

MATCH
HIRING AFRICAN TALENTS

LOOKING AT LABOUR MOBILITY INITIATIVES FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR PERSPECTIVE: KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Report of the Dedicated Workshops



This project is funded by the
European Union's asylum Migration
and Integration Fund

Introduction

The present report presents a summary of the views expressed by companies from the private sector established in the four EU Member States participating to the MATCH project which seeks to address workforce challenges by enabling young professionals from Nigeria and Senegal to work for companies in Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg or the Netherlands. The perspectives of the private sector were gathered through on-line awareness raising sessions and dedicated workshops aiming at highlighting the benefits of legal pathways for migration and skills partnerships with Africa.¹ Careful listening and dialogue with companies allowed the project partners to better understand the concerns and motivations of companies in joining a project such as the MATCH project. Together with surveys and data collection, exchanges with companies are also deemed to be essential to follow closely the evolution of the labour market and stay agile to unexpected developments.

As of April 2021, the project was presented in 12 awareness raising sessions in digital format² with an overall attendance of 188 companies. The present report also includes the outcome of bilateral meetings with 60 companies, which have manifested an interest in joining the MATCH project. The majority of these companies are medium to intermediary size companies and they operate in diverse sectors of activity, such as: ICT, engineering, telecom, pharmaceutical, transport, infrastructure, manufacturing, health care, and the food industry (agriculture).³ Although this report is based on the views of a sample of companies, it offers a comprehensive overview of the concerns and key consideration raised by private companies. The report covers the following aspects:

- The scope of the MATCH project;
- The operational steps underlying the pre-selection of the talents;
- The administrative steps needed to apply for a work and a residence permit – “single permit”
- The costs and the legal obligations for the potential employers;
- The flexibility of the labour mobility scheme
- The measures available for the smooth onboarding of the talents

The conclusions of the report include some recommendations for the future labour mobility initiatives funded by the European Commission.

