

Skills and Talent Mobility



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1. INTRODUCTION

A skilled workforce is key to the competitiveness of the EU economy, and its capacity for growth and innovation. Employers are struggling to find the workers they need. The Commission's recent Demography Toolbox showed how Europe's ageing demographic further sharpens the challenge¹. The **EU urgently needs to take action to boost its workforce**.

Labour shortages in the EU affect a variety of occupations and sectors across all skills levels including healthcare, long term care and social work activities, construction, manufacturing, transportation and storage, accommodation and food services, engineering, technical and scientific activities and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). There are foreseeable skills gaps in areas essential as the EU adapts to a changing world. With the right policies in place, the **green transition** will create 1 to 2.5 million additional jobs by 2030. The **digital transition** will increase demand for both high-level ICT expertise but also basic digital skills, with the EU currently 11 million short of its target of 20 million ICT professionals employed by 2030².

The European Year of Skills underlines that a strategic approach to solving labour and skills shortages is and will remain indispensable. This work must start at home. At the core of the EU's labour market policy are measures to reskill and upskill the domestic workforce³, activate groups with lower labour market participation⁴ with targeted support to regions facing depopulation and skills shortages, and for intra-EU mobility. Many actions are already underway (see summary in Annex), promoting systems and practices for the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills, helping labour mobility to reduce barriers in the Single Market and enhancing learner mobility. However, these actions alone will not be enough to meet demand. With skills at a premium worldwide, the EU's future competitiveness will be influenced by its capacity to attract global talent and provide a supportive environment to **bring people across all skills levels to Europe**.

The EU will continue to **deepen cooperation with partner countries**, ensuring a mutually beneficial approach in opening new pathways for legal migration, offering support in skills development and promoting circular migration in order to counteract brain drain.

This Communication and the accompanying proposals present a set of mutually reinforcing actions to make the EU more attractive to talent covering the full range of occupations where skills might be needed by employers as well as boost intra-EU mobility. It addresses barriers to international recruitment and helps ensure that third country nationals can make full use of their skills and qualifications in Europe. The initiatives presented aim to **use EU support and the EU's combined weight to help Member States compete in the global race for talent**. New tools proposed would help **job-matching** between EU employers and third country nationals seeking work in the EU. Action at EU level can have more impact than efforts by individual Member States, creating a more compelling case to attract the staff employers need, and using economies of scale to reduce obstacles to recruitment. Making it easier to move within the EU – such as measures to promote

¹ COM(2023) 577 final.

² Target set in COM(2021) 118 final. Statistics drawn from Eurostat dataset on employed ICT specialists, available at : [Statistics | Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

³ The EU's domestic workforce comprises employed and unemployed EU citizens and legally residing third country nationals.

⁴ Such as women, youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, Roma and people with a migrant background.

learning mobility – also has a positive impact for those from outside the EU looking to participate in the EU labour market.

The actions set out aim to ensure **a cross-cutting and whole-of-government approach. This builds on existing work including the Skills and Talent package and the Pact on Migration and Asylum**, as well as on ongoing **cooperation with third countries**. Implementation will rely on the contribution of Member States' migration and employment authorities, actors at local and regional levels, social partners, businesses, and their counterparts in partner countries.

2. HOW TALENT MOBILITY FROM NON-EU COUNTRIES CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

The scale of the skills challenges facing the EU means **all available policy measures must be mobilised**.

Already today, **third country nationals make a fundamental contribution** to the EU labour market and the EU economy. As many as 13% of key workers performing essential functions are third country nationals⁵. Member States are increasingly opening their labour markets to third country nationals with the necessary skills to address shortages. In 2022, around 1.6 million first residence permits were issued to third country nationals in the EU for employment purposes⁶, the highest figure since Eurostat began collecting records in 2009. Occupations with shortages tend to have a higher share of workers born outside the EU⁷.

Several **Member States have recently implemented or are currently discussing reforms to their labour migration systems to facilitate entry from abroad**⁸. However, Member State approaches vary, information on migration schemes is not always easy to find⁹, and cooperation with partner countries is often fragmented, all of which makes the EU less attractive for potential workers.

Failure to attract and make better use of the skills of workers from outside the EU in shortage occupations will lead to continuing unmet labour demand across all skill levels, slowing economic growth and affecting the quality of services. Making the EU attractive to global talent is needed not only to address shortages but also to **drive innovation and technological progress**. Outstanding individuals can have a huge impact on the EU's ability to innovate and to upscale new business models. For example, if the EU wishes to become a leader in disruptive technologies and the transition to Web 4.0 and virtual worlds¹⁰, it is essential that this narrow segment of high-end skills is addressed, where global competition for talent is most acute. Countries such as the US and Canada have

⁵ Immigrant Key Workers: Their Contribution to Europe's COVID-19 Response: https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/crucial-contribution-migrant-workers-europes-coronavirus-response-2020-05-13_en

⁶ [Nearly 3.7 million first residence permits issued in 2022 - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ 2023 Employment and Social Developments in Europe report.

⁸ For example, Germany adopted a labour migration reform in June 2023, with the government citing the need to attract 400,000 third country nationals annually. Italy adopted a new legal migration decree in July 2023, citing the need for 833,000 third country nationals between 2023 and 2025, in a broad range of sectors including social care, transport, tourism and agriculture. See Annex 8 of the Impact Assessment report on the EU Talent Pool (SWD(2023) 717 final) for further information on Member State labour migration policies.

⁹ While an EU Immigration Portal is in place, third country nationals and employers are not always aware of it, and it does not offer information that is customised to individual situations.

¹⁰ See COM(2023) 442 final.

dedicated schemes in place targeting talented individuals with sought-after skills¹¹, as do some Member States¹².

