

2 Recent developments in migration policy

This chapter provides an overview of the changes in the immigration policies of OECD countries during the period 2022-23, with a particular focus on major trends and policy changes related to labour migration and international pathways and protection.

In Brief

Key findings

- Most countries in the OECD are experiencing labour shortages and a lack of skilled workers, which has pushed labour migration higher on the policy agenda.
- New and ongoing wars and geopolitical conflict around the world have also led to record high levels of displacement and created a need to strengthen and expand current policy approaches to provide international protection, but also pilot new initiatives for persons in need of international protection.
- Several OECD countries have announced larger changes and reforms to the legal migration policy framework in the past year, often with the aim to increase migration to address labour and skill shortages. A few countries are instead explicitly looking at ways to reduce inflows.
- Besides measures to expand labour migration more generally, OECD countries are increasingly looking at making labour migration more skill-selective and/or focused on specific occupations and sectors.
- In the face of fast-growing numbers of persons in need of international protection, increasing exits from origin countries, and movements through transit countries, several OECD countries have introduced stricter asylum and border policies and reduced quotas for resettlement.
- Temporary approaches to protection – without a direct pathway for permanent or long-term residency – are increasingly being applied to address protection needs in multiple current protracted displacement situations.
- At the same time, there is a trend towards more diversification in the international protection and humanitarian admission responses. This includes the expansion of existing development of new complementary pathways such as private sponsorship programmes and labour and education pathways for refugees, to strengthen and extend national asylum and resettlement frameworks.

Introduction

Two years after the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing labour and skills shortages has become a top priority in national migration policy agendas in a majority of OECD countries. Part of this is related to short-term effects of the reduction in international mobility during the pandemic as well as widespread and persistent backlogs in processing applications. Part is due to a growing number of unfilled job vacancies. In the background, long-term demographic shifts are also shaping labour migration policy decisions. Many policy changes in 2022-23 thus focused on strengthening and expanding existing labour migration pathways as well as developing new policies and favourable pathways to admit labour migrants in specific occupations and sectors.

2022-23 was also marked by increased migration pressure in key origin and transit countries, driven by the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions, multiple and protracted refugee situations and escalation of geopolitical conflict. This has resulted in record high levels of displacement globally, as well as a sharp increase in irregular arrivals and asylum applications in many OECD countries. Against this background, a few, partly contradictory, trends in the provision of international and humanitarian protection have emerged in the OECD area. On the one hand, several countries have tightened their asylum policies,

lowering resettlement quotas and imposing stricter eligibility conditions for asylum seekers. On the other hand, policy responses have become more diversified, with a growing number of programmes established as a complement or alternative to traditional international protection pathways.

Major policy trends in 2022-23

Several OECD countries have announced sweeping changes or reform to the migration policy framework in the past year. Some have gone as far as announcing a migration policy “paradigm shift” (Sweden, Finland and Germany), although the purpose and intended impact on net migration of these reforms varies. While many countries are focusing on attracting immigrants to address labour and skills shortages, several committed to decrease overall migration levels.

Following elections, both Sweden and Finland are translating into stricter migration policies. The new government which took office in Sweden in October 2022 announced a series of changes with the overall aim to reduce net migration. The proposed reforms include stricter asylum legislation as well as stricter conditions for low-skilled labour immigration – including a higher salary threshold – and family reunification. The new coalition government in Finland following the elections in April 2023 announced its intention to cut refugee quotas and family reunification, raise the bar for work-based immigration and apply stricter language and residence requirements for foreigners to obtain citizenship. The post-Brexit immigration system in the United Kingdom aimed to make migration more selective, in particular limiting low-skilled migration, and reduce irregular border crossings. In the face of record-high immigration numbers in 2022 – due in part to a fast-growing number of dependants of international students, which increased by 750% between 2019 and 2023 – the government announced restrictions to student visa routes in May 2023. Only international students in post-graduate research routes will be able to bring family members.

