

# Cultivating talent:

Exploring effective talent attraction and retention practices in and beyond the EU

## About

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This study seeks to highlight current challenges and opportunities of talent attraction and retention policies in the EU and beyond. National, regional and municipal case studies have been selected to look into potential practices that appear to be promising to strengthen the EU's and Member States' efforts in this area.

The Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) is an EU-funded initiative supporting the external dimension of EU migration policy. The MPF aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility between Member States and priority partner countries outside the EU. The project is implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

<https://mobilitypartnershipfacility.eu/>

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## Introduction

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The European Union (EU) stands at a critical juncture, with the opportunity to redefine its approach to talent attraction, bolster EU Member States' efforts and coordinate a more cohesive strategy in the international talent competition. The European demographic dependency ratio, as well as growing labour shortages, underscore the increasingly recognised importance of talent as the cornerstone for future innovation and success.

Managing the attraction of talent on national and regional levels has emerged as a crucial catalyst for fostering innovation and expansion in the EU. As businesses grapple with the challenge of sourcing and recruiting talent locally, they increasingly recognise the imperative to explore international avenues. Consequently, the competition for international talent intensifies, prompting numerous regional and national economic development agencies to either venture into this domain or contemplate doing so. In essence, securing access to global skills has become a pivotal competitive advantage.

Moreover, the world finds itself in unprecedented times, where both cities and employers must adjust to a post-pandemic landscape and shifts in industry dynamics, including changes in work modalities, and preferences concerning lifestyle and career trajectories among both today's and tomorrow's workforce.

As delineated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its indicators on talent attractiveness, non-EU countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand have asserted themselves as frontrunners in the talent attraction landscape.<sup>1</sup> This contest is often characterised not as a mere race,<sup>2</sup> but as a war for talent.<sup>3</sup> While certain European countries also command strong positions, the EU, as a collective entity, finds itself trailing in the global talent acquisition challenge. The intensified competition for a share of the international talent pool stems from a growing awareness that attracting talent is essential for addressing adverse demographic shifts and, crucially, for stimulating innovation and economic growth.

Reiterated further by the European Commission's (EC) 2023 Employment and Social Development Report, persistent labour shortages are found in a diverse range of occupations

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, 2023, Talent Attractiveness 2023, Migration Policy Debates No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> ICMPSD, 2023, Same but different: Strategies in the global race for talent, <https://www.icmpd.org/blog/2023/same-but-different-strategies-in-the-global-race-for-talent>.

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2017, Attracting and retaining the right talent.

across all skill levels.<sup>4</sup> As one of the findings highlights, migration significantly contributes to Europe's labour shortages since people with a migrant background are more likely to work in low-skilled-shortage occupations. According to the European Employment Services (EURES) report, Member States submitting the highest number of shortage occupations were Italy (205), the Netherlands (166), Belgium (164), Slovenia (107), Denmark (106), Estonia (97), France (77) and Finland (60).<sup>5</sup>

A growing number of nations are joining the race for international talent, rolling out measures that include fast tracks to permanent residency, tax incentives and promotional campaigns that advertise their location as a talent-friendly destination. Nevertheless, a country's or region's appeal to global talent hinges on a multifaceted array of factors. These factors encompass career prospects, quality of life, inclusivity, family-friendly aspects and other dimensions. This underscores the necessity of adopting a strategic and all-encompassing approach to talent policy.

Individually, a range of EU Member States have implemented a wide spectrum of talent attraction strategies, with countries like Denmark, Finland and Germany implementing distinctive policies that emphasise coordination, digitalisation and integration measures. Likewise, regions such as Carinthia, Flanders and South Moravia have adopted unique approaches to talent attraction, along with cities including Barcelona, Gothenburg and Vilnius. These selected countries, regions and cities will serve as the subjects of this case study research.

Despite the EU's limited competences in the area of labour migration, the von der Leyen Commission has placed the topic high on its agenda, and has been making efforts towards developing tools and projects that reinforce the attractiveness of the EU and its Member States for international talent. Some key initiatives were developed within the scheme of the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#). The EC further tabled proposals dedicated to legal migration, presented in its Communication on [Attracting skills and talent to the EU](#). Therein, the [Talent Partnerships](#) open up collaboration with key partner countries of the EU to support legal migration. Talent Partnerships provide a single framework to mobilise EU and Member State tools, combining direct support for labour mobility schemes alongside capacity building. The focus is placed in areas such as labour market or skills intelligence: vocational education and training; integration of returning migrants; and diaspora mobilisation.

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 2023, Employment and Social Developments in Europe. Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU – 2023 Annual review.

<sup>5</sup> EURES, 2022, Report on labour shortages and surpluses, <https://www.ela.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-03/eures-labour-shortages-report-2022.pdf>.

The [European Skills Agenda](#) outlines a comprehensive five-year plan aimed at fostering the development of enhanced skills for both individuals and businesses. Its objectives include reinforcing sustainable competitiveness in alignment with the European Green Deal, ensuring social fairness by implementing the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which refers to the provision of access to education, training and lifelong learning for everyone across the EU, and building resilience to effectively respond to crises, drawing from the insights gained during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to tackle the demographic and social challenges, the EU has launched the [Talent Booster Mechanism](#). This initiative, part of the 2023 [European Year of Skills](#), aims to support regions in training, retaining and attracting people with necessary skills. Additionally, the [Harnessing Talent Platform](#) is a recently established platform focused on knowledge building and exchange of experiences. Its primary objective is to assist European regions in tackling the repercussions of demographic change, and overcoming challenges linked to the decline of tertiary-educated populations across the EU. The platform is dedicated to providing impacted regions with the necessary guidance, information and knowledge to formulate, strengthen, develop and execute customised and comprehensive strategies for training, attracting and retaining talents.

In November 2023, the EC presented a [Skills and Talent Mobility package](#) to further strengthen the attractiveness of the EU, taking action to boost its workforce and underlining the EU's cross-cutting approach to solve labour and skills shortages, as well as deepening cooperation with partner countries. One of its latest key initiatives is the proposed [EU Talent Pool](#), the first EU-wide platform aimed at facilitating international recruitment of interested third country nationals. The online platform is designed to address the challenge of EU-wide shortages by providing reliable matchmaking between skilled employees and employers. Once adopted, it will target specific occupations at all skills levels, based on the most common shortage occupations at EU and national levels, as well as on occupations contributing to the EU's green and digital ambitions.<sup>6</sup>

## Methodology

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This study seeks to highlight how the EU and its Member States can assume a more active role in this policy domain and support national initiatives. Instead of relying solely on indicators to assess country attractiveness, this study takes a descriptive approach, examining select policies through brief case studies at national, regional and municipal levels. It showcases successful examples of talent attraction and provides insight into the shortcomings yet to be addressed.

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<sup>6</sup> 42 EU-wide shortage occupations have been identified and compiled in an amendable annex to the [EU Talent Pool Regulation](#).

For further inspiration, policies and practices of non-EU countries which have a history of successfully attracting talent, such as Australia, Canada and Norway, will be reviewed. This study's methodology includes desk research and interviews with experts of selected EU Member States and non-EU countries. Consultations took place between ICMPD and [Future Place Leadership](#), which provides data-driven expertise on talent attraction and retention, as well as with members of the [European Talent Mobility Forum](#). This study particularly benefitted from the exchanges held, inter alia, with experts from the *Carinthian International Centre*, *Berlin Partner*, the *International House Leuven*, the *Expatriate Centre Brno*, and the *Oslo Region Alliance*, who all provided their perspectives and experiences as practitioners in the area of talent management.

### Who is considered talent?

Despite frequent use of 'talent mobility' in policy discourse, there is still no precise definition for who should be included under the term 'talent'. Talented individuals are often defined as (highly) skilled professionals with at least tertiary education. National and international university students are also included in this group. Nevertheless, since the possession of skills and talent are not limited to those with tertiary education, certain groups of entrepreneurs, as well as persons who have acquired specialised knowledge and skills through work experience or specialised training, are also included in the definition.

There is no single definition of talent. The categorisation is typically based on the level of education and/or work experience. However, the term is constantly evolving to the demand of a country's economy and gaps in the workforce. The OECD has outlined a conceptual framework of talent attractiveness and provides a useful working definition of the term.<sup>7</sup> The OECD describes talent as individuals who have a key role in a country's prosperity, being essential for innovation, technological progress and contributing to economic growth. This flexibility leads to diverse immigration policies across countries and over time. As also underlined by the annual *Employment and Social Developments in Europe* report of the EC, labour mobility to the EU is essential to alleviate the persistent labour shortages, as migrants at all skill levels – from construction workers to ICT specialists, and lorry drivers as well as nurses – are more likely to work in shortage occupations.<sup>8</sup>

The EU has, to some extent, standardised its definition for high-skilled migration through the revised [Blue Card Directive](#). In this directive, a high-skilled worker is an individual in possession

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<sup>7</sup> OECD, 2019, Measuring and assessing talent attractiveness in OECD countries. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, 2023, Employment and Social Developments in Europe. Addressing labour shortages and skills gaps in the EU. Annual review 2023.

of specific and adequate competencies, which can be demonstrated through higher professional education, or five or more years' experience in a single profession. However, individual Member States maintain different criteria for their national programmes despite these efforts towards harmonisation. In this study, a definition of talent is adopted that encompasses a wide range of qualified individuals capable of fulfilling roles demanding a high level of expertise. This definition is not restricted to specific professions to include a diverse pool of skilled individuals. Adopting such a broad definition enables the analysis of a wide array of contexts without being limited by the multiplicity of definitions adopted by a respective organisation or country.

## Global leaders in the race for talent

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As the 2023 OECD report on talent attraction highlights, talent attractiveness is multidimensional and not limited to economic factors but also dependent on a welcoming environment and an effective integration into the host country's society. The corresponding indicators factor these dimensions in, for example those related to integration (e.g. employment, income, citizenship or family environment) and the wider environment (e.g. tax rates or gender equality). Generally speaking, inclusive and family-friendly societies, a high standard of living and a strong skills environment are central to attracting and retaining talent.

Moreover, the ease of procedures and prospects for migrants to stay mid- to long-term in a country are important factors. In addition, countries with English as the main (business) language, as well as English-language study programmes, are attractive to international talent. With a look at their respective labour migration systems, it comes as no surprise that countries such as Australia, Canada and Norway are placed among the top ones for talent attractiveness.<sup>9</sup>

### Canada

Canada has consistently ranked high in labour migration system comparisons. In 2023, it ranked third in attractiveness for international entrepreneurs according to OECD data, despite having introduced stricter capital requirements. At the same time, it places in the top ten most-attractive OECD countries for international students and high-skilled workers, despite long average visa processing times.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> OECD, 2024, Talent Attractiveness 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/migration/talent-attractiveness/>.

<sup>10</sup> OECD, 2023, Migration Policy Debates No 29, <https://web-archiv.oecd.org/2023-03-09/652850-What-is-the-best-country-for-global-talents-in-the-OECD-Migration-Policy-Debates-March-2023.pdf>.



The Canadian migration system has historically been praised for the comprehensive ways to permanent residency and integration measures.<sup>11</sup> In the last decade, more temporary labour migration schemes were adopted as measures to quickly address shortages. Canada's reformed migration system offers two streams of temporary schemes: the *International Mobility Program* (IMP) and the *Temporary Foreign Worker Program* (TFWP). The IMP does not require labour market tests and mostly includes high-skilled occupations. Workers under the IMP can access open work permits and work for more than one employer, as well as freely changing employers, occupations, locations and sectors. Their family members receive facilitated access to open work and study permits. IMP permits can be renewed, and workers have the possibility to access permanent residence. In contrast, work permits under the TFWP are subject to labour market tests, are mostly employer-specific and predominantly target low-wage workers. These are also often excluded from pathways to permanent residency.<sup>12</sup>

There are various government programmes in place to manage economic immigration.<sup>13</sup> The majority of economic immigrants in Canada are 'selected' through a range of core programmes based on different human capital factors (e.g. level of education and language proficiency) as well as on labour market needs and a granted job offer. Each programme has distinct objectives to choose international talent across a range of skill levels. At federal level, these include the *Federal Skilled Worker Program* (FSWP), the *Federal Skilled Trades Program* (FSTP), targeting tradespersons in certain industries and sectors, the *Canadian Experience Class* (CEC) for skilled workers with Canadian work experience, as well as the *Start-Up Visa Program* and the *Self-Employed Program*. At the same time, Canada abolished a federal visa programme for entrepreneurs, thus losing its first place in the 2023 OECD ranking.

In order to meet specific regional economic development and labour market needs, federal pathways are complimented by regional programmes. These include for example the *Provincial Nominee Programs* where provincial and territorial Governments nominate immigrants who can meet regional labour market needs to settle in their respective regions. The *Atlantic Immigration Program* aims to support economic growth and retention of newcomers in the Atlantic provinces, thus helping employers find skilled workers to fill vacancies. There are also provincial visa programmes for entrepreneurs, which, however, often have capital requirements and are thus less attractive.

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<sup>11</sup> OECD, 2019, Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Canada 2019, <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/recruiting-immigrant-workers-canada-2019-4abab00d-en.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> PICUM, 2023, Labour migration policies case study series: Canada, <https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Labour-Migration-Policies-Case-Study-Series-Canada-EN.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Canada, 2024, Hire a temporary foreign worker with a Labour Market Impact Assessment, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers.html>.

## Express Entry System

Canada introduced its points-based immigration system in 1967 and has adapted it several times since. The *Express Entry System*, an electronic application management system introduced in 2015 for the core economic immigration programmes (FSWP, FSTP and CEC), provides a more sophisticated points system. It aims to improve the selection to better reflect labour market needs and provide flexibility in selection and application management for improved processing times. Instead of a first-in-first-out approach, this system selects candidates who are most likely to succeed in establishing themselves in Canada and contribute to the economy.

