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Link4Skills Partnership Inventory

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http://link4skills.eu

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Abstract
Labour migration is a tool to address growing skills and labour shortages, widening the talent pool from which employers can recruit and enabling them to access new skills and ideas. Skills mobility partnerships (SMPs) and related concepts, including Global Skill Partnerships and Talent Partnerships, have gained momentum as a strategy to combine skills development, mobility, and mutual benefit for destination and origin countries. To explore governmental initiatives at the intersection of mobility and skills, the Link4Skills project conducted a mapping of SMPs that have been operating in the past ten years, based on desk research. This working paper presents the resulting Partnership Inventory, including a brief comparative analysis. The aim of the inventory is to provide an overview of existing SMPs to help policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders to better understand existing government approaches.

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Link4Skills Horizon Europe

Executive summary

This working paper presents the Link4Skills Partnership Inventory, developed by the Link4Skills project. Based on desk research, the inventory includes 156 skills mobility partnerships (SMPs) that involve one or more Link4Skills countries: Austria, Canada, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, and Ukraine. It also captures relevant EU-wide initiatives. The inventory includes SMPs that engage government bodies at any level on both sides; that combine practical skills development with mobility opportunities for some or all participants; and that were launched or have been in operation at any point between January 2015 and April 2025.

The Partnership Inventory data show a high level of diversity among the 156 SMPs that were mapped. Almost all Link4Skills project countries act as both a country of origin and a country of destination. However, there is a range in terms of the number of SMPs the countries participate in – the most active country, Germany, participates in 56 SMPs, while Ghana has just 4 SMPs that fit the inclusion criteria. Additionally, there is diversity in the forms of cooperation between countries. This working paper identifies the most frequent trends. Agreements are the most common type of SMP in the inventory, with formal bilateral or multilateral agreements the most frequent. Most other SMPs take the form of projects or non-binding agreements such as memoranda of understanding (MoUs) or letters of intent. Nearly half of the SMPs specify one or more sectors or professions that they target; the most frequently targeted sectors were healthcare, construction, ICT, agriculture, and STEM. The remainder either leave participation open to any sector or do not specify any requirements in this regard. Many SMPs aim to engage younger individuals, defined in various ways. The mapping found that only a small number of SMPs specifically targeted underrepresented populations as part of their design; where specified, women were the most common focus. The majority of SMPs offer some form of on-the-job training and may provide more than one type of skilling for participants. The majority of SMPs in the inventory facilitate mobility for all participants (where this information is specified), while a smaller number of SMPs use home and abroad tracks. Regarding the duration of mobility, there is considerable diversity; however, in more than half of SMPs in the inventory, the return of the participants to their origin country was foreseen in the design of the initiative. The inventory highlights that social integration support, mainly in the form of language training, is specified in the design of 42% of SMPs, and re-integration support for (potential) returnees is specified less often, in the design of 17% of SMPs.

The full dataset of the Partnership Inventory will be shared online as part of the interactive Link4Skills Navigator,[1] an online dashboard that will share project findings and curated external resources to help policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders make informed decisions about skills needs and mobility. The inventory will be supplemented by case studies of selected SMPs to enable in-depth analysis of negotiation settings and evaluation of success, with the aim to both share these insights in areas not yet well explored and discuss trade-offs in SMP models and approaches.

[1] See https://corridors.link4skills.eu/partnerships.

I. Introduction

Europe is facing severe and widespread labour shortages, especially when it comes to the healthcare and construction sectors; shortages have also been identified regarding welders, cooks, and electricians.[2] Labour and skills shortages are set to further increase across the EU, with the ageing and shrinking of the EU population as a key driver.[3] Labour migration is one tool to address shortages and foster growth and innovation by widening the talent pool from which employers can recruit and enabling them to access new skills and ideas.[4] Yet, skills shortages are also a challenge for many countries of origin. Many middle-income countries that have traditionally sent labour migrants to Europe are now facing shrinking and aging populations themselves.[5] Meanwhile, low-income countries are experiencing growing youth populations, while often lacking the resources necessary to invest in education and training structures to enable them to develop the skills needed to compete globally.[6] In addition, traditional international recruitment models often benefit destination countries disproportionately, potentially leading to brain drain that can have negative consequences for origin countries.[7] Against this backdrop, skills mobility partnerships (SMPs) and related concepts, including Global Skill Partnerships and Talent Partnerships, have gained momentum. These initiatives aim to combine skills development, mobility, and mutual benefit for destination and origin countries.

Within the context of the Link4Skills project, the Link4Skills Partnership Inventory includes data on 156 SMPs based on desk research. The data will be visualised in an interactive format on the Link4Skills Navigator, complemented by a short comparative analysis to provide an overview. The inventory aligns with accepted definitions by the International Organization for Migration,[8] the Centre for Global Development,[9] and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development,[10] covering SMPs that:

- engage government bodies on both sides (at any level);
- combine practical skills development with mobility for some or all participants;
- include at least one Link4Skills project country (Austria, Canada, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, and Ukraine) or the EU; and
- were launched or in operation sometime between January 2015 and April 2025.

[2] European Labour Authority (2025, 27 June), *Labour shortages and surpluses in Europe 2024*, https://www.ela.europa.eu/en/publications/labour-shortages-and-surpluses-europe-2024.

[3] BusinessEurope (2023, 30 October), *Analysis of labour and skills shortages: Overcoming bottlenecks to productivity and growth*, https://www.businesseurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2023-10-23_analysis_of_labour_and_skills_shortages-1c2-1.pdf.

[4] Triandafyllidou, A. Shirazi, H. & Engbersen, G. (2024), *Conceptualizing the Relationship between Skills and Migration,* Link4Skills Concept Paper, https://link4skills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/L4S-WORKING-Paper_Migration-Skill-Corridors.pdf.

[5] World Bank (2023), *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, Washington, DC: World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Wischenbart, R. (2016), *Global eBook 2016: A report on market trends and developments*, Rüdiger Wischenbart Content and Consulting, https://www.book2look.com/book/n5lvkJsWcF.

[8] International Organization for Migration (n.d.), *Skills mobility partnerships: Towards a global approach to skills development and labour mobility,* https://roasiapacific.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/skills-mobility-partnerships.pdf.

[9] Clemens, M. A. (2015), "Global Skill Partnerships: A proposal for technical training in a mobile world," *IZA Journal of Labor Policy 4*(1), 1-18.

[10] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024), *Engaging with Employers in Skills Mobility Partnerships*, policy paper no. 2024/01, Paris: OECD Publishing, https://doi.org/10.1787/9e6da0ff-en.

