries can benefit from them significantly and equally. Furthermore, SMPs can galvanize cooperation between multiple partners, facilitating productive and sustainable engagement across the board. They can bring together government institutions, education sectors, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, migrant associations, and private sector actors, such as federation of industries or chambers of commerce, who can represent whole economic sectors or industries amongst others, to work on a common project. However, mobilizing collaboration between different parties across and between countries can be a cumbersome exercise, especially in cases

involving different interests, expectations, and policy and bureaucratic processes. This is in addition to the data collection challenges, as many origin and destination countries do not have a good understanding of their labour market needs.

Therefore, building trust between partners from the outset is a critical element for the successful implementation of SMP projects. Related challenges involve improving efforts to form stakeholder partnerships, undertaking skills and labour market research, conducting candidate search and selection, and matching qualified candidates with employment or educational offers. This includes the tasks of organizing skills development projects and reintegration activities. Likewise, it remains challenging to mobilize the private sector in the organization of SMPs within and across countries. However, as the Global Forum on Migration and Development’s (GFMD) business mechanism argued, “an active engagement with the private sector toward a quadruple win scenario would strengthen such agreements”<sup>16</sup>. Private-sector engagement thus remains a key element in the success of this endeavour. Time and flexibility are required to organize and build tangible public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships on labour migration matters.

Skills mobility schemes are largely designed to address the situation of unemployment among the youth in African countries, which forced them to migrate to Europe. As a response, the schemes are developed to provide vocational training and technical education to the youth so that they will acquire the necessary skills to gain employment at home. Once employed, the youth will not take the risk of travelling to Europe illegally. Many skills mobility schemes are currently pilot projects with a short time frame. They are also formulated to offer skills training to persons who, overall, will eventually be recruited by European job markets. Nonetheless, despite their limitations, the pilot mobility schemes do provide important lessons for future SMPs, which can offer considerable benefits if they are organized efficiently. To achieve that requires SMPs to be continuously evaluated, so that they can be improved, expanded, and nurtured. One way to improve them is to promote deeper cooperation between apprenticeship institutions in Africa and Europe. Another way is to allocate more resources to the countries of origin to compensate fairly for the costs incurred in training migrating workers. Finally, it is crucial to embed monitoring and evaluation systems, aimed at quantifying the costs and benefits of the projects for all the stakeholders, to remove possible bottlenecks and to adapt the design of each project to improve its efficiency and impact<sup>17</sup>.



## IV. Legal and Institutional Frameworks Governing Migration between Africa and Europe

Visa facilitation and readmission arrangements are the most notable legal and institutional frameworks governing regular pathways for migration between Africa and Europe. They are merged into a package that combines promoting legal migration opportunities, combating irregular migration, and facilitating the voluntary return and reintegration of migrants to their countries of origin. These legal and policy frameworks set the parameters of the cooperation agreements currently instituted in the Africa-EU Partnership. They are established to address the different interests and concerns of both Parties with regard to migration, and have been part of the AU-EU political dialogue since the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) was adopted in 2007<sup>18</sup>.

Since then, African governments have urged their European counterparts to commit to the creation of reliable and sustainable legal and regular pathways for labour migration opportunities. Unfortunately, little has been achieved to date. A significant obstacle in this regard has been the fact that European governments prioritize the management of migration within the framework of the Partnership. This is increasingly evident as combating irregular migration through immigration and border controls has become the focus of policy attention, rather than promoting legal labour migration from Africa<sup>19</sup>. It is possible, however, to manage the movement of migration humanely on both sides while, at the same time, promoting feasible labour mobility between the two continents. By contrast, African States view migration largely as an issue of demographics and development phenomena.

Reconciling these divergent perspectives on migration and mobility has been a recurring theme of all AU-EU political dialogues since 2007. Currently, the legal and policy frameworks governing human mobility between the two Partners needs to be jointly reassessed. They should ideally be used as instruments to combat irregular migration as well as to promote the positive impact of migration on development in Africa and Europe<sup>20</sup>. In particular, the readmission agreement, which is a central pillar of the JAES cooperation agreement, remains a contentious matter that needs to be carefully addressed within the framework of the partnership. Likewise, the facilitation of visas also remains inadequate across the board. Visas are issued randomly, mostly to selected highly skilled migrants and, to a lesser extent, medium-skilled migrants<sup>21</sup>.

Low-skilled African migrant workers rarely qualify for the visa facilitation processes. This is because low-skilled migrant workers are not part of the mobility schemes Agreements that have been piloted since 2019 between African and Europe. Yet, low-skilled migrant workers are generally in great demand in the agriculture, hospitality, construction, and manufacturing sectors in European countries. Fortunately, SMPs target all three skill sets of high-, medium-, or low-skilled migrant workers, as well as vocational talent. This is an aspect that will need significant policy attention in the expansion of SMP opportunities between Africa and the European Unions in the foreseeable future. Related to this aspect is the issue of the benefits that can be reaped from regular labour migration in terms of remittances and skills transfers, which is a weak argument that is not supported by sufficient evidence. The reality is that remittance transfers are not always constant and can decrease overtime while skills transfer does not happen automatically and cannot occur frequently if it is not structurally organized<sup>22</sup>.

