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TAPPING INTO GLOBAL TALENT – PUTTING THE EU TALENT PARTNERSHIPS IN MOTION

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One of the innovative tools proposed by the EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum is the Talent Partnerships conceived as a single framework aiming to “offer cooperation with partner countries and help boost mutually-beneficial international mobility”. In this expert voice series, ICMPD explores how Talent Partnerships could be shaped, put in motion and brought to fruition by sharing experience, research findings and practices. In this first article, reflections are made on the lessons learnt from the implementation of several Pilot Projects on Legal Migration, within the framework of ICMPD’s Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF), funded by the European Commission, Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).

Learning from the first generation of the MPF-funded pilot projects

In 2018, as a response to the EU Migration Agenda, the [Mobility Partnership Facility \(MPF\)](#) was mandated by DG HOME to support a series of pilot projects aiming to test modalities of cooperation in the area of legal migration between EU Member States and priority countries. To date, [four pilot projects have been funded](#) – coordinated by Belgium, France, Lithuania and Spain - focusing on North Africa and Nigeria.

As a tried and tested, flexible and scalable mechanism with a track record in fostering cooperation on migration, the MPF is well placed to further accompany the EU in designing and implementing the Talent Partnerships through knowledge, research, networks, coordination and its operational ‘powerhouse’ that finances partnerships on legal/labour migration.

The MPF-funded Pilot Projects’ experience and emerging practices suggest that the upcoming Talent Partnerships would need to consider the following critical aspects:

- Enabling environments - many partner countries do not (yet) have the appropriate institutional and legal frameworks and infrastructure in place to implement and pilot fully-fledged mobility schemes with EU MS. Hence, dedicated opportunities for research, preparation and incubation of pilot partnerships should be offered that could

help create an enabling environment for the implementation of sustainable legal pathways.

- Bridging the gaps between the public and private sectors by engaging with their mandates, needs, motivations, expectations and interests. Private sector engagement remains a key aspect that makes or breaks the success of a Pilot Project. More structural engagement and exchange with relevant bodies (such as chambers of commerce, employers' associations and others), and investment into trust building, are needed in both national and international contexts.
- The matching of skills to the demands in both EU and partner country labour markets remain complex and challenging. Competencies often formally lie with public employment services which have insufficient capacities. A mixed approach, based on timely research on skills, making the most of the breadth of available technological tools, should be encouraged to help systematise approaches.
- A dedicated monitoring and evaluation framework for mobility initiatives with specific and measurable qualitative objectives and indicators is indispensable to foster learning, and demonstrate the impact and added value of the talent partnerships – looking beyond mere numbers of mobility beneficiaries as a measurement of success.

Paving the ground for the Talent Partnerships

The Talent Partnerships represent a tremendous potential cooperation instrument between the EU and its key partner countries, yet their conceptualisation would need to be predicated on the following dimensions:

1. Inclusive and multi-stakeholder partnerships with tailored-made mobility schemes

The only way to achieve meaningful outcomes and impact is to involve a wide range of institutions, actors and networks in partnerships. The Pact makes clear reference to several actors, yet the modalities to bring them into the process are still to be defined. The most suitable skills and mobility schemes, that take into consideration these actors' potential, capacities and interests, are yet to be designed and eventually tested out. In this respect, skills mobility schemes with circular movements and additional practical elements of support (internships, vocational training, mentoring, business development, entrepreneurship, diaspora engagement, apprenticeship) can help leverage more positive effects in both countries of origin and destination. Nevertheless, simplicity of design is often key to ensuring that pilot initiatives can be scaled up, replicated and transformed into permanent legal pathways that can be sustained without public funding.

2. Enabling ecosystems, robust and coherent multi-stakeholder governance

The success of the Talent Partnerships will be contingent upon the institutional capacities, policy and legislative frameworks, administrative practices, institutional infrastructure, and overall migration governance structures in the key countries and EU Member States. The more advanced and well-structured the conducive environments and the cooperation frameworks are, the smoother the facilitation and implementation of talent partnerships could be.

Suitable enabling ecosystems, which incorporate a wide spectrum of constituents, policy areas and dimensions, are essential to pave the ground for increased communication, collaboration, engagement and cooperation across the board or coherence between institutions, sectors and policies. They also facilitate relevant processes and stages (e.g. skills intelligence, matching, pre-departure, visa, mobility, integration, upskilling/reskilling, return and reintegration, etc.), build common understanding, as well as enable the management of expectations and interests.

Coordination of all interventions in countries of origin, in EU Member States and in Brussels should be strengthened to ensure strategic engagement with partner countries across policy or project boundaries. Governance structures within projects or at local level should be used to ensure and make the most of multi-stakeholder dialogue and participation. Any enabling environment will need to benefit from tailor-made, peer-to-peer capacity development and technical assistance measures.

3. Better local contextualisation and ownership in partner countries

The selected regions - the EU's Neighbourhood, the Western Balkans, and Africa - have been long promoting legal pathways with the EU (including within the Mobility Partnerships framework), hence their engagement in the upcoming Talent Partnerships is expected to be unproblematic. Apart from understanding the opportunities and challenges of their institutional environments, it will be salient to further understand their development, labour market and migration priorities and other needs with due consideration to avoiding brain drain, investing in their human resources capital and strengthening their enabling systems (e.g. vocational education training, emigration procedures, etc.).

In turn, this should build more confidence between partners, facilitate the implementation of partnerships and, very importantly, ensure full ownership of the partner countries throughout the entire lifetime of partnerships. Partner countries should be given a strong voice as far as their priorities, coordination and engagement modalities are concerned. Ownership is also

key when it comes to ensuring flexibility and adaptability of partnerships, based on research, labour market developments, the dynamics in the private sector, and monitoring and evaluation.

Therefore, the creation or consolidation of formal settings for the purpose of coordination with a wider range of entities in the area of labour migration should be favoured. Deliberate and strategic engagement has already proved to be effective in fostering the ownership of different stakeholders in broader consultative contexts (such as for Mobility Partnerships) in the recent past. Learnings from these processes can inform the set-up of new and more targeted platforms for engagement on skills and mobility.

More information about the lessons learnt of the MPF actions could be found in this [Policy Brief](#).

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