



# Green Borders: Policy Recommendations to Improve Talent Mobility

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A powerful and balanced voice for business

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## Introduction

This paper puts forth recommendations to governments for migration-related policies that will facilitate the low-carbon transition and assist businesses seeking to adapt to climate change impacts and honour their sustainability commitments. Just as misguided environmental policies can be counterproductive, too misguided or outdated migration systems can inhibit progress toward a green transition.

Presented by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE)<sup>1</sup> and based on the report: “[Green Borders: Climate Change and Business Mobility](#)” launched by the Business Advisory Group on Migration at the 2024 Summit of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, **the paper outlines ways in which governments can ensure that migration systems and policies are fit to meet the climate challenge, thus providing migrants with opportunities to contribute to the transition to a low carbon future and at the same time helping support local enterprises, economies and societies.** Experts from the IOE Policy Working Group contributed to the

drafting of this paper. Their valuable inputs have ensured that the recommendations are concrete and foster impact.

Many of these recommendations are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. When supported by responsible and sustainable business practices, as well as an enabling legal and regulatory environment for sustainable enterprises and safe and orderly migration, acting on them should result in an improvement in global talent mobility, accelerated green skills training, and critical support for climate-affected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).



This paper puts forth recommendations to governments for migration-related policies that will facilitate the low-carbon transition and assist businesses seeking to adapt to climate change impacts and honour their sustainability commitments.

<sup>1</sup> With 152 national employers’ organisation members in 143 countries, in addition to a large network of partner companies, IOE is one of the most representative voices of the private sector at global level.

## Background

The global response to climate change is accelerating as countries work to reduce emissions in line with Paris Agreement targets. Both governments and the private sector have risen to this challenge. 89 per cent of global emissions, representing 92 per cent of global GDP, now form part of a Net Zero target through countries' Nationally Determined Contributions. Further, companies are making their commitments: targets now cover 65 per cent of the annual revenue of the world's largest 2000 companies, and private sector investment and innovation will be an important, if not the most important, source of the goods, services, and technologies required to achieve these targets.

Yet, according to numerous authoritative sources, the world is facing a green skills gap that, in the energy sector alone, is expected to rise to 7 million jobs by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the International Energy Agency predicts that the transition to Net Zero will require additional skills training for some 16 million workers within this sector.<sup>3</sup> This skills and training gap is widespread, affecting a range of industries in developed and developing countries alike. According to a recent study by McKinsey, for example, in the U.S. 87 per cent of companies surveyed reported that they currently or soon will be unable to find appropriately skilled hires.<sup>4</sup> In short, the achievement of Net Zero is crucially dependent on companies finding and deploying appropriately trained workers at all skill levels.



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- 2 Boston Consulting Group (2023), "Will a Green Skills Gap of 7 Million Workers Put Climate Goals at Risk," <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2023/will-a-green-skills-gap-put-climate-goals-at-risk>
- 3 International Energy Agency (2021), "Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector," <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>
- 4 McKinsey & Co. (2021), "Mind the [Skills] Gap," <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/sustainable-inclusive-growth/charts/mind-the-skills-gap>

# Twelve Key Recommendations

The Green Borders Report identified four areas where climate-related migration is salient for business. There are 12 recommendations on migration-related policies that will facilitate the low-carbon transition and assist businesses seeking to adapt to climate change impacts and honour their sustainability commitments.

## Area 1: Labour mobility is required to fill crucial skills shortages

The common understanding of the term “climate migrant” is that it is someone forced to move because of the impacts of climate change. This need not always be the case. Increasingly, the effects of climate change are driving the demand for migrant labour at every skill level, creating an increasingly competitive international labour market. As noted above, no country currently has sufficient domestic talent in key sectors to address the climate challenge. In most countries, national training and reskilling schemes are not being scaled up at the pace needed to fill the green skills gap. At the same time, weak institutions and/or outdated or inefficient migration systems often act as barriers to hiring and training talent at all skill levels, as well as to orderly migration flows. While not a panacea, better integration between the green skills in demand and legal pathways could help accelerate the green transition and provide decent livelihoods for those wishing to move, as well as those forced to do so.