In efforts to improve visa facilitation procedures to expand legal mobility, the EU has generally opted for a sectoral approach. This has resulted in the establishment of several labour migration directives for highly skilled workers, seasonal workers, intra-corporate transferees, and a single permit for residence and work. These directives are bilateral in nature and are expected to be implemented between at least one country of origin and one country of destination but remain limited to certain sectors/occupational needs<sup>23</sup>.

In addition, there is an EU Blue Card Directive, which EU member states have committed to implementing bilaterally. The Blue Card generally grants highly qualified migrant workers from outside the EU the right to live and work in an EU country under certain conditions, though it currently also includes blue-collar jobs. This is on the condition, however, that highly skilled migrants possess higher professional qualifications, such as a university degree, an employment contract, or a binding job offer with a relatively high salary in whichever EU country the job is located. Very few African migrant workers can meet this demand. The directives were created to establish a common comprehensive approach to the admission and residence conditions of third-country national workers<sup>24</sup>. More specifically, the directives are established to help EU member states increase labour migration flows from middle- and low-income countries to combat increasingly ageing populations or labour shortages. To date, the selected migrant workers generally fall under skill mobility partnerships, healthcare partnerships, construction, engineering or manufacturing partnerships, and information and communications technology (ICT) partnerships<sup>25</sup>.

Within the framework of SMPs, the visa facilitation Agreement can be further improved to expand legal migration opportunities for African migrant workers, trained at all skill levels and in meaningful ways. One suggested and novel approach is the creation of a quota for a mix of African migrant workers with high, medium, and low skills, who would be granted entrance to Europe each year. They could be temporary, seasonal, or circular migrants, depending on labour market demands. Another possible solution is the expansion of the areas and sectors that the Partnership covers. The creation of more bilateral projects and programmes between countries of origin and destination can enhance migrant workers participation in SMPs. Finally, the parameters of SMPs can also be expanded by instituting more circular migration projects through which members of the Diaspora can play an active role in the transnational development process, i.e., transnational entrepreneurship or migration and trade more broadly. Improving the visa facilitation Agreement in line with the proposals listed above can help to ensure more regular mobility opportunities between Africa and the EU in the foreseeable future.

## V. Mobility Pathways between Africa and Europe

Labour mobility pathways generally refer to migratory practices and processes in pursuit of employment opportunities or the acquisition of other material gains through legal channels of migration<sup>26</sup>. There are currently very few labour and student mobility pathways between Africa and Europe. Those that exist largely cater for movement to higher education institutions and internships, entry-level graduates, and mid-level professionals<sup>27</sup>.

The current mobility pathways are often used by, among others, students, researchers, higher academic professionals, business entrepreneurs, and those with family members in Europe. They are also used by high-, medium- and low-skilled migrant workers whenever it is possible. However, when it comes to employment opportunities, it is highly skilled migrants who tend to benefit from the current mobility pathways. Furthermore, mobility pathways remain limited to certain sectors in the labour market, as listed in the section above. This means that only highly skilled and qualified candidates in certain competitive sectors substantially benefit from the mobility pathways between Africa and Europe<sup>28</sup>. As such, these existing frameworks neither encourage nor facilitate mobility of low- and medium-skilled workers<sup>29</sup>. They also do not have the potential for scale—due to their selection policies regarding who can be trained and who can migrate to work in countries of destination. There is an occasional exception, however; specifically,

when low-skilled migrants are needed to fill acute or temporary labour shortages, e.g., as seasonal workers in the agricultural sector in destination countries.

A brief reviewing of the history of mobility schemes can offer preliminary lessons and an understanding of good practices as a solid foundation for the further development of SMPs policies. For instance, between 2014–2016, several mobility schemes were implemented that became the basis for the development of subsequent Skills Partnership programmes, such as those implemented by Europe Member States under the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF), the EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, and the Migration of African Talents through Capacity building and Hiring (MATCH)<sup>30</sup> project. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and the ensuing lockdown resulted in significantly reduced international mobility. It also delayed the implementation of several mobility schemes between 2019–2022, while others proved to be highly adaptable and resilient. This particularly applies to the IT industry interventions implemented under the MATCH project. This is because professionals with IT skills can work from home, anywhere. Nonetheless, the pandemic generally led to an economic downturn with dire consequences for many African and European countries. It led to the suspension of many mobility scheme activities in 2020 due to travel restrictions and other related challenges. This setback, therefore, makes a case for the need to expand opportunities for SMPs between Africa and Europe in the future. Such opportunities have the potential to mitigate the adverse socio-economic effects and aftershocks of the emergencies, such as the pandemic, which has not yet been fully contained.

In sum, the number of skilled African migrant workers moving to EU countries remains relatively small, although no actual figures are currently available.

There are various mobility schemes facilitating current mobility pathways. They comprise both old and new pilot schemes, such as the EU MS under the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF), the EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, MATCH projects, and the EU Talent Partnerships, among others. These mobility pathways are often used by different categories of persons, including students, researchers, higher academic professionals, business entrepreneurs, and those with family in Europe. They are also used by high-, medium- and low-skilled migrant workers whenever it is possible. However, in terms of employment opportunities, it is highly skilled migrants that tend to benefit more from the current mobility pathways.

