

RESEARCH ARTICLES

From Triple Win to Sustainable Labour Migration: Dancing the Dance of Complexity with Transnational Skills Partnerships¹

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Abstract

What does 'desirable' or 'sustainable' mean in the context of labour migration? And what should programmes geared towards making migration more compatible with development look like? These questions provided the starting point for the 'Sustainable Labour Migration' research project implemented by Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences between December 2020 and August 2022. The project looked at how sustainability in different transnational skills partnership schemes was perceived by different stakeholders in three countries chosen as case studies: Georgia, Kosovo and Vietnam. Embracing the notion of a 'triple win', many transnational skills partnership schemes aim to deliver benefits for their main stakeholder groups. As well as reflecting critically on this triple-win narrative, this paper also argues for a more nuanced approach in order to grasp the complexity of skilled labour migration. The paper introduces one such approach, namely the sustainable labour migration framework, and highlights the key elements of the research project. It details the methodology used in the study (systematic literature review – employer survey – semi-structured, in-depth interviews – focus group interviews) and explores the perception of sustainability in skilled labour migration with a focus on the cost/benefit ratio, the relationship between vocational education and training and labour migration, and the various arrangements for the partnerships employed in the schemes. In introducing the key findings from the three countries selected for the case studies, the paper highlights that the perception of sustainability is not underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the term amongst most stakeholders. Within all the schemes, however, some stakeholders identified elements which make a positive contribution to development in the respective countries of origin and thus identify elements of sustainable labour migration with room for improvement in multiple areas. The paper concludes with a presentation of overall policy recommendations: The ongoing reform of Germany's labour migration policy should be accompanied by more development-oriented activities. As part of this, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) should stand up more forcefully for the needs of migrants and potential partner countries in order to reduce existing inequalities.

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Key Words:

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1 Introduction

Migration is a *condition humana*, and people have moved around since time immemorial. In the age of migration (Castles et al., 2014) that we have entered, however, mobility is likely to increase.

In Germany, as in many other highly developed countries, the demographic change is one of various dynamic social transformation processes. This has increasingly shone a spotlight on the global competition for skilled workers. Ultimately, it makes little real difference whether 300,000 or 400,000 labour migrants (net immigration) are needed every year to keep Germany's pool of skilled labour at roughly a constant size. The scale of the issue and the gap between current immigration rates and those figures present the challenge. It is highly likely that demand for skilled labour migration will rise in the near future, and there are already many different examples of unsustainability in labour migration in practice.

The coalition treaty that underpins the current German government refers to the need for a paradigm shift and a fresh restart of migration and integration policies (Die Bundesregierung, 2021: 137–142). The German government's strategy for skilled labour has experienced considerable changes over the last ten years. Back in 2011, labour migration was not viewed as a priority tool for closing the skilled labour gap. This has changed with the latest strategy, published in October 2022 (Die Bundesregierung, 2022), which makes explicit reference to a holistic approach that incorporates the interests of the migrants' countries of origin and destination as well as their own, directly identifies Global Skill Partnerships (GSP) as a potential approach to a partnership, and namechecks the Centres for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration³ in their role as resource centres in the countries of origin (ibid.: 27). With skilled labour immigration moving into the centre of the debate and policy changes being testified to by both recent changes in the German Skilled Immigration Act (Bundesgesetzblatt 2023), the further development of more holistic analyses and approaches is of major importance.

The paradigm shift in politics, science and academia, in terms of considering the migration-development nexus, pinpoints the idea that, if migration is properly managed, the positive impact from migration could be maximised for the relevant stakeholders: this is the if-paradigm of the migration-development nexus.

In a research project entitled 'Sustainable and Socially Acceptable Labour Migration Management',⁴ or 'Sustainable Labour Migration' for short, we put the countries of origin

³ In the Western Balkan countries where the centres have been piloted since 2015, the term 'DIMAK' has been used. DIMAK stands for 'German Information Centre for Migration, Training and Career' (Deutsches Informationszentrum für Migration, Ausbildung und Karriere).

⁴ The core research team consisted of Andreas Meyn, Jehona Serhati, Jurica Volarević and Michael Sauer. The operationalisation of the research design was supported by the Policy and Management Consulting Group in Georgia, the Institute of Southeast Europe for Health and Social Policy in Kosovo, and the National Economics University Hanoi in Vietnam. The research project was funded

front and centre and explored how sustainability in different labour migration schemes is perceived by different stakeholders in three countries chosen as case studies: Georgia, Kosovo and Vietnam. The main objective of the research project was to apply an analytical concept of sustainable labour migration to selected case studies in order to research the varying degrees of understanding, relevance, application and effects of transnational skills partnership schemes and to highlight viable ways forward for developing these policy options further. In this research, the scope of the (potential) benefits and costs generated by labour migration schemes between Germany and Georgia, Kosovo as well as Vietnam was explored. The study identified more precisely which types of costs and benefits accrue and how they are distributed amongst the actors involved. A greater understanding of these dynamics supports a better understanding of what makes certain types of labour migration more desirable or more sustainable than others.

The overarching and guiding question of the research project focused on the stakeholders' perceptions as well as the relevance of sustainability to skilled labour migration in the countries selected as case studies. Focusing on perceptions in this way allowed us to explore the breadth of understanding of sustainable labour migration. The breakdown of the overall research question into sub-questions was guided by the definition of sustainable labour migration and existing biases in research that had been identified based on a systematic review of the literature. In this process, 1) the expected and/or actual costs and benefits of labour migration, 2) the role of skills (development) in labour migration, and 3) the importance of the partnership principle in planning and implementing labour migration schemes were addressed. The overall research question and the sub-questions were as follows: How do stakeholders perceive the sustainability of selected mid-level skilled labour migration schemes? Sub-question #1 on costs and benefits: How do stakeholders perceive the actual and expected costs and benefits of selected labour migration schemes? Sub-question #2 on skills: How do stakeholders assess the potential of vocational education and training (VET) to make labour migration beneficial for all? Sub-question #3 on partnership: How do stakeholders assess the partnership underlying the labour migration scheme?

Amongst other objectives, existing concepts such as the triple-win narrative were discussed by exploring the cost/benefit structure of selected labour migration schemes, its trade-offs and polarisations, economic and social costs, short- and long-term effects, and intended and unintended consequences in various migration aspects along the migration cycle. The discussion involved a selection of stakeholders in the countries of origin as well as the countries of destination. With the selection of case studies, heterogeneous labour migration schemes reflecting different types of transnational skills partnerships as defined by Sauer and Volarević (2021) were depicted. In the case of Georgia, a bilateral agreement between Georgia and Germany on seasonal employment in agriculture was covered. The Kosovo case explored an initial vocational training partnership scheme through which young Kosovars commenced vocational training in construction-related businesses in Bavaria. In Vietnam, a partnership approach for

by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through a grant provided by the "Programme Migration and Diaspora" of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. For further information on the research project, please refer to the project website: <https://www.h-brs.de/en/sv/h-brs.de/en/sv/sustainable-labour-migration>.

development-oriented vocational training and labour migration in the metalworking industry was addressed.

In this paper, I will draw on the main body of information from the research project, link it with the concept of transnational skills partnerships and present the sustainable labour migration framework as a potential response to the call to develop the triple-win paradigm further towards a more nuanced approach. The following questions will guide the paper's structure: 1) How can skills partnerships be defined and classified?, 2) How do skills partnerships contribute to sustainable labour migration?, and 3) What is the potential of skills partnership models for contributing to sustainable labour migration? The paper will start with a brief presentation of the methodology applied to the research project. Chapter 3 will introduce the conceptual framework, which includes a reflection on the term 'transnational skills partnerships', a proposal for getting a handle on and sorting through the variety of empirical schemes, a critical reflection on the triple-win approach, and an introduction to sustainable labour migration. Chapter 4 is a synopsis providing an overview of results from the research project's country-specific case studies. The results are followed by ten recommendations for the further development and practical realisation of transnational skills partnerships shaped by the idea of more sustainability in labour migration. The paper then concludes with a brief summary.