Making the EU more attractive to talent from abroad

The OECD talent attractiveness indicator¹³ shows the EU failing to compete successfully for the best global talent. The **EU collectively is currently punching below its weight** in attracting skilled workers from abroad¹⁴. Despite the high quality of life and opportunities available in the EU, third country nationals do not cite EU Member States amongst their most desired destinations, preferring other OECD members such as New Zealand, Australia, the US or Canada. Learning the language of the countries of destination may also be a factor in this. Only one Member State (Sweden) appears in the top 5 countries of the OECD attractiveness indicator for highly skilled workers.

Legal migration is a shared competence, meaning that Member States retain the full right to determine volumes of admissions. However, they also face **common challenges and needs**. Promoting the EU as an attractive destination for foreign talent can benefit all Member States, allowing those with a lower international profile or fewer resources for attracting talent to benefit from the pooling of efforts and reflecting the integration of the EU economy. EU cooperation also helps Member States and employers address shared practical challenges: assessing the skills of third country nationals, matching them with employers and structuring cooperation with third countries.

Work is underway to address shortcomings in the legislative framework. The 2019 ‘fitness check’ of legal migration¹⁵ showed that the EU acquis in this area was fragmented and did not do enough to increase the EU’s overall attractiveness. Since then, a revised EU Blue Card Directive¹⁶ was adopted, introducing more efficient rules to attract highly skilled workers (the deadline for its implementation is November 2023). As set out in the Skills and Talent package¹⁷, negotiations are underway on the Commission proposals to review the Single Permit Directive¹⁸ and Long-term Residents Directive¹⁹ in order to streamline legal migration procedures. As a follow-up, the Commission committed to exploring potential further legal migration avenues to the EU in three important areas: long-term care, youth mobility, and innovative entrepreneurs.

The Skills and Talent package made clear that – given the scale of the practical obstacles to recruiting third country nationals – **existing legislative measures are not enough**. International job matching remains overly complex and costly for both non-EU nationals and employers²⁰, particularly SMEs with limited resources. Third country nationals often face significant costs such as administrative fees or translation costs. Beyond the financial burden, **the complexity and length of procedures for international recruitment are**

¹¹ See for example the US O-1A visa.

¹² European Migration Network, [Synthesis report on Migratory Pathways for Start-Ups and Innovative Entrepreneurs in the European Union](#), December 2019.

¹³ [Talent Attractiveness 2023 - OECD](#)

¹⁴ See Impact Assessment report on the EU Talent Pool for further analysis, SWD(2023) 717 final.

¹⁵ SWD(2019) 1056 final.

¹⁶ Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC.

¹⁷ COM(2022) 657 final.

¹⁸ COM(2022) 655 final.

¹⁹ COM(2022) 650 final.

²⁰ See the Impact Assessment report on the EU Talent Pool for further details (SWD(2023) 717 final). This estimates that the average cost to recruit a third country national can be between EUR 1 500 and EUR 2 500 (excluding relocation costs), which can rise to EUR 8 500-10 000 if recruitment agencies services’ are required.

dissuasive for both third country nationals and employers²¹ – with over half (52%) the companies recruiting outside the EU finding it very or moderately difficult²². Problems accessing clear information on legal migration rules and procedures are another long-standing obstacle²³.

As highlighted in President von der Leyen’s 2022 State of the Union address, challenges linked to the **recognition of qualifications of third country nationals** are often another practical obstacle dissuading workers from coming to the EU. Member States have particular obligations concerning those professions that are regulated in all Member States. Minimum training standards have been defined at EU level for seven professions (such as nurses and doctors) under EU legislation on the recognition of professional qualifications (Directive 2005/36/EC). The regulation of other professions is a national competence²⁴. Hundreds of professions are regulated in only some Member States, such as civil engineers or heating technicians. Formal recognition decisions may be necessary for access to a profession, but also for the purposes of legal migration or access to further study.

The recognition of qualifications is essential to ensure that incoming workers in certain professions have sufficient education, training or experience. However, processes for the recognition of third country qualifications are often overly **expensive, complex and time-consuming**. They also represent a significant administrative burden for Member States, due to lack of information on third country qualifications systems, limited pooling of expertise and resources at EU level, and difficulties verifying the authenticity of documents.

Many occupations facing shortages are not regulated. In these cases, employers have the discretion to decide whether third country nationals have the right profile based on their qualifications, experience and skills and a formal recognition process is not needed. However, employers’ lack of understanding and **trust in skills and qualifications gained in third countries** necessary for recruitment to non-regulated professions is another significant barrier to talent and skills mobility²⁵.

The result not only affects the EU’s attractiveness but leads to **‘brain waste’** – third country nationals working below their qualification level. According to Eurostat, in 2022 over a quarter of third country nationals are highly qualified but 39.4% are overqualified²⁶ for the job they do, with women more likely to be overqualified than men. The equivalent figure for EU citizens working in another Member State is 31.8% and for those residing in their own country just 21.1%²⁷. Facilitating the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills can therefore also help harness the untapped potential of third country nationals already in the EU.

Creating a **welcoming environment** for legally residing third country nationals and offering effective integration support, including to workers’ families, is also central to the EU’s attractiveness and to the overall success of legal migration policies. Challenges remain in this area. Third country nationals experience more discrimination at work, and

²¹ The average length is 4-6 months.

²² Flash Eurobarometer 529: European Year of Skills: Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises.

²³ 2019 legal migration fitness check (SWD(2019) 1056 final).

²⁴ Member States must however ensure that the regulation of access to professions is proportionate and does not discriminate based on nationality or other grounds. A proportionality assessment is also needed before adopting any new or amending existing measures on professional regulation in line with Directive (EU) 2018/958.

²⁵ Impact Assessment Report accompanying the EU Talent Pool proposal (SWD(2023) 717 final).

²⁶ Meaning they work in low or medium skilled occupations despite having a high level of education.

²⁷ Data extracted in July 2023 (Eurostat).

evidence suggests this disproportionately affects the highly educated²⁸, one reason why the employment rate for non-EU citizens is lower than for EU nationals²⁹. The EU anti-racism action plan³⁰ and the action plan on integration and inclusion for 2021-2027³¹ both seek to address this problem. Fair and transparent recruitment ensures that all candidates have an equal and unbiased opportunity to compete for jobs regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, age, religion or belief³².