This raises the need to regularly gather and analyze the data to better understand whether and to what extent the mobility schemes work and contribute to development.

This observation also applies to the classification of skills and the different skill levels of African labour migrants involved in pilot mobility schemes in different EU countries. This is because most of the initiatives have only recently been initiated and are still ongoing. Consequently, it is not yet possible to gather accurate data on their impact. It is safe to state, however, that the development impact that the current African migrant workers in EU countries are having on countries of origin remains very limited. This is in terms of the size of the remittances transferred as well as the benefits of the skills acquired from the countries of origin, as most Africans permitted to use the mobility pathways are students and academics coming to Europe to study or enhance their educational development, not individuals seeking to work and earn an income. For instance, since 2015, about 26,000 African students and academic staff have come to Europe<sup>31</sup>. Increasing the numbers of workers from Africa in EU countries who are permitted to work and earn an income will make a tangible difference in terms of the impact on sustainable development. However, this will require a substantial expansion of legal labour migration pathways in the foreseeable future. Related to this is the re-evaluation of the visa facilitation regime determines the mobility pathways between Africa and Europe<sup>32</sup>.

Increasing labour migration opportunities will therefore require the creation of new, less restrictive legal pathways to entering the EU. This would also benefit Europe, as increasing the number of legal migration channels could reduce irregular migration. Perhaps the recently launched Africa-Europe Alliance for sustainable investment and jobs can better address the hurdles of current mobility pathways between Africa and Europe. It could also promote regular labour migration opportunities that are both comprehensive and sustainable as the Alliance was created with the objective of modernizing and revitalizing the partnership between the two neighbouring continents, particularly in the areas of education and skills development, trade, and investment<sup>33</sup>. SMPs can play a leading role in this regard through initiatives aimed at increasing skills development in countries of origin.

Another related opportunity is the commitment made by the EU to the AU during their sixth summit, referred to earlier, which states that “new avenues for legal migration opportunities will be further developed between both continents”, as declared in the Joint Vision for 2030. This requires a renewed EU political commitment, however, one that goes beyond paying lip service and addresses the long-standing demands by African governments for more avenues for legal mobility and less cumbersome visa regimes.

## VI. Selected Skills Mobility Schemes (SMPs):

### i) Country Case Studies

Five (5) cases were selected for this position paper to showcase the state of play of current mobility schemes between Africa and Europe. Some of the initiatives can be classified as SMPs while others are pilot mobility schemes of a shorter duration. These cases were selected to provide a better understanding of the specific contexts in which they are implemented, the modalities adopted, the successes achieved, challenges encountered, and lessons that can be garnered from each initiative. The cases are assessed for the extent to which they contribute to skills development, are genuine partnerships with regards to cost-sharing, and are mutually beneficial. They are also evaluated against the benchmarks as well as the essential prerequisites for sustainable SMPs developed by the IOM, i.e., formalized state cooperation, clear multi-stakeholder partnerships and involvement, education and training, and recognition of previously earned qualifications and acquired skills. Furthermore, highlighting these cases can provide information about the diverse policy tools adopted, the nature of coordination, and the cooperation mechanisms established at the country level. This is in combination with the lived experiences of the stakeholders involved in the processes. The boxes below introduce the selected cases and then summarize the findings.

### Box 1. Education and Training for Egyptian Youth in the Fayoum Governorate<sup>34</sup>

In December of 2009, the Italian and Egyptian Governments signed an agreement to enhance bilateral cooperation through specific interventions to provide alternative and durable solutions for vulnerable Egyptian youths residing in areas affected by high rates of unemployment and irregular migration. Between 2010 and 2013, IOM, through its project on 'Education and Training for Egyptian Youth', worked in the Fayoum Governorate to strengthen youth access to education and training. The IOM project's overall objective was to facilitate regular labour migration from Egypt to Italy by enhancing local education and training opportunities, whilst supporting migrant communities. In Fayoum, The Advanced Technical School for Hotel Management and Tourism Services decided in 2019 to partner with the Italian Tourism School Elena Cornaro of Jesolo<sup>35</sup> to provide its students high-quality education and training in line with both national and international labour market requirements. Through this project, IOM worked with Italian training authorities, the Egyptian Ministry of Education, as well as Italian and Egyptian employers to improve the quality of training at a tourism school in Fayoum to meet the needs of major hospitality employers in Italy and Egypt and to harmonize with EQF qualifications levels. The results achieved were over 60 teachers trained in Egypt and abroad; traineeships and internships for 115 students in major tourist destinations on the Red Sea organized in 2013; and 91% of students and 89% of parents out of the 600 participants demonstrating an increased understanding of the importance of education. As part of the project, the Fayoum Advanced Technical School for Hotel Management and Tourism Services was renovated, and modern equipment and furniture was installed. This work was complemented by a media and information campaign to enhance awareness of the dangers of irregular migration and to promote education and training as a positive alternative. The project has also established a database for international job matching which includes use of international occupation standard classifications (ISCO) to enhance employer understanding of candidate skills. The database is currently integrating an evaluation component based on European Training Foundation (ETF) methodology, thereby further enhancing European employers' ability to understand and assess the skills of Egyptian candidates in the database. It forms part of a wider ETF program in Europe's 'neighbouring' nations.

