

The compounding effect of looming skills shortages in a wide range of occupations and a shrinking workforce in many countries may constitute a barrier to implementing green growth strategies and transition towards greener economies. In this context, international recruitment can help adjust supply and demand for skills and thereby speed up the green transition.

This policy brief looks at the potential role of migrant and already established migrants in responding to looming skills needs as a result of the green transition in OECD countries.

What role for migration and migrants in the green transition of OECD countries?

Key Findings

- The green transition will generate changes in demand patterns and production processes and reshape labour markets. Implementation of the EU green deal for example, is estimated to generate up to 2.5 million additional jobs in the EU.
- As potential migrants in origin countries may not always have the exact skill set that is required in OECD labour market, international recruitment may be usefully coupled with skills development modules in countries of origin. Skills mobility partnerships can help strengthen skills relevant for the green transition in both countries of destination and origin.
- Settled migrants in OECD countries constitute an important part of the workforce in many countries, representing between 16% of the total workforce in OECD Europe and 25% and above in countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Provided they have access to up skilling and reskilling programmes designed to meet the needs of the labour market in the context of the green transition they can make a significant contribution.
- Labour and other complementary pathways can simultaneously meet resettlement needs and help fill labour gaps, if programmes are in place to help refugees overcome the administrative hurdles that prevent their recruitment and make their potential more visible to employers in OECD destination countries.

Introduction

Most of the discussion related to the climate change-migration nexus has centred around the need to mitigate the risk of large climate-induced migration through a combination of mitigation and adaptation policies but also on the need to adapt and expand legal options for displaced people in need of international protection. Beyond these important considerations, sound labour migration and integration policies can also contribute to support the efforts to move towards economically-sustainable growth and an economy that is not based on fossil fuels and overconsumption of natural resources.

The green transition, which interacts with other mega trends that affect the functioning and structure of the economy such as digitalisation,

population aging and globalisation, will require an adaptable workforce with adequate skills to meet current and future labour and skills demand. However, the compounding effect of looming skills shortages in a wide range of occupations and a shrinking work force in most OECD member countries poses specific challenges. In this context, it seems legitimate and necessary to look at the potential role of labour migration and integration policies.

This policy brief reviews how migration can contribute to the green economy and elaborates on ways to adapt and strengthen the policy framework to support the role of migration and migrants in the green transition.

The green transition and the labour market: what is the possible role for migration and migrants?

A growing number of countries have implemented national development strategies and green growth plans to support the transition to green economies and the creation of green jobs. For example, through the European Green Deal, the EU is striving to make Europe the first climate neutral continent in the world. The European Commission has adopted a set of proposals to adapt the EU's climate, energy, transport, and taxation policies to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. The green transition has both direct and indirect implications for migration through its effect on employment and skills demand (Adaawen, 2022^[2]; Gencsü, Grayson and Mason, 2020^[3]).

Impacts of green growth policies on net employment and labour and skills demand

The green transition will generate changes in demand patterns and production processes and reshape labour markets. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will impact existing sectors and industries, especially fossil-fuel industries. At the same time, other less polluting and carbon-intensive sectors and industries will be able to expand and experience innovation and job creation in the light of the green transition. These structural transformations are hard to quantify in terms of net employment outcomes, but macroeconomic modelling analysis to date find that energy and climate change policies have modest effects on overall employment (OECD, 2017^[4]). Different models reach different conclusions. One OECD simulation finds net employment effects lower than 2% of total employment in most regions of the world, corresponding to a rotation of 21 million jobs (Chateau, Bibas and Lanzi, 2018^[5]). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that the transition towards energy systems that limits the global warming to 2 degrees Celsius would lead to about 24 million new jobs created against 6 million lost jobs, corresponding to a net job increase by about 18 million (ILO, 2018^[6]). A forecast scenario analysis of the implementation of the European Green Deal, the European Union (EU) roadmap to make the EU climate neutral in 2050, equally shows a positive impact on job creation, corresponding to an estimated 2.5 million additional jobs created in the EU (CEDEFOP, 2021^[7]).