The inventory focuses on the design of SMPs and builds on existing databases, including the mapping conducted by the Migration Partnership Facility[11] and the Global Migration Skill Partnership Portal developed by the Centre for Global Development.[12]

The aim of the Partnership Inventory is to provide an overview of existing SMPs to help policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders to better understand existing government approaches at the intersection of skills and mobility, including their design and aims. The inventory has also served as a source for further analysis, including through an examination of the mutual benefits that SMPs currently and can potentially provide.[13] The research team gathered data on 18 different criteria encompassing stakeholder involvement, participant profiles, skilling and mobility design, and (re)integration support planned. These criteria and the methodology employed for the mapping are discussed in Section II. The mapping also allows for an analysis of trends and patterns in SMPs across countries, which is briefly discussed in Section III. The full dataset will be published at https://corridors.link4skills.eu/partnerships in an interactive format. The inventory will be supplemented by case studies of selected SMPs to enable in-depth analysis of negotiation settings and evaluation of success, with the aim to both share these insights in areas not yet well explored and discuss trade-offs in SMP models and approaches.

II. Methodology, inventory structure, and limitations

The Link4Skills Partnership Inventory includes government-to-government partnerships that combine practical skills development with mobility. It includes partnerships that involve at least one Link4Skills project country, as well as EU-wide initiatives, within the timeframe of January 2015 to April 2025. This ten-year period was selected to provide a sizeable data pool while maintaining a focus on relatively recent or ongoing partnerships. In addition, the larger number of irregular arrivals to Europe in 2015-16 prompted a range of policy responses from EU Member States, some of which, where relevant, could be included in the inventory.

The development of the inventory was based on extensive desk research, drawing on publicly available primary sources such as international agreements, memoranda of understanding (MoUs), project websites, and news articles, as well as secondary sources including academic publications, policy analyses, and project evaluations. In particular, authors drew on existing mappings conducted by the Migration Partnership Facility and the Centre for Global Development,[14] supplemented by internet searches as well as input from stakeholders within and outside of ICMPD. This included the extensive knowledge of Link4Skills partners conducting the corridor research, who verified and provided suggestions for additional SMPs.

Drawing on this information, as available, the inventory captures 18 data points. These criteria have been selected and validated with partners and were guided by both conceptual and practical considerations. The chosen parameters primarily reflect the design of the SMPs, which could be captured through desk research. These criteria made it possible for the researchers to assess the fundamental aspects of the SMP design. Furthermore, the chosen dimensions include criteria that additionally capture practical constraints and recurring criticism of labour mobility initiatives in the

[11] See https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/.
[12] See https://gsp.cgdev.org/.
[13] Katsiaficas, C. & Kessler, S. (2026), "Skill Mobility Partnerships: Addressing global skills shortages more fairly?" in *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*, Izabela Grabowska & Mary Boatemaa Setrana, eds.; Kessler, S. & Katsiaficas, C. (2026), *Six ways to improve the mutual benefits of labour mobility*, ICMPD Policy Insights blog.
[14] See https://gsp.cgdev.org/.

current policy debate; these include, for instance, the number of participants.[15] Additionally, the mapping examined whether SMPs had a focus on underrepresented populations, such as individuals with protection concerns or minority groups. It also captured bilateral information at the national and subnational levels. This additional layer of data collection aims to fill existing gaps and incorporate information not yet systematically covered in existing inventories, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of SMPs across different contexts. The criteria mapped are listed below.

- Partnership **name** is listed (in English).
- **Origin** and **destination** are specified, with subnational places of origin and destination highlighted where relevant. Country names are generally taken from the list of United Nations member states, adapted to reflect SMP approaches.
- **Partnership type** refers to the formal arrangement underpinning the cooperation between partners, which can take several forms.
    - Formal agreements, such as bilateral agreements, are binding arrangements between two or more states or organisations.
    - Non-binding agreements, including MoUs or memoranda of cooperation, are less legally binding; however, they outline shared intentions and frameworks for future collaboration between the signatories.
    - Projects are more specific and often more time-bound initiatives designed to achieve a specific goal, including pilots.
    - Finally, the "other" category encompasses a range of arrangements, such as scholarship agreements and recruitment agreements, which support cooperation between signatories in a targeted and specified way.
- The **start year** and **end year** are marked, along with other relevant information such as the planned end date for ongoing initiatives or automatic renewal, when relevant.
- **Target sector(s) or profession(s)** refers to the main labour market area(s) of focus of the partnership, where this is specified. Some SMPs are explicitly open to participants from all professional backgrounds, while others specify a certain field or occupation, and yet others do not specify a focus.
- **Main stakeholders** outlines who leads, manages, and/or implements the partnership, including the signatories of agreements. In some initiatives, governments are not among the SMP partners listed in this column; they are still considered government-to-government partnerships in cases where letters of support were required from the origin or destination and are thus included in the inventory.
- **Funding** indicates who finances the initiatives, whether this is a specific entity, a stakeholder type, and/or co-financed.
- **Number of participants** records how many people were either planned to participate, or actually participated, in the partnership. Depending on the data available, this figure can refer either to the number of individuals named (e.g. capped participation) or targeted in the agreement regarding skilling and/or mobility, or to the number who have actually taken part in the SMP over a given period (for a particular year, cumulative, etc.).
- Where applicable, the inventory notes whether the SMP aims to **target underrepresented populations** such as women, persons with disabilities, particular minority groups, or persons in need of international protection.
- **Mobility type** describes the intended duration and scope of mobility planned under the SMP, including details where available.
    - Short-term mobility refers to mobility lasting less than 1 year.

[15] See for example OECD & European Migration Network (2022), *Skills mobility partnerships: Exploring innovative approaches to labour migration*, EMN-OECD Inform, . https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-issues/migration/2022-March-Joint-EMN-OECD-Inform-Skills-Mobility-Partnerships.pdf.

  - Medium-term mobility refers to mobility lasting from 1 year up to 5 years.
  - Long-term mobility is 5 years or longer, often intended to lead to permanent settlement and sometimes including a pathway to citizenship.
  - Circular mobility refers to repeated movements between countries, where participants return and move again as part of a structured cycle, often short-term in temporality.
- The inventory indicates whether an SMP provides **mobility opportunities for some or all** participants to another country. For example, some SMPs plan skilling for a certain number of participants in a country of origin but plan mobility only for a smaller subset of them.
- The inventory marks which **type of mobility design** each SMP uses, based on three approaches identified by the Link4Skills researchers across the mapped SMPs:
  1. mixed mobility planned;
  2. return foreseen; and
  3. long-term mobility planned.
- **Participant eligibility requirements** details whether the SMP targets a particular group, for instance related to career stage, occupation, or skill level. Eligibility requirements in the collected initiatives vary widely, from specific preconditions to have experience in a particular sector to broader classifications based on skill levels. To simplify this diversity of data, the requirements were categorised in three main sub-categories:
  1. career stage (e.g. current student or recent graduate);
  2. occupation (e.g. currently working in a certain field or profession); and
  3. skill level as defined in the SMP agreement (e.g. high, medium, or low where this could be determined, or the specific language of the SMP if this did not align with the team's high/medium/low classification, e.g. "skilled talent").