2 Methodology

The decision to opt for a mixed methods approach in the study – quantitative (online surveys) and qualitative tools (semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews) were applied – builds on theoretical, methodical and practical arguments. The research design builds on a comprehensive approach, which incorporates a holistic understanding of costs and benefits and targets multiple actors involved in the selected managed labour migration schemes. The research design comprises of the review of the existing literature as well as field research in Georgia, Kosovo, Vietnam and Germany.

Intense desk review including a systematic literature review was applied to take stock of the knowledge in regard to key analytical terms. Further, country information as well as project related information regarding the case studies was systematically reviewed. The following table summarises the main results from the systematic literature review, which followed the structure introduced by Khan et al. (2003).

Table I. Systematic literature review

Search Date	Database	Search Terms	Number of Results	Result Code for Annex ⁵
10.8.2021	Web of Science	'sustainable labour migration' OR	1	# 1
10.8.2021	SocINDEX		0	-
10.8.2021	Google Scholar	'sustainable labor migration'	50	#2-51
10.8.2021	Web of Science	'sustainable migration'	10	# 52-61
10.8.2021	SocIndex		1	# 62
10.8.2021	Web of Science	'fair' AND 'labour' OR 'labor' AND 'migration'	32	# 63-87
10.8.2021	SocIndex		37	# 88-124

(Source: Author)

⁵ The annex is available on the project's website.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined as follows:

- Language: German and English
- Date of publication: 2000-2022
- Access: Only publications whose full texts were accessible via the mentioned databases and/or other channels accessible via the library services of the H-BRS were included.
- Thematic: Only publications with a holistic understanding of sustainability were included. This criterion has been checked by studying the abstracts of the sources. A non-holistic understanding was attributed if sustainability was one-dimensionally defined, e.g. the study of Qin (2015). Others, such as the studies of Lixi (2016) or Scarrow (2014), rather use the term as a synonym for long-term effects. Publications solely addressing flight migration and/or forms of mobility other than labour migration (e.g. sustainable return in post conflict contexts, Black & Gent, 2006) were excluded as well.

Several screening phases were carried out to identify the articles. In the first screening phase, titles and excerpts were reviewed in order to determine if a publication is relevant for the study. In this phase, the objectivity criteria for the selection process were checked. In the second screening, the full texts were screened to find literature that corresponded to the research question and the topic of the present work. The ultimately selected seven sources have been intensively studied and build the basis for the critical reflection of the term 'sustainable labour migration'.⁶

Quantitative survey methodology: To gain more insight on the country of destination employer's perspective, an online employer survey was conducted in cooperation with the State Association of Bavarian Building Guilds (LBB). The quantitative survey was substantiated and followed up by three semi-structured interviews with employers from the construction sector in Bavaria and a managing director of the LBB. For the development of the questionnaire, a review of existing surveys was applied. Through this, 22 questionnaires, which were tested for elements to be adopted, were identified. The final questionnaire⁷ entailed a total of 35 questions. The recruitment of survey participants was organised by the LBB. All 3,000 LBB-member companies were invited to take part in the survey. In total, 332 participants opened and 81 participants finalised the survey. This number is comparable with participation rates of former surveys conducted by the LBB. The collected data were analysed through descriptive statistics.

The applied qualitative methodology is based on semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders representing the private sector, public ministries and agencies, civil society and international donor organisations involved in the selected labour migration schemes. The following table provides an overview of the interviews in the individual countries.

⁶ The studies are covered in Chapter 3.3.

⁷ Refer to the project's website for the questionnaire's codebook.

Table II. Overview of interviews

Germany	Georgia	Kosovo	Vietnam
GIZ International Services	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia	Heimerer College, Deutscher Campus	Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
GIZ Programme Migration and Diaspora	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Consular Department	GIZ Kosovo, DIMAK	The Office of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)
Bavarian construction company #1	Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	Labor Policy Department, Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs of Dong Nai province
Bavarian construction company #2	Skills Agency	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	Institute for Labour Sciences and Social Affairs (ILSSA)
Landesverband Bayerischer Bauinnungen Oberbayern	State Commission on Migration Issues	Employment Promotion Agency Kosovo (APPK)	Vietnam Association of Mechanical Industry (VAMI)
diaspora organisation DIJA e.V. München	State Employment Support Agency #1, #2, #3	Employment Agency #1, #2, #3	International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai #1, #2
	GIZ country office Georgia		Vietnam Association of Manpower Suppliers (VAMAS) #1, #2
	International Organization for Migration	Agency for Vocational Education and Training for Adults (AVETAE)	
	EU technical support program	GOPA consortium independent expert of migration Governance policy	GIC-AHK Ho Chi Minh City #1, #2
		GAP Institute	Center of Overseas Labour, MOLISA
		VET Centre of Competence	Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), MOLISA
		National Qualifications Authority (NQA)	ISHISEI Vietnam, HCMC
		Focus group: current and former apprentices in the IVET-LBB programme	Department of Formal Training, Directorate of Vocational Education and Training, MOLISA
			Hanoi Liaison Office of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, MV Ministry of Economics, Employment and Health

			GIZ PAM Vietnam Component GIZ TVET Reform Programme
			GIZ TripleWin Project
			Focus group: students of PAM Metal Working pilot programme at the International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai

(Source: Author)

The data analysis followed the method of content structuring qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2018; Mayring, 2015). First, interviews were transcribed using standard transcription rules. For coding and analysing, the software MAXQDA was used. The analysis followed a mix of deductive and inductive approaches for the formation of the coding structure. The coding structure covered the following categories: sustainability (sub-categories: definition, expectations, evaluation, definition), partnership (sub-categories: framework, goals, instruments, exchange, temporality, stakeholders), skills development (relevance, recognition) and costs-benefits (types, allocation/attribution, contribution, distribution). By comparing and contrasting the case studies along aggregated categories, the analysis became more sophisticated, complex and gained explanation power. The content analysis essentially informed the analysis in all case study reports and resulted in case related summaries and in in-depth individual case interpretations. The synopsis presents a multi-dimensional analysis of relationships between categories, which draws the connection to the research questions on a comparative level.

The research followed strict ethical procedures. Data protection standards and ethical principles were rigorously applied. Approvals of ethical norms were asked for and granted e.g. by the German Society for Psychology.

The methodology is less about the rigorous testing of hypotheses and more about the exploration of empirical interrelations in space and time, grounded on the close interplay of theory, methodology and empirical data. Consequently, the research needs to be seen as a first step to raise concrete, though complex, questions and to test the developed methodology with selected stakeholders. The SARS-COV2-pandemic heavily impacted the nature and the organisation of the project. Moreover, in individual cases, the recording of the interviews was rejected. These interviews were transcribed on the basis of notes and memory logs. In Georgia, focus group interviews were cancelled after political interference. As a consequence, the data collection from interviews is limited for the Georgian case.

