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Fostering transnational skills partnerships in Germany

Transnational partnerships for vocational education and training, as advocated in the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration, have the potential to help close the skills gap in Germany. Past projects designed to coordinate labor migration with training programs have yielded mixed outcomes. Though they can entail clear development and migration policy benefits – particularly from the German perspective – several obstacles nonetheless remain. If Germany is to promote such partnerships and open up new legal channels to training and migration for medium-skilled workers, the country will need to improve the coherence of interministerial and administrative cooperation, establish sustainable financing models that involve the private sector, and partner with countries that are a good long-run match.

Introduction: Growing pressure to take action

A key challenge facing the German labor market as the country undergoes demographic change is the need to secure a pool of skilled labor. Some sectors are already hurting for skilled workers, and demand is growing. The need for skilled workers from non-EU countries is sure to increase – a fact reflected in the introduction of the Skilled Workers Immigration Act (FEG), which came into force in March 2020. When it comes to skilled labor migration involving the Global South, care must be taken to ensure that origin countries do not already face a shortage within the respective sector and that such migration doesn't deplete origin countries' skilled

labor stock (brain drain). This is one of the reasons why the triple-win paradigm, which calls on migration policy to meet the needs of destination countries, countries of origin and migrants alike, has become such a relevant approach at the international level in recent years. The essence of the triple win also informs the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, which was adopted by 164 member states in late 2018. With regard to vocational training, the Pact recommends investing in training partnerships and facilitating the mutual recognition of qualifications and competences. It also points to global skill partnerships as a way forward. Global skill partnerships are designed to begin before skilled workers are recruited, that is, with the training of these workers in their country of origin. Germany, which has drawn international acclaim for its vocational education and training (VET) system while facing ballooning demand for skilled labor, and has also launched, through the Gesellschaft für Inter-

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nationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), several pilot projects, has become a pioneer of training partnerships around the world. Thus far, according to expert opinion, these coordinated programs “show mixed outcomes, but also considerable potential” (SVR / MPI Europe 2019: 48). Drawing on an inventory of measures already at work, the following presents three key means of leveraging this potential.

An inventory of transnational skills and mobility partnerships

In recent years, several pilot projects addressing labor migration and training have been launched in Germany, at the EU level and in non-European countries. The range of models is broad, and there are several different terms in use, which can result in some confusion. The concept of transnational skills and mobility partnerships (TSMP), as proposed by Sauer and Volarevic (2020: 21), aims to capture the diversity of empirical approaches, models and projects found in employment, education, migration and development policies. TSMPs that are designed to promote fair labor mobility and involve VET measures geared to achieve the objectives of a triple win can be classified into three types, depending on where and when the training measures start.

Type 1: Adaptation training in Germany

The traditional approach to attracting skilled labor from abroad primarily targets trained skilled workers. These partnerships are often based on a bilateral agreement between two partner countries. Whereas these partnerships, in their early days, were often aimed at low-skilled laborers and seasonal workers in agriculture, tourism, construction or the coal and steel industry, medium and highly skilled workers are playing an increasingly important role in today's agreements.

The demand for trained skilled workers is particularly high in the nursing sector. Since many countries, like Germany, regulate their healthcare professions, recruited individuals must have their credentials recognized by a government agency. Any gaps in training standards can be compensated for by undergoing adaptation training in Germany – skilled workers are allowed to enter the country for this purpose in accordance with § 17a of the Residence Act (AufenthG). Adaptation training usually takes place in the context of employment as a nursing assistant in a long-term care facility. During this phase, skilled workers receive additional language and technical training. Within Germany's form of federalism, individual states are responsible for handling recognition pro-

cedures, which means that the regulations and bureaucratic processes applied in each state can vary. Often a rather time-consuming process, recognition procedures have been an obstacle in attracting foreign skilled workers. A key goal of the recently introduced Skilled Workers Immigration Act is thus to simplify recognition procedures.

