

CONFERENCE REVIEW

Transnational Skill Partnerships as a Contribution to Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Summary of the 2023 SORM Conference¹

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Abstract

This report summarizes contributions, discussions, findings and conclusions from the 68th International Conference of the Association for the World Refugee Problem (AWR) on the subject of “Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Transnational Skill Partnerships”. It was held at the Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt on 24-26 May 2023 and gathered expertise from science and practice, from receiving and sending States.

Key Words:

labour migration; skill partnerships; safe migration; regular migration; orderly migration

1 Introduction

In 2018, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (G.A. Res. 73/195, 2019) as a non-binding but comprehensive soft law catalyst of global migration governance (Chetail, 2019: 300, 330). Reiteration No. 7 of its preamble recalls:

“This Global Compact presents a non-legally binding, cooperative framework that builds on the commitments agreed upon by Member States in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. It fosters international cooperation among all relevant actors on migration, acknowledging that no State can address migration alone, and upholds the sovereignty of States and their obligations under international law.”

While the Global Compact itself does not define the concept of safe, orderly and regular migration, migration features as a key cross-cutting theme in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Target 10.7 calls for States to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” (G.A. Res. 70/1, 2015) within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 on reducing inequalities. Through this goal and its contingent

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target, States acknowledge that good migration governance is a key element for safer, more orderly and more regular migration.

Migration is considered orderly when it occurs within the legal framework of the origin, transit, and destination countries (International Organization for Migration [IOM], n.d.). Similarly, regular migration refers to “migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination” (IOM, 2023). Although there is no single definition of safe migration, it is generally understood to be a highly variable concept which fluctuates throughout all phases of migration and is not dependent on whether the migration occurs through regular or irregular channels (IOM, n.d.). Adding the term “responsible”, as SDG target 10.7 does, means requiring arrangements that would not only avoid negative impacts on, but create benefits for the migrant, the country of origin and the country of destination – in other terms, a triple win.

The 2018 Compact thus aims to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration by encouraging international cooperation of State and non-State actors and the development of improved migratory pathways (G.A. Res. 73/195, 2019; Chetail, 2019: 330-331). To guide the realization of this formidable feat, 23 objectives were outlined in the Compact, including several relating to the development of global skill partnerships, particularly Objective 18 which reads as follows: “Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences” (G.A. Res. 73/195, 2019: Objective 18).

Global skill partnerships refer to bilateral, mutually beneficial agreements between two or more countries to promote skills development and skilled migration (Clemens, 2015: 5).

“The heart of a Global Skill Partnership is a pre-migration agreement between two countries. The governments and any private-sector partners agree on who at the destination will help finance migrants’ training, what portion of training will occur at the origin and to what standard, who will offer employment at the destination under what conditions, and how the benefits of skilled migration will support training for non-migrants. The agreement shapes the financing for training skilled migrants in such a way that it creates, rather than depletes, human capital in the origin country. At the same time it meets the needs of the destination country while opening opportunities for migrants.”

The overarching goal is to design partnerships that benefit not only the destination country but also the country of origin and people migrating. This is no easy task, as concerns about brain drain and other negative developmental consequences in countries of origin remain front and centre; however, if implemented properly, skill partnerships should work to counteract these potential consequences and ensure other agreed-upon benefits for the country of origin (Clemens, 2015).

However, terminology is not fixed so far. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Organization of Employers (IOE), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), too, formed a Global Skills Partnership (GSP)

“to mobilize technical expertise of the [originally] three organizations towards supporting governments, employers, workers and their organizations, educational institutions and training providers, and other stakeholders to develop and recognize the skills of migrant workers with a particular focus on women and youth” (ILO et al. n.d.).

Skill partnerships, otherwise known as talent partnerships, are also a central component of the European Commission's deliberate approach to migration as set out by the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (European Commission, 2022: 10, footnotes omitted):

“Talent Partnerships should combine direct support for mobility schemes or work or training with capacity building and investment in human capital, including skills development, vocational education and training and operationalisation of work-based exchange schemes. In doing so, they aim to ensure an equal win for partner countries, Member States, business communities on both sides and individuals benefitting from the partnerships. In line with the EU bilateral cooperation with partner countries, they should benefit the economic development of communities of origin, advance key partner countries' broader development goals and strengthen opportunities for their citizens. At the same time, they should help address shortages in certain sectors of Member States' labour markets and help the business community on both sides to build the skills in demand. They should transform the risk of brain drain from partner countries into brain gain for all partners, benefiting those involved as they access renewed training opportunities, professional experiences and additional study or vocational education and training developed either in the EU or in their countries of origin.”

So far, several pilot projects have been set up in different parts of the world. Some have been evaluated or reported on (Bailey, 2021; ICMPD 2021). Other studies relate to the potentials of certain countries or regions of origin (Adhikari et al., 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; Ogwo & Ezekoye, 2020; Ibourk, 2020). Guidelines have been issued (ILO, 2020). The envisioned and promulgated triple win, however, has been questioned. Rother et al. (2021) claim:

“However, these high aspirations have not resulted in many concrete projects, much less larger scale approaches. The focus of the few existing partnerships so far have been mostly on nurse training and employment, with some promising programs – such as the German GIZ Triple-Win-Program – supporting their fair recruitment from countries such as the Philippines and Tunisia . Beyond nursing, the GIZ started a German-Moroccan Partnership for the Training and Recruitment of Skilled Workers in 2019, which seems to work with some success. Moreover, a number of small pilot projects on 'Legal skilled migration', Nigeria with Lithuania, Morocco with Belgium and Spain; as well as Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt with France, have been launched under the Mobility Partnership Facility, providing first lessons learned. What is still missing, though, are firstly, a broadening of programmes to include further sectors of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and employment; and secondly, an implementation of programmes that benefit all sides.”

