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Staying or moving on? Drivers and policies to retain global talent

European Migration Network – OECD joint inform

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Explanatory note

This inform/study was prepared on the basis of national contributions from 25 EMN NCPs (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and UA, RS) collected via an AHQ developed by the EMN NCPs to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability. The information contained in this inform refers to the situation in the abovementioned EMN Member and Observer Countries up to July 2026.

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1. KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- Talent retention is an increasingly important policy objective for European Migration Network (EMN) Member and Observer Countries.[1] However, explicit retention strategies remain relatively uncommon. Most countries embed retention within broader migration, labour market, education, innovation or economic development policies.
- The groups most frequently prioritised for retention are international students and graduates, highly skilled workers, researchers, professionals working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and information and communications technology (ICT), healthcare professionals and entrepreneurs. Priority tends to be highest where these groups meet labour shortages or support innovation and competitiveness. Responsibility for talent retention is often shared between multiple public authorities, with limited data, fragmented governance, administrative complexity and wider labour market conditions remaining key challenges to designing, implementing and evaluating retention policies.
- EMN Member and Observer Countries use diverse approaches to measure talent retention, with only a small number reporting comprehensive monitoring systems. Differences in data sources, indicators and administrative systems limit comparability and make it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of retention policies.
- Employment opportunities, career progression, clear migration pathways, family support, integration measures and quality of life emerge as the principal factors supporting retention.
- Administrative barriers, limited career development opportunities and competition for international talent are among the most commonly reported factors influencing onward migration. Weaker career prospects and international competition for talent are among the most commonly reported reasons for onward migration.
- Housing affordability and availability, family-related challenges and social integration also emerge as important factors influencing decisions to leave.
- The most widespread retention measures focus on facilitating transitions from study or research to employment, providing longer-term residence pathways, supporting accompanying family members, strengthening innovation ecosystems and improving practical settlement and integration services.
- Available evidence suggests that retention may be supported by clear and predictable pathways to employment and long-term residence, simplified administrative procedures, the involvement of employers and education and training institutions and measures supporting the integration of third-country nationals and their families. These measures should be complemented by attractive employment opportunities and favourable living conditions. However, systematic evaluations of their effectiveness remain limited across most countries. Measures are more likely to be effective when they provide predictable pathways to employment and longer-term residence, reduce administrative burdens, involve employers and educational institutions, support family integration and are complemented by attractive employment opportunities and settlement conditions. However, systematic evaluation remains limited in most countries.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Why talent retention matters

Europe is facing long-term demographic change, alongside rapid labour market transformation. A shrinking working-age population, demographic change, the green transition and technological advancements are increasing demand for skilled workers across many sectors, while intensifying existing labour shortages.[2] Attracting and retaining international talent has therefore become an increasingly important element of efforts to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and economic growth.

Recent European Union (EU) initiatives reflect this shift. In January 2026, the first EU Visa Strategy was adopted, accompanied by a Recommendation on attracting talent for innovation, to make the EU a more attractive destination for highly qualified professionals, researchers, students, start-up founders and entrepreneurs.[3] The Union of Skills recognises that attracting talent from outside the EU is not sufficient on its own and highlights the importance of creating favourable conditions for skilled third-country nationals to remain in the EU , make effective use of their skills and contribute to the EU labour market and economy in the long term. alone is insufficient and emphasises the importance of creating conditions that encourage skilled third-country nationals to remain in the EU and contribute over the longer term.[4] The earlier Communication on Skills and Talent Mobility highlighted the importance of integration measures, career opportunities and pathways to longer-term residence in supporting talent retention.[5]

Although attracting global talent has received increasing policy attention, comparatively little evidence exists on what encourages highly skilled third-country nationals to remain in their destination country. Existing research suggests that retention is influenced by a combination of employment and career development opportunities, clear and predictable immigration and residence pathways,

1 Note for the reader: The key points section provides a summary of the main information contained in the inform. For ease of reading, key points do not contain footnotes. Please note that EMN Member and Observer Countries referred to in the key points are listed in the relevant sections within the current document.
2 European Commission, 'Union of Skills', n.d., accessed 7 October 2026; Eurostat, 'Population structure and ageing', n.d., accessed 27 July 2026.
3 European Commission, 'Commission adopts Visa Strategy and Recommendation on attracting talent for innovation', 29 January 2026, accessed 27 July 2026.
4 European Commission, 'Union of Skills', 2025, accessed 27 July 2026.
5 European Commission, 'Communication on Skills and Talent Mobility', COM(2023) 715 final, 15 November 2023, accessed 27 July 2026.

integration experiences, living conditions and family considerations.[6] Understanding these factors is increasingly important, as countries seek to both attract talent and maximise their long-term contribution to their economies and societies.