Other countries are instead focusing on facilitating legal migration, notably to fill labour gaps, through for example more flexible admission conditions, increased quotas, and streamlining of immigration procedures and processes. Spain has reformed its General Immigration Law to streamline migration policy procedures with the overall aim to address persistent labour shortages and attract legal labour migrants into needed occupations. The reform facilitates and expands access to work permits and streamlines migration processes for different categories of migrants, including students and seasonal workers. The German Government adopted the bill to reform the German Immigration Act for Skilled Workers in March 2023. The reform, which passed legislation in July, will broaden the eligibility criteria for the EU Blue Card (e.g. by lowering the statutory salary requirements), relax several of the requirements for labour immigration of skilled workers, and facilitate temporary low-skilled labour migration. A new points-based job-search visa is also foreseen. The Australian Government is currently reviewing its immigration system and has identified a rebalance in temporary and permanent programmes as a key area to attract and retain global talent. In line with this, the government has announced an aim to create more pathways for permanent residency for skilled migrants in the future. Other policy changes include reforming the occupational shortage and streamlining intra-company transfers.

Strengthened regional migration management collaboration

At the EU level, Member States have agreed on significant parts of the long-negotiated New Pact on Migration and Asylum. A critical topic in the negotiations has been how to distribute asylum seekers more evenly across member countries. How and where an asylum application is processed is currently set out in the Dublin Regulation, but some countries have shouldered a greater burden, and asylum seekers are treated differently across the EU. The core of negotiation was the need to strike a balance between responsibility and solidarity. In June 2023, the European Council reached an agreement on two central legislative acts of the proposal affecting the distribution of asylum applications between Member States.

Two other main components of the pact include simplified asylum procedures and procedures for labour migration.

Migration management collaboration is also expanding in the Americas, notably with the adoption of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection in June 2022, signed by 21 countries. The non-binding declaration focuses on addressing the root causes of migration, expanding legal pathways, combatting human trafficking and other dangerous activities, and creating an early-warning system for large-scale crises. Since adoption, governments in the region have launched important initiatives, including expanded refugee resettlement programmes, family reunification and labour mobility schemes and other safe legal pathways to protection and immigration into the United States and other countries. In parallel, several bilateral migration-related agreements have also been concluded. The United States signed bilateral migration-related agreements with Costa Rica and Panama, and five mobility agreements were signed in different subregions within the Americas.

Electronic Travel Authorisation to be introduced in Europe

New requirements to travel to Europe will come into effect in 2023 through the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS). ETIAS is an electronic travel authorisation system that requires people from over 60 visa-exempt countries to seek travel authorisation to enter the Schengen zone. The authorisation does not apply to EU countries that are not part of the Schengen Zone. The system is expected to be fully operational in 2024. Similarly, the United Kingdom is implementing an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for people travelling to the country without a visa. The ETA is an electronic permission linked to the passport and is required for various visit purposes, including tourism, visiting family or friends, business, study, and transit through the United Kingdom without going through border control. Applications can be made through the UK ETA, with a decision usually provided within three working days. The ETA is valid for a maximum of two years and can be used for multiple visits. Individuals entering the United Kingdom under the ETA will continue to be subject to the same restrictions which currently apply to all visitors under the UK Immigration Rules. The scheme will initially be rolled out at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 for nationals from certain countries (Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), followed by a roll out for all other nationalities, except Irish nationals, during 2024.

The return of labour migration policy

While 2022 was marked by weakened economic conditions with high energy and food prices and turbulent financial markets, the global economy showed signs of slow recovery and improving prospects for growth in the first quarter of 2023. Despite weak economic conditions, labour markets in the OECD area remain strong, with record high employment rates and steadily falling unemployment rates. Many OECD countries are struggling to fill labour vacancies due to labour shortages and a lack of skilled labour. Attracting mid- and high-skilled migrants from abroad to support economic recovery and address labour shortages has thus become a priority in migration agendas in many countries. This is manifested in an increase in national targeted levels of labour immigration, more skill-selective policies, and efforts to facilitate immigration processes more generally.

Attracting talent continues to be a top priority in many OECD countries

A focus on increasing overall labour migration...