3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Transnational Skills Partnerships (TSP)

3.1.1 Terminology

In previous research, Sauer and Volarević (2021) developed an understanding of transnational skills partnerships as “[...] agreements between institutions that aim to link up issues associated with skills and training placement, the recognition of qualifications and (circular) migration across different policy fields. If this creates (a fair distribution of)

benefits to key stakeholders, skills partnerships contribute to the idea of triple-win migration and/or sustainable labour migration” (ibid: 12). Hence ‘skills partnerships’ is an umbrella term for transnational models linking development-oriented migration policies with vocational training and education (VET) policies. Skills partnerships can answer the question of how to distribute the benefits generated by skilled migration. They have the potential to provide empirical answers to the call for action as formulated in the UN’s Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Global Compact on Migration highlights the commitment to invest “[...] in innovative solutions that facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of migrant workers at all skills levels” and the promotion of “[...] demand-driven skills development to optimize the employability of migrants in formal labour markets in countries of destination and in countries of origin upon return” (United Nations, 2019: 26). In objective 18, number 34e, the Compact refers to skills partnerships as one of the few empirical models that have been included in the Global Compact: “Build global skills partnerships amongst countries that strengthen training capacities of national authorities and relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions, and foster skills development of workers in countries of origin and migrants in countries of destination with a view to preparing trainees for employability in the labour markets of all participating countries” (ibid: 27). TSP encounter a diverse range of approaches and frameworks across different countries and thus incorporate complex governance structures. TSP models can be utilised to manage labour migration in a holistic way and to modify the structure of VET systems in both countries of origin and countries of destination.

3.1.2 Typology

The scope of practical examples of managed labour migration schemes which connect the mobility of migrants with the topic of skills governance has widened tremendously over the past few years, and several distinct terms have been used to describe the variety of schemes, including global skills partnerships (Clemens, 2015), skills and mobility partnerships (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018), talent partnerships (Rasche, 2021), transnational skills and mobility partnerships (Sauer & Volarević, 2021), and transnational skills partnerships (Azahaf, 2021).

With their typology, Sauer and Volarević (2021) proposed a method for sorting practical cases and clarifying the diversity of skills partnership models. They critically reflected on existing typologies (Hooper, 2019; OECD, 2018) and proposed the typology based on several guiding questions: ‘Where are the training measures being offered and in what form?’, ‘What sort of recognition for existing qualifications is being sought?’, and ‘What is the migration dividend and how is this distributed?’. Figure 1 presents the further development of this typology. Besides classifying skills partnership schemes along three different types, the skills partnership cube incorporates the dimensions of skill level and duration. The continuum of skills points to a need to better differentiate between skill levels and go beyond the duality of low vs. high skills. This differentiation hints at the various ways in which migrants’ skills are produced (Which skills are produced where and how?) and how their mobility is governed at the interface between the VET systems in the country of origin and country of destination. Research into this has attracted scant attention, with the focus being more so on the country of destination “as a filter for entry” (Raghuram, 2008: 86). The temporal dimension places schemes somewhere between the two poles of short-term mobility (e.g. seasonal work or temporary return) and long-term

partnerships, such as global skills partnership models. The third dimension spans a continuum between three types of skills partnership schemes. The idea is that a continuum is designed to provide space for hybrid and mixed scenarios which might not be allocated clearly to one of the given types.

Type 1, adaption qualification in the country of origin, is focused on labour migrants with a formal qualification and grants them access to mobility by having their existing credentials validated and acknowledged in their country of destination. Type 1 schemes cover short-term, low-skilled workers (e.g. doing seasonal work in agriculture) and, increasingly, medium- to high-skilled workers with an emphasis on permanent migration. The Triple Win project is one example of a type 1 TSP scheme. Drawing on bilateral agreements between the German Federal Employment Agency and the respective ministries of labour in the partner countries, GIZ and ZAV (the International Placement Services of the German Federal Employment Agency) have been implementing multi-stakeholder triple-win projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (until 2020), the Philippines and Tunisia. All the legal and formal aspects of information regarding skilled workers, their selection and preparation, as well as the distribution of costs and the recognition of professional qualifications in the destination country are agreed on in advance by both governments, which then sign a bilateral agreement. The Triple Win project, which has been running since 2013, is often viewed as a flagship project among German TSP schemes because it focuses heavily on the needs of employers, skilled workers and countries of origin and continues to deliver essential insights relevant to the development, implementation and transferability of comparable approaches.

Type 2, vocational training in the country of destination, covers schemes in which training and skills development largely take place in the destination country. Prior to moving to the destination country, potential migrants might receive language training and develop intercultural skills through specific programmes. An example of a type 2 scheme is the 'Ausbildungsinitiative' (training initiative) in the construction sector between Germany and Kosovo, which will be outlined in Chapter 4.

Type 3 schemes refer to what has been introduced by global skills partnership models as *dual-track approaches* (Clemens, 2015). Here, vocational training is mainly delivered in the country of origin following an international curriculum or one employed in the country of destination. Through the double-track structure – providing a qualification for the purpose of migration on the away track and a qualification for the purpose of local employment on the home track – an explicit impact for development is envisaged for the country of origin through knowledge transfer, the further development of VET structures and better employability of a workforce looking to forge a career for themselves in their homeland. If migrants on the away track send financial and/or social remittances and/or return, the positive impact for the country of origin might even increase. Needless to say, type 3 schemes are the most ambitious and complex. The GSP model has not been widely applied, with only a handful of examples such as Heimerer College in Kosovo, a pilot nursing training partnership which is currently being implemented by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and GIZ in cooperation with their clinical partners in Germany and the Philippines, and the development of VET structures in metal-cutting in Vietnam, which will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 4.



Figure 1: The skills partnership cube (Source: Author, based on Azahaf [2021] and Sauer and Volarević [2021]).

3.2 Triple Win⁸

In the field of migration, the term triple win is frequently associated with the idea that migration produces benefits for multiple stakeholders, rather than just focusing on one actor. The idea of a triple win has been widely employed in international settings since 2003. This dates back to the creation of the Global Commission on International Migration by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. According to Annan's statement at the UN General Assembly's High-Level Dialogue on international migration and development (United Nations, 2006), a triple win means a chance to create benefits through migration for migrants, the countries of origin (CoO) and the countries of destination (CoD). Thus, triple-win migration refers to labour migration strategies that consider the diverse interests of the three stakeholder groups involved in the migration trajectory.

⁸ For an in-depth discussion on the triple-win approach, see Bauböck and Ruhs (2022), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (2019), Angenendt (2015), Brennan and Wittenborg (2015), Castles and Ozkul (2014), Abella et al. (2014), Wickramasekara (2011), or Thränhardt (2008).

Even though countries or institutions have agreed on appropriate regulations and standards for labour migration (e.g. the WHO's Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, [World Health Organization, 2010]), there is currently no comprehensive framework for regulating the fair or socially ethical recruitment of workers from third countries. The normative narrative of a triple win takes a step towards providing this. The idea of a triple win is a convincing one thanks to its simplicity and its embodiment of multiple perspectives and interests in order to generate mutually beneficial outcomes. It also provides specific criteria for collaboration and determining both benefits and costs.

In practice, however, triple-win models occasionally fail to meet the requirements set out above and can, therefore, be accused of amounting to little more than empty talk and paying lip service. Moreover, the debate about triple wins has largely been guided by some fairly blanket definitions of (costs and) benefits which do not adequately address the diverse needs and priorities of various stakeholders in different contexts. Several biases exist in the triple-win debate: 1) the distribution bias, i.e. the tendency to neglect the costs and benefits in the country of origin; 2) the costs bias, i.e. the tendency to take economic costs and benefits into account but ignore non-economic ones; and 3) the duration bias, i.e. the tendency to favour short-term costs and benefits over long-term ones.