Azahaf (2020) proposed a classification of three types of partnerships depending on where and when qualification measures would come into play:

- Type 1: Upskilling measures in the country of destination
- Type 2: Vocational training in the country of destination
- Type 3: Vocational training in the country of origin according to harmonized standards

Rother et al. (2021), however, proposed a “Type 2.5” approach for the specific case of Ghana, where

“some fundamental skills (for example the equivalent to a German Bauhelfer, or construction assistant) could be taught in Ghana along with German language training embedded within the local TVET system, with the potential to access further specific training after migration to Germany. In a first step, training would likely be implemented as a full dual vocational training according to German standards following a preparatory year, with prospectively acknowledging further skills obtained in the country of origin. Drop-outs during the phase in Ghana would ideally

continue their skills training in the TVET system with a sustainable job perspective in the local labour market. If participants in Germany decide to leave the programme, they would have acquired skills useful in the Ghanaian context. This »Type 2.5« approach could easily be integrated into the curriculum of the Ghanaian National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) or other training institutes such as the Accra Technical Training Institute (ATTC). German language training would be provided by established German institutions in Ghana.”

A similar binational model was proposed by Roßkopf (2022) for Jordan.

A multifaceted discussion on the potential use of global skill partnerships, otherwise known as transnational skill partnerships, as a method for safe, orderly, and regular migration was held during the *2023 Conference on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration: Transnational Skill Partnerships*, hosted by the Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (THWS), the Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem (AWR), the German Jordanian University (GJU), and the Nuremberg Institute of Technology (NIT). A multidisciplinary group of guests, including speakers from government institutions, international organizations, and various universities, presented on the relevance of skill partnerships within their respective fields. Additionally, a number of panel discussions were dispersed throughout the three-day event to allow for more in-depth discussions on the topic. Talking points included the definition of a triple win, the advantages of and concerns regarding such partnerships, the steps and barriers leading to their development, descriptions and evaluations of already existing projects, perspectives from countries of origin, and suggestions for improvement, amongst others. While a number of the contributions are published in this issue, the following sections will summarize the main findings of the conference.

2 Triple Win: Who Benefits from Skill Partnerships?

The conference began with a brief explanation of transnational skills partnerships and the underlying triple win theory by *Prof. Dr. Ralf Roßkopf*. The latter aims to ensure that the benefits of skill partnerships are distributed equitably among the country of origin, destination country, and migrants themselves.

2.1 Benefits of Skill Partnerships

The benefits for destination countries are easily identifiable and were reiterated by several presenters throughout the conference. *Prof. Dr. Michael Sauer*, University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg, Germany, for example, began his lecture by outlining the relevance of the labour shortage issue in Germany, stating that to meet labour demands, a net migration of 400,000 workers was needed each year. Workers in health care and trade sectors are particularly needed. *Dennis Röntgen*, Senior Policy Officer in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) flagged that this is largely due to Germany’s aging population. Thus, the BMZ has turned to developing and emerging countries in search of skilled labour.

This challenge, however, is not at all confined to Germany. In fact, many EU countries are reportedly struggling to meet labour needs as *Diane Angermüller*, Head of Sector Legal Migration at the European Commission 2023, outlined. *Rob De Lobel*, head of the Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Unit of the IOM in Belgium, confirmed that Belgium is also experiencing a shortage of skilled workers.

Moreover, this challenge is not only prevalent in the labour market, but also in the education field. Due to the decrease in young people in Germany, universities are tasked with recruiting students from abroad if they wish to remain open as both *Stefan Bienefeld*, Head of Division Transnational Education and Cooperation Programmes at DAAD, and *Prof. Dr. Robert Grebner*, President of the THWS, Germany, illustrated.

In some cases, benefits for the destination country extend beyond just filling the labour shortage gap. *Prof. Dr. Bader Madi*, Head of the Department of Social Work, German Jordanian University (GJU), Amman, Jordan, pointed to the role of Germany's partnership with Jordan in opening his university which has helped the EU establish a conduit with the Middle East. In exchange for representing Jordanian values abroad, the migrants themselves benefit by gaining skills to work in both the local and international labour markets.

The potential benefits of a transnational skill partnership for the country of origin tend to vary greatly. A dialogue during the conference's first panel discussion elaborated on such benefits. *Angermüller* claimed that many migrants are trained via a partnership and subsequently stay in, or return to, their country of origin, thereby avoiding a brain drain. *Röntgen* then emphasized the nuance, stressing that each country had different interests. It is consequently extremely important to listen to each individual partner country to determine what they were looking to gain. *Sauer* echoed the answers of his peers, introducing that some countries proactively sought partnerships to mitigate the consequences of high youth unemployment rates.