  Where additional criteria are explicitly stated in SMP documents, for instance relating to language proficiency or the lack of a criminal record, these are also included.
- **Training type and location** summarises what kind of skills development is offered, such as on-the-job training including work placements, vocational training, and internships, as well as other skilling components such as language courses, professional development, and specialised training. The location is also mentioned where this information is available (i.e. in the origin or destination).
- **Recognition of qualifications and skills** outlines whether and how participants' qualifications are recognised (if specified). Some SMPs do not mention the recognition of skills and qualifications or specify how this is to be dealt with.
- Social **integration support** covers settlement assistance offered to participants, such as language instruction or cultural orientation activities, which may be offered pre-departure or post-arrival. This was not always specified.
- **Reintegration support** refers to measures to help (prospective) returnees settle back into their home country, which may be offered before or after return. This was not always specified.
- **Evaluation** lists publicly available evaluations and assessments, where applicable.
- **For more information** lists the information sources used for each SMP.

The inventory includes separate entries for initiatives that operate in tandem. For example, several pilot projects were launched following the announcement of the EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership, and each agreement and project is treated individually as the SMP design can differ significantly across the different arrangements. Because the inventory includes both political and practical initiatives, there is some overlap (for instance, programmes that are based on a series of bilateral agreements); in these cases, the larger number of inventory entries may skew the overall trends identified. For example, Canada's Young Professional Programme has 28 entries – 1 for the programme itself and 27 for the related bilateral agreements.

Limitations

While the inventory offers a robust evidence base, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the dataset only includes initiatives that involve at least one of the project countries, whether as a country of origin or destination, and EU-level agreements. Still, the final inventory covers many partnerships that go beyond the project countries to include other origin or destination countries around the world. These encompass both bilateral and multilateral initiatives and reflect a diversity of approaches.

Second, the inventory is limited to government-to-government partnerships (at the local, regional, national, and supranational levels). Although some of these include private sector actors, the exclusion of public-private and private-to-private initiatives inevitably excludes some partnerships at the skills-mobility nexus. The same can be said with regard to civil society. This scope was chosen to focus on the role of government-to-government partnerships as an interesting point of analysis and contribution to the research base.

Third, the mapping concentrated on initiatives with a clear and structured practical skilling element. For this reason, while study-related internship programmes were included, the inventory does not cover SMPs that only include academic university study, such as student exchanges or scholarship programmes. Working holiday programmes were also excluded because there was no work or skilling requirement as part of their design.

Fourth, the inventory focused on partnership design. While fewer data points are focused on outcomes and impact, data on participation in skilling and mobility were gathered where possible. This was purposeful in the research design due to the limited information typically available on SMPs via desk research, in particular public evaluations, as well as the understanding that broader success factors may not always be captured by evaluations or specific metrics (e.g. participation numbers). It also differentiates the Link4Skills mapping from other existing mappings. This focus on partnership design also enables further analysis under the Link4Skills case studies related to negotiation dynamics, governmental priorities, and mutual benefits. For this reason, case studies of selected SMPs have been planned as follow-up to the inventory to go into further detail with regard to implementation and impact.

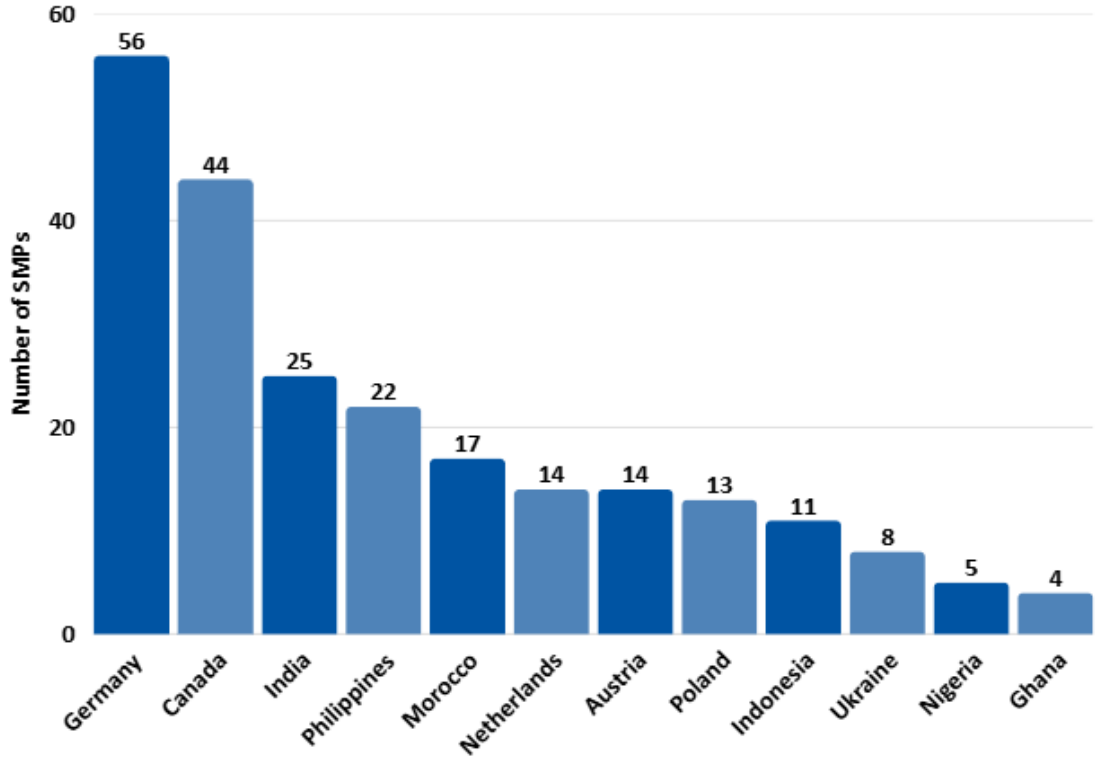
Finally, the depth of information available varies considerably across initiatives. Detailed data on design, implementation, and outcomes are often particularly scarce for high-level agreements and for newer initiatives that have not yet undergone evaluation (or where the evaluation is not publicly available).

Despite these limitations, the 156 SMPs in the inventory provide a sizable picture of the SMP landscape. Insights into relevant trends are discussed in the next section.

III. Comparative overview of SMPs in the inventory

This section highlights key high-level comparative findings of the 156 SMPs included in the Link4Skills Partnership Inventory.

