PRESS INFORMATION

Expansion of legal migration opportunities for third-country nationals, particularly in middle- and low-skill sectors, holds potential but should not be oversold as migration management tool, new study cautions

Berlin, 22 October 2019. While the European Union has called on Member States to expand channels for foreign workers as a way to meet labour market needs and potentially tackle spontaneous migration, they have struggled to deliver on this pledge. To date, policies have focused more on attracting high-skilled workers, but less attention has been paid to admission of low- or middle-skilled nationals. Policymakers would do well not to overestimate the potential of legal channels to reduce irregular migration. They should instead consider existing and future migration policies in light of labour market, foreign policy and development objectives, a new report from the Research Unit of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (SVR) and Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) cautions.

"While these policies offer opportunities to meet labour and skills needs, and potentially to promote development benefits, there is as yet little evidence that they can in fact contribute to the EU’s stated goal of reducing irregular migration and disentangling mixed flows", the report states.

The report “Legal Migration for Work and Training: Mobility options to Europe for those not in need of protection” concludes a two-year research project of the same name, conducted by SVR in cooperation with MPI Europe. The final report out today provides an overview of mobility options open to low- and middle-skilled third-country nationals, distilling findings from an analysis of existing policy in the European Union and case-study countries France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden. The project, funded by the Stiftung Mercator, is meant to address the knowledge gap in how new or alternative migration channels for low- and middle-skilled nationals for the purposes of work and training could look in practice.

The final report notes Member States remain the central gatekeepers of labour migration into the European Union, and studies the differing selection systems used, each coming with certain advantages and drawbacks. The liberal approach that relies on employer sponsorship, exemplified by Sweden, allows businesses to quickly fill demand, but risks fuelling competition with the domestic workforce or lowering labour market standards. State-run steering tools, used by the other case-study countries, allow for greater control, but risk being slower, more resource intensive and potentially less responsive to current labour market needs.

Country-specific partnerships or programmes, which have been popular with key migrant-transit or origin countries since the 2015 increase in spontaneous arrivals of migrants and refugees at Europe’s borders, allow governments to pursue foreign policy and development objectives alongside meeting labour needs. However, privileging certain countries adds complexity to migration policies for what are ultimately often small numbers of people moving compared to those using regular admission channels. Targeting the right skills sectors and doing so at a sufficient scale to incentivise cooperation on migration management by a migrant-origin or transit country is highly complex and costly — and requires employers’ buy-in.

"Persons without high levels of formal qualifications have few genuine options to enter Europe legally for work and training — but there are initiatives that the EU and Member States can build upon. In particular, migration opportunities for vocational training should be further developed", said Dr. Jan Schneider, head of the SVR’s Research Unit.
The report offers a number of recommendations to improve outcomes, including:

- At the domestic level, policymakers should build capacity to permit better assessment of labour market needs, develop the infrastructure to allow employers to hire workers quickly and improve protection for labour migrants, particularly in seasonal jobs that are especially vulnerable to exploitation.
- EU and Member State governments should, as part of country-specific programmes, support employers’ capacity to recruit workers in countries of origin, further explore schemes for both temporary work and vocational education and training placements, and find ways to share costs sustainably.

‘European migration policy will remain a priority, including for the new European Commission, and legal migration should be framed in terms of the opportunities it offers—not only as a measure to limit irregular migration’, said Stiftung Mercator Executive Director Winfried Kneip.

Other reports in the research project critically assess the design, implementation and impact of legal migration programmes at EU and national levels, with case studies of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden conducted by SVR, MPI Europe and other partners generating ideas and options for the development of future legal migration opportunities.

Read the final report here: www.migrationpolicy.org/research/legal-migration-work-and-training-mobility-options-europe. The German version of the final report will be launched on 20 November 2019.

Read all studies in the project here: www.svr-migration.de/en/publications/mobility_options_to_europe.

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About the Expert Council’s Research Unit
The Expert Council’s Research Unit conducts independent, practice-oriented research projects in the field of integration and migration. The project-based studies are dedicated to emerging trends and issues and focus mainly on the fields of education and refugees/asylum. The Research Unit complements the work of the Expert Council. The core funding is provided by Stiftung Mercator.

The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration is based on an initiative of Stiftung Mercator and the Volkswagen Foundation. The initiative further includes: Bertelsmann Stiftung, Freudenberg Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stifterverband and Vodafone Foundation Germany. The Expert Council is an independent nonprofit, monitoring, evaluating and advisory committee on integration and migration policy issues that provides action-oriented policy recommendations.

For additional information, please visit: www.svr-migration.de/en/Research-Unit

About Migration Policy Institute Europe
MPI Europe provides authoritative research and practical policy design to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who seek more effective management of immigration, immigrant integration
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