The system is flexible and responsive, meaning adjustments to the selection criteria have an immediate impact on who gets invited to apply. In this regard, 'traditional' selection factors, such as a job offer, are less relevant for the selection, while French language skills and ties to Canada (e.g. concluded studies or having a sibling in Canada) carry more weight. In 2023, a category-based selection was added to better reflect change in the economic environment and labour market needs – an example of this is the *Tech Talent Strategy*.

In addition to these core programmes, there are a range of pilot programmes geared to specific regions, occupations or sectors, or other measures in response to unique circumstances which are often limited to a certain time period.

- For example, the *Caregivers program* is tailored to address labour market needs in caregiving occupations by providing pathways to permanent residence for foreign caregivers and their families, while the *Agri-Food Pilot* provides pathways to permanent residence for experienced non-seasonal workers in specific agri-food occupations.
- The *Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot* is a community-driven model providing rural and northern communities in Canada with tools to attract and retain workers to support regional economic development.

In addition, there are pathways to immigrate to a francophone community outside Quebec.

- The *Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot* supports Canadian employers to hire refugees to meet their labour needs in facilitating access to existing economic pathways for refugees in need of protection. Moreover, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's altering of global migration, a temporal programme enabled certain categories of immigrants already in Canada to become permanent residents, including international graduates, and healthcare and other essential workers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Government of Canada, 2023 Immigrate to Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada.html>.

### Spotlight: [The Tech Talent Strategy](#)

In June 2023, Canada pitched its new *Tech Talent Strategy*, embedded within the broader [Global Skills Strategy](#), and helping employers to hire international skilled workers. It includes quicker services, improving the *Start-Up Visa Program* and expanding the *International Mobility Program*, as well as promoting Canada as a destination for [digital nomads](#). At the same time, it also created a draw specific to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) under a category-based selection to issue additional invitations to apply under the *Express Entry System*.

Most notably, the *Tech Talent Strategy* creates an open workstream for H-1B speciality occupation visa holders in the USA to apply for a Canadian work permit, and study or work permit options for their spouse and any dependent children. It especially targets H-1B visa holders, who often face challenges in retaining their visas due to demanding requirements, quotas for transitioning to permanent residence permits, as well as limited possibilities for their spouses to receive work permits. The geographical proximity to relocate and the positive place branding of Canada contribute to the attractiveness of this measure, while presenting a prominent example of the global race for talent. However, the Strategy's effectiveness and long-term impact for both countries remains to be seen.<sup>15</sup>

## Australia

Australia has long been renowned for being one of the world's major immigration nations. It remained in the top five of the most attractive OECD countries in 2023 for highly-skilled workers as well as for international students.<sup>16</sup> The national migration programme addresses skilled and family migration, for which each year quotas are allocated by the Australian Government in line with national priorities and economic needs. Since the 1990s, temporary migration has also grown significantly and is demand-driven rather than subject to quotas or caps.<sup>17</sup> Australia follows a points-based system to select skilled immigrants (also without concrete job offers) based on different skills, but prioritising education and work experience in Australia – although less sophisticated than the Canadian equivalent. The Australian Government also imposes limits on the number of people who will be invited to apply for each occupation. There is a plethora of visas existing on federal, regional, state or territory levels. The most popular is the *Skilled Independent Visa* followed by visas targeted at investors and

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<sup>15</sup> MPI Europe, 2023, Canada's New Tech Talent Strategy Takes Aim at High-Skilled Immigrants in the United States, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/canada-recruitment-us-immigrant-workers>.

<sup>16</sup> OECD, 2023, Migration Policy Debates No 29, <https://web-archiver.oecd.org/2023-03-09/652850-What-is-the-best-country-for-global-talents-in-the-OECD-Migration-Policy-Debates-March-2023.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Parliament of Australia, 2017, Migration to Australia: a quick guide to the statistics, [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick\\_Guides/MigrationStatistics](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick_Guides/MigrationStatistics).

entrepreneurs.<sup>18</sup> While Australia generally is a popular destination for international talent, and in a similar situation to Canada where it can choose its workers, challenges and occupational shortages persist. Thus, in 2023, the Australian Government released an update to its *Migration Strategy* seeking to address systemic issues in the Australian labour market and immigration visa system which, inter alia, suffered from long and bureaucratic delays.<sup>19</sup>

Key targeted areas for labour needs include healthcare, net zero transition and the digital economy. The strategy aims to make the immigration system more efficient and fairer address the skills shortage, ensure better workplace conditions and prevent exploitation of migrant workers. Thus far, implementation has focused on increasing pay for skilled workers, creating more pathways for skilled workers and changing the rules around international student visas. Moreover, the number of working visas for skilled immigrants under the *Pacific Australia Labour Mobility* scheme has been expanded and now includes plans to allow skilled workers to bring their families to the country. In addition, a new *Pacific Engagement Visa* will allow up to 3,000 nationals per year from participating countries to become permanent Australian residents, and direct pathways for New Zealand residents in Australia to gain citizenship have been created. The new migration strategy also addressed labour market tests with some minor changes by streamlining requirements and reducing complexity in the skilled migration process. The Government is also considering moving away from employer-conducted labour market testing towards mechanisms for robust and genuine independent verification of labour market needs for which it has proposed a new visa class: the *Skills in Demand Visa*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Skills in Demand Visa**

The *Skills in Demand Visa* will replace the *Temporary Skilled Shortage Visa* with a three-tier system for applicants based on their annual earnings and occupation. This visa will not be tied to an employer, will initially be granted for four years and will have clear paths to permanent residency.

The visa pathways are (1) *Specialist Skills Pathway*, if a salary is above AUD 135,000, excludes trade workers, drivers and labourers; (2) *Core Skills Pathway*, if a salary is above AUD 70,000 and on a Core Skills Occupation List (i.e. occupations in shortage); (3) *Essential Skills Pathway*, if salary is below AUD 70,000 but an essential skills occupation. Some pathways will be sector-specific, encompass a stronger regulatory framework than other programmes for lower paid workers, and hold minimum standards in wages and conditions.

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2023, Immigration and Citizenship, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing>.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Government, 2023, Migration Strategy, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/migration-strategy>.

<sup>20</sup> Visa Envoy, 2023, Core Skills Pathway, <https://visaenvoy.com/skills-in-demand-visa/core-skills-pathway/>.

## Norway

While Australia and Canada fit with the picture of the classical frontrunner and have manifold pathways for international talent, Norway shows a more complex picture. According to 2023 data, Norway is in the top five of the most attractive OECD countries in all measured categories of highly qualified workers: entrepreneurs as well as international students. While most labour needs have traditionally been met by workers from the European Economic Area (EEA), Norway also offers pathways for skilled workers from further abroad, the main path being the *Skilled Worker Immigration Scheme*. This scheme allows skilled workers with a job offer in Norway to apply for a residence permit. Entrepreneurs in turn can either utilise the *Entrepreneur Residence Permit* or the *Start-Up Visa* schemes which offer pathways for individuals who wish to start, operate or take over a business in Norway.<sup>21</sup>

While Norway offers attractive living standards, social welfare benefits and a high quality of life, it must contend with other countries that offer similarly attractive incentives and opportunities. In addition, Norway faces country-specific challenges, for example the importance of Norwegian language proficiency for many job opportunities and for integration into society. Since autumn 2023, Norwegian universities charge at least cost-covering tuition fees to new degree students from outside the EU or EEA. Another barrier for international students to stay after graduation are the comparative costs to transfer a student into a working visa, and the time requirements students need to find a job relevant to their respective field of studies.<sup>22</sup>

Norway also has a relatively small labour market compared with other countries, which may limit the job opportunities available to skilled workers, particularly in specialised fields. This can make it more challenging to attract and retain talent in certain sectors where demand for skilled professionals is high internationally.

Attracting skilled international workers is mostly left to the private sector. While the Norwegian Government has not engaged much in a dedicated leadership role on talent attraction, it mainly aims to offer a well-functioning administrative framework for Norway's companies to operate in.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, many businesses in Norway do not yet target international talent as a priority, including due to a lack of recruitment process knowledge, and additional resources and efforts required compared with hiring Norwegian citizens. Only a third of companies see international recruitment as relevant, despite Norway's demand, especially for

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<sup>21</sup> UDI, 2024, Skilled Workers, <https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/work-immigration/skilled-workers/>.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with *Osloregionen*, 26 February 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Juho-Matti Paavola, Rune Rasmussen, Amanda Kinnunen, 2020, Talent Attraction and Work-related Residence Permit Process Models in Comparison Countries, <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162601>.

highly educated roles, as assessed by the Oslo Business Region.<sup>24</sup> However, a competence barometer study conducted by the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises showed that 62% of Norwegian industry faces a talent shortage which demonstrates the country's demand for skilled labour, notably in crafts, engineering and the tech sector, which cannot be sufficiently covered by only tapping into the national and EU candidate pools.<sup>25</sup>

### Spotlight: [Digital Wallet](#)

In a cooperation between the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, Police, Tax Authority, the Norwegian Directorate of Labour and Welfare, and the City of Oslo, a pilot project – [Kompetansespor](#) – was initiated in 2023 to reduce the visa processing time from 37 weeks to only three days. Following a series of workshops exploring solutions for enhancing the immigration process for companies and new hires, a digital wallet technology emerged as a viable solution. The technology, designed to provide an EU-wide platform for storing and sharing information securely, presented an opportunity to enhance privacy considerations while fostering greater efficiency for users and stakeholders involved in immigration processes. With the digital wallet initiative, an employer is approved and trusted by the municipality and immigration authorities. All data related to recruitment and immigration is designed to be machine-readable and interlinked, facilitating ID checks, and immigration and registration processes which are usually done by several different stakeholders.

The pilot focused on testing solutions for candidates from visa-free countries (outside the EU) applying for work permits in Norway. The University of Oslo was selected as the primary partner due to its status as a prominent public institution with a substantial pool of potential users, and it hosts a considerable number of researchers and visiting professors every year. A total of nine candidates participated in the pilot, and visa processing for all was completed in three days.

While the Norwegian authorities are adjusting to the changing demand, by increasing the annual quota for skilled workers (from 5,000 to 6,000) and extending the system of automatic recognition to cover more international talent, a national talent attraction and retention strategy is lacking.<sup>26</sup> Hence, there is as yet no unified national body or agency to promote such approaches and advertise Norway as a great place to live (and attractive to work). Efforts in Norway are steered rather by individual regions and cities, such as the Oslo region. Under the 2023 State budget, municipalities can receive (limited) funding for welcome services to immigrants. Larger cities run dedicated [Service Centres for Foreign Workers](#) with both physical

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<sup>24</sup> Oslo Business Region, 2024, Norwegian industry struggles to fill the talent gap: Tech sector faces urgent need for skilled labor, <https://oslobusinessregion.no/articles/norwegian-industry-struggles-to-fill-the-talent-gap-tech-sector-faces-urgent-need-for-skilled-labor>.

<sup>25</sup> Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, 2023, Competence Barometer, <https://www.nho.no/contentassets/cd1336aad0eb43e9b724a0da5c83644c/rapport-kompetansebarometeret-2023.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> OECD, 2023, Norway, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/7879415d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/7879415d-en>.

offices and an online presence, which serve as administrative hubs for third country nationals regarding registrations, residence card applications, tax information and other aspects of living and working in Norway.

The Oslo Region Alliance (*Osloregionen*) was established in 2005 and today consists of 65 municipalities, including the City of Oslo. The region of Oslo has about 2.2 million inhabitants. The alliance is a collaborative, political membership organisation with the goal to showcase the Oslo region internationally as a competitive and sustainable region. This regional collaboration is a response to increasing pressure for national economic growth, and growing competition among international cities and regions for international talent.

In 2015 a new marketing campaign for tourism, foreign investment and student attraction was launched, and, in 2020, talent attraction was included. *Osloregionen* coordinates with different national and regional public bodies, to facilitate immigration processes amongst others, and provides information to companies. They host meetings, activities, events and best practice sharing for their members. *Osloregionen* also launched *Oslopolitan*, a platform providing career opportunities in Oslo through its *Oslo Talent Pool*, and other relevant information for international workers thinking of moving to the city and the region.

The case of Norway shows that, despite the absence of a national talent attraction strategy and unfavourable business processes, a country can still be attractive to international talent for other factors, such as inclusive and family-friendly societies, a high standard of living and a strong skills environment. With growing international competition for top talent, this might, however, not be sufficient in the long run.

## EU countries

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### Denmark

The 2023 edition of the INSEAD Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) has confirmed Denmark's leading position among EU Member States rankings in attracting, growing and retaining talent.<sup>27</sup> Globally, the country scored fourth in the GTCI, close behind Switzerland, Singapore and the United States of America. The capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, stands out with its ability to seize opportunities of technological change and develop skills that are globally high in demand. Denmark further dominates the Global Remote Work Index by combining strong digital infrastructure and social safety. The country excels in social

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<sup>27</sup> INSEAD, 2023, The Global Talent Competitiveness Index. Tenth Anniversary Edition 2023, <https://www.insead.edu/system/files/2023-11/gtci-2023-report.pdf>.

inclusiveness, internet quality, e-infrastructure, e-government and healthcare, outperforming other Scandinavian countries in most dimensions.<sup>28</sup>

## Practices

A key source of Denmark's success is the development of a sophisticated national strategy for talent attraction and retention, convening all relevant stakeholders from the Government, public administrations and business sector. Already in 2012, Denmark launched its innovation strategy, called [Denmark – a nation of solutions](#), a project including 27 policy initiatives focused on research, innovation and education. It was complemented in 2015 by the [Growth and development throughout Denmark](#) strategy (only available in Danish), which laid the groundwork for fostering regional growth and development in the country through 'regional smart specialisation'. The programme included more than 100 actionable initiatives focused on strengthening partnerships between research institutions and the private sector by intensifying knowledge sharing and fostering innovation in businesses. In 2019, a government reform reshaping the landscape by restructuring business support activities under the [Danish Board of Business Development](#), consolidating nearly all public financial support.

