

Policy Brief

A Labour Pathway to Ireland for Displaced Workers:

Looking Back at the Policy Design Process and Charting Next Steps

Irene de Lorenzo-Cáceres Cantero





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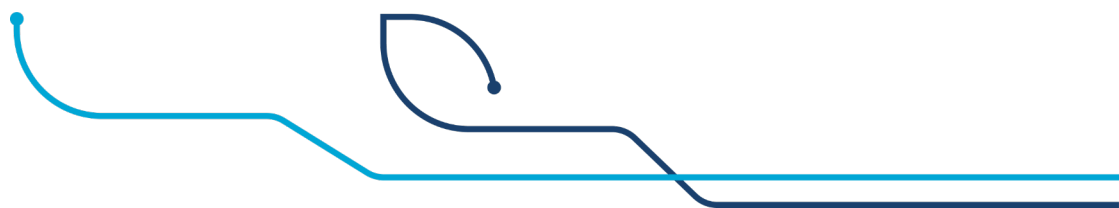
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This policy brief is part of a series documenting specific aspects of the policy design process of skills-based pathways to Belgium, Ireland and Italy in the context of the EU-Passworld project.

As a signatory to the Global Compact on Refugees, Ireland is committed to resettlement and other third-country solutions for people in need of international protection, including complementary pathways. Ireland is one of the first Member States of the European Union (EU) developing a labour pathway for displaced workers. This is taking place in the context of two projects funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF): EU-Passworld and Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E).

EU-Passworld is a three-year (2022-2024) project in which a multi-stakeholder consortium led by Caritas Italiana is working to design and pilot innovative education and labour pathways with a link to community sponsorship in Belgium, Ireland and Italy for at least 200 individuals in need of international protection by the end of 2024. In Ireland, EU-Passworld has the support of competent national authorities and aims to pilot education and labour pathways linked to community sponsorship for 50 people in need of international protection. The project is led by UNHCR and Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre, while Fragomen and TBB are providing advisory support.

Despite an initial focus on testing different policy approaches with small numbers of beneficiaries, pilots established in the context of EU-Passworld are being built in a way that will allow pathways to grow into self-sustaining programmes that work at scale. By exploring how community sponsorship can be leveraged to support the welcome and integration of education and labour pathway beneficiaries, EU-Passworld will develop evidence on when and how sponsorship leads to more sustainable, effective and efficient complementary pathway programmes, also benefitting receiving communities and societies at large. For further information, please visit the project website: <https://www.eupassworld.eu>.

DT4E is a three-year project (2022-2024) led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and implemented in partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), Fragomen, Fedasil and the Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (ACM). The project aims to facilitate and strengthen labour mobility schemes to match skilled individuals in need of international protection living in Jordan and Lebanon with employers in Ireland, Belgium, Portugal and the United Kingdom. DT4E aims to address global skills shortages while also providing a safe and legal pathway that enables displaced workers, including refugees and their families, to sustainably integrate into the European labour market. This is an employer-led initiative based on international recruitment models with little or no cost to receiving States. DT4E targets a minimum of 250 workers to benefit from the project, including 50 beneficiaries in Ireland, where DT4E is co-funded by the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). For further information, please visit the project website: <https://belgium.iom.int/displaced-talent-europe-dt4e>.

I. Country Context **1. Ireland's Labour Market**

Ireland has a competitive and open labour market that is highly dependent on international trade with major partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom (UK) and other Member States of the European Union (EU), notably Germany, Belgium and France.¹ The country's economy relies heavily on computer and technology global exports, and functions as a major hub for technology companies both big and small.² Life sciences³ and financial services⁴ are also growing sectors.

Ireland is currently at full employment. In January 2024, the unemployment rate was 4.5%,⁵ slightly up from the record 4.1% reached in July and August 2023, its lowest level since June 2001.⁶ While job creation has been slowing down over the past year, this seems to be driven by the difficulty employers are having in filling roles when the majority of the workforce is already employed.⁷ Skills shortages persist in occupations in science and engineering, ICT, health and social care, construction, hospitality, transport and logistics, among others.⁸

Ireland's workforce is shaped by immigration, which is responsible for about half of the total population increase in Ireland over the past six years, with the majority of newcomers being of working age and in employment. In 2023 Ireland saw its highest levels of immigration since the Celtic Tiger peak in 2007, with a total of 141,600 newcomers entering the country – over 42,000 of them Ukrainians.⁹ Migrant workers are particularly crucial in the healthcare and ICT sectors, which accounted for almost half of employment permits granted by the Irish government in 2023, followed by manufacturing, accommodation, food services, and financial and insurance activities.¹⁰

2. International Recruitment to Ireland since 2022

The macro-economic context in which the EU-Passworld and Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) projects commenced in early 2022 significantly deteriorated in 2023. While the Irish economy has weathered much of the recent turbulence quite well, its labour market is not immune to current global trends shaped by inflation and high interest rates.

The global ICT and broader tech sector have been particularly impacted, with hiring freezes put in place since mid-2022¹¹ and an estimated 262,735 workers laid off in 2023¹² – which has also been interpreted as a labour market 'normalisation' in the wake of an unusual post-pandemic hiring surge.¹³ Ireland has been disproportionately affected by this development, accounting for 40% of all EU layoffs in the ICT sector¹⁴ and leading to a decrease of almost 54% in the number of employment permits granted

¹ OEC, Ireland Yearly Trade, see [link](#).

