



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**Commission for  
Citizenship, Governance,  
Institutional and External Affairs**

**CIVEX**

# **Attracting Global Skills and Talents to EU's cities and regions**



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# Introduction

European Union (EU) member States have diverse qualifications and education systems, which are a primary competence of member States. Understanding those systems and the factors that contribute to the effective recognition of qualifications of migrants is an important first step to identifying strategies to more effectively connect the needs of European economies and the set of skills that migrant workers have to offer. EU institutions acknowledge the potential of these systems to attract global skills and talents to EU cities and regions, as well as the role that cities and regions play in facilitating that connection. Unlocking that potential requires a good understanding of the labour market and demographic trends in this context, and of existing practices across cities and regions in the EU that facilitate the recognition of qualifications and the validation of skills of third-country nationals.

This report aims to map the current situation regarding the labour market and demographic situation in European regions and cities. In particular, it considers the percentage of third-country nationals living there and actively employed or looking for work and the barriers to their employment, with a focus on the systems, policies, programmes and procedures in place in regions and cities to facilitate the recognition of their qualifications and validation of their skills.

The research set out in this report is especially important in light of the fact that across Europe, there is presently an acknowledgement of severe labour shortages which can be addressed and supported by migrant workers. As was noted at a recent Eurocities event, there is consensus that:

... we need more skilled individuals to run our economies and plug the gaps in our local labour markets. Migrants coming to our city are a great opportunity to meet this challenge, but we need to ensure that they are employed according to their skills profile, qualifications, and aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

To this end, this report addresses the need to understand the current employment and education situation of third-country nationals in EU regions and cities, particularly in those affected by a decline in the working-age population. It also addresses the gap in evidence about ways in which global skills and talent can be

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<sup>1</sup> EuroCities, 'My Skills, Our City: Skills Development and Recognition of Qualifications for Migrants – Meeting Report' (Report, 27–29 June 2023) 3.

attracted to the EU, supporting those regions most affected. The study explores the practices currently being implemented and indications of their impact, especially at the territorial level.

The report is organised as follows. Part 1 showcases the findings of a literature review focused on integration efforts at the regional and local levels, specifically those directed towards validation of skills and recognition of qualifications. Part 2 provides an overview of the most relevant communications by the EU institutions of relevance to the area from a local/regional lens. Part 3 presents findings from existing datasets (Eurostat) and of our research with cities and regions about their efforts to attract foreign workers. Finally, a number of conclusions and recommendations reached in conducting the research are set out.

# Part 1: Literature review

While migration research has traditionally focused almost exclusively on national models, in recent years, there has been mounting empirical evidence of the heterogeneity of immigration and integration policies, not only across but also within states.<sup>2</sup> As a result, there is a growing recognition in the literature, as observed by Schmidtke, of the need to “move beyond a conceptualization that is restricted to national politics, its institutional arrangements and its actors”.<sup>3</sup> An emerging literature has pointed to the differing outcomes at regional and municipal levels to those seen at national levels,<sup>4</sup> with Poppelaars and Scholten speaking of distinctly “divergent logics of national and local integration policies” in the Netherlands specifically.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the sub-national level of governance has become a meaningful arena of political debate and policy formation in the field of integration, as well as an increasing focus of migration research. It has been recognised that cities and regions have become “important laboratories for deliberating, developing, and implementing immigration and, in particular, integration policies”.<sup>6</sup> Particularly in the European context, cities and regions increasingly act as significant sites of innovation, often in stark contrast to the lack of coherent policy formation at the national level.<sup>7</sup> This has been closely linked to a growing emphasis on place and community-based governance in the social policy development field.

Several articles have considered specifically the expanding role of cities and regions in integration policy in the European context. For example, an article by Schmidtke adopts a comparative perspective on the issue, considering the

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<sup>2</sup> Tatjana Baraulina, ‘Integration und Interkulturelle Konzepte in den Kommunen’ (*Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 16 May 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Schmidtke, ‘Beyond National Models? Governing Migration and Integration at the Regional and Local Levels in Canada and Germany’ (2014) 2(1) *Comparative Migration Studies* 77, 79.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Tiziana Caponio and Maren Borkert (eds), *The Local Dimension of Migration Policymaking* (Amsterdam University Press 2010); Caelesta Poppelaars and Peter Scholten, ‘Two Worlds Apart: The Divergence of National and Local Immigrant Integration Policies in the Netherlands’ (2008) 40(4) *Administration and Society* 335; Peter Scholten, ‘Agenda Dynamics and the Multi-Level Governance of Intractable Policy Controversies: The Case of Migrant Integration Policies in the Netherlands’ (2013) 46(3) *Policy Sciences* 217.

<sup>5</sup> Caelesta Poppelaars and Peter Scholten, ‘Two Worlds Apart: The Divergence of National and Local Immigrant Integration Policies in the Netherlands’ (2008) 40(4) *Administration and Society* 335.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Schmidtke, ‘Beyond National Models? Governing Migration and Integration at the Regional and Local Levels in Canada and Germany’ (2014) 2(1) *Comparative Migration Studies* 77, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Schmidtke and Andrej Zaslove, ‘Why Regions Matter in Immigrant Integration Policies: North-Rhine Westphalia and Emilia-Romagna in Comparative Perspective’ (2014) 40(12) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1854.

approaches of Canada and Germany to governing immigration and integration at the regional and local levels.<sup>8</sup> Schmidtke's piece examines the form and degree to which subnational levels of government have played a more prominent role in the field in both Canada and Germany.<sup>9</sup> Specifically in relation to Germany, Schmidtke describes the unique and space-sensitive approaches to integration that have developed at the *länder* and municipality levels, offering a space for dynamic solutions to challenges and issues relating to integration to emerge, as well as for civil society engagement and advocacy and inclusion efforts.<sup>10</sup> A major enabling factor in this regard, in Schmidtke's view, is the emerging system of multi-level governance in the European context, which has "created new opportunities for sub-national-level actors to become policy entrepreneurs rather than simply administrators of federal programs".<sup>11</sup>

Relatedly, an article by Schmidtke and Zaslove publishes the results of a comparative case study of integration policies in the regions of Emilia-Romagna in Italy and North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany.<sup>12</sup> Using these two case studies, Schmidtke and Zaslove hypothesise that the sub-national level of governance has taken on a distinct role in shaping the conceptual design, practice and effects of integration policies in Europe.<sup>13</sup> In particular, they point to the increasing incorporation of migrants in the political process at the sub-national level and the significant impacts that this has had on policymaking and implementation.

Although various works have explored labour market integration in Europe and analysed the processes and policies in place for recognition of skills and qualifications in the European context, these have largely adopted a national lens.<sup>14</sup> The academic and grey literature specifically addressing the role played by regions and cities in the context of labour market integration and recognition of skills and qualifications appears to be limited. An article published recently by De

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<sup>8</sup> Oliver Schmidtke, 'Beyond National Models? Governing Migration and Integration at the Regional and Local Levels in Canada and Germany' (2014) 2(1) *Comparative Migration Studies* 77.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 85–89.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 91.

<sup>12</sup> Oliver Schmidtke and Andrej Zaslove, 'Why Regions Matter in Immigrant Integration Policies: North-Rhine Westphalia and Emilia-Romagna in Comparative Perspective' (2014) 40(12) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1854.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 1869.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Stanislaw Lipiec, 'The Recognition of Professional Qualifications in the European Union' (2021) 25(2) *Studies in European Affairs* 93; Ziva Suta and Karmen Pisek Suta, 'Professional Qualifications Recognition of Doctors in the EU: A Perspective of EU Citizens and Third-Country Nationals' (2023) 16(1) *Medicine, Law and Society* 149; Lavinia Kortese, 'Exploring Professional Recognition in the EU: A Legal Perspective' (2016) 4(1) *Journal of International Mobility* 43; Melanie Kiehl and Heinz Werner, 'The Labour Market Situation of EU and of Third Country Nationals in the European Union' (Working Paper No 32, Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung 1999).



Coninck and Solano explores the role of the local context and its relationship with national-level policy outcomes on migrant integration and labour market inclusion, using new regional data from Eurostat and integration policy data from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX).<sup>15</sup> Although the focus of the piece is national-level integration policies, it nevertheless offers important insights into the role played by local and regional actors in integration outcomes.

Turning to relevant grey literature, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recently published a study on the contribution of migration to regional development.<sup>16</sup> A chapter in this study is specifically devoted to the integration of migrants in regional labour markets,<sup>17</sup> addressing topics including migrant labour market outcomes, differences between labour market performance for migrant and native-born populations, regional labour market differences, gender differences and educational attainment and use of skills. Also relevant is the Migration Integration Statistics publication by Eurostat, the 2020 edition of which includes a regional analysis of labour market indicators.<sup>18</sup>

Another OECD publication of relevance is a report on local integration of migrants and refugees in Europe.<sup>19</sup> The report recognises that, although migration policy largely remains a national responsibility, both central and local authorities have a significant role to play in effectively integrating migrants into their new societies, including through coordination with other levels of government and local partners like business, civil society and NGOs. To this end, it offers development strategies and provides an overview promising practices from 72 cities with a particular focus on Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Paris, Rome, and Vienna. Many of the promising practices described in the report relate to efforts to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills.

Integration of migrants in cities was also the focus of a report published by Eurocities.<sup>20</sup> This report centres around a policy framework developed by

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<sup>15</sup> David De Coninck and Giacomo Solano, 'Integration Policies and Migrants' Labour Market Outcomes: A Local Perspective Based on Different Regional Configurations in the EU' (2023) 11(23) *Comparative Migration Studies*.

<sup>16</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'The Contribution of Migration to Regional Development' (OECD, 10 March 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 37–70.

<sup>18</sup> *Migration Integration Statistics: 2020 Edition* (Eurostat 2021) 50–76.

<sup>19</sup> *Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees* (OECD 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Eurocities, 'Cities and Migrants: Implementing the Integrating Cities Charter' (Report, October 2018).

Eurocities pursuant to its Integrating Cities Charter, an instrument outlining cities' commitments on the integration of migrants and providing an overarching framework for work in this area. It outlines general trends and analyses the progress of integration in cities across Europe based on the results of a survey conducted with 22 European cities, and considers the ways in which these cities and the broader municipalities in which they are situated have organised their departments and offices in the area of integration, as well as the development of the concept of integration across different cities. Several of the integration strategies described in the report relate to skills recognition efforts by city authorities.

