

**ICMPD Working Paper**

# **Retention of International Students/Graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands**

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2019

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Vienna, Austria, 2019

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This document has been produced within the framework of the “Labour Migration Strategy in Poland” project with funding by the European Union via the Structural Reform Support Programme. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Polish Ministry of Investment and Economic Development, the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Statistics Poland and the European Commission’s Structural Reform Support Service.

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinions of the European Union or the Polish institutions involved in the project.

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## Executive summary

- Ageing populations and (projected) labour shortages in many highly industrialized countries have turned the attention of policy-makers, university managers, and industry leaders to international students as an interesting group to attract and retain post-graduation. This notion is echoed by the majority of international students who would like to stay and work.
- In order to retain more international students after graduation, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands have introduced new or reformed existing post-study work schemes, thereby lifting many of the bureaucratic obstacles to employment and (in the case of Canada and Germany) providing a fast-track to permanent residence.
- The experiences in all three countries show, however, that policies alone are not enough to retain more international graduates; neither are isolated support services, which in many cases escape the radar of most international students and graduates.
- In order to help international students and graduates transition to host country employment, universities, employers, local governments, employment services, and other relevant local actors need to reassess and better coordinate their job entry assistance.

# Introduction

Ageing populations and (projected) labour shortages in many highly industrialized countries have turned the attention of policy-makers, university<sup>1</sup> managers, and industry leaders to international students<sup>2</sup> as an interesting group to attract and retain post-graduation (OECD 2011). Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands are no exception. Over the past decade, the three countries have not only advanced to rank among the world's most popular study destinations for international students,<sup>3</sup> but they have also made wide-ranging legislative changes in order to retain more international students after they finish their studies. These legislative changes appear to have been successful – the majority of international students plan to stay after graduation.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands were chosen for cross-country comparison as their individual experiences with the study-migration pathway hold valuable insights for the talent retention efforts of other study destinations. While Canada can look back at its years-long experience with recruiting fee-paying international students and, subsequently, retaining them via a plethora of policy instruments, Germany and the Netherlands are relative newcomers when it comes to competitive student recruitment and fostering post-study retention (cp. Hanganu and Heß 2014; Klabunde 2014; SER 2013). As this paper shows, since 2005, all three countries have introduced and expanded the post-study work rights of 'their' international graduates as well as their paths to permanent residency (Section 1.1). So far, however, policy outcomes have highlighted that legal changes are necessary, but insufficient. Today and going forward, additional practical measures are needed to help international graduates not only to stay, but also to find adequate employment (Section 1.2). In Section 2, said practical measures taken by universities as well as employers, governments, and NGOs are analyzed for a sample of 208 Canadian, German, and Dutch universities and their surrounding communities. Underpinned by examples of good practice from all three countries, the findings underline the necessity of a more coordinated effort to retain international graduates in host country labour markets, as is further elaborated on in the concluding Section 3.

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**1** In this paper, the term 'university' is used generically to encompass research universities, universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen/hogescholen*), colleges and all other educational establishments which issue state-accredited post-secondary degrees at ISCED 2011 levels 5 to 8 (UNESCO 2012).

**2** International students are those who have crossed borders for the purpose of study. Once they obtain their degree they become international graduates (cp. Knight 2006).

**3** In 2017, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reported a total of 370,710 international students in Canada (CBIE 2019). In Germany, the total number of international students in higher education was 282,000 in 2018 (DZHW/DAAD 2019). In the same year in the Netherlands, the total enrolment amounted to 85,955 (Nuffic 2019). In all three countries, international students make up roughly 10% of all students in higher education.

**4** In Germany, 80% of international master's students intend to stay and work after finishing their studies. In the Netherlands, 64% of international master's students (64 %) entertain similar intentions, and in Canada, 61% of international students plan to stay (Esses *et al.* 2018; Sykes and Chaoimh 2012).



# 1. Regulatory measures to retain international graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands

## 1.1 Government policies

The idea of attracting and retaining international students by cultivating study-migration pathways has become a much-regarded policy issue in a number of highly-industrialized countries (Hawthorne 2008; 2010; Arthur and Flynn 2011; Klabunde 2014; Chira and Belkhodja 2013). In the past ten to fifteen years, policy-makers in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands have introduced and expanded the post-study work rights of international graduates as well as their paths to permanent residency.

### *Post-study work rights of international graduates*

While overall, Canadian, German, and Dutch regulations are reflective of a growing international consensus around the economic benefits of retaining more international graduates as skilled workers, their post-study schemes differ slightly, as the following brief comparison illustrates (see also Table 1):<sup>5</sup>

- **Canada:** According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2018), “[Canada’s] immigration focus has shifted to view international students as more than temporary residents, but also as a source of temporary workers and a pool of potential permanent residents.” In order to encourage more international students to stay and work in Canada, the federal government introduced the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) programme in 2005. The programme has been designed to help international graduates gain Canadian work experience by temporarily exempting them – and especially their employers – from much of the paperwork involved in hiring other skilled migrants. For example, a Canadian employer can hire a PGWP holder without having to pass a labour market test, which would require her or him to prove that no Canadian worker had been found to fill the position. Unlike the German and Dutch regulations, which are more geared towards professional orientation after graduation,<sup>6</sup> Canada’s PGWP is advertised

<sup>5</sup> For Germany and the Netherlands, the following comparison of salient regulations will focus on non-European students and graduates, since EU/EEA and Swiss citizens already enjoy free movement within the European Union. Currently, only about one third of all international students in Germany originate from a member state of the EU, the EEA or Switzerland. In the Netherlands, the share of EU/EEA/Swiss students is much higher at around 75% (DAAD/DZHW 2019; Nuffic 2019).

<sup>6</sup> The Dutch and German regulations denote national interpretations of EU law, the most recent being Article 25 of EU Directive 2016/801 of 11 May 2016, which provides that “after the completion of research or studies, researchers and students shall have the possibility to stay on the territory of the Member State [...] for a period of at least nine months in order to seek employment or set up a business.”

as an open work permit which is issued for the length of an applicant's study programme, up to 36 months (IRCC 2019a). In this way, Canadian employers are encouraged to hire international graduates and thereby help them gain the skilled work experience needed to apply directly for permanent residence.