### Box 2. Digital Explorers Programme<sup>36</sup>

The Digital Explorers programme aims to facilitate knowledge exchange between Lithuanian and Nigerian ICT sectors. The programme is built on and supported by an ongoing collaboration between public, private and non-profit organizations in Lithuania and Nigeria. The 2019 edition of the Digital Explorers programme took 15 young and bright Nigerian ICT talents to be employed in seven leading Lithuania ICT companies. Explorers, selected from a competitive 1,400-strong Nigerian ICT talent pool, had a chance to work on complex projects involving high-end bespoke solutions, big data, automation systems, and other advanced technologies. In 2019, despite the global Covid-19 pandemic, several international events were organized in Vilnius, Abuja, and Lagos. Online and offline high-level business missions took Lithuanian tech companies and government representatives to meet with Nigerian counterparts for launching new business opportunities and institutional exchange on digital economy development and global talent circulation for mutual growth. Companies in Lithuania included Beyond Analysis, iTo, Rupetla, Syno, TransUnion, TeleSoftas, and NRD Companies. Digital Explorers' engagements include elements of career advancement, professional training, and exposure to an up-and-coming digital market of Lithuania, thus corresponding to the needs of young Nigerian ICT talents at different career stages. At crossroads, the programme leads with expertise in different ICT sub-fields: The Fastest Track: the programme provides professional market-validated training and international employment opportunities, advancing careers one leap at a time or the personalized Itinerary: training received and company for digital exploration will correspond to the needs of each Explorer, laying a career path forward, be it leading a posting at a Nigerian tech company or freelancing and working remotely internationally. Digital Explorers team will map beneficiaries' journeys in accordance with their own goals and guide them along the way. Digital Explorers return home with increased exposure and experience. To leverage it, back in Nigeria, a tailored support programme helps the participants in the training to quickly re-establish his- or herself and make the most out of skills gained and professional networks built in Lithuania. Become a part of something bigger: Digital Explorers represent the unexpected connection between Nigeria and Lithuania and further link these two ambitious digital economies together.



### Box 3. Young Generation as Change Agents (YGCA)<sup>38</sup>

YGCA is a one-year mobility scheme for Moroccan students willing to enrol in a master's degree in Spain. Courses offered in the context of the project address the specific needs of the Moroccan Labour market, with a strong focus on entrepreneurship. At the end of their master's degree, the project supports graduates in implementing their professional or entrepreneurial projects in Morocco. The YGCA project aimed to establish a circular legal migration scheme with Morocco, with a mobility phase in which young Moroccan graduates study a one-year master's degree in Spain. This, in turn, allows for their insertion into the labour market and the implementation of business and entrepreneurship projects upon their return to Morocco. The project provides adequate facilitation of a form of legal migration in the face of continued irregular migration across Europe, while strengthening relations between Spain and Morocco. Such Master's degrees have now been completed by 98 Moroccan graduate students, related to 20 different strategic sectors in Morocco. Those with the highest-graded theses are awarded extraordinary funding for the implementation of an entrepreneurship project in Morocco, which is expected to contribute to the revitalization of the area in which it is developed.

### Box 4. Migration of African Talents through Capacity Building and Hiring (MATCH)<sup>37</sup>

MATCH is a 36 month initiative funded by the EU aimed at providing highly skilled workers to private sector companies whose needs for qualified staff cannot be satisfied within the EU labour market. It seeks to address labour market shortages in Europe and improve the employability and skills of high-tech workers from Nigeria and Senegal. It has enabled 210 workers from those countries to work at companies in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Italy in which labour shortages had been identified. The project is needs-driven and allows companies to retain the workers recruited through the MATCH project. It provides high-quality matches of talent through selective advertisement, advanced skill assessment technologies, and a network of reputable talent management providers. IOM leads the overall implementation of the project. Project partners support efforts in each of the four EU member states. They include EUROCHAMBRES (regional), Agoria (Belgium), VDAB (Belgium), VOKA (Belgium), Unioncamere Piemonte (Italy), IMS (Luxembourg), and the Netherlands-African Business Council (the Netherlands). Highly qualified candidates are invited for job placements, following profile screening, and matching with companies, where they upgrade their skills and increase their employability upon return to their home countries. Targeted recruitment takes place in Senegal and Nigeria with the support of reputable networks, recruitment agencies, and public institutions. A shortlist is shared with European employers for their final selection. MATCH also conducts complementary activities, such as intercultural competence training, skills development, capacity building, and knowledge sharing.