While the net overall employment effect is likely to be rather modest, the implications of the green

transition will not be homogenous across all sectors and occupations. Certain sectors and jobs will be predominantly negatively impacted, while others will see a rise in demand when employment and capital are reallocated away from activities that are high-carbon, energy-intensive and polluting. Sectors that are more directly linked to sustainability and climate change are likely to be more affected, such as water supply and waste management, utilities (through increased recycling) and renewable energy (CEDEFOP, 2021^[7]). These results strengthen the notion that a substantial degree of labour market flexibility is important to achieve a smooth transition to green growth (OECD, 2017^[4]). In terms of job categories, low-skilled workers (blue collar workers and farm workers) are generally predicted to be more affected by the policies than other categories of workers, especially in non-OECD countries. Mid-skilled workers in the service and sales sector are an example of workers that will gain in terms of net employment. At the same time, certain sectors will see a large growth in employment also for low-skilled workers, such as the construction and business sector and the electricity sector that is not based on fossil fuels (Chateau, Bibas and Lanzi, 2018^[5]). The green transition will hence not only rely on high-skilled workers, but also generate employment gains for almost all occupational categories, including middle-skilled ones and elementary occupations (CEDEFOP, 2021^[7]).

The effect of climate mitigation on labour markets will also differ across geographical regions. Non-OECD countries are likely to face higher job reallocation rates, due to more fossil-fuel dependent production structure. Certain countries will also be harder hit by reallocation rates. For example, the total labour reallocation is estimated to become at least twice higher than the OECD average in countries where the economic structure is dominated by large fossil-fuel sectors, such as the Middle East and North Africa (Chateau, Bibas and Lanzi, 2018^[5]).

The impacts of the green transition on the labour market dynamics implies that certain sectors will experience labour and skill shortages while a sizeable number of workers may need to change jobs and/or sectors. A challenge is therefore to adjust to the changes through a shift of workers between jobs and sectors that requires similar skills, or through reskilling and upskilling to take up new jobs in sectors and occupations that will be in high demand. The reallocation of workers can take different forms. A first example would be sectoral transition, with workers moving from a sector with declining labour demand to another sector that is

seeing a rise in labour demand. Another example is *occupational transition*, such as displaced coal mine workers taking up employment in other sectors. Finally, *regional transitions* happens when certain regions disproportionately benefit or lose from the green transition (Keese and Marcolin, 2023^[8]).

In addition, the labour market transformations related to the green transition also raises questions about future needs for reskilling and upskilling. Skills required in jobs adversely impacted by climate change and climate policies are not necessarily transferrable to new jobs, and workers may have to adapt and expand their skill set with new competencies. Most of the reskilling and upskilling will likely take place within existing occupations, as new and emerging green occupations are expected to be more limited and emerge at higher skill levels (ILO, 2019^[10]). The progressive greening of existing industries will probably also require workers not transitioning to a new sector to update their competencies to master new more environmentally friendly production methods (Botta, 2018^[11]).

Irrespective of climate mitigation efforts today and in the future, the negative impact of climate change are already causing profound and irreversible impact that are expected to continue to intensify in the future. Climate mitigation efforts will thus need to be coupled with adaptation measures, which in turn also affects job creation and destruction through for example increased demand for the construction of climate-resilient infrastructure. Evidence suggests that Europe alone will see an additional 500 000 jobs created by 2050 directly and indirectly driven by adaptation-related activities (ILO, 2018^[12]).

Migration and migrants can help fill labour gaps in OECD countries

To minimise the labour market adjustment costs linked to the green transition, workers that have been displaced need to quickly move into new jobs. However, the labour market transitions are constrained by rigidities in job matching, occupation and geographical mobilities as well as skills adaptation, that are already recognised as major bottlenecks in a number of key sectors to the green transition. These include notably renewable energy, energy and resource efficiency, construction and environmental services and manufacturing (OECD, 2020^[13]).