During the part of the conference in which country-specific case examples were presented, many speakers confirmed this statement, citing high unemployment rates as a reason for showing interest in skill partnerships. According to *Prof. Dr. Ala'aldeen Al-Halhouli*, President of the GJU, Jordan has experienced rapid population growth due to the many recent waves of refugees, leaving roughly 70% of its population under the age of 29. Since Jordan does not have a well-working industrial economy to accommodate such a large workforce, unemployment is on the rise. Similarly, *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdullah Omar Yassen*, Head of Cultural Relations Unit, Erbil Polytechnic University, Erbil, shared that Iraq suffers from a low employment rate due to unrelenting wars, economic reliance on oil, and a large percentage of the country's population being under the age of 24. This led many people to emigrate to other countries or other regions of Iraq. Since Germany had a large Kurdish population, many migrants prefer to search for employment in Germany, which was affirmed by *Asst. Prof. Dr. Paiman Ahmad*, President of University of Raparin, Ranya, Iraq. Other countries are also struggling with high unemployment as was acknowledged by *Dr. Hélène Syed Zwick*, Executive Director of the Research Center, ESLSCA University, Cairo, for Egypt, *Prof. Dr. Samir Djelti*, Department of Economics, University of Mascara, Mascara, for Algeria, as well as *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chukwuedozie K. Ajaero*, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka, for Nigeria.

Other influential factors may be economic, geographic, or political. Egypt's economy, for example, is in a precarious state according to *Syed Zwick*. As inflation rises, the GDP per capita declines and debt levels remain high. Moreover, the country has a strong connection with migration due to its volatile political situation and its geographic location.

Furthermore, *Sauer* proposed skill partnerships as a pathway to legal migration for people from Kosovo, a country in which many citizens turn to migration to escape family hardship

and the lack of political infrastructure. As *Shege Bahtiri* and *Dr. Petrit Beqiri*, Institute of Southeast Europe for Health and Social Policy (ISEE-HSP) exemplified with the case of the Heimerer College, advantages of a partnership in the case of Kosovo include increased income, skill formation and mobility opportunities for graduates, improvements to Kosovo's Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in terms of transformative sector development, improved social security and political stability, increased networks and expert perception in case of return, as well as the expansion of private industries.

Discussed benefits of skill partnerships for Nigeria differ slightly, as *Ajaero* demonstrated, and include the utilization of Nigeria's young population, a reduction in irregular migration and the connected costs on all sides, brain gain, remittances to Nigeria and, in the best case, even the reduction of inequalities among nations.

A presentation by *Dr. Ngozi E. Chukwu*, *Prof. Dr. Uzoma U. Okoye* and *Mary Olaitan*, all from the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, on the existing partnership between the THWS and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) further highlighted some of the potential benefits of bilateral agreements in the field of higher education. Although the partnership is not to be considered a transnational skill partnership in the strict sense, as it does not aim at training and recruiting Nigerians for the German labour market, and despite having been established only in 2017, several benefits in terms of capacity building were already identified including the incorporation "of intercultural dimensions in teaching and research", hosting an international conference, developing a journal, increased respect from other departments at the University, advice on writing research grants, and using networking opportunities with the THWS to help Master and PhD candidates secure "admissions to institutions in Europe, Canada, Australia, and Hong Kong" (Chukwu et al., 2023, slides 9-10).

Ultimately, the benefits of partnerships are highly dependent on the needs of the stakeholders involved, and the importance of individualized projects was emphasized throughout the conference. *Bienefeld* exemplified and reiterated this sentiment, stating that the idea that migration should be fair and sustainable is at the core of DAAD's work. In other words, all projects and partnerships should be justifiable and beneficial for all actors involved. This means designing partnerships on a country-to-country basis. While some countries may be happy to establish a partnership and give their citizens the chance to emigrate, other countries may experience a loss of needed workers and would therefore not welcome the same proposed partnership. Therefore, transparency is key.

2.2 Concerns regarding Skill Partnerships

Although the triple win narrative is easy to understand and seemingly encompasses the interests of several parties, it is not without flaws. In this regard, *Sauer* pointed to disadvantages including trade-offs, its oversimplification of a complex issue, disregard for certain stakeholders including employers and civil society groups, a narrow and short-term outlook, and the lack of acknowledgement of potential power imbalances. In sum, it presents as good in theory, but all too often it does not hold up as well in practice.

One concerning reality of skill partnerships that cannot be ignored is the fear of a nation-wide brain drain for countries of origin who agree to partnerships. Brain drain refers to the emigration of highly qualified, skilled workers from the country of origin to countries where they may have better prospects. As was highlighted by *Olaitan*, *Chukwu* and *Okoye*, unfortunately, brain drain is already a highly relevant topic in Nigeria, where it is currently

occurring in key sectors such as the healthcare, education, and banking sectors. The healthcare sector is taking an especially hard hit, as the annual number of doctors emigrating out of Nigeria increased drastically from 2015 to 2021, leaving Nigeria with only 43,013 doctors for its population of more than 215 million people. To exacerbate to this already existing problem, *Ajaero* cited recruitment from abroad as a factor contributing to brain drain in Nigeria, especially in relation to the high number of Nigerian nationals becoming nurses in the UK. As *Roßkopf* flagged, however, when debating this topic, one should carefully separate unregulated international recruitment from abroad from transnational skill partnerships, which actually aim at preventing a brain drain by selecting the right partner countries and carefully designing the partnership. In the same vein, *Röntgen* argued brain drain should not become the ultimate argument against transnational skill partnerships. Instead, it should be taken as a reason to increase efforts to mitigate related risks and to maximize the benefits for both partner countries. *Ajaero*, too, concluded that skill partnerships could actually prevent brain drain if rightly implemented.