### Box 5. Enhancing Tunisian Youth Employability through Professional Internships in Belgian Companies<sup>39</sup>.

Like elsewhere in Africa, high unemployment has been one of the main development challenges for Tunisia in recent years, with an even higher incidence among young graduates. This situation contributes to internal instability and is a driving factor of irregular migration towards the EU. In this context, Belgium recognized that reinforcing regular migration channels would contribute to Tunisia's development by reducing unemployment. Through this project, IOM promoted youth employability in Tunisia through targeted short-term employment assignments in Belgium, providing concrete opportunities for young graduates to scale-up their skills and increase their chances of finding a job or opening their own businesses once back in Tunisia. The project was implemented from March 2018 to December 2019. In the first phase of the project, outreach towards the private sector in Belgium and Tunisia was conducted, and contact was established with stakeholders in both countries. Once an initial number of companies were identified and a set of internship notices were collected, a recruitment campaign was launched in Tunisia in cooperation with ANETI, the local public employment agency. In parallel, a monitoring mechanism to oversee both the companies and the interns' satisfaction with the project was developed in Belgium. The first recruitments were confirmed by companies in the second half of 2018, and others continued throughout the first half of 2019. In February 2019, IOM also organized a training on soft skills for the interns, based on the feedback received by the first companies who engaged in the project. By August 2019, all interns had completed their placements and returned to Tunisia. In this third phase, IOM contacted Tunisian companies interested in hiring some of the returnees and, where applicable, provided additional support to other interns to identify job opportunities or to launch an entrepreneurial activity, which some interns prepared in Belgium. In some cases, interns were hired in Tunisia by their Belgian host company. IOM followed up with the interns between January and February 2020 to assess the impact of the project in the short term. The project offered 31 Tunisian graduates the opportunity to intern with 12 Belgian companies to upscale their professional skills. After the internships, twenty-four out of thirty-one interns were employed in Tunisia; two interns decided to continue their studies; three were employed abroad; and two were dismissed by their host companies for unsatisfactory performance. Most of the host companies evaluated the project positively and were even open to participating in similar initiatives in the future. The project also provided all parties involved with a better understanding of regular migration and helped companies and interns to explore the complementarities and differences between Belgium and Tunisia. It was also an opportunity for Belgian companies to understand Tunisia's market potential: four host companies manifested the intention to open a branch in Tunisia following their experiences in the project, contributing even further to positive economic development for both countries.

## ii. Analysis of the Cases

The above cases provide a mixed picture of the nature of projects developed to advance skills mobility between Africa and Europe in recent years. Some of the cases have been designed as skills mobility schemes with the purpose of training mostly young skilled people mainly for labour markets in destination countries. Only one of the cases was designed as an SMP, the Fayoum school project between Italy and Egypt, which was aimed at increasing skills development in origin countries so that local labour markets get access to a competent and skilled workforce needed to improve productivity. The SMP between Italy and Egypt was also the only project where an agreement was concluded between two countries; the other initiatives were driven by the private sector, like the case between Tunisia and Belgium. All the cases focus on higher education, technical and vocational education training, job training, apprenticeship, and internships, but, apart from the Fayoum school project, the initiatives promote a specific kind of skills training that is largely limited to a few beneficiaries and does not actually translate to sufficient skills development in origin countries.

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Sending Countries</i>	<i>Receiving Countries</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Additional Information</i>
Migration of African Talents through Capacity building and Hiring (MATCH)	To promote regular migration	Nigeria, Senegal	Belgium, The Netherlands, Italy, and Luxembourg	Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU countries	No	Africa talent can apply for the Highly Skilled Migrant Visa: for employees recruited from abroad whose skills are hard to come by locally (engineers, programmers, etc)- The visa requires a "Sponsor", being a Dutch employer.
				Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU countries	No	
				Bilateral Agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU country and AU country	No	
				Public Private Partnership	Include public-private multi-stakeholder involvement	No	
					Include provision of training	Yes	
					Ensure skills recognition	Yes	
					Support migration/mobility	Yes	
Young Generation as Change Agents (YGCA)	To facilitate a legal circular migration scheme between Spain and Morocco for Moroccan university students	Morocco	Spain	Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU countries	No	Education takes place in Spain  After Graduation, the student can apply for the Highly Skilled Professional Visa as a <b>work permit</b> that enables citizens from outside the European Union to live and work in Spainlegally, if they find a job offer in a Spanish country.
				Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU country and AU country	No	
				Bilateral Agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU country and AU country	Yes	
				Public Private Partnership	Include public-private multi-stakeholder involvement	Yes	
					Include provision of training	Yes	
					Ensure skills recognition	Yes	
					Support migration/mobility	Yes	

<b>Enhancing Tunisian Youth Employability through professional internships in Belgium companies</b>	To facilitate a legal circular migration scheme between Tunisia and Belgium	Tunisia	Belgium	Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU Countries	No	Non-EU trainees wishing to do a traineeship for a Belgian employer for less than 90 days need to apply for a work permit B. Conditions: have a traineeship agreement with a Belgian based company, for less than 90 days. This permit can be renewed if the holder still meets the requirements.	
				Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU and AU	No		
				Bilateral Agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between one EU country and AU country	Yes		
				Public Private Partnership	Include public-private multi-stakeholder involvement	Yes		
						Include provision of training		Yes
						Ensure skills recognition		Yes
						Support migration/mobility		Yes
<b>Global Programme on Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development</b>	Promote regular migration	Tunisia	Switzerland	Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU Countries	No	Switzerland has concluded trainee exchange agreements with various countries to enable young professionals to acquire further professional and linguistic skills in Switzerland. Work permits can be granted for a minimum of 18 months. Citizens of the following countries may be admitted: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Tunisia, Ukraine, USA	
				Multi-lateral agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between EU and AU	No		
				Bilateral Agreement	Have a formalized level of cooperation between one EU country and AU country	Yes		
				Public Private Partnership	Include public-private multi-stakeholder involvement	Yes		
						Include provision of training		Yes
						Ensure skills recognition		Yes
						Support migration/mobility		Yes