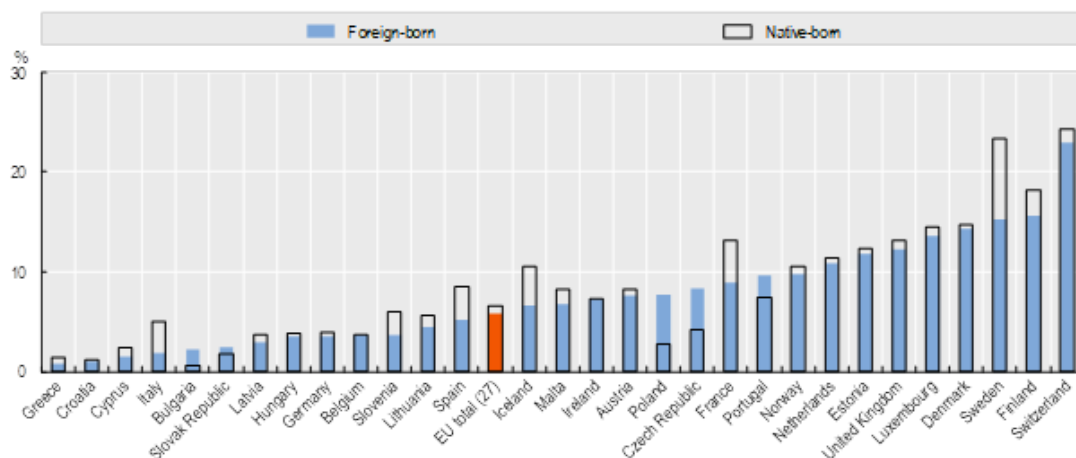
Migration and migrants can play a positive role in meeting labour and skill shortages and help speed up the green transition. Migrants already constitute a key workforce in OECD countries, representing between 16% (OECD Europe) and 25% and above (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) of the employed population (OECD, 2020^[14]). A considerable share of the current migrant workforce is concentrated in sectors that are important for the green transition, notably the service sector (including for example trade, transportation and wage management), but also manufacturing, construction, mining, ICT, and agriculture (OECD, 2020^[14]; Adaawen, 2022^[2]). The European Commission has recognised the importance of legal migration and forward-looking migration policies to support EU's transition towards a green and digital economy, which will require additional labour and skills in sectors such as construction, energy, manufacturing, and transport (European Commission, 2022^[15]).

It should be noted that the growth in employment stemming from the green transition will not only happen in green sectors and occupation directly linked to so called “green jobs”, but also create labour demand in sectors that are key to support green sectors and technologies, such as the service sector which employ many immigrants particularly in Europe, Australia, and the United States.

Some vulnerable groups of workers are expected to face particularly high adjustments costs in the green transition. Notably, higher skills make it easier to transition into more green-intensive work (IMF, 2022^[16]). A challenge for labour market and skill policies is thus to maximise the benefits from this green transition for workers and help assure a fair sharing of unavoidable adjustment costs, while also supporting broader green growth policies (OECD, 2017).

One of the potential vulnerable groups are low-skilled migrants that face above-average adjustment costs and higher risks of job displacement. Migrants are already less likely to access training in most OECD countries (see Figure 1), and the training gap tends to persist also in times when training needs of migrants are particularly high (OECD, 2022^[17]). To ensure a just and inclusive green transition it is important to ensure that already settled immigrants have access to training and skills measures.

Figure 1. Participation in adult education and training, by migrant status
15-64 year-olds outside the regular education system, 2020



Source: OECD/European Commission (2023_[18])

Migration and the green transition beyond OECD member countries

As discussed above, there will likely be geographical discrepancies in how the green transition affects labour and skills demands, with certain regions and economies being more negatively affected. The negative employment effects may eventually fuel emigration intentions in non-OECD countries if adjustment costs are high, and workers are unable to find alternative employment.

Simulations further indicate that total labour reallocation from a carbon tax could be at least twice as high in countries where the economic structure is dominated by large fossilfuel sectors, such as the Middle East and North Africa, compared to the OECD average (Chateau, Bibas and Lanzi, 2018_[5]).

Such trends will most likely impact the demand for foreign workers and raises concerns regarding the future of labour migration flows to GCC and other key oil-producing countries (see Box 1). Climate mitigation and adaptation measures may also have other indirect impacts on migration and displacement. On the one hand, development interventions to support alternative adaption strategies to migration may allow households to improve living conditions and reduce the need for migration.