One might attempt to solve this problem by recommending policies encouraging the eventual return of migrants to their countries of origin. However, as one participant at the conference pointed out, the assumption that many migrants will return home to the origin country is unrealistic as migrants often have increased opportunities in destination countries and might even be afraid of being perceived as having failed if they return to the country of origin. *Dr. Katrin Marchand*, UNU-Merit at the Maastricht University, Netherlands, agreed, pointing out that many migrants are committed to their families rather than their countries of origin; therefore, one cannot assume automatic benefits for the country of origin. On the other hand, *Roßkopf* pointed to the case of Jordan where facilitating labour migration to abroad was perceived as a strategic goal of the national government to relieve the pressure on the labour market, social security and the overall political system. The given controversial examples might, again, reaffirm that transnational skill partnerships certainly do not fit for all countries, but definitely some.

During one of the panel discussions, the issue of social disruptions arose. It was acknowledged that social disruptions often occur in countries of origin as a result of labour migration, and *Sauer* contributed that the impacts of such migration are not only economic, but also familial and structural. He admitted that this is an area of study still in need of better understanding and coping. One potential solution is circular migration; however, the topic has to be further explored. *Röntgen* concluded the panel discussion by acknowledging that although this issue has not yet been directly addressed by his ministry, it is an example of how research could guide policy development.

Another prevalent concern is the short-term nature of many partnership agreements. As *Detlef Gürtler*, German Trade and Invest, Region Africa/Middle East, pointed out, to date, several small-scale projects have been implemented to promote the recruitment of skilled professionals from abroad. Although this might be a good first step, long-term projects are the only way to ensure sustainability over time. He suggested a scientific approach to transitioning from short-term to long-term projects. By evaluating the projects in a scientific and collective manner, new projects could learn from the successes or failures of previous projects, thus avoiding the repetition of mistakes and the waste of resources.

Challenges in relation to skill partnerships not only affect countries as a whole, but also the individual migrants themselves. According to *Bahtiri* and *Beqiri*, in the case of the

Heimerer College in Kosovo, an educational institution established based on a bilateral agreement between the Kosovar and German governments and modelled after German curricula, migrants might experience increased income and mobility opportunities. However, they also face many challenges such as non-transferable professional qualifications and the inability to find a job upon return to the country of origin. Alternatively, the students who choose to migrate often face struggles relating to integration in the destination country.

It thus became clear throughout the conference that achieving a triple win is not an easy task. In some cases, it simply fails, such as is the case with the European Blue Card system according to an intervention by *Syed Zwick*. Furthermore, one may question how often extensive and unbiased evaluations of skill partnerships occur. In fact, during the presentation of *Dr. Ngo Quynh An*, Faculty of Human Resource Economics and Management at the Hanoi National Economics University, Vietnam, *Andreas Meyn*, Saarland University, Germany, *Sauer* and *Marchand* on skill partnerships between Germany and Vietnam, it was noted that true evaluations on whether or not a particular pilot program qualifies as a triple win are rare, and, thus, a better understanding of the overall distribution of advantages and disadvantages for all stakeholders must be sought after.

To account for these concerns, *Sauer* proposed an alternative, supposedly more nuanced approach, which he called the sustainable labour migration framework. This approach is supposed to involve a more in-depth and long-term analysis of the impacts of partnerships on all interest groups, not only the three parties outlined by the triple win theory. By dividing different types of skill partnerships into typologies based on temporal types of migration, qualification levels, and types of labour migration, a cube is developed which could be used in practice to assess and evaluate the outcomes of labour migration.

3 Existing Skill Partnerships

Since the concept of skill partnerships is relatively new and their establishment procedure is not yet streamlined, figuring out how to initiate a partnership can be confusing. Thus, during the first panel discussion, *Roßkopf* provoked a conversation on missing, unclear, untransparent and overlapping responsibilities, procedures and budgets. Taking Germany as an example, he pointed to non-harmonized activities of different ministries and governmental or semi-governmental entities. This was even added by a regional layer with the European Commission, in an attempt to harmonize Member States's policies, tasking the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, a non-governmental organization from Austria, to implement, i.e., skill partnership projects for Germany.

Throughout the conference, many examples of pilot projects for skill partnerships were introduced. First, *Dr. Jennifer Tangney*, Senior Project Manager, Migration Partnership Facility, ICMPD, Brussels, Belgium, presented on the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), an initiative sponsored by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and financed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME). It aims to be a bridge between policies and practice by providing support for labour migration partnerships. This is accomplished by offering advice for the development and design of mobility partnerships and providing continuing support by way of technical assistance. One such practical support mechanism was the creation of a partner country dashboard which provides relevant information about

potential partner countries, laws and agreements, and pertinent economic sectors. Several MPF projects have been completed and several are currently underway (including Digital Explorers between Lithuania and Nigeria; PALIM between Belgium and Morocco; HOMERe between France and Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt; YGCA between Spain and Morocco, MOVE_GREEN between Spain and Morocco; MENTOR 2 between Italy, Morocco and Tunisia; PEM between Belgium and Senegal; Digi Talents between Slovakia and Moldova; and WAFIRA between Spain and Morocco). Their projects are divided into three phases: pre-departure, mobility, and reintegration into the country of origin. The overarching objective of all projects is to help meet labour demands in both the EU and partner countries.