To maintain activities, different Danish stakeholders involved in the country's talent management formed a consortium of 28 entities to establish [Talent to Denmark](#). This project was a resounding success, connecting companies to the sought-after international workforce. More than 450 companies participated in the project and in excess of 16,000 applications were received through the dedicated job platform [State of Denmark](#), which brands the country as a destination where talents can expect 'a pretty good life'. Accompanying marketing campaigns during the project period ensured that applicants became aware of opportunities in all parts of the country, fostering an interconnected strategy for talent attraction.

[Work in Denmark](#), the national public employment service for qualified international candidates, provides information, guidance and access to digital self-service tools, connecting international talent with Danish employers.

Another supporting measure that Denmark has put in place for strengthening its talent management system is a fast-track scheme. Individuals who have received a job offer, from a Danish company endorsed by the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration, are eligible for a special scheme. This is a scheme for certified companies, which streamlines the process of hiring third-country nationals, making it quicker and more adaptable. The permit granted is directly linked to the specific job for which it is issued. In the event of job loss, individuals may apply for a job-seeking permit under specific circumstances.

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<sup>28</sup> Nordlayer, 2024, Global Remote Work Index 2023, <https://nordlayer.com/global-remote-work-index/>.



If changing jobs, applicants must submit a new application for a combined residence and work permit. The application process is handled by the employer, who must be granted power of attorney by the employee. To qualify for this process, the employee must meet the criteria for one of the designated tracks.

### Spotlight: [International House](#)

Denmark's talent attraction strategy is exemplified through emblematic initiatives, such as the [International House Copenhagen](#), which soon became a role model across Europe, and which was a collaborative effort between the Danish Government, the City of Copenhagen, the University of Copenhagen, and private companies dedicated to attracting and retaining international talent.

Established in 2013, the International House Copenhagen operates as a regional one-stop-shop, streamlining the relevant administrative processes for newcomers settling in Greater Copenhagen. Services offered include administrative assistance, job and career counselling, and participation in events. The International Houses across Denmark also help companies expedite administrative tasks for their international employees, showcasing a commitment to efficiency and a welcoming environment.

The repository of all relevant links, resources and centres is steered by the [New to Denmark](#) portal, which is continually updated and designed to enhance the experience of moving abroad and investing in a new country, making the process more pleasant and less stressful.

[Copenhagen Capacity](#) (CC), which is behind the brand management of *State of Denmark* and *Talent to Denmark*, is the organisational linchpin for attracting international companies, investors and professional talent to the country and the Greater Copenhagen Region. It is financed by public organisations, as well as companies, and maintains special programmes on attracting businesses and investors looking to establish, reside and expand in Denmark. Furthermore, the organisation promotes the attraction and retention of international talent, whether through in-house services or by forming partnership projects with other organisations. CC has strategically positioned Denmark's capital as a gateway to global expertise in specific sectors, while maintaining a clear sectoral focus on ICT. CC is also spearheading European campaigns, such as [Choose Europe](#), an informal group of agencies representing different metropolitan regions across the European continent.

Another initiative through which Denmark raises awareness and connection with talent is the [Study in Denmark](#) portal which provides centralised and filterable information about all study programmes offered at Danish higher education institutions. The portal is managed by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, and offers practical guidance for graduates to start a professional career in Denmark, including services and information on finding a job, starting a business, paying taxes and unemployment benefits.

## Finland

Similar to other European countries, Finland faces the dual challenge of an ageing population with resulting demographic dependency ratio, coupled with labour shortages. Particularly occupational groups like nurses, healthcare educators, software and application developers, home care workers and security personnel bear the brunt of these shortages. Finland has proactively addressed this concern by implementing a series of well-coordinated talent attraction programmes operating at local, municipal and national levels. It emerges not only as an attractive leader with a strong brand but as a hub of unique and creative initiatives.

It is noteworthy that, unlike many other EU countries, Finland does not emerge as a prominent attractor of European talent. Aside from nationals from Estonia and Sweden, Finland registers limited migration from other EU Member States and yet the country stands out as the sixth most competitive country in the world concerning global labour mobility, according to the GTCI.<sup>29</sup> The largest group of foreign-born residents with a non-Finnish background come from Russia or other countries of the former Soviet Union. Other notable groups include people coming from China, India, Iraq and Somalia. The rate of working-age people shows the highest share coming from Iran, Nepal, the Philippines, Spain and Thailand.<sup>30</sup>

The substantial presence of Filipino and Thai workers can be ascribed to the efforts of Finnish companies, such as [Silk Road Workforce Management](#) and [Healthcare Staffing Solutions Oy](#), which specialise in the attraction and placement of healthcare professionals in Finland. These companies provide a comprehensive recruitment pathway, with a particular emphasis on nurses, offering services such as language training, facilitating contract and employer connections, assistance with administrative and travel arrangements.

Initially launched in the Philippines, these projects have steadily expanded to a global reach, thanks to online training courses. These recruitment initiatives are not without their criticisms, particularly concerning the issue of brain drain affecting countries of recruitment. Moreover, data indicates that nurses recruited through such programmes are frequently overqualified for their roles and pay, where a lack of language fluency, as well as discrimination, are often pinpointed as main causes.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the move to recruit nurses from the Philippines has faced opposition from the Finnish nursing union.

The most comprehensive initiative is the [Talent Boost Program](#), which stands as Finland's flagship effort in the realm of talent attraction. The programme is jointly administered by the

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<sup>29</sup> INSEAD, 2023, The Global Talent Competitiveness Index. Tenth Anniversary Edition 2023, <https://www.insead.edu/system/files/2023-11/gtci-2023-report.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Statistics Finland, 2024, Population and society. Key figures, <https://stat.fi/en/topic/population-and-society>.

<sup>31</sup> Päivi Vartiainen, 2019, Filippiiniläisten sairaanhoitajien polut Suomeen: Tutkimus oppimisesta ja työyhteisöintegraatiosta kansainvälisen rekrytoinnin kontekstissa, <https://www.tuni.fi/en/news/dissertation-paths-filipino-nurses-finland-their-qualifications-are-largely-underutilized>.

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of Education and Culture. It operates as a cross-administrative programme with the core objective of enhancing international recruitment efforts for specialists, students and researchers, while streamlining the immigration process. The scope of the programme encompasses a wide range of initiatives, spanning from branding and awareness campaigns bolstering Finland’s appeal to potential immigrants, to the digitalisation and fast tracking of bureaucratic application services. At the forefront are awareness campaigns, such as [Finland Works](#), which promote the Finnish culture and aspects such as quality of life, work-life balance, equal welfare society with a flat hierarchy and climate action. Finland’s *Talent Boost Program* is a relevant example of a cooperative system, where cities, regions and local organisations collaborate while pursuing their specific goals and guidelines.

According to [Business Finland](#), by far the most important driver for international talent is a safe and secure environment for jobseekers and their families. Even when lagging behind Canada or the United States of America as regards business investments, Finland capitalises from its high standards in social security. Additionally, Finland invested in the development of job advertisement platforms such as [Work in Finland](#) to connect talent to English-speaking jobs. When it comes to bureaucratic services, the process has been reformed and streamlined. Applicants can expect a one-month average processing time for all work-based and education-based residence permits; two-week fast track for specialists, start-up entrepreneurs and family members; and post-graduation residence of two years for job-seeking purposes.<sup>32</sup>

Talent Boost Program		
Finland’s Talent Boost Program is a cross-administrative programme to develop the international recruitment of specialists, workers, students and researchers, and to facilitate immigration. See more on their methodology and objectives in the programme’s <a href="#">Talent Boost Cookbook Finland 2.0</a> .		
Actors		
<b>National level</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment</li> <li>■ Ministry of Education and Culture</li> <li>■ Finnish National Agency for Education</li> <li>■ <a href="#">Business Finland</a></li> </ul>	<b>Regional level</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Talent Hubs</li> <li>■ Cities and municipalities</li> <li>■ Employment and economic development offices</li> <li>■ Higher education institutions</li> </ul>	<b>International level</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Diplomatic representations abroad</li> <li>■ <a href="#">Team Finland Knowledge network</a></li> </ul>
Packages of measures		
<b>Awareness campaigns</b> Finland Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality of life, work-life balance</li> <li>■ World’s best education system</li> <li>■ Technological innovation</li> <li>■ Equal welfare society, flat hierarchy</li> <li>■ Climate leader</li> </ul>	<b>Recruitment services</b> Work in Finland: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Structures and service paths</li> <li>■ Active recruitment of international students</li> <li>■ Educational programmes in foreign languages</li> <li>■ Scholarships and traineeships</li> </ul>	

<sup>32</sup> Finnish Immigration Service, 2024, Fast track service of residence permits, <https://migri.fi/en/fast-track>.

Legislation and permit procedures development	
<b>Residence permit process:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Digitalisation of the residence system</li> <li>■ Streamlined processes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1-month average for all work-based and education-based residence permits</li> <li>● 2-week fast-track procedure for, inter alia, specialists, entrepreneurs and family members</li> <li>● Foreign students' residence permits for the entire duration of their degree programmes; extension to 2 years post-graduation and job-seeking period</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>Immigration services:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identification and registration systems</li> <li>■ Enhanced prevention against exploitation of foreign labour</li> </ul>	
Talent Retention	
<b>Connecting the labour market:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Connecting students to the labour market</li> <li>■ Engagement between international talent and Finnish companies (mentoring and training models)</li> <li>■ Degree recognition and equivalency services and supplementary training</li> </ul>	<b>Language-oriented solutions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improving Finnish/Swedish language learning opportunities of foreign students</li> <li>■ Encouraging integration of non-Finnish/Swedish speakers</li> <li>■ Supporting integration of spouses/families through English language public services</li> </ul>

At regional level, Finland's *Talent Boost Program* is implemented through [Talent Hubs](#) which are regional cooperation models offering services to support the attraction, recruitment, settling in and integration of international talent, and facilitating the coming together of companies and talent. These *Talent Hubs* encompass, for example, cooperation between research institutions and employers. Their networks usually include cities, State authorities such as the Employment and Economic Development Office, entrepreneur organisations and national chambers of commerce. One of the mechanisms through which *Talent Hubs* operate is the 'International House' model. The services offered vary across regions, however, the primary objective is to provide convenient access and assistance in immigration matters, bringing the relevant public services under one roof.

### Spotlight: [90-Day Finn Program](#)

The *90-Day Finn Program* is a unique initiative that takes place once a year, organised by Helsinki Partners. The programme invites international professionals to live in the capital for a period of 90 days, be immersed in Nordic culture and adopt a sustainable lifestyle, all whilst fostering a business network.

The programme is designed to fuel business interest through offering experiences 'only Finland can offer', from business opportunities to the integration of polar-plunges and saunas in the daily routine. The programme is considered a striking success, kicking off a 30-day intensive immersion that can be extended with an additional 60-day period to connect with the Finnish way of life.

Relevant talent attraction projects in Finland are led by [Helsinki](#), [Tampere](#) and [Turku](#), in collaboration with the surrounding regions of Oulu, Joensuu, South Karelia Vaasa and Vantaa. Additionally, the network established through the *Talent Boost Program* is well connected with higher education institutions, with some playing a coordinating role, while others are active participants in the respective projects.

Despite Finland being acclaimed for its quality of life, work-life balance and education system, there are challenges that limit attraction and retention of global talent. Both international family members of Finnish citizens as well as students from abroad encounter difficulties accessing the labour market, due to their limited networks and language proficiency. According to Finland's employment data, the employment rate for foreign-born individuals aged 20 to 64 in Helsinki stood at 57% in 2021, whereas it was 77% for individuals with a Finnish background. Efforts to bridge this gap are crucial for Finland's objective to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

While the country excels at attracting international students, the rates of retention after graduation remain low. According to a study of the University of Jyväskylä, the key factors influencing retention of students after graduation include family ties and employment opportunities.<sup>33</sup> To address this, Finland plans to enhance internship opportunities offered in English and encourage employers to engage more with international university students.

The primary hurdle is the official language spoken. Finnish, with its unique structure and dissimilarity to other languages, is considered a particularly difficult language to master. While Swedish is a minority language (5% speak Swedish as their native language), Finnish is often required in work settings. The majority of the country's businesses are small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which rarely have the resources for the recruitment and hiring of international or non-Finnish speaking talent. Thus, Finnish employers often prioritise Finnish language proficiency in international talent.

Recognising language as a primary barrier to entry, Finland is taking steps to foster inclusivity by offering services in English. They have committed to expanding services and communication available in English, and improving customer orientation and quality. Efforts will be made to remove language-related obstacles by developing skill reception and training packages for employers as well as orientation for potential talent. Businesses are strongly encouraged to look for talent outside the traditional networks and into international talent, starting with graduates from Finnish universities. Learning Finnish and Swedish will be

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Mathies, Hannu Karhunen, 2020, Do they stay or go? Analysis of international students in Finland, in: *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Volume 19, 2021, Issue 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1816926>.

supported directly in the workplace by creating a city-wide model for language training alongside work. This represents a shift in priorities – Finland is committed to *first* employing talent and *then* addressing language proficiency as a secondary consideration. The demand for skilled individuals takes precedence over fluency in the Finnish language. Language preservation does not represent a concern as immediate as the need for talent, considering the high natality rate and number of children with a foreign background also registered as Finnish- or Swedish-speaking. This transition may especially be attainable in Finland due to the widespread proficiency in English among its population, a strength that might not be as prevalent in other European countries.