² Enterprise Ireland, see [link](#).

³ See [link](#) and [link](#).

⁴ See [link](#).

⁵ See [link](#).

⁶ See [link](#) and [link](#).

⁷ European Commission, Labour Market Information, Ireland, see [link](#).

⁸ National Skills Bulletin 2023, page ii, see [link](#).

⁹ National Skills Bulletin 2023, page 23, see [link](#).

¹⁰ Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Employment Permit Statistics 2023, Permits by Sector, see [link](#).

¹¹ See [link](#).

¹² Alyssa Stringer and Cody Corral, A comprehensive list of 2023 & 2024 tech layoffs, Tech Crunch, see [link](#) (last updated on 28 February 2024).

¹³ IBEC (2023), IBEC Quarterly Economic Outlook, Q2 2023, page 2, see [link](#).

¹⁴ Pádraig Hoare, Ireland had 'by far' the highest tech layoffs in EU, Eurofound confirms, Irish Examiner, see [link](#) (7 July 2023).

by the Irish government for jobs in information and communication activities, from 10,832 in 2022 to just 5009 in 2023.¹⁵

While observers expect this downward trend in international recruitment to continue,¹⁶ Ireland's health and social work sector is showing resilience,¹⁷ despite a freeze since June 2023 on the recruitment of managers and administrators¹⁸ by the Health Service Executive (HSE)¹⁹ linked to overspending.²⁰ This reflects the country's longstanding labour shortages in the health and personal care sectors.

Two additional factors impacting international recruitment to Ireland at present are the country's chronic housing crisis,²¹ as well the arrival of 104,870 Ukrainian citizens since February 2022.²²

It is in this broader context that a labour pathway to Ireland for people in need of international protection has been developed, using existing channels for international recruitment and focusing on key sectors with persistent skills shortages and a solid track record of hiring third country nationals.

¹⁵ Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Employment Permit Statistics 2022 (see [link](#)) and Employment Permit Statistics 2023 (see [link](#)). For further Employment Permit Statistics, see [link](#).

¹⁶ IBEC (2023), IBEC Quarterly Economic Outlook, Q2 2023, pages 2 and 8, see [link](#).

¹⁷ 9,791 permits were issued for Health and Social Work activities in 2022 and 10,037 in 2023. Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Employment Permit Statistics 2022 (see [link](#)) and Employment Permit Statistics 2023 (see [link](#)). For further Employment Permit Statistics, see [link](#).

¹⁸ See [link](#).

¹⁹ See [link](#).

²⁰ See [link](#).

²¹ See [link](#) and [link](#). Ireland's housing crisis is not limited to Dublin, and it is impacting Irish and EEA nationals as much as non-EEA nationals.

²² Ireland Central Statistics Office, Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland Series 12, see [link](#).

II. Key Features of the Labour Pathway to Ireland

1. The Critical Skills Employment Permit as Recommended Framework

1.1. Advantages of the Critical Skills Employment Permit for Displaced Workers

Similarly to most displaced labour mobility pilot programmes around the world, EU-Passworld and DT4E project partners are using a well-established pathway under Ireland's Employment Permits framework. This is not only because testing an existing system in the context of a pilot project can serve to identify law and policy reforms needed to make that system more flexible, equitable and inclusive, but also because it is essential that employers – as key stakeholders – can hire displaced workers using mainstream international labour mobility processes, rather than having to get used to new and ad-hoc pathways.

To work in Ireland, individuals who are not from the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA), Switzerland and the UK must have either an Employment Permit granted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), which involves employer sponsorship, or, alternatively, a permission from the Department of Justice (DoJ) which grants them a right to work without the need for an Employment Permit.²³ In addition, if the individual resides outside the State and they are a visa required national,²⁴ they must obtain a Long Stay D entry visa at the nearest Irish embassy or consulate in order to be able to enter Ireland on foot of the Employment Permit.²⁵

Ireland's Employment Permits framework establishes different types of permits.²⁶ Among those, the option deemed most suitable for displaced workers is the Critical Skills Employment Permit, a pathway “designed to attract highly skilled people into the labour market with the aim of encouraging them to take up permanent residence in the State. Eligible occupations under this type of permit are deemed to be critically important to growing Ireland's economy, are highly demanded and highly skilled, and in significant shortage of supply.”²⁷

The Critical Skills Employment Permit is particularly attractive because permit holders can either travel to Ireland together with their spouse or partner, children and other dependents; or apply for family reunification immediately upon arrival. Once in Ireland, spouses and approved de facto partners are eligible for an immigration permission that allows them to enter any type of employment or role without the need for employer sponsorship (with the exception of self-employment).²⁸ Children over 16 can also apply for a dependent employment permit free of charge, as long as they secure employer sponsorship.²⁹

Another key advantage of this choice is that once the two-year Critical Skills Employment Permit expires, holders are eligible for a Stamp 4, an immigration permission renewable every two years that provides access to employment rights alike to those of EU citizens.³⁰ Stamp 4 holders can work anywhere without an employment permit, can also start a business, and are able to apply for Irish citizenship after a total

²³ S2 of the EPs Act 2003 (as amended). See [link](#).

²⁴ See [link](#).

²⁵ See [link](#).

²⁶ See [link](#).

²⁷ See [link](#).

²⁸ Critical Skills Employment Permit Holders receive a Stamp 1, while family members a Stamp 1G.