A study by the Migration Policy Institute shows mixed results regarding the extent to which these projects have delivered successful outcomes. There are significant operational costs associated with the vocational and language training, as well as social integration measures needed to integrate these workers into the host country's labor market (Hooper 2019). The viability of such projects thus depends, in the medium term, on the willingness of employers to invest in such programs. So far, the experience shows that employers invest only when they perceive their current business model to be threatened by the skilled labor shortage and can count on newly acquired skilled workers staying for the long term. Temporary models that rely on skilled workers returning to their country of origin (i.e., circular migration), tend not to pay off for employers. GIZ's Triple Win Project relies on a more long-term approach and thus sustained employment for the skilled worker.

Case study

Triple Win Project

Germany's GIZ and the International Placement Services (ZAV) of the Federal Employment Agency are implementing the Triple Win Project for nursing professionals. The Philippines, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Serbia (until February 2020) and Tunisia are the project's partner countries. GIZ works with local institutions such as employment agencies and language institutes in these countries to recruit nurse professionals for Germany. While returning to one's country of origin remains an option for program participants, the project is designed to foster permanent immigration. The project is located within GIZ's International Services (InS) division, which serves as the agency's operational arm in the private sector. With one foot solidly in the private sector, GIZ is able to assert its entrepreneurial side and charges potential employers (care facilities) a placement fee of €5,500 for each skilled worker to cover the costs of services provided by GIZ (i.e., coordination, language training, professional training, and integration courses). Employers are also required to cover nurses' travel costs to their place of employment. Additional costs associated with the recognition of qualifications may be

incurred. The total cost involved with training a skilled worker recruited through the Triple Win Project is estimated to be anywhere from €8,000 to €10,000 (Federal Government 2020).

This approach has already helped meet the high demand in Germany for skilled labor in nursing and long-term care facilities by securing skilled workers for the sector. Since its launch in 2013, the project has placed 3,577 qualified nursing professionals from the four partner countries with German long-term care facilities, with 2,220 of these workers having already arrived in Germany. The project has also developed a number of innovative management approaches that are setting the standard for future projects. This includes gearing programs to account for the full cycle of migration. In addition, the project has succeeded in involving key stakeholders such as unions and employers' associations.

And partner countries have already begun to feel the impact of such programs as labor markets with high unemployment rates are relieved of excess labor and migrants' remittances are sent to families in origin countries. However, greater impact could be achieved if, in addition to language training and integration courses, professional training modules were to be carried out in the origin country before departure. Program participants themselves also often languish as a result of the enormous time and organizational effort needed to complete the recognition process in Germany (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung 2019).

Type 2: Occupational training in Germany

The second type involves participants acquiring German language skills in their country of origin prior to departure and following this up by completing a full course of occupational training in Germany. This approach has the advantage that the countries of origin lose neither skilled labor (brain drain) or the human capital investment associated with such labor (fiscal drain); instead, new workers are trained to be skilled laborers. Participants receive training that is tailored to German needs, and they have more time to develop their intercultural and job-related language skills. This approach also avoids the risk of workers facing underemployment and the considerable frustration that often accompanies the recognition process. However, these programs' lengthy duration is often associated with a high dropout rate, which negatively affects the total cost calculation of such programs.

We can distinguish two variants within this type. On the one hand, there are programs that focus on temporary or circular migration and explicitly aim to

ensure that (some) of the skilled workers return to their country of origin after completing their training. On the other hand, there are programs that aim for permanent migration as a means of convincing companies to share the additional expense. The benefit for the country of origin thus consists in the remittances sent by migrants and in the relief such programs provide the labor market. The country of origin also benefits from the capacity-building measures accompanying the project, which help the local employment agency improve on service delivery. The know-how and networks created by the trained workers, however, only benefit the origin country if these individuals voluntarily return to their home country. GIZ is applying this model in the restaurant and hospitality sector and has begun to apply it more recently in Morocco's construction sector.

