



MIGRATION AND THE EU

CREATING A MULTILATERAL APPROACH FOR PROTECTION AND LABOR PATHWAYS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

As political divisions over migration deepen, European Union (EU) leaders have recently taken measures to address domestic concerns by strengthening border management, coordinating with neighboring countries to curb migration flows, and promoting legal pathways. However, in spite of this emphasis on law enforcement, it remains unclear whether these initiatives will effectively reduce irregular migration, particularly as demand for foreign labor in the EU continues to grow.

To help address these challenges, the ELIAMEP Capstone Team has developed an innovative mechanism, titled the Mobility, Protection & Labor Program (MPLP), which encourages safe and lawful migration to the EU by way of labor and protection pathways in line with United Nations (UN) principles. The program aims to meet the needs of those on the move, reduce irregular migration, and address EU labor shortfalls through a multilateral, scalable, and human-centered approach modeled after the Safe Mobility Initiative, a U.S.-run migration management platform in Latin America.

In its initial phase, the MPLP proposes labor and protection pathways to four EU countries — Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain. The team analyzed labor shortages and resettlement frameworks in each of these receiving countries as well as migration routes and demographic data of sending countries. Based on its research, the team strategically identified the most impactful locations for MPLP offices — in Egypt, Senegal, Türkiye, and Tunisia — with the aim to expand the program in the future in order to serve all EU member states as well as increasingly larger populations on the move.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE RESEARCH

01 EMPHASIZING SAFE AND LEGAL PATHWAYS

The four primary routes that migrants and refugees take toward the European Union (EU), namely the Central Mediterranean route, Western Mediterranean route, Eastern Mediterranean route, and West African route are among the **deadliest and most dangerous** routes in the world. Since 2015, **over 30,000** people have died along their journeys to the EU. Despite the inherent dangers, since then, hundreds of thousands of people have crossed these paths annually seeking better living conditions (UNHCR, n.d.).

Modeled after the Safe Mobility Initiative in Latin America, this project seeks to promote **safe alternatives** to these dangerous routes through **legal pathways to the EU** by establishing physical centers at strategic locations along key migration routes. These centers would serve as entry points for **both protection-based and labor-based migration pathways**, which would help meet the needs of people on the move, while reducing the risks and scale of irregular migration.

02 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EU AND PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Forecasts show Europe will need **20 million more people in order to fill all the needs of its labor market** by 2030. With current labor force trends, the EU will only be able to fill 11 million gaps in the market (European Commission Official, 2025). Specifically, EU member states have significant shortages in low-skilled sectors. Often times, when they are able to access the formal market, migrants and refugees fill jobs that native workers are unwilling to do.

Given these pressing demographic and workforce challenges, **this policy proposal therefore places strong emphasis on labor mobility**, unlike the U.S.-based model we drew inspiration from. Our mechanism proposes labor pathways and complementary pathways for both migrants and refugees, aiming to align available labor with identified sectoral shortages across the EU, especially in low-skilled labor.

03 ENHANCING COLLABORATION IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Our analysis showed significant collaboration challenges between the different stakeholders involved in migration management. This policy proposal aims at **meeting different stakeholders' needs** through a comprehensive approach and the use of appropriate tools.

The program introduces an **innovative, joint governance model involving the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), alongside strong participation from transit countries, EU host countries, and private sector companies**. Central to its coordination framework is a digital platform designed to facilitate the process, ensure transparency, and facilitate data sharing among stakeholders.

01

INTRODUCTION

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The Research Question: How to Design a Multilateral Approach to Manage the EU's Migration Challenges and Address Labor Needs

This report explores the potential for the implementation of a policy tool designed to support the EU's efforts towards migration management. Drawing lessons from the Safe Mobility Initiative (SMI), an innovative multilateral migration mechanism in Latin America, we examine whether and how this model could be adapted to benefit the European context.

The proposed policy, Mobility, Protection & Labor Program (MPLP) is designed to promote legal migration pathways, addressing both the protection needs of individuals—such as refugees—and the movement of migrants, while meeting the EU's labor demands and responding to their migration challenges. This program serves as a more sustainable and effective migration management mechanism, addressing irregular migration while meeting their increasing need for foreign labor, as Europe will need an additional 20 million people to meet labor market demands by 2030 (European Commission Official, 2025). By providing structured alternatives to irregular migration and information-sharing mechanisms, the MPLP aims to enhance protection, deter the use of dangerous migration routes, alleviate pressure on transit countries, and fill labor shortages across the EU, particularly in low-skilled sectors.

This analysis draws from the experience of the SMI between Latin American countries, the United States, Canada, and Spain between 2023 and early 2025. It evaluates how it could be tailored to the EU's political and socioeconomic context through an examination of migrant skills and demographic profiles, existing legal frameworks and policies, and the labor market profiles of EU member states.

Overall, our research accounts for the EU's complex political landscape, with 27 countries sharing different political and socioeconomic environments that may produce challenges or opportunities when considered with migration. Although the proposed mechanism is initially focused on a pilot program involving four member states, it is intended to be scaled up across the entire European Union if proven effective.

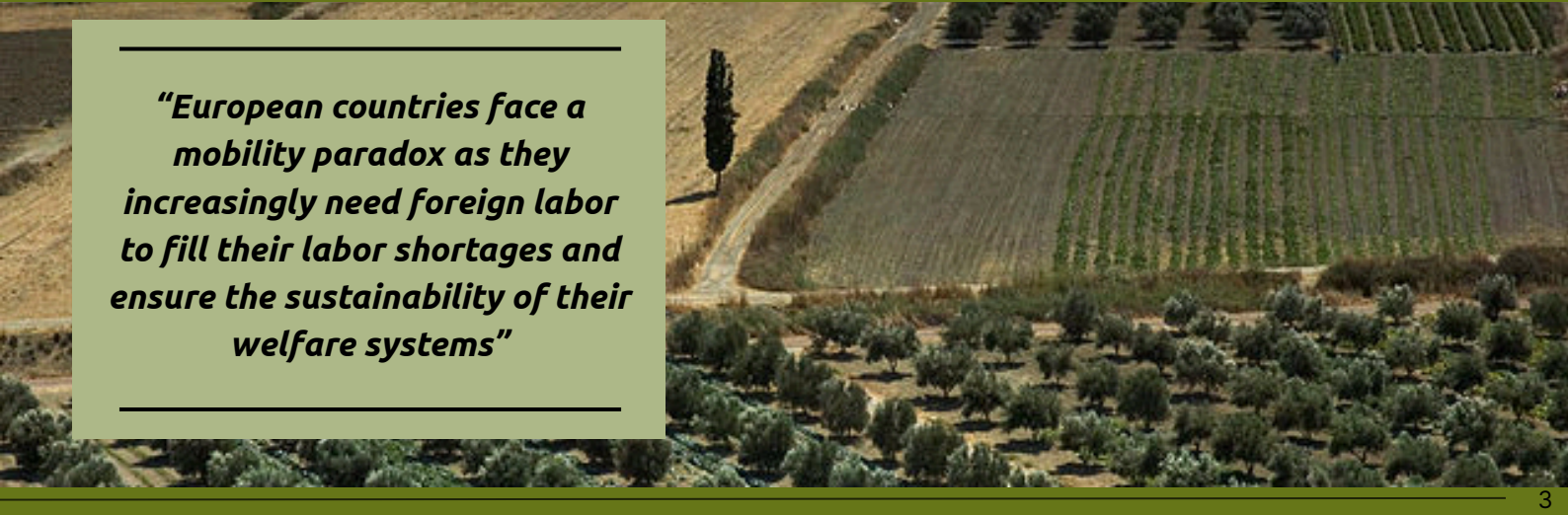
Why This Work Matters: Europe's Mobility Paradox

Within the last decade, there has been a significant increase in irregular migration to Europe, with the most notable crisis being the more than one million refugees that entered Europe in 2015 following the escalation of wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Since then, thousands have migrated to Europe, with 208,679 asylum seekers and refugees having arrived by sea in 2024 (IOM, 2025). Likewise, migrants and refugees increasingly face perilous journeys. In 2024, for example, approximately 2,844 people lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean (UNHCR, n.d.).

The dynamics of migration have drastically changed Europe's political environment and have become a point of contention in electoral campaigns and broader society. Progressive challenges in migration management have prompted the EU to implement a variety of policies aimed at curbing inflows. Nevertheless, European countries face a mobility paradox as they increasingly need foreign labor to fill their labor shortages and ensure the sustainability of their welfare systems, as their aging population currently weighs on the pension system, potentially pointing to its long-term instability. Moreover, labor shortages and high vacancy rates dampen economic growth and stifle Europe's potential in the global market. Forecasts note that Europe will need 20 million more people in order to fill all the needs of the labor market by 2030 (European Commission Official, 2025).

Nevertheless, current policies fail to effectively address these paradoxical needs towards migration. Recently, the EU voted to move forward with its new Pact on Migration and Asylum, a policy whose development dates back to 2016 and will not be fully implemented until 2026. The Pact aims to secure external borders while promoting legal pathways to tamp down on irregular movements. While the Pact creates a space for discussion on legal pathways and migration, it is insufficient to address the growing economic needs of the EU, such as significant demographic challenges that pose strong economic risks in the long run and have been felt through consequential labor shortages. Other initiatives to address migration include the EU Talent Pool, set to launch in 2028, EU Talent Partners, which provides support packages to neighboring countries, and several bilateral agreements between EU countries and other states. However, there still remains gaps that need to be addressed, such as the demand for low skilled labor and how to effectively channel current migration flows to meet this need.

This comprehensive approach therefore aims to meet the EU member states' paradoxical needs towards migration management. This project seeks to bridge the existing gap between the EU member states' desire to manage irregular migration and their need for foreign labor due to an aging population, while also ensuring the EU's compliance with commitments and obligations under international law and addressing the needs of those on the move.



“European countries face a mobility paradox as they increasingly need foreign labor to fill their labor shortages and ensure the sustainability of their welfare systems”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research analysis was conducted in three parts:

- 1.** The **first element** of the analysis involved establishing a detailed understanding of the SMI as it was applied in the Latin America-United States context. This was achieved through a combination of desk research, interviews with government officials and actors directly involved in the establishment of Safe Mobility Offices (SMO), as well as meetings with relevant NGOs and think tanks.
- 2.** The **second element** of the research involved understanding the European context and refining the research proposal. This included identifying challenges and economic opportunities within the EU member states. Desk research and interviews with government officials, UN officials, as well as NGOs and think tanks were used to understand the current political environment and policies around migration.
- 3.** The **third element** of this research involved the development of a version of the SMI for the European context, called the Mobility, Protection & Labor Program (MPLP). This involved applying the lessons learned from the SMI in Latin America and adapting this mechanism with Europe's economic needs in mind, as well as the humanitarian needs of migrants and refugees. The potential for this policy to scale up and expand was examined throughout this report.

A Note on Data & Terminology

Several interviews were conducted off the record. As a result, direct quotes and specific data points may lack attribution. However, all data gathered through interviews and used throughout this study have been fact checked and corroborated. A non-attribution policy is applied for discussions with stakeholders.

Quantitative data used to produce graphs, charts, and used as support for our analysis has been gathered through publicly available information from Eurostat, International Monetary Fund, Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Italian National Institute of Statistics, ISTAT), and World Trade Organization databases. Further descriptions of the specific data used throughout this paper can be found in the Appendix.

In this project, fieldwork was conducted in Greece and Belgium to gather insights from EU member state representatives, NGOs, and UNHCR.

Finally, this report adopts UNHCR's terminological approach to "migrants" and "refugees." Refer to the report's glossary for additional information on these terms.

THE SAFE MOBILITY INITIATIVE (SMI)

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WHAT IS THE SMI?

The Safe Mobility Initiative (SMI) was launched in June 2023 by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in tandem with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and in collaboration with multilateral stakeholders, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

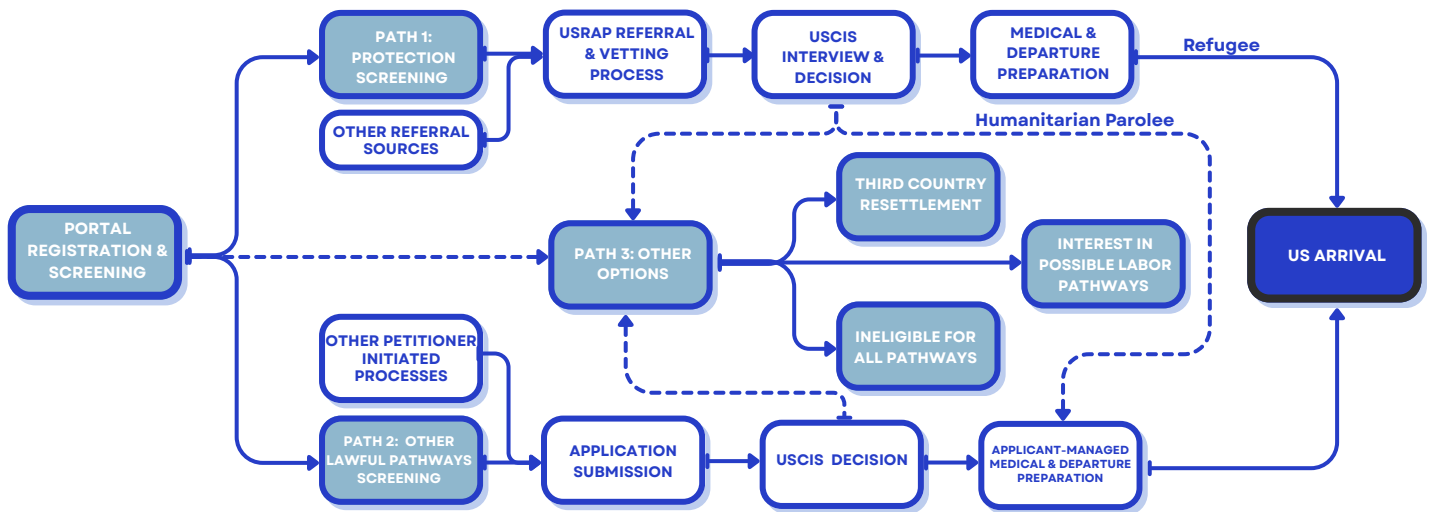
With its goals of addressing irregular migration, the initiative worked to expand access to lawful protection pathways, such as refugee resettlement, while also strengthening national asylum systems in Latin America and advancing the legal regularization of migrants. These efforts included facilitating access to diverse migration pathways, offering not only resettlement opportunities to the United States, but also pathways to third-country partners, including Canada, New Zealand, and Spain. At its core, the primary goal of the program was on intercepting migrants on the move in order to provide an alternative option to dangerous migration journeys, thereby working to relieve migration pressures at the U.S. southern border and in hosting countries in Latin America, all while serving the economic needs of resettlement countries such as the United States, Canada, and Spain (Hovil et al., 2024).

With these aims, the program established four brick-and-mortar Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) located in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Ecuador. These offices, jointly operated by UNHCR and IOM, allowed individuals invited for in-person interviews to access information and streamlined services from all three organizations related to options for lawful pathways. Positioned in key migrant and refugee host countries, the SMOs in Costa Rica, Colombia, and Ecuador, served designated third-country nationalities, with eligibility varying by country based on local context. In Guatemala, a key country of origin, the SMO additionally served Guatemalan nationals, highlighting the tailored considerations made to each SMO's operations. Uniquely designed to serve individuals on the move—particularly those likely to continue their journey north toward the U.S. Southern Border—the SMI model was unprecedented in bringing these protection services closer to migrants, enabling access earlier in their journey rather than requiring them to wait until reaching the border. As of January 2025, the initiative's online application portal had recorded over 260,000 registrations. Of these, over 26,000 approved refugees arrived in the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and an additional 1,000 individuals were referred from the SMOs to third country partners for resettlement (Safe Mobility Initiative, n.d.). With the provision of informational resources being an essential part of SMO's services, over 30,000 people received information on other lawful pathways to the United States, as well as opportunities for local integration in the Latin American host country (Safe Mobility Initiative, n.d.).

However, changes in policy led to the initiative's dismantling in early 2025, ending its expansion and continued implementation (Safe Mobility Initiative, n.d.).

The SMI Explained: How It Worked

The following flow chart highlights how the SMI worked, from applicants applying for the program to their arrival in the United States.



Portal Registration & Screening

- **Portal Registration:**
 - Individuals registered through an online portal: *MovilidadSegura.org*, for screening.
- **Pathways screening:**
 - A set of six initial screening questions determined their eligibility.
 - Based on their answers, applicants fell into one of three categories.

1. Protection Pathway

- **Who:** Individuals flagged as eligible for protection via the portal or referrals (e.g., UNHCR) were referred to the U.S. **Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).**
- **Steps:**
 - USRAP initiated the vetting process and case file creation.
 - USCIS conducted interviews and issued **initial eligibility determinations: refugees, humanitarian parolees, or ineligible for a protection pathway.**
 - Approved refugees completed medical and departure preparation, and were then resettled in the United States.

2. Other Lawful Pathway

- **Who:** Individuals ineligible for refugee resettlement but eligible for humanitarian parole or other lawful pathways.
- **Steps:**
 - The **petitioner initiated the application process for parole or another lawful pathway.**
 - USCIS or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued a decision approving or denying the application, conducting an interview of required.
 - Approved applicants managed their own medical and departure preparations, and then arrived in the United States.

3. Other Options

- **Third Country Resettlement:** Canada, New Zealand, and Spain partnered with the U.S. in the SMI, offering alternative pathways for applicants who did not qualify for U.S. resettlement or parole, or preferred third-country resettlement.
- **Labor Pathway:** Individuals ineligible for any lawful U.S. or third-country pathways were referred to IOM to assess interest in labor pathways in third countries.
- **Ineligible for all processes:** Individuals screened out or denied, and not interested or eligible for non-U.S. pathways, received informational resources, including local integration resources.

SOURCES: SAFE MOBILITY INITIATIVE, N.D.; PRM, 2024

Lessons Learned: The Opportunities Provided by the SMI

The SMI introduced several innovative elements that offer practical opportunities for replication within the EU context. These key successes of the SMI are detailed below.

Broadened Availability of Information Resources

1.

The SMOs expanded access to accurate information resources by setting up dedicated spaces where migrants could be informed about the pathways available to them and the potential consequences of unlawful entry, as well as available integration resources in host communities in Latin America. In doing so, the SMOs played a critical role in dispelling the false information spread by traffickers and smugglers that have contributed to the willingness to undertake irregular and high-risk migration journeys (Hovil et al., 2024).

Expanded Access to Resettlement

2.

By increasing resettlement pathways to the United States and introducing new third country pathways, the SMI created a mechanism by which applicants had expanded access to resettlement pathways. Critically, with the implementation of a web-based system, the program allowed eventual refugees to self-refer for resettlement for the first time, reducing the administrative burdens typically associated with sponsored programs. Moreover, because IOM, UNHCR, and USCIS worked together to process these cases, the SMI was able to eliminate long wait times in the country of the SMOs. Importantly, the process had a shorter processing time in comparison to the U.S. asylum system for processing irregular arrivals who reach the U.S. Southern Border, which typically takes years. These reduced processing times, in turn, created a strong incentive to stay in lawful migration channels (*attributed to government officials, 2024; UNHCR, 2025).



Flexible Design

The SMI had a highly flexible design which enabled it to effectively respond to the needs of the local communities the offices were located in, as well as in the receiving countries. Due to the process being initiated with a questionnaire, this survey could easily be adapted based on the expected pool of potential applicants and in alignment with the needs of the United States or its partner countries. Translating this to the EU context, if a receiving country in Europe required more migrants with a specific profile for a labor pathway, the questionnaire could be altered to vet for potential applicants that would fit this desired profile.

3.

Data Collection Tool

The SMOs gathered large sums of information about people on the move, including demographic information, along with reasons why they might have moved in the first place. These data categories included whether individuals had ever been severely harmed or threatened with serious harm in their country of nationality, whether they were afraid to return or live there, and their ties to the United States, such as whether someone had a family member potentially able to sponsor them. As highlighted in fieldwork interviews with U.S. officials involved in the development of the offices, the SMOs present an opportunity to be readily adapted for collecting work experience data, alongside demographic information on people on the move. This, in turn, would permit the creation of a database highlighting the labor skills and past experiences of migrants and refugees, thereby facilitating the development of labor pathways through job matching across a variety of participating countries.