A study conducted by Tangermann and Grote for the European Migration Network, which was co-financed by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the European Union, analysed the labour market integration of third-country nationals in Germany.<sup>21</sup> Although primarily focused on government measures at the federal level, the study recognises that the regional level is “where integration concepts are developed, assistance programmes are implemented and projects for labour market integration are supported”,<sup>22</sup> and that the local level is where integration actually takes place.<sup>23</sup> To this end, the study emphasises the important role played by *länder* and regional authorities in ensuring the success of labour market policies, coordinating employment promotion efforts, and developing projects and programmes to support integration efforts. The establishment of integration offices in several municipalities in Germany is one prominent example of a promising practice identified within the study.<sup>24</sup> The study also discusses various programmes and policies in place to assist with the recognition of skills and qualifications,<sup>25</sup> however the programmes and policies discussed are all federal, rather than regional or local, initiatives.

A report by Lethbridge, commissioned by the European Public Service Union and Local and Regional Europe, considered the impact of policies and activities of local authorities on jobs and working conditions for migrants.<sup>26</sup> The report recognises the important role that local authorities are playing across the European Union in supporting the integration of third-country nationals within society and

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<sup>21</sup> Julian Tangermann and Janne Grote, ‘Labour Market Integration of Third-Country Nationals in Germany’ (Working Paper No 82, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 36.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 39–40.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Lethbridge, ‘Migration and Local Authorities – Impact on Jobs and Working Conditions’ (Public Services International Research Unit 2016).

the local economy, including through social cohesion activities, language education, wider education and learning services.<sup>27</sup> Lethbridge notes that the position of third-country nationals in local labour forces is often weak, and specifically identifies the lack of recognition of existing qualifications and cumbersome and slow processes for such as a major barrier to labour market success.<sup>28</sup> She also identifies promising practices at the municipal and city level in Barcelona, Spain and Malmö, Sweden, geared towards helping third-country nationals obtain recognition of their country of origin qualifications, as well as providing other supportive services.<sup>29</sup>

A working paper produced by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) also offers valuable guidance on strategies to enhance the labour market integration of migrants across the European Union.<sup>30</sup> The working paper surveys practices and policies in place across Europe at the national, regional and local levels to assist migrants with integrating into, and moving within, the European labour market. In this regard, the provision of information about the equivalence of qualifications and assistance during recognition processes is identified as a crucial aspect of successful integration.<sup>31</sup> The report also presents a number of case studies covering a range of services provided to immigrants in European Union member states, including several regional and local initiatives designed to facilitate, enhance or provide guidance in qualifications and skills recognition processes.<sup>32</sup> Key examples include the Centre for Validation of Occupational Skills operated by the city council of Malmö (Sweden); the Associació d'Ajuda Mútua a Immigrants a Catalunya (AMIC) in Catalonia (Spain); and the NOBI Network in Hamburg (Germany).

More recently, the European Commission's 2023 report on employment and social developments in Europe<sup>33</sup> found that labour and skills shortages were persisting across Europe, and considered various ways in which these labour shortages and skills gaps could be tackled. Relevantly, the report noted that workers born outside the EU are more often employed in occupations facing persistent labour shortages, in particular in low-skilled occupations, and are 8.7 percentage points more likely to work in occupations with persistent labour

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid 7–9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 15–16.

<sup>30</sup> 'Valuing Diversity: Guidance for Labour Market Integration of Migrants' (Working Paper No 24, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 47–48.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 109–114.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission, 'Employment and Social Developments in Europe' (Report, July 2023).

shortages compared to workers born inside the EU.<sup>34</sup> To this end, a key solution noted by the report is promoting targeted labour migration from non-EU countries to reduce labour shortages in specific skills groups.

In summary, while the critical role played by regional and local authorities in the integration of migrants in labour markets in the European context appears to be widely acknowledged in the existing literature, discussion of the specific policies, practices and programmes in place at the local and regional levels to assist with labour market integration and the recognition of skills and qualifications remains limited. However, some promising practices and potential case studies emerge from a review of relevant academic and grey literature, which can be further explored through the survey and activities of this project.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid 16.

## Part 2: An analysis of the relevant EU communications and other EU documents from the local and regional lens

A review of some of the most relevant EU communications in this area indicates that whilst there is a clear acknowledgement that cities and regions are very much impacted by labour market shortages, policy responses have tended to focus on the national level, in part as a result of the fact that competences on immigration and recognition of skills and qualifications tend to vest at the national rather than the sub-national level. This section provides an overview of these communications.

The European Commission's 2022 [Communication on Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU](#) recognized that “[l]egal migration benefits migrants as well as countries of origin and destination”,<sup>35</sup> and has the potential to support “the EU’s green and digital transition, while contributing to making European societies more cohesive and resilient”.<sup>36</sup> It also emphasized the “challenges that the EU is facing in attracting skills and talent, in the short and long term”,<sup>37</sup> which it paired with another challenge: the shrinking working population in the EU, which affects some EU regions more than others, particularly in rural areas.<sup>38</sup> The communication also flagged occupational shortages in specific sectors and regions,<sup>39</sup> partly owing to differences in development levels between regions,<sup>40</sup> and the presence of urban areas within regions.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee of Regions reacted to this communication with its [2022 CoR Opinion on Legal Migration – Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU](#), in which it acknowledged that “legal migrants play a crucial role in Europe’s economy and society and can also become agents of development when the right policies are put in place”.<sup>42</sup> It recognized legal migration as “a fundamental driver of cities’ growth, contributing to making cities much more diverse and economically

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<sup>35</sup> European Commission, ‘Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU’ (Communication) COM(2022) 657 final, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>42</sup> European Committee of the Regions, ‘Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on Legal Migration: Attracting Skills and Talent to the EU’ (Opinion 2023/C 79/10) [2023] OJ C 79/59, 1.

vibrant”.<sup>43</sup> It also pointed out that “local authorities are best placed to have a coherent overview of current and more structural shortages and opportunities in the local labour market and should be included in multi-level governance for attracting and retaining international talent to respond to the needs of the local labour market”.<sup>44</sup>

In her [2022 State of the Union address](#) to the European Parliament, European Commission President von der Leyen noted shortfalls in the labour market, especially with regard to specific professions (nurses, IT technicians, engineers) and proclaimed 2023 the [European Year of Skills](#).<sup>45</sup> One of the objectives of this initiative is to attract people from outside the EU with skills needed by the EU, including by strengthening learning opportunities and mobility and facilitating the [recognition of qualifications](#). President von der Leyen flagged the need to “speed up and facilitate the recognition of qualifications of (...) third-country nationals”.<sup>46</sup>

The [Commission proposal for making 2023 the European Year of Skills](#) was adopted on 12 October 2022, and referred to “promoting tools and instruments for increased transparency of qualifications, including qualifications awarded outside the Union”.<sup>47</sup> In March 2023, the European Parliament adopted its position on the Commission’s proposal ([EP-PE\\_TC1-COD\(2022\)0326](#)), flagging in this regard that “trust in, and the transparency of, qualifications, whether acquired in the Union or in a third country, are key to facilitating their recognition”.<sup>48</sup> It refers to Union existing tools, such as the [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals](#), and notes that “further strengthening skills identification and documentation, as well as guidance to make skills visible, are crucial steps towards the better transparency and portability of all skills”.<sup>49</sup> The role of local authorities and of facilitating the recognition of skills and qualifications is emphasized when calling for developing “joined-up approaches with all branches of governments at Union, national, regional and local level[s]” and “facilitating

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 16.

<sup>45</sup> EC President von der Leyen, ‘2022 State of the Union Address’ (Speech, Strasbourg, 14 September 2022) 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, ‘Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Skills 2023’ 2022/0326 (COD) 17.

<sup>48</sup> European Parliament, ‘Position of the European Parliament adopted at first reading on 30 March 2023 with a view to the adoption of Decision (EU) 2023/... of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Skills’ (EP-PE\_TC1-COD(2022)0326) 17.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

the recognition of skills and qualifications”.<sup>50</sup> As the European Universities Association has flagged in its [policy briefing on recognition of professional qualifications](#), “the full toolbox already exists: it just needs to be utilised as widely, as efficiently and as soon as possible”.<sup>51</sup> In its [contribution to the public consultation on the proposal](#), the European Students’ Union called for “easing the recognition of qualifications” of migrants and refugees, including by “widening the application of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees”.<sup>52</sup>

The European Commission’s 2023 [Communication on Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions](#) pays attention to the “demographic transition” taking place in the EU, noting that many regions are “falling into (or risk falling into) the talent development trap”<sup>53</sup> as they suffer from a shrinking labour force and the departure of a young and skilled workforce. It is observed that this could “trigger new and growing territorial disparities as regions age and fall behind in terms of the number and skill-level of their workforces”.<sup>54</sup> The communication recommends that regions and cities implement “tailored place-based strategies and policies”<sup>55</sup> to address this issue, including policies and programmes aimed at “addressing inefficiencies in their labour market, education, training and adult learning systems, improving innovation and public governance performances, the business environment and increasing the level of and access to services”.<sup>56</sup>

The Committee of the Regions’ (CoR) 2023 [Resolution on Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions](#) issued in response to the Commission’s communication “points out that these demographic trends mean that the only way for many regions in Europe to fill gaps in their labour markets is through regular migration” and “calls for more dialogue between regional authorities, businesses, universities and NGOs, particularly in border regions”.<sup>57</sup> The resolution also calls for “the implementation of a strategic approach to the integration of third-country nationals in the EU as a potential driver of local growth”.<sup>58</sup> It also:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid 26.

<sup>51</sup> Howard Davies, ‘Recognition of Professional Qualifications’ (Policy Briefing, European University Association, January 2023) 4.

<sup>52</sup> ‘ESU’s Contribution to the Public Consultation on 2023 – European Year of Skills’ (*European Students’ Union*, 15 December 2022).

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, ‘Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions’ (Communication) COM(2023) 32 final, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>57</sup> European Committee of the Regions, ‘Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions’ (Resolution 2023/C 188/01) [2023] OJ C 188/1, para 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid para 35.

... welcomes the measures set out in the Skills and Talent package, including the launch of a new online job-search tool, the EU Talent Pool pilot initiative specifically for people fleeing Ukraine, and the plan to extend it to skilled non-EU workers expressing their interest in migrating to the EU, thus paving the way towards a more sustainable and inclusive approach to labour mobility and third-country solutions.<sup>59</sup>

In April 2023, the [European Parliament's report](#) on the proposal for a directive on the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents (recast) flagged the recognition of qualifications and skills of third-country nationals as a “key step for their integration into the labour market”.<sup>60</sup> It also noted that “[q]ualifications, including diplomas, certifications, as well as skills and competences acquired by a third-country national in another Member State should be recognised in the same way as those of Union citizens”.<sup>61</sup>

The [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals](#) supports early profiling of the skills of refugees, migrants and citizens of non-EU countries who are staying in the EU (third country nationals). The tool is not intended as a recognition or authentication tool, but can be used by services that assist third country nationals to support further assessment, form a basis for offering guidance, identify up-skilling needs, and support job-searching and job matching.