Further, Finland's Parliament showed commitment to enhance the promotion of foreigners in the country by reforming the country's legislation, concretely via the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration*, whose renewal will enter into force in 2025. The Parliament has mandated several measures to enhance integration in Finland, including improving the efficiency of integration measures upon immigrants' arrival, transferring integration service responsibility to municipalities, promoting the employment of immigrant women, enhancing language education quality, considering the needs of companies, and bolstering the role of the third sector and adult education. Additionally, ongoing and forthcoming changes in the operating environment, such as reforms in wellbeing services, health and social services, will impact integration promotion responsibilities.

## Germany

The shortage of skilled labour in Germany has increasingly become a nationwide problem that affects almost all economic sectors and regions. According to a study led by the Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich, almost half of all companies are currently reporting that their business is being impacted due to a lack of skilled labour.<sup>34</sup> The shortage of skilled labour has increased significantly across all of the regions in Germany (the *Länder*), particularly in recent years. In addition, compared with other European countries, Germany is among the hardest hit by the shortage of skilled labour. In October 2022, the Government assessed that there would be about 240,000 more vacancies in 2026 than workers available, posing an existential issue for Germany's companies.

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<sup>34</sup> Andreas Peichl, Stefan Sauer, Klaus Wohlrabe, 2022, Fachkräftemangel in Deutschland und Europa – Historie, Status quo und was getan werden muss, ifo Institut München, <https://www.ifo.de/en/publications/2022/article-journal/fachkraeftemangel-deutschland-und-europa-historie-status-quo>.

According to the Mobility Attractiveness Index of the *2023 International Talent Map Report*, Germany excels with its significant appeal as a destination for international mobility, due to factors such as economic opportunities, quality of life and cultural richness.<sup>35</sup> According to the OECD's findings, Germany is highly attractive to international students where it ranks second place among OECD countries.<sup>36</sup> However, for entrepreneurs, the country misses the top ten and scores worst among academics where it is only in 13<sup>th</sup> position among OECD countries. This is mainly due to the lack of professional opportunities for people with foreign qualifications and the comparatively low net wages.

## Practices

Looking at policy level, it is evident that Germany has made increasingly bigger steps towards becoming Europe's frontrunning country as regards immigration. The Coalition Agreement also highlights the self-conception of Germany as a 'diverse immigration society'.<sup>37</sup>

In 2022, Germany passed a new [skilled labour strategy](#) which focuses on five fields of action: (1) updating Germany's dual education system and career guidance for pupils; (2) enhancing professional development and training for continued education irrespective of age; (3) stepping up national efforts to increase women's participation in the labour market by providing more opportunities for flexible working hours and extending childcare services; (4) support for projects that contribute to improving corporate and employee-oriented work culture; as well as (5) modernising and simplifying the administrative procedures of Germany's immigration system.

Marking a new era of attracting highly skilled professionals from around the world to Germany, the new [Skilled Immigration Act](#) (*Fachkräfteinwanderungsgesetz*) contains several significant provisions and reforms phased in since November 2023. In line with the *Blue Card Directive*, the country is widening the possibilities of employment in and migration for work to Germany by lowering salary thresholds; opening the labour market to a wider group of people; easing access for ICT specialists without a university degree; extending the list of bottleneck professions; enabling short- and long-term mobility for Blue Card holders; and facilitating family reunification. With the new legislation, Germany has set concrete measures to strengthen the retention aspect of its talent attraction policies as well as to simplify processes regarding the recognition of qualifications. Under the Skilled Immigration Act, a new 'special

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<sup>35</sup> Future Place Leadership, 2023, Report: International Talent Map, 2023,

<https://futureplaceleadership.com/reports-handbooks/report-international-talent-map-2023/>.

<sup>36</sup> OECD, 2020, How attractive is Germany for foreign professionals?, Migration Policy Debates No. 23,

<https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/migration-policy-debates-23.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Bundesregierung, 2021, Koalitionsvertrag zwischen SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und FDP,

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/gesetzesvorhaben/koalitionsvertrag-2021-1990800>.

provision for practical professional experience' has been introduced applying to all non-regulated professions in Germany.

### Spotlight: [Recognition partnership](#)

Since March 2024, Germany has been further expanding opportunities for foreign professionals seeking recognition of their qualifications. The recognition partnership is a programme that allows foreign skilled workers from non-EU countries to enter Germany and work without the need for prior recognition of their professional qualifications. Instead, they can have their qualifications officially recognised after they have arrived in the country.

The residence permit for a recognition partnership is contingent upon a contractual agreement between the employee and the employer. For those without a permanent job offer, there is an option to apply for an [Opportunity Card](#), which allows holders to stay in Germany for one year while searching for suitable employment. Further, the recognition partnership enables: a streamlined recognition process for foreign skilled workers from non-EU countries; the opportunity to work in Germany without prior recognition; the possibility of extending a stay upon successful completion of the recognition partnership; a larger pool of applicants for potential employers; concrete job offers for foreign skilled workers; and the flexibility to engage in part-time employment of up to 20 hours per week, with adaptable working arrangements between employers and applicants.

In 2012, the platform [Make it in Germany](#), the country's central welcome portal for qualified professionals from abroad, was introduced. The range of offers available has been steadily expanded and today includes information on working, study and vocational training, visa and residence, and living in Germany, thus covering the most important aspects for EU and international talent. *Make it in Germany* maintains a diverse partner network comprised of government-funded organisations and public entities specialised in specific areas of work, such as on [recognition of foreign professional qualifications](#) (*Anerkennung in Deutschland*), the [Office for the Equal Treatment of EU Workers](#) (*Gleichbehandlungsstelle EU-Arbeitnehmer*), and the German Competence Centre for International Skilled Workers in the Health and Nursing Professions ([DKF](#)), to name a few.

In terms of employment, Germany's regulations expand opportunities for professionals with significant practical experience and ICT specialists. As one of the top 20 bottleneck occupations in Germany, the German labour market has particularly opened up to nursing professionals from third countries with its EU Blue Card, effective since November 2023, due to the country's high demand for healthcare professionals. This includes a regulation that reduces the foreseen salary limits for international workers for the approval of a residence permit, as well as the *Nursing Studies Strengthening Act* ([Pflegestudiumstärkungsgesetz](#)), in force since January 2024, which further simplifies the recognition of international degrees by establishing guidelines for



the scope and documents that are required. Some employers also provide additional training and opportunities for career development for people with less than three years of vocational training in nursing. Permanent residency criteria are adjusted, granting it faster to certain skilled workers. Family reunification procedures are also streamlined for skilled workers.

Addressing the country's deficit in retaining international students and graduates, the [German Academic Exchange Service](#) introduced a new programme to support the integration of talents into the German labour market. Between 2024 and 2028, around €120 million will be dedicated to implementing 114 projects with 104 higher education institutions across all 16 Länder in Germany. This aims at increasing the employability of international students and graduates for the German labour market, and at promoting the establishment of cooperative networks and transition structures between universities and the business community.

## Challenges

Over 99% of German businesses are SMEs. The experiences of [Berlin Partner](#), the leading business development agency managing talent attraction projects in Germany's capital, point to the persisting challenge of international recruitment processes in the country demanding more resources and know-how from German companies which are often still lacking. In addition, international hires often struggle with Germany's complex and fragmented administration system which requires specific knowledge and rather advanced German language skills. Business immigration services, as provided by [Berlin Partner](#), which assist in the full immigration procedure of internationals, present a key support to navigate talent through national administrative processes and have proven to be a much-needed service in the country to successfully attract and retain talent. Although the *Make it in Germany* portal provides all the necessary information, newcomers often feel disoriented when browsing the technical information and immigration requirements, as reported by Berlin Partner. Personal guidance is often necessary to navigate through the complexities of Germany's immigration process.

In addition, Germany is struggling with the slow digitalisation of its administration. The fragmentation of competencies between different national authorities, agencies and other contact points, which are involved in immigration procedures, hampers a swift and simplified onboarding of international talents. Finally, the official services provided lack human interaction and an efficient one-stop-shop character. Internationals need to physically visit multiple authorities in Germany in order to register their address, receive a tax ID and health insurance card.

However, the planned policy reforms in the area of immigration are expected to have a positive and tangible impact, notably the measures on recognition of qualifications and digitalisation of visa processes. Further, the recent amendment of its Nationality Law, providing quicker access to citizenship, will enhance Germany's attractiveness for international talent, and is foreseen to enter into force in June 2024.<sup>38</sup>

## Regions

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### Flanders

In Flanders, the labour market is experiencing a historic surge in job vacancies, while the pool of qualified job seekers available to fill these positions has significantly diminished. Industries facing the most acute hiring challenges, including skilled trades in industrial and construction sectors, healthcare and transportation, find the current demand-driven system insufficient in addressing labour shortages. The region is well-known for its high-quality education and research institutions, and for hosting Belgium's largest hospital. For centuries, the many prestigious universities have been serving the Flanders region as a magnet of talent, putting Flanders on the map of a globally migrating labour force.

Immigration policy in Belgium is predominantly formulated at federal level, falling under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration. In 2014, the federal Government decentralised decision-making authority on employment-based immigration policy, distributing it between three regions: the Brussels Capital region, Flanders and Wallonia. The Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking communities collectively share responsibility for the country's integration policy, while the Belgian federal level is rather absent on talent attraction policies.

In Flanders, the labour migration services are offered by the [Integration Agency in Flanders](#), which is the agency of the Flemish Government. It operates through 70 contact points located throughout Flanders and Brussels, serving individuals seeking integration into the Flemish-speaking community.

Flanders has taken several initiatives to attract talent, especially targeting students. The Government has launched [Study in Flanders](#), an orientation platform aimed at prospective

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of the Interior, 2024, Anreize schaffen für Integration, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/schwerpunkte/DE/einwanderungsland/staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht>.

students, boasting the region's excellent higher education institutions, open and multilingual society, high quality of life, economic robustness and location at the heart of Europe.

Since August 2021, graduates can apply for a one-year residence permit as a 'graduate in orientation' in Belgium.<sup>39</sup> During this orientation year, the Flemish employment service ([VDAB](#)) is playing a crucial role. Upon graduation, job seekers can register with the VDAB, where they will receive specialised job counselling tailored to their qualifications. This comprehensive approach will ensure that individuals receive personalised advice and support to enhance their employment prospects. The employment service offers support to both talent and companies, as well as guidance towards vocational training, language courses and job fair events in Flanders. Local companies are encouraged to employ foreign talent, with the VDAB supporting the development of a fitting diversity policy. In addition, Dutch language courses are offered at no cost to everyone working and living in Flanders.

In September 2023, a project called *Improving the Economic Migration Framework to Attract and Retain Qualified Talent in Flanders and Wallonia* was initiated. This 18-month project aims to provide technical assistance to Flanders and Wallonia, addressing labour shortage challenges in their respective markets. The project has two region-specific strands. The primary objective is to enhance economic migration management in both regions, facilitating the attraction and retention of talent from third countries. To ensure the development of a well-qualified workforce that meets the labour needs of domestic employers, each region will receive support in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their regional economic migration frameworks. It will identify best practices and support corresponding regulatory efforts. To address causes of labour shortages more broadly, the project works with social partners, trade unions, the EURES network, the European Migration Network, local think tanks, the Belgian Development Agency and the Belgian Immigration Office.

Other regional efforts are aimed at attracting investors and new businesses. This role is taken on by the [Flanders Investment & Trade](#) (FIT). This agency offers expert guidance on strategic site selection, tax benefits, financial grants and incentives, provides introductions to key regional decision-makers, Flanders' business set-up regulations, and supports the identification of promising business opportunities, as well as a smooth integration into the local business community. Investors and entrepreneurs can benefit from a range of cost-free services, including professional tools, services and access to expert resources. FIT also powers the [Startup Flanders](#) initiative, offering services and promoting the growth of the start-up ecosystem in Flanders. Additionally, the agency [Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship](#)

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<sup>39</sup> Immigration Office, 2024, Orientation year after the completion of the studies, <https://dofi.ibz.be/en/themes/third-country-nationals/study/orientation-year-after-completion-studies>.

(VLAIO) finances research and development (R&D) activities carried out by and for Flanders-based companies, and acts as the contact point for European funding programmes.

The Government also contributes to an attractive environment for businesses by ensuring an advantageous employment framework, substantial reductions in social security contributions, diverse employment-related incentives and attractive labour schemes, incorporating options such as reductions or exemptions in social security contributions for Flemish employers. This strategic approach provides the region with highly competitive labour costs compared with other locations across Europe. Similar incentives such as special tax breaks and profitable conditions for investments are provided to R&D-intensive companies.<sup>40</sup>

In Flanders, the City of Leuven is notable for its inclusive climate, distinctive among Belgium's medium-sized cities with the highest approval rating of citizens seeing cultural diversity as an added-value (and not as a threat). Furthermore, the widespread proficiency of English among the population in Flanders has the capability to easily bridge potential language barriers that elsewhere hinder the social integration of newcomers.

## Practices

In 2015, the concept of the *International House Leuven* (IHL) came into existence in a ten-point programme set up by a taskforce by *Leuven MindGate*. This taskforce interviewed over 1,200 international knowledge workers from 24 organisations in the Flanders region with the aim of investigating what makes the region an attractive place to live and work, and where there would be room for improvement. The results were summarised in a white paper published in October 2016.<sup>41</sup>

One of the recommendations of the white paper was the creation of the IHL as a one-stop-shop for talents, following the leading example of Copenhagen, as well as the wider objective of community-building between the Flemish community and newcomers. Since 2018, the IHL has been offering support relative to relocation, social integration, living and working in Leuven and the wider region, as well as serving as a hub for local networking and community building – the latter accounts for the majority of its activities. According to the IHL, and based on its experiences, the main issue faced by international talents who have relocated to the Flanders region for work or study remains the lack of a social network and integration. IHL

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<sup>40</sup> Invest in Flanders, Various tax breaks for R&D investments in Flanders, <https://invest.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/en/investing-in-flanders/rd-and-innovation/flanders-offers-specific-tax-incentives-foreign-businesses-0>.