- **Germany:** Germany's so far unnamed post-study scheme (officially referred to as Section 16 subs. 5 Residence Act) initially allowed international graduates to stay and look for skilled employment for up to 12 months. In 2012, seven years after the introduction of the scheme, this search period was extended to 18 months.<sup>7</sup> During this time, international graduates are permitted to work in any job – skilled or unskilled – without any restrictions on work hours and without prior approval from immigration or labour market authorities. Once an international graduate finds a German employer who is willing to sponsor his or her subsequent work permit, the graduate is encouraged to make this status change (to work permit holder) soon after – provided that the job qualifies as skilled labour and requires a university degree. Here too, the employer is exempt from proving that the position could not be filled by a German or European candidate (*Vorrangprüfung*).
- **The Netherlands:** Since 2007, international graduates have enjoyed privileged access to the Dutch labour market. Once graduated from a Dutch university or a university of applied sciences (*hogeschool*), they are eligible for an Orientation Year (*Zoekjaar afgestudeerde*) throughout which they can stay and look for skilled employment. During this time, international graduates are free to work without prior approval from Dutch authorities. Once they find a job that pays more than 2,364 euros per month (gross)<sup>8</sup> graduates are encouraged to switch to a work permit. International graduates can commence their Orientation Year up to three years after finishing their studies in the Netherlands. Unlike in Canada and Germany, the Dutch post-study scheme is also open to international graduates from selected institutions abroad. Non-European holders of a master's degree or a PhD from a top 200 foreign university are also invited to participate in the Orientation Year for up to three years after graduation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Germany's newly proposed Skilled Workers Immigration Law (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*), which was tabled in the federal parliament (*Bundestag*) in the spring of 2019, does not include any substantial changes to the post-study work rights of international students in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag 2019).

<sup>8</sup> All other labour migrants who seek to enter or remain in the Netherlands are required to earn a minimum of 3,299 euros per month if under the age of 30. For those aged 30 or older, a higher minimum of 4,500 euros applies. Applicants for an EU Blue Card are required to earn a minimum of 5,272 euros per month (IND 2019a).

<sup>9</sup> The top 200 universities are determined with the help of major university rankings: Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities. (IND 2019a)



Table 1.

**Key characteristics of post-study work schemes for international graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands 2019**

	Canada	Germany	The Netherlands
Post-study scheme	Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP)	Section 16 subs. 5 Residence Act ( <i>Aufenthaltserlaubnis zur Arbeitsplatzsuche</i> )	Orientation Year ( <i>Zoekjaar afgestudeerde</i> )
Maximum duration of stay	Up to 36 months (largely depending on length of study programme)	18 months	12 months
Permitted working hours	Full-time employment, self-employment	Full-time employment, self-employment	Full-time employment, self-employment
Labour market test	Not required	Not required	Not required
Target group	All international graduates of eligible Canadian colleges and universities	All international graduates of German universities	All international graduates of Dutch universities and highly-ranked universities abroad
Eligibility period	Within 180 days of completing a full-time study programme in Canada	Until 4 weeks before study permit expires	Within 3 years of graduation
Special privileges for international graduates	Priority access to permanent residence (extra points in Express Entry application)	Fast-track to permanent residence (after two years of skilled labour/self-employment)	Lower salary requirements for subsequent work permit

**Note:** A labour market test is a verification process whereby host country authorities assess an offer of employment to ensure that the employment of a foreign worker will not have a negative impact on the local labour market. The Dutch and German schemes only apply to students who are not citizens of the European Union, the European Economic Area or Switzerland.

Source: Author's compilation.

### *Paths to permanent residency for international graduates*

The post-study work schemes in Table 1 were created with the goal of putting international graduates in a better position to apply for permanent residence. By lifting many of the bureaucratic obstacles to employment and by giving graduates extra time these schemes seek to facilitate host country work experience – a key prerequisite for permanent residence in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands:

- **Canada:** International graduates are given multiple options to become permanent residents of Canada. Depending on where in Canada they have studied or where they are planning to live afterwards, graduates can apply through three different federal programmes or two provincial programmes (Table 2). For many, a preferred path is the Canadian Experience Class (CEC). Through CEC, an international graduate can be granted permanent residence once he or she has secured an offer for continued employment after a minimum 12 months of skilled full-time work and has met the language requirements in English or French (IRCC 2019b). In order to achieve this, many international graduates are given a generous time window of up to three years through the aforementioned Post-Graduate Work Permit programme. The CEC and the other two federal programmes, the Federal Skilled Workers Program and the Federal Skilled Traders Program are all managed through Express Entry, Canada’s online application system for skilled workers. In Express Entry, international graduates are ranked against other skilled migrants based on their work experience, language ability, and education, among others. International graduates receive extra points for their post-secondary education in Canada. For some international graduates, Canada’s Provincial Nominee Programs provide an even more direct path to permanent residency, in some cases one that doesn’t even require post-study work experience. Unlike in Germany and the Netherlands, where immigration is a national policy issue, Canada’s thirteen provinces and territories possess the legislative power to design their own tailored immigration streams. One example is the Career Employment Pathway in Manitoba’s Provincial Nominee Program, which – similarly to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot in Table 2 – does not require applicants to have any work experience if they have a job offer in an occupation that is in high demand (Province of Manitoba 2019).

Table 2.

**Paths to permanent residency for international graduates in Canada, eligibility requirements 2019**

	Canadian Experience Class	Federal Skilled Workers Program	Federal Skilled Traders Program	Provincial Nominee Program	Atlantic Immigration Pilot
Work experience in Canada	Required, minimum 12 months	Required, minimum 12 months (continuous)	Required, minimum 24 months (within last 5 years)	Depends on Province	Not required
Job Offer	Not required	Not required	Required	Depends on Province	Required
Canadian Post-Secondary Education	Not required, but degree holders can receive extra immigration points	Not required, but degree holders can receive extra immigration points	Not required, but degree holders can receive extra immigration points	Depends on Province	Required, degree must be issued by public colleges and universities in Atlantic Canada

**Notes:** Canada's Atlantic Provinces comprise New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

Source: Author's compilation.