Case study

German-Moroccan Partnership for Training and Skilled Worker Recruitment

On behalf of the Moroccan National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC), and in cooperation with the German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA) of Bavaria and Thuringia and the Bavarian State Association of Bavarian Construction Guilds (LBB), GIZ is focusing on training young Moroccans for the German labor market. The project is carried out under the auspices of GIZ's private-sector division, International Services, and is financed by the World Bank through the MENA Transition Fund. The project aims to address skills shortages in Germany's restaurant and hospitality industry as well as its construction sector by recruiting workers in Morocco and training them in Germany. Closely involved in the project, ANAPEC is responsible for the selection process in Morocco. ANAPEC also receives advice on institutional matters aimed at strengthening its international outreach capabilities. At the same time, GIZ identifies suitable companies in Germany able to provide training and arranges for binding employment contracts. The participants then attend a German-language course and integration courses in Morocco. Once they've arrived in Germany, they start their dual training, which consists of on-the-job training at a company and classes at a vocational school, which means they have a good chance of being hired long-term by the German company where they've trained at. In its first phase, the project focused exclusively on the hospitality sector and involved a total of 108 trainees. In August 2019, a new cohort of 100 trainees joined the program. These individuals are now engaged in two-



to three-year vocational training courses in Germany, with half of them working in the hospitality sector, and the other half in the construction sector.

As a model that provides comprehensive training for its participants, the partnership is designed to foster permanent migration. As in the previous “Type 1” case, the development benefit for the country of origin here would also be greater if at least some of the technical training were to take place in Morocco. Working hard to achieve its ambitious tourism strategy, Morocco has a high demand for skilled labor in the hospitality sector.

Given this, the fact that industry associations are involved in an operational capacity here is a notable innovation. Their involvement entails providing positions for trainees and helping them integrate into the new environment. However, it’s unclear whether they will prove willing to shoulder the costs of the program – which are currently borne by the World Bank – on their own in the medium term.

Type 3: Training in the country of origin

The most ambitious approach involves providing occupational training in the country of origin that is aligned with the curriculum of the destination country or broader international standards. This reflects the idea underlying the concept of a Global Skill Partnership, as defined by the American economist and migration expert Michael Clemens at the Washington Center for Global Development and which is referred to in the Global Compact for Migration. In a Global Skill Partnership, destination countries invest in an origin country’s VET infrastructure to develop skill creation programs for occupations that are in high demand in both countries. All public and private ac-

tors involved in such a project agree in advance on the basic framework conditions and costs to be shared. A two-track training program is then developed that includes a “home” track targeting the creation of skilled workers who plan to remain in their country of origin, and an “away” track targeting those who plan to work abroad. In direct comparison, the migration-oriented abroad track is somewhat more cost intensive because it includes, in addition to technical training, other modules such as language courses and pre-integration courses. However, according to Clemens, training a skilled worker in the country of origin is usually still considerably less expensive than training the same worker in the destination country. This efficiency effect makes it mathematically possible within the framework of the partnership agreement to essentially cross-finance, at least in part, training programs for skilled workers who stay in the country of origin. Global Skill Partnerships thus offer a cost-efficient means of creating skilled workers for both destination and origin countries, while at the same time supporting VET systems in countries of origin and fostering a transfer of know-how in both directions. Vocational training that is aligned with international standards also improves opportunities for employment in the domestic labor market. At the same time, these partnerships open up new legal pathways for skilled workers who are willing to leave their home country and whose job skills match those needed in the destination country’s labor market.

This approach is conceptually persuasive because it aims to tangibly reconcile the interests of both origin and destination countries, takes hold before emigration (pre-departure), and promises economic viability. These kinds of multi-stakeholder partnerships

can have global benefits for the international pool of skilled labor and can, at the same time, contribute to efforts targeting the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in different areas (Goal 4: Quality Education; Goal 10.7: Facilitate Orderly, Safe, Regular and Responsible Migration; Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals). They are therefore particularly relevant for international efforts targeting global sustainable development. However, the long-term success of this approach also stands and falls with the extent to which employers – ideally in both partner countries – are willing to participate (see also OECD 2018).

Although there are, to date, no Global Skill Partnerships in the purest sense of Clemens’ concept, there are some transnational training initiatives that have been launched in countries of origin.