²⁹ See [link](#). Although in theory children need sponsorship in order to work, in practice this is rare, as children will typically pursue higher education and then possibly obtain a graduate permission.

³⁰ This is the most common example of a permission from DoJ which grants a right to work without the need for an Employment Permit, as referred to above.

of five years of legal residence in Ireland. This unsponsored right to work and pathway to permanent residence after just two years in the country make the Critical Skills Employment Permit one of the most advantageous of its kind in the EU, something that is widely recognised. An additional feature of the Critical Skills Employment Permit is that a labour market needs test is not required by the employer before applying for it.

By contrast, the General Employment Permit provides access to a broader range of occupations (including those featured in the Critical Skills Occupations List); only requires a minimum remuneration of €34,000 in most cases;³¹ and a twelve month contract of employment is sufficient to obtain it. However, this type of permit only allows for family reunification after twelve months,³² and dependents, partners or spouses of permit holders must apply for a separate employment permit in their own right on arrival if they want to work. Furthermore, General Employment Permits are issued for an initial period of two years (or less, depending on contract duration) and must be renewed for up to a further three years. Only after that five-year period can the permit holder apply for Stamp 4 and naturalisation as an Irish citizen.³³ Finally, a labour market needs test is generally required to obtain a General Employment Permit, although exceptions exist under specific scenarios.³⁴

1.2. Eligibility

Eligibility for the Critical Skills Employment Permit is defined by the type of occupation; contract duration; combination of qualifications and experience; and salary level of the applicant. There are two main avenues to qualify for this permit. In both cases, if the job offer is for a regulated profession,³⁵ all relevant qualification recognition and registration requirements must be met:

1. Securing at least a two-year job offer for one of the occupations set out in the Critical Skills Occupations List,³⁶ with a minimum gross annual remuneration of €38,000. This list includes a restricted number of strategically important positions and is regularly updated in line with the analyses of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.³⁷ The latest version of the list includes ICT, telecommunications, engineering, health and business professionals, among other occupations.³⁸ A relevant degree qualification or higher is required for occupations on this list if the remuneration is not higher than €64,000 (see option 2 below).
2. Securing at least a two-year job offer for any occupation with a minimum gross annual remuneration of more than €64,000, with the only exception being those on the Ineligible List of Occupations for Employment Permits³⁹ and those that are contrary to the public interest. In this case a degree qualification or higher is not a requirement, but the prospective employee must have the necessary level of experience.

³¹ On 20 December 2023, Ireland's Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail announced comprehensive changes to the Employment Permits system, as well as a roadmap for increasing salary thresholds. 32 roles were made eligible for a General Employment Permit, and the salary requirement for the majority of General Employment Permit holders rose from €30,000 to €34,000 as of January 2024. See [link](#).

³² See [link](#).

³³ See [link](#).

³⁴ See [link](#).

³⁵ See [link](#).

³⁶ See [link](#).

³⁷ See [link](#).

³⁸ On 20 December 2023, the following professions were added to the List: Professional Forester; Resource Modelling, Earth Observation and Data Analyst; Meteorologist; Operational Forecaster; Chemical Engineer; Project Engineer; BIM Manager; Optometrist (Ophthalmic Optician); Commercial Manager; BIM Coordinator/Technician; and Estimator.

³⁹ See [link](#).

1.3. Requested Adaptations to Access the Pathway

Project partners anticipated that the professional profiles of displaced candidates and the type of employment offers they may receive would meet the occupation and remuneration requirements set out by the Employment Permits Acts and Regulations in relation to the Critical Skills Employment Permit.

However, given their displacement background, some candidates may require concessions, particularly in relation to documentary requirements to obtain the necessary entry visa to travel to Ireland.

Below is a detailed analysis of agreed exemptions and adaptations relating to documentary, procedural and safeguarding considerations:

A. Documentary Considerations

1.3.1. Valid up-to-date passport or equivalent identity and travel document

Employment permit and entry visa applicants are expected to present a valid up-to-date passport at the time of application. They will also require a passport or an equivalent document to register with public authorities once in Ireland. However, displaced individuals may not have a valid passport, and obtaining a new one might be a challenge or simply impossible, including because relevant authorities might be unwilling or unable to issue one, or because they fear approaching authorities from their country of nationality or first asylum. In addition, even if a valid up-to-date passport or travel document is available upon entry in Ireland, displaced workers might not be able to renew it once inside the country.

Although most beneficiaries of the labour pathway will likely have a valid up-to-date passport or travel document, DoJ and DETE were asked to consider allowing candidates who might not have such a document to prove their identity through another kind of photo ID, such as an expired passport, a national ID card, a driving licence, or a residence document from their current country of residence.

DoJ has indicated its willingness to demonstrate flexibility and exercise discretion, and will consider the possibility of using one of the above documents as alternative proof of identity, upon a case-by-case examination and assuming that there is a reasonable degree of certainty around both the identity and qualifications of the person concerned. DoJ has however flagged that it may not be possible to issue an Irish travel document to programme beneficiaries, due to the absence of a legal basis. A CTA check and a standard biographic security check will have to be undertaken by Irish authorities, and biometrics will be required for applicants from some countries.⁴⁰

1.3.2. Evidence of legal residence and proof of income

Entry visa applicants need to submit proof that they are legally residing in the country from which they are applying to obtain an Irish visa. Since displaced workers may not be able to produce documentary evidence of legal residence in their country of first asylum, the possibility of EU-Passworld and DT4E project partners providing a letter confirming that the candidate is a displaced worker residing in a specific country has

⁴⁰ See [link](#). Biometrics are also always required once in Ireland when registering any immigration permission to obtain an Irish Residence Permit (see [link](#)).

been discussed. DoJ has also agreed to show flexibility with candidates who do not have a bank account, indicating a willingness to accept alternative ways to prove their income.