<sup>41</sup> Leuven MindGate, 2016, Towards an Outstanding Working and Living Environment for International Workers, <https://www.internationalhouseleuven.be/ihl-milestones>.

tries to address this concern by offering opportunities to meet people and activities that help new arrivals find a sense of belonging in Flanders.

### Spotlight: [Welcome Ambassador Programme](#)

Besides a plethora of activities which include work-related workshops and social events, ranging from informative webinars on taxes and philosophy club evenings to game nights, the IHL has launched a *Welcome Ambassador Programme*, teaming up Leuven residents (international or not) with newcomers. The goal is to provide an individual contact point to recently arrived international working professionals, researchers and entrepreneurs, as well as accompanying family members, personalising the experience of arrival, settling in and living in the wider region.

The IHL attempts to address a recurring issue: international talents arrive in Flanders for a job but leave the region again because they are unhappy with their social life. Cities in the Flanders region, such as Leuven, have recognised the need to lay a strong focus on soft-landing measures in support of arriving talents, as well as providing opportunities for and catering to the needs of their respective partners.

The talent attraction and retention initiatives introduced by Flanders are restrained by the national legal framework governing immigration. In the absence of a national strategy, Belgium lacks reforms aimed at simplifying procedures to pull in international talent. The complexities of the country's political system and the strongly fragmented competencies between the federal and regional levels further constitute a certain handicap. Flemish employers have to deal with permit procedures taking up to nine months to process. This circumstance stands in stark contrast to its neighbour the Netherlands where the completion of the same administrative process would take only six days.

## Carinthia

Austria's southernmost province is home to the [Villach tech and start-up hub](#), which has emerged as an attractive location for talent. The region hosts big players, such as [Infineon Technologies](#) and the European research centre for electronic-based systems, [Silicon Austria Labs](#). The region is part of the EU programme [Interreg 2021-2027](#), fostering cooperation between regions. One of the aims of the Slovenian-Austrian Interreg programme is to pool resources across national borders for developing skills and competences for work. As a rural region, Carinthia is facing challenges such as a less developed public transportation infrastructure and a lower density of social services, when compared with more metropolitan areas.

Given the demographic changes and impending waves of retirements in the coming years, Carinthia is calculating labour shortages of over 20,000 people by 2040. The [Carinthian International Center](#) (CIC) assessed that regional companies are already facing difficulties to maintain certain processes and production lines. Similar effects can also be seen in the care sector, for which the region will be relying on labour migration as part of a sustainable solution.

## Practices

The main point of contact for newcomers is offered through the CIC founded in 2009. It follows a similar approach as the International House model which originated in Copenhagen. The CIC offers specialised assistance on relocation and integration, and administrative and family services to foreign professionals arriving in the region. The CIC also organises workshops, training sessions, and networking events with the aim of making the international community feel welcome in Carinthia. The CIC has created guidance on life in Carinthia as well as everyday practicalities, for talents arriving alone or with their families.<sup>42</sup>

In the early 2010s, Carinthia, the City of Villach and the CIC engaged with local companies to identify the central needs of international talents coming to this comparatively rural region for work. These referred to quality childcare, an international school environment and personal support with taxes, health providers and other social services. As a result, in 2013, the [International School Carinthia](#) was founded in Velden starting with 55 students originating from nine countries. Today, it hosts 370 students from over 40 countries. Furthermore, the creation of the multi-language [International Daycare Center Villach](#) for one- to six-year-old children was seen as another essential contributor that has strengthened the overall talent attractiveness of the region.

The Carinthian region has put in place relevant soft-landing services and communication campaigns to attract potential talents, driven by its strong high-tech sector and promoting its Central European geography. Especially with the creation of the CIC and the continuous expansion of its programmes, the region has seen enhancement since personal support has been offered to international talents on respective social needs through tailored activities, which also includes guidance for dealing with the specific local winter conditions (notably, for internationals not accustomed to Alpine climate zones).

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<sup>42</sup> Carinthian International Center, 2024, Activity overview, Welcome Map for Singles/Families, <https://www.cic-network.at/activity>.

### Spotlight: [Dual Career Couples](#)

The Carinthian International Center assesses that over 70% of international talents arrive in the region with their partners, over 90% of whom have obtained a university degree. The CIC identified early on the untapped potential of family members and the relevance for an initiative to cater to the needs of both the recruited talents as well as their respective partners. A so-called *Dual Career Couples* programme was created which collaborates with local companies and institutions with the goal of integrating the families of employed talent by facilitating their connection to secure employment.

The programme, which lasts six to 15 months, provides a personalised plan that begins with German language courses, advice on how to obtain qualifications recognised in Austria, skills training and career planning support. It culminates in matchmaking sessions that introduce candidates to potential employers. These sessions are often linked to advanced training programmes, on-the-job training or in-house mentoring and coaching systems.

In close collaboration with the regional and municipal levels and local companies, the CIC also took a decision to champion intercultural understanding and interreligious awareness, and has developed corresponding activities to this end. For example, in a collaboration with the City of Villach and Infineon Technologies, awareness-raising campaigns were employed in the context of a circular work programme with over four hundred South-East Asian professionals arriving and being trained in Villach. Over the years, the CIC and its network have helped over 1,900 internationals and their families, and can be considered to have their stake in the success of talent management in Carinthia.<sup>43</sup> For example, the placement rate of its *Dual Career Couples* programme reached a placement quote of 85% in 2021 and 2022, according to CIC's own data.<sup>44</sup>

A distinct dimension is Carinthia's ability to develop and shape an image of its region as a sought-after place to live, communicating perspectives for international talents that emphasise the region's particular advantages, notably high quality of life and the opportunity to enjoy both the comfort of an urban lifestyle and the benefits of nature. In addition, Carinthia placed a strong focus on promoting a good work-life balance, catering for the needs of family members of international talents and fostering an overall welcoming environment, together with the local population.

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<sup>43</sup> CIC, 2023, Welcome to Carinthia (March 2023), [https://www.cic-network.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/welcome\\_mappe/cic\\_welcome\\_map\\_family\\_version.pdf](https://www.cic-network.at/fileadmin/user_upload/welcome_mappe/cic_welcome_map_family_version.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Mirela Nowak-Karijasevic, 2023, Interview with Alexandra Truppe, [https://www.meinbezirk.at/kaernten/c-wirtschaft/bei-zuzug-auch-die-familie-im-blick-haben\\_a6197387](https://www.meinbezirk.at/kaernten/c-wirtschaft/bei-zuzug-auch-die-familie-im-blick-haben_a6197387).

## South Moravia

The South Moravian region of Czechia is recognised for its substantial growth, being awarded the prestigious European Entrepreneurial Region award in 2023 for promoting sustainable, resilient and digital growth. South Moravia, along with the City of Brno, was commended for being a 'Home for Globally Successful Entrepreneurs'. The European Committee of the Regions particularly appreciated the long-term strategy for supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, resilience, sustainability and digitalisation of companies, and the efforts made across the spectrum, from students and pre-entrepreneurs to start-ups as well as scale-ups.<sup>45</sup>

Committed to fostering an open and innovative society, South Moravia has invested in skills and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset through exemplary cooperation across the region, mobilising stakeholders, and demonstrating openness to European and international networks. Key economic sectors of the region include ICT, with specialisations in cybersecurity, gaming and e-commerce; analytical and precision instruments; aerospace; precision engineering; and specific areas of biotech.

The region is also home to the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC), a consortium comprising six Brno universities and research institutions. Contributing to the region's international scientific environment, CEITEC has demonstrated consistent growth and secured scientific grants from the European Research Council. As a result, it stands as a significant magnet for attracting talent to the region.

As of 2020, about 124,000 immigrants, including a significant number of highly skilled internationals, contributed to CEITEC's workforce, which has tripled in the past decade. Today, immigrants constitute 10% of the total Czech population of 10.5 million.<sup>46</sup> Most are located in major cities such as Prague and Brno. Czechia is experiencing significant population loss, which has prompted a re-evaluation of the country's immigration policies, especially for highly qualified third-country nationals. The country strikes a remarkable low unemployment rate (2.9% in October 2023) and favourable conditions for highly-skilled workers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> European Committee of the Regions, 2023, Famalicão, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and South Moravia/Brno awarded for their entrepreneurial visions promoting sustainable, resilient and digital growth, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/eer-award-2023.aspx>.

<sup>46</sup> Expats.cz, 2023, Foreigners now comprise one-tenth of the Czech Republic's total population, <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/foreigners-comprise-one-tenth-of-the-czech-republic-s-total-population>.

<sup>47</sup> OECD, 2024, Unemployment rate indicator (accessed April 2024), <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm>.



## Practices

Czechia manages a network of [Centres for the Support of Foreigners' Integration](#), strategically located across all [14 regions of the country](#). These Integration Centres play a vital role in initiating, coordinating and implementing various activities geared towards bolstering the social, linguistic and cultural integration of legally residing third-country nationals. To this end, they provide Czech language as well as mandatory integration courses, interpretation services, social-cultural programmes and access to online library resources. They also organise forums for stakeholders involved in attracting talent to the regions, and events designed to foster interaction between newcomers and local communities.

The [Centre for Foreigners of the South Moravian Region](#), located in Brno, has been operational since 2009 and is supported by the City of Brno, the South Moravian region, the Ministry of the Interior and the EU, as well as non-governmental partners such as the [Diocesan Caritas Brno](#) and [Organisation for Aid to Refugees](#). The Centre aims to facilitate communication between foreigners and residents in the South Moravian region. It contributes to an improved integration of newcomers through engagement with public institutions, government offices, unions, schools and other stakeholders within the South Moravian region. Regular gatherings of the regional platform for integration stakeholders serve as a forum for enhancing cooperation and networking among individual entities involved in integration efforts. Following the International House model, the Centre extends tailored soft-landing and integration assistance to newcomers. It accommodates services in various languages, including Czech, English, Russian, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. It serves as a comprehensive resource for foreigners seeking guidance and support in navigating various aspects of life in the region, including on education, employment, healthcare, insurance, leisure activities, transportation and communal waste management. Moreover, the Centre provides a helping hand for talents arriving in the region by providing support with navigating Czech bureaucracy, interpreting official documents and offering accompaniment to medical appointments (also for interpretation purposes).

In many cities of Czechia, the so-called Expat Centres have been established by municipalities with the aim of assisting talents in integrating into the city. Founded in 2010 and modelled on similar institutions in Eindhoven and Vienna, the [Brno Expat Centre](#) (BEC) is dedicated to facilitating the process for international talents of settling down and participating in Brno's community. It offers various social services such as individual consultations, interpreting during meetings with the authorities and networking events, as well as business development support. The services are provided free of charge to internationals and their families residing or intending to live and work in Brno. The BEC acts as the first line of contact with newcomers, but also as an information and support hub for managers of local companies.

By far the most frequent requests for which talents contact the BEC refer to support related to residence permits and visas, since internationals experience certain difficulties in navigating the country's immigration system and often need assistance when communicating with the authorities. Other questions, which the Expat Centre receive regularly, concern housing, the social security system, healthcare, taxes, parental leave and employee's rights. At the moment, the majority of people who seek help and guidance at the Expat Centre are non-EU citizens, with those from India ranking first. Responding to needs over the years, the BEC has worked on and is maintaining an extensive online library of useful guides relevant to international talents, covering essential questions pre-arrival, visa and permits, health insurance and taxes, but also information for the LGBT+ community, on recycling and providing a map of local services recommended by foreigners (listing English-speaking doctors, trusted insurance companies and estate agencies).<sup>48</sup>

### Spotlight: [Great Brno Expat Survey](#)

In 2018, the City of Brno and its Expat Centre conducted a comprehensive survey to gather feedback on the experience of internationals living in Brno. The survey was extensive, backed by a team of researchers, and the results from the questionnaire were picked up by the Brno Municipality. The *Great Brno Expat Survey* is considered one of the biggest research projects into the workings of an international community in Czechia. A 2023 edition is currently in preparation.

The City of Brno expressed a clear interest to know more about how foreign professionals, their family members and spouses, and students from abroad felt about living in the South Moravian Region and Brno in particular, in relation to public services, jobs and careers, and family life, in order to improve the services provided and the quality of life of foreigners living in the region.

## Challenges

Two of the main barriers to talent retention in Czechia are integration with the local community and finding a sense of purpose within Czech society, as research by the Migration Policy Institute Europe finds.<sup>49</sup> Immigrants in Czechia reportedly encounter an 'integration paradox', wherein highly educated and integrated individuals may disengage from the host country's culture. A significant reason for their detachment from Czech society, despite proficiency in the local language above others, seems to be challenges in forming friendships with peers. Finding a sense of purpose within society is crucial, often tied to the ability to pursue one's

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<sup>48</sup> Brno Expat Centre, 2024, Library of useful guides, <https://www.brnoexpatcentre.eu/im-an-expat/>.

<sup>49</sup> Lucie Macková, Nikola Medová, 2023, Can Czechia Capitalize on High-Skilled Immigration amid Influx of Ukrainians?, MPI Europe, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/czechia-ukrainians-high-skilled-immigration>.

expertise and have qualifications acknowledged.<sup>50</sup> Essentially, retaining talent not only hinges on securing suitable employment and financial stability, but also on fostering a sense of belonging in the new community. Following the regions' awareness of this issue, they are reacting by expanding their foreign integration centres.