5.

Benefits for Host & Origin Countries

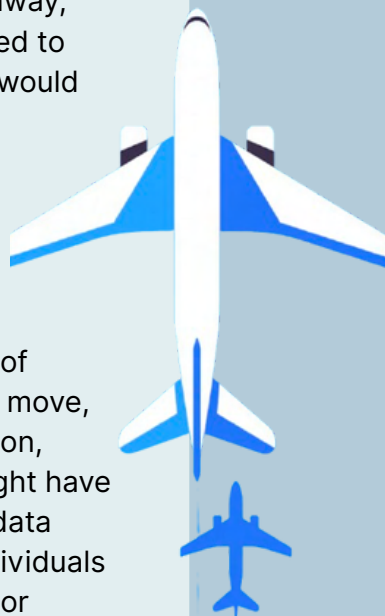
The host countries in Latin America, as well as migrants' and refugees' countries of origin, benefited from this program model. For one, when migrants and refugees arrive receiving countries, many enter the workforce and begin sending remittances to their families. These financial transfers play a critical role in supporting the economic development of countries of origin. Additionally, in Latin American host countries, the initiative helped relieve pressure on key social support systems—such as healthcare and education—thereby also helping ease political tensions linked to migratory influxes (Hovil et al., 2024).

4.

Benefits for the Receiving Country

In such a model, the receiving countries benefit from the economic contributions by the individuals who are resettled and begin to work. Those resettled often arrive with a wide range of skill sets and are able to fill high, medium, and low-skilled labor sectors, filling in labor shortages and contributing to improvements in the economic conditions of the receiving country. In translating this to opportunities in the European context, a tangible example is Spain's use of resettled and migrant labor to address workforce shortages in the renewable energy sector.

6.



Lessons Learned: Gaps and Constraints of the SMI

Several aspects of the implementation of the SMI offer valuable lessons into how this model can be recalibrated and adapted for Europe. The key challenges the SMI encountered in its implementation are outlined below.

The Need to Expand the Types of Pathways

1.

While the SMOs primarily facilitated resettlement pathways, they placed comparatively less emphasis on labor mobility and other lawful migration channels—leaving a gap in addressing a broader spectrum of migration needs. Such a restricted focus meant the SMI had a more limited impact on overall mobility patterns. In addition to lacking a labor mobility component, the SMOs, for example, provided information on, but did not provide direct support in applying for other lawful pathways to the United States for those ineligible for resettlement, such as family reunification and work visas. Expanding such a program to provide direct support for applying to a wider array of lawful pathways other than resettlement would have improved the program and the lives of those who engaged with it. As such, the European model needs to sufficiently develop a multi-pathway, multi-country system given the diverse profiles of those on the move (Hovil et al., 2024; *attributed to migration specialists, MPI, 2025) .

Failure to Reach the Most Vulnerable Populations

2.

The SMI was criticized for failing to serve those who were considered the most vulnerable, instead serving those who had greater resources and access to move to the United States. One challenge is that the SMO did not solve the fact that most other lawful pathways – whether humanitarian parole, work visas, or family reunification – needed to be initiated from a U.S.-based sponsor, such as an employer or family member, advantaging those with already existing connections. Also, a March 2024 survey of SMO users indicated that 90 percent sought U.S. entry for economic opportunities, raising criticisms of granting refugee status to migrants rather than those fleeing persecution (Bensman, 2024). In a cascading effect, SMO beneficiary numbers impacted refugee cap numbers for refugees from other regions, restricting their access to protection pathways.

Financial Considerations

3.

SMI had high start-up costs. The Department of State's FY 2025 budget request had included \$300 million for the SMI, reflecting the scale of resources being committed to its implementation (Noyes, 2024). However, the costs per migrant were under the costs of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was estimated to be €30,000 per migrant (Assistant Secretary, 2024). This conclusion was made by dividing the total SMI budget from FY 2023 to FY 2025 by the number of individuals resettled.

Limitations Arising from Eligibility Requirements:

4.

Access to pathways through the SMOs was restricted by eligibility requirements which varied by SMO, including target nationalities, regular status, and entry cut-off dates. For example, with the exception of Guatemala, the SMOs' eligibility criteria excluded individuals who had moved to the host country in the previous 6 months to a year. As such, the SMO ended up serving many individuals who were already established and possibly would have stayed in the SMO office countries, rather than those who were going to keep moving northward, cutting down on achieving the SMOs' goals of reaching individuals on the move. In this sense, the aims and practicalities of implementing the SMI were not always aligned. In addition, SMOs in Colombia and Ecuador required applicants to have regular immigration status or be in the process of obtaining it, effectively restricting SMOs from assisting individuals in irregular situations—many of whom were in transit (Hovil et al., 2024; *attributed to migration specialists, MPI, 2025).

5.

The Use of Technology

The initial screening for the SMI occurred through an online site, *MovilidadSegura.org*. While innovative, the reliance on web-based systems drew criticism for excluding individuals with limited access to technology—particularly those without reliable internet, those who are illiterate, or those who do not speak the supported languages. As a result, the digital-first approach risked disadvantaging some of the vulnerable populations in need of access to pathways.*

6.

Managing Expectations

There was a need to manage expectations of what such offices can achieve, as initial expectations were reportedly high. For instance, access to the application portal was limited to a short window each month, limiting the number of applications that could be accepted (Hovil et al., 2024).



7.

Increased Coordination Needs

The policy required sending countries and receiving countries to come to an agreement and coordinate between themselves to ensure dignity for people on the move and ensure access to opportunities once in the receiving country. As such, a lack of larger quotas from third partner countries hindered the full multi-country success it could achieve, especially for those who signed up for the program, and had the potential eligibility to be resettled to other partner countries (UNHCR Official).

8.

Difficulty in Integration with Local Infrastructure

The SMOs lacked integration with local infrastructure and services, which led to the underutilization of civil society organizations that typically serve as key intermediaries between IOM, UNHCR, and migrant and refugee communities, and play a critical role in outreach to more populations that may have benefitted from SMO services (MPI Official). As an added challenge for the SMOs' local integration, the initiative reflected a degree of tension between two objectives: facilitating pathways to third countries and supporting the local integration of people on the move through informational resources—goals that could appear to be in conflict.

* (UNHCR Digital gateway, n.d.; Hovil et al., 2024)

THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION CONTEXT

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Migration and Mobility in the EU: Emerging Trends and Structural Tensions

Migration towards Europe stems from multiple sources. Several migrants and refugees take routes beginning in various countries in Africa and Asia, including countries that have faced prolonged instability and economic turmoil. Likewise, Europe faces primarily a mixed migration environment, meaning that migrants and refugees are moving for multiple reasons. Some move due to economic reasons, while others move to escape persecution and exploitation in their home countries. However, surveys of migrants and refugees who have made the journey from Africa and Asia to Europe indicate that their decisions to migrate were driven by a combination of factors, often including both deteriorating economic conditions in their home countries and increasing political instability.

Following the influx of migrants and refugees in 2015, the EU developed policies that are designed to curb migration. At times, these policies focus on the last touchpoints migrants and refugees have before leaving Africa and Asia. These efforts include making deals with Tunisia, Libya, Turkey, and Egypt aimed at blocking individuals from leaving Africa and Asia. However, migrants and refugees move along several extremely dangerous paths prior to reaching these border countries within Africa and Asia, often making deals with smugglers long before entering border frontline nations.

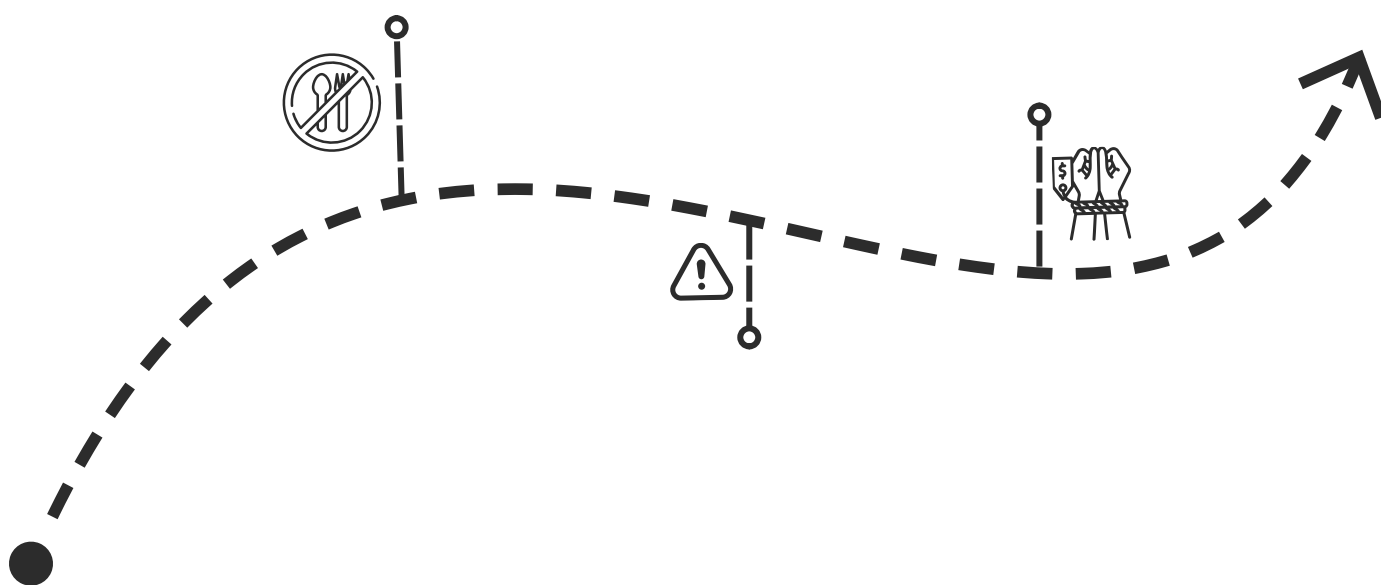
The following section explores Europe's migration routes and the profiles of those who travel towards the continent. Likewise, this section also discusses the economic challenges that European nations face, as well as the political discussions around migration in the EU and current policy frameworks in place.



Image Source: Northern Horizon

The Primary Routes That Migrants Take Toward the EU are Riddled with Risks and Dangers

Four routes were chosen as the routes of focus for this paper: **the West African route, the East Mediterranean route, the Central Mediterranean route, and the West Mediterranean route.** These routes were chosen as the paths of focus due to the high volume of migrants and refugees that pass through them, as well as the dangers migrants and refugees face as they go through these journeys. Because these paths span several thousand kilometers, migrants also tend to stop throughout their journeys to rest as well as temporarily earn an income, oftentimes to pay smugglers.



EU policy on the matter of mixed and irregular migration flows has **largely focused on migrants and refugees from Africa and Asia.** First, because African migrants often move due to economic reasons (80% of arrivals from Africa to the EU are traveling for economic reasons while 7.2% are refugees), migration routes that directly pass through Africa were selected as key points of focus (Africa-Europe Foundation, 2024). In addition, the route that leads to Türkiye, a frequent stop for migrants and refugees before entering Europe, was also identified as a focal point. The routes of focus for the EU span these chosen four routes, including the Eastern Mediterranean route due to previous bilateral deals with the EU and Türkiye, as well as the potential for Greece and Türkiye to further build political relations on the topic of migration. For these reasons, the Western Balkan route is not analyzed in this report.

The following pages highlight each of the four routes of focus for this report, the common paths taken in these routes, the sea arrivals from these routes between 2015-2024, and the common dangers along each respective route.



46,877 arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2024 (+18% from 2023)
 Top nationalities include those from *Senegal, Morocco, and Mali*



Dangers along this route include:



source: MIT

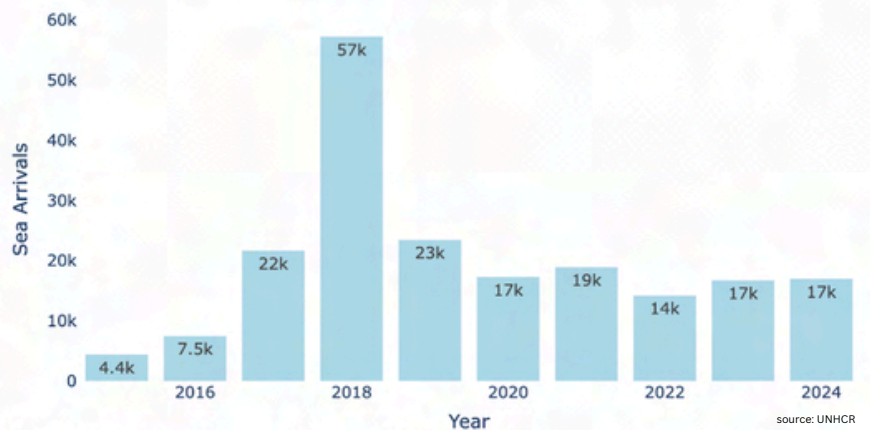
West African Route Towards the Canary Islands

West Mediterranean Route Towards Spain



17,026 arrivals to Spain in 2024 (+1% from 2023)

Top nationalities include those from *Algeria, Morocco, Mali*



Dangers along this route include:



source: MIT

66,766 arrivals to Italy in 2024 (-59% from 2023)

Top nationalities include those from Syria, Tunisia, and Bangladesh



Dangers on this route include:

**this route is noted to be one of the deadliest routes in the world*

- Human trafficking
- Kidnapping (Children)
- Heat Exposure
- Violence

source: MIT

Central Mediterranean Route Towards Italy

Eastern Mediterranean Route Towards Greece and Cyprus

69,436 arrivals to Greece and Cyprus in 2024 (+14% from 2023)

Top nationalities include those from Syria, Afghanistan, and Egypt



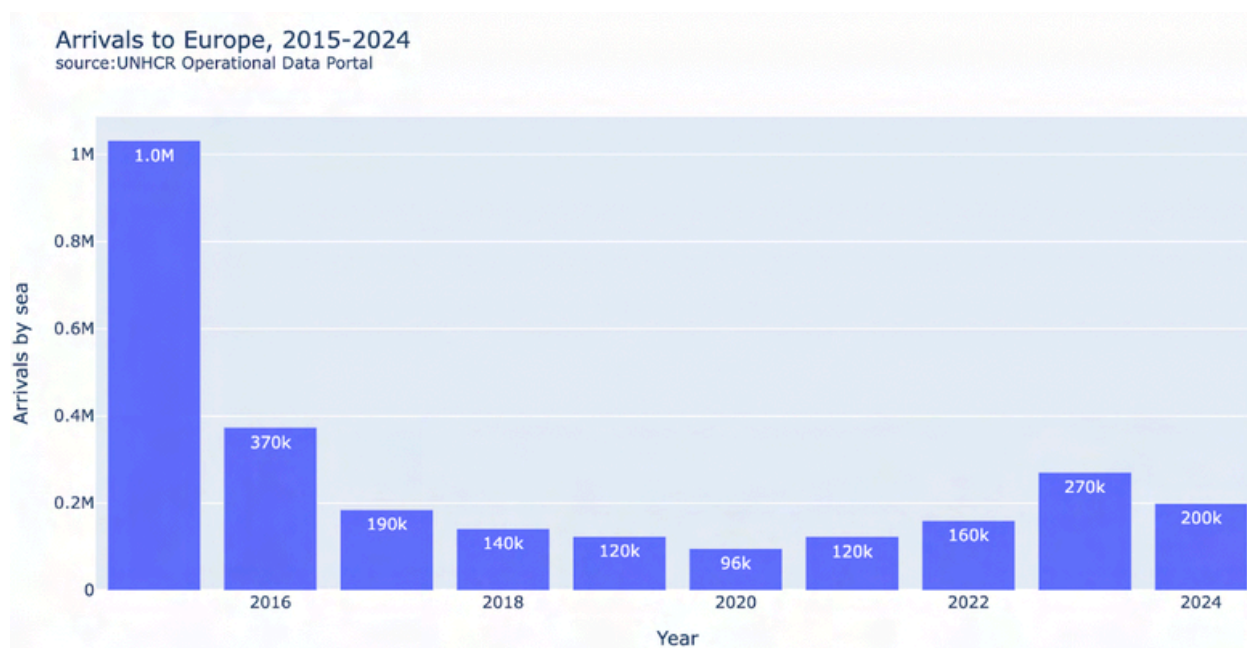
Dangers along this route include:

- Drowning
- Human trafficking
- Exploitation
- Violence

source: MIT

Migrants on the Move Towards the EU have Varying Backgrounds

In 2015, Europe saw its largest influx of migrants and refugees in the last decade, with many of these individuals coming from Syria and Afghanistan. Since then, migration levels have decreased and migrants and refugees have arrived in the EU with various backgrounds and skills profiles. As previously noted, many migrants cross the Mediterranean to get to Europe, with this often viewed as one of the most dangerous aspects of migrants' and refugees' journey to Europe. The figure below illustrates the sea arrivals to Europe between 2015 and 2024. According to UNHCR, between January and May 2025, approximately 44,595 people have arrived by sea to Europe (UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 2025).

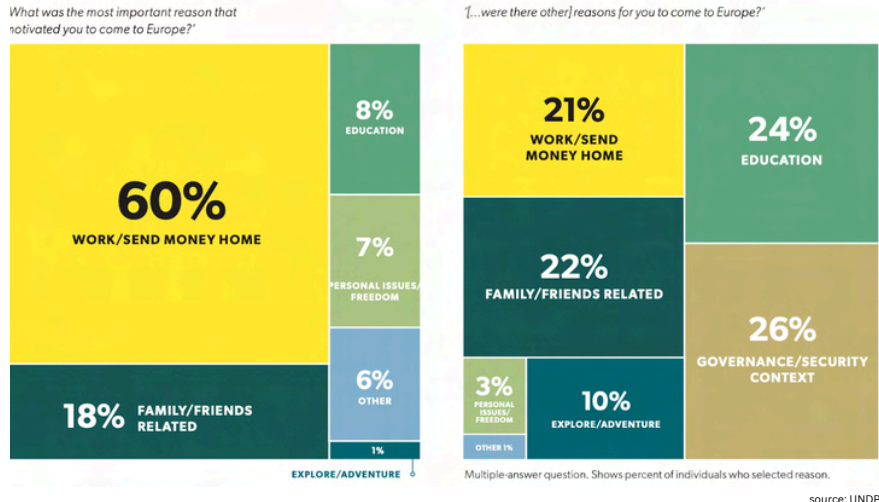


In 2019, the UNDP surveyed 3,069 migrants from Africa who had travelled from 43 different African countries towards Europe. All migrants surveyed in the study were in Europe for at least six months before they were interviewed and they had all arrived in Europe through irregular means. This study provides a unique dataset on the profiles of migrants, including their intentions, previous work experience in their countries of origin, and insights into their integration into local economies upon arrival in Europe. Relevant and key takeaways from the study can be found below. Please note that all charts and graphs from this point on in this section come directly from the “Scaling Fences” study conducted by the UNDP, which focuses on migrants specifically.

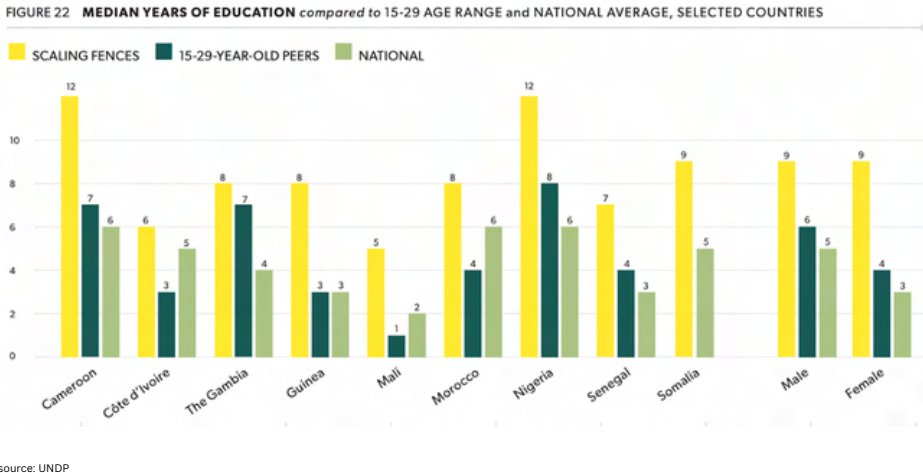
Key Takeaways from the Study Include:

Migrants move for multiple reasons

The top reasons for movement from those surveyed include **the desire to work and send money home**. This indicates that many migrants upon arrival to Europe want to contribute to the European economy and seek to integrate into the local economy. A secondary reason for moving includes **seeking an education and family reunification**.