1.3.3. Proof of family relationship

Applicants for a Critical Skills Employment Permit who want to bring their family to Ireland typically need extensive proof of family links to apply for an entry visa for them. Displaced individuals might not have all requested documents available, and they are often not able to obtain them from their home or host country.

DoJ is open to follow a flexible approach and exercise discretion, accepting for example a religious or traditional marriage document in lieu of an official marriage certificate. Another alternative way of confirming family relationships that is common practice in refugee family reunification applications is witness statements. DNA testing should only be used as a last resort, as this is a lengthy process.⁴¹

1.3.4. Proof of relevant qualification

Documentary evidence of having obtained a qualification relevant to a Critical Skills Occupation does not need to be submitted as part of the standard online application for a Critical Skills Employment Permit. Although DETE has discretion to request such evidence at any stage of the process, a contract of employment and proof of identity (and in certain instances tax documentation regarding the employer) is sufficient to process the permit.

Employers, however, will likely ask for relevant documentary evidence of higher education during recruitment or as part of background checks, as it is up to them to do their own due diligence and put candidates through a rigorous interview and background check process.

As displaced candidates may not have access to their qualification documents or may not be able to request these from institutions no longer in existence or in countries undergoing conflict, employers could consider conducting tailored background checks, or waiving the requirement of a qualification assessment altogether on the basis that candidates will undergo a competitive recruitment process aimed at determining that they possess all necessary skills and qualifications.

B. Procedural Considerations

1.3.5. Dedicated focal points and centralised processing of employment permits and visas

At the time of writing, the processing time for a Critical Skills Employment Permit is between four and six weeks.⁴² Visa applications are processed by Irish diplomatic posts as and when they are received. Depending on the location where they are processed, entry visas can typically take between three and eight weeks. DoJ cannot guarantee

⁴¹ In the context of the Afghan Admission Programme (see [link](#)), DNA testing was suggested when DoJ believed that the person was a family member but there was insufficient proof of family relationship.

⁴² See [link](#), as processing times fluctuate throughout the year. In March 2024, the timeline was four weeks for a Trusted Partner Initiative (TPI) sponsor and six weeks for a non-TPI sponsor. For more information about the TPI for regular employer users of the Employment Permits framework, see [link](#).

that anyone who is granted an employment permit will be issued a visa, as applicants and their dependents need to pass a security clearance, and there might also be other considerations.

Experience in other countries shows that visa applications involving displaced workers can be complex and lead to lengthy and costly delays or refusals if necessary guidance about possible adaptations and concessions is not provided, or if the responsible case processor is not aware of agreed concessions. It is therefore key to have a single point of contact to process the visas of displaced workers, as some candidates might not be able to include in their application all the documents that are typically required to issue a visa, such as evidence of legal residence (see above).

DETE and DoJ have identified dedicated focal points in order to facilitate prompt processing of employment permit and visa applications of displaced workers, reduce waiting times, and avoid delays or refusals. Contact persons ensure a common understanding of agreed concessions; can carry out an individual examination of cases that require additional flexibility; and are in a position to troubleshoot any issues. DoJ has also agreed that applications of displaced candidates are processed centrally in Dublin. All documents are submitted to the relevant Irish diplomatic post as per standard practice and then forwarded. DoJ also notifies staff at the Border Management Unit of Dublin Airport of displaced worker arrivals to ensure that the immigration process at the airport runs smoothly.

This bespoke case-by-case support is also crucial to centralise knowledge about agreed concessions, facilitating monitoring and evaluation of the project, as well as documentation of lessons learned about how specific obstacles were overcome.

1.3.6. Processing and renewal of Irish Residence Permit (IRP)

An employment permit is not a residence permission. In order to lawfully reside in Ireland, individuals who are not from the EU, EEA, Switzerland and the UK but are in possession of an employment permit must register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau and Immigration Service Delivery to obtain an Irish Residence Permit (IRP). This can take anytime from two to sixteen weeks, depending on the specific location within Ireland where the person makes an appointment. It is thus accepted practice that employment permit holders can work immediately upon arrival while waiting for their IRP.

Applications for an IRP by displaced workers or their dependents may lead to refusals if the case processor is not aware of the concessions that have been agreed as part of the EU-Passworld and DT4E pilot projects, for instance in terms of admissible proof of identity and other documentation requirements.

DoJ was therefore asked to appoint a dedicated focal point or desk to facilitate prompt processing and renewal of IRP card applications for displaced workers and their dependents once they enter Ireland in accordance with any agreed concessions, especially in cases where the person is only in possession of an Irish travel document.

Furthermore, when displaced workers apply for a visa, DoJ was also asked to provide a letter confirming their prima facie need for international protection and displacement status – a document that they would be able to present when registering their immigration permission and applying for an IRP to make the process easier and prevent any issues or delays.

However, in practice, the first five displaced workers who are already in Ireland have applied for an IRP at their local Garda Station or Burgh Quay, and no letters have been issued by DoJ so far.