Case study

Porsche Training and Recruitment Center

A discussion of German training activities in countries of origin should begin with a look at the activities of German companies abroad. Typically, they provide training or upskilling support in line with the German model to meet their own needs and are often supported in these efforts by the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK). However, this type of training always serves their own needs at their production site. The mobility of these skilled workers usually does not

fall within the scope of the companies’ interests. However, the Porsche Training and Recruitment Center Asia (PTRCA) in Manila, which was expanded to South Africa in 2018, is transnational in scope. Facing skilled labor shortages in its foreign markets, Porsche has created its own training centers for mechatronics engineers, who are trained in their home country. These workers are then employed in several Porsche factories across the globe, mainly in the Middle East. The project, which is carried out together with the Catholic NGO Don Bosco Mondo, focuses on helping disadvantaged youth lift themselves out of poverty by providing vocational training and employment at Porsche. Innovative and cost-effective, the program features digital and multilingual education modules.

Case study

Pilot Project Addressing Labour Shortages Through Innovative Labour Migration Models

The Belgian development agency Enabel is currently implementing a training program in the IT sector in Morocco that is supported by EU funding. Designed with the Global Skill Partnerships model in mind, the program involves training some 80 Moroccan skilled workers for the IT sector who will undergo a selection process by which 30 participants will be offered the opportunity to work in Flanders and the rest will be placed in the Moroccan labor market. The project,

TABLE 1 An overview of TSMP types

	TYPE 1 ADAPTATION TRAINING	TYPE II TRAINING IN GERMANY	TYPE III TRAINING IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainees and young professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainees and young professionals
Occupational training (distribution of responsibilities origin country/Germany)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the OC • Partial recognition and post-training in G 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-training in OC, if necessary • Full training in G 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Two-track) full course of training in OC, with harmonized curriculum
Language training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to B1 in OC • Continues after arrival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to B1 in OC • Continues after arrival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In parallel with occupational training • Continues after arrival, if necessary
“Migration dividends” (the “win” for the OC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eases burden on the labor market • Transfer of funds (remittances) • Potentially builds knowledge/skills and networks, in the event of return migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eases burden on the labor market • Transfer of funds (remittances) • Potentially builds knowledge/skills and networks, in the event of return migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of funds (remittances) • Potentially builds knowledge, skills and networks, in the event of return migration • Brings new ideas to vocational training system • In case of GSPs: creates skilled workers for domestic labor market
Examples	Triple Win	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • German-Moroccan Partnership for Training and Skilled Worker Recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PALIM

which brings together a broad spectrum of actors from both countries, is supposed to be transferred to other sectors and countries in the future. The hope here is that the project will prove able to sustain itself beyond the pilot phase without the support of government or EU subsidies and rely instead on the financial support of participating companies.

Prospects for the expansion of TSMs

Transnational skills and mobility partnerships are demanding ventures. Each of the types outlined here has the potential to contribute to the effective and fair procurement of skilled workers. While the first two types have already been successfully implemented in a number of pilot projects, the global skill partnerships approach for now remains a highly promising concept that has yet to demonstrate its practicality. In principle, it appears plausible that investments in origin countries' VET infrastructures and the multi-track education and training of skilled workers across borders could yield the greatest dividends for origin countries. This is particularly the case when this cooperation takes place in occupational fields for which there is considerable demand within German labor markets, and which also have strategic significance for the origin country's economic development. This is often the case in the tourism, construction and IT sectors, for example. However, given that occupational qualifications are not directly transferable or compatible, extensive adaptations to vocational-training standards and curricula are required under this approach.

The fact that it is possible to operate VET programs abroad that teach to German standards has already been demonstrated by numerous vocational-training initiatives run by German companies with production sites around the world, for example by German auto manufacturers in Mexico or China. While these dual vocational education and training programs focus on the companies' own on-site need for skilled workers, there remains considerable unrealized potential in linking them more strongly with mobility-oriented measures intended to bring skilled workers to Germany. The results could be beneficial both for the VET systems in the countries of origin and for Germany's skilled-labor pool.

