

## SAFE – foSter cooperAtion for improving Access to protEction

### Webinar 5: Labor mobility for refugees in Europe: towards a new form of complementary pathway in Europe

7 September 2023 – 4:30 – 5:30 pm CEST

#### Introduction

[SAFE](#) is a three-year project co-funded by the European Union that aims to foster collaboration between stakeholders at a transnational level to develop and improve access to international protection through complementary pathways.

In the past few years, labor mobility as a complementary pathway for refugees has gained momentum, with the development of initiatives such as the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot in Canada. Following this, labor mobility pathways emerged around the world, reaching Europe where the European Commission expressed a keen interest in their development. Beyond political will, what are the main challenges to their implementation?

#### Objectives

- Understanding how labor mobility for refugees works at a global level.
- Looking at the replicability of these initiatives in a European context.

#### I. Presentation - Labour pathways for refugees. Briefings on current global programs

*David Manicom, Director of Global Advocacy for Displaced Talent, Fragomen and Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB)*

Two defining challenges have been identified in TBB's work: the loss of potential of displaced people and the market shortages in Europe and North America. These two challenges call for a reinforcing solution.

The work is framed by the Global Compact for Refugees, the UNHCR three-year strategy, but also within the Global Taskforce on Refugee Labor Mobility established last year and chaired by the government of Canada. Some of the core members of the task force are the UNHCR, IOM, the government of Australia, the European Commission (DG Home), Fragomen, the International Chamber of Commerce, TBB, and Refuge Point. There is an ever-growing number of partners working in this area who are also part of the task force.

TBB developed the talent catalog before the Global Compact for Refugees was developed in 2018, as a searchable database for refugee employment skills to enable the matching of destination country employers with refugee talents. The catalog has grown and now represents 75,000 individuals.

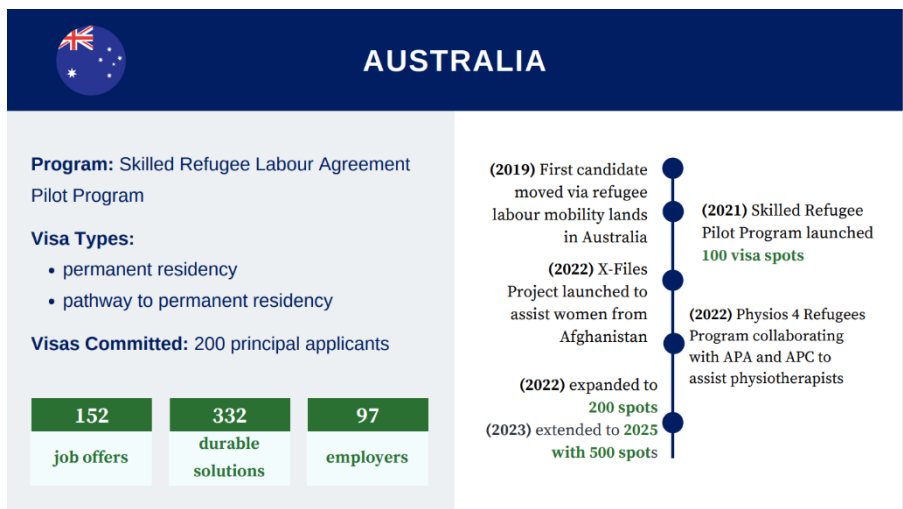
The momentum on labor mobility pathways has the direct and personal support of several Senior political and business leaders, Ylva Johansson, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, the governments of Canada and Australia, etc.

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**a) The Australian Labor Mobility program**



The Government of Australia enabled several measures for refugees to facilitate the use of existing economic migration pathways and permanent resident programs. Australia had committed to enable 200 applicants to enter the country via this program, which has recently

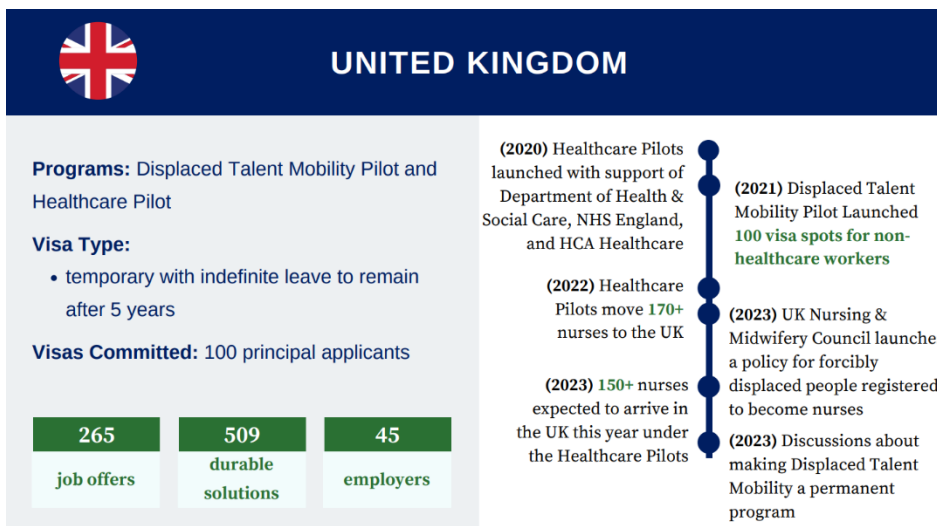
been extended to 500 spots. The pilot has now been extended to 2025, showing great promise.