Several OECD countries have raised the national quotas or targeted number of immigrant workers to ease workforce and skills shortages and support economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Australia and Canada have announced increased immigration targets in their latest migration

plans. Canada aims to progressively increase immigration over the coming three years. The 2023-25 Immigration Levels Plan targets an admission of 465 000 permanent residents in 2023, 485 000 residents in 2024, and 500 000 residents in 2025. The 2023 target is 4% higher than in the 2022-24 Immigration Levels Plan. Italy and Norway increased quotas for third-country national workers compared to 2022 quotas. Italy further introduced a new law to issue future quotas every three years instead of annually and extend the validity of residence permits issued for family reasons, indefinite contract work, and self-employment from two to three years. In July 2023, Italy announced sharply higher quotas for 2023-25, of about 150 000 entries annually, as well as 40 000 additional seasonal entries open to those who were excluded from the 2022 quota. Austria, among other changes aimed at facilitating labour migration, increased its quota for seasonal workers by about 15% (from 5 035 in 2022 to 6 568 places in 2023). Finland – prior to the change in government – adapted its immigration legislation to spur work-based annual immigration to address skilled labour shortages, and introduced a fast-track plan for specialists by extending the long-term D visa to students, researchers, and employees with a certified employer and their family members. The H-2B programme in the United States, which allows employers to hire migrant workers for temporary and seasonal jobs, reached record numbers in 2022 as the government raised the fiscal year 2023 allocation with 64 716 supplemental visas for businesses who would suffer “irreparable harm” if unable to secure the workers requested.

New visa streams to attract workers have also been put in place. In July 2022, the Australian Government introduced the Temporary Residence Transition (TRT) stream under the Employer Nomination Scheme visa. This stream is designed for Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa holders whose employers wish to sponsor them, and the eligibility for the TRT stream was reduced from three years to two years of employment with the sponsoring employer and enables employers to address skills shortages by ensuring a permanent employer-sponsored pathway is available for a wider range of occupations.

Slovak Republic and Slovenia have adopted new laws to facilitate labour migration procedures. Slovenia made amendments to the law on the employment of foreigners in March 2023 to address labour shortages by speeding up the recruitment of immigrant workers from abroad or through status changes while ensuring adequate working conditions and fair remuneration. Employer or job changes will now be possible without any further administrative procedure beyond a consent of the public employment service and during the validity of the single permit. The simplified rules do not apply to foreign workers in the public sector. Furthermore, access to the labour market for asylum seekers will be shortened from nine to three months after the application has been registered. In the Slovak Republic, a new law adopted in January 2023 expands the categories of workers who are exempt from labour market testing and allows non-EU nationals on Single Permits to remain employed while their renewal application is pending.

Other measures to enable immigrants to fill labour shortages include facilitating legalisation processes of undocumented workers. The French Government has put forward a new immigration bill that will facilitate the legalisation process for undocumented workers already in the country who are active in sectors with labour shortages, while at the same time providing for swifter deportations. As part of a larger reform of its immigration system, Spain is introducing a regularisation programme to allow those who have lived in Spain for at least two years to regularise their situation in order to fill positions that are in demand, subject to training. The eligibility requirements and geographical scope for self-employment have also been relaxed.

In Germany, in addition to the significant overhaul of its labour migration system outlined above, a further new law, effective as of January 2023, allows migrants with long-term “tolerated status”¹ to obtain a temporary residence permit for 18 months, subject to certain conditions such as having resided in the country for the past five years. During this time, they are given a chance to fulfil the legal requirements for longer-term residence.

In contrast to the policies above, there are also policy changes that will increase the barriers for immigration, and particularly for low-skilled migrants. While Sweden has announced measures to promote

high-skilled migration through a new model for more efficient processing of work permit applications and the establishing of international recruitment units, the government also aims to cut low-skilled migration by raising the minimum salary requirement. As of October 2023, the minimum threshold salary requirement will double, from SEK 13 000 to SEK 26 560 which corresponds to 80% of the median salary. Australia has also announced an increase in the minimum threshold salary. As of July 2023, Australia increased the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) from AUD 53 900 to AUD 70 000. The TSMIT had remained constant since 2013, and the new income threshold corresponds to the threshold if it had been indexed to inflation and wages growth over the past decade. About 21 000 current workers on temporary skill shortage visas are currently paid less than AUD 70 000.