Furthermore, the unequal distribution of power and resources between stakeholders is often only recognised implicitly, making it difficult to deliver genuine benefits for all parties. Less powerful stakeholders may end up with fewer benefits than more powerful actors. Benefits from labour migration may be cumulative rather than balancing gains, and those in a better position are more likely to benefit: “[...] migration-induced social change in sending countries and regions tends to be more far-reaching than in receiving societies” (Portes, 2010: 1555). This can be explained by asymmetric power relations, the distribution of technical expertise and differences in the strength of institutions (Portes, 2010: 1555). The overall impact of skilled migration on the stakeholders and societies involved as a whole is controversial, depends to a great extent on the context, and varies from sector to sector. Moreover, “consequences [of skilled labour migration, M.S.] may sometimes be in conflict with each other, and therefore policies cannot be made without certain trade-offs” (International Organization for Migration, 2005: 203).

Consequently, the empirical evidence on the relationship between migration and development is not as clear-cut as the triple-win narrative might suggest. This indicates a need to develop and apply a more nuanced understanding of triple win. Identifying conflicting impacts will be an important task in this endeavour. Acknowledging trade-offs and embedding these findings in a debate on basic principles will provide valuable insights for evidence-based policymaking in the context of skilled labour migration. A more nuanced understanding would need to go beyond a pure economic assessment of costs and benefits in order to reveal the real complexity of labour migration in its entirety. Costs and benefits need to be addressed in a comprehensive way, while at the same time acknowledging the limitations of quantifying these and regarding some of them as unquantifiable. “Benefits of migration tend to be immediate, measurable and concentrated, while costs of migration, if any, tend to be diffuse, deferred and harder to measure” (ibid: 189). While economic benefits might be measured with relative ease, the character of social costs (such as those stemming from the weakening of family ties and altering the demographic structure with the potential to change cultures and values) and

social benefits are particularly more difficult to grasp.⁹ Social and long-term effects are difficult to account for due especially to the lack of data.

In the light of the paradigm shift and the call for a more nuanced approach, it is of secondary importance which term one uses in the debate over good migration. One may call it triple win+, quadruple win, multiple win, dynamic rectangle of labour migration or sustainable labour migration. What is important is the underlying understanding adopted and the specific approach taken. The framework as outlined in the sustainable labour migration research project responds to the criticism levelled at the triple-win narrative (and others) and adds additional elements. In the following sections, I will introduce the framework, present its operationalisation within three country-specific case studies, and contribute overall policy recommendations.

3.3 Sustainable Labour Migration Framework

The Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (United Nations, 2015), the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (United Nations, 2016a), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2016b) all expressly recognise international migration as a multidimensional reality of major relevance for the development of the countries of origin, transit and destination for migration and one that requires coherent and comprehensive answers (United Nations, 2013). But what does desirable or, as some would say, good migration mean? Established concepts that provide possible answers to this question are: 1) the sustainable development goals of orderly, safe and responsible migration; 2) the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration; 3) the IOM's mission statement: humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all; 4) the ILO's rights-based migration approach; 5) the triple-win debate; and 6) the fair/ethical migration debate.

Erdal et al. (2018: 6-7) identify five common perspectives that can be attributed to these concepts: 1) the diversity of stakeholders; 2) the diverse (positive and negative) consequences of migration; 3) the dispersion of migration impacts along the migration trajectory; 4) the idea that, with the right management of migration, positive migration results could be maximised and negative ones minimised; and 5) the primarily positive attitude towards migration. The exercise to develop and define sustainable labour migration builds on an understanding of the existing approaches, focuses on the common ground, reflects the critical views voiced and goes beyond the established concepts by responding to the criticism and adding additional elements.

Sustainability is not rocket science – it is much more complex than that. Consequently, the complexity, the wicked nature of underlying problems,¹⁰ and the deep gamut of sustainability, must be addressed and operationalised rather than being avoided. Within the labour migration project, this exercise was approached while introducing, defining and operationalising the term sustainable labour migration. Sustainability is considered to be a concept that questions the consequences of an action at the present and for the future in its local and global dimension. The term provides the gravity and elasticity needed for its further application in the context of skilled labour migration.

Academics have hitherto only employed the term sustainable labour migration sporadically and not systematically. Although the pairing of the concepts of 'sustainability'

⁹ On social costs, classically refer to Kapp (1971).

¹⁰ On wicked problems, refer to Churchman (1967), Rittel and Webber (1973) or Armstrong (2013).

and '(labour) migration' is found in the literature, it does not follow a consistent pattern and is hence not systematically established. Authors' understanding of the pair of terms is very heterogeneous, inconsistent and usually limited to single aspects of the integrated sustainability approach.¹¹ Analytical clarifications of sustainability in combination with (labour) migration are scarce. Recently, however, some prominent exceptions have emerged: "The Migration-Sustainability Paradoxon: Transformation in Mobile Worlds" (Gavonel et al., 2021), "On Societal Security of the State: Applying a Perspective of Sustainability to Immigration" (Beňuška & Nečas, 2021), "A new narrative for European migration policy: Sustainability and the Blue Card recast" (Lange, 2020), "Defining Sustainable Migration" (Erdal et al., 2018), "Sustainable Migration Framework" (Betts & Collier, 2018), and "Creating a Triple-Win through Labor Migration Policy? Lessons from Germany" (Angenendt et al., 2015).

Building in particular on the key tenets of the studies by Erdal et al. (2018) as well as Betts and Collier (2018), I came to define sustainable labour migration as those schemes of labour migration that build on a specific distribution of costs and benefits, which (1) is informed by a sound understanding of the mechanisms producing costs and benefits, (2) reflects the wide-ranging needs of diverse stakeholders today and in the future, and (3) is formally or informally accepted by the stakeholders involved. This definition informs a specific way of thinking for implementing and assessing labour migration schemes, incorporates a variety of stakeholders and suggests ways of differentiating better between them. In particular, the role played by employers has not been adequately assessed in many labour migration schemes, which tend to focus more on the major role played by state actors and individual migrants.

Labour migration results in positive and negative outcomes for a diverse set of social and economic costs and benefits that are dispersed over a wide range of stakeholders. The country of origin (and transit country) perspective on this has started to gain importance. Applying the classic idea of sustainability, taken from forestry, namely "do not cut more wood than grows back" (Carlowitz, 2022 [1713]), clearly signals a need to focus more effectively on the impact that labour migration has on the countries of origin. With regard to the important aspect of the distribution of costs and benefits, the proposed definition suggests that the dilemma that a universal prescription for the distribution is impossible might be circumvented, at least partially, if the distribution is agreed upon by all the partners involved. This can be achieved in the form of bilateral labour agreements or memoranda of understanding. An important element of all agreements is the principle of good partnership. Such a partnership model could deliberately account for the structural power imbalances of involved stakeholders, develop ways of balancing these out (e.g.

¹¹ A widely perceived understanding of sustainability nowadays builds on the integrated sustainability approach. This model goes beyond various three-pillar models of sustainability, as it does not limit its perspective to three disjunct dimensions standing side by side. Whilst the three 'circles of sustainability' – ecology, economy and social – prevent an autonomous logic and autonomous goals, the integrated approach implies cross-dimensional discourses, elements and goals and the interaction between the circles. Beyond the cross-dimensional interaction, the integrated approach is founded on overall principles: intergenerational justice, quality of life, social cohesion and global responsibility. Questions that can be deduced from these principles include: 'What are the effects of our actions for future generations?', 'What are the effects of our local actions around the globe?', and 'How willing are stakeholders to compensate for damages and costs incurred?' (Reich, 2021: 38–42).

through capacity development) from the very beginning and lay the ground for the sound management of labour migration.

At the centre of the conceptual framework, various migration dimensions are linked along the migration cycle (e.g. Katseli, 2006) and across the spatial dimension of countries of origin and destination.