The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) has also been tasked with the promotion of transnational skill partnerships as was introduced by *Sonja Alves Luciano*, Advisor Labour Migration, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Bonn, Germany. Their projects are based on three models. The Triple Win Model I “Adaption Training” simplifies the qualification recognition process for migrants who are already qualified nurses in their respective countries of origin. Alternatively, the Triple Win Model II “Training in Germany” provides vocational training completely in Germany for trainees in the Vietnamese healthcare sector. The Triple Win Model III “Skills Partnership in the Country of Origin” is the opposite in that healthcare trainees receive full vocational training in the country of origin. The Triple Win Project and Global Skills Partnership Program are already underway in collaboration with countries such as Bosnia, Herzegovina, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Jordan, Tunisia, and Mexico. The majority of costs for both programs are covered by the receiving employers. In total, GIZ programs have already recruited over 5,000 nursing professionals to work in Germany; however, future triple win projects will address labour shortages in other professional sectors as well.

Anna-Kristina Kaufmann, Division Foreign Professionals, Federal Ministry of Health, Germany, showed that in parallel, the German Federal Government’s Skilled Labour Strategy was established following the 2021 cabinet decision. The strategy aims to fill the gap that has been created by the growing shortage of skilled healthcare workers in Germany and is guided by five main measures: (1) state-of-the-art training, (2) specific continuing education, (3) more effective leverage of labour potential and increased labour force participation, (4) improvement of the quality of work as well as a change in work culture, and last but not least (5) the modernization of immigration policy. She pointed to findings of the Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft [Institute of the German Economy] according to which the supply gap in the health care sector as a whole could increase to a total of just under 500,000 skilled workers by the year 2035. To mitigate this dramatic development, the working group, “Concerted Action for Nursing” [Konzertierte Aktion Pflege], was launched and has contributed to several projects including the Global Skill Partnerships program, implemented by GIZ, and the “Fair Recruitment Healthcare Germany” project which provides a legal basis for the distribution of seals of quality for institutions recruiting healthcare staff from abroad. As for the Global Skill Partnerships, the partnerships aim to enrich the Philippine and Mexican nursing education with additional content enabling the foreign nursing students to achieve a direct recognition of their qualification in Germany.

As already mentioned, Germany is not the only country implementing transnational skill partnerships. *Rob De Lobel*, Head of the Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Unit at IOM Belgium and Luxembourg, presented on Belgium's response to its shortage of skilled workers. The country has established several economic migration programs based on three project models. First is the Hybrid Labour Mobility model which provides young workers from Nigeria and Senegal with the opportunity to gain professional experience and hybrid employment in certain EU countries (Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands). This project is carried out with the concept of a triple win in mind. Next is the circular mobility model in which companies in Belgium offer temporary internships to young graduates from Tunisia before they return to their country of origin. Last, the Displacement Talent for Europe (DT4E) project was developed to allow highly qualified, displaced people from Lebanon and Jordan an opportunity for employment in Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Egypt has also implemented various mobility projects with several European countries, including Italy as *Syed Zwick* referenced. A cooperative, trusting relationship between several stakeholders already exists. Furthermore, Egypt has a close relationship with Germany due to development projects, language schools, trade, and tourism. In total, an estimated 400,000 people are currently learning German. In 2019, the pilot project Holistic Approach to Labour Market Governance and Mobility in North Africa (THAMM) was launched between both countries, and meanwhile the Egyptian-German Center for Jobs, Migration and Return was established. As its mission is to promote safe, regular, and responsible migration, it could become the nucleus for a sustainable framework for future transnational skill partnerships.

As has been shown, Nigeria is already involved in several transnational skill partnerships. According to *Ajaero*, the harmonization of certifications and standards in West Africa between Nigeria, Ghana and Togo in order to facilitate the portability of skills between the three countries could also serve as a catalyst to boost the confidence of employers abroad to engage in transnational skill partnerships. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), for example, has already been working with Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning to develop an improved vocational training system in Nigeria with a focus on construction and agriculture fields – both sectors are in high demand in Germany.

Vietnam, on the other hand, has well developed bilaterally managed migration programs with industrialized countries in the ASEAN region – Taiwan, South Korea and Japan – as *Marchand* highlighted. Their partnerships are based on their well-established government structures and policy framework for labour migration. Germany, too, has identified Vietnam as a "Global Partner" in development cooperation with a focus on vocational training, energy, and environment. Together, both countries have piloted several skill partnership projects in the healthcare sector.

Skill partnerships, in a broader sense, are not only confined to the field of labour, but are also prevalent at the educational level. The German Academic Exchange Service [Deutscher Akademischer Ausstauschdienst – DAAD], for example, is an umbrella organization connecting German universities with students from around the world. In response to German labour market needs, *Bienefeld* reported DAAD has recently adopted a focus on the transition from students to workers. With regard to potentials of transnational education structures for international skill partnerships, he pointed to the

German curricula offered, the German language skills of many graduates, their experiences in Germany during an exchange semester and/or internship, the reputation of a German or European accredited degree as well as the disciplinary focus on engineering in many of those activities and binational universities.

The GJU offers an example of this as *Al-Halhouli* elaborated. The University is a public state university designed in conjunction with Germany's applied sciences approach and has many programs aimed at opening pathways for students into the German labour market if they choose so. All students are required to achieve at least a B1 German language certificate and spend one year in Germany studying and completing an internship. This requires a great deal of coordination with German universities and companies, which is managed by the International Affairs Department (IAD). Additionally, the Deanship for Innovation, Technology Transfer and Entrepreneurship (DI-TECH) provides further resources aimed at helping students to integrate into the job market, such as career fairs and workshops, lectures, and "offshore" working opportunities. Students are also aided in the search for an internship and in the visa process. While these efforts primarily target GJU students, the ultimate goal is to expand offers to students from other Jordanian universities and vocational training programs. Such interinstitutional collaboration has been managed before for the local Jordanian field in a program inclusive of refugees from Syria called EDU-SYRIA.