...and making it more skill and sector selective

Rapid technological development, growing specialisation in human capital and digitalisation in OECD economies has led to an increased need to design policies to attract immigrants with specific skill sets to support growth and innovation in key sectors. A common approach is to design labour policies to favour certain attributes, such as high wages, advanced qualifications, or specific sectors and occupations.

Australia has launched an international marketing campaign targeting skilled workers overseas in key sectors and occupations and prioritised processing for skilled visa applications in healthcare and teaching occupations. Austria has extended the occupation shortage list from 66 occupations in the 2022 list to 100 occupations in 2023. In Belgium, Flanders added four occupations to its shortage occupation list, while Wallonia expanded its shortage occupations list from 42 to 75 occupations in October 2022. Switzerland has relaxed the rules for highly skilled immigrants, including exemption from labour market tests for migrant workers in industries with skills shortages.

Visas to attract specific groups of immigrants with in-demand skills or experiences, such as start-up and talent visas, have also been on the rise in OECD in the past decade, but saw mixed developments in 2022-23. Canada has launched a Tech Talent Strategy to strengthen its position in global tech talent recruitment and attraction. The approach focuses on four key pillars. These include a new innovation stream under the International Mobility Program to attract highly talented individuals; improvements to existing programmes for workers in high-skilled tech occupations, including the Global Skills Strategy and the Start-up Visa Programme; and promoting Canada as a destination for digital nomads. Spain has created a one-year digital nomad visa, renewable for up to five years. Spain also extended the maximum initial validity of its start-up permit from two to three years and eased permit requirements by broadening the definition of “highly qualified professionals” and “entrepreneurial activity”. Japan improved rules for digital nomads. Italy’s plans to introduce a one-year digital nomad visa in the second half of 2022 were however put on hold. On the other hand, the United Kingdom has decided to phase out its start-up visa, while Australia is scaling down on the number of visas issued for its Global Talent Visa – which includes start-ups – from 15 000 in 2019 to 5 000 2023.

Migration and mobility agreements as a tool to recruit immigrant workers in key origin countries

To step up efforts to actively recruit immigrant workers, several OECD countries continue to sign bilateral agreements and advance migration and mobility partnerships with selected origin countries. Portugal, Germany and Austria have recently concluded agreements on migration and mobility with India. This is the first time Germany has signed such a bilateral agreement, and the agreement is intended to serve as a model for potential future similar agreements with other countries. India previously also concluded bilateral migration and mobility agreements with Finland, France and the United Kingdom. Portugal has also concluded a bilateral agreement on Moroccan workers staying and working in Portugal. Spain has signed a circular migration agreement with Guatemala to attract seasonal agricultural workers and launched a new edition of its wider bilateral programme with origin countries² with the aim to recruit more

than 16 000 seasonal workers from Morocco to the Spanish agriculture sector. Spain also admitted workers from Honduras, Ecuador and Senegal on a pilot basis.

Other measures to attract foreign talent include Germany's placement agreements with Jordan and Brazil for care workers, and the extension of an earlier placement agreement with Mexico to include hotel and restaurant workers. Workers recruited under these agreements can initiate the procedure for the recognition of their qualifications at the same time as they take up employment in Germany.

Australia is expanding the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM) through the consolidation of two provisions under one streamlined scheme and an aim to increase the number of PALM scheme workers to around 350 000 by June 2023. The PALM scheme also allows workers to bring immediate family members, who are allowed to live, work and study in Australia.

At the EU level, the Talent Partnerships launched in the context of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum aim to address skills shortages in the EU, strengthen mutually beneficial migration partnerships with third countries, and combat irregular migration. The talent partnerships will be open to all skill levels, various types of mobility (temporary, long-term, or circular), and economic sectors. In a first phase, the EU intends to conclude agreements with Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Addressing labour market matching issues

One barrier to international recruitment is friction in matching, which may be due to information shortfalls and processing delays. To reduce this friction, some OECD countries have allowed migrants to enter the country with the main purpose of seeking a job through a specific job-search visa. Job-search visas offer an opportunity for employers to meet potential candidates prior to making employment decisions and accelerates and simplifies the hiring process once a decision is taken. However, only a limited number of OECD countries currently offer job-search visas (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Job search visas in the OECD