Working with **social partners** is also essential to well-managed legal migration. Social dialogue can help achieve a common vision of how legal migration should fit into broader labour market strategies. Social partners' views should be taken into account by Member States to ensure that, where they consider that labour market tests are necessary, these tests can be completed rapidly and involve a limited administrative burden for employers, in particular SMEs, and for third country nationals. Clear and accessible information on their functioning should be made available. Both employers and trade unions have a role in integration of third country nationals and the European Partnership for Integration structures EU-level cooperation in this area³³.

The need for a targeted approach with skills intelligence as a springboard

Successful talent mobility requires measures to recruit non-EU nationals in sectors where there is the greatest need for their labour, and economies of scale through improved cooperation on legal migration between EU and Member State levels.

The Commission considers that talent mobility measures at EU level should be **strategic** and target occupations affected by the **green and digital transitions**, as well as **healthcare and long-term care**, given the acute EU-wide needs and likely labour market developments in these areas.

Labour market needs can however evolve quickly, and also vary between Member States. The EU should be able to ensure its labour migration initiatives reflect the latest needs of the economy and its employers. Accessible and up-to-date **skills intelligence is crucial** to design flexible strategies to address labour shortages, help labour matching, and guide skills development.

Building on initiatives underway to develop more sophisticated approaches to skills intelligence³⁴, the Commission is working towards a more **systemic approach to**

²⁸ 2023 Employment and Social Developments in Europe report.

²⁹ In 2022, 61.9 % of non-EU citizens were employed, while for citizens of other EU Member States it was 77.1 % and 75.4% for nationals (Eurostat).

³⁰ COM(2020) 565 final.

³¹ COM(2020) 758 final.

³² Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

³³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/cooperation-economic-and-social-partners/european-partnership-integration_en

³⁴ For example, the 2020 European Skills Agenda includes an action on generating more up-to-date, granular and precise skills intelligence. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Eurostat, ELA and EUROFOUND are engaged in a variety of initiatives to refine skills intelligence, including by drawing on big data. Skills anticipation at sectoral level is carried out under the blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills, targeting priority sectors. In June 2023, a skills intelligence tool was launched on Europass, providing information on shortage occupations per country. At Member State level, Public

delivering and using skills intelligence. The Labour Migration Platform, launched in January 2023, provides a valuable forum for discussion on how to develop a targeted labour migration policy, that reflects strategic shortages based on skills intelligence. It brings together representatives of employment and migration authorities of Member States with social partners and has allowed exchanges in the context of the European Year of Skills on these issues³⁵.



ACTION

The **Commission will continue to promote a more strategic approach to skills intelligence**, drawing on the latest labour market data, engaging with Member States and Public Employment Services.

3. MAKING RECRUITMENT FROM OUTSIDE THE EU EASIER – THE EU TALENT POOL

This Communication sets out measures to address key obstacles identified in the previous section by facilitating international recruitment, supporting the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills, and reinforcing cooperation with third countries in these areas. A cornerstone of this approach is the Commission's proposal to establish an **EU Talent Pool**, which delivers on commitments made by the Commission in the Skills and Talent package and the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The EU Talent Pool aims to boost the EU's overall attractiveness by setting up the **first EU-wide platform** open to third country nationals worldwide wishing to work legally in Europe and employers who are unable to find the talent they need on the EU labour market. It will provide access to a wider pool of talent for EU employers and make recruitment faster and easier. It will provide information for both jobseekers and employers on recruitment and immigration procedures as well as on recognition of qualifications in the participating EU Member States. To facilitate integration, it will also include information on living and working conditions in the participating Member States and third country nationals' rights and obligations. The network of EU Delegations around the world will support the provision of information and serve as a relay for third country jobseekers looking for information on legal migration pathways and the EU Talent Pool platform.

The EU Talent Pool will target specific **occupations at all skills levels, based on the most common shortage occupations** in the Union, and on occupations with a direct contribution to the green and digital transitions, updated as necessary to respond to changing labour market circumstances. The Commission has identified 42 EU-wide shortage occupations today³⁶, annexed to the proposed Talent Pool Regulation. To allow for

Employment Services are increasingly active in identifying future skills needs, with many also developing comprehensive strategies to address future skills needs.

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_103

³⁶ The list is based on three main sources: i) European Labour Authority (ELA) using PES data on labour shortages across occupations; ii) Labour shortages relevant in light of net-zero and digitalisation identified based on the sector's direct contribution to implementation of EU climate and digitalisation targets; iii) Occupations not in widespread shortage in previous years but likely to grow in importance for the transition in future due.

a swift response to changing labour market needs, the Commission will be able to amend the list by delegated act. In addition, Member States will be able to notify the addition or removal of specific shortage occupations for which they will submit job vacancies.

Participation in the EU Talent Pool will be **voluntary** for Member States, who will support the management of the Talent Pool system via their relevant authorities. National authorities in participating Member States would be closely involved in the implementation of the tool, and only employers established in these Member States would be able to register their vacancies on the portal and search for candidates there. The proposal fully reflects Member States' sole responsibility for determining volumes of admissions of non-EU nationals and will complement rather than replace existing tools for attraction of talent at national level.

The EU Talent Pool will be a new IT platform focused on third country nationals who are not yet in the EU, with its design building on the Commission's longstanding successful experience with the **EURES** platform³⁷. The EU Talent Pool will include in-built safeguards to avoid exploitative practices by employers, recalling that third country nationals recruited through the EU Talent Pool will enjoy the same rights and obligations as domestic workers once they are in employment. It will also support interoperability with national recruitment platforms.

The Talent Pool will help in implementing the external dimension of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, by contributing both to Talent Partnerships and developing effective complementary pathways to the EU. Registration in the EU Talent Pool will be open to displaced persons in third countries that need international protection and thus support efforts to put in place complementary pathways for those who qualify.