Migrants who travel to Europe tend to be more educated than the national average of their countries of origin

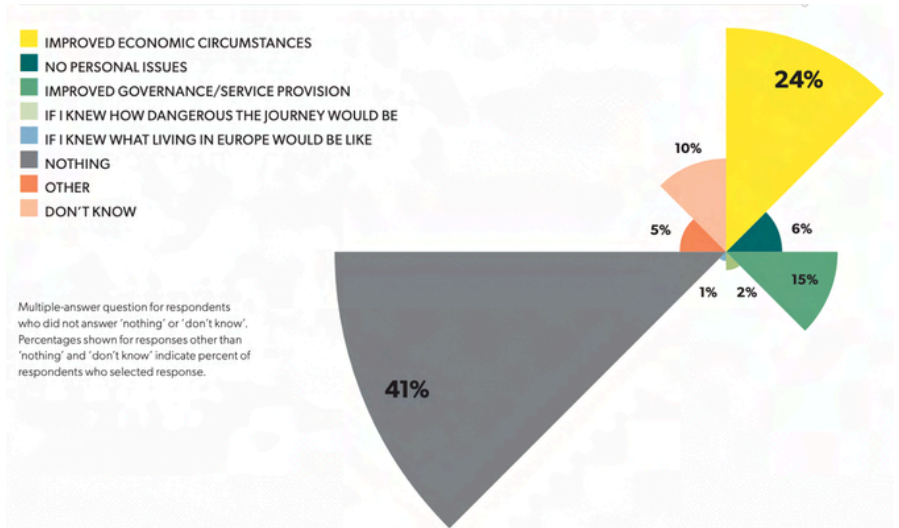


For some nationalities, the migrants surveyed have double or almost double the national average of median years of education (i.e. Nigerian migrants). UNDP suggests that the migration process may incentivize people to invest in education and accumulate further skills, likely seeking out better paying jobs upon arrival.

Very little would have changed the minds of migrants about coming to Europe

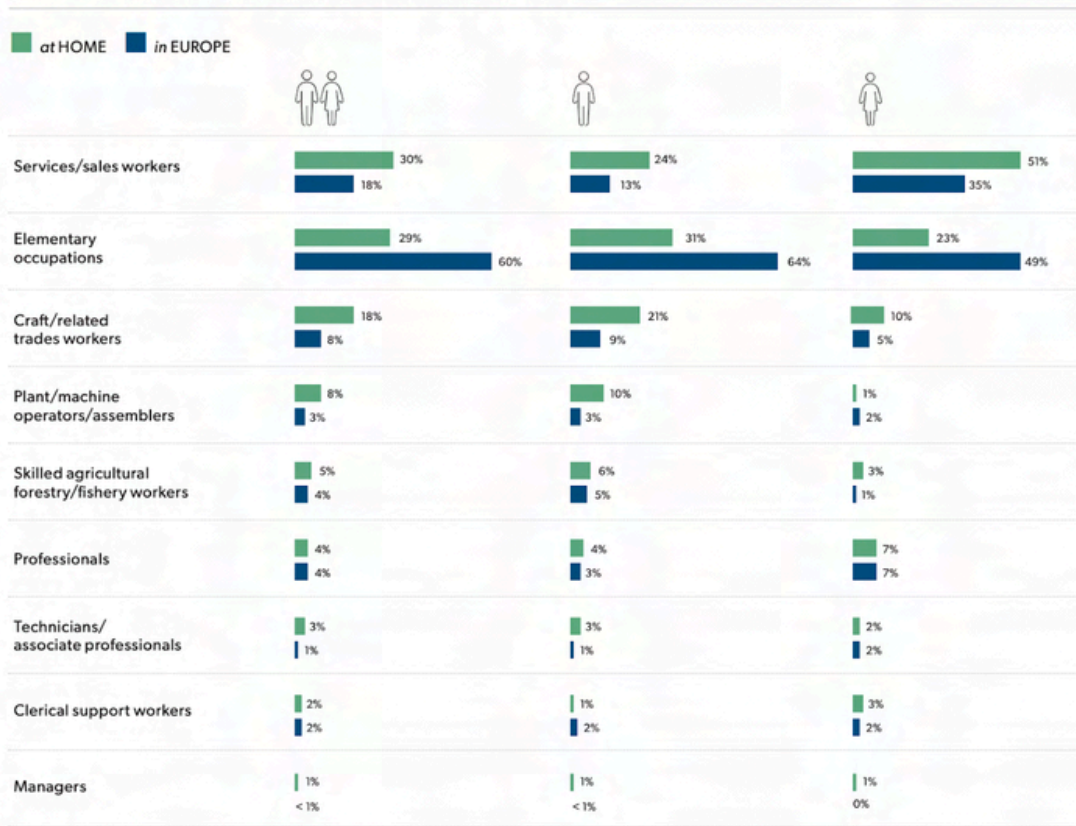
41% of respondents stated that nothing would have changed their decision—they would have migrated regardless, and likely toward Europe. However, 24% indicated that improved economic conditions in their home country might have led them to stay.

These findings indicate that migrants will continue to move for the foreseeable future. As a result, the EU will require tools to manage migration, such as the policy proposed within this report.



Migrants often fill labor gaps in the countries they settle in in Europe

FIGURE 45 MAIN OCCUPATIONS at HOME and in EUROPE by GENDER



Many migrants are trained in the service sector, craft and trade, as well as elementary occupations, such as agricultural laborers and construction workers. Likewise, many work in these fields when arriving to Europe.

Many of the fields in which migrants have been trained are considered understaffed across various EU countries.

source: UNDP

Of note, migrants that have suggested that nothing would have deterred them from making the journey to Europe also indicated that they were aware of the risks along the route. This awareness, according to the survey, is insufficient to stop them from moving. According to UNDP, harsher policies against migration implemented by the EU are unlikely to be successful given this fact. As a result, the EU will require better and more comprehensive tools to manage migration, rather than come at the issue solely through a security lens.

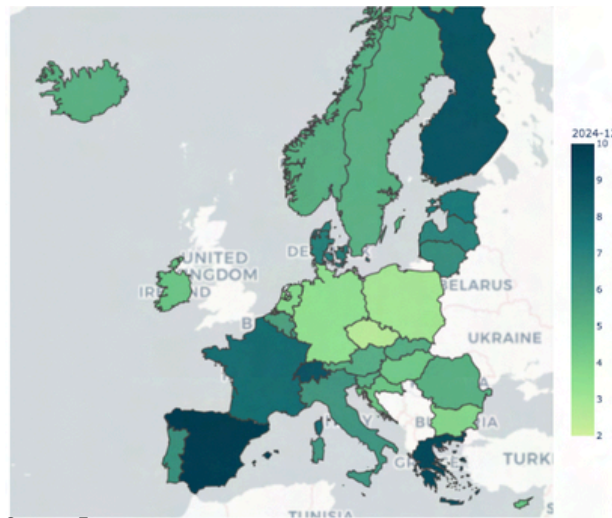
A significant takeaway from this study is the suggestion that migrants are trained in the fields that the EU consistently sees labor shortages in. Likewise, these fields play a significant role in the EU economy as many feed into trade and economic growth of the local economies, such as in the agricultural sector. As a result, matching migrants with jobs available within the local economy would serve the EU's economic interests while meeting the aspirations of the migrants on the move.

The following sections highlight the economic challenges that the EU currently faces as a whole and illustrates the spaces where migrants can integrate into the economy. These sections also discuss the current policies and political environment within the EU.

Labor Gaps and Economic Pressures in Europe

Over the last decade, EU member states have seen increasing economic challenges. These include demographic challenges associated with an ageing population and an increasing inability to fill labor gaps in key sectors.

Likewise, the EU has not fully recovered from losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include high unemployment rates across countries. Several reasons contribute to large unemployment rates across the EU, including generous unemployment benefits as well as labor market rigidities. However, across several countries, including Greece and Spain, unemployment rates are particularly high due to an overreliance on temporary labor contracts with low-skilled workers, as well as a reduction in young workers staying in the national labor market and moving to other countries within the EU.

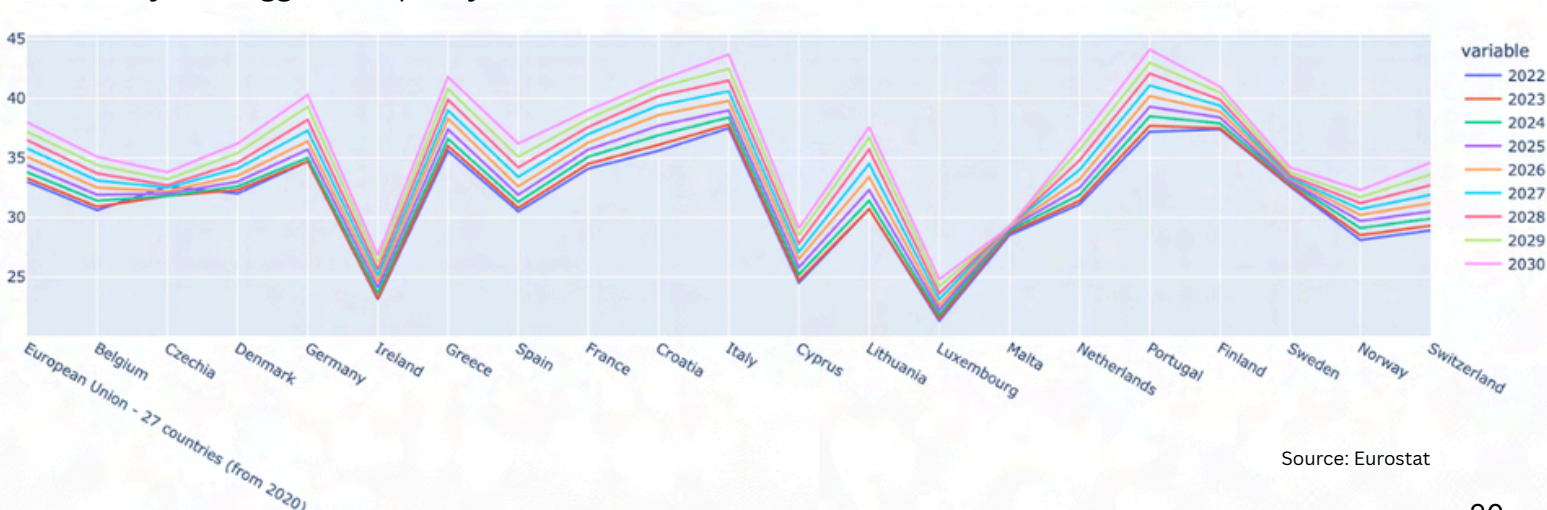


Source: Eurostat

High unemployment rates are seen across EU States

Demographic challenges have also increased the old age dependency ratio, defined by Eurostat as “the ratio of the number of elderly people (aged 65 years and over) compared with the number of people of working age (15-64 years)” (Eurostat, ‘Population structure and ageing’, 2025). An increasingly aging population, combined with high unemployment rates and labor gaps in key sectors, creates severe strain on the pension system, potentially leading to its collapse as larger portions of the population claim retirement funds with relatively less workers injecting money into the system. Despite efforts made by politicians to boost pension payments and reform the pension system, little can be done without more workers contributing to the system.

The following chart illustrates the old age dependency ratio for each member state. Forecasts up to 2030 for the old age dependency ratio are also provided. From the graph it can be seen that the ratio will continue to progressively increase by 2030, with some member states, such as Italy, seeing the ratio jump from 37.5 in 2022 to a predicted value of 43.7 in 2030. Such jumps would place severe strains on the economy if no aggressive policy measures are taken.

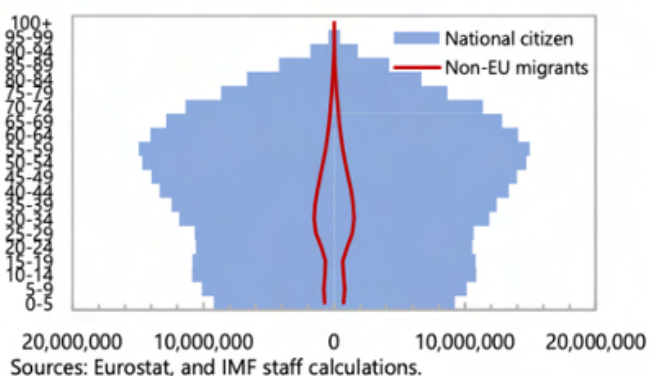


Source: Eurostat

Migration Creates Opportunities for the European Union

Current projections suggest that older people (65+) in the EU27 will reach 129.8 million by 2050, up from 90.5 million at the start of 2019. However, projections also show that there will be 13.5% fewer people younger than 55 years in the EU27 by 2050 (Caselli et al, 2024).

Figure 5.1 Age Distribution for National Citizen and Non-EU Migrants (2023)

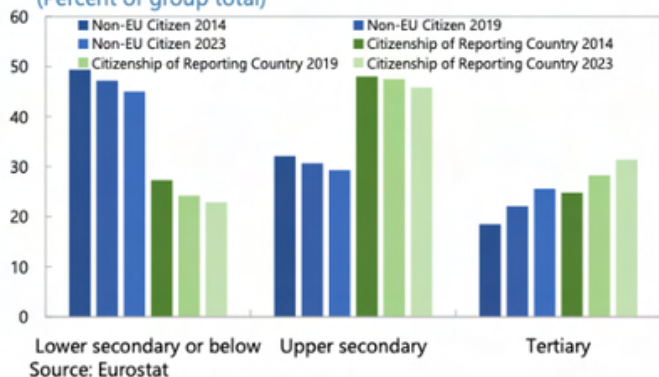


While these projections may seem like a far-off issue, this demographic shift is having economic and social impacts now. Labor shortages and a potential reduction in economic growth is a major concern with forecasts showing that Europe will need 20 million more people in order to fill all the needs of the labor market by 2030. Yet at Europe's current pace, they will only be able to reach 11 million (European Commission Official, 2025).

“Europe will need 20 million more people in order to fill all the needs of the labor market by 2030”

Specifically, industries that are typically considered to be “low-skilled” are facing the most significant labor shortages in Europe. Shifting expectations around wages for these jobs has created difficulties in recruiting and retaining European laborers for these positions. Severe labor shortages currently exist across the construction, agriculture, care, and hospitality sectors. According to the IMF, “labour and skills shortages are on the rise in all EU Member States.” It further notes that “nearly two thirds (63%) of small and medium-sized businesses said in a recent survey that they cannot find the talent they need” (Caselli et al, 2024).

Figure 5.2 Educational Attainment by Citizenship in 2014, 2019 and 2023 (Percent of group total)



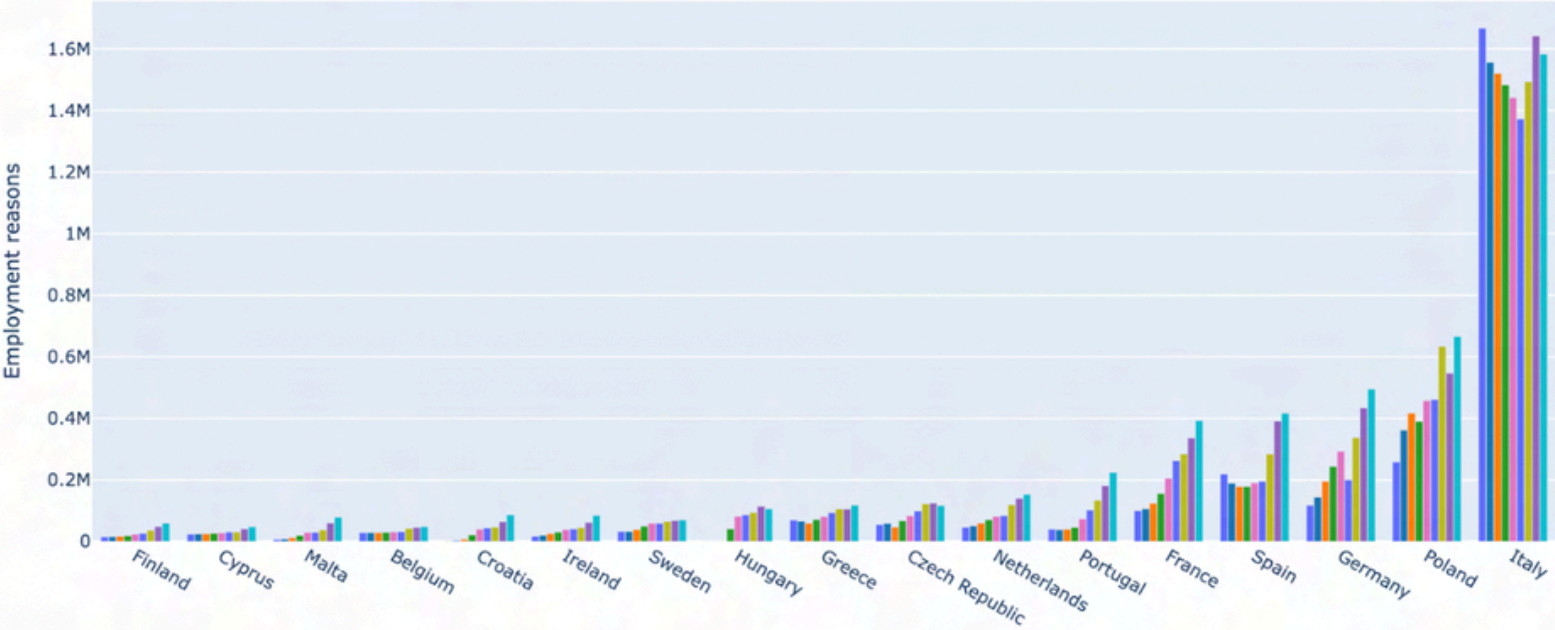
As Europe considers ways to address these challenges, many are looking to migration as a way to mitigate the effects of an aging population, ensuring a sustainable workforce.

The EU Faces a Trifecta of Economic Challenges: Aging Population, High Unemployment, and Labor Shortages in Key Low-Skilled Work

As previously mentioned, many migrants heading to the EU are seeking employment opportunities. Likewise, many are trained in the fields that match the labor shortages that exist in these states. For example, the Italian economy sees frequent year-over-year shortages in the construction industry. Some individuals coming to Italy from Africa, primarily through the central Mediterranean route, were construction workers in their countries of origin prior to moving towards the EU. As seen in the chart below, movement due to employment has increased across all countries over the past decade. The leftmost bar for each country represents movements due to labor reasons in 2015, with each bar after this representing movement for employment reasons in every successive year up to 2023. France, Spain, Germany, Poland, and Italy have all seen large influxes of migrants within the last decade, with Italy experiencing the largest sustained increase relative to other member states.

Reason for movement: Employment

Source: Eurostat



Note: Each line represents a year beginning from 2019 (furthest left line) to 2023 (furthest right line)

Difficulties in regional job matching, inability to issue visas quickly to migrants, as well as the desire for EU member states to issue short term visas and participate in circular migration programs hinder the ability for unions and the private sector to sustainability address labor shortages. Moreover, temporary labor visa issuance for seasonal work further creates difficulties for local integration efforts for migrants.

Countries that Receive Migrants and Refugees Benefit from Increased Labor Force, Growth, and Revenue

Migrant and refugee workers contribute to the European economy by filling jobs, paying taxes, and boosting consumption, which boosts overall economic growth. Migrants and refugees are also able to support the aging population of their host countries because they decrease the ratio of older persons to the working-age population and contribute to Social Security and health care. Oftentimes, migrants have worked in the service sector in their home countries and continue to work in these fields when they arrive to Europe, filling the jobs that those native to the country are unwilling to do. For industries that have been struggling over the past few years to fill these jobs, migrant and refugee workers have proven to be their solution to worker shortages.