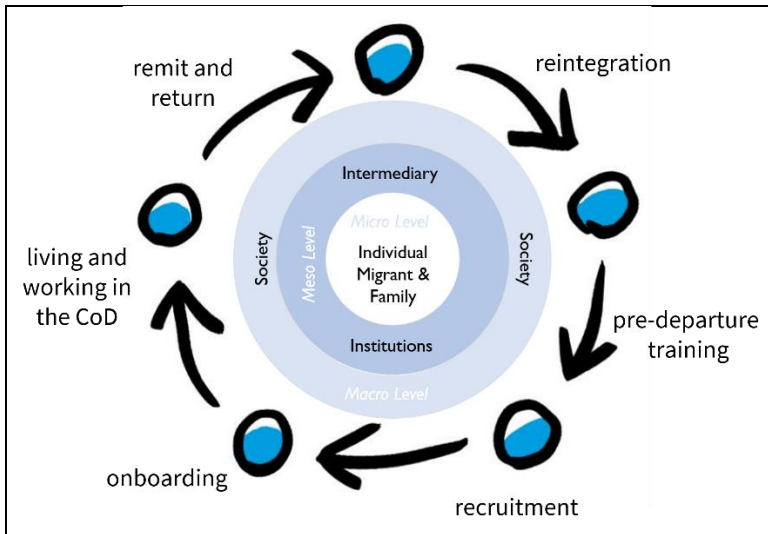


Figure 2: (Source: Author)

The analytical framework builds on a transnational perspective to incorporate and analyse migrant agency without being “structure-light” (Bailey, 2001: 421), in order to incorporate the perception of skilled labour migration not as an irrevocable process but rather as repeated pluri-local transactions and practices related to people, state and non-state organizations and resources that transcend national borders (Faist et al., 2013: 1). Because of this, migrants and non-migrants create and sustain social relations across borders (ibid.: 8). Consequently, the interconnectedness between the country of origin and the country of destination needs to be focused. The framework of transnationalism allows one to go beyond methodological nationalism, “[...] to capture a sense of how migration is experienced across two countries” (Raghuram, 2008: 83) and to focus on cross-border interconnections and institutions at various analytical levels as well as their potential to contribute to sustainable development.

4 Results from the Case Studies: The Road to More Sustainability in Transnational Skills Partnerships

The selection of countries for the study incorporates heterogeneous labour migration schemes that reflect the different types of transnational skills partnerships as defined by Azahaf (2021) and Sauer and Volarević (2021). In Georgia, the bilateral placement agreement between Georgia and Germany on seasonal employment in the agriculture sector (type 1) was addressed. In Kosovo, a vocational training or apprenticeship partnership scheme (type 2) which was initiated under the guidance of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the Republic of Kosovo (MLSW) and implemented together

with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the State Association of Bavarian Construction Guilds (LBB) was targeted. In Vietnam, the field research focused on a recently launched pilot project that involves an apprenticeship in metal cutting in Vietnam for the first time (type 3). The explicit goal of this dual-track project is gaining recognition for the Vietnamese qualification in Germany for participants on the away track, thus creating various potential pathways to Germany under the German Skilled Immigration Act (direct employment, adaptation training, or further apprenticeship qualification).

4.1 Countries of Origin

All schemes observed in the study make a contribution to sustainable development, albeit to varying degrees. The seasonal employment scheme in Georgia exhibits some limited but clear-cut benefits for the migrants. In particular, it respects the creation of employment opportunities, the paramount importance of return.

“Germany, as I mentioned before, is one of the leading countries in terms of emigration from Georgia. Accordingly, what we expect from this German scheme is primarily to minimize illegal migration to Germany by providing opportunities for legal employment” (GE8, 5).

In the case of Kosovo, the initial high expectations of the scheme have only been partially met. The benefits have so far been restricted to an increased number of skilled workers in Germany and the positive effect on the migrants’ incomes. The initial idea of contributing to the further development of the VET system in Kosovo has only been realised to a limited extent.

„We aimed higher, we did not achieve everything, but this was the start of what we envisioned, and it began well. Then, as I previously stated, we considered going to a higher level by linking a Kosovo employment centre with a German partner so that they might come and offer training here; but we couldn’t realize it. Part of our purpose as a ministry was realized, but not all of it, because there was a changing of government, and then others took over and continued the process“ (XK5, 107).

In Vietnam, the major benefit so far has been the transfer of knowledge and the development of the VET system in the country.

“When this program ends, I confirm ... that LILAMA2 can train learners and students so that after graduation they can go directly to work in Germany. It shows that the training quality in Vietnam, especially at LILAMA2, ensures vocational training standards that allow entry into the global labour market” (VT6, 120).

The following section contains a summary of the results achieved for each of the project’s research questions.

4.1.1 Perception of Costs and Benefits

There is ample evidence that migration brings both benefits and costs for stakeholders in their countries of origin and destination and that costs and benefits are shared to varying degrees by employers, (potential) migrants, state authorities and development cooperation agencies. The focus of almost all stakeholders was on short-term economic costs and benefits (and specifically on income effects, employment effects and human capital effects), with potential non-economic and long-term effects being underestimated. In all cases, only a few interviewees mentioned non-economic costs and benefits such as social remittances or psychological effects.

„But the social aspect, that in the beginning it is difficult to go to another country and there is a psychological burden, missing family and so on” (XK4, 30).

This indicates a lack of awareness and understanding of different cost/benefit categories. With regards to an understanding of the cost/benefit distributions among stakeholders, many interviewees referred to the triple-win narrative. Little, if any, mention was made of the relative distribution of costs and benefits or the level of distributional inequality.

“So, these are schemes which realistically, theoretically should be schemes of common interest, but the devil is in the details ((laughs))” For tomorrow when they qualify, have Kosovo construction companies been on board for these people? In order to have a healthy competition over who will get these people. I am keeping this very simple! So, if at the beginning you have created an advantage for German companies, which train them, by default they will remain there, because otherwise where is the perspective for these people? Finish two years or how long does that program last and come back? Without any plan in Kosovo where they will be settled? At the start of the scheme there are disadvantages for our country, because the first motive to migrate, from the beginning, since the genesis, the scheme as a scheme is such that people who are interested in migrating to go abroad, as the program is being held there” (XK9, 25).

None of the schemes exhibit a built-in mechanism for the redistribution of costs and/or benefits. The understanding of the migration-development nexus varies considerably amongst stakeholders in all countries. Besides the importance of financial remittances, which is widely accepted by most interviewees, the return of skilled migrants was also highlighted as a key positive impact factor for development in all countries.

“But at our company those that migrate are talented and even excel over there. Vietnamese people who migrate are considered lucky and are very eager to have the opportunity to move and once they do, their first goal is to earn an income to improve their family finance, secondly to learn skills, technology of the country of arrival, thirdly to learn the language. Those points are very important to labour abroad and especially in the future when they return to Vietnam if we have those skills we will have jobs and a good income so everybody understands that” (VT13, 20).

“Even with the case of the seasonal migration scheme with Germany, although only minor positions are available for Georgians in the agriculture sector of Germany, since there are a number of highly developed plantations in Germany, these workers at least get the chance to see how these plantations are grown, cared for, etc. This, of course, means that they can successfully use this knowledge and practice on their own farms after returning home. This is highly important, as in Georgia, most farmers use obsolete technology in agriculture and have outdated approaches and as the climate and the environment is changing constantly, new approaches and know-how about modern ways are useful for the development of Georgia’s agricultural sector” (GE8, 3).