This inform provides a comparative overview of how EMN Member and Observer Countries approach the retention of global talent, the factors influencing retention, and the policies and practices introduced to support it.

2.2. Scope and methodology

This inform analyses how EMN Member and Observer Countries[7] seek to retain global talent and identifies common policy approaches, challenges and good practices. It examines:

- Whether retention forms part of national strategies addressing skills shortages;
- Which categories of global talent countries seek to retain;
- Availability of data and monitoring mechanisms measuring retention outcomes;
- Factors facilitating and hindering retention;
- Public policies and initiatives supporting the retention of students, researchers, skilled workers and entrepreneurs;
- Implementation challenges, good practices and policy evaluation;
- Cooperation and exchange of good practices between countries and through EU initiatives.

For the purposes of this inform, the term 'global talent' refers broadly to international talent, namely skilled third-country nationals whose knowledge, qualifications or entrepreneurial potential contribute to addressing labour market needs and strengthening innovation and competitiveness. It includes international students and graduates, researchers, skilled workers, entrepreneurs and start-up founders.

The findings are based primarily on information provided by EMN National Contact Points (EMN NCPs) and reflect the state of knowledge available in participating countries at the time of reporting (June 2026).

As national policy frameworks, definitions and data collection systems differ considerably, the inform focuses on identifying common trends and comparative insights. The availability of quantitative evidence varies substantially, with several countries relying on qualitative assessments or expert knowledge where comprehensive retention data are not available.

3. NATIONAL APPROACHES TO TALENT RETENTION

3.1. Retention as a policy objective

Talent retention is increasingly recognised as an important policy objective for EMN Member and Observer Countries.[8] However, it generally remains a less developed policy area compared to attracting talent. Most respondents report measures supporting the longer-term stay of global talent within broader policy frameworks, such as international education or labour market strategies,[9] with a limited number identifying an explicit strategy or policy framework dedicated to retention.[10]

As national approaches frequently combine elements of attraction, retention and wider workforce policies, the categorisation below reflects the predominant approach described by each country rather than mutually exclusive policy models.

Explicit and implicit approaches to retention

Six countries[11] report policy frameworks that explicitly incorporate elements of talent retention into broader workforce or talent strategies. These approaches typically combine measures to attract, develop and retain global talent within wider economic or labour market objectives. For example, Finland's Talent Boost Programme brings together talent attraction, retention, integration and monitoring within a single national framework (see Box 1).

Box 1: Finland: Talent Boost Programme

Finland's Talent Boost Programme (2023-2027) provides a national framework combining talent attraction, retention, integration and international recruitment within a single strategy. Alongside measures to strengthen Finland's retention capacity, including expanding English-language early childhood education and increasing opportunities for international talent and their families to learn Finnish and Swedish, the programme includes a dedicated monitoring and reporting framework. The framework tracks progress through 13 predefined indicators covering three strategic objectives: Finland's attractiveness, efficient and controlled residence permit processes, and Finland's retention power. Four indicators specifically monitor retention outcomes:

a) Number and share of foreign workers in selected occupations and changes in labour shortages (quarterly);

b) Transition of international university students into the Finnish labour market (annually);

c) Number of decisions on extended residence permits in selected occupations (quarterly);

6 European Migration Network (EMN), Attracting and Retaining International Researchers – EMN inform, 2022, accessed 7 October 2026 ; European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), New and Innovative Ways to Attract Foreign Talents in the EU, 2025, accessed 29 July 2026.
7 Responses received from AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and UA, RS.
8 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.
9 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SK and RS.
10 CY, DE, FI, LU.
11 AT, CY, DE, FI, FR, LU.

d) Wage development among foreign employees (annually).

The indicators draw on administrative data from the Finnish Immigration Service, employment authorities, higher education institutions and Work in Finland, enabling regular monitoring of retention outcomes. More information on the programme can be found here.

Retention is typically pursued as an implicit policy objective within broader strategies. Dedicated retention policies remain the exception, with most countries addressing retention through economic migration,[12] labour market,[13] innovation and research,[14] higher education or human capital strategies[15] aimed at strengthening the workforce, supporting competitiveness and addressing long-term labour market needs. Within these broader frameworks, countries use two main, often complementary, types of measures.

Seventeen EMN Member Countries and Serbia report using migration pathways that facilitate both initial admission and longer-stay of global talent.[16] These include post-study work opportunities,[17] highly skilled migration programmes[18] and pathways to long-term or permanent residence.[19]

Some countries focus primarily on facilitating the transition from temporary to longer-term residence.[20] Others place greater emphasis on creating conditions that encourage global talent to remain, including labour market integration, language training, support for accompanying family members, settlement services and broader measures enhancing the attractiveness of living and working in the country.[21] Six EMN Member Countries combine both types of measures.[22]

Efforts to develop talent retention strategies continue to evolve. Five respondents report plans for new strategies, some embedded within broader policy initiatives[23] or work to strengthen existing frameworks,[24] suggesting a gradual move towards more coordinated and comprehensive approaches.