At present, at least nine OECD countries offer a job-search visa: Austria, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden. A few of these countries have introduced more than one type of job-search visa or permit (Chile, Germany and Japan). The duration and eligibility criteria of job-search visas vary significantly across countries. Most job-search visas implemented in OECD countries have focused on highly qualified workers and/or shortage occupations. The Portuguese job-search visa stands out as the only visa without explicit skills requirements. Job-search visas are initially issued for between 6-24 months, sometimes with the right to renewal. A job-search visa often allows the holder to work, but some countries (Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Portugal) require a change of permit once the job seeker receives a job offer.

Several OECD countries have also experimented with job-search visas in the past but decided to phase them out. The reasons for cancelling the programmes vary, including difficulty in assessing likelihood of success, extended processing times, low number of applications, or overlap with other legal labour migration channels.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on information provided by the OECD Working Party on Migration.

Retaining talent through permit transitions

Australia is planning to improve access to permanent residence for skilled migrant workers to attract more highly skilled immigrants and move away from temporary labour migration. Following a comprehensive review of the Australian immigration system, the government announced that it plans to amend and expand the Temporary Residence Transition (TRT) stream of the Employee Nomination Scheme (ENS) by the end of 2023. All Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa holders will be eligible for ENS visas. Sponsored foreign nationals who hold a valid visa will be eligible for the ENS TRT stream after two years of employment instead of three years, and the limit on short-term TSS visa applications that can be made onshore will also be removed. Australia will further introduce a new Permanent Engagement Visa (PEV) to boost Pacific permanent migration, with an annual limit and distribution by lottery.

International students constitute an important pool of current and future workforce. Spain has improved the conditions for students to work during their studies and to stay and work post-graduation to encourage employment and self-employment among international graduates from Spanish universities. The changes allow foreign students to work 30 hours per week, up from 20, to gain more work experience in the Spanish labour market during their studies and more easily transition from a study permit to a work permit after graduation, including for self-employment. Australia has extended post-study work rights for international graduate students from an Australian higher education provider in targeted sectors (health, teaching, engineering, and agriculture). Korea has launched a fast-track programme for permanent residence and naturalisation of outstanding foreign scientific and technological talents to retain international top students and promote their integration.

International protection and humanitarian pathways

The global level of forced displacement reached new record levels in 2022. Much of the increase in the past year was driven by the war in Ukraine, but war and conflicts in other parts of the world, including Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar and Sudan, also contribute to the unprecedented numbers of displaced persons. Besides the inflow of Ukrainian nationals, the EU also saw a sharp increase in asylum applications from other nationalities in 2022. In the Americas, an increasing number of migrants from the region and beyond looked to cross from Mexico into the United States.

Several OECD countries have introduced reforms and policy changes to tighten the asylum system. Two additional trends related to international protection have emerged in the past years. The first is increased resort to temporary rather than permanent protection status for those in need of protection. Beyond the activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian nationals, similar approaches are increasingly being applied to other nationalities and protracted displacement situations. The second is the diversification of humanitarian responses, with the development of a broader set of pathways applied to respond to international protection needs. Countries are increasingly looking at complementary approaches, such as private sponsorship programmes and labour migration pathways, alongside national asylum and resettlement frameworks.

Recent changes in asylum-related policies

Several OECD countries have introduced stricter asylum-related policies in the past year. In November 2022, Costa Rica signed two decrees establishing stricter conditions for asylum seekers, to alleviate pressure on the asylum system that is suffering from heavy backlogs. The new policies limit the ability of asylum seekers to obtain a work permit while their application is pending approval, restricts the time between entry to submission of the application to one month, and requires a justification. Sweden is also introducing more strict asylum legislation, phasing out permanent residence permits in favour of

temporary restrictions. The Swedish Government is further planning to limit the possibility to grant residence permit on humanitarian grounds.