- Germany:** International graduates with a certain amount of German work experience after graduation can access two different pathways to permanent residence. First, they can utilize the fast-track provided for by Section 18b of Germany's Residence Act, which provides that after two years of skilled employment or self-employment and attainment of intermediate German language skills, a permanent residence permit can be issued (as opposed to the five-year requirement for most other migrants). The second path is through the EU Blue Card, which is an EU-wide work permit for highly-skilled migrants. Blue Card holders can apply for permanent residence after 33 months of skilled employment. This period can be reduced to 21 months if the Blue Card holder possesses intermediate German language skills. To obtain an EU Blue Card, international graduates must earn a minimum of 53,600 euros per year (gross) or, in the case of graduates in shortage professions such as engineering or information and communication technology, a gross income of 41,808 euros per year (BAMF 2019).

- **The Netherlands:** Unlike in Canada and Germany, international graduates in the Netherlands do not enjoy preferred access to permanent residence. Like other migrant groups, international graduates can apply for permanent residence once they can prove five years of lawful residence in the Netherlands along with sufficient Dutch language skills and knowledge about Dutch culture. Half of the years as a student in the Netherlands are counted against the five-year residence requirement, whereas the Orientation Year does not (IND 2019b). In addition, Dutch employers face financial obstacles to employing international graduates. In order to retain an international graduate beyond her or his Orientation Year, businesses are obliged to pay a one-time fee of 3,927 euros to the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) in order to be recognized as a sponsor for said graduate. For start-up companies and small businesses this fee can be reduced to 1,963 euros (IND 2019c).

## 1.2

### Policy outcomes: Successes and shortcomings

The question of whether or not or to what extent the government policies in Section 1.1 are successful can be answered in many different ways. Over the past decade, the calculation of national, subnational, and supranational stay rates has advanced to become the most common measure of policy success in this area (cp. Weisser 2015; Hanganu 2015; SVR 2015; OCED 2011). Inspired by the OCED's (2011) calculation of stay rates of international students in 14 popular host countries,<sup>10</sup> numerous country- and region-specific studies were conducted in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and beyond (see, for example, Weisser 2015; Nuffic 2018; Lokhande 2017; Ruiz 2014; New Zealand Ministry of Education 2017). In the absence of an international consensus on how to statistically measure the post-study retention of international students, even the stay rates for a single country can differ widely based on which data sources and observation periods are being used to calculate said rates (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015; Weisser 2015; Burkhart *et al.* 2014). For the three countries under investigation, the most established and up to date stay rates are as follows:

- **Canada:** Given the Canadian government's explicit goal of increasing the post-study retention of international graduates (Scott *et al.* 2015), Canada's stay rates are generally conceptualized as the share of (former) international students who transition to permanent residency (PR). Recent calculations by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2018) confirm that around 25% of international graduates achieve PR status. Among those who enter the Post-Graduation Work Permit programme the share is as high as 70%, highlighting the (quantitative) effectiveness of this pathway.
- **Germany:** So far, most of the stay rates of international students in Germany have been calculated based on data from the Central Register of Foreigners (*Ausländerzentralregister*, AZR), Germany's official source of immigration statistics (Mayer *et al.* 2012; Hanganu and Heß 2014;

<sup>10</sup> The OECD (2011) defined the stay rate as the proportion of student permit holders changing to a status other than 'student' during the years 2008 or 2009 to the number of international students not renewing their student permits in the same year. As such, it represents the share of students staying on for any conceivable reason, not necessarily those who enter the labour market or stay on a longer-term basis. According to the OECD, Canada was most successful at retaining its international students (33%), while Germany and the Netherlands ranked in mid-table (26% and 27% respectively).

Hanganu 2015). These data show that by October 2014, 54% of former international students<sup>11</sup> from non-European countries were still living in Germany and had changed to a different residence permit, including work permits, family-based residence permits, and permanent residency (Hanganu 2015).<sup>12</sup>

- **The Netherlands:** Calculations from the Netherlands confirm that short-term stay rates are generally higher than medium- to long-term rates. The data from the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics show that by 2013, 49% of international graduates were still living in the Netherlands one year after finishing their studies. For graduates with non-EEA<sup>13</sup> citizenship, the rate was as high as 67%. Of those who had graduated five years earlier, 25% (and 39% of non-EEA graduates) were still present in the Netherlands (Nuffic 2018).

The growing body of literature on the post-study retention of international graduates shows that stay rates are only *one* (insufficient) measure of policy success (Scott *et al.* 2015; Morris-Lange and Brands 2015; Weisser 2015). Many ‘stayers’ soon realize that their extended stay does not necessarily lead to skilled employment. The job search experiences of stayers in Germany are a case in point. More than one year after obtaining their German degree, 30% of all remaining international members of the graduating classes of 2011 and 2012 were still searching for employment in Germany: 12% of them were unemployed, 9% worked part-time and 9% were looking for a new job while working full-time. If the latter group is excluded, close to one-quarter of all stayers were without a job or full-time position for more than one year after leaving higher education.<sup>14</sup> Among German graduates that share was lower than 5% (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015). In the Netherlands, 55% of international graduates were not employed more than one year after finishing their studies (Nuffic 2018). And in Canada, when surveyed, many of the international graduates who participated in the Post-Graduation Work Permit programme worked only part-time and/or for a low income (IRCC 2018). These aggregate data confirm the findings from several local studies which show that many international graduates experience significantly larger obstacles than their domestic counterparts when trying to find adequate employment (see, for example, Chira and Belkhodja 2013; Arthur and Flynn 2011; SER 2013; Arajärvi and Drubig 2014; Scott *et al.* 2015). And while their medium- to long-term labour market outcomes are by and large comparable to those of domestic graduates (Fabian 2014; Schomburg and Kooij 2014; Nuffic 2018), the initial obstacles cause many would-be stayers to leave.

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<sup>11</sup> Former international students include all non-EU/EEA/Swiss citizens who had been issued a study permit after January 2005.