By facilitating access to existing legal pathways, the EU Talent Pool will also serve as a disincentive for irregular migration. This will be reinforced by the fact that no one subject to an entry ban, in particular following a return decision under the Return Directive³⁸, will be eligible to register with the EU Talent Pool.



ACTION

Regulation on the establishment of an EU Talent Pool:

- The Commission proposes a **Regulation on the establishment of an EU Talent Pool**³⁹, to facilitate the strategic international recruitment of non-EU jobseekers in shortage occupations of EU relevance;
- The Commission will cooperate with Member States to ensure that the EU Talent Pool is designed from the outset to appropriately address national labour market needs and complement existing national initiatives, including through interoperability with existing national recruitment platforms.

³⁷ [EURES](#) aims to facilitate the free movement of workers within the EU and operates as a European cooperation network of Public Employment Services, with a searchable portal to facilitate the matching of jobseekers and employers.

³⁸ Directive 2008/115/EC on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.

³⁹ COM(2023) 716 final.

4. ACHIEVING EASIER AND FASTER RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND VALIDATION OF SKILLS GAINED IN THIRD COUNTRIES

The Commission is proposing a set of measures promoting **common approaches and cooperation between Member States on the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills**, making it easier to find information on relevant rules and procedures, and helping Member States and employers access reliable information on non-EU qualifications and skills frameworks. Simpler, better procedures in this area will help employers to know what a qualification gained outside the EU means in practice, ensuring third country nationals are able to perform the jobs they are recruited for and have comparable qualifications to their EU counterparts.

The reality of the labour market also calls for wider use of a 'skills first' approach. This is already used by many businesses when recruiting, recognising the value not only of formal qualifications but also other demonstrable skills and experiences necessary to identify the right candidates for vacancies, with successful outcomes so far.

Working on a common EU approach to recognition of qualifications of third country nationals

The Commission is today adopting a Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of all legally residing third country nationals⁴⁰, setting out guidance to improve procedures and help Member States recognise qualifications and skills obtained outside the EU more quickly and efficiently. The recommendation advocates for increased flexibility and reducing administrative burdens on third country nationals, so they can access employment or higher education opportunities in the EU more quickly and effectively. It relates to cases of recognition for access to regulated professions, as part of legal migration procedures, and for further learning. It highlights that formal recognition procedures should only be required where rights would be granted to a qualification holder in these three contexts. Recognition of qualifications should not be required for the purposes of recruitment in non-regulated professions. In these cases, transparency tools and information can support the understanding and comparison of qualifications and skills.

Regarding access to regulated professions, the recommendation takes inspiration from Directive 2005/36/EC, which sets out the system of recognition of professional qualifications in the EU⁴¹. The recommendation also draws on experience with implementation of the April 2022 Commission Recommendation on facilitating the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine⁴². An assessment of the follow-up to this Recommendation⁴³ demonstrated a range of promising practices which have informed the new Recommendation, including

⁴⁰ The Recommendation applies to third-country nationals who are in the process of obtaining a visa or work and residence permit in a Member State or are already legally resident in the Union.

⁴¹ The framework offered by Directive 2005/36/EC establishes common principles, procedures, and criteria for recognition, promoting transparency, fairness, and consistency in the recognition process. As noted above, it also sets out minimum training standards for certain professions.

⁴² Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/554 on the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

⁴³ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/assessment-commission-recommendation-eu-2022554-5-april-2022-recognition-qualifications-people_en

highlighting the benefits of exchange of information between Member State authorities and partner countries to facilitate the recognition of qualifications.

The recommendation will be a valuable complement to the EU Talent Pool and should help Member States **improve recognition procedures as part of their efforts to attract skilled workers from abroad**. It encourages Member States to use skills intelligence data to identify ‘priority regulated professions’ for which recognition procedures should be further expedited for third country nationals, as well as for mobile EU citizens. Once the EU Talent Pool is operational, Member States could take into account the list of EU-wide shortage occupations developed for the Talent Pool when identifying priority regulated professions.

Recruitment procedures in a broad range of sectors can be improved through the recommendation’s guidance, but its application will differ according to how employment in each profession is regulated. For example, as digital professions are in general unregulated, the recommendation advocates a skills first approach for recruitment to such posts. These professions can also draw on the revised Blue Card Directive, which has introduced equivalence as regards skills attested by professional experience and comparable higher education qualifications in some ICT jobs⁴⁴. For these occupations, Member States should not impose a formal recognition procedure as a precondition for admission.



ACTION

The Commission Recommendation on recognition of qualifications of third country nationals⁴⁵.

This Recommendation would lead to simpler and faster procedures, while ensuring information submitted can be verified and processes can be trusted. Upholding professional standards should not result in requirements that deter applicants or slow down recruitment procedures.

The Commission will support implementation of the Recommendation by:

- organising dedicated meetings with Member States, particularly in the group of coordinators for the recognition of professional qualifications, as well as with other stakeholders;
- inviting Member States to report on national initiatives, reforms and statistics on recognition decisions linked to third country qualifications;
- providing access to online information to assist third country nationals to understand requirements for recognition of skills and qualifications in the Union;
- maximising synergies between the Recommendation and other actions set out in the Communication.

⁴⁴ See Article 2(9)(a) and Annex I of Directive (EU) 2021/1883.

⁴⁵ C(2023) 7700 final.

Boosting information on recognition procedures, and comparability of qualifications

Finding **information on qualifications and skills gained in third countries and applicable recognition and validation procedures in Member States** is a key element for both employers and non-EU candidates⁴⁶. Responsibility for recognition and validation procedures is frequently shared among various administrative bodies within Member States, including central and regional levels. Currently, third country nationals and mobile EU workers may find it difficult to determine whether the profession in which they wish to work is regulated or not in a particular Member State. The lack of multilingual information on recognition can also be an obstacle: efforts to address this for people displaced from Ukraine has been a support to those seeking work⁴⁷.