Three levers should be used to further expand TSMs here in Germany, and to bring them into mainstream use: the political-administrative framework, the development of sustainable funding sources, and the selection of suitable key partners.

Interministerial coherence through a clearing house

The FEG has opened up new opportunities for skilled foreign workers with mid-level qualifications. For instance, such individuals can be granted a visa for the purposes of finding a vocational-training position in Germany. However, substantial financial, vocational-qualification and linguistic hurdles remain. It is thus unclear whether the new rules will in fact encourage a significant independent influx of skilled workers and individuals seeking vocational training from abroad. It is only through accompanying measures, for example in the form of coordinated vocational-education and labor migration projects, that the legal access corridor opened by the new regulations will be filled with skilled workers meeting the immigration rules' high standards.

Taken as a whole, the FEG and the German federal government's new strategy for skilled workers focus primarily on skilled workers from key selected partner countries. These individuals are to be provided with additional training, at moderate expense, so that their qualifications can be officially recognized. However, due to the very specific vocational-training standards and the growing demand for skilled workers from third countries, this pragmatic path is unlikely to lead Germany to its goal over the long term.

A number of countries of the Global South have expressed an interest in the German dual VET system. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is responding to this demand through the use of cooperative international vocational education and training programs. However, while these programs do transfer individual elements of the dual system, this engagement in non-European countries is above all aimed at "addressing German companies' needs for skilled labor in the respective foreign markets" (BMBF 2020). Foreign trade promotion is also a key focus of projects led by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi). In this case, the ministry draws on "skills experts" among the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK), providing support to German companies operating overseas by training young people using the German dual vocational training model.

Only recently, following the adoption of the UN Global Compact for Migration, has the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) recognized the development-policy potential and international competitive advantage generated in recent years by GIZ, its subordinate implementing organization. This GIZ expertise is now being used in two new BMZ projects that address legal labor migration in

the sense of the triple win: One is a project cofunded through the EU Trust Fund, which aims to create legal migration pathways by offering vocational training in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt; the other is the Partnership Approaches for Development-Oriented Vocational-Training and Labor Migration project, which is intended to make a cross-regional contribution to development-oriented vocational-training and labor migration in the pilot countries of Ecuador, Mongolia, Nigeria and Pakistan.

As yet, there is no sign of a whole-of-government approach. The FEG and the federal government's current skilled-worker strategy seek to improve cross-ministerial cooperation in the recruitment of skilled workers from abroad. The plan to enhance coordination between all operational institutions and structures abroad – such as embassies, AHKS, the Goethe Institute and German foreign schools – could improve the legal, political and organizational framework for future partnerships. In addition, new cross-departmental initiatives being implemented in the wake of the FEG, such as the Concerted Action on Nursing (KAP) program and the Service Center for Professional Recognition (ZSBA), offer hope of improved interministerial coordination. There is a great need for stronger interministerial coordination in the vocational education and training field. The federal government's existing roundtable for international cooperation in VET, along with the associated GOVET secretariat that reports to the BMBF, could serve as a coordination body for future projects. The roundtable regularly brings together federal ministries, implementing organizations, Germany's federal states, chamber organizations, unions and employers' associations, a variety of trade associations, and other organizations active in international VET cooperation. As such, it should be expanded into a clearing house that also coordinates TSMP-related activities. The affiliated Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training could offer valuable advice in the design and implementation of future skilled-worker projects.

Sustainable mixed-finance concepts through inter-sectoral partnerships

TSMPs promise to realize synergies in the training and recruitment of skilled workers that benefit all stakeholders. However, experience shows that due to high operational costs, they often suffer from an unfavorable cost-benefit ratio if they prove unable to scale the number of participants rapidly. In fact, it is particularly the initial investments in small pilot projects that are large in relation to the number of graduates generated. Yet successful examples also show that these investments pay off in the form

of increased employer demand, higher numbers of graduates and established processes. In the future, one solution for the cost-intensive startup financing could be public-private partnerships, a mixed-finance approach involving the state, private sector entities and civil society organizations.