4.1.2 VET’s Potential to Make Labour Migration More Beneficial

The fundamental potential that enhanced skills governance offers development was universally recognised by almost all interviewees across all cases. However, this potential is often referred to as ‘theoretical potential’, with high barriers existing in practice. The lack of any private-sector engagement in the countries of origin was highlighted for all three countries. Practical learning is relatively limited in vocational education and training, and the private sector plays only a marginal role in the school-based VET systems in Georgia and Kosovo. In the case of Germany and Vietnam, the two countries’ long tradition and shared experience of cooperative vocational education and training provides for a much more advanced understanding and actual cooperation with the private sector in implementing VET programmes that have been modelled on and benchmarked against the German dual system. VET partnerships and GSP models are widely seen as viable

options for increasing the level of local human capital, responding to local and international labour market needs and enhancing the VET system in the country of origin. The potential development impact was obvious to all interviewees who reflected on this specific type of cooperation.

“We are now in a situation where we at least know a lot about or let’s say, about most of the technical health profiles, the process of recognition, validation and so on, but also the construction of a communication channel with the German institutions of most subjects and the federal aspect, and these processes were pushed forward by a relatively small private institution like us” (XK8, 10)

However, the limits and the requirements of such models were highlighted in the Kosovo interviews in particular. This ambivalence reflects the power and limitations of mutual learning and the ‘export’ of VET system elements from Germany to another country. Several interviewees identified a robust expectations management setup as a precondition for the implementation of VET partnerships or GSP models. The complicated and costly process of and requirements for getting certificates obtained in the country of origin recognised were additionally emphasised by interviewees in all three countries. The perception of skills transfer, e.g. the transfer effected by returning migrants, differs according to the maturity level and nature of the individual migration schemes and is highly dependent on context. However, our analysis supports the assumption that little is known about skills addressed through the lenses of emigration and re-emigration in the three countries. Across the board in these three countries, emigration is seen as one of the ultimate causes of the loss of skilled labour. However, skilled migration is not only perceived as a brain drain but also as brain overflow or as “brains in the drain” (International Organization for Migration, 2005: 175). The policy interventions presented in the case study interviews for improving this brain outflow/inflow focused on migrants’ contractual obligation to return (Georgia), their voluntary return and the utilisation of expertise to develop the VET system (Kosovo), and the built-in skills transfer agreed upon for the development of the VET system (Vietnam).

4.1.3 Assessment of Partnerships

Most interviewees pointed to the importance of partnership as a precondition for sustainable labour migration programmes. Empathy and trust were regarded as having only developed to a limited extent in those schemes which have been running for a while (Kosovo). The idea of a democratic partnership¹² with the firm involvement of social

¹² These include but are not limited to: trust, fairness, shared goals, common values, mutual respect, loyalty, equity, participation, transparency, empowerment, legitimacy, flexibility, diversity, the harnessing of the skills of actors involved, the transformative potential of partnerships, innovation, etc. Amongst these elements, the relevance of trust stands out. According to Sockett (1998: 77), trust entails two primary conditions: “there must logically be (a) predictability of behaviour and (b) agreement on ends.” Amongst other implications stemming from such conditions, the careful definition and clarification of the undertakings made by the partner, such as in bilateral labour agreements, needs to be highlighted. Such written forms of clarification establish shared decision-making and could potentially mitigate a significant risk of partnerships, namely the unequal distribution of power and resources. Democratic partnership can be achieved in the form of bilateral labour migration agreements (BLMAs) that are specific enough to create sufficient transparency for the partnership while retaining enough flexibility for adjusting individual parameters. BLMAs

partners and civil society and the means to enhance transparency has played only a subordinate role in the management of the schemes so far. Overall, the complexity of building trusted partnerships is often acknowledged but rarely sufficiently addressed in terms of timeframes and resources or is pushed back to later stages in an evolving project.

“It depends on how such a project is continued. I think it needs several rounds more than just a pilot phase to really identify reliable partners” (VT16, 41).

Although the formal character of partnership arrangements is marked by equal relationships between the partners, the interviews highlight the existence of informal power imbalances founded on varying levels of resources such as financial resources, human capital, experience, access to actors, etc. These kinds of implicit and unaddressed power imbalances have an impact on processes designed to build trust.

“As you are aware, Germany is a noteworthy and strategic partner for us and when country like Germany with such an economy, gives consent to work with us, Georgia to implement similar schemes, it is already a big thing” (GE3, 3).

“It's called an agreement, if based on the sense of an agreement, it's not an agreement yet, but it's called a joint statement or letter of intent. (...) Regarding the agreement, it must be made clear that this is also the intention of the Vietnamese side, which has been proposed many times to the German side. The Vietnamese side has always wanted a government-level legal framework. (...) I also think that, firstly, in the current context, if the two sides do not take the necessary next steps, they will miss opportunities for cooperation in various fields. And if we do it in a floating way like today, it even brings many unnecessary negatives.” (VT15, 26 and 34)

The interviewees highlighted two ways in particular in which power imbalances could be tackled and potentially reduced: agreements with a higher level of formalisation (e.g. bilateral labour migration agreements) and capacity development (Sauer, 2024).

“Each of these schemes has perfectly shown us how well they work in terms of training and qualification enhancement.” (GE8, 3)

4.1.4 *Perception of Sustainability*

The perception of sustainability is not underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the term amongst most stakeholders. Nevertheless, putting the single pieces and elements together, as they were highlighted by the interviewees, it would be possible to piece together a more holistic understanding of sustainability which goes beyond a standard perception of the term, taking its long-term and ecological aspects into account as well. In most of the interviews, the arguments made in relation to sustainable labour migration drew on the balance and distribution of economic costs, the positive impact for countries of origin stemming from remittances and returning migrants, and skills transfer (in Vietnam) as well as the power imbalances which implicitly shape the partnership arrangements. Within all the schemes, the stakeholders identified elements which boost development in the countries of origin and thus exhibit elements of sustainable labour migration. All managed labour migration schemes considered in our study demonstrate some aspects of sustainable migration in their current form and thus contribute to sustainable development. Although the schemes have to be considered superior in

increase the scope of state involvement and can be signed in the form of formalised treaties, less formalised memoranda of understanding (MoUs), or even as an informal practical arrangement.

comparison with most unmanaged, individualised labour migration patterns, even in their current state, all schemes still have significant room for improvement. All the schemes could be developed further in order to realise their full potential for development.

4.1.5 Synopsis

Table III provides short abstracts from the case studies in Georgia, Kosovo and Vietnam, focusing on essential results and country-specific recommendations for how the sustainability of the programmes could be enhanced.

Table III. Sustainable labour migration illustrated by way of examples – the main points from three case studies

Country	Georgia: bilateral placement agreement between Georgia and Germany on seasonal employment (agriculture), type I, temporary, low-skilled variant	Kosovo: vocational training/apprenticeship partnership scheme (construction), type II, mid-level skill level, medium term	Vietnam: Global Skill Partnership model (metal cutting), type III, mid-level skill levels, long-term partnership
Key findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The seasonal labour migration scheme exhibits limited but clear-cut benefits for migrants and for employers in the country of destination and the country of origin. • Key benefit and positive impact: return of skilled migrants (built-in contractual obligation to return) having accumulated significant funds. • Skills development has not been an issue (so far). • Lack of awareness and information on the structural risks of seasonal labour migrants being exploited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The short-term benefits are clearly attributed to the employers in Germany and to the migrants; positive effects for Kosovar society/economy have been limited so far. • There is a huge desire for an empowering and engaging skills transfer. • Prior assessment has remained limited to head-counting, economic indicators and short-term effects. • Tendency to neglect non-economic costs and benefits. • Tendency to favour short-term over long-term costs and benefits. • Engagement through skills partnerships in producing qualifications that are transferable and/or equivalent to those of Germany's education and training system is perceived as important in helping to reform the VET system in Kosovo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High potential and positive framework conditions for sustainable labour migration pathways between Vietnam and Germany. • The Vietnamese government has expressed a clear interest in working more closely with industrialised countries such as Germany. • Persistent bottlenecks: German language teaching capacities, recognition of Vietnamese vocational certificates. • There are opportunities for expanding all three TSP types of labour mobility pathways. • While dual-track approaches are seen as more beneficial than other approaches, pursuing and supporting the scaling-up of all three pathways at the same time will have additional, mutually reinforcing and synergetic effects.

Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up expectation management to support informed decision-making. • Offer comprehensive and unbiased return and reintegration counselling. • Strengthen the link between return and reintegration support. • Incorporate active labour market policy measures (e.g. career guidance). • Offer skills development before, during or after migration (e.g. through micro-credentials for the flexible and demand-oriented acquisition of competences). • Refine selection criteria in order to enhance development effects and contribute to poverty reduction. • Enhance the protection, monitoring and enforcement of legal rights and the extension of social protection coverage to migrant workers. • Build capacity to enable Georgian institutions to respond to these challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make skills partnerships a priority for the Kosovar government's migration governance agenda. • Define and agree on the role and involvement of partners in all phases of the migration cycle, including the resources available. • Improve future forms of evaluation by taking better account of long-term effects. • Identify arrangements, instruments and environments that support the return of migrants' 'vocational expertise'. • Conduct further research/studies, cost analyses and evaluations of measures in place to identify the costs and benefits of 'dual-track' skills partnerships in particular. • Invest more in the capacities of public and private actors in order to define roles and responsibilities more effectively. • Address regional mobility as part of partnership schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guiding principle of Germany's future approach towards Vietnam should be to establish a more formalised long-term partnership and specific overarching transnational governance framework. • Starting point: intergovernmental agreement. • Pool resources (private, public, technical and financial assistance) as part of a flexible transnational support facility and introduce co-funding instruments in support of private-sector investment (e.g. develoPPP facility¹³). • Have German stakeholders invest more in language training and testing capacities. • Make more information available in Vietnamese across institutions. • Involve German private-sector companies and/or their business membership organisations in the design and governance structures of pilot projects from an early stage. • Conduct further research/studies into the actual costs and benefits of the dual-track mobility scheme in particular and make the actual cost per trainee transparent.
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¹³ The BMZ supports private-sector initiatives through develoPPP where business prospects and potential for development policy intersect. Companies can obtain financial and technical support through the programme if they want to expand their local operations while making a sustainable investment in a developing or transition country (develoPPP, n.d.).

4.2 Countries of Destination

Although the research focused on the country of origin perspective, it was also vitally important to include the country of destination perspective as well.

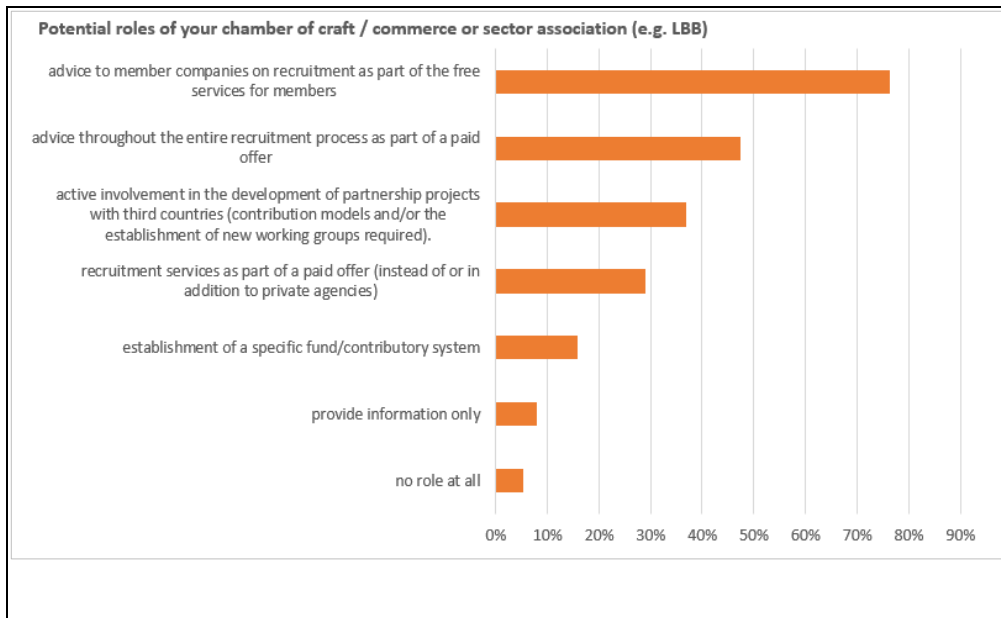
In the following, the results of the employer survey, which was methodologically covered in Chapter 2, are displayed in a nutshell and substantiated by a selection of charts:

- There are widespread labour shortages and growing demand for international skilled labour and trainees.
- International recruitment is a viable recruitment strategy.
- People’s experiences of recruiting trainees/workers from third countries are largely positive.
- Informal networks are the most important recruitment channel.
- The budget available for recruiting skilled labour/trainees is comparatively low.
- The main problems are bureaucratic and legal hurdles, insufficient knowledge of the language and a lack of knowledge of procedural steps.
- There is a positive attitude towards workers/trainees from third countries in companies.
- There is strong support for managed migration and further formalisation or recruitment.
- Companies would like to see more support from their sector associations in the form of advice.

Figure 2: Selected results from the employer survey







(Source: Author)

The data shown in Figure 2 clearly indicates that recruiting workers/apprentices from abroad is a viable strategy but not the top priority for most companies. Hiring skilled workers/apprentices from EU countries and third countries is an important or very important recruitment pathway for 65% and 60%, respectively, of all respondents. Other pathways, such as putting more effort into vocational education and training (which is considered important or very important by 91% of respondents), improving working conditions (84%), and hiring and training new starters switching from other sectors (83%) are considered to be more relevant. By contrast, other main options such as working with (international) subcontractors (27%) or employing more women (24%), elderly people (23%) or people with disabilities (8%) are deemed less viable recruitment pathways.

Amongst those respondents who were already actively recruiting from abroad, the majority experienced bureaucratic hurdles (74%), challenges related to the candidates' language skills (66%), legal hurdles (58%), and insufficient knowledge of the processes (55%). Legal and administrative challenges are currently being debated, and the envisaged revision of the German Skilled Immigration Act, which is expected to come in autumn 2023, will most likely address corresponding problems such as the recognition of qualifications and skills.

In answer to the question "How much is your annual budget for recruiting trainees/professionals?", the respondents indicated a budget for trainees of between €250 and €5,000 (average: €1,450) and for skilled workers of between €150 and €5,000 (average: €1,863). This budget is clearly insufficient to cover all costs related to recruitment from abroad even for a single person. Although empirical data is scarce, evidence taken from recruiting healthcare workers from abroad would suggest a range of €5,000 to €20,000 per person recruited is required. Recruitment costs in the construction sector might be slightly lower due to less strict language skill requirements and less expensive recognition procedures. Nevertheless, the discrepancy is obvious. Even though

the private sector is willing to (co-)finance certain activities to a certain extent, the question of financing remains unanswered. What are potential sources of additional financing? How can the private sector be encouraged to fund a larger share of the recruitment (and integration and potentially also return) process(es) in compliance with international and ethical standards? How can the investment risk be pooled or hedged? This debate needs to be facilitated in order to identify innovative proposals or funding arrangements.

The survey results are not representative due to the low number of participants. In order to apply more sophisticated data processing and analysis techniques, more survey participants would have been needed. One recommendation is, therefore, to run a (modified) survey with other regional partners in the construction sector and/or in other sectors.