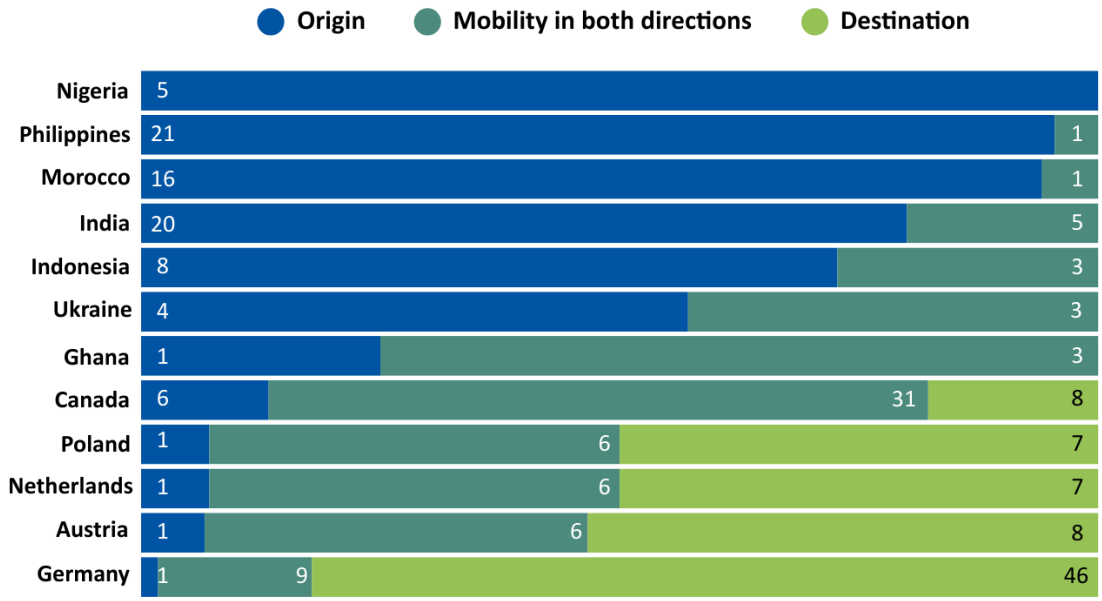
Figure 1. Some countries more frequently engage in SMPs than others.



The above data shows arrangements in which countries serve as an origin or destination country – or both, in cases where SMPs facilitate mobility in both directions. Among Link4Skills countries, Germany and Canada are particularly active, with a relatively high number of SMPs.[16]

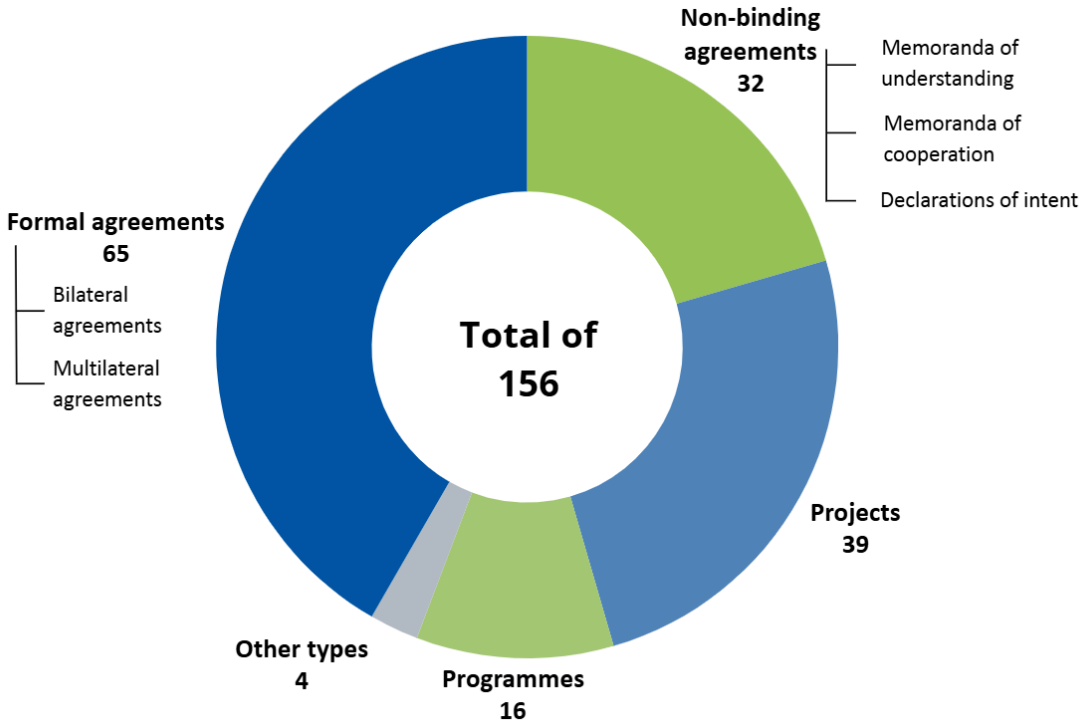
[16] Of these, Canada's Young Professional Programme has 28 inventory entries – 1 for the programme itself and 27 for the related bilateral agreements.

Figure 2. Most countries act as both origin and destination countries in SMPs.



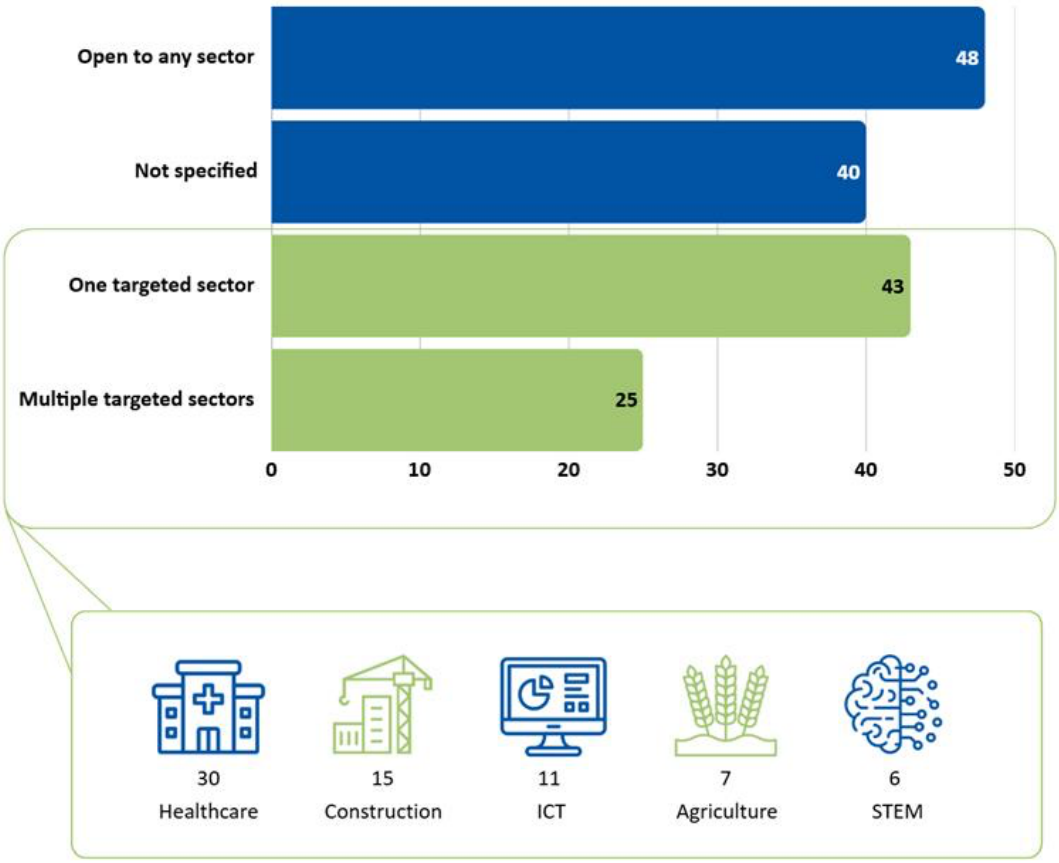
Nigeria is the only Link4Skills country that acts exclusively as a country of origin, whereas all other project countries have at least one partnership with mobility in both directions, meaning they also serve as a country of destination. As a share of their SMPs, Ghana, Canada, Poland, and the Netherlands have the most reciprocal partnerships, where they act as both countries of origin and countries of destination.