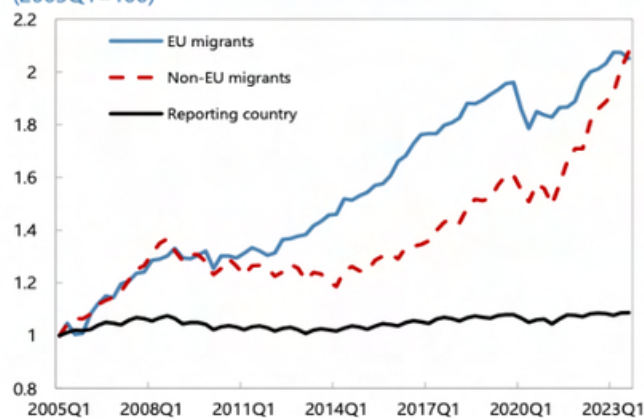
In 2022, the EU saw migration of non-EU citizens reach nearly 50% above 2015/2016 levels, largely due to refugees from Ukraine. While the EU saw its population grow at its fastest rate in recent history, “EU labor markets in 2022 and 2023 saw record low unemployment levels and strong employment growth.” (Caselli et al, 2024).

This aggregate labor market strength, at least in employment levels, came as a surprise relative to the projections of many forecasters [as] pre-pandemic projections assumed a sharp slowdown in employment creation over 2020–23 relative to 2016–19. This did not materialize, and over 3 million more jobs existed in the euro area in 2023 than expected in 2019 (Caselli et al, 2024).

“Migrant workers contribute to the European economy by filling jobs, paying taxes, and boosting consumption, which boosts overall economic growth.”

Migration almost certainly had a role to play in these dynamics. In 2023 Q4, the Euro Area employment stood at three million, or about 2 percent, above pre-pandemic projections—primarily driven by the increase in the foreign working-age population and higher-than-expected domestic worker participation (European Commission, 2023a). On aggregate and using EU-Labor Force Survey (EU-LFS) data, out of 4.2 million EU jobs created between 2019Q4 and 2023Q4, close to two-thirds (2.7 million) were filled by non-EU citizens. This share was the “highest seen in recent history in the EU, suggesting immigrants likely helped alleviate labor shortages to some degree. Simulation results suggest that an increase in the labor force of 0.3–1.1 percent of the existing labor force can increase the level of euro area potential GDP by 0.2–0.7 percent by 2030” (Caselli et al, 2024).

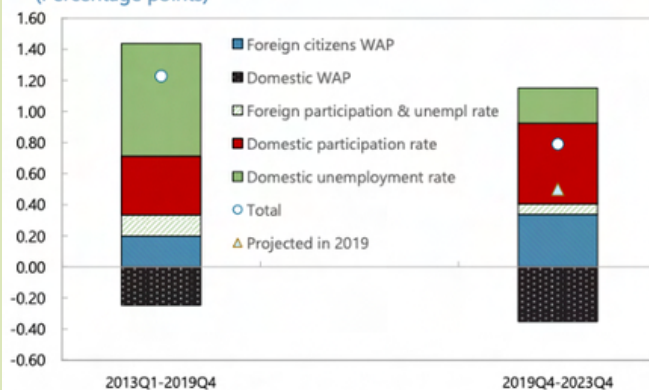
Figure 8.1 EU Employment Index by Citizenship (2005Q1 = 100)



Sources: Eurostat and IMF staff calculations.

EU: Employment and Decomposition of its Growth

Figure 8.2 EU: Decomposition of Annual Employment Growth (Percentage points)



Sources: Eurostat, IMF WEO database and IMF calculations.

Nevertheless, despite the proven economic benefits that migration can bring to the European economy, challenges still remain. While the EU is aware of the benefits that high-skilled laborers can bring to the continent, **the conversation regarding low-skilled laborers has been insufficiently addressed, despite the unsustainable shortages in these positions.** Of note, the private sector has expressed interest in participating in economic migration policy, however, there exists a lack of resources for them to fully engage (Vasilopoulos, 2024) (European Commission, 2024). Small and medium-sized enterprises may want to hire migrant and refugee workers, but they may lack both the knowledge and capacity to implement the recruitment of foreign workers in their operations.



Image Source: Bloomberg

“The private sector has expressed interest in participating in economic migration policy, however, there exists a lack of resources for them to fully engage.”



Image Source: Reuters

On the other hand, while large enterprises do have the knowledge and ability to navigate the hiring system, they may not have the internal flexibility to do so. As a result, low-skilled positions tend to fall under the “informal sector”, as trying to formalize this sector has created significant hurdles and hiring complications. However, working in the informal sector poses risks for laborers, as they often lack job security, legal and social protections, and are more vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions. For governments, informal economic activity reduces tax revenue and has the potential to become a hotspot for corruption and illegal activities that undermine good governance efforts.

Another issue is the overqualification of migrants and refugees, where the failure to properly match their skills means that highly qualified individuals are unable to work to their full potential. This labor productivity would be enhanced with better skills matching.

The Politics of Migration Policy in the EU: Navigating Narratives and Economic Necessities

The Current Political Atmosphere on Migration

As political divisions deepen across Europe, discussions centered around migration management have become a policy priority for the EU. Today, parties from various sides of the spectrum have demonstrated an openness to introducing and passing restrictive policies on migration. For example, within the first two days of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's government, asylum seekers were turned away at German borders (Martin, 2025). Similarly, Italy's Meloni government has also made several efforts to process irregular migrants' asylum claims outside of Italy, despite judicial pushback (Legorano, 2024). Both Germany and Italy's policies around migration are viewed as potential blueprints for EU-wide migration management (Sorgi & Barigazzi, 2023).

In part, these policy proposals reflect a growing societal view on migration. For instance, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubled its vote share in 2025 from 2021. They did so largely by appealing to a voter base frustrated by increased influxes of immigrants and migrants (Schuetze & Tankersley, 2025).

Moreover, political rhetoric often fuels resentment against migrants and refugees. In particular, migrants and refugees may be scapegoated in environments with limited job availability and stagnating growth. For instance, migrants may be seen as competing with domestic citizens on jobs and welfare. Additionally, Europeans may further question the ability of migrants and refugees to access the same benefits as they do, especially since they are not citizens of the country.

However, it should be noted that societal views on migration are as divided as the views of their elected leadership. For instance, U.S. President Trump's support for the AfD and backlash against conservative immigration policies contributed to the success of the Die Linke (The Left) party in Germany's elections.

Due to its complexity in both political and social dimensions, migration policy in Europe continues to be an emotional and salient issue.



Image source: DW



Image source: BBC

The Politics of Migration Policy

In recent years, EU politicians have pledged to tackle the issue of migration management by examining the potential for establishing broader border security measures while simultaneously balancing concerns on human rights and migrant safety typically brought by NGOs. However, EU member state politicians have increasingly advocated for stricter legislation aimed at limiting the entry of migrants and refugees into the EU. This includes agreements, such as the Italy-Albania agreement, which allowed Italy to process asylum claims while migrants were placed in detention centers housed in Albania. The effort was widely criticized by NGOs, judges, and politicians alike. For instance, Elly Schlein, the leader of Italy's center-left Democratic Party, viewed the deal as "a clamorous failure," calling on Prime Minister Meloni to resign. Despite losses in court, Meloni has been set on making the deal work (Elezi, 2025).

In general, nearly three million non-EU migrants and refugees enter the EU legally and through regularized pathways every year (EUAA, n.d). However, discussions on migration have centered on the struggles associated with taming the influx of irregular migrants along with the plurality of the reasons behind why people move. In 2023, over 260,000 irregular migrants arrived by sea, and over one million people filed for asylum in EU Member States. These numbers demonstrate the volume of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers who are pursuing dangerous routes in order to escape the danger from their origin country. Some of the causal factors that result in migration include escaping conflict and persecution, the need for new economic opportunities, family reunification, and environmental factors. Regardless of these reasons, several migrants and refugees have made dangerous journeys to get to the EU, often risking their lives by crossing the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea.



Image source: AP News



Image source: BBC

Moreover, field research conducted throughout this project has shown rising economic challenges in EU member states. High youth unemployment rates and difficult economic conditions during the COVID recovery period has provided the space for rhetoric that perceives migrants and refugees in the formal market as displacing native workers to flourish. **It should be noted that while rhetoric suggests that foreign workers displace domestic ones, research has shown that foreign workers often fill gaps and shortages in the local market that have not been filled by domestic workers.** As a result, while these beliefs are effective politically, they fail to reflect the reality of mixed migration and resettlement. This exacerbates the difficulties faced by arrivals and often hinders the ability to create comprehensive policy that would effectively benefit the communities that migrants and refugees often settle in. Furthermore, academic research, corroborated by field research, has shown that entering into the local economy is one way among many in which migrants and refugees can integrate and contribute to the country they have settled in.

Based on data gathered through fieldwork, there is stark misalignment on the policies that elected officials believe should be implemented to address migration management. Similarly, coordination and political discourse hinder efficient policy making. For example, there may be a lack of communication, opposing and culturally emotional perspectives on migration, difficulties in creating effective burden sharing mechanisms, and a mismatch between rhetoric and state needs that leads to lags in comprehensive policy implementation. As a result, lags in implementation and decision-making can negatively impact the issue at hand, which is to effectively manage the migration crisis in the EU.

As a result, the EU has found itself in a vicious policy cycle when it comes to migration, one that fails to address the underlying economic challenges and the solutions that migrants, as well as refugees, can offer

(Rosina, 2024). Many people on the move are qualified for the jobs that have shortages and vacancies.

Blocking these individuals from legal labor pathways and failing to provide them with interventions while they are still on their journey increases the likelihood of irregular migration and large influxes. This feeds into local communities frustrations with housing large groups of people in need of desperate help and resources. When the EU responds to these frustrations with security measures, they create an environment that fails to serve the very economic needs of their citizens. By pushing migrants out of the country, this then allows labor gaps to persist and macroeconomic indicators, such as growth and employment, to deteriorate, further prolonging frustrations without effectively addressing irregular migration (Robinson, Roy, & Baumgartner, 2024) .

“Lags in implementation and decision-making can negatively impact the issue at hand, which is to effectively manage the migration crisis in the EU.”

Migration policies in the EU: Policies on Migration are Implemented Through a Variety of Forms, Including Agreements

As a result of rising pressure on politicians to curb migration, the EU has implemented several agreements with North African countries. **Two examples of current bilateral agreements in place involving North African Countries include the EU-Egypt deal and the EU-Tunisia deal.**

EU-Egypt Deal

The expanded partnership offers “€7.4 Billion in financing and aid (equivalent to \$8.06B)” in return for Egyptian officials curbing migration within Egypt. (Al Jazeera, n.d.) However, external organizations such as NGOs like the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as members of the private sector, have claimed that this deal is as flawed as the deals with Tunisia and Mauritania. They see this as a violation of human rights, and as a means to “stop migrants, and ignore abuses.”

EU-Tunisia Deal

The EU offered €1 Billion in aid in exchange for stemming the departure of migrants from Tunisia’s coast. Under the agreement, EU money will flow to Tunisia if the Tunisian coast guard successfully blocks migrant boats from exiting Tunisian waters towards the EU. On a trip with Von der Leyen to Tunisia, the Dutch PM said that “it is essential to gain more control over irregular migration” (Hayden, 2023). The €100M are meant to help with border management, search and rescue, anti-smuggling measures, and other initiatives to address the issue.

The EU views these deals as blueprints to establish other partnerships with countries from North Africa, with EU officials claiming that the idea of exchanging euros for humane deterrence has the potential to be replicated with other countries (Sorgi & Barigazzi, 2023). It should be noted, however, that while Tunisia is considered a partner in this policy, it is reluctant to be seen as a border-controlling state.

Other policies and models implemented by the EU and EU member states include the following:

EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

The EU pact on migration and asylum lays out a set of rules to manage migration and establish a common asylum system. Entered into force in 2024 and set to enter into application in 2026, the pact builds on previous migration policies and sets out four main pillars for migration management—securing external borders, establishing fast and efficient procedures, creating an effective system of solidarity and responsibility, and embedding migration within international partnerships (European Commission, 2024).

EU Talent Partnerships

A part of the pact on migration and asylum, the EU Talent Partnerships aims to improve matching labor market needs and skills in member states with workers in partner countries. The program is currently open for students, graduates, and skilled workers. Its North African partners currently include Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt (European Commission, n.d.).

EU Talent Pool

The EU Talent Pool is currently in its pilot phase. It helps match skilled third-country nationals from outside the EU with EU employers, based on shortage occupations and labor market needs. The Talent Pool aims to support recruitment processes, protect third-country nationals from potential exploitative labor practices, and improve cooperation with non-EU countries on legal migration by disincentivizing irregular migration (European Commission, 2023).

POLICY PROPOSAL: THE MOBILITY, PROTECTION, & LABOR PROGRAM

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The Proposed Policy: The Mobility, Protection, & Labor Program

A Tool for Migration Management Strategy

The proposed **Mobility, Protection, & Labor Program (MPLP)** is a multilateral, joint IOM-UNHCR operated mechanism designed to facilitate access to multiple lawful migration pathways, connecting people on the move with protection pathways and labor mobility opportunities, while also providing information on lawful migration routes and host country resources. This **multi-pathway, multi-country model** functions to meet migrants and refugees while they are on the move and before they make dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean, thereby working to provide safer and lawful alternatives.

The **primary focus of this model is on migrants**, in addition to the protection of refugees in vulnerable positions. **Of unique focus for this program is the recruitment of low skilled labor.** Previous and current labor related migration policies have focused on high skilled labor, however, data collected through European statistics agencies, as well as testimonies from government officials and NGO staff, have highlighted the consequential labor shortages in low-skilled work. As a result, EU countries across the board will require a mechanism to fill these gaps that can adapt to the needs of each member state as conditions change over time. **Current policies in place have had limited impact due to their inability to address a wider range of people on the move,** integrate migrants and refugees successfully into their host economies, and address the needs of the host countries. Likewise, these policies fail to effectively engage the private sector. **Of notable difference, in the following proposed model, the private sector will play a key role in the labor components of the program.** UNHCR and IOM will play major operational roles as project leads of this mechanism, considering their expertise and experience with the SMI in Latin America.



Image source: BBC



Image source: UNHCR

This policy proposal would work in coordination with services and support from the host countries of the Mobility, Protection, & Labor Centers (MPLC), such that the potential for these centers to serve as a pull factor and competition between this policy and pre-existing policies is mitigated. Likewise, the legal and policy framework of this proposal is designed to complement the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum such that it does not contradict, but rather strengthens and helps build a comprehensive approach to EU policies on migration, asylum, border management and integration.

The proposed mechanism provides a framework for safe and lawful migration in alignment with EU policy and UN principles and with the goal of helping address needs of those on the move as well as receiving countries. **This policy is being proposed as a pilot program with four main recipient countries selected as initial participants: Greece, Italy, Spain, and Germany.**



The proposed policy serves five main purposes:

- 1 Reduce irregular migration to the EU by deterring migrants and refugees from taking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean through the expansion of lawful pathways
- 2 Meet the needs of migrants and match them with shortages in participating EU member states
- 3 As an extension of point two, meet the economic needs of the participating member states, particularly in low-skilled labor positions
- 4 Address protection needs through resettlement and complementary pathways
- 5 Provide credible informational resources to people on the move regarding lawful pathways, local host country resources, and the risks of irregular journeys
- 6 Gather data on migrants to build skills and work experience profiles

Changes from the Latin American Model

The proposed policy differs from the Latin American-U.S. model in four crucial ways.

The Addition of Labor Pathways

1. The proposed policy preserves the humanitarian pathways associated with resettlement for those eligible for protection using the mechanisms currently in place in the EU pilot countries to resettle refugees that qualify. However, the MPLP will focus on the large numbers of migrants who are already on the move to connect them with labor pathways they may qualify for, including for low-skilled labor.

Strong Engagement of Private Sector & Civil Society

2. To improve upon the shortcomings of the SMI model, the MPLP will engage with civil society organizations that support the integration of migrants and refugees in receiving countries, as well as those equipped to conduct outreach to vulnerable populations within host and transit countries. The MPLP will also heavily engage the private sector, recognizing that securing employer participation in labor pathways is essential to address pilot countries' labor market gaps.

Enhanced Digital Services

3. The program maximizes digital services and creates information hubs such that migrants and refugees are empowered to educate themselves and make informed decisions. Ensuring that people on the move have access to information serves a dual purpose: it not only helps them make informed decisions, but also disrupts the operations of smugglers who seek to exploit them.

Emphasis on People on the Move

4. This program places an overwhelming emphasis on people on the move. The centers will serve only third country nationals when matching applicants with available pathways. Only MPLP locations in countries with the highest rates of irregular migration to the EU will offer support—and only in the form of information resources—to nationals of those countries.



Image source: Bloomberg

THE DIGITAL APPLICATION PORTAL FOR THE MPLP



→ The portal will be part of a **UNHCR-IOM joint operated, multilingual website**

→ The applicant creates a secure account through the portal and **completes an intake questionnaire for initial screening**



www.mplp.europa.eu

01 Basic Information Collected

- **Full Name**
- **Date of Birth**
- **Nationality/ Country of Origin**
- **Current Status** in Host Country
- **Arrival Date** in Host Country
- **Migration Intentions** (Why they want to move)
- **Contact Information**
- **Family Composition** and Dependents' information (if applying as a head of household in an eligible family application)

02 Additional Intake Components

2.1

Protection Screening

→ The applicant will complete a set of **UNHCR-designed protection screening questions to identify those in need of protection.**

2.2

Initial Preference Questions

- **Rank Choice:** Will provide migrants and refugees with the opportunity to rank country choices in the application, though not guaranteed.
- **Family Considerations:** The applicant will be asked to note if they have family in any of the EU pilot countries.

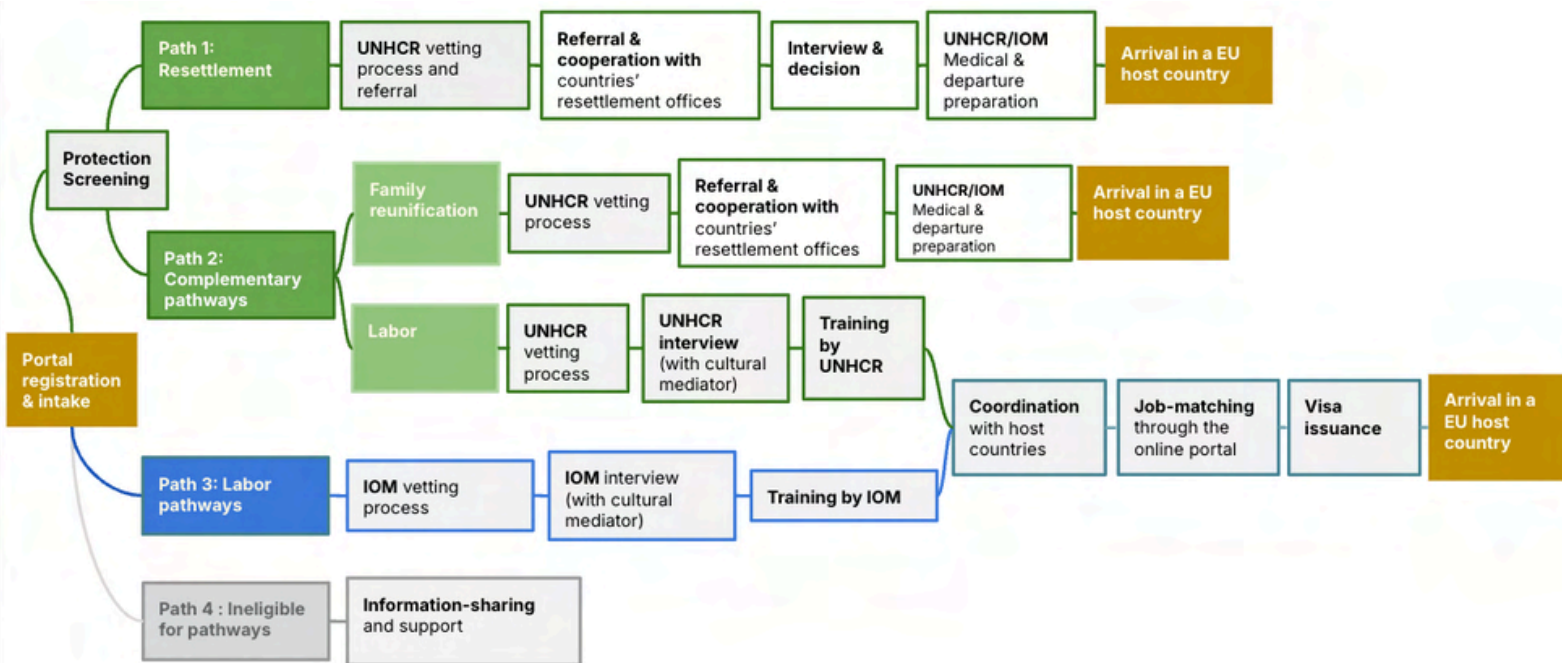
2.3

Requests For Documentation

→ An **identification number**, such as from a passport or national ID

THE PROPOSED MECHANISM: HOW THE MPLP WORKS

The following flow chart highlights how the MPLP would function from people on the move registering through the online portal to eligible applicants' arrivals in the EU.