As the charts illustrate, the five selected cases are assessed against the benchmarks as well as the essential prerequisites for sustainable SMPs described in the introduction of the position paper. In this analysis, an ideal SMP is one that places skills development at the core of its activities. The benchmarks delineate characteristics, such as formalized state cooperation, of which only two cases meet such criteria. The governments of Italy and Egypt and the governments of Morocco and Spain have all signed a formal agreement to enhance their bilateral cooperation on this initiative. The other three cases do not have a formalized state cooperation. In addition, all the cases meet the SMPs criteria of multi-stakeholder cooperation as, in most instances, the private sector, educational institutions, and employers are involved in the execution of the projects. Likewise, all the cases meet the SMPs training criteria as they largely provide technical and vocational education, but only in the Fayoum school project was the improved educational training programme accessible to the wider population in the country of origin. In all other cases, the training only targeted a select number of beneficiaries and moreover, the training did not take place in the countries of origin. Furthermore, while all the cases promoted skills recognition through the harmonization of educational standards in the countries of origin and destination, only the Fayou school project evidenced an effort to work on the accreditation of the reformed tourism curriculum by both the Ministries of Education in Egypt and in Italy. Finally, all the cases meet the SMPs criteria related to migration/mobility. It should be reiterated here, however, that the primary purpose of the SMPs is not, in the first instance, to promote mobility. It is about making migration work for the development of all stakeholders. This begins by investing in skills development to build skilled labour workforces that meet skills shortages and labour market needs both in countries of origin and destination. This is what differentiates SMPs from the current mobility schemes, albeit most of the cases analysed have a very strong mobility element. According to the SMP model, mobility is only beneficial when it is not just one directional but a two-way street. A good example is the case between Tunisia and Belgium where the Tunisians trained in Belgium return with additional skills that are in demand in their local labour market.

The cases are also tested for the extent to which they meet the eight essential prerequisites for sustainable SMPs, as listed in the introduction. Currently, except for the Fayoum school project, the other cases cannot be classified as SMPs as they do not sufficiently meet these criteria. For instance, most of the cases are mobility schemes with a very narrow objective. They rarely promote comprehensive skills development, and, to date, there is no indication that they contribute to tangible job creation and local development in countries of origin.

Likewise, because of their original set up, most of the cases lack the flexibility to address complex issues, such as skills classifications and recognition at national level and beyond, social aspects of employment and mobility, ways of incorporating migration rights in the partnership, and the importance of financing and cost-sharing of skills development among all benefitting stakeholders.

The immediate impact of some of these mobility schemes has been formally evaluated and several positive impacts noted at various levels, although this remains incremental in nature and need boosting and further expansion. As the cases reviewed show, enhancing the technical and vocational skills of youth in different areas is a key benefit of SMPs, as it increases their potential employability in labour markets in need of well-trained workers, among others. For example, some of the beneficiaries of the Digital Explorers Programme stated that they acquired enhanced digital skills, which they used after returning home<sup>40</sup>.

The partnership between Egypt and Italy largely represents what a SMP model looks like if it is effectively implemented. Firstly, governments of both countries concluded a bilateral agreement for a joint project in advance. Secondly, both countries made large-scale investments (cost-sharing) in quality education and vocational training in the tourism sector. This collaboration includes providing on-the-job training and internships in both Egypt and Italy for graduates of the vocational training, before they start working in the tourism sector armed with better skills and increased job prospects in Egypt. The importance of this type of bilateral cooperation is that it effectively implements several of the benchmarks and the essential prerequisites for sustainable SMPs used in assessing the selected cases. This relates to the standardization and recognition of acquired skills between the two countries, multi-stakeholder cooperation among diverse government-to-government agencies, education ministries, technical schools, private companies, etc. The Egypt-Italy SMP model can offer a blueprint for the innovative ways that skills development and skills-based migration can be better managed and organized in the future.

Likewise, the evaluation of the ICMPD's Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF) identified some positive results. For instance, skills mobility schemes with circular movements and additional practical elements of support (such as internships, vocational training, mentoring, business development, Diaspora engagement) can help leverage more positive effects in both countries of origin and destination.<sup>41</sup>

The evaluations of the Digital Explorers and the MPF have both uncovered a few challenges relevant to this paper that must be addressed:

- Trust building: it is important to build trust between cooperating partners and all stakeholders involved in the project, which is considered a critical element for the successful implementation of the skills mobility schemes.
- The second challenge is the cumbersome process related to forming stakeholder partnerships, undertaking skills and labour market research, candidate search and selection, matching between candidates and employment or educational offers, etc.
- The third challenge identified is the uneasy collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders in the partnership. In certain cases, it remains challenging to mobilize the private sector in the organization of mobility schemes within and across countries.
- The fourth challenge is the lack of an enabling environment on the ground in countries of origin, because of the weak institutional support base, which could be bolstered for the implementation of the mobility schemes.
- Finally, the evaluation has highlighted a lack of an institutional mechanism for promoting the coordination and collaboration of diverse stakeholders within and between countries.