C. Safeguarding Considerations

1.3.7. Post-arrival safeguards in case of loss of employment

If the holder of a Critical Skills Employment Permit loses their job, they must find a new employer who is willing to sponsor them. In case of a redundancy, permit holders are required to notify DETE within four weeks and have six months from the date of dismissal to seek alternative employment.⁴³ If the dismissal was not a redundancy, the worker needs to persuade DoJ to grant them a temporary extension of their residence permission for job searching purposes. In practice, most of these extensions are also for six months, despite their length not being specified in legislation.

In the eventuality of a termination by their employer, displaced workers should have high chances of reemployment, not only because they will be working in areas experiencing skills shortages, but also because they will be provided with pre-departure and post-arrival supports that should facilitate their job search and daily life while they are unemployed, as explained below.

However, there may be cases where a displaced worker is not able to find new employment. By definition, people in need of international protection cannot return to their country of nationality, and going back to the country of first asylum from which they travelled to Ireland is often not an option either. This means that displaced workers could find themselves with no other alternative to legally stay in Ireland other than applying for international protection.

DoJ is therefore willing to consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether a displaced worker who loses their job can be granted an interim immigration permission for the purposes of securing a new sponsor and applying for a new Critical Skills Employment Permit. In the unlikely case that reemployment does not happen, DoJ is minded to exercise flexibility and work with project partners to offer a durable solution.

Ultimately, national and EU legislation guarantees everyone's right to seek international protection, where due consideration will be given to a prior recognition of international protection status in another country. While labour pathway beneficiaries will always have this option, the discretionary approach and robust safeguards described above should in principle ensure that this measure of last resort is not necessary.

⁴³ See [link](#).

2. Exploring an Alternative Pathway in the Healthcare Sector

As noted above, the current slowdown in international recruitment to Ireland does not seem to have deeply impacted the healthcare sector, which continues to face long term structural shortages.⁴⁴ A way in which relevant government authorities have tried to address this critical skills gap since 2014 is the Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) for doctors and nurses,⁴⁵ a dedicated pathway that could in principle also be made available to displaced workers, in particular nurses, as long as they have had their previous qualifications recognised – a process that can take up to six months.

Registered nurses, midwives, medical practitioners and other healthcare professionals are included in the Critical Skills Occupations List⁴⁶ and are thus eligible to work in Ireland on a Critical Skills Employment Permit. The key advantage of the Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) for Nurses⁴⁷ is that it allows nurses to enter Ireland and stay for six months working as pre-registered nurses while they undertake the Clinical Adaptation and Assessment programme or a Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) examination in order to become registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). Once they qualify, the employer who is listed in their AWS application can apply for a Critical Skills Employment Permit without them having to leave the country.

However, nurses on AWS are explicitly prohibited to work as healthcare assistants, and if they fail to register within six months, they must go back to their country of origin or previous residence – something that would not be an option for most displaced nurses.

Having implemented the UK's Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot⁴⁸ successfully for two years, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB)⁴⁹ has found that 75% of candidates are registered to become nurses within eighteen months of arrival. This is triple the time allowed under the AWS pathway.

This is why EU-Passworld and DT4E project partners are currently exploring how to add necessary safeguards to the AWS for Nurses. In addition to commitment from employers to provide sufficient time and support for displaced nurses to study and practice for relevant tests, conversations are ongoing with the HSE, with Chief Directors of Nursing of two large public hospital groups, with private employers and with the NMBI about the potential retention as healthcare assistants of any displaced nurses who fail to meet registration criteria. This would require additional flexibilities from the Government to allow a transfer from AWS to GEP, as well as the provision of detailed information to eligible candidates about the conditions of the scheme.

Work is also ongoing to adapt the process for the recognition of qualifications of nurses from non-EU countries, which can be a lengthy and complex one, and is at the moment a precondition that must be met by nurses before entering Ireland under the AWS, as noted above. Many displaced nurses may not be able to provide sufficient evidence of their primary qualification, nor the required Certificate of Good Standing from every jurisdiction that they previously worked in. As this is a statutory procedure, there is limited scope for flexibility or discretion, although the NMBI has shown willingness to support.

⁴⁴ See [link](#).

⁴⁵ See [link](#).

⁴⁶ See [link](#).

⁴⁷ See [link](#).

⁴⁸ See [link](#).

⁴⁹ See [link](#).

3. Candidate Sourcing

The pilot phase of the labour pathway to Ireland is using TBB's Talent Catalog⁵⁰ to source candidates from three priority countries: Jordan and Lebanon, where TBB has active operations, and Uganda, where Finn Church Aid⁵¹ works as TBB's implementing partner.

So far over 106,131 professionals have registered in the Talent Catalog, including 14,144 medical professionals; 8,752 engineers; and 8,880 IT professionals. 87 % of them possess English language skills, and 44% have completed a tertiary degree.⁵²

When developing a labour pathway, the identification of priority source countries where relevant stakeholders are active on the ground or have referral partners is key for operational reasons, not only to support the processing of exit permits or other required documentation, but also – and most importantly – to identify eligible candidates and support them throughout the application, recruitment and relocation process.

Nonetheless, EU-Passworld and DT4E project partners strive to be geographically agnostic and look for the best fit for each specific position, regardless of the country of origin or first asylum of the candidate.

4. Employer Outreach

Over the past few months, EU-Passworld and DT4E project partners have reached out to private and public sector employers, anticipating that many of them would be keen to participate in the labour pathway and offer competitive packages to candidates.