Retention is becoming a more visible component of talent policy, although countries remain at different stages of development, with most pursuing retention implicitly through broader policy frameworks and supporting measures.

3.2. Priority talent groups

Most respondents identify specific groups of global talent as retention priorities,[25] particularly where these groups are considered important for addressing labour shortages, supporting innovation or contributing to broader economic objectives. These groups are defined by occupation, sector or career stage and most frequently include STEM and ICT professionals, researchers, international students and graduates, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs and innovators. Five EMN Member Countries[26] and Ukraine focus broadly on highly skilled talent without identifying particular occupations, sectors or other subgroups as retention priorities.

Retaining talent already present in the country

Reporting EMN Member and Observer Countries place a clear emphasis on retaining talent already present in the country. International students and graduates are identified as priority groups by 14 EMN Member Countries,[27] mainly because they have already established educational, professional or social links, making their transition into long-term employment and residence comparatively easier. Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia and Poland describe broader attraction strategies and transition measures that support long-term stay.

Supporting innovation and economic transformation

Several countries prioritise entrepreneurs, innovators and start-up founders[28] to support longer-term innovation and competitiveness. Researchers are also identified as a priority group[29] because of their contribution to research capacity, innovation and knowledge-intensive sectors. These priorities are frequently linked to broader objectives such as innovation ecosystems, digital transformation, advanced technologies[30] and the green transition.[31]

Overall, EMN Member and Observer Countries prioritise selected categories of talent rather than labour migrants more broadly, with a particular emphasis on talent already present in the country, individuals with high or critical skills, those addressing identified labour shortages, and those supporting longer-term innovation and competitiveness.

12 CZ, EE, EL, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, PL.
13 AT, FI, FR, LU, LV, NL, SE, SK.
14 FR, HU, NL, SI, SK and RS.
15 AT, EE, FI, LU, SK.
16 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SK and RS.
17 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SK.
18 BE, CZ, EE, EL, FR, NL.
19 AT, BE, CY, DE, EL, FR, IE, NL.
20 BE, CY, EL, IE, PL, SK.
21 EE, FI, LU, SE and RS.
22 AT, CZ, EE, ES, FR, LT.
23 AT, BG, CZ, NL.
24 BE.
25 CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, PL, SI, SK and RS.
26 AT, BE, BG, DE, LU.
27 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, NL, SK.
28 AT, CY, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, NL, SE and RS.
29 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LU, NL, SE, SI, SK.
30 CY, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, LT, LU, SE and RS.
31 EL, FI, SE.

4. UNDERSTANDING TALENT RETENTION[32]

4.1. How countries monitor retention

This chapter is drafted in collaboration with OECD. EMN Member and Observer Countries use different approaches to monitor talent retention outcomes. Indicators vary, ranging from length of residence and transition between residence statuses to employment outcomes (including whether people are working, post-study employment and earnings) and intention to remain. The approaches described are not mutually exclusive and do not fit neatly into distinct categories.

Six EMN Member Countries[33] report structured approaches to monitoring talent retention. They combine administrative sources, such as residence permit, social security, employment and higher education data, with survey-based evidence collected directly from migrants, international students and graduates.

Box 2: France and Italy: survey-based monitoring of talent retention

France's Longitudinal Survey on the Integration of First-Time Arrivals (*Enquête longitudinale sur l'intégration des primo-arrivants*)[34] monitors newly arrived migrants over time, measuring changes in their employment, housing, French language proficiency, social participation, living conditions and administrative pathways. Through successive editions, it provides longitudinal evidence on the factors influencing integration, longer-term settlement and onward mobility. Italy's AlmaLaurea Graduate Employment Survey[35] follows graduates one year, three years and five years after graduation. The latest survey found that more than half of foreign graduates remained in Italy five years after graduating. Among those who left, most cited personal or family reasons rather than employment opportunities, suggesting that onward mobility is often driven by private circumstances rather than labour market conditions.[36]

Alongside survey-based evidence, countries draw on administrative and programme data. Finland's Talent Boost framework brings together labour market, wage and education data (see Box 1), the Netherlands combines data from Statistics Netherlands, Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), and Sweden's Work in Sweden initiative uses Statistics Sweden data to monitor the proportion of third-country labour migrants remaining in Sweden after three, five and 10 years, including highly skilled workers.