Figure 3. Agreements are the most common type of SMPs in the inventory, with formal bilateral or multilateral agreements the most frequent.



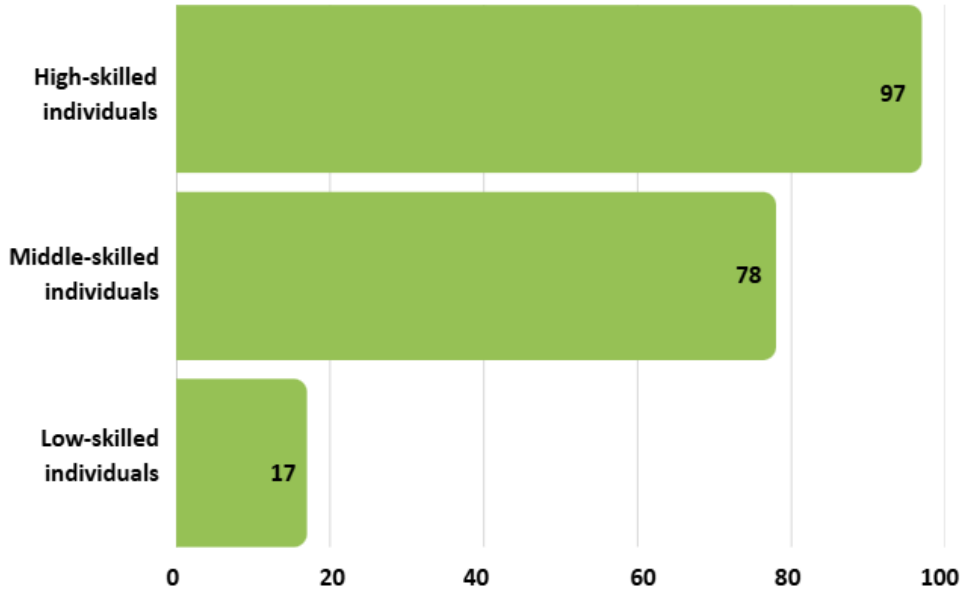
Formal bilateral or multilateral agreements account for 42% of SMPs, followed by projects, which represent 25%. The project category includes pilot projects; it was not always clear whether an SMP was a pilot project or another type of project. Non-binding arrangements, such as MoUs, make up around 21%, with the remaining SMPs falling into other categories.

Figure 4. There is a roughly even split between SMPs targeting specific sectors or occupations and SMPs leaving this open or unspecified.



56% of SMPs are either open to all sectors or occupations, or do not specify a particular focus. Around 44% of SMPs take a more targeted approach, defining one or more targets. Healthcare is the most frequently targeted sector, followed by construction and ICT.

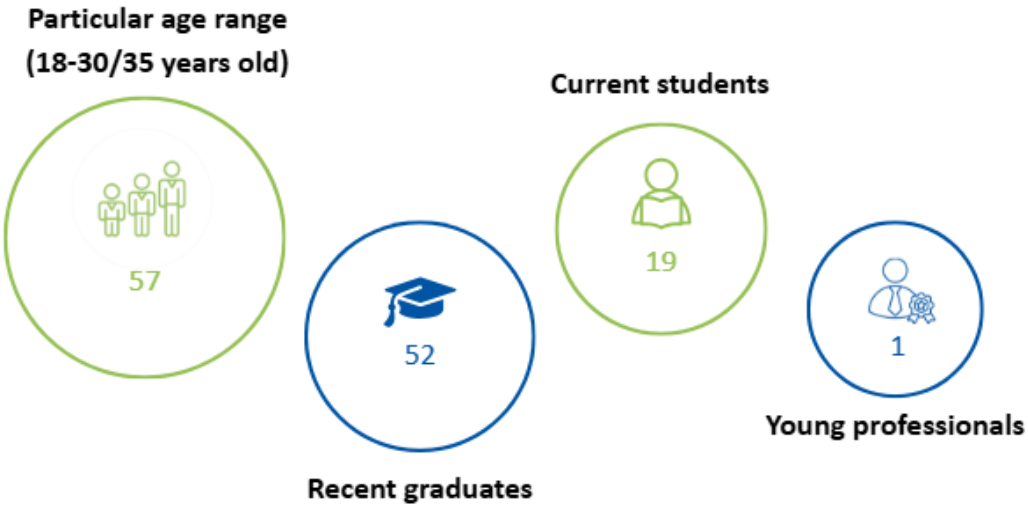
Figure 5. SMPs most commonly target highly skilled individuals.



Note: Overlap exists, as SMPs may enable the participation of more than one skill level.

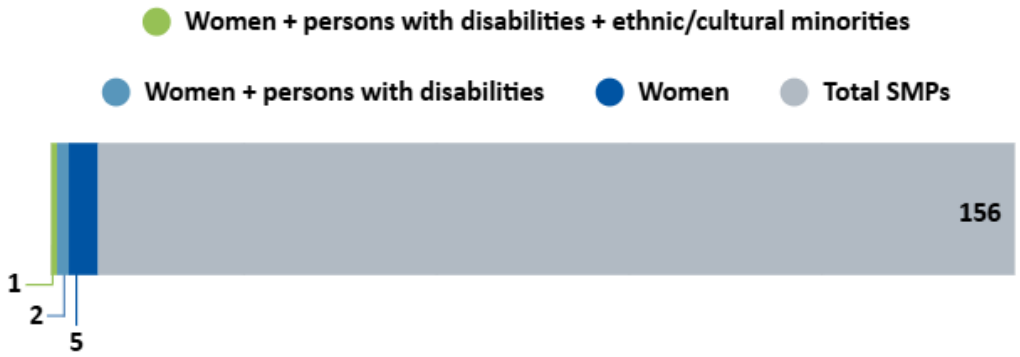
The highest number of SMPs (97) cover high-skilled individuals, defined as participants with advanced expertise and qualifications, often holding higher education degrees or specialised certifications in their given fields. Half of SMPs (78) cover middle-skilled individuals, defined as participants with intermediate skills and qualifications, typically possessing technical or vocational training or associate degrees or currently undergoing higher education. Only 17 SMPs cover low-skilled individuals, defined as participants with basic skills and minimal formal training or education, often performing routine or manual tasks. There is overlap, as several SMPs are open to more than one skill level (e.g. current students and recent graduates – see Figure 6). In addition, some SMPs state that they are open to "skilled workers" or use another term that cannot be categorised into the above low/middle/high scale, as sufficient detail was not specified. Yet other SMPs do not clearly specify what skill level participants must have in order to be eligible to participate.