<sup>12</sup> One downside of these calculations based on AZR data is that they exclude students from member states of the EU, the EEA, and Switzerland as well as exchange students who stay in Germany for less than six months.

<sup>13</sup> The European Economic Area (EEA) includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and all member states of the European Union.

<sup>14</sup> The actual number of unsuccessful job seekers is expected to be significantly higher since many international graduates had already left Germany by the time the survey was conducted (between January and April 2013).



## 2. Practical measures to retain international graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands

In comparison to their local counterparts, international students and graduates face additional obstacles when trying to enter the labour market of their host country. These obstacles include insufficient host country language skills, a lack of host country work experience and networks, and hesitation on behalf of employers. As a result, many international students and graduates report that they need more help from their university and other local actors during their transition from study to work (Woodend and Arthur 2018; Lokhande 2017; Arajärvi and Drubig 2014; Hanganu and Heß 2014; Dömling 2014).

In order to learn more about whether or not they find this kind of help and what kinds of local support landscapes they encounter, the author of this paper has compared the international graduate retention measures taken by universities and local employers, government agencies, and NGOs in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands. To do so, an online survey was conducted among middle managers at 208 public universities in the three countries.<sup>15</sup> The survey was administered between September and December 2014 (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015). The survey results, which are summarized in the following three subsections, can be considered up to date, as corresponding results from more recent (less comprehensive) surveys indicate (CSND 2018; Dietsche and Lees 2017). Apart from providing aggregate statistical data on the practical measures taken to retain international graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, Subsections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 also present examples of good practice from all three countries.

### 2.1 Measures taken by universities

When it comes to successful (labour market) integration, many international students and graduates look to their university for support. The university is usually the place where they first adapt to life in their host country and the people around them. Consequently, Canadian, German, and Dutch universities, colleges, and other higher education institutions (henceforth: universities) serve as important facilitators in the post-study retention of international graduates. In order to do so, around 50% of

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<sup>15</sup> The survey population encompassed 379 public universities and other higher education institutions. The total response rate of 55% can be seen as a reflection of the growing interest in retaining international students post-graduation. Survey invitations were sent to the leadership of university career service departments and international offices, given their managers' expert knowledge about international students and their study-to-work transition. This assumption could be confirmed a priori through expert interviews in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands.

universities in the three countries have introduced new or re-designed existing job entry support services to meet the needs of their international students and graduates (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015). These tailored services include

- Workshops and trainings for international students and graduates on how to apply for a job in their host country
- Individual career counselling
- Information sessions on the host country labour market
- Field trips (e.g. tours of local businesses)
- Administrative assistance (especially visa questions)
- Career mentoring programmes for international students and graduates
- Professional networking events / workshops on how to network in the host country
- Additional efforts to place international students in internships
- Additional efforts to place international students and graduates in student jobs, trainee positions, and full-time employment
- Career development support provided in a foreign language (e.g. English in non-Anglophone host countries like Germany and the Netherlands)
- Host country language courses to prepare for the host country labour market
- Active collaboration between universities and local businesses and other local actors to help international students and graduates find employment in the local labour market.

These tailored services differ from universities' standard student services portfolios in terms of content, language of instruction, and forms of outreach to international students. And while Canadian, German, and Dutch universities show some similarity in how likely they are to tailor their career services (i.e. around 50% in each country currently do so), there are some notable differences (as well as plenty of good practices) in their day to day work with international students and graduates, most noticeably in the way they:

- **broaden career service portfolios:** Overall, the range of tailored career services is relatively identical across Dutch and German universities, the most common ones being tailored job application trainings and labour market information sessions. In comparison, Canadian universities place more emphasis on connecting international students with potential employers. Close to one in two Canadian universities assists international students in gaining practical experience, often through so-called co-operative learning programmes, or co-op, which are integrated into



the curriculum (see Box 1 for a good practice example). The placement efforts of Canadian universities are rooted in the realisation that international students often experience difficulties in finding a company that will employ them full-time for several months (Arthur and Flynn 2011). In Germany and the Netherlands, only a few universities provide such placements.

- **move career support to the beginning of study programmes:** Only a handful of international students know the ins and outs of how and where to find a job in their host country (Flynn and Arthur 2011; Arajärvi and Drubig 2014). Therefore, around one in two career service departments at German universities and between 67 and 80% of departments at Canadian and Dutch universities have begun to improve the work readiness and employability of their newly arrived international students by offering workshops, career counselling, and networking events during the first semesters and, from then on, throughout the entire study programme (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015). This kind of continuous support is especially helpful for international students, who often need more time to overcome language barriers and to build professional networks in their host country (Weisser 2015; Hawthorne 2010; Scott et al. 2015).
- **involve international alumni:** When it comes to the transition from study to work, current international students can benefit from the experiences and assistance of those who came before them. Fortunately, many international alumni identify with their alma mater and are willing to help, for example, by sharing their professional experiences with current students or helping students find an internship (Guhr et al. 2009; Hanganu and Heß 2014). Nevertheless, two out of three career service departments at German universities do not involve their institution's international alumni in their programming. In contrast, around 50% of Canadian and 80% of Dutch university career services involve their international alumni regularly via guest lectures, career mentoring opportunities, and internship placements (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015).

**Box 1:**  
**Georgian College (Canada) –**  
**co-operative learning for everyone**

Founded in 1967 in Barrie, Ontario, Georgian College is one of Canada's largest providers of co-operative learning opportunities, or co-op. The College enrolls 13,000 full-time students across seven campuses. More than a quarter of all students are international students from 85 countries. In accordance with the College's mission to offer relevant study programmes for in-demand jobs, Georgian College made it a goal to offer co-op and other forms of work-integrated learning to all of their students, no matter where they come from. This includes the more than 3,600 international students on campus who can access hands-on opportunities with more than 6,200 partnering businesses in Ontario and beyond, many of which are interested in hiring international students after they graduate. To help international students find a co-op position, the College's career service department employs more than 40 career and co-op consultants and employer liaisons.

