



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

‘SECURING AND RETAINING SKILLED WORKERS TO TACKLE SKILLS SHORTAGES’

Thematic Seminar | 15 May 2025

The European Commission organised a Thematic Seminar on 15 May 2025, as part of its ongoing efforts to create opportunities for Pact members to discuss and share ideas and practices within the Pact for Skills community. Good practice examples and panel discussion reflected on the topic of securing and retaining skilled workers to tackle skill shortages.

Key messages

In the face of accelerating demographic change, evolving technological demands, and growing international competition, the ability of Member States and industry ecosystems to secure and retain skilled labour has emerged as a central pillar of economic resilience. The thematic seminar titled "Securing and Retaining Skilled Workers to Tackle Skills Shortages", held on 15 May 2025, underscored the pivotal role that initiatives such as the Pact for Skills can play in supporting coordinated responses at both national and regional levels.

Discussions held during the event highlighted the importance of developing integrated talent strategies that embed lifelong learning, facilitate ethical and well-managed labour mobility, and promote greater recognition and portability of qualifications. The need to tailor such strategies to the specific needs of different industrial ecosystems was a recurrent theme throughout the seminar.

The seminar served as a platform to explore good practice examples and to hold a panel discussion that critically reflected on how different sectors are tackling skill shortages through securing and retaining skilled workers. Participants were united by a shared recognition that attracting talent alone is not sufficient; retaining skilled individuals and fostering long-term professional development are equally crucial to ensure sustainable labour force participation and competitiveness in the evolving European economy.

Securing and retaining skilled workers to tackle skills shortages

To support the promotion of upskilling and reskilling and the tackling of skills needs, the EU has put several policies and initiatives in place. The most recent, the [Union of Skills](#) will support Member States tackle these skills development challenges.

Adopted in March 2025, the Union of Skills has four major components with dedicated skills-related support measures to ensure to be able to build solid skills foundations and engage in lifelong upskilling and reskilling. Its fourth strand centres on attracting, developing, and retaining talent for Europe's future innovation, growth, and competitiveness, from inside the EU and around the world.

Figure 1. The Union of Skills



Source: Union of Skills factsheet, European Union, 2025. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/880647/Factsheet%20Union%20of%20Skills.pdf>

The Union of Skills builds upon and expands existing initiatives, such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, where a pilot call named '**Choose Europe**' aims to attract top talent globally by offering excellent scientific working and employment conditions and career prospects. It will have a budget of €22.5 million.

A keynote in the thematic seminar offered further insights into the underlying vision and strategic direction, highlighting how these efforts are designed to create a more integrated approach on retaining and securing skills under the Union of Skills.

Keynote on Union of Skills

Elin Danielsson, Policy Officer at the Legal Pathways and Integration Unit of DG HOME, delivered a keynote presentation on the Union of Skills, emphasizing the European Union adoption of a comprehensive and strategic approach to workforce activation, aiming to address structural labour shortages and demographic challenges through a combination of policy instruments on skills retaining.

Central to this strategy is the integration of legal migration pathways with skills recognition and development measures. The keynote outlined key initiatives, including the EU Talent Pool—a pan-European platform designed to match international talent with European employers—as well as operational frameworks such as Talent Partnerships.

The EU Talent Pool will build upon the key initiatives of the [Skills and Talent Mobility package](#) of 2023, referring to the [EU Talent Pool Regulation](#), designed to connect EU employers with jobseekers from third countries. The EU Talent Pool will additionally support the implementation and further development of [Talent Partnerships](#) towards Multipurpose Legal Gateway Offices, aiming to provide a comprehensive policy framework and financial support to boost mutually beneficial international mobility between participating EU Member States and third-countries, providing additional support to employers in finding

the skills they need, in particular in sectors of shared interest, such as construction, care, ICT, transport, bioeconomy, tourism, agriculture, or culture.

These partnerships focus on enabling targeted cooperation with third countries, supporting mobility at all skill levels and promoting temporary, long-term, and circular migration schemes.

Danielsson also highlighted recent legislative efforts to simplify legal migration procedures, including the revised Single Permit Directive, which strengthens safeguards against exploitation and clarifies conditions of residence and work. She stressed that viable and ethical legal migration strategies are essential not only for addressing labour shortages but also for supporting the EU's digital and green transitions.