Other relevant frameworks for third country nationals are [Talent Partnerships](#) under the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) (2020), the [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion \(2021–2027\)](#), and the [Talent Booster Mechanism](#). In the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, support and capacity building efforts for local and regional authorities by the Commission is specifically contemplated, with explicit recognition of the importance of building strong multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels of governance to support integration and inclusion efforts.<sup>62</sup> The Talent Booster Mechanism also recognises the critical role played by local and regional authorities, and many of the projects, initiatives and programmes it encompasses aim to empower and assist regions to train, attract

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> European Parliament, ‘Report on the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council Concerning the Status of Third-Country Nationals who are Long-Term Residents (recast)’ (COM(2022)0650 – C9-0162/2022 – 2022/0134(COD)), proposed amendment 17, recital 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> European Commission, ‘Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027’ (Communication) COM/2020/758 final, 15–16.



and retain skilled workers and stimulate innovation and opportunities for high-skill jobs.

Most recently, on 15 November 2023, the Commission published [a series of new initiatives in a Skills and Talent Mobility package](#) with the stated objectives of making the EU more attractive to talent from outside, and facilitating mobility within, the EU. One component of this package of particular relevance is the Commission's [Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications of Third-country Nationals](#). Recognising that facilitating the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills gained in non-EU countries is a key enabler for the integration of third country nationals, the Recommendation outlines a set of measures to simplify and speed up the recognition of skills and qualifications. These measures are to be implemented at the national level, with the aim of developing the capacity of national recognition authorities to simplify and expedite procedures by improving comparability of third country qualifications and of how to assess jobseekers' skills. The Recommendation includes a reference to member States coordinating their "approaches to information provision and support services for the recognition of skills and qualifications of third-country nationals, at national, regional, and local level".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> European Commission, 'Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications of Third-Country Nationals' (Recommendation) C(2023) 7700 final, 14.



# Part 3: Research findings

Preliminary research was conducted, making use of the Eurostat website, to gather data on the presence of foreigners living in European regions, and the employment rates of these individuals. For the regions for which data is available, the figure below shows a breakdown by the percentage of foreigners living in the region. Whilst the largest categories are those between 5% and 10% and those between 10% and 15%, it is remarkable to note that in over 25 regions (11% of the regions examined) the migrant population exceeds 20%. Within this, eight regions have a migrant population constituting more than 30% of the population. The average percentage is 10.5%. The highest percentage is in **Luxembourg** followed by **Guyane** (France). The lowest is in **Sjeverna Hrvatska** (Croatia).

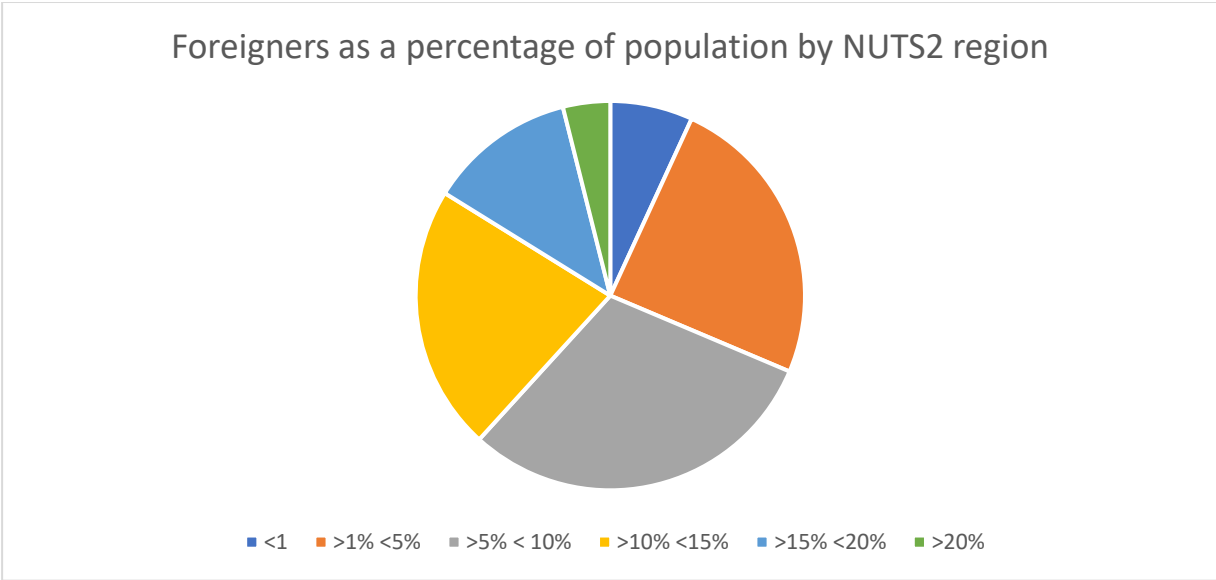


Figure 1

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)

This data is also depicted on the map below:

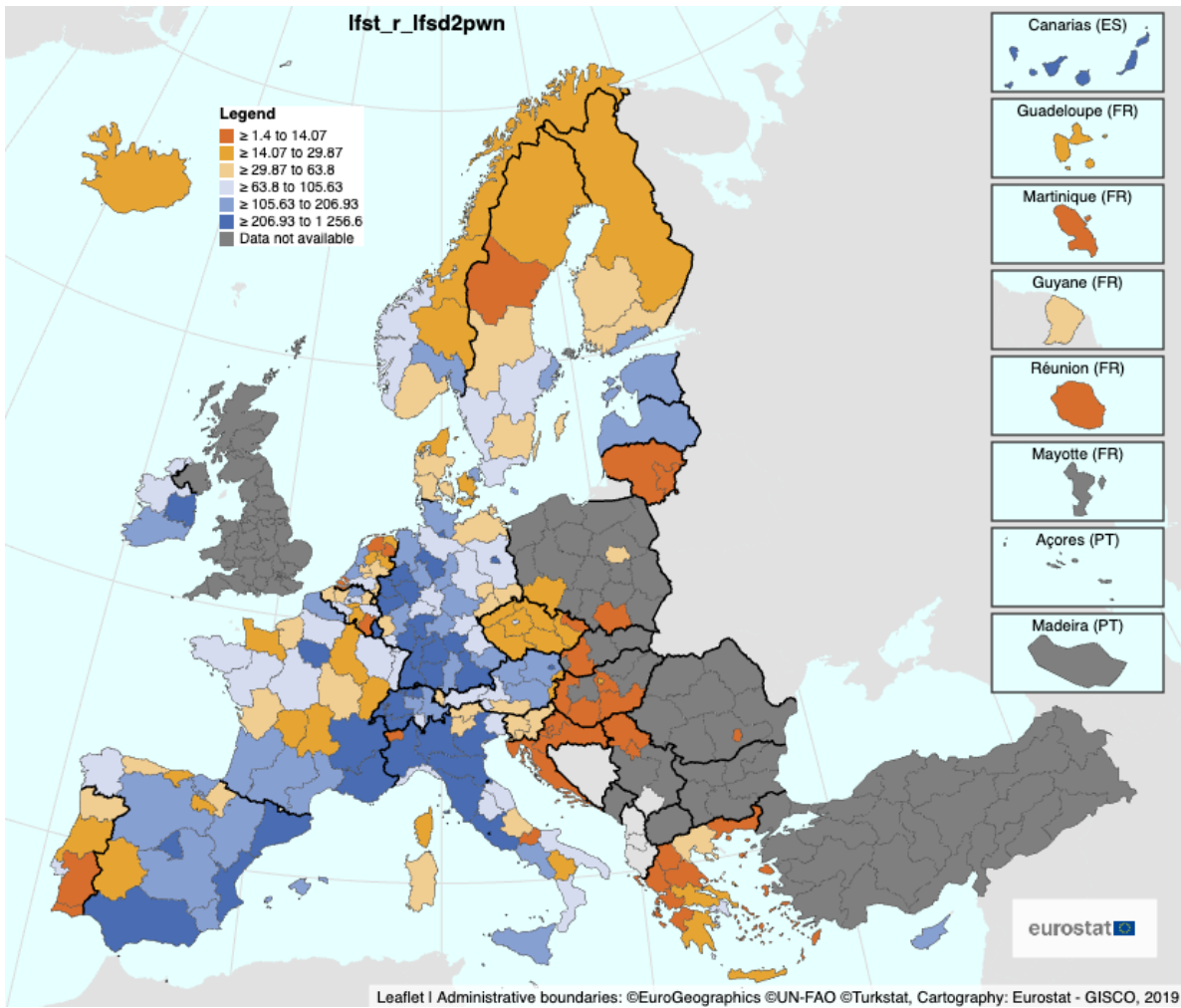
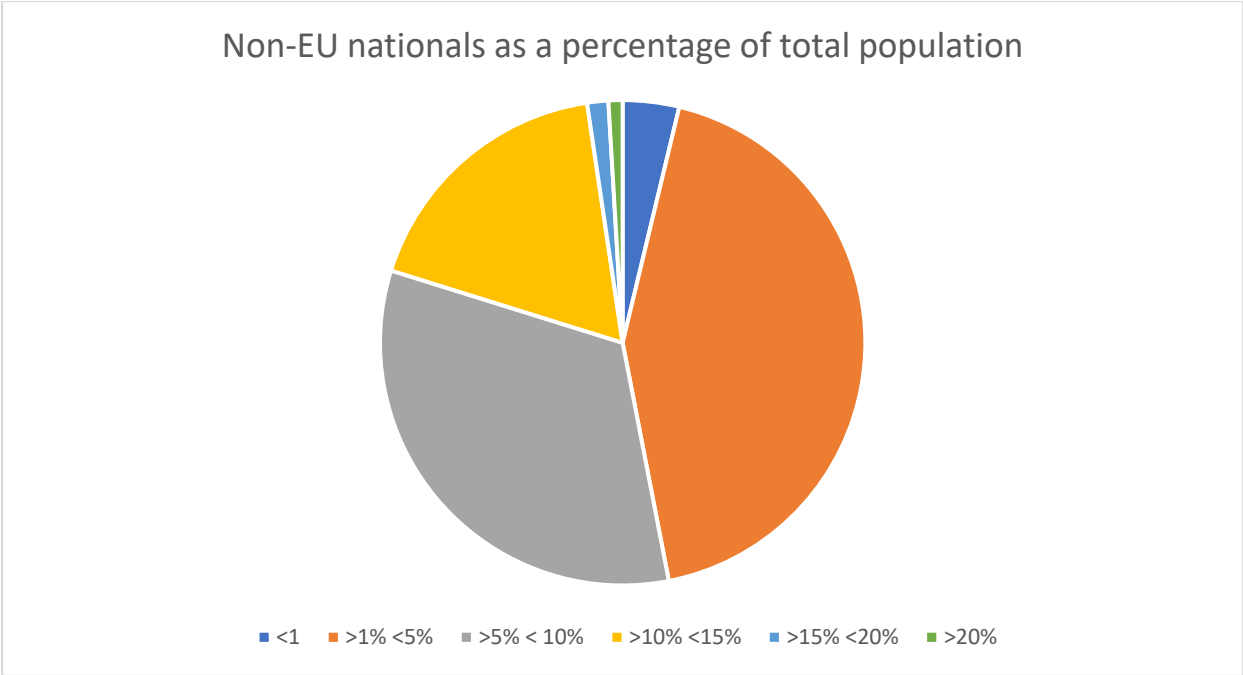