More information: <https://www.georgiancollege.ca/student-life/student-services/co-op-and-career-services>

**Box 2:**  
**University of Düsseldorf (Germany)**  
**– ‘driver’s license’ for German labour market**

With more than 36,000 students, the University of Düsseldorf is one of Germany’s largest universities. In 2019, around 2,000 international students pursued a degree at the university, Mathematics and the Natural Sciences being particularly popular. In the past, many international students who wanted to gain work experience and stay in Germany started too late with their search for employment or experienced difficulties navigating the plethora of student services offered by central administration, faculties, and student groups. That is why in 2014, the International Office started pooling new and existing support services into its UNI2JOB programme. The programme offers individual counselling and mentoring, as well as a series of tailored trainings, including job application workshops and German language courses. In the end, successful participants are issued a certificate, akin to a (symbolic) driver’s license for the German labour market.

More information: <https://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/home/internationales/interkulturell-aktiv/uni2job-karriere-in-deutschland.html>

For university career services and other student service departments, these and other tailored services are oftentimes more labour intensive and therefore require more (human) resources. Nevertheless, in the three countries under investigation, the recent growth in international student enrolments has had a limited impact on institutional staffing decisions, particularly in career service departments. At Dutch universities, the average career service staff member is responsible for 8,800 students (domestic and international combined); in Germany, the ratio is around 1 to 7,300, which makes it difficult to address individual student needs.<sup>16</sup> When compared to their European counterparts, Canadian university career services enjoy a more favourable staff-to-student ratio (1 to 2,900), which is in part because at many Canadian institutions, (international) students are required to pay an ancillary fee along with their tuition, much of which goes to student services (Dietsche and Lees 2017). In Germany, many tailored career services are funded through short-term government grants and pilots, oftentimes allocated by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). While these grants have given numerous universities an opportunity to innovate and to offer a broader variety of career support services to international students, their sustainability has been openly questioned by university staff (Esser and Gillessen 2014).

## 2.2 Measures taken by the state, employers, and NGOs

In order to successfully transition from study to work, international students do not only seek advice and support from their universities, but also from local employment offices and other public service providers, local governments, and the local business community.

<sup>16</sup> For the purpose of this three-country comparison, the ratio of staff members (full-time equivalents) to the total number of students enrolled (full-time and part-time, domestic and international, no distance learning) was calculated. The number denote national averages (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015).

**Box 3:**

**Leiden University Mentor Network (the Netherlands) – making connections**

In order to assist its (international) students and recent graduates during their transition from study to work, Leiden University operates an elaborate Mentor Network with over 800 alumni from around the world. Mentors and mentees are connected through an online platform (which automatically appears on their profile if they choose to sign in via LinkedIn). Once signed in, mentees can use a variety of search filters to look for (international) alumni who have previously agreed to serve as mentors. The Mentor Network is a win-win. Mentees receive valuable information and career coaching from alumni who, given their student experience at Leiden University, are able to provide more tailored support. In return, mentors are given the opportunity to stay in touch with and contribute to their alma mater, while potentially identifying new talent for their own organisations.

More information: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/alumni/mentor-network>

- **Larger businesses are actively hiring, smaller businesses still hesitate:** Close to one in two municipalities in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands is home to numerous large and medium-sized businesses which actively recruit international graduates.<sup>17</sup> 55% of large businesses and 38% of medium-sized companies in Germany are interested in hiring international students and graduates. Canadian (40% and 37%) and Dutch employers (48% and 40%) have also laid their eyes on international students.<sup>18</sup> For smaller businesses, the situation looks drastically different: In Germany and the Netherlands, international students and graduates are still a blind spot in the human resource strategies of small companies. Although recruiting international graduates in front of their doorstep is more resource efficient than attracting skilled workers from abroad (which many of these companies say they need now or in the near future), less than one in six small companies has started to actively approach international students. The roots of this inaction are manifold, ranging from a lack of awareness to a lack of information about the administrative procedures and additional costs to the continued availability of domestic applicants (Hanganu and Heß 2014). In Canada, the size of a business hardly affects how open it is to hiring international graduates. At a share of 28%, smaller businesses in Canada are almost as interested in hiring international graduates as larger businesses (40%). This openness of companies in Canada, regardless of size, might be the result of the country's long tradition as an immigrant receiving country, international students' advanced language skills in English or French,<sup>19</sup> and a high need for skilled migration, especially in more remote provinces and territories (Klabunde

<sup>17</sup> Here, businesses with more than 250 employees were defined as 'large businesses'; businesses with between 50 and 249 employees were considered to be 'medium-sized businesses'; businesses with 10 to 49 employees were classified as 'small businesses'; and businesses with less than 10 employees were referred to as 'very small businesses'.

<sup>18</sup> The following data summarize how middle managers in university career service departments and international offices perceive the local support landscapes for international students. Since these middle managers usually operate at key intersections within their university as well as between the university and the world of work they are often aware of how employers and government actors outside of their university interact with 'their' international students.

<sup>19</sup> It should be stressed that learning English or French is also a challenge for international students in Canada (Chira and Belkhdja 2013), albeit less so than Dutch and German. This is in part because more international students originate from countries where English and French are the official languages (cp. Weisser 2015).

**Box 4:**

**croonwolver&dros (the Netherlands) – running the extra mile to recruit international students and graduates**

Headquartered in the City of Rotterdam, croonwolver&dros provides solutions for electrical and mechanical engineering, automation, and information technology. Around 100 of its well over 2,000 employees are located outside of the Netherlands, including Aruba, Poland, and the United States. But even at its Rotterdam headquarters, a growing number of engineers hail from outside of the Netherlands. For croonwolver&dros, Dutch-trained international graduates represent an important talent pool, not least due to the looming shortage of Dutch engineers.

Over the past decade, the company has been reaching out to international engineering students at nearby universities and universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*), inviting them to participate in an internship programme, which for many has been a pathway to full-time employment with the company. Outreach is often done in collaboration with local universities and goes well beyond traditional job postings. Past efforts include the sponsoring of field trips, company presentations, and sports events.