THE FIGURES



IN 12
AWARENESS
RAISING
SESSIONS

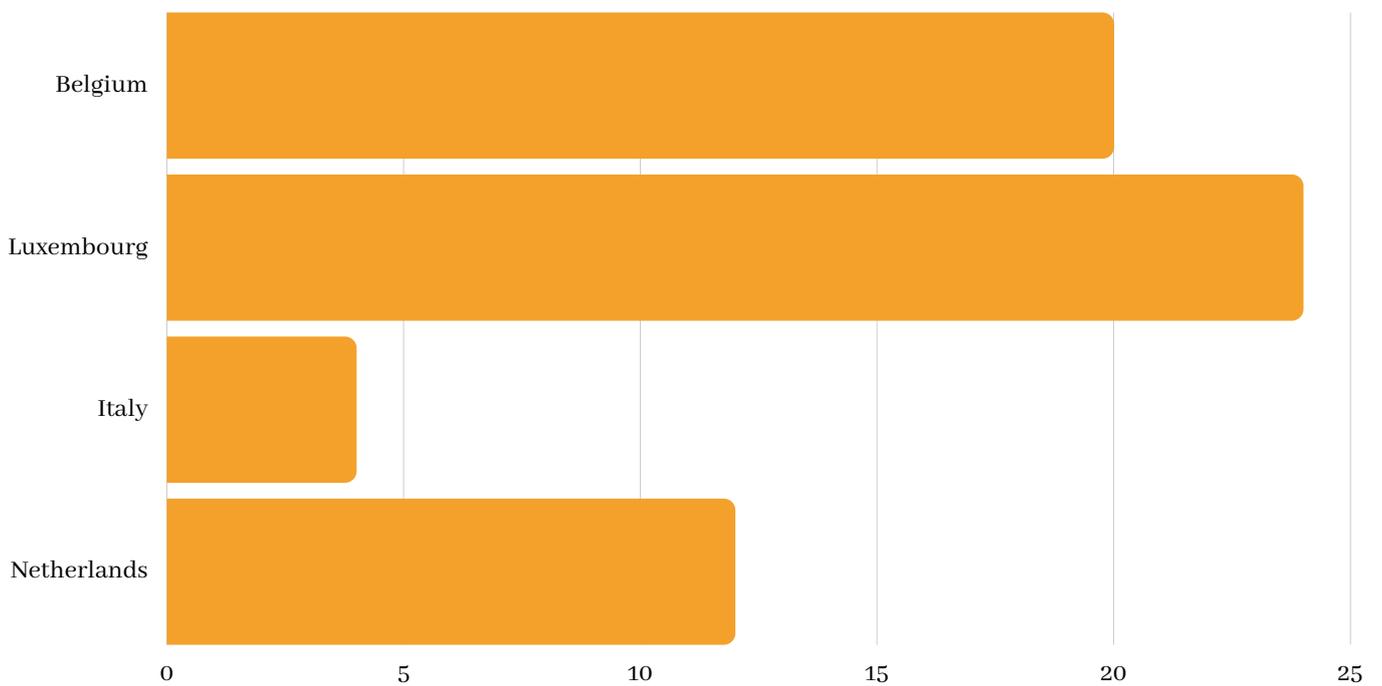


WITH
INTERESTED
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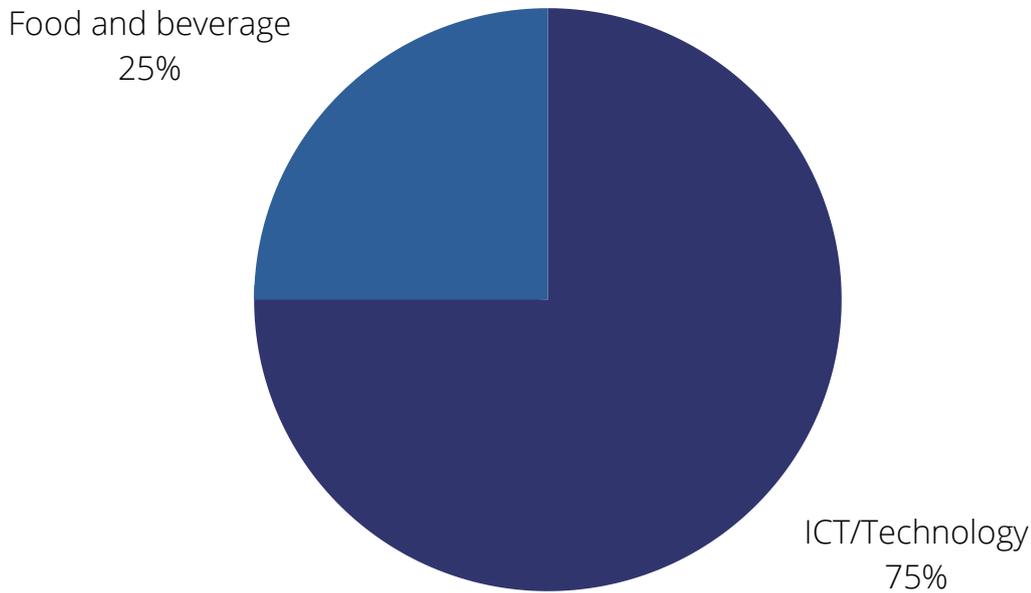


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IN
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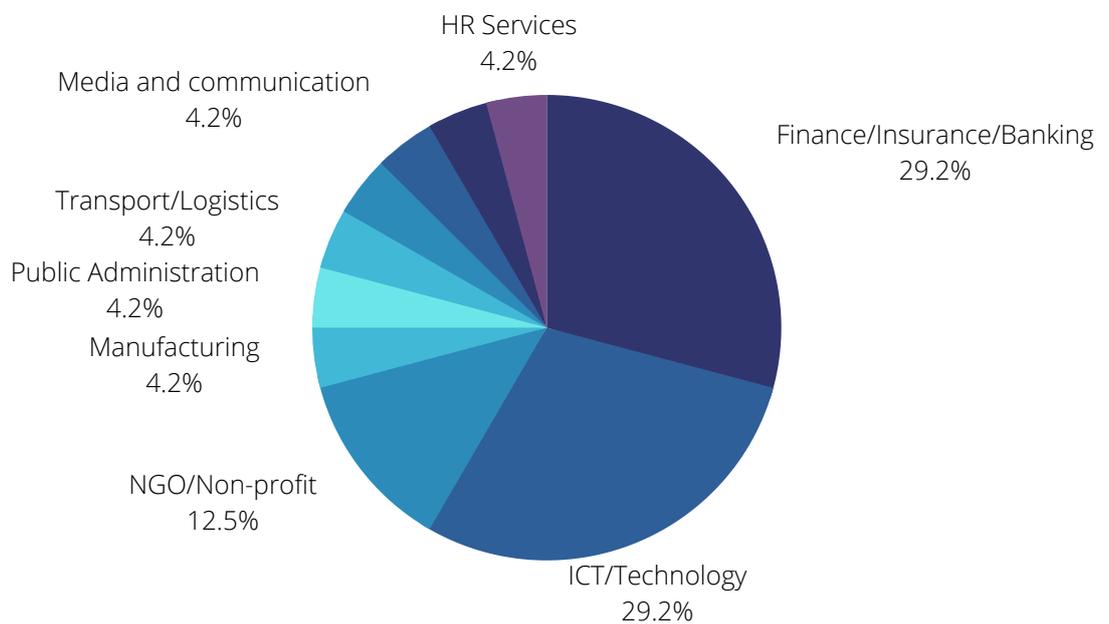
CALLS PER COUNTRY