To address these skills gaps, governments could:

1. Ensure that migration systems provide sufficient legal pathways to address the movement of “green talent” wherever needed. Existing routes of managed migration should be adapted to accommodate the efficient recognition of skills and qualifications, allowing governments to facilitate labour mobility and better respond to developing climate-induced disasters. In addition, consideration should be given to developing complementary labour pathways targeted specifically at the talent required to effect climate change policies, including those tied to the Hire-Train Move model.
2. Ensure that fair and ethical recruitment policies and practices are enshrined in legal and regulatory frameworks and effectively implemented, including in newly initiated Talent Pools.
3. Ensure horizontal and vertical policy coherence across relevant sectors and levels of government.

## The ‘Hire – Train – Move’ model

This model would allow climate migrants to train in their host country to equip them with green skills for the future, whether updating or adapting existing skills or re-skilling for critical green roles in destination countries.

A plumber could retrain as a heat pump technician with relative ease, noting that any such professional training would need to be coupled with the appropriate language training.

This approach would build a scalable and sustainable talent pipeline for business, tied into regulatory frameworks to ensure responsible cross-border recruitment (Reco 1) and provide clear expectations for migrants (to minimise potential exploitation, Reco 2.)

## Area 2: Climate-related migration affects the size and composition of different workforces

Large-scale displacements of people can create labour shortages and simultaneously give rise to social unrest, unemployment and informality. Such movements also exacerbate skills gaps and skills shortages and highlight deficiencies in certification schemes. Improved global cross-recognition of skills will facilitate labour mobility and the ability of climate migrants to find work that befits their skill levels. Moreover, the timely integration of large groups of migrants into the formal economy will benefit both local economies and migrants themselves.

To address these imbalances and support the development of skills and talent, governments could:

4. Adopt policies and regulatory frameworks that discourage informality, including by encouraging diverse forms of work such as remote, platform, agency and freelance work.
5. Adopt legal frameworks that address the ability of migrants to work in the formal economy, including labour market reforms, social protection schemes, access to banking and financial services, and access to education and vocational training, including language training.
6. Enhance green skills training and up-skilling programmes and improve systems for the identification, recognition, certification, and development of skills, including consideration of such schemes as Skills Mobility Partnerships, Talent Pools, and the Common European Framework of Reference to Languages, which has successfully standardised the assessment of foreign language proficiency.

## Area 3: Enterprises are affected by climate change and require policies and measures to deal with relocation and restructuring challenges

Many economies are suffering the consequences of climate change through, among other factors, the impact of extreme weather events on infrastructure, supply chains and the cost and availability of raw materials. SMEs are particularly vulnerable in this regard, and many potential climate migrants will be SME owners or will be employed by an SME. The closure or relocation of enterprises has implications for the sustainability of jobs and the economic viability of local communities. On the other hand, new business opportunities will arise from changed circumstances.

### Brazil's Green Visa (not yet operational)

To support Brazil's green transition ambitions, several regulatory reforms have been launched to encourage investment into renewable projects (including hydrogen) and a forthcoming "Green Visa", the first of its kind in the world. The full details of the Green Visa are not yet known; however, it is expected that investors in green projects certified by government authorities will benefit from immigration facilitations to bring foreign nationals to undertake the projects.

To address these vulnerabilities and allow entrepreneurs to take advantage of new prospects, governments could:

7. Ensure a proper enabling environment for businesses, especially SMEs, to efficiently incentivise and enable the development of resilience strategies that would allow companies to remain in their communities and assist those required to relocate.
8. Ensure that disaster recovery policies and programs provide sufficient support to businesses to thrive and, where necessary, adapt to the consequences of climate-induced natural disasters, thus allowing them to continue providing employment.