Given croonwolver&dros' strong business ties to Poland, a good amount of its international student interns and workers are from Poland. Others originate from India or Hong Kong. Pleased with the work ethic and commitment of international graduates, croonwolver&dros is planning to continue its investment in this talent pool.

More information: <http://www.croonwolverendros.nl>

2014; House of Commons Canada 2012).<sup>20</sup> For many international graduates, local businesses represent only one of many employment options. A sizeable share of international graduates is interested in a research career in or outside of their university. In 48% of university towns in the Netherlands, this interest appears to be mutual as research institutes actively recruit international students and graduates. In Germany, 44% of research institutes see great potential in them. In Canada, around one in every three research institutes actively recruits international students (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015).

- **Growing awareness in the local business community:** In every second university town in Canada, key actors in regional and local economic development such as labour organisations and business associations are increasingly supportive of the retention of international graduates to benefit the local labour market. In many cases, these institutions act as mediators between universities, employers, and local and (sub)national policy makers. The same situation applies in Germany, where 44% of university towns report significant activity. In the Netherlands (28%), the local agencies involved in economic development are less concerned with attracting and retaining international students.

<sup>20</sup> Another reason could be the activities of immigrant entrepreneurs who have often entered Canada as international students themselves (cf. Eiyebholoria 2012).

- Local governments, employment services, and local NGOs help bridge the gap between study and work:** Municipalities are generally interested in attracting and retaining a highly skilled workforce. That is why in Germany, local politicians and public service providers are beginning to regard international students and graduates as a valuable asset for the local labour market. In 41 percent of university towns, local government agencies, immigration offices (*Ausländerbehörden*) and local politicians actively support international students and graduates during their transition to the local labour market. The local field offices of Germany's Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) have also begun to target international students, e. g. through their higher education teams (*Hochschulteams*), which provide job search assistance on site at larger universities. A similar development can be observed in municipalities across Canada. Apart from local governments (40% are active supporters) (see Box 7 below), 48% of Canada's employment service providers provide assistance to international students and graduates who seek to stay and work. Furthermore, Canada's international students and graduates can benefit from a wide range of settlement services such as immigration-related advice, language courses, and information about life and employment in Canada. The oftentimes federally funded settlement services are provided by a number of local and regional organisations including economic development boards, language schools, and local chapters of ethnic community associations (CIC 2011). Although international students and other temporary residents are traditionally not eligible for settlement service support, in 60% of university towns, service providers actively admit international students and graduates to their workshops, information and counselling sessions (see Box 6). In the Netherlands, local government and NGOs are not as active. Less than one in four university towns in the Netherlands hosts employment agencies<sup>21</sup> and other public services which actively seek to retain more international students.

**Box 5:**

**Chamber of Commerce Chemnitz (Germany) – connecting international students and local employers**

Like many other municipalities in East Germany, the City of Chemnitz is projected to suffer a demographic decline. To offset this loss in population, the local business community has formed a committee on talent attraction and retention. The committee, which is hosted by the Chamber of Commerce Chemnitz (*Industrie- und Handelskammer*) has made skilled migration a top priority. In this context, the many international students at the Technical University of Chemnitz and other nearby institutions have been identified as an important group to woo. One way to achieve this has been the event series “*Wirtschaft trifft internationale Studierende*”, which facilitates networking between the students and local employers.

More information: <https://www.chemnitz.ihk24.de/System/vst/1954364?id=323219&terminid=524773>

<sup>21</sup> In the Netherlands, the state-run employment agencies (UWV) are rarely concerned with the placement of highly skilled professionals since they seek out private services such as Randstad, Tempo-Team or UnDutchables. Therefore, governmental oversight of job entry support is much less pronounced than, for example, in Germany.

**Box 6:**

**COSTI Immigration Services (Canada) – providing pathways to employment and permanent residence**

Just like the many other settlements service organisations across Canada, COSTI provides employment, education, settlement and social services to various migrant groups, including international students and graduates. In general, settlement services are designed to assist migrants with settling in and adapting to life in Canada. Although oftentimes funded by the Canadian government, these services are usually delivered by NGOs like COSTI.

At its 18 locations in the City of Toronto, COSTI places primary emphasis on helping permanent residents. International students and graduates are not part of this group; however, in recent years, their number has grown and they have become a key audience for COSTI.

Most international students coming to COSTI seek assistance with their application for a Post-Graduate Work Permit (see Section 1.1) or permanent residence. After a 2013 change in Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, many Canadian universities are no longer authorized to provide this kind of immigration counselling. As a result, COSTI has been serving an increasing number of international students and graduates who would like to extend their stay in Canada. In addition, a growing number of international students and graduates has been accessing COSTI's employment services, such as career counselling and job placement services, making COSTI and other settlement service organisations an important local resource outside of the university.

More information: <http://www.costi.org>

**Rhine-Neckar Triangle (Germany) – immigration processing across jurisdictions**

The Rhine-Neckar Triangle between the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region and the Stuttgart region is one of Germany's economic powerhouses with a significant amount of in-migration. The Triangle is home to 22 immigration agencies (*Ausländerbehörden*) which are in charge of issuing and extending student and work permits. In order to expedite and streamline the administrative decisions and processing behind said permits, agency representatives have successfully introduced shared forms, English language courses for their staff, and have begun using digital platforms and other means of e-government to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information between the 22 agencies within the Triangle whose territory spreads across three federal states.

More information: <https://www.m-r-n.com/was-wir-tun/themen-und-projekte/projekte/arbeitskreis-auslaenderbehoerden>

**Box 7:**

**Germany's Federal Employment Agency – Increasingly involved in supporting the labour market entry of international students and graduates**

Traditionally, universities in Germany and several other Continental European countries did not concern themselves much with the labour market entry of their graduates. If a (domestic or international) student needed help with finding employment, Germany's Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA*) and its field offices in and outside of universities were entrusted with providing the necessary counselling and job placement services. By the mid-1980s, a good two decades before the introduction of career service departments at most German universities, the BA started to run a number of work readiness pilots at several German universities, many of which were later introduced into the standard service portfolio of these institutions (Jörns 2002). While international students were also permitted to access these and other BA services, most chose not to. This was, in part, because many of them did not know about said services or felt that these services did not cater to their specific needs.