**b) The Canadian Labor Mobility program**

The development of the Canadian program was complex. After several consultations with the Canadian government, administrative adjustments have been made to the program, enabling a dedicated pathway, operated by the Federal government. This led to an increase in the number of employers, and TBB expects to see high numbers of arrivals in Canada in 2024. Canada has committed to 2,000 spots, a soft ceiling that could be increased in the future.



### c) The UK labor mobility program



The UK healthcare pilot was launched and enabled over 200 nurses to come so far. New cohorts are arriving and more are in the pipelines for the future.

The program DT4E (Displaced Talents for Europe) was developed with the support of the AMIF, in Ireland, Belgium, the UK, and Portugal. The numbers remain limited for this program, but the matching between employers and talents started.



#### d) The United States (US) labor mobility program

The US program has not been fully launched, as the job matching has not started. The US government has committed to assist in different ways, using modified sponsorship-related programs under the USRAP or some categories of their regular work permits.

## II. Presentation – Marina Brizar

### UK and Europe Director at Talent Beyond Boundaries

#### a) Policy changes in the UK

In the UK, more than 550 people have secured solutions, whether as healthcare assistants or not. An important learning is that even with such great numbers, inflation and changes in government can shake everything.

In the UK, the process has been scalable and reliable. Instead of trying to get as many people as possible in, the UK pilot has focused on systemic change, striving for equity and fairness in access to labor mobility pathways. With the first cohort of healthcare professionals, TBB developed a pathway where registered nurses were able to travel to the UK as healthcare assistants and do their registration and language requirements in the UK before becoming registered nurses. These are new measures, as international nurses need to have certain requirements met before they travel to the UK. This was a necessary adjustment given that people in displacement may not have the capital to attend language tests, and testing centers, and not have access to electricity to study for certain things, and through that innovation, the healthcare program was scaled to what it is now. The latest development is that TBB partnered with the organization called NHS Professionals, which is the standing organization for NHS recruitment. Through this partnership, TBB has managed the program to exist without TBB's direct involvement. While numbers are important, the real incentive in this program is to have the systems change, which very often leads to an exponential growth in numbers.

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Policy change can be a matter of regulatory change or within specific employers, global mobility, etc.

## **b) The next steps for Labor Mobility in Europe**

**Spain:** TBB will start a partnership with the government of Spain. From a border context, which is a signatory to the trilateral agreement, with Canada and the US that looks at safe and legal options for displaced people from Latin America. A memorandum of understanding should be signed soon.

In the Spanish context, one of the biggest hurdles to labor mobility, language, is lifted, which will hopefully allow the program to scale up quickly.

**Germany:** TBB is looking at ways to open pathways in Germany, with the help of the Bosch foundation. This is a big target in terms of the size of the economy, but also the capacity of Germany to look at developing and upscaling capacity building of candidates while they are at source and create pipelines of applicants that can move through equitable pathways.

**Italy:** Discussions are being held with Italian organizations such as FCEI to see how TBB can contribute to expanding pathways in Italy.

**France:** TBB is looking at France now, considering the size of the economy but also the lifting of language barriers.

The goal is to open to 27 countries, including 19 European countries. Each context is different so there is no one-size-fits-all model that can be applied everywhere.

## **Q&A:**

### **1. How does the process work concretely, from the first identification to the matching with the employers, and ensure that the skills are sufficient for the employer?**

**Marina:** TBB believes that it is the role of the employer, as TBB is not a skills qualification agency. There is a database available to everyone, and we do the outreach for candidates. The employer sends a job description and then TBB goes through the Talent Catalog which is continuously developed and enhanced. TBB looks for the candidates with the right experience and shortlists them, asks them if they are willing to travel to the employer's country, and ensures that they have a well-founded fear of persecution. TBB sends the shortlist to the employer that decides who to invite for an interview. TBB facilitates the interviews and can run mock exams. On the surface, it is international mobility, but TBB is there as a facilitator and steps in if there are issues. For example, if the employer needs a coding test TBB will step in and facilitate access to the test, but the skills' determination is the responsibility of the employer and TBB does not certify degrees. There are too many people in the catalog and TBB does not have the expertise to certify them, this is not a recruitment agency. Also, there are countries where skills recognition is incredibly important, like Belgium and we are expecting the same in Germany. If this is very important, we need to see how to access these. In the UK, the nurses, together with us, developed a registration process for forcibly displaced people.

## 2. What kind of support do employers need to be persuaded to engage and implement the program?

**Marina:** what persuades employers is the skills shortage. They are motivated by diversity, inclusion, and a willingness to help people seeking asylum. For example, in Ireland, we are working with public health care and they were looking for 4 security software engineers. They could not fill this position since September 2022. TBB had security specialists in the catalog to fill the positions.