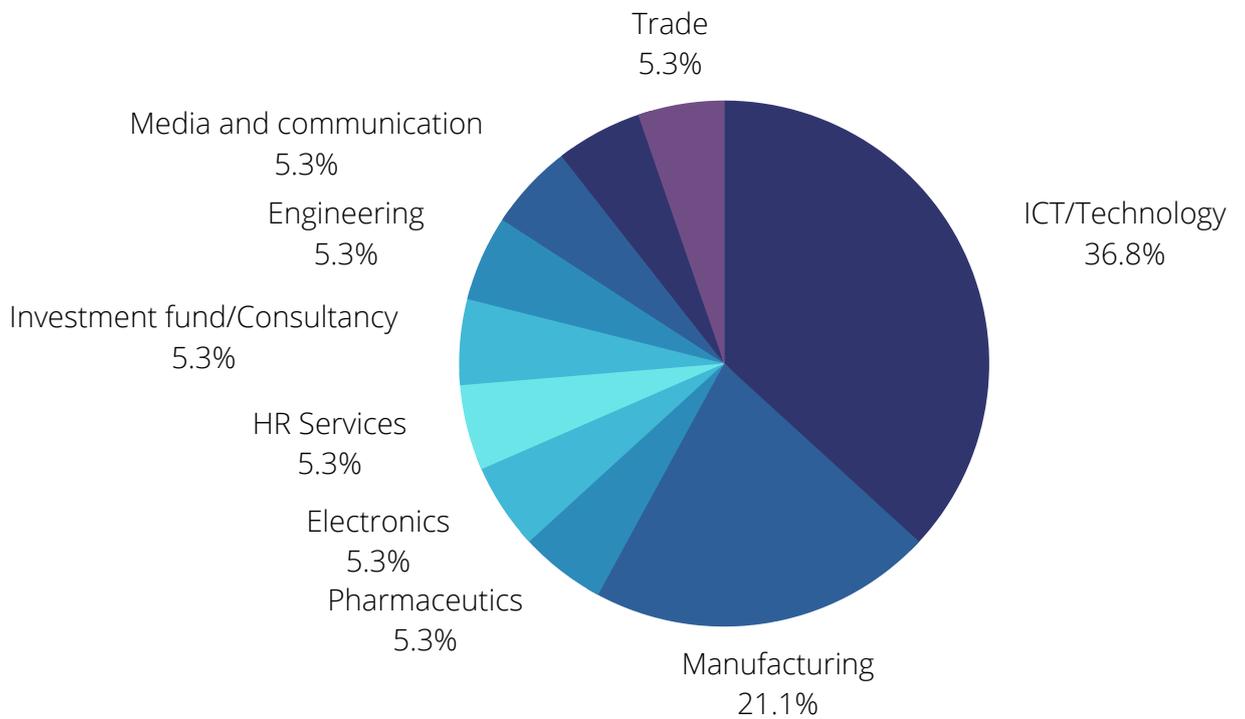
Companies called in Italy per sector



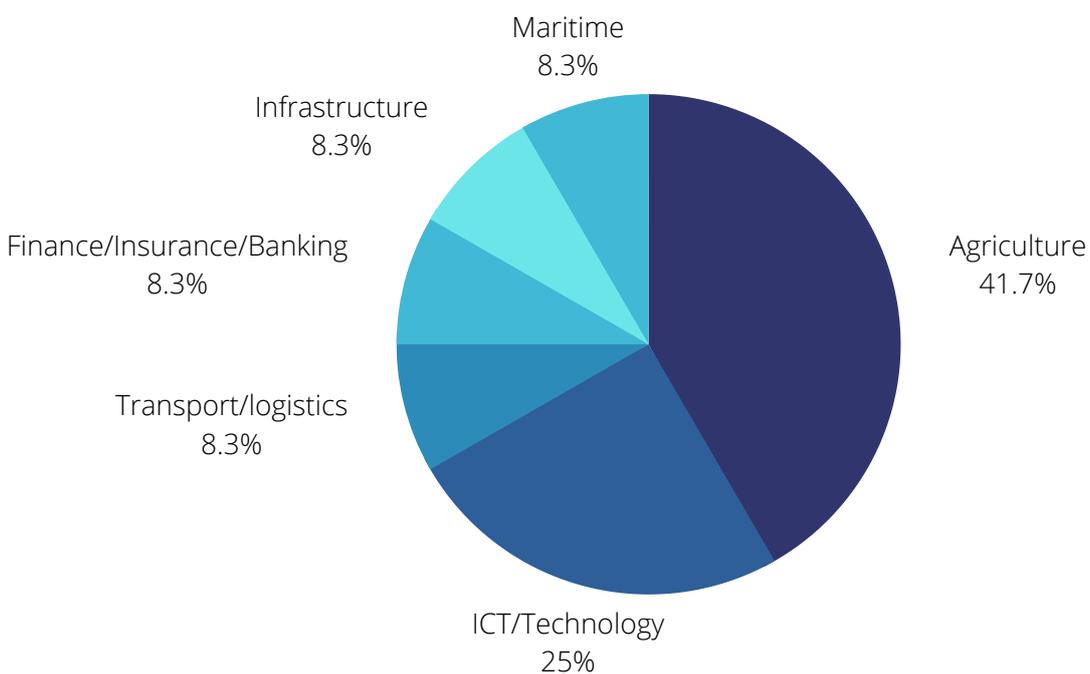
Companies called in Luxembourg per sector