In order to increase awareness and encourage more international students to benefit from the Federal Employment Agency's wide array of counselling and job placements services, in 2012, the Agency, along with its International Placement Service (*Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung, ZAV*), started a pilot project which focused on retaining international graduates in the German labour market. Together with the international offices at the University of Bonn and the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, the BA and ZAV started to offer tailored services to 22 international graduates, including career counselling, connecting them with local employers, and informing them about visa requirements for post-study employment. Given the pilot's success – 19 out of the 22 graduates found employment – the BA and ZAV rolled out additional pilots in Aachen, Cologne, Bochum, Dortmund, Essen, Duisburg, Darmstadt, Dresden, Munich, Nuremberg, and Erlangen. The pilots encompassed the following five service components:

- a 90-minute information session on the German labour market
- a one-day job interview training
- an individual check of participants' CVs and application materials
- individual counselling
- a networking event with (local) employers

The roll-outs can be considered a success, especially in the cities of Erlangen, Nuremberg, and Munich, where 95 percent of the 38 participating graduates found employment in Germany. As a result, Germany's Federal Employment Agency has been increasingly regarding international students and (especially) graduates as a 'new' target group. After completing the pilots, the BA concluded that the best results can be achieved if local BA/ZAV employees coordinate their support services with the career service departments and international offices at nearby universities, which tend to have more immediate access to international students (Peters 2014).

## 2.3

### Local coordination of post-study retention

Even the best university career service department is of little help if local employers shy away from hiring international students. In the same vein, employers have a hard time recruiting international students if universities choose to withhold all information about the young talent. Consequently, the successful retention of international students in the local labour market requires joint action by universities, local businesses, local government, public service providers, and NGOs (cp. Roth 2015; Lokhande 2017; SER 2013). However, so far, this type of local coordination can be found in only a few municipalities across Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands.

- **University-business collaboration so far largely ad-hoc:** For most international students and graduates in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, the local career support landscape is a patchwork of occasional career fairs, job application trainings, and chance encounters with service staff or company representatives, who may or may not be able to help them. Rarely do universities and local businesses work hand-in-hand in order to retain more international graduates in the local labour market. Only 28% of Dutch and German universities team up regularly<sup>22</sup> with local businesses to organize mentoring programmes, internships, and labour market integration measures for international students and graduates. In Canada, as few as 21% of universities engage in this type of collaboration at least once per academic year, often through their co-op programmes, which they co-run with local businesses. Although labour organisations, business associations, chambers of commerce, and other intermediaries within the local business community can help with

<sup>22</sup> Here, regular collaboration means that universities and businesses work together at least once per academic year in order to facilitate the labour market entry of international students and graduates.

#### Box 8:

#### Greater Moncton Local Immigration Partnership (Canada) fosters sustainable collaboration

Canada's Local Immigration Partnerships (LIP) are multi-level governance initiatives designed to strengthen local capacity to attract international students and other newcomers and improve their integration outcomes. Federal and provincial government grants are used to set up LIPs, which are generally bound by formal agreements. In the Greater Moncton Area – one of the three metropolitan areas in Canada's bilingual province of New Brunswick – the LIP consists of a council of immigration stakeholders, the local business community, and municipal government partners. The council meets bi-monthly to identify and address gaps in service delivery to international students and graduates as well as the many other migrant groups in the Greater Moncton Area. Key services include English and French language courses, employment services, support for (aspiring) entrepreneurs, networking and volunteering opportunities, as well as support with work permits and applications for permanent residence.

More information: <https://www.immigrationgreatermoncton.ca/greater-moncton-local-immigration-partnership>



connecting universities to local employers, only a small share of universities engage regularly: 26% in Canada, 20% in Germany, and 12% in the Netherlands (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015).

- Limited university-city collaboration, infrequent interaction with employment services:** In a growing number of Canadian, German, and Dutch municipalities, the potential benefits of international students and graduates have not escaped the attention of local government officials. Nevertheless, universities are rarely embedded in the cities' established talent attraction and retention initiatives. In Canada, 26% of universities engage with the local government in order to retain more international students after graduation. In the Netherlands, collaboration with local officials takes place at 24% of universities, while in Germany, only 17% of universities collaborate regularly.<sup>23</sup> A similar dynamic can be observed for university engagement with employment services: in Canada and Germany, less than one-third of universities connect with local employment services in order to organize joint training and information sessions for international students or other forms of regular collaboration. Dutch universities were found to have comparatively weaker ties to state-run employment services, whose primary target groups do not include international students and graduates (Morris-Lange and Brands 2015). In Canada, the settlement services mentioned in Section 2.2 are a viable partner in universities' efforts to assist those international students and graduates who are willing to pursue post-study employment and permanent residence in Canada. Currently, one in three Canadian universities coordinates its language courses, information sessions, and counselling services with the support offered by local settlement services.

<sup>23</sup> In Germany, collaboration between universities and local government was significantly higher (38%) in the six East German *Länder* (Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia), which may be explained by a growing political willingness to limit the number of departing graduates – both domestic and international – due to the lower availability of jobs.

**Box 9:**  
**Jointly-Run Recruiting Event “Your Future in Stuttgart” (Germany)**

Since 2014, the City of Stuttgart – together with local universities, employers, NGOs, and the Stuttgart field office of the Federal Employment Agency has been co-organizing an annual recruitment fair for international students. The all-day event takes place under the auspices of the Mayor of Stuttgart and is held at city hall. International students and graduates are invited to learn about local resources on how to find a job in Stuttgart; they can network with Daimler, McKesson Europe, and other employers on-site, and they can participate in industry-specific workshops, for example “Different possibilities after your study – architecture and urban planning”.

The event concludes with a one-hour reception which provides additional networking opportunities for students and the local actors who co-organize the event. Your Future in Stuttgart has not only encouraged collaboration between the City and local actors, but also within city government. Every year, the City's Economic Development Department, the Department for Social Integration and Social Affairs, and the Immigration Office work together to provide all other local partners with logistical support.