The support we offer to employers is the understanding of the challenges forcibly displaced people face. We also explain things employers may not understand: gaps in the CV, in the education, how to invest in candidates like salary advances, leases being put in the candidates' names, and for us, three distinct areas: outreach, which is selling the general thing, the engagement, and the recruitment process and making sure it's fair, and then the integration and adapting mobility processes, connecting with the communities, with alumni, and finally conducting M&E to make sure we monitor the progress.

**David:** our programs are new and genuinely innovative and therefore we build new connective tissues with governments and different civil society sectors that have not come across a humanitarian program with a business side to it. We are learning as we go, as we scale, we go through troubleshooting mode and we start dealing with exceptional situations. Giving employers confidence that we can find ways and help. When we find success stories with employers, we make sure they know about them and build confidence. The main thing is the shortage: in elderly care for example, they are hiring anyone, even people who do not have the right skills, and if we can provide and fill these vacancies, we can build a cohort hiring like in the UK and bridge the gap. It's quite varied and there are different challenges. It's often us working in the background to tell employers they need talents, and we'll help you once you find the right candidate.

## 3. Do you manage to monitor employees' retention after a certain time after their arrival?

**Marina:** we monitor and evaluate both the employers and the candidates, and 97% of candidates have remained in position for at least one year. It is for employers to welcome their staff and make sure they will stay with them.

**David:** employers know what retention and lack thereof costs them. We are too new to have long-term retention data but we will soon.

## 4. Will the candidates in the talent catalogue enter with a labor visa or do they need to apply for asylum?

**David:** our general approach is to use any existing visa pathway; most countries have various models. We will be experimenting in the US to use humanitarian visa pathways. If it's good for the refugee and the employer, that's all we need. When it comes to the visa category, we seize opportunities, which category will work more easily, and all candidates arrive with legal status and full legal rights, and we will not work with countries that do not provide for that. Asylum is a safety net, but we hope they will stay in employment. So far it has not been an issue and there have not been asylum claims for people who moved to the UK.

**Marina:** Speaking about employers, they are used to using sponsor visas. Labor mobility cannot happen without the employer's support. With the humanitarian pathways, applying for



asylum has created a double-layer entry, you need to demonstrate your vulnerability and refugee claim, but also that you are skilled and can be employed. We are trying to remove one layer of this and broaden the use of skilled pathways. In Australia, I was an immigration lawyer, and we used the humanitarian pathway before, but it's a matter of using what already exists to create something new. We must save the opportunity to prove that it exists and then pivot as needed.

**David:** we know from the Italian experience that humanitarian tools can be restructured, to enable humanitarian corridors for example, and we see interesting hybrids to move forward.

#### **5. What are the best innovations or practices introduced to scale up?**

**David:** There are specific examples, we know that if we want to become efficient at scaling up, and how we work with partners. In the early stages of the program, you know that you have to do things differently and the key learning is that you develop a stream of movement towards a given employer or a network of employers, and things go smoothly, and you start to decrease costs. If you work with large-scale hiring or small businesses and industry associations. In Canada, the hotel association is talking about the possibility of moving thousands of refugees to work in their hotels.

**Marina:** the innovation is to do it all and understand where things can start working but the first cohort of nurses was in the middle of covid and everyone went into quarantine I remember ordering people food to eat, and it was important for us to do that and understand why employers need to support with opening bank accounts, but also salary advances, pre-paid cards upon arrival. We need to do as much as possible and connect the dots. An innovation is to have the scale and mindset and we need to do everything to understand it and reach the end goal. The first cohort in the UK was 4 people but the end goal is 750, we start small and then increase as needed. Even with smaller organizations, come with the mindset of scaling with our end goal in mind. Creating that is the key to sustainability and scalability.

#### **6. What happens when the match between the employer and employee does not work out? Any educational support for the employer to bridge the gap between employer and employee?**

**David:** One of the advantages of the Canadian program, the person is a permanent resident, so you hope the employment works out.

**Marina:** One typical safeguard, the employee gets 60 days to find another opportunity and we advocate to double this time. Claiming asylum is the safeguard in this. There is a prima facie understanding that these people need international protection, and there is only one case where someone had a breakdown in employment, he was found redundant because of COVID-19 but shortly found another position in a better-suited location for him.

**David:** for your second question. We work through assisting with interview preparation, but we are very interested in the work being done by certain organizations, some IT companies, and other pilots to look at how we can work to prepare refugees to move for work.

**Marina:** TBB started an innovation challenge with a university. Usually what we find is that employers are interested in going to source countries and train people in specific skills that they can then move ready. It's an investment but it gives time for induction while they are in the source country, ready to move. This is something we are exploring, and we'll have a report on this. Europe is a challenging place because of the regulation, but once we get Ireland at

scale, it'll be a real leader as with the shortage, within 2 years you can access permanent residency and access to the Schengen space. The general opportunity to scale will be in Europe and we will see it hopefully increase exponentially.