A few countries are also introducing policies to prevent people entering the country through irregular channels from seeking asylum. In the United States, the Title 42 public health order border restrictions introduced under the Trump administration, which allowed for the expulsion of asylum seekers to prevent cross border spread of COVID-19, were lifted in May 2023. The Biden administration instead ordered a transition back to Title 8 border processing, individuals who unlawfully cross the border are considered ineligible for asylum – unless they can demonstrate an exception – and will be removed and barred from reentry for a least five years. In 2022, the United Kingdom announced its aim to send irregularly arriving asylum seekers to Rwanda, and Denmark has signed a declaration with Rwanda to enable a mechanism for the transfer of asylum seekers from Denmark to Rwanda.

Finally, policy responses to displacement directly and indirectly impacted by climate change has been gaining interest from policy makers and the international community in recent years. Few OECD countries have introduced explicit policies to respond to climate-induced displacement. One exception is Colombia. In April 2023, Colombia's Congress began discussing a bill to recognise climate-induced displacement, the first of its kind in Latin America. Adopting a broad definition of climate-displaced people, it seeks to prioritise access to housing, health services and education and to establish a national register of climate-displaced people. The bill has received approval in the first out of four rounds of discussion required to pass.

Resettlement programmes are picking up after the COVID-19 pandemic, but several countries have reduced annual quotas

Most refugees and forcibly displaced persons are hosted in neighbouring countries and regions. Many OECD countries are currently receiving refugees through resettlement programmes, which can help alleviate pressure in countries of first asylum.

The United States has historically resettled more refugees annually than any other country. In recent years, resettlement declined in both commitments and actual numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and stricter policies introduced by the Trump administration, including a historically low cap of 15 000 in fiscal year 2021. The Biden administration has announced a substantial increase in the total resettlement admissions caps for US Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 to 125 000, the highest quota in several decades.

Some countries in OECD Europe, such as Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland have long-standing resettlement programmes going back several decades. Other countries only recently started receiving refugees through resettlement, often around or just after 2015 when the EU Resettlement Programme was launched (EMN, 2023^[2]). Several OECD European countries reduced the annual quota for resettlement during 2022-23, including Belgium, Germany and Sweden. Finland was one of the few countries to increase the quota between 2021 and 2022, but the new government that came into power in June 2023 has announced a future reduction in refugee resettlement quotas.

At EU level, the European Commission proposed a Regulation establishing a Union Resettlement Framework in 2016, to secure a more permanent and predictable EU policy on resettlement that can complement national resettlement programmes. The European Council and Parliament reached a final agreement on the Regulation in December 2022, which is still awaiting formal adoption.

Besides refugee resettlement programmes, some OECD countries are also providing humanitarian admission programmes as a complement for displaced people that do not meet the requirements for resettlement. Such programmes have for example been applied in the evacuation of Afghan nationals following the fall of the prior government in 2021.

International protection responses are increasingly of temporary nature

The response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis reveals an emerging trend to provide temporary humanitarian protection. Recent examples include responses to mass displacement of not only Ukrainian but also Afghan, Venezuelan and Syrian nationals. Temporary protection approaches have the advantage of being flexible and offering fast access to protection in critical situations such as mass displacements. On the other hand, temporary approaches sometimes come with limited rights and are often designed to remain temporary, providing no direct pathway to permanent or more long-term residence. Beneficiaries are left in an uncertain and sometimes vulnerable situation.

In Europe, the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) has now been extended to grant protection status to Ukrainians until March 2024. Finland and Poland have recently started offering Ukrainians under temporary protection status an opportunity to apply for a residence permit for work, to provide greater stability for employment and other rights. Uptake in both countries has however been low.

Other OECD countries also offer similar temporary protection approaches as the TPD. The United States offers humanitarian parole under Uniting for Ukraine (U4U). Humanitarian parole does not grant a pathway to permanent residence. Canada grants two-year temporary protection to Ukrainians through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel for overseas Ukrainians (CUAET). The application deadline for CUAET has been extended to mid-July 2023, while those already in Canada with a visa under CUAET have until end of March 2024 to apply to extend or change their temporary status in Canada.