As *Greber* explained, the THWS has previously taken a similar approach, from the perspective of an institution in a receiving country, by developing so-called English-taught TWIN programs to existing German-taught study programs. This enables the University not only to offer the same courses in two languages but also to become very attractive for the roughly 2,500 international degree seekers out of a total of around 9,600 students. A new entity at the University, the Campus German Applied Transnational Education (GATE) has been recently established with the support of DAAD and the mission to establish binational programs abroad. The aim is to encourage students to start their studies at a university abroad and then complete them at the THWS with a prospect to integrate into the labour force in Germany with a German degree. Such transnational partnerships assist the University's goal of equalizing transnational skills, thus contributing to a balance of skills worldwide. On a smaller scale, an online Social & Impact Entrepreneurship course with students from all over the world has "allowed micro-level skill partnerships to emerge" as Prof. Dr. Bolsinger, THWS Business School, illustrated (Bolsinger, 2023, slide 4).

A further blueprint for a partnership in the education field, presented by *Bahtiri* and *Beqiri*, is the previously mentioned Heimerer College, established in Kosovo with the goal of providing legal pathways and opportunities for graduates to join both local and international labour markets.

4 Common Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement

Although the previous examples prove that many partnerships are already in place, several barriers still prevent new partnerships from forming. *Najim Azahaf*, Senior Project Manager, Bertelsmann Stiftung, took the perspective of German businesses and found many barriers hindering a company's ability or willingness to recruit from abroad including primarily language barriers, the assessment of foreign qualifications, and bureaucratic hurdles but also misguided expectations from employees, recognition of foreign credentials and entry restrictions. A survey identified 28 projects/programs with a focus

on medium-skilled professionals in Germany in 2022. The undefined responsibility, frictions and inefficiencies were illustrated by the fact that on the federal level alone, five ministries (Ministry for International Cooperation and Development; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Protection; Ministry for Health; Ministry for Education and Research; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) were hosting a total of nine transnational skill partnership projects. While the most prevalent obstacle was seen in such a lack of efficiency, many companies believed an increased use of digital tools could lead to improvements in the processes for language qualification, training, and administration of partnerships. As classical barriers to the implementation of transnational skill partnerships, he listed high costs, lacking capacities for language courses (especially abroad), drop-outs, bureaucratic processes, hurdles for the recognition of qualifications and the buy-in of employers. Furthermore, during the related panel discussion, *Kaufmann* added that recruiting foreign professionals was expensive for companies, as they were often required to finance the training, language courses, and housing of said employees. To solve for this, three suggestions were made in *Azahaf's* presentation: increased policy coherence, project investors from both public and private sectors, and the development of practitioner communities across multiple, diverse sectors.

Gürtler then expanded the topic to a national level, outlining the primary hurdles standing in the way of Germany becoming an immigrant country to meet labour demands. First, bureaucratic red tape makes it extremely difficult for non-EU citizens to be granted a work permit. Second, foreign professionals are deterred from immigrating due to both racist attacks and the lack of a “welcoming culture”. Current immigration laws and societal discourse indicate a lack of openness and preparedness; hence, to break the gridlock, a mind-shift on all sides and best practice were called for. In his eyes, this includes shifting from “perennial projectitis” to long-term and large-scale structures, proposing Jordan to become a scientifically evaluated lab for labour immigration to Germany.

In some cases, the barriers for a partnership are found to be country specific. In Lebanon, for example, according to *Asst. Prof. Dr. Jasmin L. Diab*, Director Institute for Migration Studies, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon, there is a willingness of many refugees to work for significantly lower wages than Lebanese nationals. Refugees are also more likely to work in sectors of the informal economy, particularly construction and agriculture. This, in conjunction with Lebanon’s unstable political system, presents a unique challenge when organizations like the ILO attempt discussions on transnational skill partnerships. In Egypt, *Syed Zwick* identified a lack of a coordinated political framework, along with technological limitations and complex bureaucratic procedures, which act as prominent hurdles. Similarly, corruption, bureaucratic red-tape, and a lack of resources present a unique challenge for developing partnerships with Nigeria, as *Ajaero* took into consideration.

There may also be conflicts of interest as, according to *Yassen*, was the case in Iraq, where local governments are attempting to prevent emigration from Iraq or, as *Sauer* reminded the audience, in many countries of origin which are interested in circular migration, as opposed to receiving countries which often are interested in long-term migration. In the discussion portion of *Chukwu's*, *Okoye's* and *Olaitan's* presentation, *Brain Drain and its Impact on Access to Adequate and Quality Services from Key Sectors by Nigerians*, circular migration via skill partnerships was recommended as a tool for decreasing brain drain by establishing a policy framework that allows professionals trained abroad to return

to Nigeria and reintegrate into the Nigerian workforce. Whether this plan would be supported by Germany was not answered; however, perhaps a mutually beneficial solution would be the education model utilized by Heimerer College and introduced by *Bahtiri* and *Beqiri* in which there is a home track (for students who stay in the country of origin), an away track (for students who emigrate to a different country), and a returnee path (for those who study in Kosovo and then work in Germany for a limited period of time before returning to Kosovo).