#### **Area 4: Climate-related migration may make it difficult for enterprises to attract and retain employees**

The impacts of climate change on infrastructure and business operations may be compounded by its effect on the labour supply, i.e. by the departure of skilled workers and difficulties in attracting and retaining appropriately skilled new talent, as well as by the deleterious effects of extreme weather on employees' health, wellbeing, and productivity. At the same time, demonstrating leadership by promoting just transitions can be an important factor in attracting and retaining talent, both to support ongoing business objectives and take advantage of new products, services and markets created by the Green Economy.

In light of these concerns, governments could:

9. Seek ways to promote the development and deployment of technologies that provide access to relevant training while providing clear guidelines around the parameters of remote work – thus encouraging knowledge sharing and ensuring effective access to appropriate talent pools.
10. Facilitate collaboration among government, business and educational institutions at national and international levels, and devise policies to support foreign students and facilitate academic and work-related exchange programs, including the recognition of foreign credentials and qualifications, provisions for work visas, and extensions of student visas.

#### **Egypt's expansion of foreign worker percentage for hydrogen production projects**

Companies involved in any eligible Egyptian green hydrogen production project are now able to increase the percentage of their workforce, which is comprised of foreign nationals, up to 30 per cent for the first 10 years after signing a green hydrogen project agreement. Eligible employers can now hire proportionately more foreign nationals, providing flexibility with respect to talent management strategies, including a greater ability to acquire and retain individuals with project-relevant specialised skills.

Businesses are vital stakeholders in the climate space. To be credible and effective, the design and implementation of policies and programmes targeted at the nexus between climate and migration should be demand-driven and based on the best available information—information best obtained from employers on the ground. Even with such information, however, migration policymaking will likely be taking place within the context of the hostile political environments to immigration that persist in many countries, making overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and integrating migrants in labour markets increasingly difficult.

To address these general concerns, governments could:

- 11.** Involve employers as appropriate at the global, national, regional and local levels at the earliest stage of policy design, thus ensuring that they are fit for purpose –i.e., they focus on the needed skills. This should include identifying and seeking the input of key stakeholders such as IOE, national employer federations, local companies, and business networks.
- 12.** Work to improve the migration narrative, e.g. by reinforcing the message that when migration and integration policies are properly implemented, migrants constitute an important resource: they carry with them skills that are vital to confronting the structural and technical challenges posed by climate policies.

## **The UAE's Blue Residency Visa**

The United Arab Emirates has announced the eligibility requirements for its Blue Residency Visa, including provisions for visa holders to sponsor family members and domestic workers. This visa type – which will grant visa holders a right to reside in the country for up to 10 years (renewable) – is not yet in effect, and authorities are yet to clarify when the permit type will be available. The Blue Residency Visa is likely to increase the attraction and long-term retention of talented individuals in the environmental, climate change, sustainability or renewable energy sectors.



## Conclusion

Businesses are accustomed to managing risk and dealing with uncertainty. However, the accelerating impacts of a changing climate, as well as the demands of climate policies, are straining the resilience of many enterprises. Without the ability to adapt and in the absence of adequate government support, their coping capacities will be severely tested – with implications for the owners of those businesses, their employees, and the wider community. Moreover, without access to the appropriate skills and talent, their ability to address climate change will be severely compromised.



Business and government must work together to mitigate the consequences and maximise the benefits of climate-related migration.

It is within the power of governments to ameliorate this situation. Many governments have made climate-related commitments. Their implementation will require both political leadership and the involvement of civil society and business. Business and government must work together to mitigate the consequences and maximise the benefits of climate-related migration by providing assistance for adaptation, particularly to SMEs, enhancing green skills training, and implementing effective immigration systems that facilitate the movement of global talent at all skill levels. Doing so would give new meaning to the term *climate migrant*, allowing many of those on the move to become productive contributors in their host communities.



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