Eleven EMN Member Countries[37] and Serbia report measures enabling them to monitor certain retention-related outcomes without a dedicated system measuring talent retention. Their approaches draw on administrative data, research, surveys and other indirect indicators, including residence permit records,[38] labour market participation,[39] graduate employment,[40] researcher mobility[41] and intention to remain in a country.[42] In many cases, the data relate to specific groups, such as international students,[43] graduates,[44] researchers[45] or holders of special categories of permits,[46] rather than global talent as a whole.

Six EMN Member Countries and Serbia report drawing on indirect sources, such as broader migration and labour market data, sectoral analyses,[47] employer feedback and consultations with employers,[48] higher educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders,[49] to provide some insight into retention patterns.

4.2. Retention rates of immigrants and international students: evidence from selected non-EMN OECD countries

Given the varying data availability and sources used, internationally comparable evidence of talent retention remains limited. OECD analyses provide one of the few comparative sources of retention estimates across countries and talent groups.

International comparisons of retention rates should be interpreted with caution. As most countries have detailed information on immigration inflows but limited information on departures, retention can only be measured in countries where administrative, survey or longitudinal data allow individuals to be followed over time. Differences in data sources, definitions, observation periods and the treatment of onward migration or unregistered departures further limit comparability. To address some of the challenges in cross-country comparability, the OECD has developed retention estimates for selected OECD countries where suitable data are available, including estimates of both immigrant retention and international student retention.

Immigrant retention

Immigrant retention is estimated by following cohorts of migrants aged 15 and over who entered a destination country between 2010 and 2014 and measuring the share still present after three and five years. The

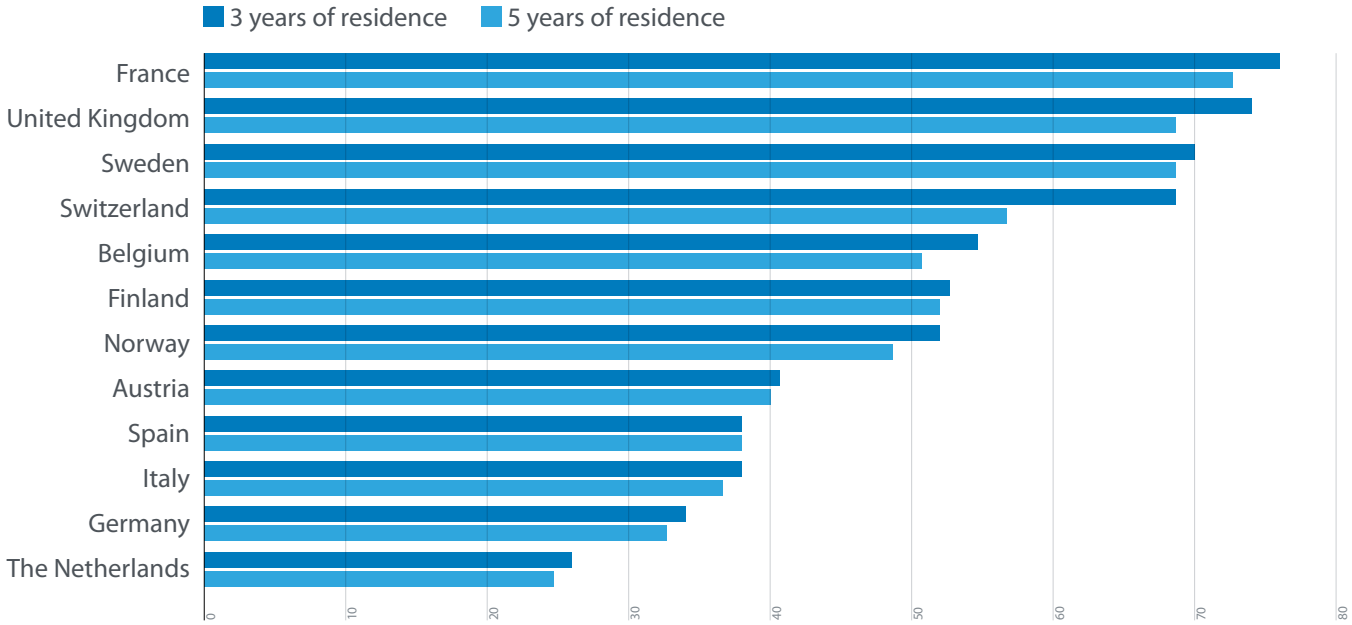
32 This chapter is drafted in collaboration with OECD.
33 FI, FR, IT, LU, NL, SE.
34 France Ministry of Interior, 'ELIPA', 2024, accessed 11 September 2026.
35 Italy, 'Alma Laurea Portal', n.d., accessed 11 September 2026.
36 Ibidem.
37 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, ES, IE, IT, LV, SI, SK.
38 AT, CZ, DE, EE, IE, IT, LV, SI, SK.
39 BE, EE, IE, SI, SK.
40 EE, IE, LV.
41 EE and RS.
42 AT, SI, SK.
43 AT, IT, LV, SI, SK.
44 AT, IE, LV, SK.
45 SI, SK and RS.
46 AT, IE, SK.
47 HU, LT, PL and RS.
48 IE, LT.
49 SK and RS.