On the other hand, development investments may unlock liquidity constraints and allow more migration in communities where the population previously could not afford to emigrate. Research indicates that access to for example cash transfers and irrigation systems in climate vulnerable communities can lead to an increase in internal out-migration (Benonnier, Millock and Taraz, 2021_[19]; Tiwari and Winters, 2018_[20]) with possible implications for regional and intercontinental cross border mobility.

Box 1. The future of immigration to oil countries in the light of the green transition

The states that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) currently host around 30 million migrants. More than five million workers relocate every year for work from Asia to GCC countries— almost equivalent to the total number of migrants, temporary and permanent, that OECD countries receive from third countries every year.

A global shift towards more renewable energy sources, and a sequential fall in oil prices, is likely to result in some changes in the demand for foreign workers. The capacity of these countries to absorb labour migrants from key origin countries, mostly from southeast Asia, would be undermined if oil

revenues decrease drastically. A large number of relatively low-skilled workers may seek other opportunities abroad, including in OECD countries.

The implications of the green transition for labour demand and immigration will ultimately depend on how the GCC manage to handle a green transition. Meeting the Paris Agreement temperature implies that the world's richest countries must reduce their production of oil and gas by 74 percent by 2030, and investment into new production capacity must cease. Important changes in labour demand in Gulf countries have already been observed over the past decade, demonstrating the vulnerability of these economies to oil price fluctuations. Most are actively pursuing policies to replace foreign workers with nationals, and to move to new sectors which are less reliant on low skilled labour.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[21]; ADBI/OECD/ILO, 2023^[22]; Huckstep and Dempster, 2022^[23]).

Designing migration policy frameworks to strengthen the role of migration in the green transition

Existing labour migration schemes and integration policies can theoretically respond to the challenges of emerging skills needs associated with the green transition. Nevertheless, to realise the full potential of migration and migrants some adjustments might be needed.

This section highlights a number of migration and integration policy options to bridge labour and skills gaps in light of the green transition, including by adapting existing management tools, promoting the labour market integration through upskilling and reskilling, and encouraging global skills development and mobility.

Adapting and improving existing labour migration programmes and expanding alternative pathways

Adapting existing tools

Labour migration offers one way to address labour and skills demand-supply mismatches and speed up the green transition process. Enabling migrant workers to bridge labour and skills gaps and facilitate the low-carbon transition requires flexible policies that can respond to specific labour and skills needs. General labour migration programmes often include regional shortage occupation lists or local labour market tests but may also need to be complemented by more targeted programmes (OECD, 2020^[14]). Shortage occupation lists and targeted programmes could thus be used to design targeted labour migration policies in support of green growth strategies and the green transition by particularly focusing on green sectors and occupations. This could be coupled with priority processing of work permits in occupations essential to the green economy or

favouring employers that are identified as key in the green transition and green skills development. Other measures to facilitate and support international recruitment and retention include reducing visa costs and facilitating renewals and transition towards permanent permits for those working in green sectors and occupations, as well as enhancing the skills recognition infrastructure in green occupations and sectors to improve labour market outcomes.

Although the main employment demands will be concentrated in sectors and occupations classified as “green”, employment and skill demand in other sectors that are key in supporting the green transition is also likely to increase (CEDEFOP, 2021^[7]). In addition, labour reallocation of workers towards green sectors and occupations may result in labour shortages in sectors not classified as green but with an indirect impact on the greening of the economy. Labour migration policies designed to support the greening of the economy may thus also need to look beyond sectors and occupations that are directly driving the greening of the economy.

Expanding alternative pathways

International students constitute one of the most promising pools of future innovators in countries of destinations. Students can also help spur international knowledge transfer. On average, internationally mobile students account for 14% of Master's students and 24% of doctoral students in OECD countries, and they are further overrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programmes compared to national students (OECD, 2022^[24]). Given the central role of technology in greening the economy, the employment demand for scientists and engineers is expected to boom in the future (CEDEFOP,

2021^[7]). Facilitating international student mobility and research exchange between OECD and non-OECD countries can thus help promote future innovation and technology development and strengthen knowledge and technology transfers between countries of origin and destination in sectors of particular importance to the green transition.