Many suggestions were made throughout the conference on how to improve skill partnerships. Often, the suggestions overlapped, and presenters echoed the ideas of those before them. Already in the first presentation of the conference, *Sauer* proposed recommendations for improvement based on his proposed sustainable labour migration framework. (1) He called for a better interlinkage with other policy areas and integration into governmental strategies. (2) In the case of Germany, the BMZ should use its expertise to promote comprehensive bilateral labour migration agreements. (3) A more coherent and coordinated overall governmental approach is required. (4) The private sector, civil society and local actors should be systematically involved at an early stage. (5) Consistent expectation management as well as adequate time and planning horizons are seen key. (6) The availability of information and capacity development is stressed. (7) More complex skills partnership programmes should focus on transformation-relevant sectors. (8) If proven successful, sustainable funding should be made available for successful pilots. (9) Successful and innovative approaches have to be disseminated. (10) Finally, he asked for inter-, transdisciplinary and long-term analysis of labour migration.

Following this, *Röntgen* reiterated the importance of a relational approach which prioritizes rapport-building and a sustained effort from all actors involved, in addition to consistent funding. He also emphasized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, as each country has unique wants, needs, and social structures. Moreover, he suggested starting with smaller projects and, if successful, implementing them in the private sector on a larger scale. Other practical and structural factors key in determining the success of skill partnerships include language learning opportunities, capacities of immigration services, policies and legal framework, the welcoming culture of the country of destination, and availability of living spaces.

An alternative approach is that of EU Talent Partnerships, elicited by the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. As *Angermüller* demonstrated, the overarching concept is to replace country-specific bilateral skill partnerships with joint European agreements with interested third countries. The goal is to harmonize EU skill partnerships, thus streamlining migration procedures for migrants from third countries interested in participating in a skill partnership program. The key factor for ensuring triple win success of such partnerships is involvement from all relevant actors, including public officials of all involved countries and spokespeople from the corresponding private sectors, from the inception of the project. This could be implemented via round table discussions.

In the panel discussion *Making Transnational Skill Partnerships a Triple Win: How to Establish a Suitable Framework*, a recurrent theme was that of cohesiveness and the long-term success of transnational partnerships. As the presentations revealed, many projects are currently being implemented; however, a lack of infrastructure and an unclear distribution of responsibilities prevents long-term results. Suggested solutions included utilizing structures already existing in countries of origin, round table discussions involving

all relevant actors, improved digitalization and streamlining of migration processes, giving small projects the opportunity to expand to a larger scale, intensifying the collaboration between counselling centres in countries of origin and employment agencies in the receiving country, and a move to determine a responsible body for coordinating partnership agreements. Proposed bodies include ministries of foreign affairs, ministries for economic development or ministries for international cooperation and development. Furthermore, to eliminate structural barriers such as limited resources and funding and a fragmentation of responsible parties, one panel member suggested migrant-led projects in which migrants could initiate partnerships in a self-steered way. An alternative solution to the funding barrier could be to obtain more funding from the private sector.

Suggestions made by *Bienefeld* for improvement in the educational field are addressed to the different stake holders: (1) Policy-makers are to improve access to higher education in Germany, simplify and accelerate visa procedures, support higher education institutions through funding programs and support long-term fair migration funding programs. (2) Universities are called upon to design and offer attractive programs and, regarding marketing, to improve completion rates, knowledge competencies and social integration, provide active support in the transfer to the labour market and strengthen further education offers and lifelong learning. (3) Finally, companies should recognize and make use of the existing potentials provided by transnational higher education arrangements.

In the context of Heimerer College in Kosovo, *Bahtiri* and *Beqiri* suggested key improvements such as the diversification and harmonization of professional standards to account for the non-transferability of qualifications across countries. Furthermore, to encourage the return of graduates to Kosovo, *Sauer* introduced an initiative by Germany's GIZ in which Germany offers funding to Kosovo to supplement local salaries.

The presentation on skill partnerships between Germany and Vietnam also concluded with several recommendations for more sustainable labour migration in the context of mid-level professionals. Bottlenecks should be addressed such as German language teaching capacities and the recognition of Vietnamese vocational certificates. Multiple pathways should be pursued by scaling up and supporting all three types of labour mobility, namely recruiting youth for apprenticeships, recruiting skilled professionals with direct work contracts, and offering initial vocational education and training programs in a dual-track approach. Germany and Vietnam should establish a formalized partnership and implement a flexible governance structure based on an intergovernmental agreement, defining long-term goals, targets, and minimum standards, as well as enabling flexible and decentralized implementation. This should be accompanied by the creation of a transnational support facility, which should pool resources in a trust fund (possibly managed by KfW) and complement existing funding facilities in Vietnam. Information availability should be enhanced, the private sector better involved and further research on costs and benefits carried out.

Reinforcing what has already been proposed, a few very practical measures for improving mobility partnerships were recommended by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anja Zorob, Birzeit University, Palestine, including

“negotiating visa facilitations, improving consular services, enhancing information, facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications, improving migrants’ social integration, and enhancing social security coordination” (Zorob, 2023, slide 22).

5 Conclusion

Overall, the Conference “Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration” created a space for multifaceted discussions on transnational skill partnerships via presentations, panel discussions, and networking opportunities. Several aspects of skill partnerships were addressed such as the concept of a triple win, advantages and disadvantages of partnerships, barriers to developing sustainable partnerships, and suggestions for improvements. An overview of select current agreements and projects was also given.