estimates are derived from labour force surveys combined with OECD migration statistics.[50]

The results show substantial variation across countries (see Figure 1). Five-year retention rates range from around three out of four immigrants in France (73%) to around one in four in the Netherlands (25%). Retention rates are also relatively high in the United Kingdom (UK) (69%) and Sweden (69%), with lower rates observed in Germany (33%), Italy (37%) and Spain (38%). Five-year retention rates in non-European OECD countries are considerably higher, reaching around 79% in Canada and between 84% and 87% in the United States (US). These differences partly reflect variations in migrant composition, admission categories and opportunities for onward migration.[51]

The methodology has important limitations. The estimates do not measure whether migrants have returned to their countries of origin, moved onwards to a third country or simply disappeared from the underlying data source. They also refer to the overall immigrant population rather than highly skilled migrants or other specific talent groups. The data do not allow for more detailed cross-country analysis of retention rates by education level or sector of employment.

Figure 1. Immigrant retention rates after three and five years of residence, selected OECD countries



Source: OECD (2024), based on national labour force surveys and OECD International Migration Database.
Note: Population aged 15 and over that entered the destination country in the period 2010-2014.

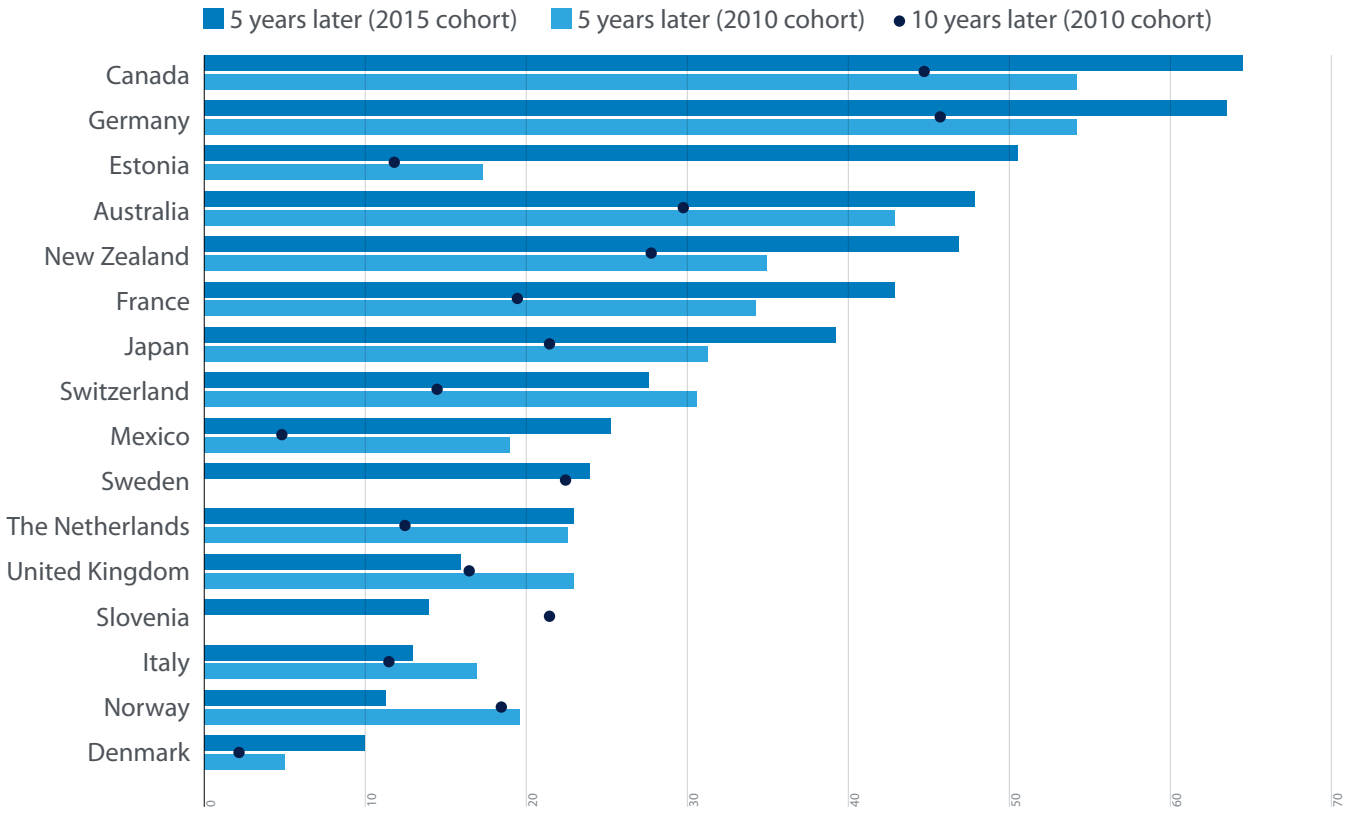
International student retention

The OECD analysis of international student retention[52] follows individuals who initially entered on student permits and measures the share who remain in the destination country several years later. Depending on the country, retention is measured through the continued validity of residence permits and transitions to other residence categories, including work permits.

The results indicate substantial variation between countries. Five years after entry, retention rates exceed 60% in Canada and Germany, with rates of around 40-50% in Australia, France and New Zealand. Lower rates are recorded in countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. Where 10-year data are available, retention rates decline further, highlighting the importance of longer-term return and onward migration among former international students.

50 OECD, Return, Reintegration and Re-migration, 2024, accessed 07 September 2026.
51 Ibid.
52 OECD, International Migration Outlook, 2022, accessed 07 September, 2026.

Figure 2. International student retention rates five and 10 years after student permit issued, selected OECD countries, 2015 and 2010 student cohorts



Source: OECD (2022).
Note: Data include individuals on a valid permit, including those with an education permit. No 5-year retention estimate is reported for Sweden and Slovenia due to data availability or comparability limitations in the underlying longitudinal data. Figure does not include individuals benefiting from free mobility. For more on data and methodology, see OECD (2022).

These estimates have important limitations. Definitions and data sources differ between countries, and the indicator generally captures continued legal residence rather than labour market attachment or permanent settlement. The estimates do not distinguish between different fields of study, skill levels or sectors of employment, making it difficult to assess the retention of specific categories of talent. As they generally exclude persons benefiting from free mobility arrangements, they capture only part of international student mobility.