Figure 2

(Source: Eurostat. Unit of measure: thousand persons)

Similar dynamics apply when looking at the percentage of non-EU nationals living in these regions, although the numbers are lower. Of 213 regions, only two (less than 1%) have a non-EU population of over 20%, with the largest category being between 1% and 5%, followed by between 5% and 10%.



*Figure 3*

*(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)*

Of the regions (NUTS-2) for which data is available (n=197), the employment rate (ages 15-64) for foreign nationals is only higher than the overall employment rate in 17% of cases (n=34), whilst it is lower in 83% of cases (n=163). Data is not available for 52 regions. The number is even lower if one looks only at non-EU27 nationals. In this context, the employment rate for non-EU nationals is only higher in 11% of regions where data is available (n=21), whilst it is lower in 89% of cases (n=170).

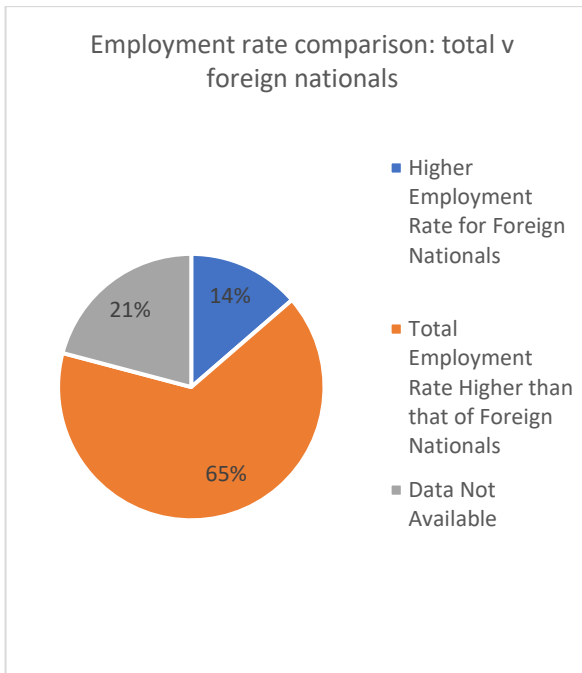


Figure 4

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)

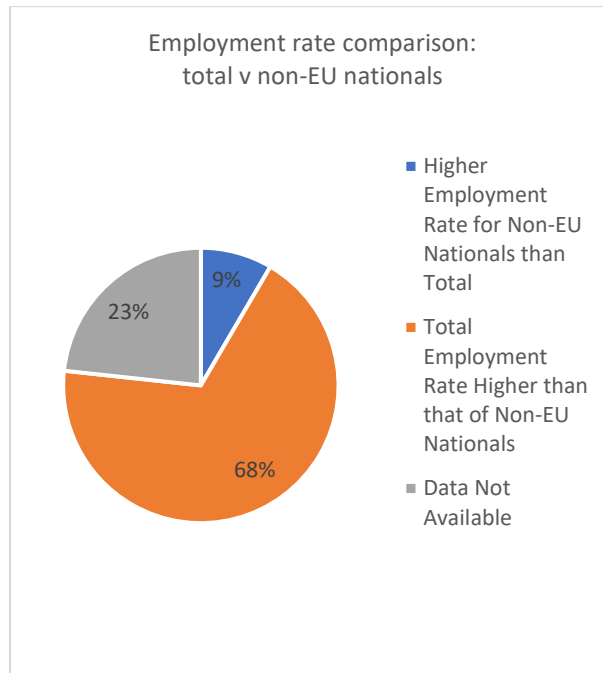


Figure 5

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)

These trends are exacerbated when one looks at the situation for persons with a tertiary education. It is only in 6% of regions that the employment rate for foreign nationals is higher than the total for the region (n=8), with that number diminishing further to 3% of regions in the context of non-EU nationals (n=4). Data is not available for 113 regions, and the above calculations are made solely on the basis of regions for which data is available via Eurostat. Challenges in the recognition of qualifications can help explain some (but not all) of these findings.

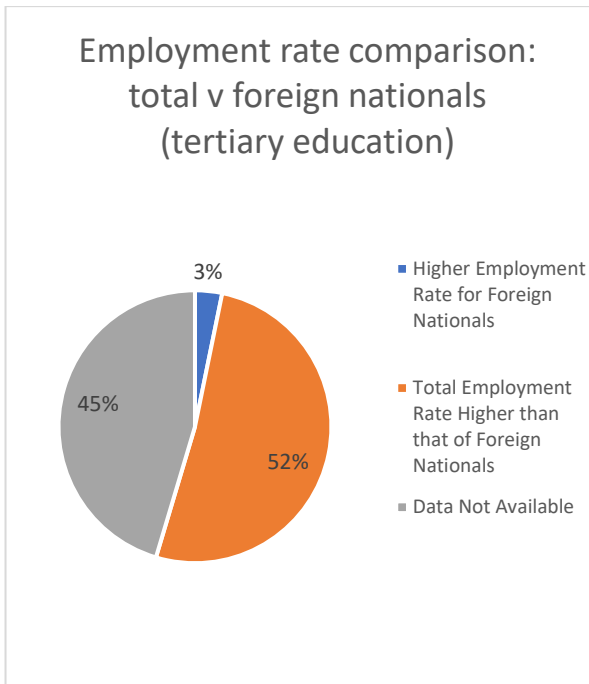


Figure 6

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)

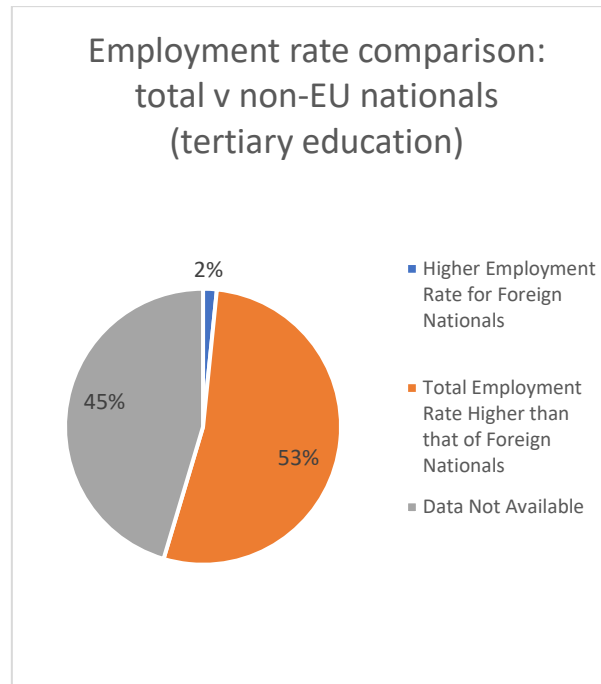


Figure 7

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: Eurostat)

## Survey findings

For the purposes of this research, we interacted with 45 entities representing municipalities/cities of various sizes (n=36), regions (n=2), intermediary entities (in countries with 3 levels of subnational government) (n=5) and others (n=2). [See Figure 1 below].

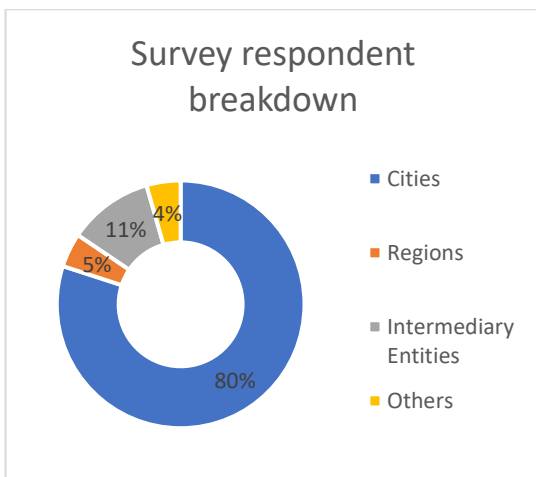


Figure 8

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

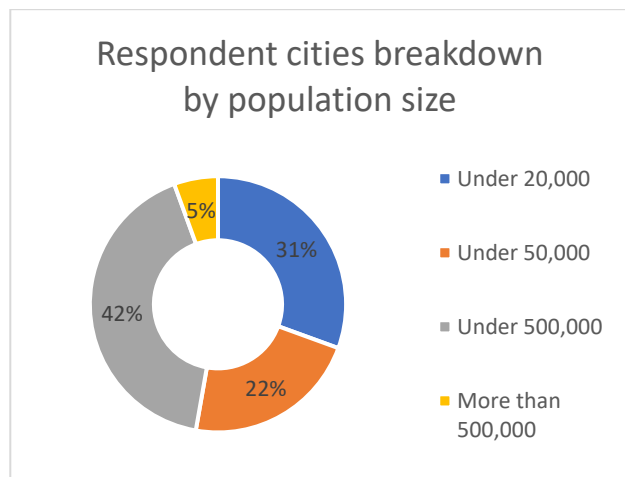


Figure 9

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

Cities interacted with included 11 with under 20,000 inhabitants, eight with under 50,000 inhabitants and 15 with between 50,000 and 500,000 inhabitants [See Figure 9 above]. Two of the cities interacted with had more than 500,000 inhabitants: **Lodz** (Poland) and **Vienna** (Austria). [See Figure 9 above].