A frequently mentioned challenge in South Moravia and in Brno is the lack of English-speaking employees at public offices. The region is far from solving this issue, but progress has been made. Instructions and directions on the walls of city buildings are translated into English, and initiatives have been introduced in some public authorities to provide material and communication in English.

A key element, which practitioners of the South Moravian region feel Czechia is missing, is a national strategy, including centralised coordination and marketing campaigns, which boost the talent attraction of the country. Furthermore, a list of professions, qualifications and skills, which are in high demand in the national labour market, would improve the effectiveness of the regional Expat Centres in their efforts to inform and guide the relevant Czech stakeholders and authorities involved in the area of talent management.

## Cities

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### Vilnius

Being a home to global companies such as Vinted, Nord Security and Shift4, Vilnius ranks today among Europe's top innovative cities. Lithuania's capital was decorated with awards on economic potential, business friendliness and human capital.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Vilnius has been recognised as the 2025 European Green Capital for its sustainability efforts and as the most business-friendly city emerging in Europe, reflecting its commitment to environmental sustainability, a tech-oriented approach to citizen engagement and a positive business climate.<sup>52</sup> The EC's 2023 report on the quality of life in European cities confirmed Vilnius as a place where people are highly satisfied to live.<sup>53</sup> The city has also created a welcoming

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<sup>50</sup> Marcus Andersson, 2023, Place Attractiveness, Development and Marketing Trends for the coming years.

<sup>51</sup> Vilnius TechFusion, 2023, Vilnius Among Europe's Top Cities of the Future for the Second Year in a Row, <https://vilniustechfusion.com/en/news/vilnius-among-europes-top-cities-of-the-future-for-the-second-year-in-a-row/>.

<sup>52</sup> European Commission, 2023, Urban sustainability: Vilnius, Viladecans and Treviso win 2025 European Green City awards, [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/winners-european-green-city-awards-2025-2023-10-05\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/winners-european-green-city-awards-2025-2023-10-05_en).

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, 2023, Report on the quality of life in European cities 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/maps/quality-of-life\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/maps/quality-of-life_en).

ecosystem for remote workers and digital nomads, helping the country reach the top eight countries in the Global Remote Work Index.<sup>54</sup>

Vilnius also profits from Lithuania's substantial investments in talent attraction, where progress has been made in the past few years. In 2018, the Seimas, the legislative branch of government in Lithuania, endorsed a strategy aimed at encouraging a balanced arrival for foreigners by pursuing attraction, admission and integration policies.<sup>55</sup> Later in 2020, the country renewed its migration policy guidelines and a corresponding strategy. The ICMPD-led and EU-funded [TALENTAS](#) project further underscored Lithuania's commitment to improving its competitiveness in the race for global talent, funded via the Structural Reform Support Programme of the EC.

A gradual development towards strategic-level policy planning on migration and integration illustrates the growing awareness of the impact of migration on Lithuania's demography, society and economy – and reflects significant and long-term planning and policy efforts. Strategic, national-level policy documents in the fields of demography, migration and integration emphasise Lithuania's interest in the recruitment of highly qualified workers and international students.<sup>56</sup>

The Lithuanian Parliament has passed amendments to the national Employment Law, introducing financial incentives for both international talents and their employers. The compensation includes a one-time payment of €3,000 for newcomers and reimbursement of the company's recruitment expenses of up to €5,200. These incentives apply exclusively to workers in highly demanded fields, such as life sciences, ICT, engineering and physical sciences.<sup>57</sup>

## Practices

The concerted efforts seem to pay off as every year there are more and more people willing to relocate to Lithuania. There were more than 118,000 foreigners living in the country in 2023, compared with 49,000 five years earlier, according to government data. This spike has certainly been fuelled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but people arrive in the Baltic country also from

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<sup>54</sup> Nordlayer, 2024, Global Remote Work Index 2023, <https://nordlayer.com/global-remote-work-index/#countries-score-table>.

<sup>55</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2018, Seimas endorsed the Strategy for the Demographic, Migration, and Integration Policy for 2018–2030, [https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=35403&p\\_k=2&p\\_t=260865](https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=2&p_t=260865).

<sup>56</sup> Justyna Frelak, Caitlin Katsiaficas, 2021, How can Lithuania harness international talent to drive growth?, [https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/53014/file/Harness0International0Talent\\_PolicyPaper\\_EN\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/53014/file/Harness0International0Talent_PolicyPaper_EN_WEB.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Glimstedt, 2022, Higher qualified specialists migration to Lithuania : win-win situation for employer and employee, <https://www.glimstedt.lt/en/news/higher-qualified-specialists-migration-to-lithuania-win-win-situation-for-employer-and-employee/>.

elsewhere including France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Forbes hints that tech companies that were able to pay competitive salaries attract talent to Vilnius while the city provided the socio-economic surroundings appealing to fintech professionals from abroad.

[Go Vilnius](#) is the official development agency of the City of Vilnius which provides information not only to visitors and investors, but also to convince global talent to move to Lithuania's capital. It serves as the main point of contact connecting internationals to the most relevant services and information on their website on professional and cultural life in Vilnius, as well as job offers from selected partners. Vilnius manages to steal the spotlight by leveraging global news coverage into a successful talent attraction campaign. According to the agency's Head of Marketing, today's talent attraction strategies need to foster in the new corporate lifestyle and mode of working, especially with the *Generation Z* entering the labour market and moving quickly up in careers while still being young and not committed to a particular place. Attraction efforts need to review the behaviour patterns of their targeted audiences and make offers tailored to the generational perspectives, including values such as sustainability.<sup>58</sup>

### Spotlight: Guerilla marketing campaigns

Vilnius won top place at the City Nation Place Awards 2023 for its viral '[Got fired by Meta or Twitter? Move to Vilnius](#)' campaign, showcasing the city's effective advertising efforts and highlighting its growing reputation as a global hub for business and innovation.

Despite a limited budget, the campaign initiated by *Go Vilnius* made a significant impact. Amid widespread media coverage of tech industry layoffs, the agency leveraged social media to reach ICT professionals with catchy messages to consider Vilnius as the next destination in their careers. The campaign gained momentum and evolved into a larger initiative, featuring posters near London's King's Cross station, close to Meta's headquarters. These posters, approximately 3,000 in number, featured QR codes directing the reader to the [Vilnius TechFusion](#) website. This budget-conscious approach, 'newsjacking' global stories as a marketing method, effectively garnered international attention and secured the award for best communication strategy.

[International House Vilnius](#) (IHV), established in a joint effort between the City of Vilnius, the city's business development agency and the country's talent attraction [programme](#), offers assistance to international talent on relocation matters ranging from tax guidance to the organisation of social events. Following the data gathering covering the city's need for skills, the agency *Go Vilnius* established IHV with the clear goal of providing soft landings for

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<sup>58</sup> City Nation Place, 2024, Interview with Pija Ona Indriūnaitė, <https://www.citynationplace.com/how-vilnius-leveraged-global-news-coverage-of-mass-layoffs-from-the-tech-giants-into-a-successful-talent-attraction-campaign>.

international talents. IHV began by conducting research into understanding the needs of foreigners relocating to Vilnius. The most important institutions were then invited to join the project – the Migration Department, Tax Inspectorate, Social Insurance Agency and Employment Service. Specialists from each of these institutions work on-site at IHV serving foreign clients. In addition, they can consult each other under one roof and jointly identify solutions to unusual situations. According to the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, this has also helped Vilnius to identify systemic problems and pinpoint emerging challenges more effectively and which can only be solved when institutions work together.<sup>59</sup> Previously, talents relocating to Vilnius had to visit several public institutions to undertake the same procedures.

IHV serves around 1,300 people each month and conducts surveys inviting foreigners to express their level of contentment with their life in Vilnius. Other programmes initiated by IHV connect newcomers with locals who serve as mentors and ‘professional friends’, providing guidance and assistance with challenges internationals may encounter in Vilnius. The [BeFriend Vilnius](#) programme connects and helps newcomers engage in the local community on arrival, expanding their networks and making them feel at home in Lithuania. Special attention is dedicated to the integration of the Ukrainian community. To support this effort, the Lithuanian Government has established an information centre as part of the IHV.<sup>60</sup>

Vilnius has recognised community building as one of the most essential steps for retention. Therefore, in addition to offering job-finding events, the city dedicates significant resources to curating distinctive community-building experiences. These include the [International Community Festival](#), excursions for foreigners, musical activities, free photoshoots around the city and game nights.

## Barcelona

Barcelona has made significant progress in enhancing talent attraction, particularly targeting investors, researchers, high-skilled professionals and digital nomads.<sup>61</sup> International companies chose the city as a place for establishing tech and digital hubs due to its innovative

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<sup>59</sup> Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2021, International Service Centre Vilnius, <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/international-service-centre/>.

<sup>60</sup> Support Ukraina, 2024, Support for Ukraine and its people, <https://suukraina.lt/en/>.

<sup>61</sup> Spain offers a [Digital Nomad Visa](#), designed for foreigners intending to reside in Spain while working remotely for companies or employers outside the Spanish territory. Self-employed applicants can also collaborate with Spanish companies, provided such work does not exceed 20% of their overall activity. Eligibility criteria includes possessing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, or having at least three years of relevant work experience.

environment and appeal to young talent. Barcelona ranks as the eighth most attractive city globally for living and travel, as per the latest *World's Best Cities* report.<sup>62</sup> It also claimed sixth position worldwide for establishing start-ups, as indicated by EU-Startups in 2023.<sup>63</sup>

Geographically, Barcelona secures third spot as an ideal city for start-up creation, according to *Startup Heatmap Europe*, with nearly two thirds of founders originating from abroad.<sup>64</sup> In the last few years, more than 20 tech hubs have been established in the city with, for example, AstraZeneca, CISCO, Lufthansa, N26 and Nestlé among other large companies which have created more than 6,000 jobs for international talent, including fintech experts and microchip engineers. The 2022 *City Talent Index* further emphasises Barcelona's lead in attractive lifestyle.<sup>65</sup> According to [Tech Barcelona](#), the city's advantages lie in its good infrastructure, existing research centres, business schools and the political support to increase incentives to set up a business — all of which are leading international companies to choose the city for its digital hubs.<sup>66</sup>

Barcelona stands out as a compelling example in the field of soft landing, social integration, community building and LGBT+ inclusiveness. For example, the city runs a dedicated office for non-discrimination matters, which includes legal and psychological aid. Barcelona commits to cross-border cooperation on anti-racism with the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR), for which the city currently holds the vice-presidency and hosts the Coalition's Co-Secretariat.<sup>67</sup> Ghent, also an ECCAR member, took this European example as inspiration to initiate a network of [Flemish cities](#) against racism.

## Practices

Barcelona has a long tradition of bottom-up approaches on migration, reception and intercultural integration of foreigners, with frameworks dating back to the 1990s.<sup>68</sup> The [Barcelona City Council](#) is the top administrative body of the city and is organised on political and executive levels, defining main guidelines for policies on the one hand, and implementing these initiatives on the other. Since its establishment, the City Council body has taken on an

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<sup>62</sup> World's Best Cities, 2024, World's Best Cities Report 2024, <https://www.worldsbestcities.com/rankings/worlds-best-cities/>.

<sup>63</sup> EU-Startups, 2023, TOP 30: Europe's biggest startup hubs in 2023, <https://www.eu-startups.com/2023/07/top-30-europes-biggest-startup-hubs-in-2023/>.

<sup>64</sup> Startup Heatmap Europe, 2024, Best Startup Cities, <https://startupheatmap.eu/best-startup-cities/>.

<sup>65</sup> NTT Data, 2023, City Talent Index 2022, <https://es.nttdata.com/landings/city-talent-index-2022>.

<sup>66</sup> Financial Times, 2024, Founders' warm welcome in Barcelona, <https://www.ft.com/content/354f8659-fe96-4872-a395-d80d515b033e>.

<sup>67</sup> ECCAR, 2024, Structure, <https://www.eccar.info/en/structure/>.

<sup>68</sup> Barcelona City Council, 2021, Barcelona Interculturality Plan 2021-2023, <https://www.eccar.info/sites/default/files/document/Interculturality%20Plan%202021-2030%20Barcelona.pdf>.

increasingly prominent role in managing migration policies and integration matters.<sup>69</sup> It involves, for example, non-governmental organisations into its municipal decision-making processes, seeking their input to shape the city's integration policies and ensure their successful implementation.<sup>70</sup>

The city's leading facility for newly arrived people is the [Care Service for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees](#) (SAIER). Opened in 1989, the SAIER is also run by the City Council and other specialised entities, offering information and advice on immigration, international protection, emigration and voluntary returns. The City Council has invested a significant amount in such support services, providing information and legal advice to newcomers, guidance on housing and social care, and the linguistic integration of Barcelona's immigrant population.<sup>71</sup>

Migrants themselves can actively engage in the local political sphere, thanks to the [Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council](#) (CMIB), led by the Municipal Commissioner of Migration and a representative from a migrant association. The CMIB serves as a mechanism with a clear mandate that encourages social participation in drafting, providing and evaluating public policies to ensure that Barcelona is a pluralistic and integrating city for immigrants and ethnic minorities.<sup>72</sup>

### Spotlight: [Barcelona, City of Talent](#)

With this government measure, the Barcelona City Council has made a structural commitment to promote municipal policies geared towards generating, developing, attracting, welcoming and retaining talent. Supported by studies and economic data, Barcelona has decided to initiate several targeted initiatives tailored to its socio-economic needs and disposition, with an annual budget in excess of €5 million.