The mechanism integrates **four** possible pathways:

01 Resettlement Pathways

The first protection pathway is a refugee resettlement pathway **for the most vulnerable and high-risk cases**. This will be **the smallest pathway in the model**, with a proposed dedicated 10% of each EU pilot country's annual resettled population being for eligible applicants to the MPLP.

02 Complementary Pathways

The second protection pathway, complementary pathways, applies to individuals eligible for protection who are not the most vulnerable or high-risk and have **affirmed their interest in job matching or are flagged for family reunification**.

03 Labor Pathways

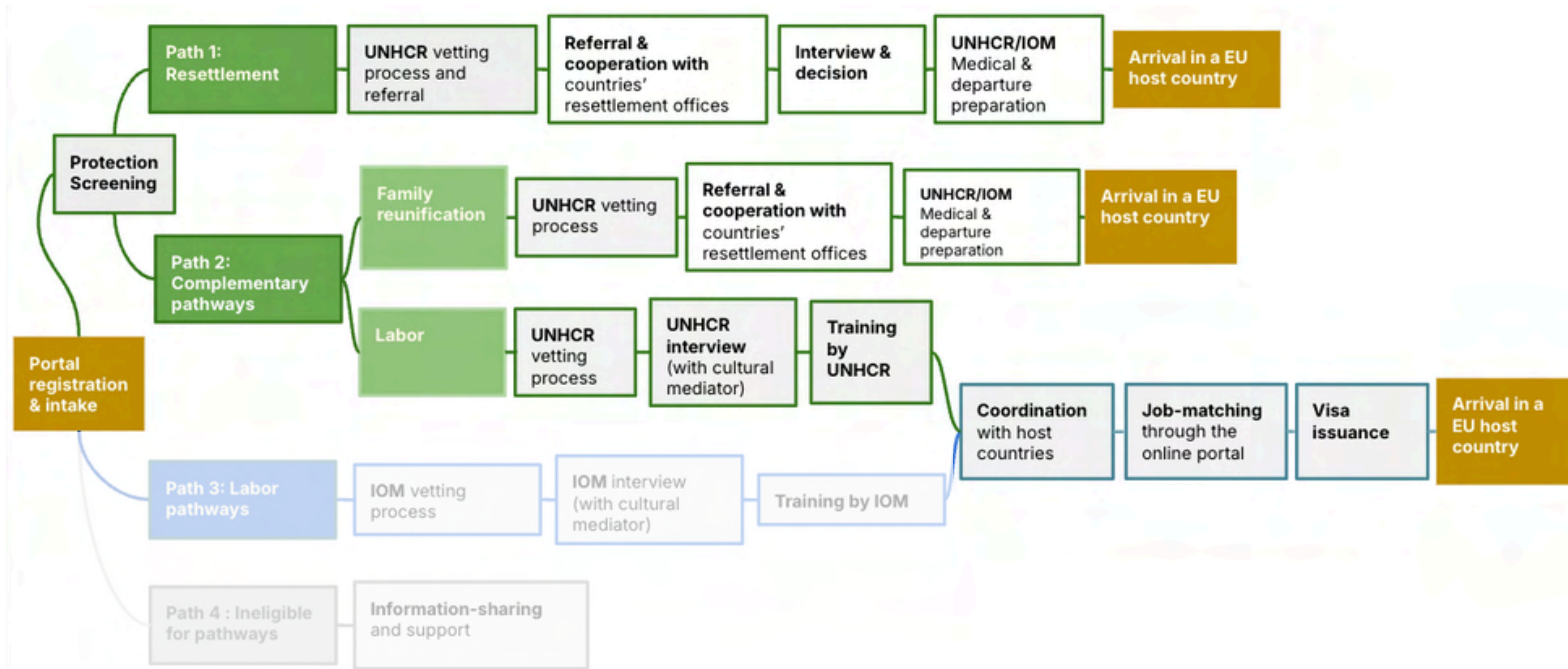
Individuals who are not eligible for protection but express interest in labor mobility are prompted to complete a detailed job skills profile and undergo an **interview process with IOM for job-matching at all skill levels**, with emphasis on low-skilled workers.

04 Ineligible for Pathways

Individuals found ineligible for both protection and labor pathways **receive informational resources** on other lawful pathways that may be available to them, worker exploitation prevention resources, and other local resources in the country where the MPLC office is located.

THE PROPOSED MECHANISM: PROTECTION PATHWAYS

This section highlights how Pathways #1 (Resettlement) and #2 (Complementary) function for those flagged as possibly eligible for protection through the initial protection screening in the intake.



01 Resettlement Pathway

Who: The most **vulnerable and high-risk cases** flagged as eligible for protection.

- 1. UNHCR completes initial vetting and submits eligible case referrals.
- 2. EU pilot country resettlement offices receive and review the referrals.
- 3. Authorities conduct in-person interviews and decide on refugee visa issuance.
- 4. Approved refugees complete medical checks and departure preparations by IOM and UNHCR.
- 5. Refugees travel and arrive in the receiving country, where they receive refugee integration support.

02 Complementary Pathways

Who: Individuals eligible for protection with an eligible relative with refugee status in the pilot country are **flagged for family reunification**. Individuals who are not the most vulnerable or high-risk, indicated interest in a labor component, and are not eligible for family reunification are automatically flagged for a **labor-related complementary pathway**.

Family Reunification

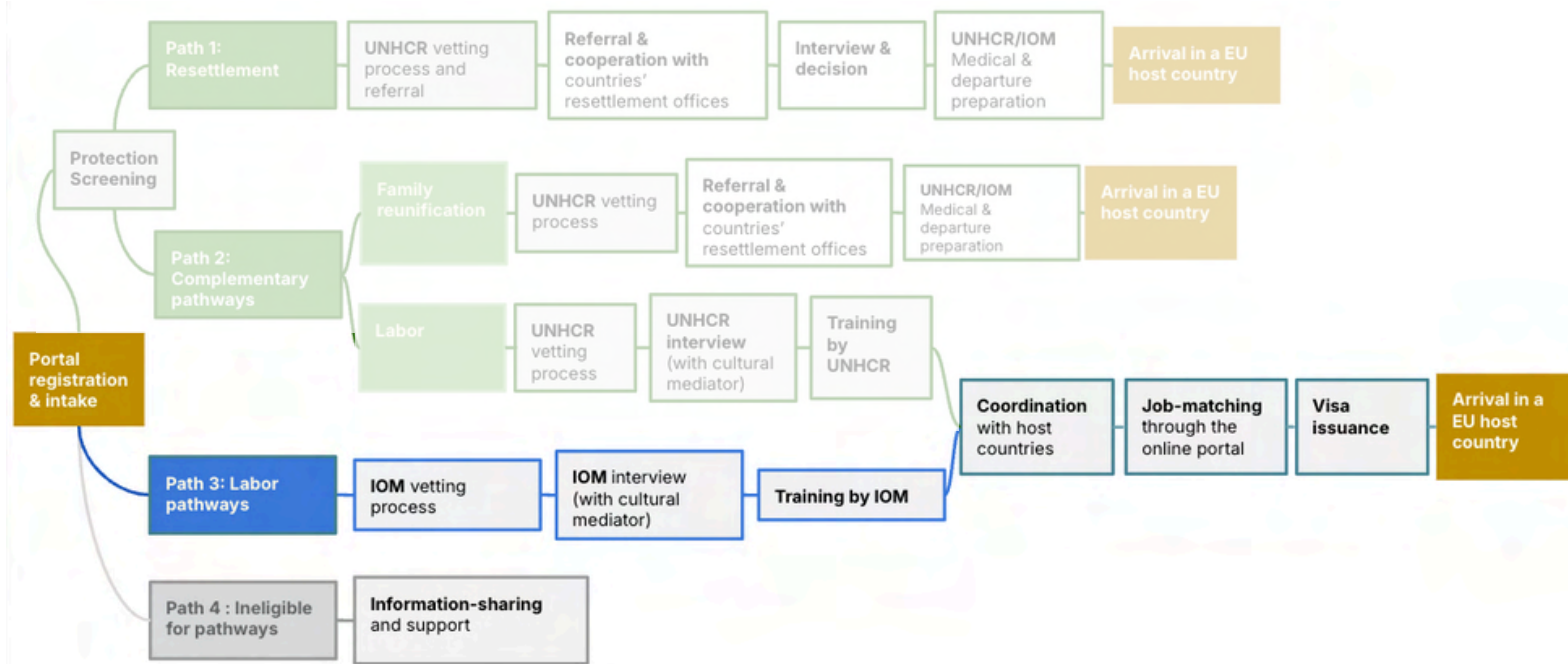
- 1. UNHCR vets and submits eligible applications.
- 2. EU pilot countries' resettlement offices receive and approve or deny reunification visas.
- 3. Approved applicants undergo medical checks and prepare for departure.
- 4. They travel and receive integration support upon arrival.

Labor

- 1. UNHCR completes initial vetting.
- 2. Eligible applicants attend an in-person interview with UNHCR and complete a job-skills profile.
- 3. UNHCR provides training on worker exploitation prevention, job skills, and language.
- 4. Applicants are matched with jobs and interviewed by employers.
- 5. Once offered a job, they receive a work visa and travel to the EU pilot country.

THE PROPOSED MECHANISM: THE LABOR PATHWAY

This section outlines how Pathway #3, the Labor Pathway, and Pathway #4, Ineligible for Pathways, function.



03 Labor Pathways

Who: Individuals who are not eligible for protection, but are interested in labor mobility are invited to complete a detailed job skills profile and undergo an interview and job-matching process with IOM.

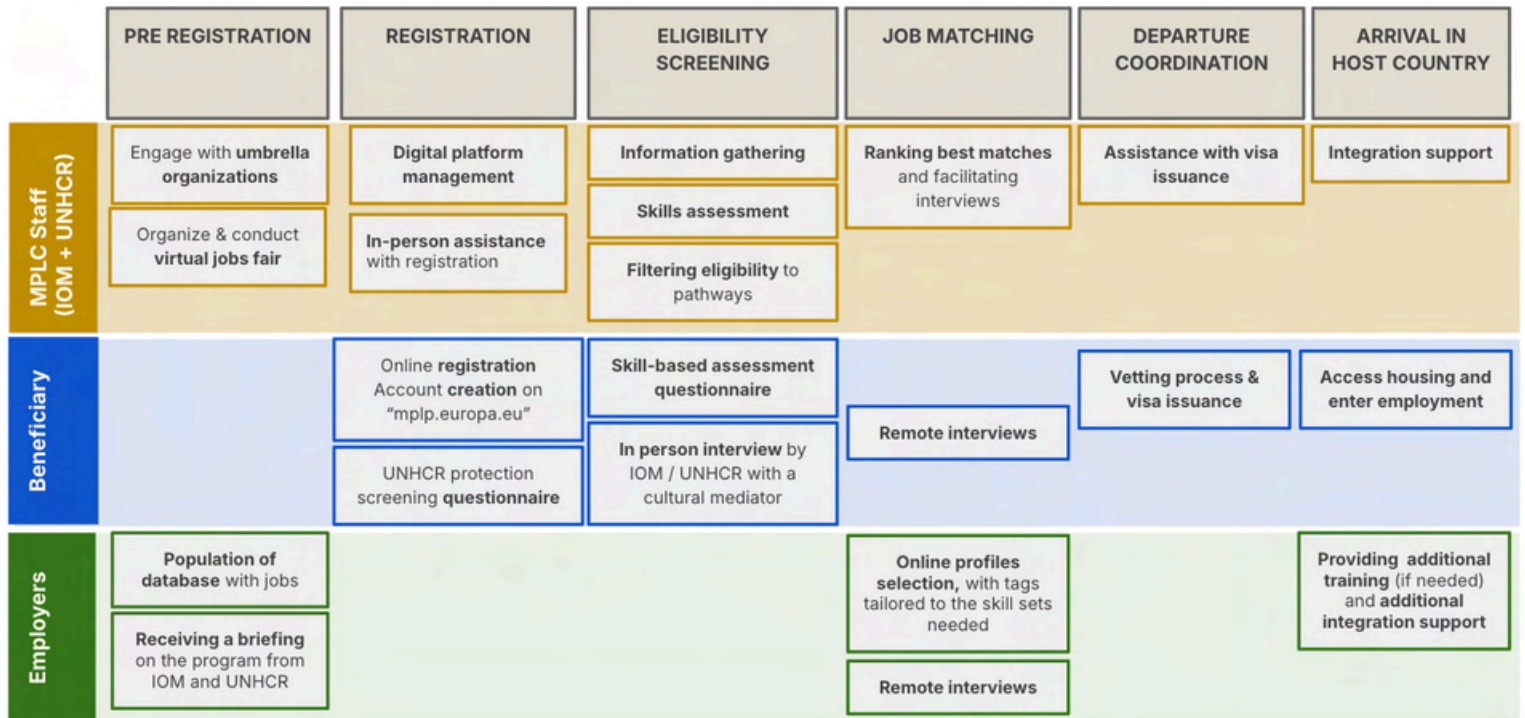
- 1. IOM completes its initial vetting process.
- 2. Applicants are prompted to submit a job skills-based profile through the MPLP's online database.
- 3. IOM mediators trained to do preliminary survey interviews conduct interviews and rank applicants by best fit within the identified labor sectors.
- 4. Applicants undergo training organized by IOM for their respective identified sector.
- 5. Employers view the anonymized list of applicants and make final hiring decisions.
- 6. Those selected go through the vetting process necessitated by the work visa of the respective participating country.
- 7. They are approved by the receiving country's immigration services and receive the work visa.
- 8. They arrive in the receiving country.

04 Ineligible for Pathways

Individuals found ineligible for both protection and labor pathways **receive informational resources** on other lawful pathways that may be available to them, worker exploitation prevention resources, and local integration resources in the country where the MPLC is located.

JOB MATCHING PORTAL PROCESS

A central objective of the mechanism is to enhance access to labor mobility pathways, offering a more structured and secure route to employment for both refugees and migrants, in part through the job-matching portal, which operates as illustrated in the diagram below



Key steps of the process include:

Registration

Individuals expressing interest in labor mobility are invited to create a profile on the MPLC’s digital platform. As part of this process, candidates complete **skills-based questionnaires** that serves as a dynamic resume. This tool captures **key data** on work experience, language proficiency, technical skills, and preferred sectors or destinations.

Each applicant undergoes an **interview process** conducted by either IOM or UNHCR, depending on their status. These interviews are designed to assess both technical competencies and personal preferences, while also identifying potential protection concerns or integration needs.

Job matching

On the employer side, participating companies are granted access to a **secure, anonymized database of candidate profiles**. Using a standardized recruitment interface, employers can browse filtered matches, identify suitable candidates, and initiate the hiring process in close coordination with MPLC staff.

While the digital platform significantly enhances efficiency, particularly through centralized data, **the process remains deeply human-centered**. MPLC staff play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between candidates and employers by ranking their opinion on the best matches and facilitating interviews. Their involvement ensures that recruitment is not only efficient, but also personalized and context-sensitive.

Locations for Mobility, Protection, & Labor Centers (MPLCs)

For the purpose of this proposal, a few optimal locations for the brick-and-mortar MPLCs are suggested below. The methodology developed to determine locations follows a four-pronged approach.

1. **Offices must be located along the routes that migrants and refugees take to reach Europe.**

Because these offices are designed to reach migrants and refugees before they take dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean, offices must be located where migrants and refugees can be intercepted along those routes.

2. **Offices must be located in areas that are deemed relatively safe and where operations can, for the most part, be expected to continue long term.**

The longer the center is able to operate in a given country, the more migrants and refugees it can reach and the better it can be used as an irregular migration management tool for the EU.

3. **Ideally, offices should be established in countries that have an existing relationship with the pilot countries, either through bilateral agreements, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), or where the European Union maintains a physical presence.**

While this program could function to build new relationships between the EU member pilot countries and other partner countries hosting people on the move, for the purpose of this proposal, countries that had pre-existing relationships were considered. Having an already established and good relationship between the respective EU member pilot country and the MPLC-hosting partner countries allows the project to eliminate aspects associated with administrative and political burdens. Pre-existing relationships allow the EU member states to simply build on these relationships rather than start from scratch, especially as cooperation can be more easily done through less politically challenging channels. Furthermore, pre-existing relationships through bilateral agreements on migration can easily be worked into this pilot proposal given the program's ability to quickly adapt to the challenges and the current migratory environment of the given country.

4. **The country should have the capacity to issue visas.**

Because this proposal involves the issuance of visas to the EU for migrants to utilize lawful pathways, offices must be located in areas with the logistical capacity to issue these visas—such as proximity to an embassy or consulate—and the ability to manage relatively large numbers of applicants.

Proposed Locations

The following map illustrates the locations that have been selected as areas that fit the above criteria and can serve as opportunities for Europe to manage mixed migratory flows before migrants reach their countries of destination. Further details for each country are provided below.



Proposed Location #1:

Cairo, Egypt

Routes Addressed: Central Mediterranean route.

Migrants in Egypt: As of February 2025, there are 925,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR in Egypt. IOM estimated in 2022 that there were 9 million migrants in Egypt.

Who will be served in this office: Third country nationals. The office will provide information to country nationals about other lawful programs that exist for them.

Eligibility Dates: Applicants must have been continuously present in the country for at least six months prior to the date of application and no more than three years.

Relationship with the EU: Strong

Current bilateral agreements with EU member states include:

→Spain-Egypt Circular Migration Agreement

→Greece-Egypt Agricultural Labor Agreement

→EU-Egypt Migration agreement aimed at curbing smuggling and trafficking, and enhancing returns and reintegration

Routes addressed: West African routes through Senegal*, Morocco, and Mauritania towards the Canary Islands.

*departures are often organized on the Senegalese coast

Migration in Senegal: An estimated 282,000 migrants passed through the area in 2024.

Who will be served by this office: Third country nationals; with informational resources provided on lawful pathways and local resources for Senegalese.

Eligibility Dates: Applicants must have been continuously present in the country for at least six months prior to the date of application and no more than three years.

Relationship with the EU: Over 50-year relationship with the EU.

Current bilateral agreements with EU member states include:

→Spain-Senegal Bilateral relationships

2024: Provisional seasonal work agreement with vocational training with the aim to incorporate new workers in Spanish sectors.

→Italy-Senegal Bilateral relationships:

2021: Lawful migration opportunities extended with new measures on seasonal migration and employment in specific sectors and occupations.

Proposed Location #2:

Dakar, Senegal

Routes addressed: Eastern Mediterranean route.

Migration in Türkiye: There are more than 4.5 million foreigners in Türkiye, of whom 3.4 million are seeking international protection (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix for Türkiye, 2025).

Who will be served by this office: Third country nationals.