The United States has extended humanitarian parole to Afghan nationals that have been evacuated from Kabul since 2021. A re-parole process providing for a two-year renewal for qualifying Afghan nationals was announced in June 2023, enabling Afghan nationals to continue to live and work in the United States. However, the US Congress has so far declined to take up the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would grant a path to permanent residence. Similarly, new parole programmes granting temporary protection status have also been introduced for up to 30 000 nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela, to address pressing protection needs and pressure at its southern border.

Temporary residence permits and visas are also being issued to asylum seekers and displaced people already residing in the country of destination. The United States Temporary Protected Status (TPS) allows migrants whose countries of origin are considered unsafe the temporary right to live and work in the United States. During 2022-23, TPS was designated or extended for nationals of South Sudan, Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Syria, Venezuela, Burma, Ethiopia, Haiti, Yemen, Somalia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nepal and Nicaragua. Costa Rica has created a temporary special labour pathway for asylum seekers from Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Asylum-seekers from these countries with a pending or rejected application can now apply for a two-year temporary work and residence permit, provided that they waive their asylum application and renounce the claim to refugee status.

In the Americas, Venezuelans have been granted temporary protection in several countries across the continent, often without a pathway to permanent or long-term residency. Temporary Protection Status (TPS) remains the main protection and regularisation instrument for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and has set a historic precedent in the region. It grants legal status to stay in the country for an initial ten years, with the possibility to apply for a permanent resident visa after ten years. However, Venezuelans have faced increasing challenges to obtain TPS, as well as barriers to access education, healthcare, or other services. To address this, in January 2023, the migration authorities developed a new temporary identification document/certificate for TPS applicants, to facilitate access to public services and temporarily enter and leave the country. Throughout 2022 and 2023, Colombia has also issued measures aimed at extending protection to those in an irregular situation.

Complementary pathways

The global increase in displacement has led to the development and expansion of innovative approaches to increase access to protection. Complementary pathways constitute a complement to refugee resettlement and other forms of access to asylum by offering safe and legal admission avenues to refugees residing outside their country of origin seeking opportunities in a third country (OECD/UNHCR, 2023^[3]). Advancing complementary pathways for refugees to safely move to third countries is a key objective of the Global Compact on Refugees. Complementary pathways can include pathways through education, employment opportunities, family reunification and humanitarian and sponsorship schemes. In recent years, there have been efforts to lift the barriers preventing refugees from reuniting with their families, moving to work or study, or being sponsored to move to a new country.

Family continues to be the most important complementary pathway (OECD/UNHCR, 2023^[3]). Recent policy developments to move towards more temporary approaches to protection may have the effect of limiting family reunification opportunities as they often do not entail family reunification entitlements. Some recent policy development has however moved in the direction of lifting restrictions for family reunification. In January 2023, Australia lifted a previous ban on refugee family-reunification for refugees arriving by boat. The decision does not however apply to refugees holding a Temporary Protection visa. In August 2022, the Netherlands suspended refugee family reunification to reduce pressure in the asylum system and ease overcrowded asylum-seeker centres and shortage of housing. In February 2023, the highest administrative court in the country ruled that the restriction on the right to family reunification of people with asylum status was unlawful and the measure was suspended.

Private sponsorship programmes are on the rise

Sponsorship programmes refer to initiatives by individuals or communities to assume responsibility for providing financial and social support to a resettled person or family for a predetermined period. Sponsorship programmes can be part of the overall national resettlement system to strengthen and expand the capacity to provide resettlement.

The United States has recently put in place several sponsorship programmes, such as the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans, a community-based sponsorship programme to help vulnerable Afghans resettle, and the sponsorship-based parole programme Uniting for Ukraine, a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to temporarily resettle in the United States during a two-year period of parole with the help of a sponsor. The most recent sponsorship programme is Welcome Corps, which was launched in early 2023 and builds on lessons learned from previous national sponsorship programmes. The first year of the programme will be carried out in two phases. The first phase includes matching sponsors with refugees whose cases are already approved for resettlement under the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), while the second phase will allow private sponsors to identify refugees to refer to USRAP for resettlement and support. The target for the first year of the programme is 10 000 persons sponsoring 5 000 refugees. Canada, whose long-standing private sponsorship programme has served as a model for other countries, has announced an increase in the number of sponsored refugees by sponsorship agreement holders to 13 500 in 2023.