Although there is currently no central point of information at EU level on the recognition of third country qualifications, the **ENIC-NARIC networks**⁴⁸ have developed several tools that facilitate access to information on recognition procedures and higher education systems that can be further developed. NARICs may issue decisions for academic recognition and statements of comparability, with a focus on higher education qualifications. Some NARICs act as a single entry point for assessment or recognition of qualifications, which can facilitate third country national' access to procedures. In ten Member States⁴⁹, NARICs have helped set up databases providing public information on national recognition decisions, in some cases with EU funding.

The Commission will encourage and support Member States to develop databases on the comparability of third country qualifications and to ensure these databases' interoperability, making funding available from Erasmus+ in 2024. For relevant qualifications, which would primarily be academic, databases should be able to generate a statement of comparability free of charge, and where possible indicate procedures for recognising the qualification. To enable direct comparisons based on use of similar terms and definitions, the Commission encourages Member States to ensure these databases are based on the standards of the European Learning Model⁵⁰. The Commission will work with the NARIC network to ensure a coordinated approach in terms of the third countries and qualifications to be covered, giving priority to Talent Partnership countries. The databases might also indicate what additional training (such as micro-credentials) may be required to fill gaps between a third country qualification and comparable qualifications in the Member States. Multilingual databases further facilitate access to information.

⁴⁶ In its 2017 study on 'Making Integration: Work: Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications', the OECD highlighted facilitating information on recognition procedures as a key issue to address to improve recognition systems. In a comprehensive 2013 report on 'Recognition of Qualifications and Competences of Migrants' in Europe, the International Organization for Migration pointed to shortcomings in migrants' access to information in several EU Member States. The Commission's legal migration fitness check of 2019 also recommended improved access to information for third-country nationals about recognition procedures and their outcomes (SWD(2019) 1056 final).

⁴⁷ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/554 of 5 April.

⁴⁸ The ENIC network (European Network of Information Centres) and NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) cooperate closely. ENICs are recognition authorities of the state parties of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, where the secretariat is provided by Council of Europe and UNESCO and the NARICs are recognition authorities of the Erasmus+ Programme countries. All NARICs are also ENICs (except the Greek recognition authority). The two networks have a joint Work Programme, Charter and Board.

⁴⁹ Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden.

⁵⁰ The European Learning Model is a multilingual data model for learning which can be used to describe all learning related data, including formal, non-formal and informal learning. The model supports data exchange on skills, qualifications, accreditation, and learning opportunities, as well as interoperability and credential exchange.

In a second phase, the Commission will also explore the feasibility of developing an **EU-level tool linking national databases on recognition** capable of developing statements of comparability for specific third country qualifications covering all Member States, based on a harmonised template and available in digital format. This could cover both EU and third country qualifications, to facilitate intra-EU mobility as well as legal migration. The tool would draw on existing national databases and be interoperable with a network of national qualifications databases of partner countries⁵¹ with which the European Training Foundation (ETF) cooperates. This tool could also allow employers to identify third country qualifications comparable to a national qualification that they are looking for, which can help with targeting recruitment procedures. And it would give candidates an indication of how their qualifications would be considered in a recognition procedure.

The ENIC-NARIC networks' current focus is on higher education. Given the need for technical skills on the EU labour market and the fact that there currently are no EU-level cooperation structures on the **recognition of VET qualifications**, extending the networks' focus to Vocational Education and Training (VET) could have significant benefits. Member States could explore whether – with Commission support – the role of NARIC centres could cover VET. This could pave the way for statements of comparability regarding EU and third country VET qualifications, as well as for academic qualifications.

Another relevant tool to build on is the Commission's **Regulated Professions Database**⁵². For each Member State, this contains information on whether specific professions are regulated in each Member State, together with the authority responsible for recognition. While the database is currently targeted at mobile EU citizens, the information it contains on which specific professions are regulated in each Member State is also of relevance for third country nationals. The Commission will work with Member States to ensure that the database contains accurate information on the authorities responsible for recognising qualifications of third country nationals, in addition to those held by EU citizens.

The platform for the EU Talent Pool will promote the visibility of the information resources related to recognition and validation procedures in the participating Member States to ensure that candidates apply with the best possible prior knowledge on prospects for having their qualifications recognised and skills validated.

⁵¹ Currently at the stage of a proof of concept.

⁵² <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof/home>



ACTION

Improving the transparency of and access to recognition processes

The Commission will:

- encourage and support more Member States to develop semantically interoperable databases on recognition processes and decisions, capable of generating statements of comparability;
- explore the feasibility of setting up further online resource hubs with information on skills and qualifications, building on the resource hub focused on Ukraine (see below);
- assess the feasibility of developing an EU-level tool that is able to generate statements of comparability based on a harmonised template for specific third country qualifications covering multiple Member States;
- continue its support to the ENIC-NARIC networks and encourage Member States to consider extending the NARIC's competences to cover VET qualifications;
- include information in the Regulated Professions Database on the Member State authorities responsible for recognising qualifications held by third country nationals giving access to regulated professions.

Building trust in qualifications and skills gained in third countries

Uncertainty about the value of skills, work experience and qualifications gained in third countries and the functioning of training and education systems of third countries is one of the key obstacles faced by both Member State recognition bodies and employers assessing the qualifications and skills of third country nationals⁵³. Filling this knowledge gap must therefore be one of the main objectives of the Commission's work on recognition of qualifications and validation of skills.

In the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU used several tools to support the assessment of skills and qualifications of people displaced from Ukraine. The Commission undertook a comparison of the European Qualifications Framework with the Ukrainian national framework⁵⁴, and provided guidelines on the fast-track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications⁵⁵. It also translated a variety of key tools into Ukrainian. And the ETF created a resource hub⁵⁶ for material on qualifications, skills and studies from Ukraine – consulted some 21,000 times between March 2022 and January 2023. These tools helped recognition professionals and employers in the EU to better understand the skills profile and qualifications of people displaced from Ukraine.