## VIII. Conclusion: Skills Mobility Partnerships as an Instrument for Advanced Cooperation

SMPs aim to serve interests of both countries of origin and destination, and migrant workers and communities. SMPs are long-term skills development programmes to long-term skills and labour scarcity, and the costs of investing in creating talent pools are shared between countries of destination and countries of origin.

Of note, to date, SMPs have yet to be operationalized at a larger scale to demonstrate their long-term development impact versus mobility schemes, which remain the dominant type of skills mobility schemes. Most of these schemes were funded and implemented after 2018, and, as such, are on-going. However, as the cases discussed above demonstrate, there are obvious benefits and evidence regarding what needs to be built on and expanded further to strengthen the effectiveness of on-going and future SMPs. This relates specifically to vocational education and training, apprenticeships, internships, and the development of meaningful skills more broadly.

SMPs aspire to make migration work for the development of all stakeholders, and, have the potential to scale up existing cooperation agreements between Africa and Europe to an advanced level. They adopt a holistic and integrated approach to skills development, labour mobility, and development that is coherent and sustainable. SMPs depart from a perspective of skills development in countries of origin, while also considering the development needs of countries of destination. This is different from the approach adopted by past pilot mobility schemes, which tend to address the short-term labour markets needs of countries of destination at the expense of interests of countries of origin. SMPs, uniquely, make multi-stakeholder collaboration a central structure for the implementation of projects to achieve impactful results, which have the potential for scale. Finally, SMPs are committed to long-term skills development projects creating large pools of skilled workforce in countries of origin, thus addressing labour scarcity rather than short-term labour shortages, and the costs of the investment for creating these talent pools are shared between the countries of origin and destination.

Furthermore, the study found that the current legal and policy frameworks governing mobility partnerships between Africa and Europe remain restrictive. They do not sufficiently enforce the central element of SMPs, which is the promotion of orderly and regular labour migration opportunities between Africa and Europe. Instead, the legislative frameworks prioritize the management of migration aimed at combating irregular migration, enforcing border control, and facilitating return and readmission activities of African migrants deported from Europe. There is consequently inadequate policy attention and financial resources currently directed to the promotion of legal pathways for labour migrants from Africa to Europe.

Related to this is the visa facilitation requirement, which is a hurdle to labour mobility in general. The study finds that only a limited number of highly skilled persons are granted visas and permitted to enter Europe. This is due to the current lack of avenues for legal mobility. Those pathways that do exist are limited to a few sectors, namely, ICT, manufacture and construction, engineering, and healthcare. Other categories of people permitted to enter Europe are students and academic staff who participate in education training for limited periods. However, while they are studying, they have no opportunity to work and so cannot earn an income to sustain themselves or transfer remittances back home in the short term. They may bring new skills when they do return home, but this can take a while. Therefore, not permitting labour migrants with medium and low skills



from Africa to enter labour markets in Europe means that Africa benefits much less economically from current mobility partnerships. Even within the current mobility schemes, skills development and skills matching remain a low priority in terms of implementation and funding. There is a need for targeted dialogue and implementation of joint resolution by AU and EU policymakers to achieve greater development dividends of labour migration and mobility between Africa and Europe.

## XI. Policy Recommendations and Next Steps

The analysis in this position paper provides insights into the state of play on Skills Mobility between Africa and Europe, which remain a work-in-progress. This is the newness of SMPs, which, in most instances, are yet to be operationalized at larger scale to demonstrate their development impact. However, this study has already identified certain shortcomings regarding the status of mobility schemes. These inadequacies relate to a few aspects that need to be addressed within future SMPs to work towards equal benefits for all stakeholders. At present, Africa benefits much less from the cooperation agreements with Europe in terms of skills acquisition, job opportunities for African labour migrants, and economic development in countries of origin. To address these shortcomings, the position paper recommends policy proposals to be considered during AU-EU dialogues on fostering large-scale skills development for human capital formation and on promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration and labour mobility between Africa and Europe:

- Create an annual quota of mixed African migrant workers composed of high-, medium- and low-skilled workers that can enter Europe. They can be temporary, seasonal, or circular migrants, depending on the demand of the labour markets in countries of destination. This novel approach will enable African and European governments to substantially benefit economically from mobility schemes while offsetting high unemployment pressures in countries of origin and labour market needs in countries of destination. It will also contribute to mitigating the adverse socio-economic effects and aftershocks of emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in slowing down the implementation of some mobility schemes under implementation, and economic downturn for African and European countries.
- Expand the areas and sectors that future SMPs could cover while also creating more bilateral projects

and programmes between countries of origin and destination. This will enable more workers at all skill levels to participate in the projects.