Although there is a clear interest for skill partnerships from multiple stakeholders, a long-term, comprehensive and unbiased analysis must be carried out to determine the true consequences, positive and negative, of such partnerships for all actors involved. It is clear that the impacts are not only economic, but also social. To avoid potential exploitation, plans must be put in place for what steps will be taken when an analysis determines a partnership actually is not a triple win. Furthermore, careful attention must be paid to class-related power-imbalances to ensure that opportunities for migrants to participate in a partnership are accessible to all, not just the upper-class.

Furthermore, considering skill partnerships from a postcolonial perspective reveals a new set of concerns. One might question whether skill partnerships are truly mutually beneficial or if they hold potential to create a new form of colonialism in which high-income countries control the narrative and hold all the power. As was mentioned during a discussion, this topic paves the way for a dialogue on power dynamics, culture, politics, and epistemology, and how this all relates to historical colonialism.

There is no single answer for the best way to move forward with transnational skill partnerships. As *Röntgen* highlighted, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The unique wants, needs, and structures of each individual stakeholder must be taken into account and, as acknowledged by *Sauer*, the nuance and variability of skill partnerships should not be ignored in pursuit of a simple answer. Transparent and inclusive discussions serve as a tool to prevent harmful consequences – intentional or not – and design projects beneficial for all. Conferences, like the SORM Conference, serve as a good meeting place for stakeholders to exchange ideas and insights.

Within these limitations, some conclusions may be drawn, meant as connection points for the required scientific discourse and the practical implementation on the ground:

1. The definition of transnational skill partnerships needs to be further clarified. A clear differentiation from unregulated recruitment policies and arrangements is needed. In order to guarantee this, bilateral agreements are mandatory where at least the government of the country of origin is one of the partners, while private entities might be similarly involved.
2. The triple win in a broader sense should be regarded as the unique differentiation point. When looking to the country of origin and the receiving country, private players are also to be taken into consideration. The partnership needs to be defined including the perspective of the country of origin from the beginning. While a brain gain by returnees in a framework of circular migration should be considered such a benefit, reality shows it seldomly materializes even if intended in the beginning. This could be mitigated if a dual approach was taken from the start with one vocational track serving the local and another one the international

market – and maybe even a third opening the return path. To compensate for the country of origin's prior investments into the education of the candidates, both tracks should be primarily funded by the country of destination, particularly its industry that otherwise would have had to invest in their own education system, typically at higher costs, if there had been enough students in in Germany. The value of remittances for the economy and society of countries of origin should not be underestimated. In case of a closed labour market in the countries of origin, emigration can often be considered a relief on social subsidies otherwise needed to sustain the livelihood of a greater population as well as on pressure on the individuals, society and public authorities threatening to delegitimize the local government and system. In any scheme, the triple win should not only focus should on the academic elite of a country but also consider those vocationally trained.

3. A careful selection of the partner countries is decisive in creating a triple win even though that limits the number of possible partner countries significantly. Apart from a clear governmental commitment, there is a need for transparent structures and responsibilities, a saturated market minimally for the professions concerned, a young demography, and a functioning and somehow fitting educational system, specifically structures.
4. The candidates, too, have to be selected carefully. They need to combine a desire for vocational training with the capability and eagerness to learn the language of the receiving country.
5. Language training and acquisition can be seen as one of the main obstacles. If it starts abroad already, the needed teaching capacities and facilities would have to be available or organized. If language training was only provided in Germany, the question of what would happen to those failing needs to be addressed.
6. Pre-departure and post-arrival services have to be offered to the candidates, providing soft skills and preparing them for the new and potentially unfamiliar environment in the receiving society and new workplace.
7. All measures must be carried out in close partnership with the private sector, which needs to show a trustful commitment to actually make the positions needed to be filled by transnational skill partnerships available. Training someone for months and years to go abroad without reliable perspective would be unethical.
8. The receiving society needs to be prepared and provide a warm welcome culture. The labour market should grant equal treatment with nationals in all aspects. Sending conflicting messages from the side of the government or political parties might risk all efforts taken in attracting talents from abroad.
9. The potentials for upscaling and sustainability should be a strict requirement from the beginning; otherwise, costs and benefits will never be balanced.
10. Transnational skill partnerships have to move from mere projects to sustainable structures. On the governmental side, complexity needs to be reduced and responsibilities have to be clarified. The assigned governmental bodies need to receive the needed budget for sustainable funding and financing structures.

Instead of focusing on project cycled quick wins, durable institutional structures should deliver sustainable output. The revised German concept of Centres for Migration and Jobs as well as increased competencies of the Trade Chambers of Industry and Commerce Abroad has potential; having them under the (main) responsibility of the Federal Ministry of International Cooperation and Development might not be stringent considering their new missions.

11. Existing and future binational universities and transnational higher education structures bear high potential to be leverage by connecting activities of transnational skill partnerships into these existing structures, in which both countries have already invested in, which already have proven to be reliable and have gathered local expertise over the years. They can be trusted and responsible facilitators for the needed capabilities, capacities and responsibilities, when amending their missions.
12. There is a high demand for scientific evaluation of transnational skill partnerships in order to make sure that money and capacities are spent efficiently, no harm is done, and the pursued triple win is actually achieved. Careful attention should be paid to who is conducting the evaluations and if there are any conflicts of interest or biases at play. The results and lessons learned should be shared in the related practical and scientific community.
13. Last but not least, transnational skill partnerships should complement, not replace, safe humanitarian pathways to safe havens. They are to be considered as an alternative offer for some wishing or being in need of migrating, thus reducing the risks of irregular migration at least for them.

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