All main regions in Europe were represented in the questionnaire, including north (represented by Sweden), south (represented by Malta, Spain and Portugal), east (represented by Romania, Czechia, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia and Estonia) and central (including Belgium and Austria). [See Figure 10 below]. There is a high representation of municipalities from Portugal in the survey (22 respondents) which reflects a limitation of the research.

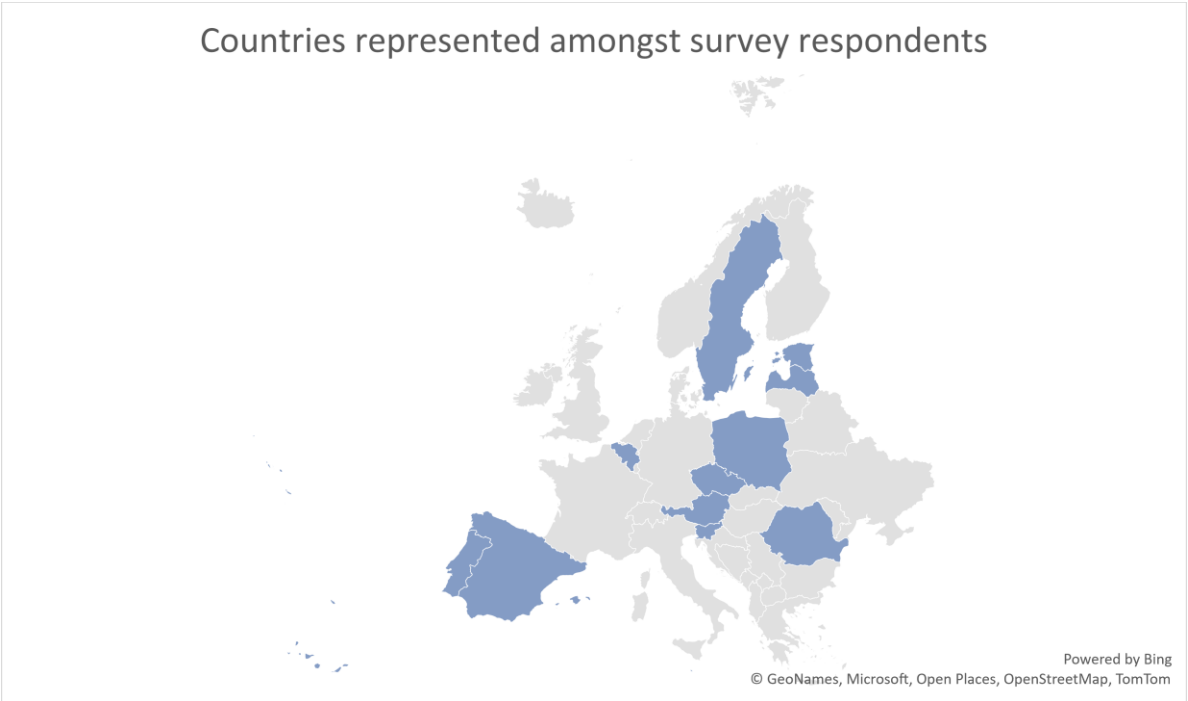


Figure 10

(Map: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

The breakdown of respondents by country is shown in Figure 11 below:



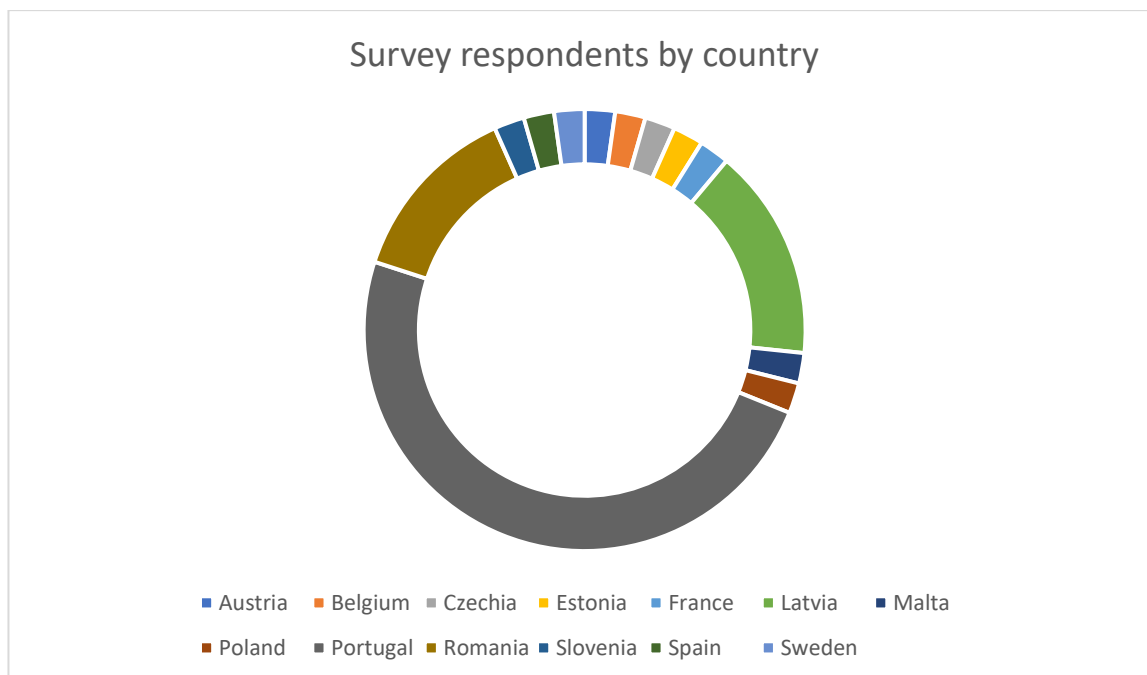


Figure 11

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

**Expected labour market needs that non-EU workers could contribute to addressing**

Of the 45 entities, 26 reported that the city/region they represented had identified labour shortages that could be filled by non-EU workers, with only five stating that such shortages had not been identified. 11 respondents noted that they did not know the answer to the question, two noted that they would prefer not to answer, and one respondent left the answer blank.

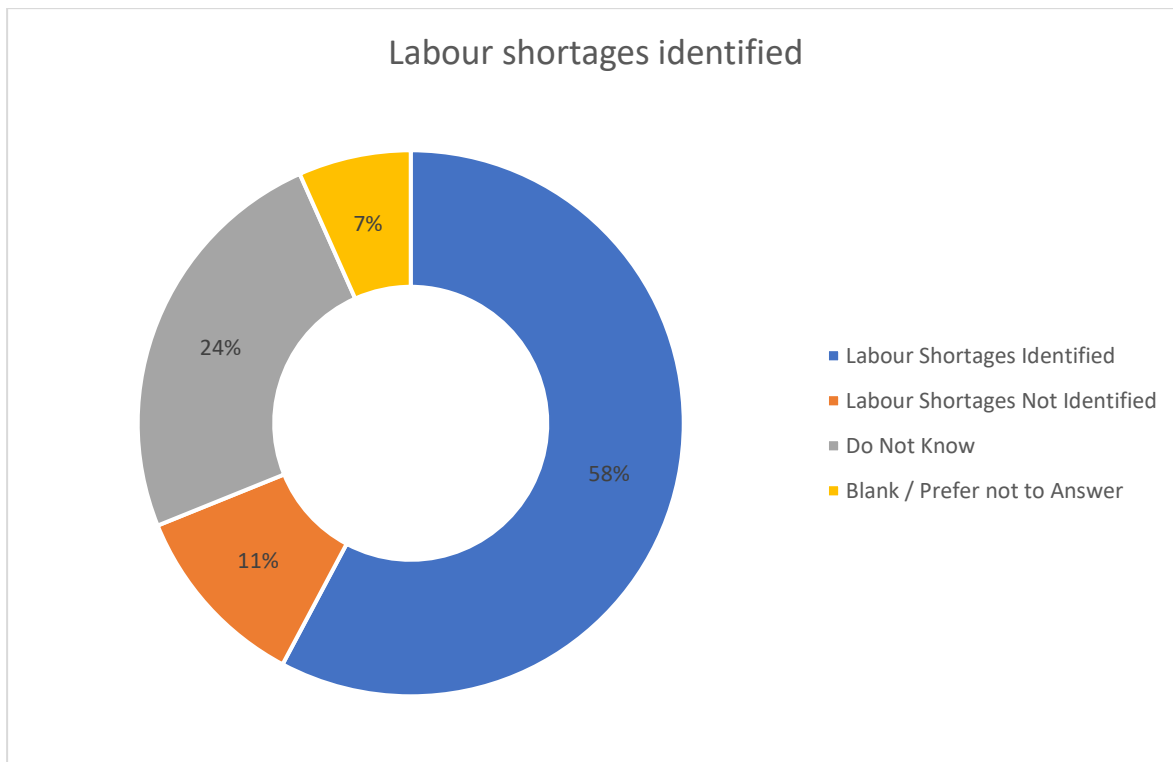


Figure 12

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

The ‘I do not know’ answer can reflect several situations, including one where the respondent might not feel that they are aware of the determinations of the city, but it might also reflect situations where the needs have only been identified informally or where labour shortages have been identified but a reliance on non-EU workers has not been agreed as the response to those shortages.

These findings support other findings and statements, including EU documents that highlight labour shortages across Europe having a significant impact at the regional and local levels. For instance, one respondent noted that the city they represent is dealing with a depopulation problem, whilst another highlighted that the city’s workforce is at capacity due to a fast-growing economy in the city and surrounding region (with an unemployment rate of under 1%).

Of those that responded that no such shortages had been identified, one noted areas where needs exist (presumably this was an error in response to the question). Two other responses are worth noting. One highlighted that no specific needs were identified by the municipality because it is integrated into a larger metropolitan area which itself attracts enough migrants to fulfil those needs. This reflects broader research on migration to and integration in smaller cities which are association (formally or merely through proximity) with larger metropolitan

areas which found that integration and migration in such localities is a side effect of the attractiveness of that larger metropolitan area.

Another reflected on the municipality's strategy to increase the employment rate within the city. This is an interesting finding highlighting migration as a second or last resort to address labour market needs and instead focusing on migrant workers as competitors for local workforce. Indeed, the understanding here is that efforts are being made/should be made to reduce the unemployment rate of locals before migrant workers are brought in. The local-migrant workforce competition is a factor that is likely to be on the minds of various regional and local authorities especially ones with high unemployment rates. An analysis of what 'needs' migrant workers can fulfil that the local workforce is unable to would help provide a more comprehensive picture of the reality being faced.