The creation of vocational-training and employment opportunities in countries of the Global South is in line with the goals of official development assistance, and thus justifies the use of bilateral and multilateral development-financing resources. Public funds could also be used to support the design stage, the evaluation of model projects by research teams, and any accompanying capacity-building measures within the partner countries' VET systems. This has already been the case in several pilot projects in North Africa, which have been funded using EU or World Bank resources.

Public-sector support is also particularly important in the development of language-learning programs abroad, which account for a significant portion of the overall costs. In many countries of origin, the German language is not widely spoken, and of course German language institutes are not available everywhere. Nevertheless, a general and professionally specific knowledge of German at a sufficiently high level is absolutely necessary for the recognition of vocational qualifications. A lack of sufficient local language-teaching capacities can make it more difficult for programs to scale. Because the FEG requires that skilled workers recruited abroad have a sufficient level of German-language knowledge, investment in origin-country language-instruction capacities benefits not only graduates of the specific coordinated VET projects, but ultimately all qualified workers from that country who may be interested in employment in Germany.

In addition, to the extent possible, the employer doing the hiring should cover additional costs associated with the vocational training for the skilled workers who will be coming to Germany to work for them. This can be regarded as an investment in the company's skilled workforce. Here, the funding model for GIZ's triple-win program, which relies on a placement fee paid by the interested employer, appears particularly efficient and sustainable.

Selection of key partner countries

For TSMPs to hold their own in Germany's market, they must be demand-driven. That is, they can function only in the presence of sufficient demand by companies. In order to ensure that this is the case,

such programs should focus initially on occupations that are currently experiencing a labor shortage, or which are expected to do so in the future. This already applies to the nursing sector in Germany. However, this sector also poses particular challenges in the selection of suitable partner countries. To counteract a critical undersupply of medical staff in developing countries, caused in large part by emigration, the World Health Organization (WHO) has adopted a set of ethical principles applying to the international recruitment of skilled healthcare workers. This Global Code of Practice is also associated with a list of countries suffering from a critical supply shortage of qualified doctors, nurses and midwives, and which therefore should not be targeted by recruitment campaigns. In the past, this WHO list has led to the categorical exclusion of the countries suffering from such shortages from pilot projects targeting the nursing sector. In this regard, it is worth taking a closer look: While TSMPs of the first and second type are primarily concerned with labor-market shortages in the destination country, global skill partnerships seek to match similar patterns of skilled-worker demand in destination and origin countries. Thus, when recruiting qualified skilled workers, programs of type 1 try to ensure that the partner country has a surplus of such workers who lack job opportunities on that country's domestic labor markets. Global skills partnerships, by contrast, on balance seek to expand the pool of skilled labor in both partner countries (producing a brain gain). If such programs in fact succeed in growing the pool of skilled labor in both countries, states with current labor shortages would be particularly interesting partners.

The German federal government's skilled-labor strategy gives the ZAV a key role in identifying potential partner countries. In the future, cooperation in the recruitment of skilled workers should be enhanced through placement agreements with selected partner countries identified by means of a potential analysis. Within the health-care sector, partially at the behest of the German Federal Ministry of Health, the countries of Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines are currently a focus. However, a recent focus has also been placed on Indonesia, El Salvador, Bhutan and India's federal state of Kerala, all countries on the WHO list. This has been done in coordination with the World Health Organization. It is striking that no sub-Saharan African countries have been included in the overview of countries favored within the federal government's new skilled-worker strategy. The lack of compatibility of these countries' domestic vocational training and education systems, their unsettled economic and political conditions, and their large informal sectors still serve to dissuade actors that want to achieve rapid results. Thus, it appears that the call to create new legal pathways for labor migrants from Africa – in large part to relieve the burden on the asylum system – has failed to elicit any practical response within the existing migration partnerships with African countries. Yet if the principle of qualification equivalence continues to be maintained, there will ultimately be no alternative other than TSMPs for the creation of new, legal access routes for African countries. This also gives Germany the opportunity to further expand its pioneering role with regard to partnership-based and development-oriented approaches in labor and vocational-training migration, while additionally promoting such programs at the EU level.

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