Eligibility Dates: Applicants must have been continuously present in the country for at least six months prior to the date of application and no more than three years.

Relationship with the EU:

→**2016:** EU-Türkiye deal, Designed to address irregular migration from Türkiye to Greece. Irregular migrants from Türkiye to Greece would be returned to Türkiye, which would take steps to prevent new migratory routes. In exchange, the EU would provide Türkiye with €6 billion, reduce visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, resettle Syrian refugees from Türkiye, and re-energize talks for Türkiye's EU accession.

Proposed Location #3:

**Ankara,
Türkiye**

In the future, an expansion of this policy would naturally point to an increase in office locations. As a result, several new offices may be located in areas that have more tensions than locations previously proposed. For instance, we believe an office located in Tunisia in the future would benefit this program.

While at this moment in time, tensions between the Tunisian government and the EU have increased, we believe that a policy of this nature will benefit the relationship between the EU and Tunisia, further creating links between the two countries that would improve over time as both countries seek the same goal: to curb irregular migration and seek a safer path for migrants. Likewise, Tunisia was selected for the location of a future office in part due its geographic considerations as it is located firmly along the routes that many migrants take and serves as a primary departure point to Italy. Several migrants have reported that some of the most difficult aspects of their journeys occur in Tunisia. Likewise, Tunisia has recently become a touchpoint for smuggling. As a result, an office located in this region would create the opportunity to limit the need for smugglers.

Routes addressed: Central Mediterranean route.

Migration in Tunisia: 56,502 people departed from Tunisia towards Europe in 2024 (UNHCR, n.d.)

Who will be served by this office: Only third country nationals will be served.

Eligibility Dates: Applicants must have been continuously present in the country for at least six months prior to the date of application and no more than three years.

Relationship with the EU:

→**2024:** Tunisia-Italy cooperation has since continued with the signing of accords as part of Italy's "Mattei Plan" for Africa, a continent-wide strategy aimed at growing economic opportunities and preventing migration to Europe (Bouazza & Metz, 2024).

→**2023:** EU and Tunisia established a €1 billion deal, including around €150 million in significant investments aimed at combating trafficking and smuggling through enhanced border control and migration management. Notably, Italy was a central figure to this deal (European Commission, 2023).

→**2014:** The passage of a "mobility partnership" with similar objectives to those in the 2023 deal (O'Carroll, 2023).

Proposed Location #4:

**Tunis,
Tunisia**

The Role of Key Stakeholders

Several key players, including the private sector, the government, and the UN are expected to play differing roles throughout the implementation of the MPLP. The following highlights how each stakeholder might contribute within the proposed mechanism.

UN AGENCIES

The United Nations has played a pivotal role in global migration policy and regional aid at the EU level. This includes providing organizational support on the ground and offering live-saving solutions for migrants and refugees. For example, UNHCR has various country offices where they work to provide shelter, clothing, food, medical assistance, and other support to migrants and refugees after they have reached their destination through a treacherous journey. Through this proposed program, as a protection actor, **UNHCR will primarily factor into leading the resettlement and complementary pathways of this initiative.** The IOM is another organization that is present within the UN system and facilitates assistance, programs, and pathways, with emphasis on migrants. They have partnerships with various stakeholders to respond to people on the move. Through the pilot program, **IOM will continue to offer support through the labor pathways and job matching portal process.**



Image source: BBC

THE EU

As previously mentioned, the EU is working on multiple initiatives aimed at managing irregular migration and creating labor pathways. Some of these initiatives include EU Partnership models, the EU Talent Pool, and Digital IT platforms. More recently, the EU has initiated the development of Multipurpose Gateway Hubs, a policy framework inspired by the Safe Mobility Initiative. **As a result, the EU will take a central role in the MPLP. This includes building relationships with African partner countries and Turkey by leaning on existing bilateral agreements.** This is of particular importance when it comes to the physical locations of the MPLCs. Ultimately, EU Member States will have the final decision on the degree and magnitude of their participation and engagement with the program. However, EU-wide institutions, such as EEAS, will play a pivotal role in migration management and funding.



Image source: AP News



Image source: Al Jazeera

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Fieldwork across the EU additionally revealed the lack of private sector engagement with migration policy despite the existence of labor needs and shortages. This policy proposal envisions the involvement of the private sector through the creation of a form where businesses can list the skills and positions they are looking to fill. The initiative in the pilot phase will lean towards the recruitment of low-skilled workers as pressing shortages in this skill category are of immediate concern. Skills and job matching are conducted through the MPLCs. Businesses looking to engage with the program will go through a costless verification and vetting process and migrants considered for positions will also be vetted through the offices. Businesses will have the opportunity to communicate the profiles they are looking for and directly engage with the program.

NGOS

Findings gathered through fieldwork conducted with the aid of various EU organizations indicate a broad disconnect between NGOs and government perspectives on migration and the end goals of migration policy. Disagreements exist on how migration policies should be implemented and who they should serve. Similar to the Latin American SMI program, the MPLCs and NGOs will play a significant role in coordinating information sharing and data collection. Several NGOs have both the capacity and ability to coordinate information sharing and build data collection portals given that they currently have offices along the general routes migrants take towards Europe. This also includes the capacity to conduct outreach to vulnerable migrant and refugee populations who may be eligible for the MPLP. Many NGOs are active in the migration policy space and have coordinated with government institutions to promote resettlement pathways. As a result, these organizations are expected to play a prominent role in the establishment of the MPLP by incorporating information sharing mechanisms and creating informative profiles of migrants, such as demographic data and skill profiles.



Image source: UC Davis

THE ADDED VALUE OF THE MPLP: A COMPREHENSIVE, SCALABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE TOOL FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Reduction in Irregular Migration and Enhanced Migration Management

A Mechanism that Increases Economic Opportunity in the EU

Emphasis on Low-Skilled Labor

01

This policy at the pilot program level creates space for it to be **scaled up** to all of the EU. Where bilateral agreements already exist, this would function as a multilateral mechanism. While EU policies tend to focus heavily on border management, this proposal provides a different approach to addressing migration to the EU. By creating a more enhanced version of the SMOs, and with more specific services being administered, this can help manage several aspects of its migration crisis.

02

One of the main contributors to the migration crisis in the EU is economic drivers. Migrants tend to leave their home countries but then find themselves unable to integrate into their destination country, in part due to the barriers in accessing the job market. As mentioned previously in the report, this may be due to a lack of jobs being available to them or a set number of low, middle, and high-skilled jobs that do not meet their skills, needs, or interests. By establishing labor pathways, **this policy can help address the inflow of migrants to EU countries** and further **improve skills matching** with employers and job opportunities that will benefit not only them but the EU countries' economies as well.

03

Through the labor pathways, we are integrating a labor mobility component that will further help **fill any labor gaps and address the labor demands** within the EU member state. While most EU labor initiatives may focus on medium- to high-skilled labor, the MPLP will **emphasize the ongoing need for low-skilled workers**, engaging with more people while simultaneously fostering relationship-building between member state communities and migrants and refugees.

Inclusive Digital Access

04

By allowing for more **inclusive digital access** through the MPLCs, more migrants and refugees are able to **access important documents, information, applications**, etc. As mentioned earlier in the report, the MPLCs will have space designated for digital tools and platforms.

Allows for Responsibility-Sharing and Diplomatic Relationship Building

05

Another main contributor to the migration crisis includes the political challenges faced by the EU. One of the biggest concerns and points of debate amongst the EU member states is the **responsibility-sharing for migrants and refugees**. By implementing the MPLP, along with the establishment of the MPLCs in the mentioned locations (Senegal, Egypt, Türkiye, and Tunisia), irregular migration flows will be more effectively and efficiently managed through the various pathways and resources offered through the program. Additionally, the MPLP and MPLCs may help reduce negative rhetoric that right-leaning political groups in EU member states have towards migrants and refugees, given that **migration flows will be lightened over time** due to improved management and distribution amongst the four EU member states we are examining.



Image source: Euronewst

Other elements of this program that will add value and benefit the EU include **little to no competition for programs in place with current EU bilateral programs/agreements**. For instance, the fact that the program highlights existing opportunities for migrants and refugees across member states means that embedded within the program is a mechanism aimed at flexibly and fairly managing arrivals in all participating countries. Since responsibility-sharing on migration management is a key goal of the EU pact on migration and asylum, this policy would serve to complement the pact in achieving this goal.

Likewise, **short-run costs**, such as building brick-and-mortar MPLCs, **are mitigated by long-run revenue and cost-savings**. In part, the program works by enhancing systems already in place and bringing in migrants and refugees to work and be resettled. Integrating migrants and refugees into the labor market allows the EU to fill shortages and increase production and revenue, while aligning with the the aspirations of those arriving. Long-run cost reductions can come in multiple forms, one of which includes the fact that this program functions to manage migration in a safe, orderly, and lawful manner. As a result, stakeholders do not need to rely on policies that have proven to be expensive in the long-run and have left member states with legal challenges and financial burdens.

Similarly, **funding is also shared across organizations**. By starting small as a pilot program and partnering with NGOs, the local governments of EU member states, the private sector, UN organizations, and others, costs are distributed across multiple entities.



Image source: Euractiv



Image source: EEAS

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

01

A **primary challenge** faced by this program is the **political dimension**. This includes addressing the potential for political pushback by far-right groups in Europe. While the MPLP is designed to manage irregular migration, it is also meant to offer protection to refugees and labor opportunities to migrants. By implementing this new mechanism, the management of migration may be more feasible in the EU due to the MPLP targeting migrants and refugees in the transit countries. Far-right political groups may oppose offering protection to refugees or labor opportunities to migrants, even with an emphasis on addressing low-skilled labor shortages.

However, the establishment of such labor pathways can help with the integration of migrants into the host country and to fill in any labor gaps, helping the host country's overall economy. An improved economy can help reduce inflation rates and high costs of living and consumption of goods. With that being said, one limitation that comes with addressing the political dimension is changing the narrative. Based on field research, sometimes community members are unaware why migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers are entering their respective territory. An increase in transparency between the EU member state governments and EU citizens may help combat any discrimination and negativity towards migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Despite this being a potential solution, the limitations to this would be that governments may not wish to disclose this information or may need to be cautious about how they communicate with the public.



Image source: AFP



Image source: Reuters

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

02

A **secondary challenge** includes the **potential costs for building the MPLCs**. Given start-up costs for the SMOs were high, it is expected that start-up costs for the MPLCs are also high. The information hubs can be costly with the amount of resources needed to build the offices itself. In the long run, however, this policy could save the EU money given that it works in tandem with NGOs, government officials, and the private sector. In recent years, tighter border controls in the EU led to increased costs in irregular migration, including more debt for those that were unable to successfully cross into an EU country. Instead of spending billions of euros on aid packages to countries in Africa, the EU can allocate those funds to the establishment of MPLCs in transit countries as an effort to manage irregular migration to the EU. As a result, it is less likely to face legal challenges from these groups. Likewise, revenue through labor migration is also set to improve economic conditions across the EU. The limitations that pose as a threat to this pilot program is that the EU only has a set number of euros that is dedicated to pilot programs, that is, the “EU has a maximum capacity for 40 million euros per any budgetary year.” (European Parliament, 2024) While the MPLP will be saving money for the EU due to the establishment of the MPLCs, it may pose as a threat to the scalability of the program if there are not enough funds to contribute to the establishment of the MPLCs.



Image source: Washington Post

03

Another challenge to be addressed includes **building brick and mortar MPLCs** in the established locations discussed previously. This may pose a challenge given the potential for locations to pose political issues in the short run and due to the fact that agreements will likely have a monetary element to them.

While this list is not exhaustive, it does highlight the potential limitations and future considerations of this proposed policy mechanism.

PILOT COUNTRIES

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Four EU member states were selected as pilot countries that would most benefit from the MPLP as applied in the European context. The countries selected are **Greece, Spain, Italy, and Germany**. These countries were selected due to their involvement in the initial implementation of the SMI (in the case of Spain), their importance in EU migration policy development, and the opportunities that could be offered from their involvement in a policy proposal such as this one. All these countries face labor shortages in key sectors that have already fed into other aspects of their economies. Labor economics—spurred by gaps in low skilled jobs—serve as the core of these countries' economic problems. Each of these nations face three core challenges: aging populations, labor shortages in low skilled jobs, and migration management. These factors pose a challenge to economic growth and create avoidable stresses. As a result, a model such as the one proposed throughout this paper highlights the fact that each country featured in the following pages can serve as a site of economic opportunity.

COUNTRY SELECTION

EU Pilot countries were selected based on the numbers of migrants and refugees they receive and the ability for them to gain economically from an increase in these populations in their respective labor markets.

The following pages provides specific reasons why each country was selected and analysis of each country's labor market.

GREECE



Greece was selected as one of the four countries of focus due it being one of the **top receiving countries** of migrants and refugees in Europe. In 2024, Greece received over 54,000 sea arrivals and over 7,000 land arrivals with over 125 individuals losing their lives while crossing into Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean Route (UNHCR, n.d.). Out of all of these individuals, over 29,000 were migrants and asylum seekers (IOM DTM, n.d.). The top countries of origin of arrivals include Afghanistan, Syria, and Egypt in 2024. Along with the amount of migrants and refugees Greece receives, it was selected as a country of focus for the pilot project in order to prevent individuals from taking the dangerous journey from Türkiye across the Aegean sea to reach Greece. The primary entry point into Greece is through the **Eastern Mediterranean route**.

Italy was selected as one of the receiving countries of interest due to it being **one of the main countries where migrants and refugees first arrive in Europe** from the **Central Mediterranean route** through Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. Primary entry points into Italy include: Sicily, particularly Lampedusa and Pantelleria (63%); Sardinia, especially Porto Pino, Sant'Antioco, and Cagliari; Apulia, notably Leuca and Gallipoli; and Calabria, specifically Crotona and Roccella Jonica (IOM, 2019). In 2024 there were 66,617 arrivals, and so far, in 2025, there have been 12,840 through the Central Mediterranean Route (UNHCR, n.d.). **Italy's approach to migration is complex** because, while politically there exists an anti-immigrant sentiment from the government, Italy also desperately needs foreign workers to fill their labor shortages. The top nationalities coming to Italy include Bangladeshis (21.4%), Syrians (18.8%), Tunisians (11.6%), Egyptians (6.6%), and Guineans (5.4%) (UNHCR, n.d.).

ITALY



SPAIN

Spain was selected because it is one of the **main receiving countries** for migrants and refugees. The top countries of origin for migrants arriving in Spain are Mali (24%), Morocco (20%), Senegal (19%), Algeria (14%), Guinea (9%), among others (23%) (IOM DTM, n.d.). **The main migration routes to Spain are the West African route to the Canary Islands and the Western Mediterranean route to Southern Spain.** Migrants taking the West African route often start in Mali, Morocco, and Senegal, traveling through Mauritania and along the West African coast before reaching the Canary Islands. Migrants on the Western Mediterranean path originate from Mali, Morocco, Senegal, Algeria, and Guinea, travel through Niger, Morocco, and Algeria, and cross the Mediterranean Sea or go by land through the Strait of Gibraltar, and end up in Southern Spain (IOM DTM, n.d.; Council of the European Union, 2025). In 2024, there were over 63,970 arrivals, with 46,877 arriving through the Canary Islands (European Council of Refugees and Exiles, 2025; The Spain News, 2024).

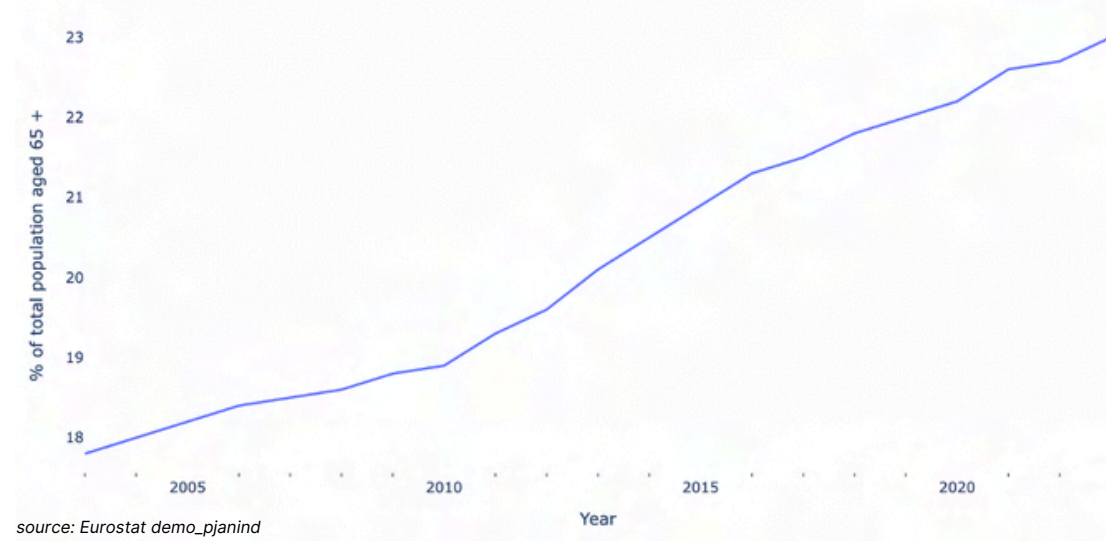
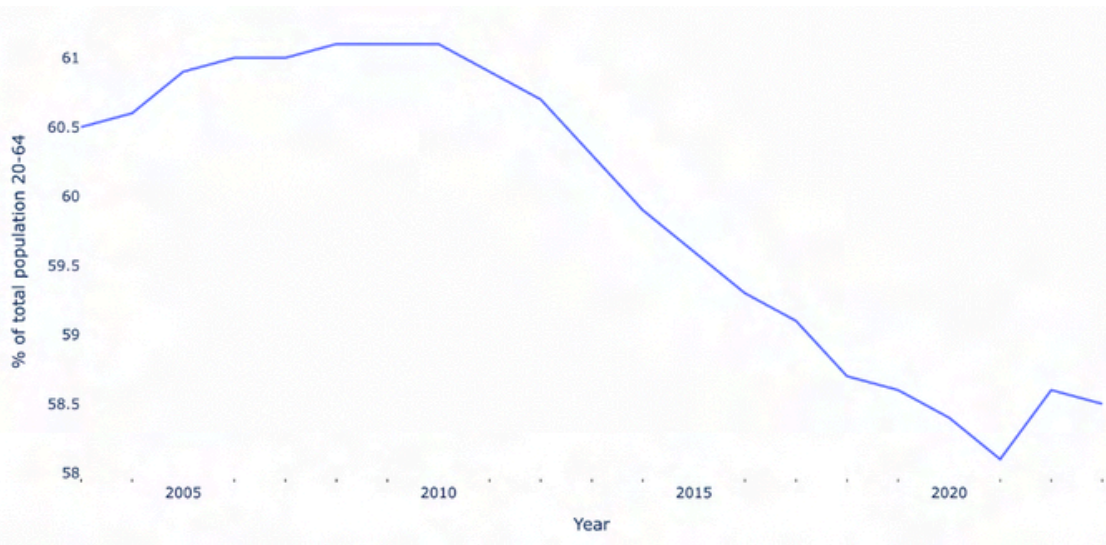


GERMANY



Germany was selected due to it being one of the **highest-receiving countries of migrants and refugees** across the EU. More specifically, Germany was the **second top destination** for migrants, after the U.S. with 8.9M in 2000 to 16M in 2020 (Destatis, n.d.). Given the current U.S. administration and changes to migration policy, this can put Germany at the top for receiving migrants and refugees. As of 2023-2024, the top countries of origin/nationalities coming to Germany are from Ukraine (14.3%), Romania (9.8%), Türkiye (6.5%), Poland (5.5%), Syria (5.3%), and Afghanistan (UNHCR, n.d. 2023; Statista, n.d.). Recent data has suggested that Germany needs 288,000 foreign workers annually until 2040 to prevent a 10% shortage in the German workforce. (DW.com, n.d.) **Data and studies show that the country relies heavily on migrants to fill in the labor gaps and help boost the national economy.** As one of the top-receiving countries, most migrants and refugees may be entering Germany through the **Western Balkan, the Central Mediterranean, and the Western Mediterranean routes** (Frontex, n.d.)