More information: <https://www.stuttgart.de/en/en/your-future-in-stuttgart>



### 3.

## Lessons learned

International graduates often have a harder time transitioning to host country employment due to insufficient host country language skills, a lower exposure to the host country labour market, and a lack of professional networks. In most cases, it is these informal barriers which prevent international graduates from staying in Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, and not the (overall very graduate-friendly) post-study work rights, which are summarized in Section 1 (cp. Scott *et al.* 2015; Hanganu and Heß 2014; Weisser 2015).

Despite international graduates' widespread willingness to stay and their need for more systematic and coordinated support, most of them encounter a poorly coordinated patchwork of occasional career fairs, job application trainings, and chance encounters with service staff or company representatives who may or may not be able to help them. As a result, many international graduates leave Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands much earlier than they – and the architects behind the policies in Section 1 – had intended.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, one key lesson from the three countries under investigation is that policies alone are not enough to retain more international graduates; neither are isolated support services, which in many cases escape the radar of most international graduates. Therefore, in order to move beyond the current state of isolated services and ad-hoc collaboration, universities, employers, local governments, employment services, and other relevant local actors need to reassess and better coordinate their job entry assistance. By doing so, the local partners can create a more impactful local support landscape that addresses the major obstacles on the path to employment for many international students. In brief, this requires local actors to exchange information regularly, develop and pursue shared goals, and communicate joint achievements in order to rally support for further coordination (cp. Innovationsbüro Fachkräfte 2012; Roth 2015). Universities, employers, and policy makers alike are required to play their parts:

- **Universities** should do more to have their career services focus on the major obstacles experienced by international students, most importantly, the development of host country language skills, early exposure to the labour market and tailored job application training. In order to roll out select support services to all international students, universities should consider supple-

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<sup>24</sup> It should be mentioned that the question of staying or leaving should not be seen as an automatic 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' for whichever country the international graduates originate from or choose to go to next. In a globalised world, migration can be increasingly regarded as 'brain circulation' – i.e. the temporary and repetitive movements between the sending country and one or more receiving countries (Hunger 2003). Even those international graduates who choose to stay in their host country are often deeply engaged with their home country, e.g. through direct communication or various diaspora activities, which hold benefits for economic and political developments back home. In the same vein, host countries do not automatically miss out if international graduates choose to leave after finishing their studies. They too can benefit from stronger business ties and the knowledge transfer with graduates' countries of origin. Furthermore, studies show that after a few years, many former international students who initially leave their host country after graduation express a willingness to come back, thus making the training of international students a long-term investment in workforce development (Hanganu and Heß 2014; Engler *et al.* 2015).

menting their face-to-face instruction with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), educational gaming apps, and other digital technologies. One example of this is the University of Groningen's Dutch language MOOC, which allows language learners to acquire enough language skills to enrol in a Dutch-taught study programme in the Netherlands.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in order to help international students build their professional host country networks early on, universities should increase their efforts to pair up international and domestic students, e.g. through cultural events and the expansion of existing mentoring programmes. Germany's Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg's service learning project *International Engagiert Studiert* serves as an interesting example. In this project, international and domestic students volunteer their time and expertise to address a problem in the local community. In doing so, students gain professional experiences, ECTS credit points, insights into their host community, and a better understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds.<sup>26</sup>

- **Employers**, especially small businesses, should include international students in their recruiting pool. Through internships, co-op positions, scholarships, and other forms of cost-efficient investments, both management and staff can test the added value of an international work environment. By diversifying their workforce, companies can increase their attractiveness for other skilled migrants, who are increasingly needed to offset talent shortages. Smaller businesses, in particular, should consider the benefits associated with employing international graduates today. Not only are they trained and accustomed to life in their host country, but they also have personal and professional networks abroad, as well as cultural knowledge and foreign language skills, which allow them to do more than just substitute for a shortage of domestic applicants. In addition, they can help companies enter international markets or assist in developing a more diversity-friendly work environment.
- **Policy makers** at the national level should assess whether their post-study work and residency rights for international students are in line with projected labour market needs. Furthermore, procedural barriers such as excessive processing times for providing the proper visa or permits should be addressed and funding options for innovative local retention practices explored further. One such funding effort is "Study and Work", a two-year initiative in Germany which between 2015 and 2017 supported innovative local practices in retaining international graduates. The key learnings from these local projects were summarized and subsequently shared by way of a toolbox which provides detailed information on eight support tools, including individual coaching during job search, strategic job fair attendance, entrepreneurship training, and educational videos for international students and local employers.<sup>27</sup> The Study and Work initiative, which placed special emphasis on supporting projects in demographically declining communities in East Germany, was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (Federal Commissioner for the East German States) and the *Stifterverband*.<sup>28</sup> Apart from national policy-makers, local governments should play a bigger role in retaining international graduates. As the data from Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands show, even in those municipalities where

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.rug.nl/language-centre/e-learning/online-dutch/introduction-to-dutch-mooc?lang=en>, 23 May 2019

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.servicelearning.uni-halle.de/index.php?id=55>, 23 May 2019

<sup>27</sup> The toolbox can be downloaded at <http://www.study-work.de/ergebnisse/toolbox> (German only), 9 July 2019

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.study-work.de>, 23 May 2019

employment agencies and other local service providers already have an eye on international students and graduates, current efforts usually run side-by-side with other existing support services, thereby increasing the risk of confusion among international graduates and local stakeholders. Hence, successful retention requires a more proactive coordination of new and existing support services. Given their long-term interest in talent retention, municipalities should play a central role in this kind of local coordination. One way to bring key stakeholders to the table is local events such as “Careers Made in Rotterdam”.<sup>29</sup> The bi-annual career fair, which in many ways resembles the “Your Future in Stuttgart” event portrayed above, was run jointly between 2013 and 2017 by the City of Rotterdam and the private consulting firm Expertise in Labour Mobility. Through an interactive programme full of workshops, presentations, and networking sessions, the event sought to introduce international students and graduates to career opportunities in and around the city and, vice-versa, help local business leaders become acquainted with the international talent pool right on their doorstep.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.labourmobility.com/events/careers-made-in-rotterdam>, 23 May 2019



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