- Increase the volume of SMPs in the areas of vocational education and training with a focus on those sectors with the highest potential for job creation, particularly for the youth. Greater investment in technical and vocational education and training is now urgent to secure skills for employability, job opportunities, and a better standard of living for the huge numbers of unemployed youth across Africa.
- Candidly address the tensions between the management of migration and the legal pathways for African migrant workers to Europe. This is an issue that remains a point of contention and has not yet been resolved. Explore more avenues for legal mobility by addressing the visa facilitation requirement hurdles. This will address the long-standing demands by African governments for more avenues for legal mobility and less cumbersome visa regimes. It is highly likely that this would also benefit Europe, as increasing the number of legal migration channels could reduce irregular migration, which the SMPs aim to address.
- Create funding instruments and provide funding support for institutional capacity building, skill development, and skills matching, and to establish training centres in countries of origin so that they can benefit more from SMPs. This also includes identifying in advance sectors where skills are needed in both countries of origin and destination, undertaking joint needs assessment, and implementing educational reform based on mid-term and long-term planning for skills needs.
- Improve coordination and cooperation between public and private stakeholders for the organization of SMPs both in countries of origin and destination, as this has not yet been sufficiently addressed.
- Improve migrant workers' access to decent work and social protection, as well as the portability of social security entitlements that are key to their successful reintegration upon returning home.
- Undertake actions to expand the opportunities provided by SMPs by instituting more circular migration schemes through which the members of the Diaspora in destination countries can play a central role. This will facilitate skills transfer to countries of origin urgently needed for the knowledge economy in the short-, medium and long term.

## Endnotes

1 The JLMP Priority project (2018-2022) was developed to kick start the implementation of the AU-ILO-IOM-ECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Regional Integration in Africa (JLMP). The JLMP was adopted by African Union Member States in 2015 with the objective of improving labour migration governance in Africa to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration for African migrant workers: <https://au.int/en/jlmp#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20have%20a,in%20relevant%20frameworks%20of%20the> accessed on 30 June 2022.

2 Goal 2 of Agenda 2063, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/goals> accessed on 30 June 2022

3 In the context of SMPs, mobility is not a one-way direction, but rather it is a two-way street, as skilled workers can move from an origin to a destination country and vice versa, as some of the ongoing initiatives illustrate.

4 International Organization of Migration, 'Skills Mobility Partnerships Info sheet', <https://eea.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl666/files/documents/Skills-Mobility-Partnerships-Infosheet.pdf> accessed 17 March 2022.

5 European Commission, 'Talent Partnerships' [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/talent-partnerships\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/talent-partnerships_en) accessed 29 March 2022.

6 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal set of goals, targets, and indicators that governments across the world will be expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 10 years.

7 UN, Global Compact for Migration, <https://www.un.org/en/migration2022/global-compact-for-migration> accessed 12 April 2022.

8 European Commission, 'Africa-EU Partnership', European Commission, 'Africa-EU Partnership', [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership_en) ; accessed 15 April 2022.

9 Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development, Tripoli, 22-23 November 2006, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32899-file-4\\_the\\_joint\\_africa\\_eu\\_declaration\\_on\\_migration\\_and\\_development\\_2006.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32899-file-4_the_joint_africa_eu_declaration_on_migration_and_development_2006.pdf), accessed on 17 June 2022

10 Valletta Summit, 11-12 November 2015: Political Declaration, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21841/political\\_decl\\_en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21841/political_decl_en.pdf), accessed on 17 June 2022.

11 European Commission, 'Africa-EU Partnerships', [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership_en); accessed 20 April 2022

12 Adopted by African Union Member States in 2015. The revised migration policy framework for Africa (MPFA) is a demand-driven migration policy agenda dictated by the policy and institutional needs of local migration dynamics in Africa. See Africa Union. <http://www.africa-union.org/>.

13 Strategic Objective two of the JLMP Strategic Framework and MEL (2020-2030) aims to increase opportunities for migrant workers both formal and informal to enjoy safe and secure working environments, access to and portability of social protection, and mutual recognition of skills and qualifications. This will be achieved through interventions aimed to address the growing gaps between skills and qualifications needs versus numbers and types produced in Africa.

14 Michael Clemens, Global Skill Partnerships: A Proposal for Technical Training in a Mobile World (IZA J Labour Policy, 2015).

15 Author interview with Daphné Clémence Laure Bouteille, Coordinator of the IOM Match Project in Brussels, 24 March 2022.

16 GFMD Business Mechanism, 'Toward a Global Compact on Migration: Perspectives on Labour Migration', <https://www.gfmd.org/gfmd-and-global-compact-migration-gcm> accessed 12 May 2022.

17 Author interview with Philip Bob Jusu, Permanent Mission of the African Union to the European Union in Brussels, 8 April 2022.

18 European Commission, 'Africa-EU Partnerships', [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/africa-eu-partnership_en) accessed 13 May 2022.

19 Center for Global Development, 'The EU's Answer to Migration is to Triple Funding for Border Management. Will This Do the Job?', <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/eus-answer-migration-triple-funding-border-management-will-do-job> accessed 15 May 2022.

20 The Sixth Summit of the AU-EU held on February 2022 reiterated this aspect. For instance, the declaration under the theme of enhanced and reciprocal partnership for migration and mobility, the Joint Vision for 2030, continues to focus on containing irregular migration, ending smuggling and trafficking in persons, border management, return, readmission, and reintegration, as well as dialogue. The potential positive impacts of migration on development were not mentioned in the declaration. See Migration Policy Centre, 'Blog', <https://migrationpolicycentre.eu/> accessed 16 May 2022.

21 Nonetheless, as of 2022, the EU Blue Card is now open to medium-skilled migrants in addition to high-skilled migrants, although how it will be practically implemented is not yet clear. This is mindful of policy preferences and the type of labour migration needed in the EU member states at a given time.

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