Figure 6. Most SMPs aim to engage younger individuals, although this is defined in different ways.



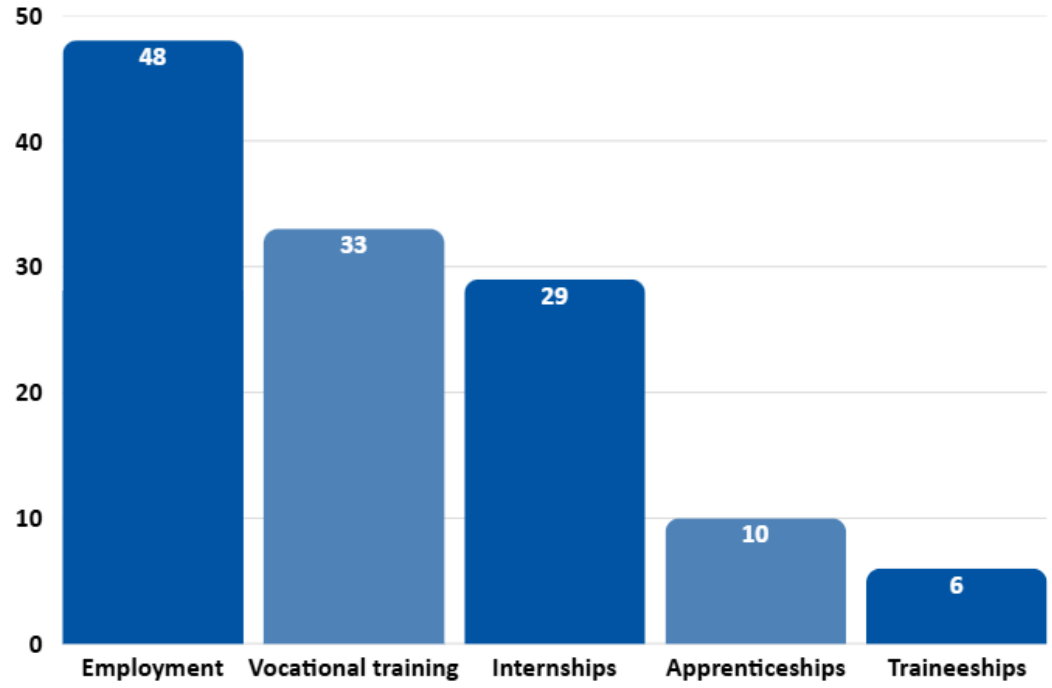
The majority of SMPs place an emphasis on engaging younger individuals, with 37% specifying a particular age range in their eligibility requirements, often 18 to 30 or 35 years old. Recent graduates are targeted by 33% of SMPs, current students by 12%, and young professionals by one SMP. There is some overlap, as there are some SMPs that target, for instance, current students and recent graduates.

Figure 7. Of 156 initiatives, just eight focus on the participation of underrepresented groups.



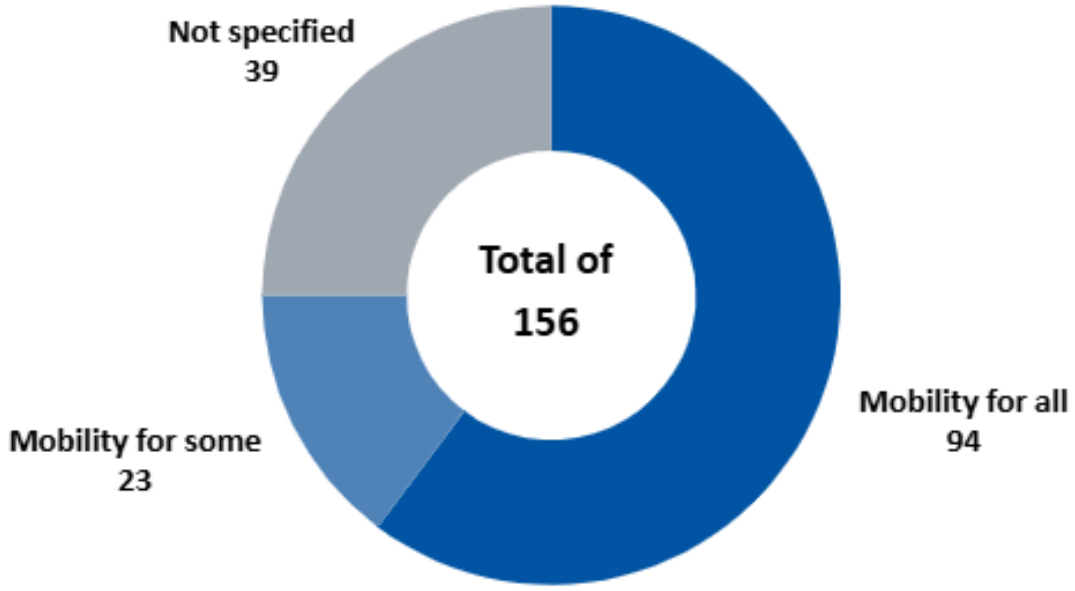
Of these eight, all focus on women's participation, of which two also target persons with disabilities and one includes persons with disabilities and ethnic and cultural minorities. None of the mapped initiatives place a specific focus on individuals with protection concerns.

Figure 8. Eight in 10 of all SMPs in the inventory include some form of on-the-job training as a skilling component.