4.3. Drivers of talent retention

EMN Member and Observer Countries identify a range of conditions that can support talent retention, drawing on available data, studies and expert insights. These factors most commonly relate to employment, settlement and the wider living environment.[53]

Career opportunities, research and education ecosystems

Access to skilled employment, career progression, professional development and opportunities in shortage occupations are the most commonly identified factors supporting retention, cited by 13 EMN Member Countries.[54] In the Netherlands, the evidence highlights the importance of finding suitable work and career opportunities, as well as employers' willingness to recruit international graduates holding Dutch degrees.

Research, innovation and higher education opportunities are also important, with nine EMN Member Countries[55] referring to these factors. For example, Spain reports research career programmes, including *ATRAE*[56] and *Ramón y Cajal*,[57] which support the recruitment and longer-term integration of researchers into Spanish universities and research organisations.

Migration pathways, family and settlement

Clear and predictable migration pathways can make it easier for talent to plan a longer-term future

53 The absence of a factor from a country's response does not necessarily mean it is not important; rather, it may reflect limited available data or evidence.
54 CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI.
55 EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, LT, LV, SI and RS.
56 Agencia Estatal de Investigación - Spain, ATRAE , accessed 21 October 2026
57 Agencia Estatal de Investigación, Ramon Y Cayal Programme accessed 21 October 2026

in the country. EMN Member Countries[58] refer to clear residence pathways,[59] access to permanent residence,[60] family-friendly immigration systems,[61] and transparent qualification recognition processes.[62] In Austria, employers can submit simultaneous residence applications for skilled workers and their family members. Eligible family members and registered partners can also apply for a Red-White-Red-Card Plus, which provides them with unrestricted access to the labour market.

Eleven EMN Member Countries[63] underline the importance of further family considerations, identifying family unity, employment opportunities for spouses or partners, childcare and education, and other support.[64] In Estonia and Lithuania, International House service centres bring key public services together for international talent and their families, supporting partners to integrate into the labour market.

Integration, quality of life and living conditions

Integration and day-to-day living conditions emerge as important factors influencing talent retention. Ten EMN Member Countries[65] identify integration programmes (including language learning[66] and childcare support[67]), access to services,[68] social networks,[69] inclusive workplaces and a sense of belonging[70] as factors supporting longer-term stay. In Finland, these measures include English-language early childhood education and care (ECEC), alongside opportunities to study Finnish and Swedish, recognising that language skills can support labour market participation and longer-term integration in the host country.