Among EU countries, several countries have introduced sponsorship programmes and schemes in recent years. The schemes in Belgium and Spain are still in a pilot stage, while Germany and Ireland have transitioned from pilot to established sponsorship programmes. Community sponsorship schemes are generally not considered a separate pathway but part of national resettlement or humanitarian admission and supplement government programmes. Beneficiaries are typically selected from the pool of refugees participating in resettlement programmes selected by UNHCR. The scale of the programmes in terms of persons admitted is so far very limited. To date, France is the European country with the highest total number of admitted persons, with 531 agreements issued between 2017-21 targeting Syrian and Iraqi refugees hosted in Lebanon (EMN, 2023^[2]).

Unlocking skilled migration pathways for refugees and displaced persons

Skilled migration pathways are generally very difficult to access for refugees and displaced persons, despite many having skills that are in high demand in potential destination countries. Against the background of skills shortages in the OECD area, several countries have started to explore possibilities to offer legal labour pathways to skilled people in need of international protection. Many of these programmes have been initiated by the organisation Talent Beyond Boundaries, whose mission is to open up access to skilled migration pathways for refugees and displaced people (Box 2.2).

In OECD Europe, Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) offers a legal labour pathway for displaced persons in Jordan and Lebanon to connect with employers to find employment in Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom. A key feature of the programme is that it is driven by employer needs and applies to all sectors with labour shortages. In February 2023, the Nursing and Midwife Council in the United Kingdom announced a new policy to support forcibly displaced persons who want to register as healthcare professionals with flexibility on documentation requirements.

Canada has announced new funding of CAD 6.2 million to expand the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), a complementary pathway for skilled refugees overseas. Canada is aiming to welcome 2 000 skilled refugees through this pathway in the years to come. In March 2023, an additional pathway was launched under the EMPP to offer a more flexible approach to eligibility by allowing other displaced people in need of protection to apply. Australia's Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot is a two-year complementary labour mobility pathway pilot for skilled refugees and displaced persons initiated in 2021. The programme applies more flexible requirements related to skills assessments, English language skills, age, and provision of travel documents, to enable skilled refugees to access employer-sponsored skilled migration pathways with eligibility criteria that are otherwise impossible for refugees to fulfil due to their status.

Box 2.2. Talent Beyond Boundaries matches employers with skilled refugees and displaced people

The global non-profit organisation Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) works with governments and local and national organisations to promote and expand skilled migration pathways for refugees that can benefit individuals, family members, communities, and the economy. TBB is focused on facilitating the matching of refugee skills in countries of first asylum with the demand from employers in destination countries. Programmes initiated by TBB have been successfully implemented in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The TBB Talent Catalog is the first online platform of its kind to collect comprehensive data on the professional backgrounds of thousands of refugees and displaced people. Over 50 000 displaced people have registered on the platform to date, and more than 300 have found skilled pathways to destination countries. The registrants represent a wide range of occupations, including software developers, healthcare professional, engineers, and skilled trade workers.

TBB collaborates with UNHCR in several regions, and at the end of 2022 TBB entered an official partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to further scale its activities.

Source: IOM (2022^[4]), "IOM and Talent Beyond Boundaries Join Forces to Strengthen Labour Mobility Pathways for Refugees and other Displaced Populations", <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-and-talent-beyond-boundaries-join-forces-strengthen-labour-mobility-pathways-refugees-and-other-displaced-populations>; Talent Beyond Boundaries (2023^[5]), <https://www.talentbeyondboundaries.org/>.

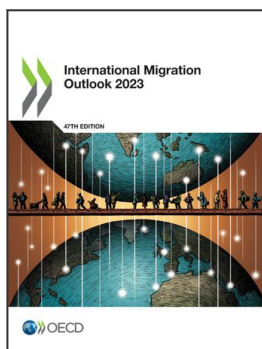
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Notes

¹ The tolerated status permit (*Duldung*) is a temporary residence permit granted in situations when deportation is deemed impossible due to humanitarian or technical reasons.

² Collective Management of Hiring in Origin (GECCO).



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