5 Recommendations

The overall recommendations stemming from the research project are to seek, recognise and realise scaling-up potential, to go beyond pilot projects and to make labour migration more sustainable. In order to make TSP schemes more relevant and highlight their potential, and in order to be able to shape the narrative of labour migration, more effort should be devoted to this quest. Where pilots prove to be at least partially successful, adjustment and scaling-up plans should be devised. Most of the tools required to develop a sustainable labour migration approach at scale are already available in the German labour migration toolbox. However, such tools must be coordinated properly in order to make them available and to create an accessible and affordable migration infrastructure. Following a joint narrative based on a whole-of-government approach could enable different types of labour migration schemes to be combined in an incremental trust-building process and could highlight and illustrate Germany's unique selling point in the international search for skilled labour. This would enhance coordinated legal pathways and facilitate the mobility of essential workers and talented individuals (i.e. seasonal employees, apprentices, and low-, medium- and high-skilled workers). This would allow

“[...] more channels of regular and safe migration to be integrated into an expansive labor policy for sustainable development, while cooperating with the CoO [county of origin, M.S.] for local development, in a perspective of economic and social convergence” (Farris, 2021: 9).

Designing and implementing a German-style skills partnership model could be a showcase for sustainable labour migration. To succeed in this endeavour, the following aspects would need to be considered and addressed, amongst others:

1. Many pilot projects are demanding, expensive and difficult to implement. If pilot programmes prove successful, appropriate resources should be made available to scale them up.
2. Labour migration should be better integrated with other policy areas and with government strategies, such as development, labour market and poverty reduction strategies in the countries of origin and destination. In this context, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) should act as a broker between the interests of the migrants and those of their countries of origin more prominently than it has in the past.

3. Many respondents see bilateral labour migration agreements as practicable instruments for documenting cooperation in a transparent manner. The BMZ should use its expertise to advocate for comprehensive TSP-agreements.
4. A more coherent overall governmental approach, coordinated between line ministries, will be able to contribute to a more accessible and inclusive migration infrastructure with simplified and accelerated administrative procedures. 360° approaches that encompass the entire migration cycle and overcome silos within institutions and specialist departments will help with coordination and navigation requirements. The subsequent coordination task will face the challenge of addressing the underlying complexity and mediating where there is tension. This will be difficult to achieve without additional resources.
5. The private sector, civil society and local political actors should be involved systematically in recruitment programmes from an early stage. There must be more transparency about the costs and benefits and their distribution. Adequate financing concepts must be established.
6. In addition to a baseline analysis, consistent expectation management and adequate time and planning horizons are needed: less pilotism and more effort to build communities of mutual trust.
7. Many actors lack the resources required to meet the demands of sustainable labour migration, meaning that caretaker structures are needed that reflect the complexity. Appropriate information and training should be made available.
8. More complex approaches to labour migration should focus on transformation-relevant sectors and occupations.
9. There is a wide range of experiences and tried-and-tested instruments in the German migration landscape. These innovative approaches should be promoted consistently and made accessible to interested actors. Promising initiatives such as the 'Fair Recruitment Healthcare Germany' seal of quality should be made available for cross-sector learning.
10. The scientific and academic community should embrace the inter- and transdisciplinary analysis of labour migration and contribute more than it has done so far to an evidence-based design of labour migration. The actions of many actors are based on gut feeling rather than on evidence-based criteria, particularly with regard to long-term and non-economic effects.

The complexity inherent in these processes must be better coordinated. The Bertelsmann Stiftung's think tank for transnational skills partnerships can serve as a good example of how different perspectives can be brought together. No counterpart to this think tank in the migration policy framework exists to date. The German Federal Chancellery and/or the German Federal Foreign Office and/or the German Federal Government Commissioner for Migration are called upon to tackle this task.

6 Conclusion

This paper builds on the 'Sustainable Labour Migration' research project as a starting point for identifying existing concepts which address skilled migration and which provide

answers to questions such as: ‘What is good labour migration?’, ‘What does the concept of “sustainability” mean in migration?’ and ‘What does the proper management of sustainable labour migration look like?’. The relevance of this endeavour is obvious: debates over the shortage of skilled labour seem to spring up at lightning speed in politics, economy and society. Moreover, negative externalities of international migration are becoming increasingly obvious in some countries of origin. This has become apparent in the (health-)care sector in particular (e.g. Schmitz-Pranghe et al., 2020).

The shift in its migration policy over the past few decades has gradually turned Germany into a modern immigration country. The expected amendments to the German Skilled Immigration Act will raise this process to a new level. If labour migration is shaped accordingly, it will be able to produce positive development effects for all actors involved. When assessing these interrelationships, it is important – at least from a development policy perspective – to give greater consideration to the distribution of development dividends and to examine the promising practical examples with regard to their scaling-up potential.

The German government’s strategy for securing skilled labour addresses the question of how to leverage previously untapped skilled labour potential and identify different channels for securing skilled workers. Labour migration is one of these channels, and it is obvious that further work is required on all the channels mentioned in the study in order to help meet the challenges resulting from the skilled labour shortage. This will not succeed without good concepts and sufficient resources. Assuming that resources are limited, the question arises of which areas to prioritise for the application of holistic approaches such as transnational skills partnerships. The triple-win idea has been presented as one approach of several that can deliver corresponding answers. A critical reflection on the concept leads to the conclusion that a more nuanced understanding of what triple win actually means is needed. The research on sustainable labour migration described here contributes to these efforts with a proposal for this kind of more nuanced, some would say holistic, approach.

The operationalisation of this framework in the three countries chosen as case studies led to the assessment that managed labour migration schemes are more sustainable than uncontrolled, individually implemented forms of labour migration in principle. This underlines the if-paradigm of transnational skills partnerships, i.e. that, if migration is properly managed, the positive impact from migration could be maximised for the relevant stakeholders. So, if the available potential is realised, such sustainable models of skilled labour migration can serve as a unique selling point in the international competition for skilled labour. However, this would require a shift to perspectives and paradigms that place the generation and distribution of development effects and partnership-based transnational management front and centre.

The interviews conducted within the research project highlighted that the understanding of the migration-development nexus varies considerably amongst stakeholders in all countries. Besides the importance of financial remittances, which is widely accepted by most interviewees, the return of skilled migrants was highlighted in all countries as a key positive impact factor for development. Return migration, as a pivotal element for making labour migration more sustainable for countries of origin, might create an area of conflict in current and future partnerships. The German government’s skilled labour strategy, published in October 2022 (Die Bundesregierung, 2022), makes direct reference to the

idea of sustainability: the strategy states that immigration can only make a sustainable contribution to ensuring a skilled workforce if the migrants stay in Germany permanently (Die Bundesregierung, 2022: 29). Besides taking a simplified view of sustainability, this perspective also fails to take the diverse motives and return practices of many migrants adequately into account. This conflict highlights the need for a comprehensive approach towards labour migration and for truly sustainable solutions. In this regard, the debates being held over temporary return migration and virtual return migration are promising.

At the end of the day, which terminology one uses in the in the debate over good migration is of secondary importance. One may call it triple win+, quadruple or multiple win, the dynamic rectangle of labour migration or sustainable labour migration. The exact term is largely immaterial. More important is the underlying perspective adopted as well as the specific approach taken. One thing should be clear though: If Germany is unable to translate the existing legal framework into practical implementation and scale up innovative approaches, many potential skilled workers will simply migrate elsewhere. Courage and a creative sense of innovation are needed in order to cope with the complexity of migration processes.

The sustainable labour migration framework presented here brings the idea of making labour migration more sustainable to the fore. With this paper, I aimed at contributing to structural ordering, providing food for thought and facilitating a discussion on possible avenues for further research into the field of skilled labour mobility. This will hopefully influence the opportunities for a new narrative of labour migration in a positive way.

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