This valuable experience can be drawn upon to adopt a more **strategic approach to developing guidance to support the evaluation of credentials and the recognition of qualifications** gained outside the EU. The ETF has substantial experience in assisting third countries to develop national qualification frameworks that can be compared with the European Qualifications Frameworks, in particular in the EU Neighbourhood and

⁵³ 2019 legal migration fitness check (SWD(2019) 1056 final).

⁵⁴ European Commission, Comparison report of the European Qualifications Framework and the Ukrainian National Qualifications Framework, January 2023.

⁵⁵ European Commission, Guidelines on Fasttrack Recognition of Ukrainian Academic Qualifications, May 2022.

⁵⁶ <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/education-and-work-information-ukrainians-and-eu-countries>

Enlargement region. In addition, it is currently providing systemic assistance to 11 African countries on development of their qualification frameworks, as part of a project implemented with the African Union⁵⁷. The ENIC-NARIC networks also provide a valuable framework for cooperation between Member State recognition bodies on the analysis of frequently seen third country qualifications.



ACTION

Use **EU tools to help understand the value of qualifications and skills** gained in third countries relevant for meeting EU labour market shortages.

Depending on identified needs, the Commission will:

- work with the ETF, the ENIC-NARIC networks, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, Member States and third countries to provide guidance on selected third country qualifications frameworks and the value of specific qualifications, comparing the European Qualifications Framework with national (and regional) qualification frameworks, and conducting targeted assessments of third country practice on accreditation and quality assurance.
- translate tools facilitating skills assessments of third-country nationals in languages of selected third countries.

A long-term vision to improve the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills

Succeeding in maximising the potential of the EU to attract talent from abroad cannot be separated from efforts to raise our game on **recognition of qualifications and skills** internally. The current pace of technical and societal change means that the EU must consider how its overall approach to the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills should evolve, to maximise the potential of the Single Market. The EU will need to go further in promoting labour mobility and reducing barriers in the Single Market, enhancing learner mobility: Systems and practices for the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills must be able to respond to shifts in skills demand.

This gives an opportunity to bring the same approach to strengthening cooperation with third countries and making the EU a more attractive place to work. Making targeted use of skills intelligence to plan and strengthen the capacity of recognition services, enabling the exchange of interoperable, reliable information on qualifications and skills, and ensuring that the information available to employers and employees alike is accessible and fit for purpose, could all be used to facilitate recruitment from outside the EU.

The era of paper diplomas is coming to an end. The EU has started **moving towards system-wide use of digital qualifications and credentials**⁵⁸. In future, every learner should receive their qualifications, credentials and entitlements in a secure digital format,

⁵⁷ <https://acqf.africa/>

⁵⁸ The Commission launched in October 2021 the European Digital Credentials for Learning, a set of standards and software to build, electronically sign, issue, store, share, view and verify data-rich credentials on learning.

that carries multilingual information and can be verified instantaneously. This will facilitate the matching of skilled workers with jobs, as well as recruitment and recognition processes.



ACTION

The Commission will explore the possibility of a **broader reform of the EU system on the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills**, to ensure that the existing legal framework, tools and systems, such as those covered by Directive 2005/36/EC, are future-proof, ambitious and contribute to a well-functioning Single Market. This will include a reflection on how to further improve the recognition of qualifications gained in third countries and the extent to which harmonisation may be necessary, based on experience in implementing the current Commission Recommendation.

5. PARTNERING ON TALENT MOBILITY AND SKILLS ACQUISITION

Labour migration cooperation can produce significant benefits for countries of origin, as well as receiving countries. Talent mobility can promote the circulation of skills and transfer of knowledge between the EU and partner countries. The remittance flow from the EU to low and middle-income countries is estimated at around EUR 65 billion, and these funds can provide vital support to the most vulnerable in developing countries⁵⁹. The Commission is committed to reducing transaction costs and facilitating remittance transfers. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise that migration helps create inclusive growth and development, and call for policies to ‘facilitate safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people’⁶⁰.

Cooperation on legal pathways is a priority of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Since the Pact’s adoption, a key focus of the Commission’s efforts in this area has been the launch of Talent Partnerships. Talent Partnerships offer a framework for the EU and key third countries to work together to boost mutually-beneficial international mobility (see below). The Commission is also working to promote innovative complementary pathways linked to employment for persons in need of international protection, as a credible alternative to irregular migration⁶¹. Such cooperation on legal pathways is linked to broader partnerships on all aspects of migration.

Ensuring effective international cooperation on labour migration requires concerted engagement, aiming to develop skills, avoid brain drain, and promote partnerships between numerous stakeholders including relevant authorities in destination and origin countries, the private sector and training institutions. Dialogue is essential to define shared long-term agendas to help achieve this, while capacity building support can contribute greatly to translating shared priorities into action.

⁵⁹ [International Remittance Day: EU committed to reducing transaction costs to make the most of key source of income for migrants and their families \(europa.eu\); Proposal for a Regulation on payment services in the internal market and amending Regulation \(EU\) 1093/2010. COM /2023/367 final.](#)

⁶⁰ Target 10.7 of Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries.

⁶¹ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1364 on legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways.

The EU is determined to respond to third countries' legitimate concerns on brain drain, that labour markets may be depleted of trained labour, and constrain development. The Blue Card Directive contains reporting obligations to monitor its impact on brain drain and encourages support for circular migration of highly skilled third country nationals. Measures set out in this Communication will support this approach by tackling brain waste in the interest also of the workers' countries of origin. Ensuring that third country nationals are recruited to jobs corresponding to their skills and qualifications on the labour market increases the potential for the transfer of skills between the EU and partner countries as well as remittances.