Companies called in Belgium per sector



Companies called in the Netherlands per sector



I. What is the sectoral and the geographical scope of the MATCH project?

Although the MATCH project was initially designed to support companies active in sectors with labour shortages, conversations with companies revealed a growing interest to recruit beyond the usual sectors with labour shortages. Recruitments have been launched with companies working in the ICT sector, the communication sector, health care industry, pharmaceutical industry and agriculture. Companies across all sectors are looking for ICT specialists to support their business development but recruitments also include other profiles such as engineers, tech profiles, business developers, and pharmaceutical experts.

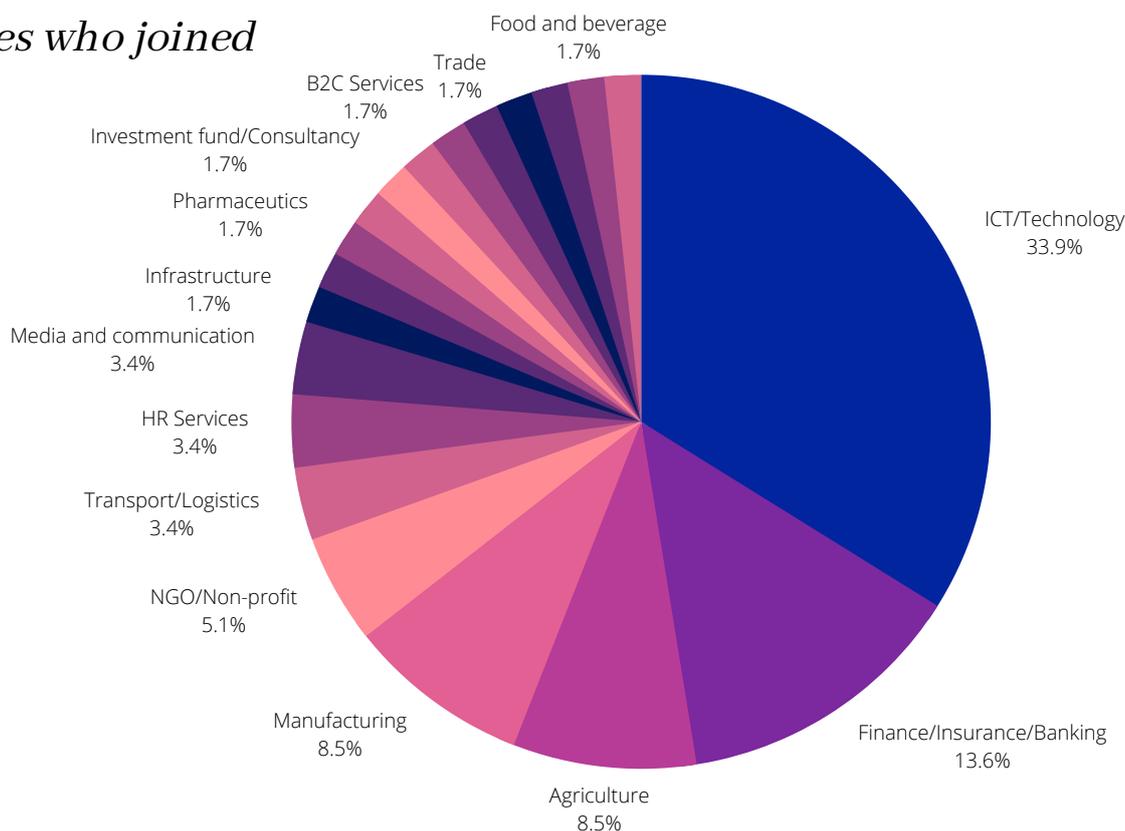


Project partners have been approached by companies that are eager to internationalize their activities or which are looking at ways to further develop existing activities in Africa. For small companies, recruiting international talents is a key way to brand themselves as international players. It is important to note that the shortage in manpower is not necessarily the only driver behind a request to join the project. The need for support to manage the administrative burden of organizing international mobility is a key consideration for companies. Companies are also eager to operationalize their diversity strategy and, on several occasions, the project partners have been approached by companies pro-actively willing to promote the recruitment of highly qualified employees with a migrant background.