Whilst the responses are not representative, they do reflect a number of interesting trends in terms of required skills. Several economic sectors emerge as particularly in need, including agriculture, construction, homecare and domestic work, care workers and orderlies, manufacturing, hospitality and tourism affairs. Other key areas of need include healthcare professionals, social workers, IT workers and teachers. These responses highlight the need to pay adequate attention not only to the recognition of formal academic qualifications but equally to the validation of skills.

When asked about the impact of implementing measures at the local and regional level to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and skills, the largest portion of respondents (n=25) noted that this would significantly improve the region/city's ability to fill labour market gaps. A third of respondents (n=15) noted that such measures will significantly strengthen EU competitiveness whilst seven responded that such measures would not have much of an impact in addressing the labour market gaps. 10 respondents did not answer the question.

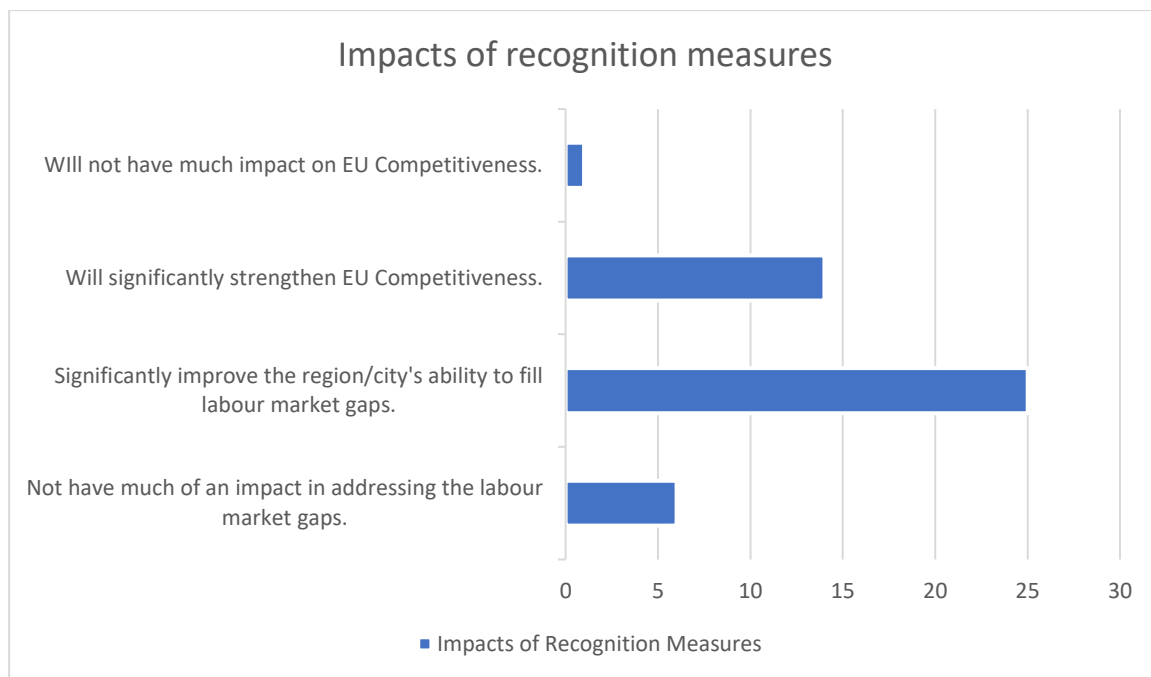


Figure 13

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

An issue raised by some of the respondents was inter-regional competition for the best workers, especially in fields of particular economic growth and need. Regional innovation strategies were identified as a key solution to this issue, to maintain the attractiveness of particular cities and regions to a migrant workforce. Several strategies of this kind were identified in the European Commission’s 2017 communication on [Strengthening Innovation in Europe’s Regions: Strategies for Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth](#) including boosting the innovation and competitiveness potential of regions through ‘smart specialisation’, increasing interregional cooperation, and targeting investments in innovative sectors with significant growth potential.<sup>64</sup>

### Attracting foreign workers: limited competencies as a barrier for regions and cities

When asked whether the city or region represented undertakes efforts to attract foreign workers, 16 of the 45 respondents noted they do not undertake any measures to attract foreign workers, whilst five noted that although they do not currently do so, they are considering the possibility of such measures. Thirteen noted that they welcome non-EU workers, but they **do not actively recruit**, and

<sup>64</sup> European Commission, ‘Strengthening Innovation in Europe’s Regions: Strategies for Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth’ (Communication) COM(2017) 376 final, 2–4.

only three highlighted that they proactively encourage non-EU workers to migrate to their city or region. This response can be explained by reference to the relative power (competence and relative economic weight) of municipalities and regions to impact migration policy.

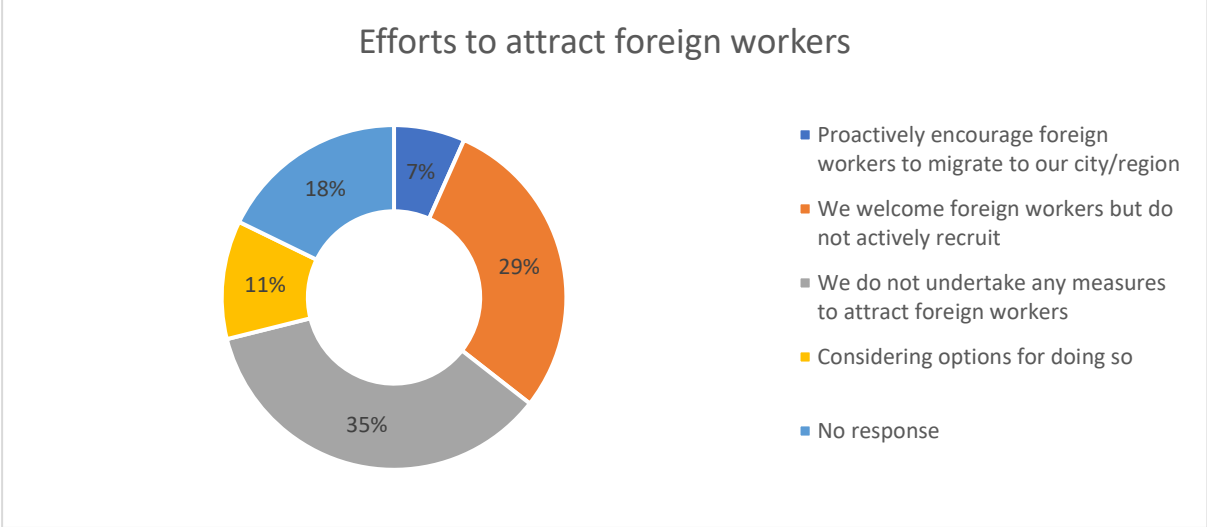


Figure 14  
(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

Efforts have tended to focus on integration more broadly, with municipalities offering integration support services directly or through local organizations.

Respondents noted the **dynamics between local and national authorities'** structures in the field of migration as a particular barrier in this context, highlighting that many competences vest at the national level, which often results in slow, bureaucratic processes that the municipalities have little to no control over. For those which are welcoming to non-EU migrants, the reasons varied from requests by the business community ('Businesses in our city/region ask us to do so'), to civil society advocacy and to having undertaken a needs assessment and as a result endeavouring to meet identified needs. Others have noted academic institutions as particularly keen on attracting migrants as students.

This highlights the **importance of cross-sectoral cooperation** in both undertaking needs' assessments and identifying possible channels for addressing them. For those who do not undertake measures to attract non-EU workers, the reasons provided were split between not having identified a need for non-EU workers and receiving enough non-EU workers without the need for direct efforts to recruit them. Others again noted that migration management structures make it very difficult for local and regional governments to have any influence, and

indeed in some cases that proactive and positive measures intended to support integration are hindered by administrative barriers. Some went as far as noting a “conflict between local needs and government politics”. One respondent highlighted difficulties in the integration of migrants generally (including due to language barriers) as a key challenge and, as a result, a reason to avoid efforts to attract more non-EU workers.

Measures intended to support migrant integration (such as the ones set out below) are implemented by cities alone in some cases, but in other cases they are implemented in partnership (and with funding) with international organizations (most notably the EU), business organizations, national governments and other cities. In some cases, such as the situation in Romania, the measures are actually measures of the national authorities implemented in the city but not by the city administration itself. The breakdown of the relevant responses is provided in Figure 14 below.

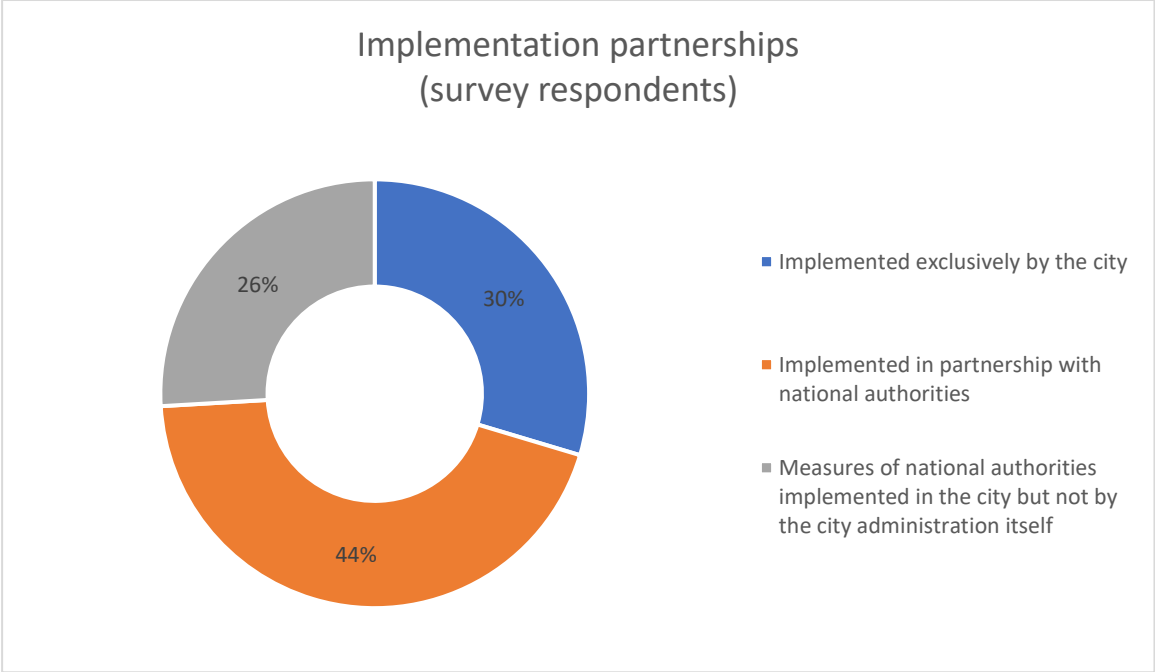


Figure 15

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

When asked about how measures were funded, of the relevant responses (n=27), the largest portion (n=10) noted that the measures were supported by funding from the national government, with 8 respondents referring to measures being funded exclusively by the city/region and 7 referring to funding from the European Union. 2 respondents referred to the measures being supported by funding from business organizations.