Among the many projects focused on talent attraction and retention, the City Council partnered with other public and private stakeholders to forge a [Digital Talent](#) alliance, including promotion campaigns, specialised fairs and congresses, to link international talent and local companies. The [Return with Opportunities](#) initiative is another action under the government measure that aims to offer incentives for those returning to Barcelona, aimed at people who emigrated, especially those who did so because of the economic crisis in Spain. It offers advice on returning, employment mediation and entrepreneurship for young people.

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<sup>69</sup> Leila Hadj Abdou and Andrew Geddes, 2017, Managing superdiversity? Examining the intercultural policy turn in Europe, *Policy & Politics*, vol 45, no 4, 493-510.

<sup>70</sup> Óscar García Agustín and Martin Bak Jørgensen, 2019, Solidarity Cities and Cosmopolitanism from Below: Barcelona as a Refugee City, *Social Inclusion*, vol 7, issue 2, 198-207.

<sup>71</sup> Barcelona City Council, 2024, Directorate of Immigrant Care and Support Services. Programmes, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/novaciudadania/en/about-us>.

<sup>72</sup> Barcelona City Council, 2024, Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/consell-municipal-immigracio/en/about-us>.



Another point of contact for talent is [Barcelona International Welcome](#), designed to facilitate arrival and establishment of persons in Barcelona. It is part of the city's strategy to attract, welcome, and engage international talent. It is backed by the International Economic Promotion Department at the Barcelona City Council and works in collaboration with the city's local development agency, [Barcelona Activa](#). The services are all free of charge, with individualised help offered in Catalan, English and Spanish. These services encompass essential matters such as residence and work permits, identity documents, access to housing, healthcare and education, as well as guidance on mobility, public transport, setting up a business, taxation and various other practical aspects of life in Barcelona. Beyond this, *Barcelona Activa* monitors the influx and outflow of talent to and from the city. In cooperation with LinkedIn, the agency developed the [Barcelona Talent Map](#). This tool analyses over 1.8 million professional records mapping the talent located in the city using quantitative methods based on data, including education and training, association with economic sectors, and regional and international mobility patterns. The generated data feeds into the agency's insights to identify new opportunities in the area of talent attraction. The map further provides the City Council with useful insights into which sectors attract but also retain talent the most, the connections between cities in terms of talent mobility, and analyses job advertisements, sought-after skills and generation of talent types by educational institutions.

Barcelona also annually celebrates an [International Community Day](#), organised by the City Council and which has established itself as a reference meeting point for the international talent ecosystem, and the main welcoming and networking space for the international community. The campaign accommodates workshops, conferences and fairs convening local businesses, organisations and associations. In 2023, the city hosted the [Cities for Talent](#) meeting gathering experts and practitioners from across European cities and regions to discuss and exchange innovative talent attraction and retention activities. The event included a variety of workshops, walking tours of the city, and other opportunities for networking, exchange and cooperation, sharing best practices, and lessons learnt, thus contributing to a better collaboration and communication among European international actors in the field of talent attraction.

## Challenges

A primary challenge in talent attraction for Barcelona is the scarcity of affordable housing for its residents, triggering the flight of younger generations to other municipalities.<sup>73</sup> The city's appeal as a major tourist destination has not only led to issues of overcrowding but has also

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<sup>73</sup> Barcelona Metròpolis, 2022, The housing crisis, <https://www.barcelona.cat/metropolis/en/contents/the-housing-crisis>.

fuelled considerable speculation in the housing market. In response, the Barcelona City Council has significantly increased its financial commitments to improving housing in the city, drawing on both its own resources and European funding. In 2016, the city approved the [Barcelona Right to Housing Plan](#), a decade-long initiative aimed at safeguarding housing rights and establishing a robust public housing service. This plan joins other housing policies in other global cities such as London<sup>74</sup> and Paris<sup>75</sup>.

As part of its housing strategy, Barcelona is acquiring private market properties and implementing controls on tourist accommodation. However, tourism falls under the jurisdiction of the autonomous region and the regulation of private rental prices is subject to national legislation. Nevertheless, the city has been at the forefront of innovative construction systems to address its housing crisis and the urgent need for new, affordable and sustainable accommodation. Since 2021, projects originating in Barcelona (such as [APROP Ciutat Vella](#)) have won several New European Bauhaus awards, including on modular, adaptable and mobile living solutions.<sup>76</sup>

## Gothenburg

Gothenburg has surpassed Stockholm as the most attractive city in Sweden for talent, according to the [Talent City Index Sweden](#).<sup>77</sup> The city is known to be an automotive hub, a hotspot for electromobility and a key location in the emerging Nordic battery industry. Large global companies, such as Volvo and innovative start-ups, have their headquarters in Gothenburg. The business community in Gothenburg accounts for 34% of the country's private R&D funds, and spends twice as much money per employee on creating jobs compared with the rest of Sweden. Combined with good opportunities to live a good life in Gothenburg, this creates an attractive situation for the city located on Sweden's west coast. Scandinavia's largest port is located in Gothenburg, making it also a prominent logistics hub.

In 2022, the Gothenburg region accommodated around 239,000 residents from diverse cultural backgrounds, comprising roughly 22% of the local population. One of the key reasons why Gothenburg ranks top as a talent city is its established reputation for safety, as well as the

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<sup>74</sup> Mayor of London, 2018, London Housing Strategy, <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/housing-and-land/tackling-londons-housing-crisis>.

<sup>75</sup> Véronique Chocron, 2022, 'Adapting the existing': Paris's plan to reach 40% affordable housing by 2035, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2022/11/22/adapting-the-existing-paris-plan-to-reach-40-affordable-housing-by-2035\\_6005169\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2022/11/22/adapting-the-existing-paris-plan-to-reach-40-affordable-housing-by-2035_6005169_7.html).

<sup>76</sup> European Commission, 2021, New European Bauhaus prize winners, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_4669](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_4669).

<sup>77</sup> Future Place Leadership, 2023, Report: Talent City Index Sweden 2023, <https://futureplaceleadership.com/reports-handbooks/report-talent-city-index-sweden-2023/>.

high value placed on community and shared values compared with the capital, all contributing to a more welcoming environment. Gothenburg excels in family-friendliness and offers more affordable housing options. In comparison with other Nordic cities, such as Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo and Stockholm, Gothenburg also offers the lowest average cost of living rate, office rent and fees for childcare. The prevalence of English proficiency among the majority of residents contributes to reducing language barriers and is a general advantage in Gothenburg's international competition for global talent. Many of the international companies also offer English-speaking jobs and provide an international corporate environment, which also contributes to the attraction of talent to the city.

In general, cities in Sweden benefit from a favourable national framework which facilitates talent management and some key decisions taken by the Swedish Government, recently demonstrated by the funding of an inter-agency initiative to strengthen coordination of the country's agencies working on attracting and retaining international talent.<sup>78</sup>

## Practices

Gothenburg is an influential frontrunner when it comes to promising practices of collaboration between the public and private sectors. This becomes evident when looking how the city connects the local and regional business communities and academia, as well as the relevant public administrations. The city's way of pursuing a multi-stakeholder approach to talent attraction is embodied by its three science parks, cultivating international collaboration between research institutions and the private sector.<sup>79</sup>

The Gothenburg region also holds a leading position offering a high concentration of so-called 'testbeds' – virtual or physical places where scientific theories or new technologies can be simulated and tested.<sup>80</sup> The city's growth strategy is driven by large investments, with an estimated €100 billion that will be spent by 2035 on property developments and infrastructure, including housing, offices and facilities.

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<sup>78</sup> Swedish Government, 2024, Myndighetsövergripande satsning för att attrahera och behålla internationell kompetens, <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/03/myndighetsovergripande-satsning-for-att-attrahera-och-behalla-internationell-kompetens/>.

<sup>79</sup> This is Gothenburg, 2024, Business landscape in Gothenburg, <https://www.thisisgothenburg.com/doing-business-in-gothenburg>.

<sup>80</sup> Invest in Gothenburg, 2024, Testbeds in the Gothenburg area, <https://www.investingothenburg.com/master-collaboration/testbed>.

### Spotlight: [Science Parks](#)

Science parks deserve attention when it comes to analysing the city's efforts in the attraction of talent since they incubate, often from the start, knowledge-based businesses with the potential for rapid growth, and present an ideal environment where international companies can access specific knowledge and participate in the development.

The city's Government plays not only a crucial role in establishing links between local universities and the private sector, but also in providing effective policy support for the tenants of the science parks, as well as providing them with a beneficial environment for the recruitment and development of international talent.

Science Parks also foster informal interaction between stakeholders, for instance by creating information networks, providing easier access to local university research facilities and their results, connecting with alumni networks, communicating the activities developed by the local universities and announcing employment opportunities in partner firms.<sup>81</sup>

The City of Gothenburg, in cooperation with different companies, funds a variety of projects that make residential housing more attractive. One of them, is the urban planning project [Fixfabriken](#), which is transforming a former industrial area into a redeveloped residential area, contributing to relieving the housing shortage in Gothenburg.<sup>82</sup>

Gothenburg also has a variety of services and platforms directed at soft landing and attraction for new arrivals. [Move to Gothenburg](#) (MTG) is a collaborative initiative involving stakeholders from the business community, academia and local government, and is dedicated to attracting and facilitating the integration of highly skilled internationals in Gothenburg and the West Sweden region. It also offers support to Swedish employers on how to attract and retain global talent, with detailed guidance on talent attraction and retention, and training courses on recruitment. [International House Gothenburg](#) serves as the central hub for international talents, offering activities, services and guidance to ease integration into Swedish society. It was initiated following a joint collaboration between the City of Gothenburg, MTG, the *Business Region Göteborg* and the *Region Västra Götaland*. In addition, Gothenburg provides a dedicated job portal, [Careers in Gothenburg](#), which lists opportunities including English-

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<sup>81</sup> Eduardo Cadorin, Magnus Klofsten and Hans Löfsten, 2021, Science Parks, talent attraction and stakeholder involvement: an international study, *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, vol 46, 1-28.

<sup>82</sup> Baltic Urban Lab, 2018, Fixfabriken, <https://www.balticurbanlab.eu/goodpractices/fixfabriken-attractive-residential-housing-area-göteborg-sweden>.

speaking jobs in the West Sweden region.<sup>83</sup> Gothenburg has also profited from its close cooperation with EURES services and career programmes.<sup>84</sup>

The well-structured cooperation across national- and regional-level stakeholders makes Gothenburg a role model in how to forge effective partnerships between the private and public sectors. Further, MTG is an active member of the working group 'Attract, integrate and retain talent' within the Swedish Government's collaboration programme where solutions to meet the needs of international talent and employers are discussed.<sup>85</sup> Various cities and regions in Sweden, companies, authorities and organisations contribute to the group, ensuring a wide range of knowledge and insight.

### Spotlight: [Personal guide and checklists](#)

*Move to Gothenburg* provides an intuitive and interactive tool which simplifies the process of moving to Sweden and the city by compiling a personalised 'to do' list of practical things to take care of, based on a given set of questions relating to nationality, reasons for moving, period of stay, family status and arranged accommodation.

The tool then provides a personal checklist including guidance on finding accommodation, learning Swedish, registration, application to schools, obtaining insurances opening a bank account and professional networks as well as leisure activities.

## Challenges

[Switch to Sweden](#), a three-year project funded by the Government's innovation agency, was tasked with mapping needs and challenges among international master's and doctoral students, in STEM fields who are already in Sweden, and knowledge-intensive companies. According to the surveys conducted in 2022, including in Gothenburg, challenges related to language barriers are the most prominent obstacle, followed by long processing times for work permit applications. Companies have voiced the need for the further development of a national strategy to improve Sweden's attractiveness, including improving conditions and accelerating permit procedures. Even though Swedes speak English fluently, respondents recall feeling rejected, or being excluded because they were not able to speak Swedish, both at the workplace and in the private sphere. Respondents noticed that Swedish is the preferred

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<sup>83</sup> On 15 April 2024, the job portal run by Move to Gothenburg listed 8,278 jobs of which 853 require English as the working language.

<sup>84</sup> Move to Gothenburg, 2024, EURES makes the job mobility easier in EU, <https://www.movetogothenburg.com/news/all-news/eures-makes-job-mobility-easier-eu>.

<sup>85</sup> Future Place Leadership, 2022, Field study on the national coordination for the work on attracting and reception of international talent, <https://www.movetogothenburg.com/publications/ppt-bilder-av-forstudie-nationell-samordningsmodell-attraktion-och-mottagande-av>.

language in different circles, and therefore not speaking Swedish can limit job opportunities as well as preventing them from truly connecting with the local community. They also described a lack of information in English, whether it be from public institutions, healthcare providers or local news outlets.<sup>86</sup> A 2023 survey of the Gothenburg University found that 30% of its doctoral candidates lacked Swedish language skills, which entailed the risk of a lack of social integration. Many doctoral candidates said that they did not have access to all the information they needed because it was often only provided in Swedish.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Switch to Sweden, 2022, Talent Map Report: Academic international talent and companies in Sweden 2022, <https://linkopingsciencepark.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/talent-map-report-high.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> Universitetslärares, 2024, Doctoral candidates' limited Swedish skills a social problem, <https://universitetslararen.se/2024/02/12/doctoral-candidates-limited-swedish-skills-a-social-problem/>.

## Commonly faced challenges

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Some countries, regions and cities have a better starting position than others, and some have to deal with more disadvantageous conditions than others. Despite the notable dispositions and differences across the EU concerning the ability and available opportunities of attracting and retaining talent, a distinct pattern of commonly faced challenges can nonetheless be identified.