Concerning the geographical scope, some concerns were raised by companies about the criteria applied to select the countries of origin. Most companies were not familiar with the potential of West African countries and, some of them, did show some reluctance about recruiting from Nigeria and Senegal due the political instability of these two countries. These concerns were addressed thanks to desk research and to the technical information provided by the economic attachés from Embassies, the World Bank as well as Trade and Investment Agencies. Overall, concerns were mainly raised about the level of qualifications of the domestic labour forces in Nigeria and Senegal. The technical support of the company Aldelia has proven to be valuable to provide detailed information about the level of qualifications of specific profiles. In particular, the fact that Aldelia is a reputable talent management provider with a local presence in both countries of origin has been a key factor in building trust with EU companies.

Finally, several companies expressed their interest in other African partner countries. Companies were informed that, in the future, pilot projects might be turned into more permanent labour mobility schemes and similar projects might be expanded to other countries. Companies were also informed about existing pilot schemes that include other countries, such as the PALIM or the THAMM projects.

Operating sector of the companies who joined MATCH



II. What are the operational modalities for the pre-selection of the talents?

In bilateral exchanges with companies, the operational aspects of the recruitment process of MATCH were typically at the core of the meetings. The sourcing and matching of talents is implemented through a pre-selection committee composed of representatives of IOM, VDAB, Aldelia and the public employment agencies in Nigeria and Senegal. Whilst the pre-selection committee was successfully established in Nigeria in December 2020, the cooperation with the Senegalese authorities has proven to be more difficult. Efforts are pursued to set up a pre-selection committee as of May 2021 and to replicate the structures and tools described below.

During bilateral meetings, companies often raised concerns about the quality of the sourcing techniques used within the framework of the MATCH project, as well as possible interference with the recruitment process. Selective advertisement, advanced skill assessment technologies together with a tailor-made sourcing process are key ingredients for the successful implementation of labour mobility initiatives like MATCH. Bilateral meetings between the potential employer and the members of the technical working group of the pre-selection committee are organized before the publication of the job vacancy. This working group consists of recruiters from VDAB, Aldelia and the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment (FMLE). Exchanges with employers enable recruiters to have a detailed understanding of the technical requirements and the expectations of the company. The vacancy notice is then published on Aldelia's recruiting platform, the [Areebajobs platform](#). In order to diversify the profiles of talents, Aldelia has a proactive sourcing strategy towards networks of alumni, foundations, universities, and tech hubs back in Senegal and Nigeria to source pools of talents. The vacancies are also published on a platform managed by the public employment agency in Nigeria, the [Nelex platform](#). The matching process includes a semi-automated selection procedure with technical tests to assess the language and technical skills, as well as an assessment of the soft skills. The sourcing process is tailor-made to the needs of employers, who are at liberty to request additional tests. Talents that successfully pass this first phase will then be called for a first round of interviews with the members of the pre-selection committee. After the interviews, the pre-selection committee short-lists the talents. It is up to the employer to take the final decision after further tests and interviews. All in all, the recruitment process, from the first call with the company to the delivering of profiles, takes four months on average.



During the sourcing and the matching process, a transfer of skills and knowledge is promoted through a coaching methodology developed by VDAB. This benefits all the members of the pre-selection committee. Knowledge and skills transfers in particular benefit the recruiters of the FMLE and aim at building capacities on the longer-term to ensure the sustainability of labour mobility initiatives.



III. What are the administrative steps required to recruit foreign talents?

Exchanges with companies in Belgium and in the Netherlands revealed that the domestic procedure to apply for the Single Permit is largely unknown and that companies often assume that it is a long and costly procedure despite of the efforts undertaken by the competent administrations to simplify the process. In the Netherlands, the fast-track procedure to recruit highly qualified talents is considered a best practice. In Flanders, in March 2021, the Minister of Work and Economy launched an initiative aiming at providing operational support to employers through a digital one-stop-shop on economic migration from non-EU countries. The platform, [“Working in Belgium”](#), aims at reducing the administrative burden and shorten the time of the overall procedure between application and permitting. Another new feature is that the employer will be able to follow the entire procedure online. However, in Italy and Luxembourg, procedures remain cumbersome and lengthy and limited improvements were noted after the transposition of the Single Permit Directive. In Luxembourg, the lack of support from the national administration has been identified as a key obstacle for companies to join the MATCH project.

Project partners and the IOM offices in each of the four EU member states compiled detailed information to help companies navigate the national labour migration framework, highlighting what are the options at disposal within the framework of MATCH. In Belgium, an informal cooperation framework has been agreed with the competent regional employment service in Flanders to assist the companies in completing their files. Although it is yet to be tested, this informal cooperation could be

used as a best practice for future labour mobility initiatives.