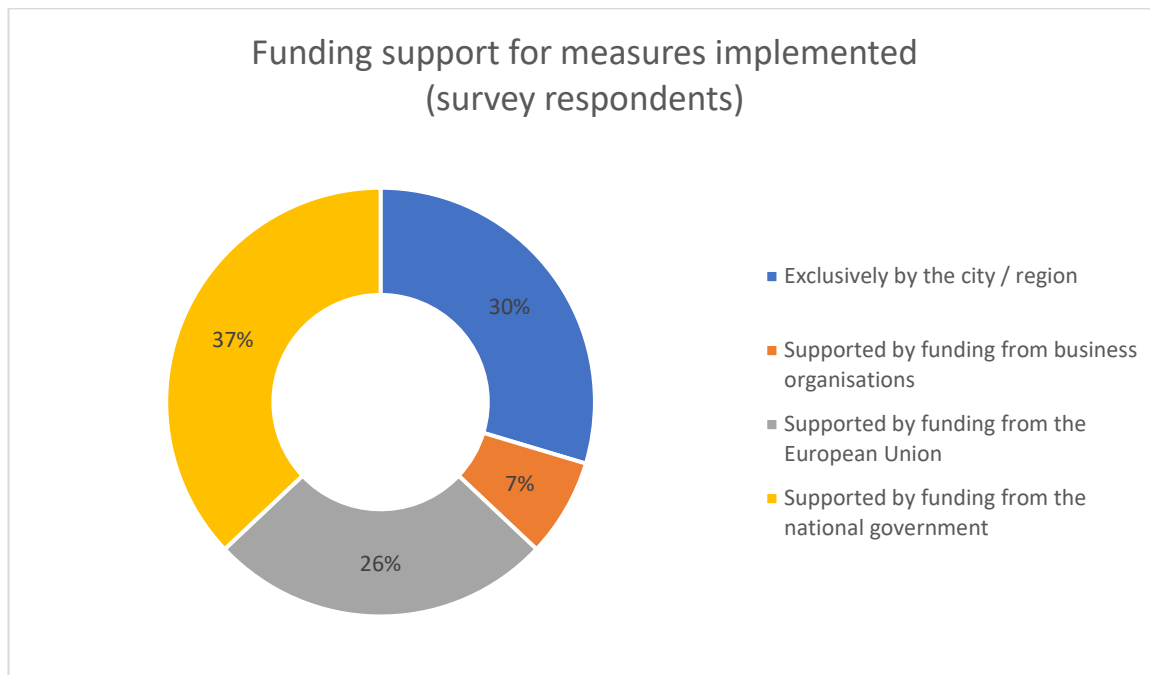


Figure 16

(Graph: own elaboration. Data source: survey results)

### Promoting integration at the local level

Given the **limited competences of the sub-national level** in matters of migration, most respondents highlighted that the measures implemented at the city or regional level are not intended to attract individuals from other countries but rather **aimed at improving the living conditions of migrants already present in the area**. As one respondent phrased it:

We don't take measures to attract non-EU workers but instead we focus on integrating them and assuring they can have a better life than before.<sup>65</sup>

**Vila Nova de Famalicão** (Portugal), for example, has developed a [municipal plan for the integration of migrants](#), organised training sessions with public services to welcome migrants and developed a reception support guide. The plan, which is aimed at “building an open, diverse and intercultural” municipality, is implemented by a platform integrated by 17 municipal entities, including health centres and police bodies, and is distributed in six branches: reception and integration, labour market, language, education and training, health, culture, and

<sup>65</sup> Survey respondent.

public participation. Beneficiaries of this programme include more than 2,000 third-country nationals of 67 nationalities, with most of them coming from Brazil, Ukraine and India.<sup>66</sup>

In **Lodz** (Poland), various institutions have been set up to support third-country nationals, including the Investor Service and Foreign Cooperation Office of the City of Lodz (Entrepreneurship and University Cooperation Unit), Lodz For Investor (Invest in Lodz), The Urban Activity Factory, Lodz Multicultural Centre, International Hub University of Lodz. There is a clear sense of joint purpose and mutual benefit between the city and the University in this context.

Other similar initiatives can also be identified in the extant literature. In **Madrid** (Spain), for example, a coordination procedure known as [the CONNECTION Project](#) was developed, as part of a European initiative, between the Employment Agency and the Municipal Office for Information, Guidance and Support for the Social Integration of the Immigrant Population. The project aims to effectively support the empowerment of migrant workers in the city of Madrid, and seeks to create a new and more direct channel of communication to reach migrant workers. Similar initiatives have been established in **Antwerp** (Belgium), **Tampere** (Finland) and **Sofia** (Bulgaria).

**Município de Vila do Porto** (Portugal) has sought to make the city or region more attractive for migrant workers, including through the creation of co-working spaces for digital nomads. The city has promoted itself as one of the most attractive cities for digital nomads and remote workers, facilitating remote work through these spaces and offering a more peaceful lifestyle than the capital, Lisbon.

Others have focused on the recognition of professional competencies. For example, the Ministry of Equality and Equal Opportunity of the Government of **Catalonia** (Spain) has noted a service that aims to harness the talent of foreign workers.

### *Recognition of qualifications: support and advice services*

Whilst the competence vests in national authorities, and programmes and processes for the recognition of qualifications and skills are generally developed

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Plano Municipal “Mais Integrar” para Imigrantes Avançar’ (*Famalicão Camara Municipal*, 1 February 2022) <<https://www.famalicao.pt/?it=printnew&co=43933>> accessed 2 November 2023.



at the national level, various cities and regions have engaged in processes to facilitate access to information on those processes. There are numerous examples of this, including the website of the [Dublin City Council](#) (Ireland), which provides information about the processes for searching for degree equivalence information and for acquiring tailored support from the national institution tasked with academic recognition of foreign qualifications (NARIC Ireland).

Similarly, information on the recognition and validation of foreign university qualifications and studies is available on a dedicated page on the website of the [Barcelona City Council](#) (Spain). The page provides details of requirements to be met, processes and steps to be followed, documentation to be provided and associated costs, as well as contact details of the Ministry of Education and Professional Training of Spain, the body responsible for recognition and validation processes. An online portal for the filing of applications for recognition and validation of qualifications is also available on the same website.

Prompted by high rates of unemployment in its immigrant population, the **City of Malmö** (Sweden) has operated a Centre for Validation of Occupational Skills since 2000. The centre assists with diploma verification and the development of a ‘qualification portfolio’, as part of the introduction program for new immigrants to Sweden. Guidance activities include skills assessment, skills testing, vocational training, informing, advising, with a particular focus on assisting refugees without documentation or proof of qualifications. Since its inception, the centre has assisted thousands of immigrants with recognition of qualifications and sourcing employment.<sup>67</sup>

Others, including respondents to the survey, noted the hosting of service counters for national services. In **Catalonia** (Spain), the Servei d’Acompanyament al Reconeixement Universitari (SARI) office will provide advice on the recognition of both university and non-university education in Spain.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the **Câmara Municipal de Moimenta da Beira** (Portugal) reported that support is provided through a local centre for the support of the integration of migrants known as Centro Local de Apoio à Integração de Migrantes (CLAIM). Others, like **Vienna** (Austria), reported that they provide financial support for such recognition efforts.

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<sup>67</sup> Anja van Heelsum, ‘Case Study on Diversity Policy in Employment and Service Provision’ (Report, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, May 2008) 21–22.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Servei d’Acompanyament al Reconeixement Universitari’ (*Generalitat de Catalunya*, 15 May 2023) <<https://igualtat.gencat.cat/ca/ambits-dactuacio/antiracisme-migracions-i-refugi/serveis/servei-dacompanyament-al-reconeixement-universitari/>> accessed 26 October 2023.

## Working in partnership with civil society stakeholders

Some municipalities work with civil society stakeholders to identify skills gaps and needs in specific industries, and match migrants seeking employment with employers. For example, the **Comunidad Autonoma de Madrid** (Spain) has worked in partnership with various civil society organisations, including the Fundacion Tomillo and the Fundacion Laboral de la Construccion, to support integration efforts for migrants. In addition, since 2005, the *Oficinas Municipales de Información, Orientación y Acompañamiento para la Integración Social de la Población Inmigrante* (Municipal Office of Information, Guidance and Support for the Social Integration of the Immigrant Population) has offered a series of services for the migrant population in Madrid, including Spanish lessons, assistance with drafting and tailoring CVs, recognition and validation of qualifications, and careers counselling. Two offices have been established in areas heavily populated by migrants and have been managed by La Rueda since 2011, an NGO with the objective of helping the most vulnerable populations of Madrid.<sup>69</sup>

**Brno City** (Czech Republic) provides financial support to the Brno Expat Centre, which supports integration in the city through legal, housing, employment and family support including activities such as kindergartens and schooling.

In **Catalonia** (Spain), non-profit organisation *Associació d’Ajuda Mútua a Immigrants a Catalunya* (AMIC) provides advisory services to immigrants, with the primary aim of enabling the recognition of their qualifications and supporting further professional development. The service offered by AMIC includes guidance on the procedures for skills and qualifications recognition and validation, review of documentation and preparation of files.<sup>70</sup> AMIC is connected to a major Spanish trade union, *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), and works in cooperation with the municipality in delivering its services.