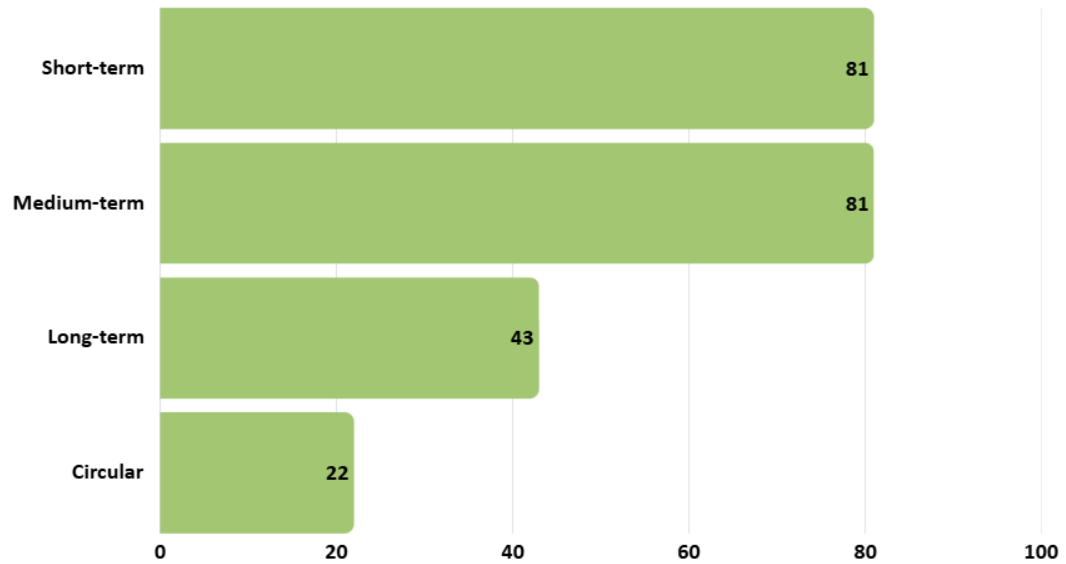
The majority of SMPs offer some form of on-the-job training and may offer more than one type of skilling. The most common on-the-job skilling is employment placements (38%), followed by vocational training (26%) and internships (23%). On-the-job training primarily takes place in the country of destination. The remaining 20% of SMPs do not include on-the-job training but instead include a variety of skilling components such as language training, courses to support professional development, and specialised courses such as ICT training, driving training, or change management. These types of skilling components occur regularly both in the origin country and the destination country.

Figure 9. The majority of SMPs facilitate mobility for all participants.



The majority of SMPs (60%) in the inventory facilitate mobility for all participants, while 15% offer mobility for some, using home and away tracks, and 25% do not specify the scope of mobility.

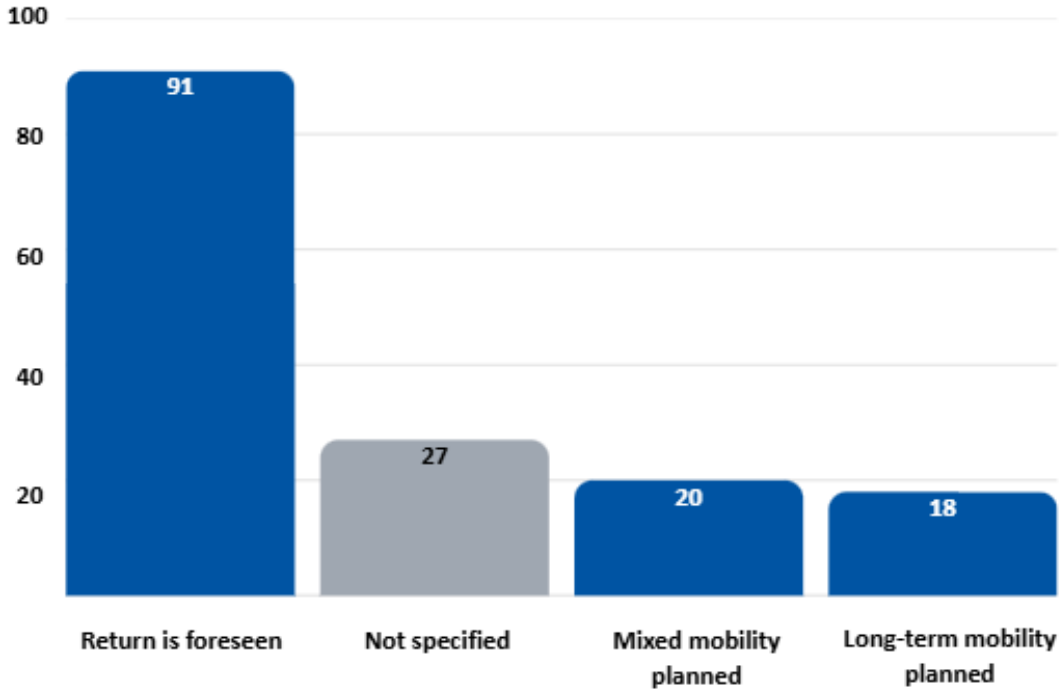
Figure 10. SMPs most frequently facilitate short-term and medium-term mobility.



Note: Overlap exists, as many SMPs facilitate more than one type of mobility duration

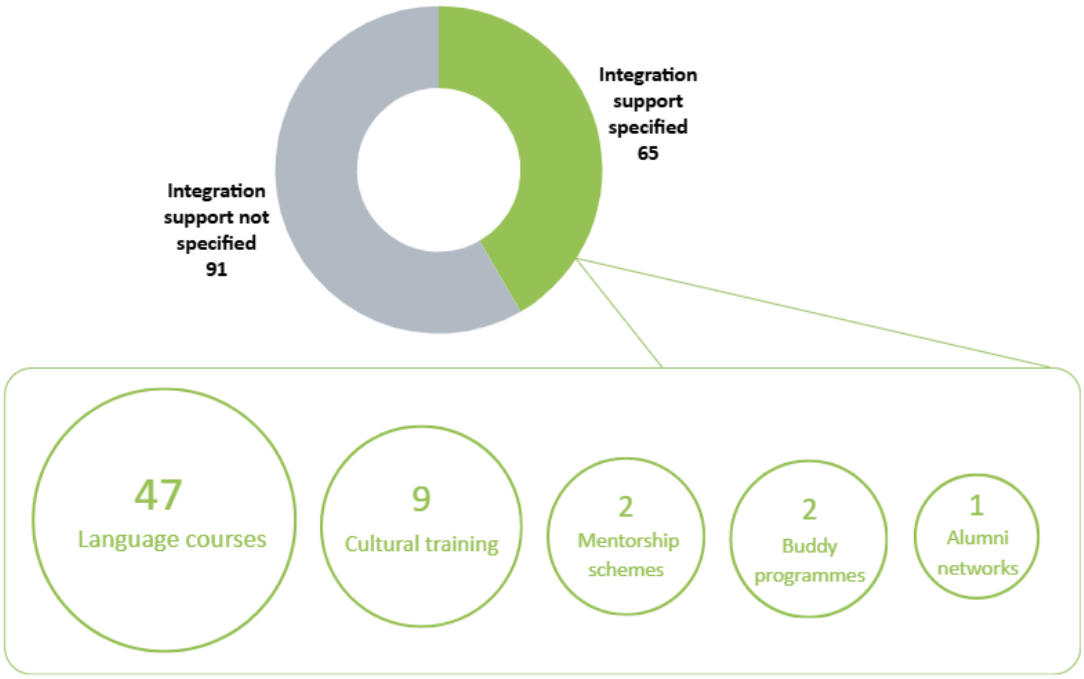
Several SMPs facilitate more than one type of mobility. Short-term and medium-term mobility are the most common, and are each included in 81 SMPs. Long-term mobility is facilitated by roughly half this number of SMPs (43), with circular mobility facilitated less often (22). There is overlap, as several SMPs offer more than one mobility duration. While these categories refer to the design of SMPs, in reality it is possible that, beyond their scope, an individual foreseen to return in fact transitions to another status and stays in the destination country, or a person meant to migrate long-term decides on their own at some point to return. This is not captured by the inventory, as it goes beyond data collected on partnership design.