G R E E C E



source: Eurostat demo_pjanind

The population structure of Greece has changed dramatically over time

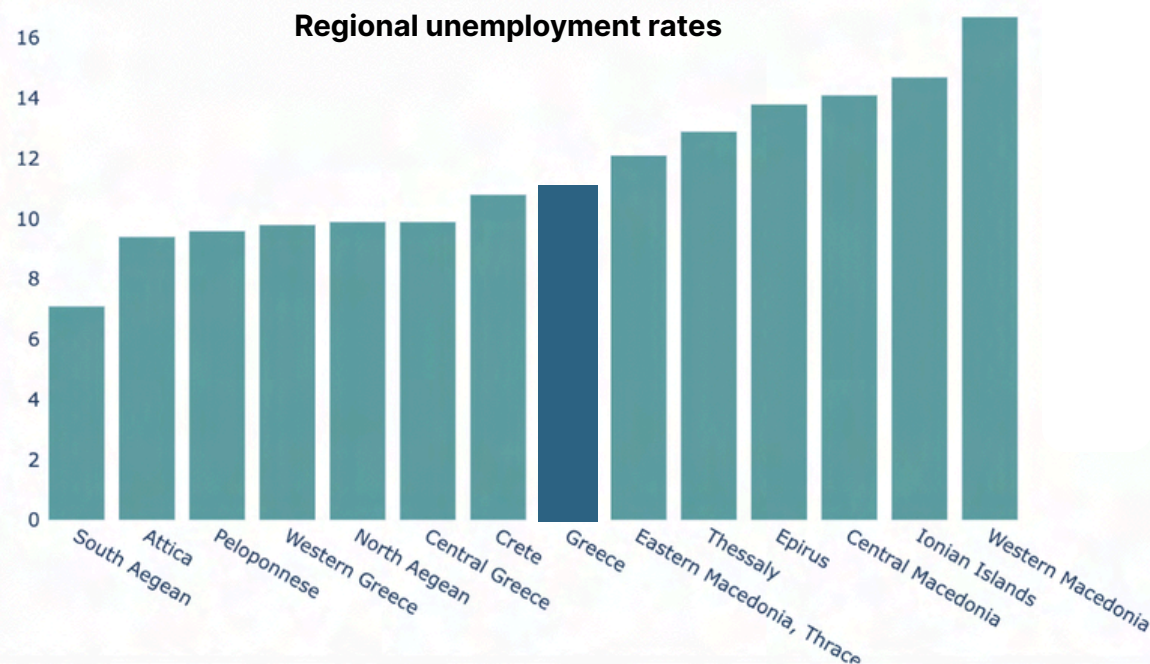
An influx of migrants post-2020 has increased the percentage of the working age population, however, difficulties in creating sustainable integration policies mean many migrants and refugees choose to leave Greece.

According to Pew Research Center, "Greece's population declined by about 500,000 people between 2000 and 2020, but it would have decreased by 700,000 if not for an increase in the country's foreign-born population." As a result, Greece cannot make up for its aging population through births alone. (Pew, 2024)

Greek unemployment is consistently above the EU average across all regions

The Greek Public Employment Service (DYPA) has expanded services aimed at recruiting young workers across Greece. Likewise, regions like Western Greece have subsidized businesses to ameliorate hiring across key sectors (Eurostat, 2024).

Greek politicians have acknowledged that failure to integrate migrants and refugees quickly into local economies reduces the potential for arrivals to stay in Greece, sustaining long standing labor shortages.



source: Eurostat Ifst_r_lfu3rt

GREECE

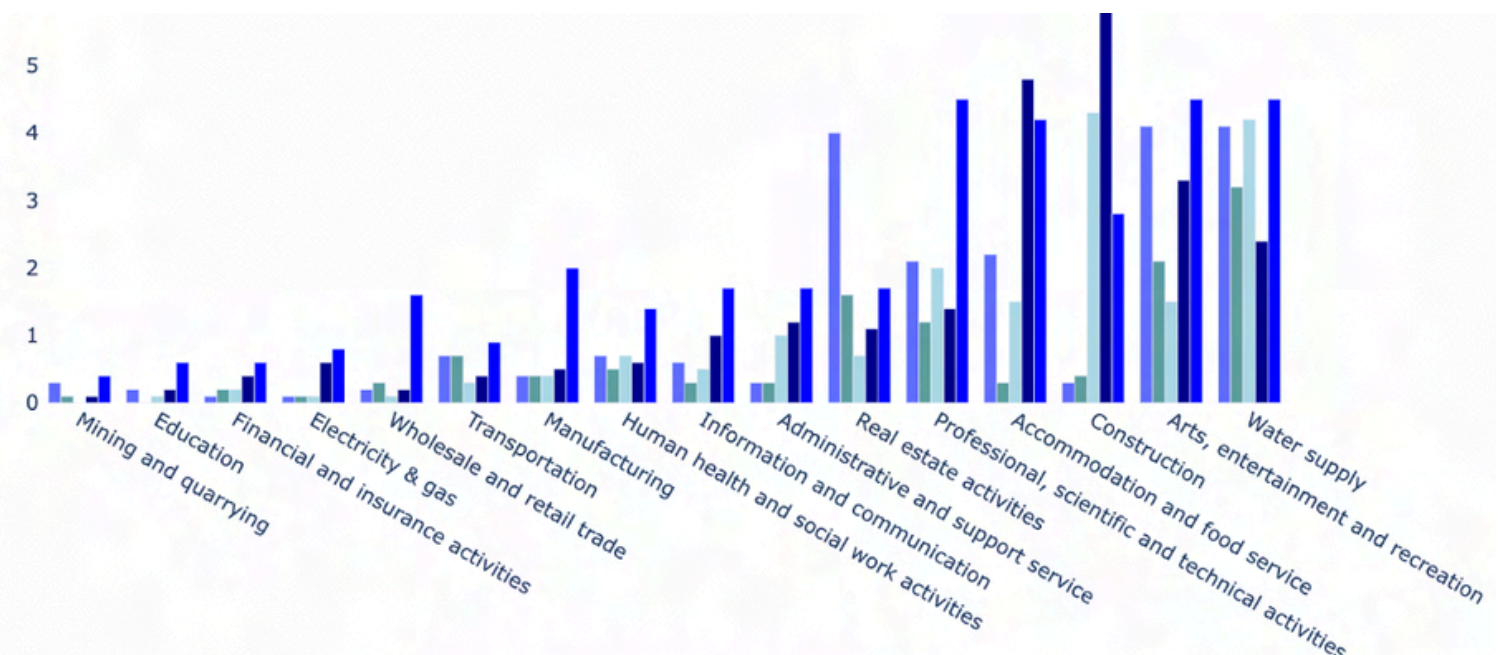


source: Eurostat

The Greek economy has shortages in low-skilled work across all regions

Shortages exist across all regions in **agricultural farming, tourism, and retail services**.

Greece is increasingly looking to countries in Asia and North Africa to provide the much-needed supply of labor. Agreements with third countries have risen to prominence in recent years as Greece seeks to attract foreign labor and plug gaps in different sectors. Reflecting the needs of the Greek economy, the emphasis has been on seasonal and temporary work, and predominantly on low-skilled rather than high-skilled labor.



Job vacancy rate by sector from 2019-2023

source: Eurostat

Vacancies exist across several low-skilled sectors including construction, accommodation, and food services

Vacancies have also been increasing over time in key sectors such as construction and food services. The sharpest increase between 2019-2023 can be seen in construction, water supply, and the service sector in accommodation and food services.

ITALY



source: Eurostat demo_pjanind

Italy faces difficult demographic challenges

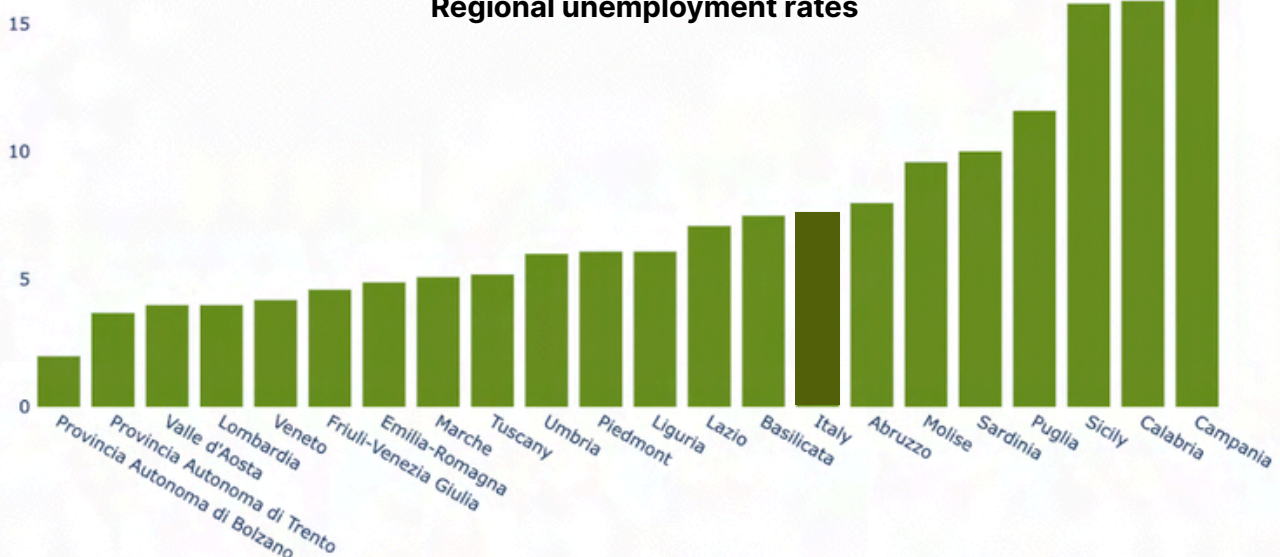
From the early 2000's, Italy began seeing a steep decline in 20-64 year olds, the primary working age population.

In contrast to this decline, Italy has seen an increase in the percent of the population aged 65 and over.

Unless policymakers implement policies aimed at offsetting these challenges, the declining working age population poses a threat to long-term economic prospects. These challenges include a reduction in the workforce, strain on the pension system, and lower tax revenue.

According to Istat, by 2050, Italy will have almost 5 million fewer people, with over a third being 65 and older.

Regional unemployment rates



source: Eurostat Ifst_r_lfu3rt

Unemployment is high across all Italian regions

Campania faces the highest unemployment rate with much of its economy being derived from the tourism and seasonal work sectors. The Italian unemployment rate has been consistently above the EU-27 average (~6.1% in 2023). There is often a disconnect between the skills Italian workers have and the needs of the economy, which primarily seeks low-skilled work. This drives the unemployment rate up in several regions.

ITALY



Regional Job Shortages Exist Largely in Low Skilled Sectors

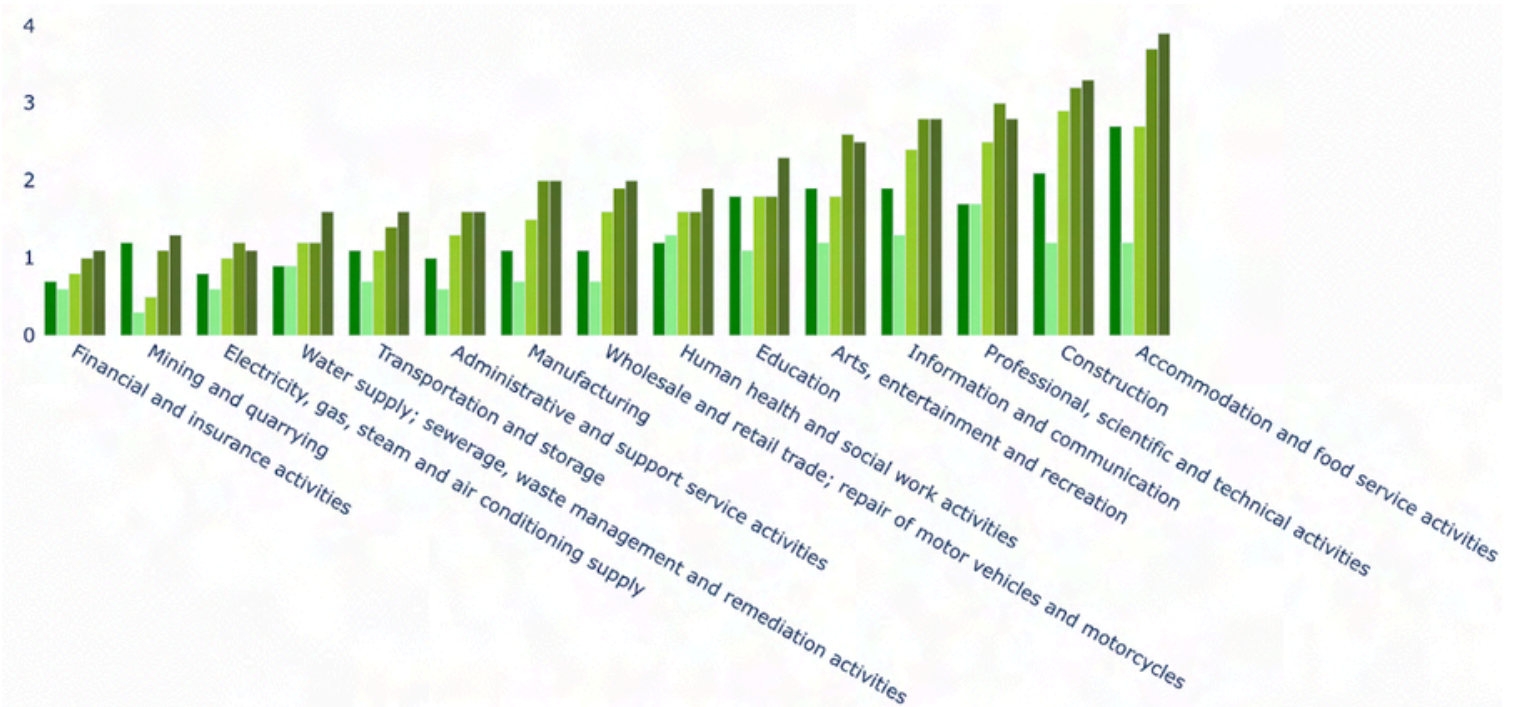
Shortages exist in sectors such as **services, tourism, and agriculture** across multiple regions in Italy.

Confindustria, the main association representing manufacturing and service companies in Italy, has recommended promoting action to foster the active inclusion of migrants in the Italian economy (European Commission, 2024)

The inclusion of migrants in the labor market is viewed as key to overcoming growing labor shortages in manufacturing and services.

According to Eurostat, in order to compensate for its shrinking labor force, **Italy would need to welcome at least 280,000 foreign workers a year until 2050.**

source: Eurostat



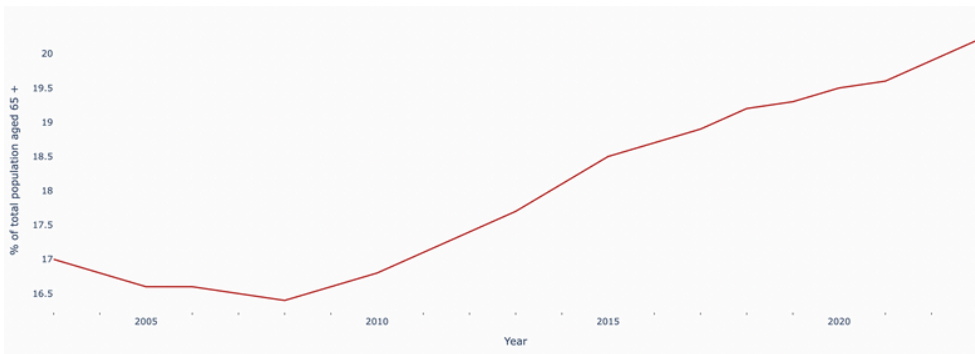
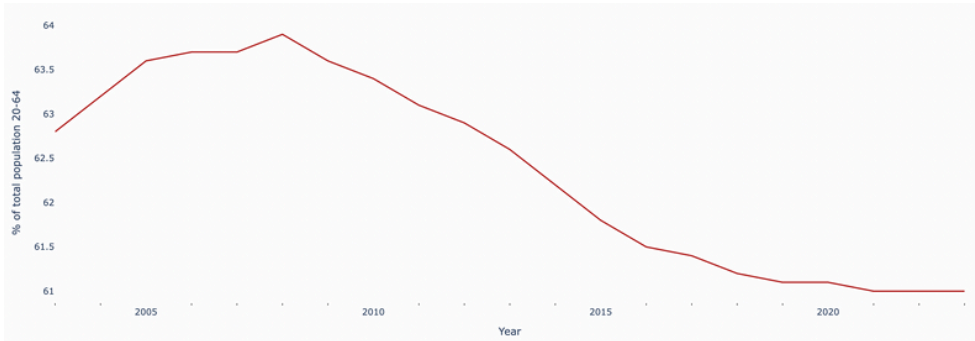
Job vacancy rate by sector from 2019-2023

source: Eurostat

Vacancies in Key Sectors Have Been Increasing Between 2019-2023

Top vacancies exist in accommodation and the food industry as well as construction sectors. Italian lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have agreed that migrants will be needed to fill these shortages and vacancies, with Prime Minister Meloni acknowledging that a quota of legal migration could make a "positive contributions to the economy." (Reuters, 2023)

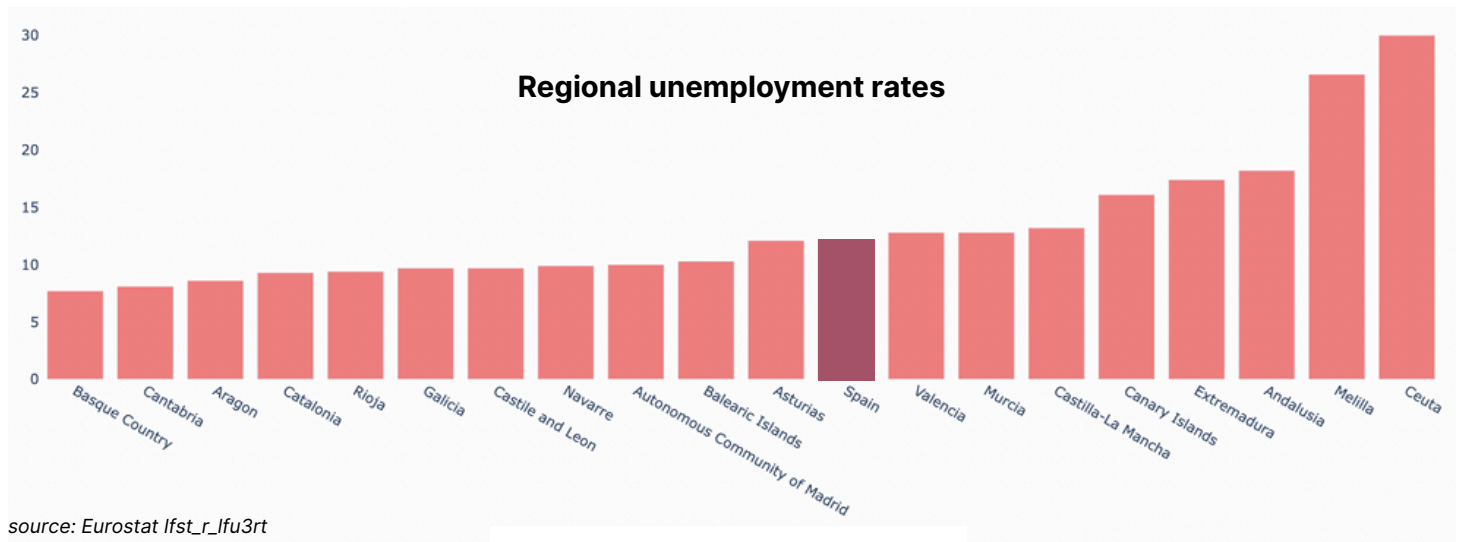
SPAIN



source: Eurostat demo_pjanind

Spain faces similar demographic challenges, however, they have seen some improvement over the last few years.