Another area where additional support would be greatly needed is a fast-track procedure to facilitate diploma recognition, as well as skills and work experience recognition. Future labour mobility partnerships should look into the development of accreditation systems per countries of origin.

Project partners and the IOM offices in each of the four EU member states have also compiled a comprehensive set of information for the talents, with a particular focus on pre-immigration procedures and visa application. When relocation to Europe will be authorized, all talents will receive a leaflet summarizing the steps and receive additional information on the procedure during the pre-departure orientation (PDO) sessions that will be organized in Nigeria and Senegal (see also below paragraph 4.2).

IV. What are the costs and legal obligations for the employers?

Concerning the costs and obligations, conversations with companies were mainly focusing on issues related to the length of employment contracts, as well as costs and legal obligations for the employers.

Concerning the length of employment, most companies have indicated an interest to retain the highly qualified talents beyond the life cycle of the project in line with their human resources strategy and long-term investment in human capital. It was therefore clarified that companies will have the option to employ the MATCH talents beyond the end of the project. In case of the African talent wants to break his/her contract with his/her employer and opt to move to another company, no penalty can be imposed by either MATCH or the current employer. However, should this scenario materialize, the talent would stop receiving any support from the project partners.



The financial terms linked to a participation in MATCH were often raised by companies. It was immediately clarified that MATCH is a cost-free initiative for companies for what concerns the sourcing and pre-selection of talents from Nigeria and Senegal. However, it was also clarified that recruiting a candidate via MATCH would entail a series of costs and obligations for the company, among which:

- A contract in line with local rules and regulations, both in terms of salary and applicable terms, and coherent with the candidate's profile;
- Coverage of expenditures for the relocation of the selected candidate to the EU or for the setup of remote working arrangements (in line with the “Employer Pays Principle”);
- Cooperation with the MATCH project team in monitoring the working relationship with and the progress of the talents Inclusion of the recruited talent into company (on-boarding) trainings;
- Facilitate the participation of the recruited talent in activities contributing to his country of origin, e.g. through engagement with diaspora organizations.

Linked to the above, a key issue was raised regarding the risk of double taxation. It was clarified that taxes need to be paid where the person is carries out his duties. In case of remote working from Senegal or Nigeria, taxes would need to be paid locally. The company Aldelia will provide support to companies with these taxation duties if needed. Once the recruited talent moves to the EU, a new contract would need to be drafted to reflect the new working context.



V. To what extent does the MATCH project offer flexible mobility arrangements?

A key concern raised by companies across the four destination countries relates to the rigid framework imposed by classical mobility schemes. Conversations with companies have shed light on the need to build projects that offer strong operational flexibility in order to help companies to navigate in a constantly evolving economic environment. The operational modalities of the project were significantly revised with the outbreak of the COVID-19 to build in additional flexibility and open up the project to “hybrid mobility” schemes. Three options have been developed in order to adopt flexible hiring strategies that correspond to their needs and changing market demands:

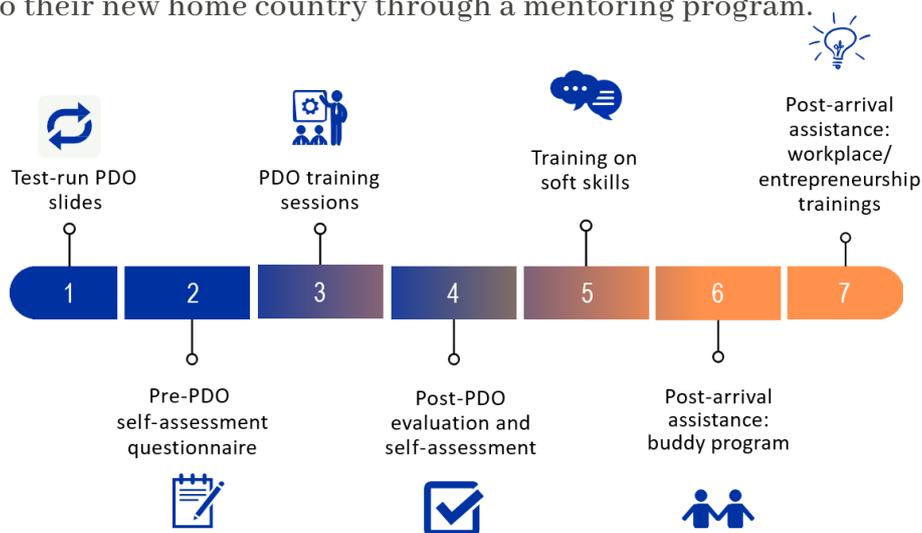
- The company and the candidate cooperate remotely for the majority of the candidate’s placement period, with the candidate undergoing short term trainings in the EU;
- The company and the candidate cooperate remotely on a daily basis, with the candidate undergoing several travels on duty to the EU all along his/her placement period;
- The company and the candidate cooperate remotely during a trial period, with the candidate relocating to the EU as soon as his/her visa is approved, and the travel restrictions are lifted.