Safety,[71] healthcare,[72] work-life balance,[73] economic stability[74] and wider living conditions[75] are identified by the majority of EMN Member Countries[76] as factors supporting longer-term retention. Finland, France, Hungary and Slovenia also highlight conditions that support family life, including access to childcare and education. Sweden refers to access to banking services, affordable housing and work-life balance as factors supporting family life. Latvia, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic compare these factors to other destination countries to assess the competitiveness of their conditions for attracting and retaining talent.

Box 3: Supporting accompanying partners to strengthen retention

Austria's Carinthian International Centre offers a Dual Career Support[77] service that companies can purchase to support international employees and their families. Following an initial consultation, the service provides personalised offerings such as career orientation workshops, German language courses, networking events and matching events with employers. Similar approaches are found elsewhere. Germany's Alexander von Humboldt Professorship programme[78] pairs permanent research positions with host institution welcome packages, language courses and other integration measures. Sweden's Stockholm Dual Career Network,[79] a partnership between 17 higher education institutions and the City of Stockholm, connects accompanying partners with the local labour market and professional networks, while Spain's employer- and talent hub-led initiatives support spouses and partners seeking employment opportunities.

4.4. Factors hindering talent retention

EMN Member and Observer Countries identify several factors that can hinder talent retention. These commonly relate to limited career prospects,[80] as well as barriers to social integration,[81] family reunification and living conditions,[82] including housing costs.[83]

Career, research and innovation opportunities

Thirteen Member Countries[84] and Serbia identify limited career progression, difficulty finding suitable work and less competitive pay or working conditions as recurring barriers to retention.

Greece reports lower pay and the overqualification of highly skilled professionals as factors encouraging talent to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia identify limited research opportunities, unstable academic careers, weaker innovation ecosystems and lower research and development (R&D) capacity. Slovenia also notes unstable project-based funding and uncertain postdoctoral career pathways, while the Netherlands reports that the share of Dutch-language PhD vacancies rose from around 12-14% in 2021-2023 to approximately

58 AT, CZ, EL, ES, FR, PL.
59 AT, FR.
60 CZ.
61 AT, EL, ES, FR.
62 ES, FR, PL.
63 AT, DE (refers to family circumstances as an assumed relevant factor), EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, NL, SE, SI.
64 LT offers improved access to compulsory health insurance for spouses and registered partners.
65 BE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, NL, SE, SI.
66 EE, FI, SE, SI.
67 FI, SI.
68 LT.
69 ES, IE, NL.
70 BE, EE, FR, SI.
71 AT, LT, LV, SI, SK.
72 LT.
73 HU, IE, NL, SE.
74 CZ, FR, LU, NL.
75 BE, EE, LU, NL.
76 AT, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK.
77 Carinthian International Centre, Dual Career Programme, accessed 21 October 2026
78 Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, Alexander Von Humboldt Professorship Programme, accessed 26 October 2026
79 Stockholm Akademiska Forum, Dual Career Programme , accessed 21 October 2026
80 BE, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.
81 AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK.
82 AT, BE, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK.
83 ES, IE, LU, NL.
84 BE, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK.

19% in 2024, narrowing opportunities for international PhD candidates who do not speak Dutch.

Twelve EMN Member Countries[85] refer to international competition for talent, with stronger career prospects and better opportunities abroad encouraging onward migration. Hungary notes that other countries offer more competitive salary packages, career opportunities and relocation support.

Migration pathways, family and settlement

Administrative barriers are the most commonly reported obstacle to retention, according to most EMN Member and Observer Countries.[86] These include complex procedures and delays,[87] qualification recognition barriers,[88] difficult status transitions and legal thresholds for work permit or status changes.[89] In France, research by the Department of Statistics, Studies, and Documentation found that one-quarter of first-time arrivals experienced a discontinuity in their right to stay during their first four years in the country.[90]

Family-related challenges also affect longer-term decisions. Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic highlight limited employment opportunities for spouses or partners. Across Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Slovak Republic, other family-related challenges include difficulties with family reunification, family separation and other settlement issues. In Ireland, for instance, the NGO MRCI(Migrant Rights Centre Ireland) found that some two-thirds of its migrant clients holding the General Employment Permit reported that difficulties in achieving family reunification resulted in them considering leaving Ireland.

Integration, quality of life and living conditions

Social integration and living conditions also emerge as barriers to retention. Thirteen EMN Member Countries[91] report language barriers, discrimination, difficulties in building social networks and a lack of belonging. The Slovak Republic notes limited induction, buddy programmes and mentoring in the education environment, alongside language barriers that can limit access to services and meaningful social ties.