Sectors targeted include ICT; finance; engineering; pharma and biotechnology; manufacturing; construction; and professional services. As outlined in section 1, these are areas of economic activity that attract thousands of foreign workers to Ireland every year. For instance, in 2023, out of a total of 30,981 employment permits issued, 5,009 permits were to work in 'Information and Communication Activities', 3,037 to work in different manufacturing jobs, and 2,373 in 'Financial and Insurance Activities'. The top sector was by far 'Health and Social Work Activities', with 10,037 permits.⁵³

TBB has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the HSE and four other employers seeking to fill vacancies for technical engineering and design roles. This MoU sets the terms of the partnership between TBB and an individual employer, ensuring a joint understanding of the activities that each party is expected to carry out. The employer confirms its intent to make an offer to a set number of professionals registered in the Talent Catalog, identifying potential candidates and assessing them through its standard recruitment processes. TBB commits in turn to identify suitable candidates; facilitate all communication between the employer and the candidates; prepare candidates for assessments and interviews; and assist with employment permit and visa applications and settlement upon arrival.

If and when a job offer is made (the MoU does not include a formal obligation in this regard), employers are expected to support the work permit and visa application process for new recruits, including any associated costs (in Ireland, the processing fee for a Critical Skills Employment Permit is €1,000).⁵⁴ This can be done in-house or by hiring an immigration

⁵⁰ See [link](#).

⁵¹ See [link](#).

⁵² See [link](#). These are data from April 2024. TBB updates Talent Catalog figures quarterly.

⁵³ See [link](#).

⁵⁴ See [link](#).

consultant. Employers should also cover the travel costs of the displaced worker and any dependents; and provide temporary accommodation upon arrival for one month.

Fragomen has approached many of their corporate clients, particularly multinationals, as well as Ireland's Foreign Direct Investment Agency (IBEC), which is the largest lobby and business representative group in the country, and the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland.

Around 230 employers have been engaged, including through targeted LinkedIn campaigns and an in-person event in Dublin hosted by Fragomen on 21 June 2023,⁵⁵ as well as an online webinar on 28 February 2024.⁵⁶

In May 2024, 24 vacancies had been received for multiple positions, 17 interviews had taken place or were scheduled, and six displaced workers had been recruited. The public employer HSE has hired three ICT and cybersecurity experts who arrived on 13 March 2024, with another currently in the employment permit process, while the private sector employer Entegro Ltd⁵⁷ has hired two network field technicians who moved to Ireland in April 2024.⁵⁸

5. Pre-Departure and Post-Arrival Supports

The depth and breadth of supports that displaced workers receive before and after they arrive in Ireland could be decisive to the success of the labour pathway. As holders of a Critical Skills Employment Permit, displaced workers will be supported by their employer, project partners (particularly IOM, Nasc and TBB) and local communities. Developing this welcome and integration framework is a key pillar of both EU-Passworld and DT4E.

Pathway beneficiaries and their families may have specific needs linked to their displacement background that their status as Critical Skills Employment Permit holders may not allow to address immediately, although they will be able to claim certain benefits⁵⁹ and access some specialised supports targeted at refugees, beneficiaries of temporary protection, asylum-seekers and migrants.

In addition to covering travel costs and temporary accommodation, employers based in Ireland typically offer some relocation supports. Depending on the sector and size of the employer, and on the salary level and seniority of the position, a corporate relocation service provider may be engaged. Relocation packages vary greatly and can include benefits such as per diems; help to obtain medical clearance; allowances covering household goods shipping, cost of living adjustment or housing; a look-and-see trip to search for accommodation before the formal start of the contract; moving days; support with school enrolment; private healthcare insurance; and assistance with taxes and social welfare benefits once settled in Ireland.

It is however not sure that all employers participating in the labour pathway will offer these additional services and allowances, unless the employer is a large multinational or the employee has been recruited for a high-level position. That is why, in addition to supports provided by the employer through a relocation package, IOM and TBB offer

⁵⁵ See [link](#).

⁵⁶ See [link](#).

⁵⁷ See [link](#).

⁵⁸ See [link](#).

⁵⁹ Displaced workers will be eligible to apply for Child Benefit for any children. They may also be eligible for additional means-tested social welfare supports if they meet eligibility requirements, for instance the Working Family Payment in instances where the family income falls below certain thresholds and depending on the number of minor children in the family, or Domiciliary Carer's Allowance in instances where the family includes a child with a severe disability.

informed decision-making sessions after a job offer has been made, as well as pre-departure and post-arrival orientation and monitoring.

This includes information to new recruits on labour rights; visas and employment permits for family members; schooling; social welfare supports; legal advice; and Irish society. IOM and TBB have developed a pre-departure orientation curriculum that is delivered online; a practical guide targeted to the specific geographic area where each worker will live; and post-arrival orientation modules focusing on long-term integration. DT4E partners have also developed a guide to support employers based on existing best practice in refugee labour mobility programmes around the world, and they provide personalised monitoring to each worker for the first six months after arrival.

A further optional component of the labour pathway to Ireland will be Welcome at Work, a programme that will engage employees and local community members in ensuring a soft landing for displaced workers and, in some circumstances, their family members, through an equality-based approach that is respectful of the autonomy and dignity of newcomers and that is solidly grounded in Ireland's rich experience with welcoming Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian families through community-based responses.