For each of these options, the local branch offices of the company Aldelia provide technical support to complete distance working arrangements in full compliance with the domestic legislation. Although the incubation phase is yet to be tested within the scope of the MATCH project, previous experiences with labour migration schemes made clear that companies with branch offices or projects in African countries bring their employees over to their headquarters in the EU to formally train them on the job, or to enroll them in external trainings to then reintroduce them into their projects/offices in Africa.

VI. What are the measures available to support the companies with the onboarding of the talents?

Concerning the onboarding process, companies raised multiple questions linked to the cultural and linguistic issues that might arise once a talent is selected. Language, in particular, has been a recurring matter, especially in discussions with Dutch/Flemish companies. It was explained that MATCH does not foresee a language training component, but the consortium can refer companies and/or talents to specialized centers that can provide this service. In addition to language, the topics of diversity and intercultural skills were also raised, in particular by SMEs which do not have previous experience with international staff. In this case MATCH does provide direct support through the project with intercultural trainings covering the topic of diversity and intercultural communication. These trainings can be provided upon request from companies and are organized by project partners, such as VDAB.

Additionally, companies raised questions about the measures of support provided to the talents before and after their arrival in the destination countries. The project partners have developed a set of pre-departure orientation (PDO) information session, trainings on soft skills and post-arrival assistance in order to ensure a soft landing into Europe in general, and into their workplace in particular. A specific PDO curriculum has also been developed to adjust to the distance working arrangements. Project partners have also built partnerships with diaspora organizations to support the talents after their relocation to their new home country through a mentoring program.



At the time of writing this report, local authorities in Belgium and in the Netherlands are looking into the development of “talent house” where public and private actors would partner to develop soft landing packages for foreign talents.

VII. Recommendations for the future

The lessons learned from the bilateral exchanges with representatives from the private sectors shed light on their perspectives and on the way forward as the European Commission is preparing to launch its new Talent Partnerships framework with selected partner countries. Some key conclusions include:

Labour mobility initiatives should be needs-driven and flexible

In order to be sustainable, labour mobility initiatives must be labour market responsive and the operational modalities should be flexible enough to allow adjustments in order to respond to dramatic evolution of the needs. In the future, the concept of “hybrid mobility” piloted within the framework of the MATCH project should be a structural component of future labour mobility initiatives.

Comprehensive research should inform the development of future labour mobility initiatives

Labour market needs and shortages have to be jointly defined between the countries of origin and destination in order to ensure that the future initiatives are mutually beneficial. Sound collection of data and continuous research are essential to follow closely the evolution of the labour market and to adjust the operational modalities of the projects to unexpected developments.

Comprehensive awareness raising, and communication efforts should be scaled up

Despite intensive efforts deployed by project partners, exchanges with companies show that overall, efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of labour mobility scheme are still needed. Sector federations and employers’ organizations should be involved in the design and the implementation of the labour mobility scheme; these stakeholders should play a key role to ensure the promotion of labour mobility initiatives towards the private sector. Trade and Investment agencies as well as diplomatic institutions should be closely involved in order to disclose the potential of countries of origin. To ensure the sustainability of future labour mobility initiatives in the region, there is a need to scale up the communication and to present the potential of West Africa.

The pre-selection of talents should comply with strong ethical recruitment standards

The technical assistance of private recruitment companies has proven to be essential to ensure the identification of a high-quality pool of talents. Specialized head hunting techniques and the diversification of the sourcing network through direct contact with the local ecosystem of the countries of origin should be structurally part of the matching techniques used in the future Talent Partnerships. In order to avoid abuses, it is recommended to look into the development of an EU certification procedures to uphold fair and ethical standards, such as IOM's [IRIS](#). The development of cross-border partnerships with public employment services from destination countries and countries of origin would be essential to ensure the sustainability of future labour mobility initiatives.

Simplified administrative procedures and measures of operational support should be developed across all EU Member States

Improving administrative procedures is key to developing effective mobility schemes. Digital desks and one “stop-shop” should be systematically available in all EU countries direct in order to provide assistance to companies. In order to significantly scale up the volume of international recruitments in sectors where access to the labour market is heavily regulated (such as the health care sector), relevant national authorities should be consulted through a fast-track procedure to help systematize and expedite skills recognition. The development of an accreditation system per country of origin should be explored to ease the recognition of diplomas, soft skills and work experience.