- **Comprehensive social integration to retain international talents:** ‘You cannot digitalise a warm welcome’ – the need for human contact remains true, especially in an ever-digital world. Genuine integration moves beyond professional onboarding, necessitating collaborations at company, civil society and public levels. Comprehensive societal inclusion is a fundamental component of attracting *but especially retaining* talents, including their families. Not finding a sense of purpose or belonging within society has been seen to be a crucial obstacle in many of the cases studied, often tied to the inability to pursue one’s expertise and have qualifications acknowledged.
- **Language barriers:** Despite efforts to incorporate language training in the majority of the examples presented, language barriers remain one of top challenges when it comes to talent attraction and retention. This ranges from specific information and documents related to immigration sometimes not being available in languages other than the official one of the country, social segregation in companies between native and non-native speakers, and general disadvantages of international talents in the national job markets. Countries with a more substantial English-speaking society (even if as a second language) are deemed more appealing for talents.
- **Entry requirements and red tape:** Concentrating solely on talent attraction falls short when entry requirements and bureaucratic complexities become deterrents for third-country nationals. One of the top barriers that prevent companies from recruiting internationals are still the long processing time for work permits and legal complexities around visas, as well as uncertainty about labour law issues. Existing policies need streamlining, and a robust emphasis on talent retention is crucial. In addition, incentives for students to stay require options for an extended residence beyond the study period, as well as supporting job searches after graduation or starting businesses.
- **Unfamiliarity of companies with international recruiting:** Small- and medium-sized enterprises often lack the resources and knowledge to recruit talent globally. The attraction, onboarding and retention of internationals demand more effort than looking for skills locally. While enterprises express a desire for international talent, they

often seem ill-equipped once cooperation with the public sector begins on the recruitment processes. In addition, slow and non-digitalised immigration procedures prove to be demanding for inexperienced and smaller companies. Furthermore, non-diverse companies who refuse to cultivate a cosmopolitan workplace and culture will put off international talent.

- **Anti-immigration and xenophobic climates:** The task of attracting skilled workers faces heightened difficulty amidst increasingly hostile political environments. Governments in Europe vary in their approaches, with some prioritising their own unemployed and underemployed citizens to internationals. Despite politicians acknowledging that relocating workers contributes to economic growth and job creation rather than job theft, this perspective is not always communicated publicly. Moreover, international workers, who often cannot vote in national elections, lack political representation. Distance from family and friends, a lack of hospitality, and challenges in building a social life and network are today central considerations of talents when choosing or reflecting to stay at their place of employment.

## Repository of prominent practices

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Although there is no one-size-fits-all, some prominent practices have clearly emerged from the case studies and outline a few fundamentals of a successful approach to talent attraction and retention.

- **Collaboration between government levels:** Effective policies necessitate collaboration and communication between the diverse actors. Cases in Denmark and Finland are good examples of well-coordinated systems where the federal, regional and municipal levels collaborate well. The Barcelona case underscores the significance of including civil society, including non-governmental organisations, particularly in integration matters. Another excellent example of multi-stakeholder cooperation comes from Luxembourg, where the Government established a detailed [National Research and Innovation Strategy](#), establishing a collaborative ecosystem involving the public sector, higher education and research institutions.
- **Collaboration with the private sector and research institutions:** Efforts to engage the private sector in policy initiatives and talent attraction campaigns have proven to be an essential factor in enhancing a country's talent attraction. *Copenhagen Capacity* sets a notable example with its seamless integration and collaboration with private



sector companies in decision-making and talent attraction projects. Testament to this collaboration is the active participation of 450 companies in the *Talent to Denmark* initiative. Further, the Gothenburg region is a champion of facilitating collaboration between its public and private sectors, as displayed by its thriving science parks.

- **Fast-track procedures:** Measures that have reduced the time required in immigration procedures, notably related to receiving decisions on residence and work permits, have been appreciated by companies. Countries have managed to implement solutions that have cut the procedures down to only a few weeks, which has enhanced not only the economic competitiveness but also the positive branding of a country. There are some leading examples across the EU, which all make best use of digitalised pathways and technologies, such as digital wallets and e-identity methods, notably observed in Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. Another promising practice to accelerate immigration procedures, inter alia implemented by Finland, is the introduction of trusted employer certification programmes that allow certified employers to benefit from faster work permit processing, and even prioritisation of their employees' work and residence permit applications in case of backlogs or delays.
- **Integration and community-building *beyond and as part of the job*:** Attractiveness hinges on positive experiences related to integration and community-building. Talents come for a job – but they stay because of the social environment. Existing family ties or the presence of one's own diaspora has a significant impact on a place's appeal. Where these networks are not present, it is imperative to foster a welcoming environment and promote openness in the local community. Relevant practices of fostering inclusion and exchange with locals come from the social initiatives of the International Houses in Leuven and Vilnius. The *Brno Expat Centre* and *Move to Gothenburg*, for instance, further advise companies on good onboarding practices and recommend to link a newcomer's professional introduction schedule also to the city's community-building and information services.
- **Ease of access to the labour market:** Countries are increasingly showing flexibility when it comes to attracting highly sought-after international talent to meet their persisting labour shortages and skills gaps. A promising example is presented by Germany with the introduction of its new legal framework governing skilled immigration that extends the access of its labour market to a wider group of people, and enhances the scope relating to residence for participating in qualification measures. With its so-called recognition partnerships, Germany demonstrates flexibility as it enables applicants to obtain a residence title for qualified employment and to complete the necessary recognition procedure *after* entering the country.

- **Digitalisation and communication:** Successful examples combine effective policies and physical presence together with user-friendly digital platforms. These platforms guide new arrivals through the formal steps of immigration, simplify the search for jobs, and offer opportunities to develop language proficiencies and other skills. In today's talent attraction efforts, especially in the tech and ICT fields, strategic digital communication and marketing are essential elements in solidifying a talent's decision to move. Lithuania stands out for its commitment to digitalisation and platform creation, complemented by physical structures of International Houses. Other excellent stand-out examples come from Estonia with the [e-Residency](#) programme, and the Netherlands with [Brainport Eindhoven](#)'s innovative platforms. Cities such as Brno and Gothenburg maintain digital libraries of guides for newcomers, and provide checklists from the pre-arrival phase onwards.
- **Stand-out advertising campaigns:** Crafting distinctive advertising campaigns designed to connect with potential talent have proven to be real success stories. Such campaigns need a substantial online component to maximise their reach of international talent, although noteworthy ones incorporate an in-person aspect, such as the creative guerilla campaigns from *Go Vilnius*. Other exemplary projects come from Finland, notably the [90-Day Finn](#) programme in Helsinki, which has grown in appeal as an opportunity to immerse in the Finnish lifestyle while forging connections in the country's business landscape.

## Recommendations for policy-making

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Following the highlights of the joint challenges observed, and given this study's identification of promising practices, a set of recommendations to consider for national and EU policy-making can be formulated.

- **Support EU Member States in creating or further developing national strategies on international talent attraction and retention:** Many EU countries have already adopted relevant national strategies, such as Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. In other countries that still lack one, most activities are driven by regions, cities and individual companies, which also need to be further supported. However, providing a national framework, leading coordination and requiring the relevant resources to manage a country's international talent policy are indispensable assets. Thus, providing technical support for Member States in drafting or further shaping their respective

national strategies appears to be crucial. This also requires the strategic allocation of adequate funding (at national and EU levels) for this topic.

- **Bring the Talent Partnerships in:** Successful international recruitment builds on good policies in the destination countries, but works even better when there is talent investment in the countries of origin. Cooperating in double-degree programmes, developing joint curricula and fostering investment in the countries of origin are relevant avenues in addressing both labour shortages across the EU as well as the developing needs of partner countries. The *EU Talent Partnerships* are a good starting point to make sure that the EU's attraction policies are rooted in an approach that is mutually beneficial.
- **Get the Talent Pool right:** The proposed *Skills and Talent Mobility package* of November 2023 contains a series of measures and is aimed at addressing many international recruitment challenges currently faced by EU countries. The tabled *EU Talent Pool* – if the co-legislators opt for the preferred options outlined in the proposal – will support the recruitment of international talent at all skill levels, while at the same time targeted to address shortage occupations of EU and national relevance. Further, it entails relevant recommendations on measures to simplify the qualification and skills recognition procedures. In particular, SMEs would benefit from such services and a streamlining of procedures, as they will likely save time and costs in international recruitment.
- **Strengthen the exchange between policy-making and practice:** Opportunities and formats fostering exchange between professionals working in the area of talent attraction and retention, policy-makers and other stakeholders should be further supported. A collection of field-related studies and good practices coordinated at EU level could serve as useful resources for talent management agencies and practitioners on the ground. In this regard, fora such as the [Labour Migration Practitioners' Network](#) of the EU-funded [Migration Partnership Facility](#), the [European Talent Mobility Forum](#) and other partner platforms contribute to further improving the diverse strands of EU labour migration and the attraction of international talent. Such practitioner-level exchanges have proven to be suitable for discussing challenges and operational details, and serve the purpose of scaling up successful pilot projects or sharing lessons learnt, allowing best practices to spread and be replicated.
- **Initiate a knowledge hub on legislation and policies:** Practitioners sometimes experience difficulties in accessing information about EU and national legislation, as well as existing labour market programmes. In particular, representatives from

municipal or regional entities, but also SME recruiting teams, may feel lost finding their way through the legislative jungle of immigration processes. A knowledge hub would add an information instrument to the toolbox available to stakeholders, to better understand their own national frameworks as well as compare them with policies of other EU Member States. Such a hub could serve as a first information gateway but would need to be further supported by dissemination campaigns to be effective.

- **Accelerate digital solutions for immigration and beyond:** Recognising the implications that extended immigration processing times across many Member States have, digitalised and interoperable solutions could revolutionise the way in which the EU attracts global talent. The [European Digital Identity](#), which is currently being developed and tested in four large-scale projects, promises to provide solutions when accessing government services, opening a bank account or travelling within the EU. Efforts in attracting global talent will be significantly strengthened from streamlined processes, whether they are investors, digital nomads or students, and remove relevant administrative burden and costs from companies as well as from the talent at key stages during immigration and integration. Based on digital wallet technology, such a system would promise a more seamless experience in also accessing social services, educational and other professional opportunities, thus reducing to a minimum the bureaucratic hurdles often encountered.
- **Invest in social integration to also retain talents:** Expanding on the acknowledgment of companies' receptiveness to international talent, it is crucial to broaden the scope beyond mere recruitment efforts. Embracing a holistic approach to onboarding and integration, which includes not just job-oriented assistance, but also social and cultural integration, makes newcomers feel more 'at home' – which has proven to enhance talent retention. Hence, comprehensive support for retention initiatives and programmes are a key element to complement any talent strategy. Such measures entail ensuring social and family life at the destination, while preserving the ability to maintain ties with countries of origin. Pooled funding, where public and private stakeholders jointly contribute, could help to further develop sustainable integration and retention measures.
- **Do not leave blue collar workers behind:** International welcome centres are increasingly used across the EU and play a key role in providing a soft landing and various types of support for newcomers. However, talents working in blue collar professions have been highly mobile across the EU and may need a different approach or communication strategy than traditionally used in such 'expat centres', which are geared towards high-income talents.

- **Cultivate multilingualism and bridge gaps with artificial intelligence (AI):** Recognising language as one of the main barriers in the area of talent attraction and retention, European countries should take greater steps in fostering inclusivity by offering more services in English. Providing services and official documents in multiple languages will contribute to the agency of talents. Fostering a widespread proficiency in English among local populations, as well as cultivating the positive image of multilingualism, add to this. In order to overcome language barriers, public administration and onboarding services could further tap into the potential of AI-driven translation and chat bots to equip their websites and relevant information in multiple languages. Further, language courses for newcomers supported directly in the workplace present an innovative measure while also constituting another element to retain talents in the long term. Companies that introduce English as a lingua franca at the workplace make themselves attractive for international talents who do not (yet) sufficiently speak the national language of their host countries.
- **Engage more with international graduates:** The findings of this study suggest that EU countries should further enhance their efforts to increase stay rates of international students. Today, international students too often leave the country of their alma mater and disappear from their host country's radar after their university graduation. Student visas should incorporate a pathway to employment. Many countries still maintain a two-track approach separating visa for study and for work. Countries should thus examine policies that grant students access to the labour market or starting a business. Retaining graduates who look for employment opportunities more effectively may also entail extending healthcare and other social services to them. Making the requirements on income and field of work more flexible could alter the strict time-bound limitation experienced by graduates.

## Annex: Interview guide

Can you tell us more about [your organisation/project] and your role?

What are some **general trends** you observe in [your country/region/city] as regards attracting and retaining international talent, but also in the so-called 'global race' for talent and skills?

In your opinion, to what extent has your work related to attracting and retaining talent **changed** for [your country/region/city] **over the past years/decades**?

- Can you think of **milestones** and/or **initiatives** from the public and/or private sectors, which have **driven momentum** in support of the talent attraction efforts in [your country/region/city]?

What are the **specific strategies** to attract and integrate talent in [your country/region/city] that you think have **proven to be effective**?

What are the **key lessons learnt** by [your organisation/project] over the years and what aspects do you see as crucial to effectively attract and retain international talent today?

What are some of the **key policies and programmes that** [your country/region/city] has **initiated** that support talent attraction in general? How would you evaluate them in terms of their effectiveness, responsiveness, strengths and weaknesses?

- Is there an area which you think **deserves more attention** in [your country/region/city] when it comes to attracting and retaining international talent?

Which efforts are there in place to **retain and integrate** international talents (or students)? Is there something you feel is **missing**?

- What are the **reasons** (if provided) why international talents **stay** or **leave**?

Given the strong demand for skilled workers at all levels in Europe, to what extent do you see [your country/region/city] **competing with other European** [countries/regions/cities]?

What is **needed at EU level** to enhance the EU's attractiveness and to provide (further) support to the objectives of your work?

In which area do you think [your country/region/city] can **serve as a role model** for other [countries/regions/cities] in the EU? Is there anything that you think **others should replicate**?