Once the programme is operational, employers will be able to choose to participate in Welcome at Work. This will depend on the level of relocation support that they provide to displaced workers, as well as further considerations, such as the employer's size, human resources capacity, and their commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives (workplace volunteering programmes; affinity groups; buddy schemes).

The programme will operate as follows:

- An employer who is interested in participating will ask newly recruited displaced workers if they, and their families where relevant, would like to benefit from Welcome at Work. This will only happen once the candidate has accepted the job offer, although general information about the programme could be shared with all candidates during the application process.
- Upon informed consent from the new hire, the employer will identify a Welcome at Work company champion. This could be a human resources manager or a staff member in charge of, or interested in, CSR or EDI issues. The employer should inform all employees about the opportunity to take part in the programme; make available a physical space for them to meet; and allow employees to engage in Welcome at Work-related activities during working hours (although engagement will also happen outside of work). Employers are thus encouraged to offer in-kind contributions through employee time, but no financial commitment is required.
- Once identified, the company champion will convene a group of between four and seven volunteers. The group, which will be anchored in the employer, will coordinate welcome and integration supports for one or several displaced workers, since cohort recruitment is encouraged by project partners. Nasc⁶⁰ will provide guidance to each champion to form a group (focusing on issues such as membership; values; boundaries; confidentiality and autonomy), also equipping them to lead the delivery of an online training to group members and the development of a 'welcome plan' ahead of the displaced worker's arrival.

⁶⁰ See [link](#).

- Bespoke online training for group members will include background information about how to offer practical advice to displaced workers (accessing healthcare; finding housing; using transportation; joining social activities; cultural norms and adaptation; community resources available to family members; understanding racism and bias; and where to seek free or affordable psychosocial support). Ideally, needs and priorities should be identified in advance thanks to early contact with displaced workers ahead of their arrival in Ireland. This would allow to plan ahead and target the training to the individual circumstances of the new hire.
- After completing the training, the group will develop a 'welcome plan' with the help of guiding questions and a simple template inspired by the Community Sponsorship Ireland settlement plan.⁶¹ Nasc will be available to provide feedback and address any queries from the group.
- The group will commit to provide support to displaced workers and their families for a total of six months, including two months of pre-arrival preparation and four months of post-arrival accompaniment. This could include orientation about life in Ireland (including rights and responsibilities) and about the worker's new neighbourhood; expectation setting; support with administrative errands;⁶² interpretation and translation; car rides; assistance with finding long-term accommodation; orientation about sports, social activities and local community life; help with accessing local services (school, childcare, GP, public transport, English lessons, mental health assistance); and support to pass the test needed to obtain an Irish driving license – a must-have in many jobs, particularly in rural areas with limited access to public transport.⁶³
- Community engagement can be key to manage expectations of new hires about life in Ireland; provide a safe space to discuss work-related issues; identify mental health support needs; find long-term accommodation through informal networks and word-of-mouth information; and accompany adult family members of workers while they rebuild their lives on their own terms. This is at least what the outcomes of similar programmes show, for example Neighbours for Newcomers,⁶⁴ thanks to which local volunteers in 25 different locations across the UK have provided wrap-around welcome and integration support for six months to a total of 98 nurses hired by the NHS as part of the UK's Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot.⁶⁵
- Governance of the Welcome at Work programme will only require a light oversight structure. Each group will have to register and have their plan reviewed by Nasc.

⁶¹ See [link](#).

⁶² Volunteers can help displaced workers when applying for an Irish Residence Permit (IRP) or a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN); setting up a bank or credit union account; buying a cell phone and / or a SIM card; applying for Child Benefit or other social welfare supports; getting an insurance; etc.

⁶³ See [link](#).

⁶⁴ See [link](#).

⁶⁵ See [link](#).

III. Charting Next Steps: Preliminary Recommendations

The first arrivals through the labour pathway to Ireland only took place in March 2024. It is thus too early to tell how the programme will deliver in terms of sustainability and scale, particularly in view of a number of structural challenges that may continue to slow down international recruitment in the near future as noted above, including hiring freezes in key sectors and the country's persistent housing crisis. The below recommendations, while tentative, might inform the next steps of pathway development for all stakeholders engaged in displaced talent mobility to Ireland.

- **Systematise, monitor and evaluate the adaptations made to Ireland's existing Employment Permits framework to ensure equitable access for displaced workers.** As analysed above, DETE and DoJ have agreed to specific practices, arrangements and concessions to pilot a labour pathway to Ireland for people in need of international protection, and both Departments are committed to exercising general flexibility and case-by-case discretion in the context of this programme. This approach could be embedded through an exchange of letters or other document that broadly articulates a policy commitment by the Irish government to address the specific obstacles that displaced workers are likely to encounter when applying for a Critical Skills or other employment permit to work in Ireland, as well as for an entry visa. This would provide crucial guidance to all relevant actors involved in the labour pathway, reiterating the government's willingness to exercise discretion and identifying where and how policies and practices can be flexible. Documenting, monitoring and evaluating each of the steps taken up to the arrival of the first displaced workers to Ireland, along with all the exemptions made, will be crucial to inform any future policy changes aimed at making Ireland's Employment Permits framework more accessible to displaced workers – and to shift course in case the initial hypotheses formulated by project partners carry unintended consequences.
- **Build on the first pilot experiences and continue to find champion employers in the public and private sector to test and iterate the labour pathway.** Project partners should continue to take advantage of the fact that Ireland is at full employment, prioritise strategic engagement, and build long-term relationships with a targeted number of employers. This will be crucial to test programme assumptions in practice, confirm the respective value added of each actor, and find the delicate balance between employer leadership, government commitment and multi-stakeholder support that is at the core of any sustainable and scalable labour pathway for displaced workers.
- **Turn the current international recruitment slowdown into an opportunity to innovate and invest in 'hire-train-move' schemes.** The current slowdown in hiring in key economic sectors provides an opening to mainstream the recruitment of displaced workers into long-term workforce planning strategies and standard talent acquisition processes. Project partners should continue to build a solid foundation for sustainable displaced talent pipelines to Ireland for roles in high demand, as they are already doing in the healthcare and green construction sectors. Vocational Education and Training (VET) and upskilling programmes for cohorts of pre-selected candidates could be developed in countries of first asylum already prioritized by Irish Aid.
- **Think out of the box to prevent that Ireland's housing crisis jeopardises the success of the labour pathway.** This could include advocating with participating employers to provide temporary accommodation for displaced workers for a longer period of time than one month after arrival and offer