Flexible onboarding of foreign talents

In order to be labour market responsive, future partnerships should systematically include components of hybrid mobility and move away from rigid circular mobility schemes. Measures of assistance to help companies operationalize their diversity strategies are deemed to be of critical importance to ensure a successful integration of the foreign talents on the work floor. Furthermore, pre-departure orientation and post arrival assistance should be tailor-made to the respective context of each labour mobility scheme. Pre-departure orientation should systematically include cultural orientation and information gained from employers on the organisational culture, vision and values. Pre-immigration assistance should be provided covering all the aspects of the logistical organisation of the travel, including support for visa applications, required certifications and overall administrative follow-up. For post-arrival assistance, the development of “talent house” where public and private actors would partner to develop soft landing packages for foreign talents might be a promising option to guide new comers in their new home countries.

Notes

[1] In order to raise awareness of the private sector, the initial project proposal envisaged to organize awareness raising sessions and dedicated workshops in order to highlight the benefits of legal pathways for migration and the potential of labour migration schemes and skills partnerships with Africa. As reflected in the revised Grant Agreement, the operational modalities of the project have been adjusted due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in compliance with the sanitary measures, these awareness raising sessions and workshops were returned into on-line meetings.

[2] Four in Belgium, three in the Netherlands, two in Italy, two in Luxembourg and one in Senegal.

[3] A comprehensive list of companies can be found in the Annex I. Additional data and graphs are available under Annex II.

Annex - List of companies contacted in bilateral calls

1.	ABBL	Luxembourg	NGO/Non-profit
2.	Aberdeen Standard Investments Luxembourg SA	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
3.	Advanzia Bank SA	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
4.	Amaris	Italy	ICT/Technology
5.	Amazon EU Sàrl	Luxembourg	E-Commerce
6.	ArcelorMittal Luxembourg SA	Luxembourg	Manufacturing
7.	Ardena	Belgium	Pharmaceuticals
8.	Association of the Luxembourg Fund Industry	Luxembourg	NGO/Non-profit
9.	Barco	Belgium	ICT/Technology
10.	Beaulieu	Belgium	Manufacturing
11.	Bejo	The Netherlands	Agriculture
12.	Bekaert	Belgium	Manufacturing
13.	Bunker Palace	Luxembourg	Media and communication
14.	CFL	Luxembourg	Transport/logistics
15.	CGI Luxembourg SA	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
16.	CHAMP Cargosystems SA	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
17.	Clearstream	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
18.	Daikin	Belgium	Manufacturing
19.	Dekimo	Belgium	Electronics
20.	Delft Imaging	The Netherlands	ICT
21.	EIB	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
22.	Euro Afro Express BVBA	Belgium	Export
23.	H2H Services	Luxembourg	HR Services
24.	HSB Identification	The Netherlands	ICT
25.	InTech SA	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
26.	Iris Corporate/Westpole	Belgium	ICT/Technology
27.	Link2Europe	Belgium	HR Services
28.	Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology (LIST)	Luxembourg	Education/research
29.	Manuchar	Belgium	Trade
30.	Ministère de la Digitalisation	Luxembourg	Public administration
31.	MS Schippers	The Netherlands	Agriculture
32.	NGN	The Netherlands	Agriculture
33.	Novable	Belgium	ICT/Technology
34.	NRB	Belgium	ICT/Technology
35.	NRX Digital	Belgium	ICT/Technology
36.	NTT Data	Italy	ICT/Technology
37.	NTT Luxembourg PSF SA	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
38.	Payconiq International	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
39.	PayPal	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
40.	Rabobank	The Netherlands	Finance
41.	Rijkzwaai	The Netherlands	Agriculture
42.	RiverRock	Belgium	Investment fund/Consultancy
43.	SES	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
44.	Silver Holdings	Luxembourg	Finance/Insurance
45.	Skyline Communications	Belgium	ICT/Technology
46.	STC BVBA	Belgium	Engineering
47.	SteelQore	The Netherlands	Infrastructure
48.	Talkwalker Sàrl	Luxembourg	ICT/Technology
49.	Tip Europe	The Netherlands	Transport



50.	Trading Organic	The Netherlands	Agriculture
51.	Tuttovo	Italy	Food and beverage
52.	Unilin	Belgium	Manufacturing
53.	Van Oord	The Netherlands	Maritime
54.	VRT	Belgium	Media and communication
55.	Wide	Luxembourg	NGO/Non-profit
56.	Wosh	Belgium	B2C services

The MATCH project is implemented by



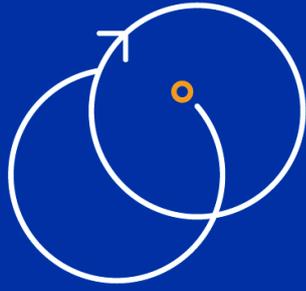
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**Kamer van
Koophandel**
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