Figure 11. Nearly six in 10 SMPs foresee the return of participants to their country of origin.



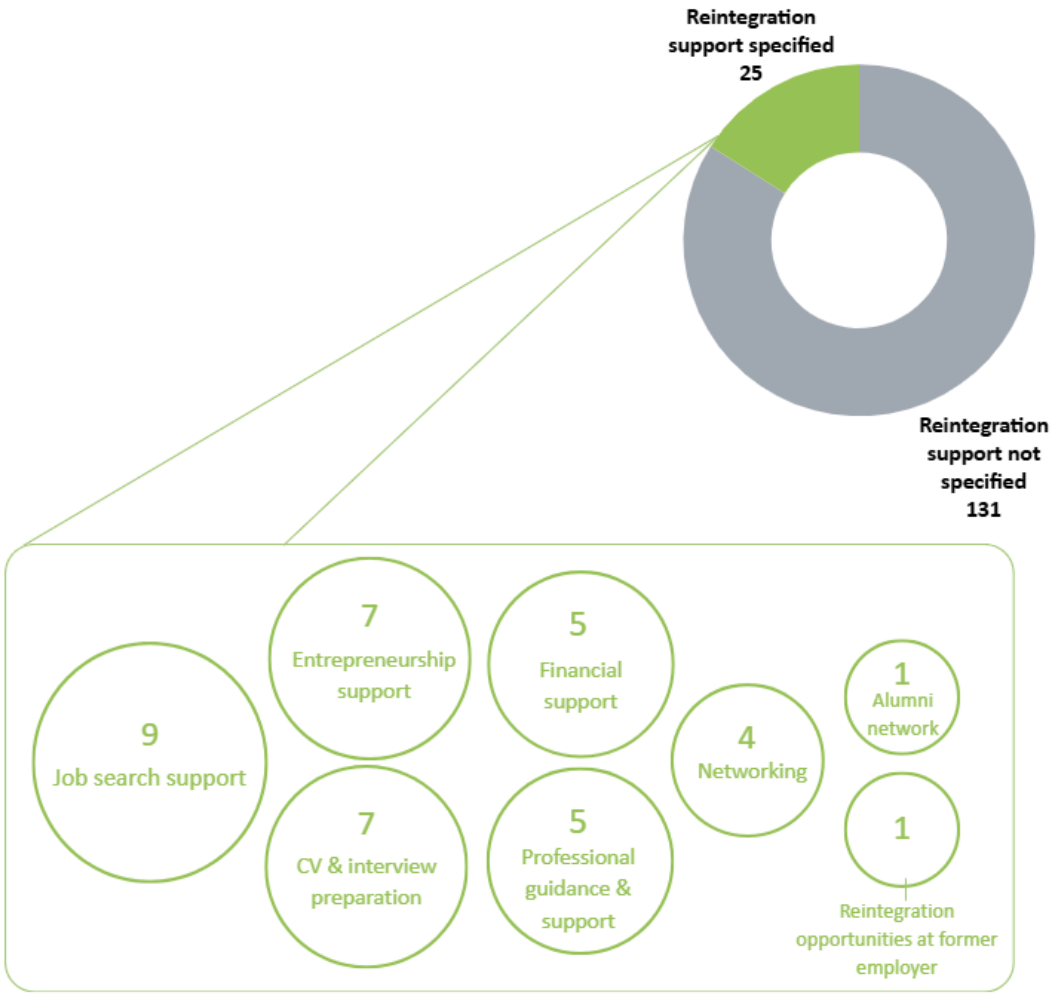
The inventory marks what type of mobility design the SMP uses, based on the classification system (typology) developed: mixed mobility planned, return foreseen, and long-term mobility planned. The most common approach is return foreseen (58%), meaning that the SMP facilitates short-term, medium-term, and/or circular mobility. 13% plan mixed mobility, meaning a combination of long-term mobility and short-term, medium-term, and/or circular mobility. Only 11% include just long-term mobility. Notably, 17% of SMPs do not specify the mobility design.

Figure 12. Social integration is offered by 42% of SMPs, largely via language training.



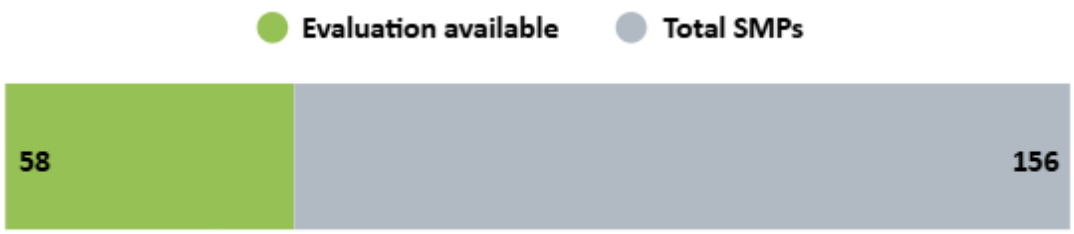
In many cases, language training is the only integration support provided. Other types of integration support include cultural training, mentor or buddy programmes, and alumni networks.

Figure 13. Reintegration support for (prospective) returnees is much less common, provided by 17% of SMPs.



Compared to integration support, reintegration support is a more diverse mix, including job search support, entrepreneurship support, CV and interview preparation, financial support, professional guidance, networking, and other activities. Activities may be conducted in the country of destination or origin, before or after return.

Figure 14. Nearly 40% of SMPs had a publicly available evaluation or assessment.



Of the 58 evaluations found, 33 assessed a formal agreement, 20 assessed a project, and 5 assessed a programme. The evaluations vary both in scope and form, and have been conducted by diverse actors such as donors, research organisations, think tanks, or universities. The publicly available evaluations vary in the amount of detail they give about the particular SMP. Many provide data on participation;

some provide detail on the design of the SMP, and some focus on the impact the SMP has had (focusing on, for example, facilitating factors or barriers to success). Additionally, some of the evaluations were interim in nature, only providing early findings without providing data on the overall impact or total number of participants.

Information on skills and qualifications recognition, integration support, and reintegration support were commonly not specified.

These elements are important for a smooth-functioning and impactful partnership, yet in several cases desk research did not yield any information about relevant measures for individuals participating in these SMPs. For this reason, where information was not available, these instances were marked as 'unspecified' in the inventory. To make these gaps more visible to users, where the inventory is visualised on the Link4Skills Navigator, an overview explanatory document drawing on information from Section III will be published to illustrate where such processes or services are not mentioned across SMPs. The lack of public information on these areas is an important finding in itself and will be incorporated into other project-related analysis and publications.