Work needs to continue to address concerns about brain drain. One way to reduce the risk is to **target cooperation with third countries on sectors where labour market characteristics are complementary** in terms of over and under supply of workers. The EU and Member States can also focus cooperation on sectors in which there is a shared need for workers and complement migration cooperation with **skills development programmes** that can benefit both labour markets, turning a risk of brain drain into brain gain.

Building on the existing national systems in countries of origin, the EU is already engaged in cooperation on skills with selected partners under the Global Gateway agenda and across the EU's Neighbourhood to strengthen partner countries' capacity to work with the EU on strategic priorities in areas such as the green and digital transitions. The EU also supports excellence in education, for example through the Regional Teacher Initiative for Africa (RTIA)⁶².

Where possible, **skills development programmes linked to mobility schemes should also draw on training standards applied in Member States** in targeted sectors. Where necessary, training to fill minor remaining skills gaps could be offered after arrival in the EU. Cooperation also needs to address the comparability of qualifications frameworks and credential evaluation.

Talent Partnerships

Talent Partnerships aim to provide frameworks for increased cooperation between the EU, Member States and selected partner countries on talent mobility and skills development. Working in a Team Europe approach, these partnerships can provide benefits for both sides in line with **mutually beneficial, tailor-made priorities**⁶³. It is important to significantly step up Talent Partnerships, which need to go hand in hand with comprehensive migration management cooperation including in particular on effective cooperation on readmission.

The EU has recently launched Talent Partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Roundtables held with each of these countries⁶⁴ with involvement of interested Member States have allowed identifying sectors and professions of mutual interest to be targeted. Partners showed a **strong interest in cooperating on skills development and the recognition of qualifications**. The need for data to compare competency standards for priority occupations was seen as an essential first step in designing measures in areas such as skills development, qualification recognition and pre-departure training. Discussions also showed potential for cooperation on recruitment, the provision of information on issues relevant for mobility, and sustainable reintegration as

⁶² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_288

⁶³ COM(2022) 657 final.

⁶⁴ Roundtables were held on 1 March 2023 with Bangladesh, on 15 March with Pakistan, on 26 April with Morocco, on 7 June with Egypt, and on 22 June with Tunisia.

part of circular migration. Talent Partnerships can also support work to pre-screen third country candidates for recruitment, to support testing for targeted occupations, as well as for pre-departure training such as language courses.

Candidates who have participated in activities linked to Talent Partnerships are likely to be of particular interest for EU employers. Therefore, these third country nationals will be flagged in the EU Talent Pool as holding a **'Talent Partnership pass'**, which will be visible to prospective employers and provide information on the skills developed or validated in the context of the Talent Partnership. The pass would include information on the jobseeker's education and training, as well as skills and qualifications that have been validated in the context of the Talent Partnership.

Since 2016, sectoral cooperation on skills have been launched under **Erasmus+ 'blueprint alliances'** in several areas relevant for the green and digital transitions⁶⁵. Some have supported the industry-led development of training programmes. Talent Partnerships could provide a valuable framework to adapt these for a third country context.

The role of the **European private sector** is fundamental for Talent Partnership activities on both training and recruitment. Public sector investments can complement but not replace the indispensable contributions from the private sector benefitting from skilled workers, to ensure the longer-term sustainability of such activities. The private sector, including professional associations, is already involved in actions financed under the Talent Partnerships, notably in the design of curricula for training in third countries.

The Commission will ensure that measures set out in this package on the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills of third country nationals are complementary to and supportive of Talent Partnerships.



ACTION

Cooperation with third countries in the framework of Talent Partnerships.

Depending on needs defined together with partner countries and participating Member States, the Commission will:

- consider Talent Partnership countries for targeted analysis of their qualification frameworks;
- encourage capacity building of the education and training systems in Talent Partnership countries drawing on planned actions under NDICI-Global Europe as well as the international dimension of Erasmus+;
- with Member States, improve information on recognition procedures for third country nationals targeted to Talent Partnership countries;
- build cooperation between Member States and partner countries involved in Talent Partnerships on recognition of qualifications.

⁶⁵ These alliances bring together key stakeholders from various industrial ecosystems including businesses, trade unions, education and training institutions, as well as public authorities. The Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills is recognised in the European Skills Agenda as a key initiative to provide skills development solutions.

6. FACILITATING THE MOBILITY OF LEARNERS AND STAFF INVOLVED IN TEACHING AND TRAINING – “EUROPE ON THE MOVE”

As part of this package on talent mobility, the Commission is proposing a **Council Recommendation on a renewed learning mobility framework**. The goal of this proposal to facilitate learning mobility inside the EU will first and foremost benefit EU citizens. But it also gives the opportunity to encourage close cooperation on learning mobility with third countries in **a Team Europe approach**, harnessing the EU’s overall attractiveness as a destination for skills development. This can build on actions of the Erasmus+ programme - notably the Study in Europe initiative and Erasmus Mundus actions - that specifically aim to attract talented third-country students to the EU. The proposal also calls for action to address recurrent challenges faced by third country nationals, notably procedures for issuing visas or residence permits for those choosing Europe as their learning destination.

Higher education students who have benefited from learning mobility through Erasmus+ are more likely to work abroad or in a job with an international dimension⁶⁶. When people gather positive experiences during temporary learning mobility within the EU, they will be more inclined to return at some stage to take up a job.

The proposal encourages Member States to **remove remaining obstacles to learning mobility abroad** embedding the opportunity for periods of mobility in all education and training curricula. Member States’ cooperation with institutions in partner countries is also of key importance, including making full use of the EU Visa Code⁶⁷ and the Students and Researchers Directive⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, 2019.

⁶⁷ Regulation 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code).

⁶⁸ Directive 2016/801 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing.



ACTION

The Commission proposes a **Council Recommendation on a Learning Mobility Framework**⁶⁹.

As part of this proposal, Member States are invited to cooperate closely in a Team Europe approach to further promote Europe as a learning destination for talent from third countries. Ratification by Member States of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education would also make a valuable contribution.