During the Q&A session, participants inquired about the equivalence of skills diplomas and qualification frameworks. Danielsson clarified that if a country has a national qualifications framework referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), equivalences can be readily identified. However, if no such reference exists, recognition becomes a matter of national discretion and is considerably more complex.

In practice: challenges and opportunities

The thematic seminar provided insights through practical examples from the Pact for Skills community, demonstrating how mobility and cooperation across borders can help address sector-specific skills gaps.

Good Practice Example in the Regional Partnership for Lifelong Learning Mobility

Nicholas Waller, Associated member of EARALL and International Coordinator of Municipality of Borås (Sweden), presented good practices from the Pact for Skills Regional Partnership for Lifelong Learning Mobility, focusing on addressing skills needs through mobility initiatives. The approach aims to reduce barriers to worker movement, provide lifelong learning opportunities, increase gender equality in specific occupations, and increase international job shadowing programmes. The partnership emphasizes creating sustainable mobility pathways that benefit both receiving regions and participating workers.

Good Practice Example of Skills Network for Egyptian Youth in Green Jobs

Daniela Palermo from CIHEAM Bari presented the "Network You" initiative targeting digital and green sector employment for young Egyptians, combining financial support with public-private engagement through multi-stakeholder partnerships between Egypt and Italy. Currently, 10 ICT companies and 24 agribusiness companies participate in the project. This initiative represents a shift in migration perspective by focusing on specific sectoral demands in both countries. The project targets four main job profiles: agriculture, sustainable agriculture, food processing, and renewable energy/ICT. The initiative exemplifies a sector-focused migration model that addresses the needs of both sending and receiving countries.

Building on the good practice examples, a panel discussion delved into distinctions between labour market shortages and skill mismatches, and concentrated largely on the effective integration of skilled workers and its challenges within sectors.

Panel discussion

Sofia Santos Nunes (LSP Health) addressed critical shortages in healthcare, noting that by 2050, the EU will need 1.6 million additional care workers. While migrant workers already constitute a significant percentage of the healthcare workforce, they face challenges including restrictive legal frameworks, inadequate social protection, and language barriers.

Slavica Uzelac (LSP Construction) emphasized the distinction between labour shortages and skills mismatches. She advocated for prioritizing worker retention and investment in working conditions and training opportunities rather than relying on third-country workers, suggesting that excessive mobility might have detrimental effects on working conditions and worker safety. She liked the idea of circular migration approaches as presented earlier.

Antonia Spera and Daniela Palermo (CIHEAM Bari) provided clarification on traineeship components within migration partnership programmes, discussing how to effectively integrate skilled migrant workers in their specific sector.

Nicholas Waller (RSP LLM) raised questions about identifying sectors requiring new talent and in what capacity. He suggested breaking down occupational areas to require varied education levels rather than uniform qualifications.

Slavica Uzelac called for further differentiation between high and low-skilled workers and criticized intermediaries in construction who create ambiguous employment situations. She stressed that migration must occur under safe conditions, not merely focusing on legal status.

Sofia Santos Nunes advocated for a new ethical approach to international recruitment, including improved recognition pathways, increased training and funding (particularly for SMEs lacking resources), and addressing gender imbalances that leave migrant women particularly vulnerable.

Elin Danielsson (DG HOME) concluded by reiterating the need for up-skilling and re-skilling programmes alongside legal migration components, emphasizing the importance of understanding sector-specific needs.

Key take aways and insights

The thematic seminar demonstrated the challenges of securing and retaining skilled workers. It shed light on tackling it through a combination of policy innovation, international cooperation, and systemic investment in skills ecosystems. Participants agreed that favourable working conditions must also be taken into consideration when discussing 'retaining talent'.

This also stresses the importance of the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals and the streamlining and accelerating of the validation of skills and qualifications obtained outside the EU ([Recommendation of 15 November 2023 on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals](#)).

Legal migration was repeatedly emphasized not as a fallback solution, but as a vital and complementary strategy to domestic skills development. Ensuring that migration happens under ethical, inclusive, and rights-based frameworks will be key to long-term success.

The seminar closed with a consensus on the need to support SMEs more effectively in accessing EU-level funding and training initiatives, particularly in the context of the Union of Skills. Looking ahead, the

Commission announced a follow-up workshop in autumn 2025, focusing on upskilling and reskilling for the digital and green transition.