## Sector-specific bridging programmes

In some countries, sector-specific bridging programmes have been introduced, offering educational support to enable migrants with overseas qualifications to

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<sup>69</sup> Raphael Garcia, ‘Madrid Focuses on Integration and Jobs for Migrants and Refugees’ (*Eurocities*, 8 October 2021) <<https://eurocities.eu/stories/madrid-focuses-on-integration-and-jobs-for-migrants-and-refugees/>> accessed 19 October 2023.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Advice for the Approval or Validation of Studies’ (*Associació d’Ajuda Mútua a Immigrants a Catalunya*, 2019) <<https://www.associacioamic.cat/ca/homologacio-de-titols/>> accessed 2 November 2023.

meet local requirements for admission to particular professions. For instance, since around 2005, the Swedish government has financed bridging programmes for lawyers, teachers, physicians, nurses, dentists and veterinarians.<sup>71</sup> Although these programmes are often administered at a national level, local authorities may be involved in their delivery or facilitation and greater localisation of such efforts could go a long way to supporting cities and regions in overcoming their labour shortages. Again, taking the example of Sweden, local authorities in some areas have built upon these national bridging programmes and targeted refugees and asylum seekers for ‘fast-track’ bridging courses, particularly in high-demand industries such as healthcare.<sup>72</sup>

### *Language as a channel towards migrant integration*

For many cities, language acquisition is one of the most important steps to integration and access to the labour market. Many language and socio-cultural classes are proposed at the local level to migrants and refugees, like in **Nuremberg** (Germany) or **Munich** (Germany). In **Milan** (Italy), the city has created a [dedicated website](#) where 115 stakeholders (such as organisations providing language courses) communicate their course offerings. To better respond to the important needs of language acquisition, and with EU co-financing, **Paris** (France) developed the [platform ‘EIF-FEL’](#), gathering and improving coherence among the linguistic offerings in the city. Every year since 2016, the city has also organised a call for projects, [‘REFUG’](#), to fund French classes for asylum seekers and refugees. The aim is to make French courses available at the earliest possible stage in the integration process.

The region **Dalarna** (Sweden) offers new workers moving to the region to work in the health sector a 22 week-long Swedish course. The course is full-time and is aimed to prepare participants for the Swedish level C1 test which is the required level of Swedish one needs to apply for the relevant Swedish license to practice. An educational salary is paid to participants for undertaking the course.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately the programme is limited to EU nationals and those holding EU qualifications, but such a programme nevertheless reflects a potential approach

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Niknami and Lena Schröder, ‘Using Bridging Courses to Make Better Use of Migrants Skills’ (Presentation, Stockholm University, February 2014) <<https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/schroder.pdf>> accessed 20 October 2023.

<sup>72</sup> Emina Hadziabdic and others, ‘Experiences of Nurses Educated Outside the European Union of a Swedish Bridging Program and the Program’s Role in their Integration into the Nursing Profession: A Qualitative Interview Study’ (2021) 20 *BMC Nursing* 7.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Our Offer’ (Region Dalarna, 2023) <<https://www.regiondalarna.se/jobb/career/moving-to-dalarna---our-offer/>> accessed 26 October 2023.

that could also work for non-EU nationals provided that recognition of qualifications and broader residence processes can be facilitated at the national level.

### *Counselling and vocational training*

Many cities and regions have also engaged in efforts geared towards integration in the labour market through cooperation with third parties such as private partners, businesses, NGOs and civil society (such as **Nuremberg** (Germany) and **Oslo** (Norway)), or through job counselling or vocational training aimed at the promotion of asylum seeker inclusion in the local context, like in **Milan** (Italy) and **Munich** (Germany).<sup>74</sup> As noted in a recent OECD study on local integration of migrants and refugees in Europe:

... some cities have tried various innovative approaches to integration service delivery, including working with local civil society groups to provide complementary integration measures (language, cultural and vocational classes, skills assessments, internships and volunteering experiences, etc.) as early as possible following migrant arrivals.<sup>75</sup>

The report refers to a project and programmes put in place in several cities and regions. For example, **Ammerland** (Germany), has put in place a project which aims to connect employers and prospective employees with a migration background, preventing future shortages of a skilled workforce in the local labour market. The project has two main components: the provision of counsellors to help asylum seekers, refugees and migrants find internships, support them during their application processes and in obtaining recognition of their qualifications; and the organisation of a network of employers by organising events in collaboration with the chamber of commerce and two other employer associations.<sup>76</sup> The OECD report also describes similar partnerships between local and regional governments and NGOs, businesses and civil society in Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris, among others.<sup>77</sup>

Also, **Nuremberg** (Germany) has strengthened cooperation with businesses and civil society to integrate migrants in the labour market, including through

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<sup>74</sup> Eurocities, 'Cities and Migrants: Implementing the Integrating Cities Charter' (Report, October 2018) 15.

<sup>75</sup> *Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees* (OECD 2018) 18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* 157–158.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid* 158.

programmes aimed at facilitating training and work for young refugees and supporting businesses employing refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>78</sup> **Stockholm** (Sweden) has also financed labour market activities and vocational training.

### *Cities implementing solutions for integration, with employment implications*

A number of cities have also implemented solutions geared towards integration that have had implications for employment rates and labour market inclusion. For example, in **Helsinki** (Finland), the City Council allocated EUR 10 million for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in autumn 2015 and a further EUR 2 million for the design of measures to access the labour market, which facilitated the establishment of the Adult Skills Centre for Migrants at the Education Department.<sup>79</sup> This initiative offers a variety of courses, lectures and events in collaboration with various organizations and partner associations, and provides training to migrants for strengthening their basic and digital skills, including literacy and writing education, as well as Finnish language courses and social networking opportunities.

In addition, the **Barcelona City Council** (Spain) has created the [“Nausica” refugee shelter programme](#), a complimentary reception programme to the state programme with a budget of EUR 1 million per year. The programme provides temporary shelter for refugees and provides them with a comprehensive work plan for social support, psychological and professional assistance, language learning, legal guidance, training, labour advice and help with schooling for young children and teenagers. The programme has shown significant success in enhancing social and labour integration, and saw 46% of working age participants find jobs in 2019.

### *Opening non-migrant specific initiatives to migrants, and making them accessible*

Many cities have also engaged in efforts to open up non-migrant specific initiatives to migrants, and make such initiatives more accessible to them. In **Barcelona** (Spain), the municipality is piloting a [social and employment integration model](#) for individuals receiving the minimum wage, including migrants and other vulnerable groups. The programme offers individualized and

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<sup>78</sup> Eurocities, ‘Cities and Migrants: Implementing the Integrating Cities Charter’ (Report, October 2018) 13.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid 15.

specialized support, basic training, training oriented to labour sectors, job insertion, entrepreneurship, community participation and exit support for all beneficiaries.

In addition, global initiatives such as the [Global Business Coalition for Education](#) (although not migrant-specific) are open to migrants and can contribute to matching migrants' skills with the needs and demands of employers.

### Access to services

**Barcelona** (Spain), **Zurich** (Switzerland) and **Paris** (France) have each created or are in the process of creating civic cards that enable migrants to identify themselves to different service providers without exposing their residence status. (Model followed: Don't ask don't tell policy – Toronto Solidarity City Network activists spread information about municipal services throughout the city, and a hotline was set up for people to report cases where access was not adequately provided).

### Regularisation programmes

Some jurisdictions have also implemented regularisation programmes aimed at assisting undocumented and irregular migrants. One such example is the Papyrus programme implemented in **Geneva** (Switzerland) in 2017, where the city authority, local civil society organisations and unions lobbied the federal government to agree to a regularisation scheme that would operate within the existing Swiss regularisation framework. This initiative was framed as a humanitarian and labour market regularisation programme, and formulated five criteria for defining who was eligible for regularisation under this program.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Centre de Contact Suisses Immigrés, 'Operation Papyrus – Practical Information' (2017) <<https://ccsi.ch/help-and-information/operation-papyrus-practical-information/>> accessed 23 October 2023.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this research can briefly be summed up in two key points. First, cities and regions are facing labour shortages and are likely to face further shortages moving forward. This is now well acknowledged. Second, restrictions in terms of competencies and resources mean that cities and regions are limited in what they can do to attract foreign workers. Most of those efforts have focused on ‘soft’ measures mostly intended to support people who are already living in the country, implemented directly by the municipal authorities or in partnerships with local organizations. Cities and regions have sought to supplement, through advice, financial support and other measures, participation in national programmes.

However, in many European countries, there is a distinct sense that the gap between the national and local level is a significant barrier to local efforts to meet labour market and related developmental needs. One area in which this is manifested is the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills which remains a competence exercised at the national level and for which cities and regions are often limited to providing information and support only. However, the agility of the regional and local level is evident in this research – whilst they may not be in a position make certain decisions, regions and cities across Europe have engaged in efforts to make themselves more attractive to migrants – supporting migrant integration at least of those who are already living in those regions and cities. The situation will, moreover, only be further improved if the measures set out in the Commission’s recent [Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications of Third-country Nationals](#) are adopted by member States and skills and qualification recognition processes are simplified and expedited at the national level.

## ***Recommendations***

*Recommendations for stakeholders at EU level, including the Committee of Regions and the European Commission:*

1. **Identify and support local solutions:** EU actors, including the Committee of Regions, should ensure that measures seeking to avoid the talent “development trap” move beyond recognition of local concerns about national solutions. Those measures should instead seek local solutions for those problems, supporting cities and regions in meeting their own needs to facilitate services and reduce administrative barriers.
2. **Provide opportunities to promote cities to talent:** EU actors, most notably the European Commission, should provide opportunities for cities and regions to showcase their approach and highlight their needs in recruiting foreign workers. This could be done through Member State diplomatic missions in chambers of commerce in various non-EU countries.
3. **Support idea generation and sharing initiatives:** EU actors, including the Committee of Regions, should convene sandpit initiatives, in close cooperation with civil society, to support idea generation. This would facilitate a forum for cooperation of cities and regions to attract foreign workers to their localities, and share experiences in their work with national authorities to overcome some of the administrative hurdles that have been faced so far.

*Recommendation for stakeholders at the European, national, regional and local level:*

**Improve cooperation and multi-level governance:** Stakeholders at the European, national regional and local levels should develop and/or strengthen mechanisms of cooperation to ensure that the needs of cities and regions are adequately considered when making decisions at the national level.



*Recommendation for stakeholders at the national level, in collaboration with regional and local actors:*

**Greater role for cities and regions in recognition of qualifications and validation of skills:** National stakeholders should consider that localising processes for recognition of qualifications could support the delivery of more holistic services for migrants at the local level, supporting the building of the integration bond between newly arrived migrants and their new local communities and municipal authorities.

\*

\* \*

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## List of abbreviations

AMIC: Associació d'Ajuda Mútua a Immigrants a Catalunya  
CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training  
CLAIM: Centro Local de Apoio à Integração de Migrantes  
CoR: European Committee of the Regions  
EU: European Union  
MIPEX: Migrant Integration Policy Index  
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
SARI: Servei d'Acompanyament al Reconeixement Universitari  
UGT: Unión General de Trabajadores



## European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

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