The Commission will support implementation of the recommendation by:

- mapping the use of relevant EU funding streams (e.g. Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps) and other funding at national or international level to raise awareness of good practice and foster synergies between learning mobility actions. The European Universities alliances under the European Education Area have helped to foster balanced mobility of students inside the EU and the approach could also inspire enhanced mobility beyond the EU's borders;
- supporting Member States in developing a comprehensive approach to language teaching and learning, which would also have a beneficial impact on third country nationals.

7. CONCLUSION

This Communication sets out a variety of workstreams to increase the EU's attractiveness to the skilled third country workers who will be key to the future health of the EU labour market. These can be pursued in tandem with other key policy goals such as up- and reskilling the domestic workforce, learning mobility, integration of third country nationals, ensuring that all workers in the EU enjoy fair working conditions and disincentivising irregular migration to the EU.

Enhanced mobility must be grounded in accurate labour market and skills intelligence, with a clear focus on occupations facing genuine shortages. Close cooperation with international partners on legal pathways to the EU will be essential.

Making a success of talent mobility requires a willingness from national authorities and stakeholders across different sectors including migration, employment and skills development, and education, to work towards shared objectives. The Commission is committed to supporting this cross-sectoral cooperation and counts on strong engagement of the European Parliament, the Council and Member States, and social partners in stepping up the EU's attractiveness for global talent and skills.

⁶⁹ COM(2023) 719 final.

ANNEX

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS UNDERWAY TO MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF THE EU DOMESTIC WORKFORCE

In tackling labour and skills shortages the EU's first priority is to maximise the potential of the domestic workforce. Dialogue with social partners is essential to this process, as is boosting the attractiveness of employment, notably through addressing inadequate working conditions, promoting equal opportunities and combating discrimination. Many actions are already underway:

- 18 Large Scale Skills Partnerships, under the **Pact for Skills**, bring social partners and stakeholders together reskilling millions of people, and further partnerships are in the pipeline.
- To make **recognition of digital skills quicker and easier**⁷⁰ a pilot on a European Digital Skills Certificate has been launched as a quality label for digital skills certification, alongside an updated *Digital Competence Framework*, as a reference framework for **digital skills**.
- Most Member States are pursuing significant apprenticeship reforms, supported by the Commission through the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships**.
- **EU funds** are investing around EUR 65 billion⁷¹ in training. This includes helping to develop **100 projects for Centres of vocational excellence** in areas such as advanced manufacturing or artificial intelligence.
- The EU is investing more than EUR 1.1 billion⁷² in the roll out of at least 60 **European Universities alliances** involving more than 500 higher education institutions, acting as pioneers to provide future-proof skills to students and lifelong learners
- EU policy and funding is promoting effective upskilling and reskilling. Around half the Member States are working to create **individual learning accounts**⁷³, aiming to provide every adult with the chance of labour market relevant training. Micro-credentials are an effective upskilling and re-skilling tool to fill newly emerging skills gaps⁷⁴.
- The **Talent Booster Mechanism** will support regions with training, retaining and attracting people with skills, in particular regions facing significant departures of workers as part of Harnessing talents in Europe's regions⁷⁵.
- The Council Recommendation on minimum income⁷⁶ includes a focus on providing **pathways to employment** for those furthest away from the labour market,

⁷⁰ Launched as part of the Digital Skills and Education Package 18 April 2023.

⁷¹ This includes support from the European Social Fund Plus, under the national recovery and resilience plans, and the European Regional Development Fund as well as EUR 400 million through Erasmus+.

⁷² Erasmus+ support for the period 2021-2027.

⁷³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2803%29>

⁷⁴ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for life-long learning and employability. EU financial support has been drawn primarily from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund Plus and Erasmus+.

⁷⁵ COM(2023) 32 final.

including income support, help in finding a job, as well as personalised social services.

- Bringing **young people not in education, employment or training** into the jobs market is a focus of the Youth Guarantee⁷⁷ and the ALMA initiative⁷⁸, helping over 43 million into employment or continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship over the last 10 years.⁷⁹
- The **action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027**⁸⁰ and the **EU anti-racism action plan**⁸¹ support the labour market inclusion of third country nationals and EU citizens with a migrant, or minority racial or ethnic background in the EU.
- Implementation of policies to **facilitate the free movement of workers** has been strengthened by the new the European Labour Authority (ELA). **Digitalisation and coordination of social security systems** are further facilitating the exercise of social security rights cross-border ⁸².
- New legislation on Minimum Wages will be key to **improving workers' rights**, and Commission proposals on platform work, protection from dangerous substances at work, and strengthened equality bodies as well as the forthcoming proposal on strengthening the quality framework for traineeship would all significantly improve working conditions.
- Achieving a **European Education Area**, where young people and lifelong learners receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent, will be key in tackling labour and skills shortages, with the support of EU funds⁸³.
- The Commission supports Member States through the **Technical Support Instrument** – and this can include support to design and implement labour migration reforms⁸⁴ as well as to design and establish skills forecasting mechanisms⁸⁵, and to facilitate procedures for the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills.

⁷⁶ Council Recommendation of 30 January 2023 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion.

⁷⁷ [The reinforced Youth Guarantee - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷⁸ [ALMA \(Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve\)](#)

⁷⁹ COM(2023) 577 final.

⁸⁰ COM(2020) 758 final.

⁸¹ COM(2020) 565 final.

⁸² COM(2023) 501 final.

⁸³ The Erasmus+ programme is reinforcing its support to learning mobility opportunities for students, VET learners, apprentices, adult learners and school pupils, with a view to boost inclusion and to address growing skills demand across the EU and beyond.

⁸⁴ TSI 2023 Flagship "[Migrant integration and talent attraction \(europa.eu\)](#)"

⁸⁵ TSI 2024 Flagship "[Flagship on Skills: Fostering skills development systems better adapted to the labour market \(europa.eu\)](#)"