While Spain has largely seen the same demographic trends as the other countries, their birth rates have gone up for the first time in a decade. This is largely due to Spain's welcoming of migrants and refugees in recent years who have improved the demographic challenges faced over the last few years (Newsweek, 2025).



source: Eurostat lfst_r_lfu3rt

“Spain needs to choose between being an open and prosperous country or a closed-off, poor country. It's as simple as that.” - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez

Spain has faced consistently high unemployment rates across all regions, especially in Ceuta.

Recently, however, due to Spain's unique approach to migration, their unemployment rate has decreased to its lowest point since 2008 (Newsweek, 2025). Spain has sought to increase migration, viewing it as a means to improve their economic conditions, with the Prime Minister stating that Spain would need to choose between allowing migrants in or closing themselves off. As a result they would also need to choose whether they wanted to be a prosperous country through migration or a poor country without it (The Guardian, 2025).

SPAIN

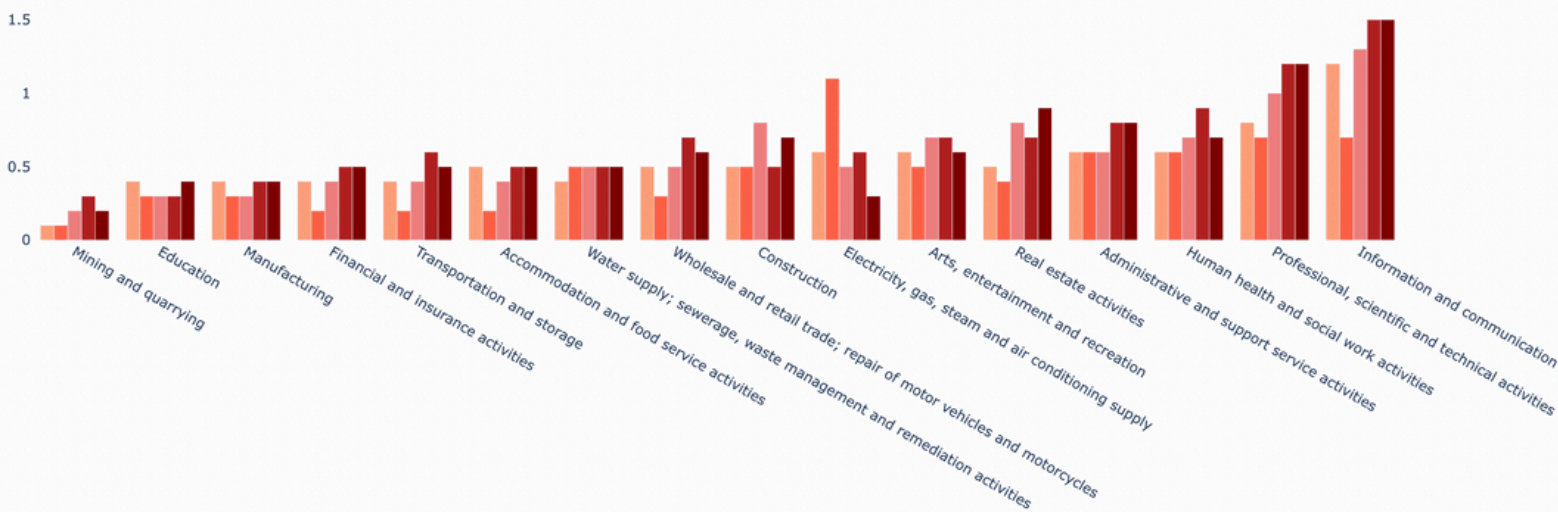
Shortages exist primarily in ICT, farm laborers, and construction

Spain has been proactive in seeking migration pathway programs and bilateral agreements to address its labor shortages. Those migration-related agreements include agreements with the Dominican Republic (2001), Ecuador (2001), Colombia (2001), Honduras (2021), Guatemala (2023).

This year, Spain introduced a new immigration rule that would grant residency to 900,000 undocumented migrants in the country over the next three years to help address a growing need for workers (The New York Times, 2025) (ODI, 2021).



source: Eurostat



Job vacancy rate by sector from 2019-2023

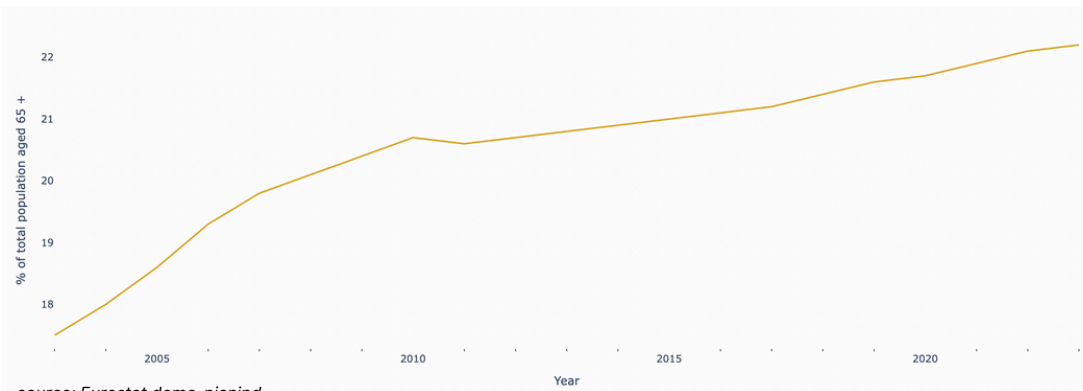
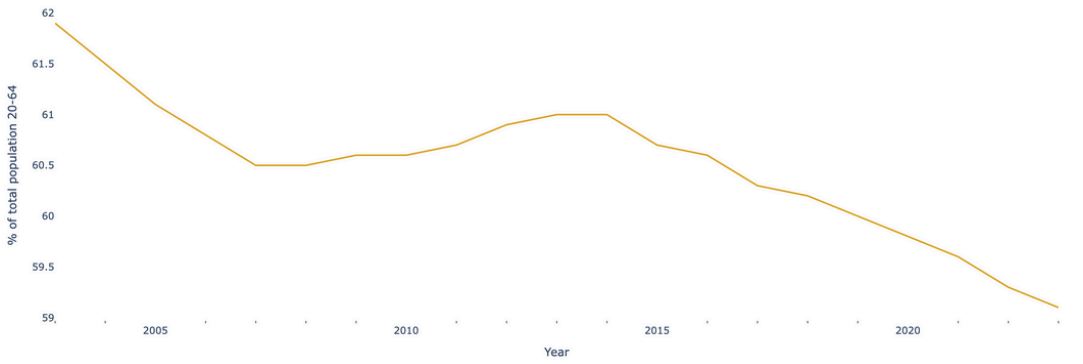
source: Eurostat

ICT, health work, and other professional activities have seen high spikes in job vacancies

Immigrants in Spain have filled both low-skilled vacancies in sectors such as construction and domestic care, as well as high skilled sectors, such as ICT. In ICT, migrant job growth more than doubled to 109,000 in 2023 from 2018. Immigrants working in hospitality also rose by 30% to 525,000 in 2023 from 2007 (Reuters, 2024).

Spain is currently experiencing a virtuous cycle due to migration: migrants enter and fill labor shortages across skill levels which boosts GDP, the supply of labor, and tax revenue (Reuters, 2024).

GERMANY



source: Eurostat demo_pjanind

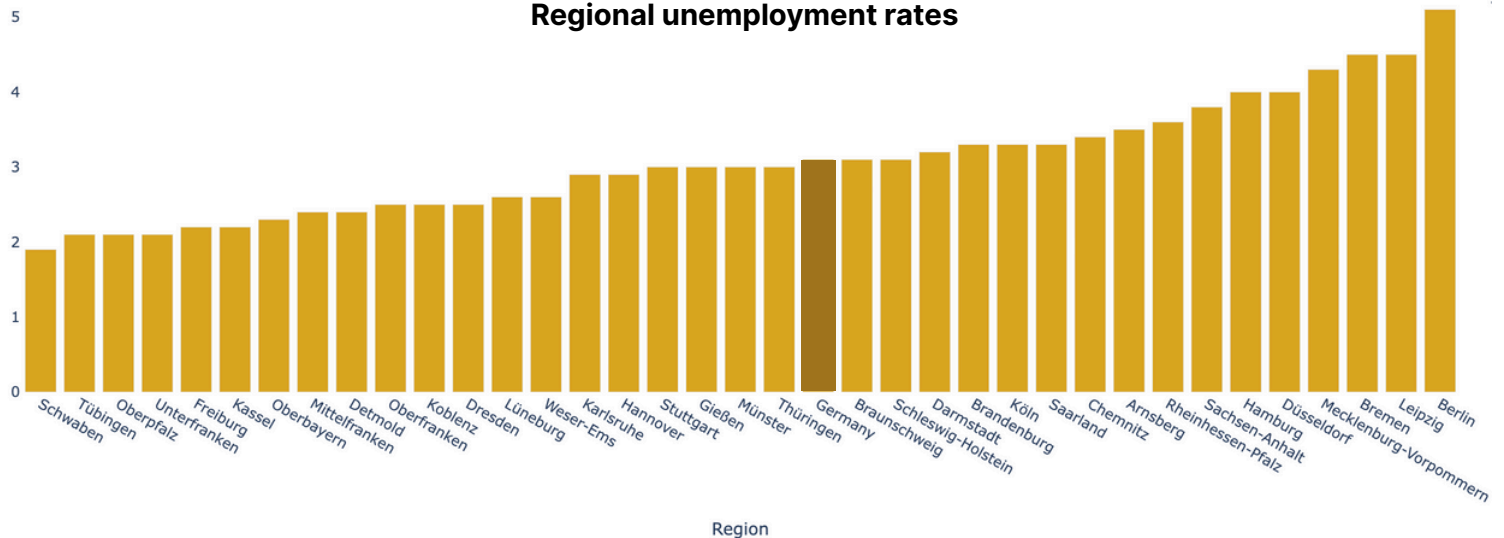
Germany faces a “demographic doom loop”

With a birthrate of 1.35, Germany, the EU’s most populous country, has recently passed the UN’s ultra-low threshold birth rate of 1.4 – where declining birth rates become difficult to reverse.

Poorer regions in Germany have entered a “demographic doom-loop,” characterized by shrinking and aging populations, reduced government capacity to meet growing needs, and stagnant economic growth. (The New York Times, 2025).

Germany saw a brief boost in their working age population due to an influx of migrants and refugees.

Regional unemployment rates



source: Eurostat lfst_r_lfu3rt

The German economy is marked by low economic growth and high unemployment

Germany’s economy contracted in 2024 for the second year in a row, pointing to wide-scale economic challenges. These include a growing unemployment rate, particularly in Berlin.

Germany has actively pursued various bilateral agreements and programs to facilitate legal migration pathways, addressing both labor market needs and international cooperation objectives. While political rhetoric often portrays migrants as overusing welfare systems and contributing to economic decline, evidence shows that migrants in Germany tend to have a high net fiscal impact—contributing more in revenue than they receive in benefits. Notably, second-generation migrants have an even higher net fiscal impact than the first generation (Sallam, Hend; Christl, Michael (2024). This points to the advantages of strong integration strategies, particularly through the labor market.

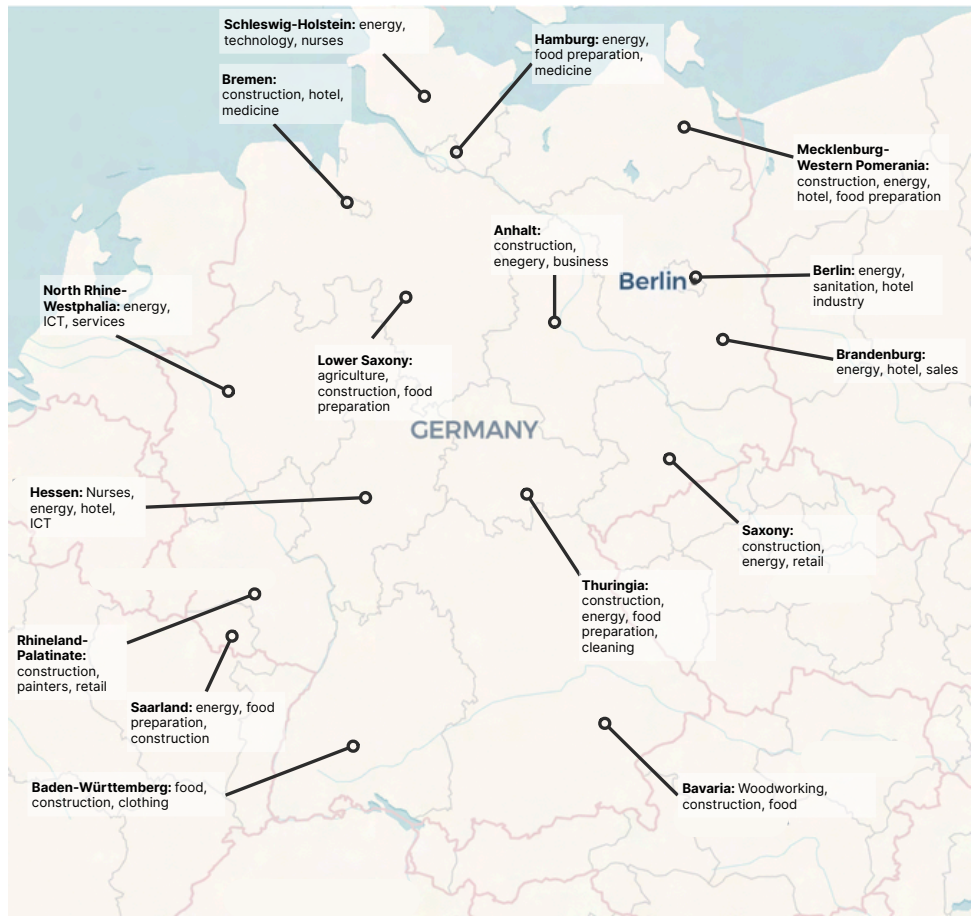
GERMANY

Shortages exist in both skilled and low-skilled sectors

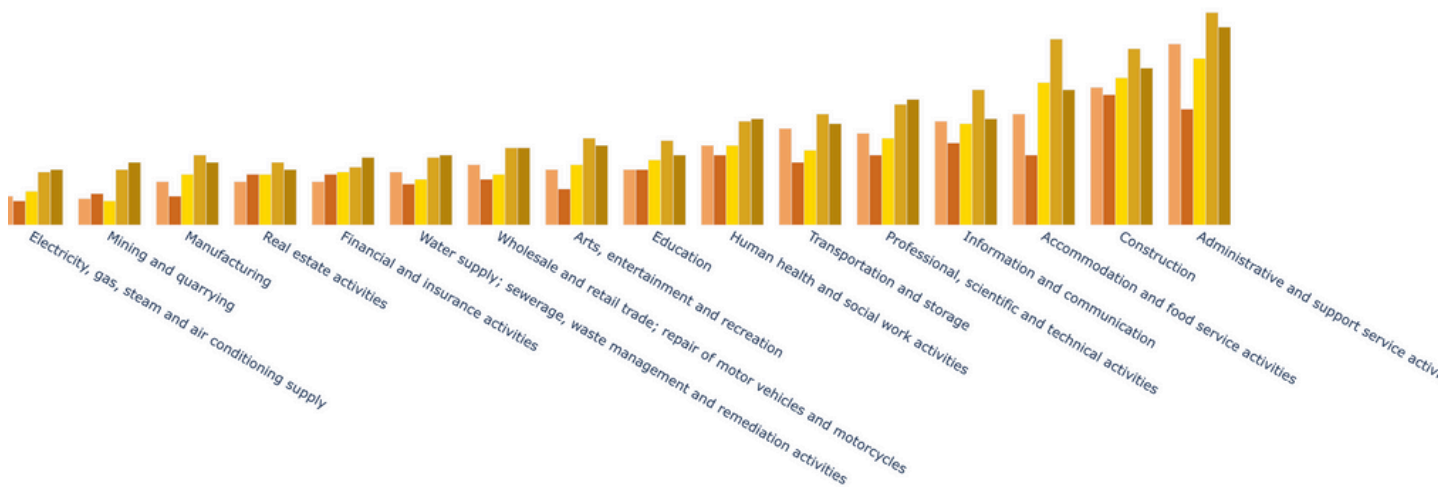
Germany's labor market shortages is marked by a mix of low-skilled jobs, such as in agriculture and retail, alongside high-skilled roles in sectors like ICT.

According to Destatis, the Federal Statistical Office, 26% of all employees in sectors with labor shortages had an immigrant background.

Workers with an immigrant background also make up most of the low-skilled sector, particularly in jobs with high shortages like construction.



source: Eurostat



source: Eurostat

Job vacancy rate by sector from 2019-2023

Administration, construction, and accommodations are the sectors with the most vacancies over time

A difficult aspect in filling these vacancies with migrant labor includes language and job training, both of which are also crucial to Germany's integration strategies. The Integration through Education and Work initiative—developed in collaboration with the Association of Bavarian Enterprises and the Federal Employment Agency (BA)—along with the ESF-BAMF program, aims to provide language training for migrants residing in Germany to support their integration into the labor market. The success of the ESF-BAMF pilot program allowed it to be permanently available as a service starting in 2016. These programs complement the proposed policy in this report as integration is a crucial step in resolving economic challenges and meeting the need of migrants once they are in their destination country.

CONCLUSION

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Final Remarks

From this project's inception, it was clear that in order to address such a pertinent topic in a feasible manner, a pilot program proposal would be the best way to convey a potential solution for the evolving migration flows towards the EU. Throughout the span of this project, the capstone team gathered an extensive amount of data and research that could easily serve as a strong foundation for further comprehensive analysis and recommendations on this subject, informing future projects with an even larger programmatic scope. Even at the pilot program level, based on the data gathered from the team's field research, this proposal holds strong potential solutions to addressing the major effects of migration to the EU.

In designing the pilot program for the project's client, ELIAMEP, the team aimed to directly address both the immediate challenges of labor pathways for migrants and protection avenues for refugees, while recognizing that this issue could also serve as a solution to broader issues facing the EU, such as labor shortages and demographic shifts. As such, the central research question that this policy proposal is centered on was: "How can a multilateral approach be designed to effectively manage the EU's migration challenges while addressing its labor needs?" In addressing this question, the report proposes the Mobility, Protection, & Labor Program (MPLP) as the policy mechanism to facilitate safe, lawful migration to the EU through the establishment of physical centres, called Mobility, Protection, & Labor Centres (MPLCs) in specified transit locations along key migration routes. The program and its centres are intended to serve as an enhanced version of the former SMI and SMOs, and by changing its target populations, this will enable it to serve a broader array of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers on the move. This targeting approach is made especially crucial in order to ensure any such program is serving the populations that intend to enter the EU through otherwise irregular and dangerous routes. As seen under the mechanism description, these centres would serve as critical entry points for both protection and labor-based migration pathways to the EU, helping reduce the use of irregular pathways through this innovative approach.

Asylum Seeker: In the global context, a person who seeks protection from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments.

CBP: (United States) Customs and Border Protection

Complementary Pathways: migration pathways with built-in refugee-specific flexibilities which allow refugees to access work, study and other opportunities.

EEAS: European External Action Service

ELIAMEP: Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy

EU: European Union

EUAA: European Union Agency for Asylum

EU M.S.: EU Member States

EU-27: The 27 Member States of the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.)

ICT: Information and communication technology

Irregular Migration: Movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries.

Legal Pathways: Refers to every lawful way in which people can move from a third country to an EU Member State, for various reasons, such as work, study, family reunification, or protection needs.

Migrant: A person who moved across borders, usually for a variety of reasons other than fear of persecution, such as labor and economic factors.

MPLC: Mobility, Protection & Labor Centre

MPLP: Mobility, Protection & Labor Program

People on the move: Any person who is crossing borders or relocating within their country, whether voluntarily or forcibly, temporarily or permanently, including migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons.

Protection: All actions needed to uphold the rights of refugees, displaced, and stateless persons, such as their safety, legal recognition, non-discrimination, and access to asylum.

Refugee: In the global context, either a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned before, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

SMI: Safe Mobility Initiative

SMO: Safe Mobility Office

USCIS: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

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