additional support to find long-term accommodation.⁶⁶ It could also mean targeting high-salary positions, employers headquartered in areas with slightly easier housing markets,⁶⁷ as well as ICT jobs that can be done remotely within Ireland. Partnerships with construction companies to train, hire and house displaced workers should also be explored. Employers and project partners should document and share specific challenges related to housing with government counterparts.

- **Test the power of community engagement.** Countless individuals across Ireland have, in recent times, demonstrated the positive impact of community mobilisation by welcoming newcomers – at work and at home. The Welcome at Work programme provides an opportunity to realise this potential in a structured, informed and supported way. The ability of volunteer groups to help displaced workers find long term accommodation and address other structural challenges creatively could be a litmus test for this kind of community-based integration initiatives. Accompaniment and information for family members and mental health support will be two further crucial pieces of the programme.
- **Why hiring displaced workers? Tell the story.** Irish employers who have experienced by themselves the transformative potential of recruiting people in need of international protection, including the spillover effects of displaced talent mobility on workplace morale and employee engagement and retention, will be the best ambassadors for the pathway. In addition to a communication strategy targeting specific audiences, platforms could be created to capture and share individual testimonies and company-wide lessons learned among both employers and employees. Displaced workers arriving to Ireland through the labour pathway should also have an opportunity to share their experiences and provide feedback to improve the programme, bearing in mind that in some cases beneficiaries wish to remain anonymous and do not want to participate in communication activities.
- **Build flexible structures, sector-specific strategies and additional capacity to achieve scale.** The labour pathway to Ireland should continue to engage a diversity of employers, sectors, professional profiles, skill levels and welcoming communities across the country. Standard resources, approaches and processes will have to be adapted to each employee, employer, workplace and community, as a small- or medium-size company based in a rural area will have very different priorities and needs than a large Dublin-based multinational. A sector-specific strategy for nurses (possibly targeting care homes and hospices) could be an effective tool to scale up the labour pathway programme. Additional capacity will however be required to achieve this level of adaptability.
- **Build ecosystems and infrastructures to support the growth and sustainability of the labour pathway to Ireland.** The labour pathway to Ireland has been designed and is currently managed by multiple partners operating in the framework of two distinct AMIF-funded projects ending in 2024, while a third project involving new national civil society actors commenced in March 2024.⁶⁸ While AMIF funding has been essential to

⁶⁶ Many employers who are heavily dependent on employment permits to fill roles are either buying property to house new staff or leasing property, which they then make available at a cost to the employee for longer periods, although this solution is more difficult to access for workers who move to Ireland with their families.

⁶⁷ For instance, Boston Scientific, DeCare, Dell or Pfizer.

⁶⁸ The project *Skills, Talent and Empowerment through Pathways* (STEP), also funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, will kick off in March 2024. It will run for three years and involve Ireland, Italy and Spain. In Ireland, in

develop and pilot the pathway, other sources of financing and new partnerships will be needed to grow the programme and deliver optimal results at scale and in a sustainable way.

- **Connect education and labour pathways for displaced individuals.** The simultaneous development of education and labour pathways to Ireland in the context of EU-Passworld provides an opportunity to explore and create links between these two types of skills-based pathways for people in need of international protection. For example, the interest of corporate sponsors investing in certain academic fields, higher education institutions or scholarships targeted at displaced students could be redirected towards the recruitment of professionals in need of international protection in countries of first asylum.
- **Share Ireland's experience to accelerate global momentum on displaced talent mobility.** At the Global Refugee Forum held in December 2023, Ireland pledged “to continue support for the arrival of refugees under safe and legal complementary pathways through education and labour opportunities [...] in particular the EU-Passworld and DT4E initiatives in this area” as part of the multi-stakeholder pledge on skills-based complementary pathways.⁶⁹ The Government of Ireland could build on its political commitment and early results in the context of the EU-Passworld and DT4E projects, investing in the sustainability and growth of existing programmes and sharing lessons learned and good practices with other countries interested in establishing skills-based pathways.

addition to partners already engaged in EU-Passworld or DT4E like TBB and Pathways International, the project will be led by The Open Community (see [link](#)) and benefit from specific inputs by the Open Doors Initiative (see [link](#)).

⁶⁹ See [link](#).



<https://pathways.website>



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