Similarly, immigrant entrepreneurs play an important role in spurring innovation, job creation, attracting foreign investment and driving economies forward. Start-ups have already had transformational effects on technology, created new sectors of employment and pushed innovation forward in many countries. The creation and diffusion of new ideas is at the heart of the green transition, and Greentech constitute one of the fastest growing areas in the innovation and start-up space. Policies to attract and retain foreign talent in the Greentech start-up sector could thus help countries speed up the transition process. About half of OECD countries have introduced visas for start-up founders in the last years, some of them with a sectoral focus to encourage growth and job creation in specific sectors (OECD, 2022^[25]).

Creating new or adapting existing labour migration channels can also be a way to facilitate the recruitment of refugees in first countries of asylum outside of the OECD and make them more visible to employers in OECD countries. The design of labour immigration policies as an alternative pathway for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection can take different forms, either by helping refugees access existing labour immigration channels, by creating incentives for employers to recruit refugee workers from abroad, or by creating new labour migration programmes specifically targeting refugees (OECD, 2016^[26]). Refugees often have relevant skills, but face barriers in accessing regular labour migration channels. Several countries, including Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, have recently launched talent visa programmes to create labour pathways for skilled refugees.

Improving labour market integration of immigrants

As discussed above, settled migrants already constitute a critical source of labour in key sectors for the green transition. An important challenge for the green transition is accelerating upskilling and reskilling of workers, including immigrants. Ensuring that migrants have access to education and training opportunities is key to sustain their contribution to the labour market, above all low-

skilled migrants who are particularly vulnerable to adverse labour market impacts. It is thus important to mainstream migration into green and skills strategies and development programmes and identify and lift the barriers for settled migrants to access upskilling and reskilling programmes for the green transition. Other examples of policy measures include an emphasis on assessment and recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications, with a special focus on green occupations, expanding and tailoring the offer for bridging courses, and facilitating retention (and regularisation) of migrants working in green sectors and occupations.

Integration policies could further focus on facilitating the geographical mobility of migrants to regions with unmet skills needs in relation to the green transition, by for example providing coverage of relocation costs. In some cases, incomes from carbon taxes have been used to finance the geographical relocation of workers (Gencsü, Grayson and Mason, 2020^[3]).

Develop new skills mobility partnerships in green sectors to facilitate mobility and enhance the global supply of skills in green sectors and occupations

Looming and anticipated skills needs that will occur in the context of the efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change will be truly global. Most countries will indeed face similar challenges and ambitions in terms of, inter alia, developing renewable energy production, fostering carbon emission free transport systems, improving the efficiency of water and sanitation systems, reinforcing digital solutions, and improving the efficiency and use of waste management. As in the case of the health sector, where the shortage of health professionals is global, it will be the responsibility of high-income countries to not actively poach green skills from less advanced economies where they are equally scarce. Research indeed shows that regions exposed to climate change lose relatively more highly-skilled workers (Burzyński et al., 2021^[27]). The loss of human capital resulting from climate change is thus mostly felt in regions that are the most affected by climate change, which in turn accentuates global inequality and makes it more difficult to put necessary adaptation and mitigation policies in place in countries and regions most affected by climate change.

To ensure that both countries of migrant origin and destination can take part in a green transition, an expansion of the global green skills base is needed. A way to support a more global transition process, and avoid that labour and skills required

for the green transition are simply shifted from non-OECD to OECD countries, is the use of Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs). SMPs integrate training in countries of origin with jobs or traineeship placements in countries of destination (OECD, 2022^[28]; Huckstep, Charles and Dempster, 2022^[29]). SMPs with a green skills focus could help develop relevant skills adapted to support green transition in both countries of migrant origin and destination. Examples of green sectors and industries where skills partnerships could play a key role include solar energy and electric batteries for green transportation, which are rapidly expanding in OECD countries. Training workers from origin outside the OECD today could help build the necessary skills to spur the development of green industries in origin countries in the future.

At EU level, the talent partnerships launched in the context of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to address skills shortages in the EU and strengthen mutually beneficial migration partnerships with third countries. The talent partnerships will be open to all skill levels, various types of mobility (temporary, long-term, or circular), and economic sectors, including sectors and industries that are identified as key for the green transition. The European Commission also explicitly highlights the potential of these partnerships to support the green and digital transition (European Commission, 2022^[15]).

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