Eight EMN Member Countries[92] refer to the cost of living, housing availability, infrastructure challenges and overall affordability concerns. Luxembourg's LUXTALENT study[93] found that 66% of respondents identified housing costs as a main factor that could prompt newcomers to leave.

Overall, the responses suggest that talent retention is shaped by professional and research opportunities, settlement conditions and day-to-day living experiences. Career prospects and quality of life emerge as the principal drivers of retention, while administrative and residence barriers are the most commonly reported obstacles to remaining in the host country.

5. POLICIES AND INITIATIVES TO RETAIN TALENT

5.1. Transitioning from study and research to work

International students and graduates are one of the most frequently targeted groups for retention. EMN Member Countries often view them as already partly integrated, having acquired local education, professional and social networks, and familiarity with national systems.[94]

The most widespread retention measure across EMN Member Countries[95] is the stay for the purpose of job-searching or entrepreneurship post-study or residence permit for the purpose of job-searching or entrepreneurship, allowing students, third-country nationals and researchers to remain after completing their studies or research, to seek employment or establish a business. The underlying rationale is consistent across countries. The period immediately after graduation or completion of research is when talent is most likely to be lost, as residence status often expires before employment can be secured. Post-study and post-research stays permits bridge that transition by allowing graduates and researchers time to enter the labour market.

EMN Member Countries differ in the design of these permits stays: 12 months is the most common permissible duration of stay,[96] although periods range from four to 24 months,[97] with longer periods available in some countries for postgraduate qualifications[98] or under bilateral agreements with specific third countries.[99] Eligibility also varies, with some countries differentiating access by qualification level,[100] extending eligibility to graduates of higher education institutions in other EU Member States, or exempting graduates who remain from national immigration quotas.[101]

85 CZ, EE, EL, ES, HU, LT, LU, LV, PL, SE, SI, SK.
86 AT, BE, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.
87 BE, EE, FR, EL, ES, IE, NL, SI, SK.
88 AT, BE, CZ, EL, ES, FR, HU, NL, PL, SE, SK and RS.
89 EL, FR, IE, LV, SE.
90 France, Ministry of Interior, 'Discontinuité du droit au séjour et parcours d'intégration des primo-arrivants | Direction générale des étrangers en 'rance', 2024, accessed 3 September 2026.
91 AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK.
92 EE, EL, ES, FR, IE, LU, NL, SE.
93 Government of Luxembourg, 'Publication des résultats de la deuxième partie de l'étude LUXTALENT au sujet de l'attraction et de la rétention de talents au Luxembourg', 2026, accessed 5 August 2026.
94 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, NL, SK.
95 This is an obligation under article 25 of Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing (recast), accessed 26 October 2026
96 AT, BE, CY, EL, FR, IE, LU, NL.
97 FI, LV.
98 CZ, IE.
99 France issues APS Master permits valid for up to two years under bilateral agreements with certain third countries, including India, Tunisia and Gabon.
100 CY, IE, LV.
101 EE.

Box 4: Greece: Multiple pathways to retain global talent

Greece supports the longer-term retention of international graduates, researchers and highly skilled professionals through complementary residence pathways. International graduates and researchers may remain for up to 12 months after completing their studies or research to seek employment or establish a business. The Tech Visa supports highly qualified professionals joining innovative start-ups registered with Elevate Greece, while the Talent Visa targets highly educated third-country nationals, including postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral graduates, seeking employment or developing professional activities in Greece.

Several countries adapt work permit requirements for recent graduates through reduced salary thresholds,[102] exemptions from labour market tests[103] and other admission requirements,[104] enabling their transition into employment.

Box 5: France: Supporting international students' transition to employment

Several French higher education institutions complement post-study residence pathways with targeted employability support for international students. Reported measures include an International Student Ambassadors programme, personalised career coaching, on-the-job training and internship applications, CV and cover letter writing in French, mock interviews, multilingual support and workshops preparing students for international recruitment.

5.2. Supporting long-term residence and careers

EMN Member and Observer Countries report immigration pathways aimed at supporting longer-term retention. These measures include EU Blue Card pathways,[105] which can facilitate the retention of highly qualified third-country nationals by providing greater residence stability, easing access to highly qualified employment and supporting family integration.[106] Reported measures include extending the validity of EU Blue Cards, reducing minimum salary and employment contract requirements, and facilitating labour market access for accompanying family members.[107] Some countries also provide favourable conditions for graduates transitioning from post-study residence to EU Blue Card status,[108] while others highlight the possibility of accumulating qualifying periods of residence across EU Member States towards eligibility for EU long-term resident status.[109] Other retention measures include pathways to permanent or long-term residence,[110] changes between residence permit categories[111] and unrestricted labour market rights.[112]

Several countries facilitate progression towards more secure residence (including pathways to permanent residence and other forms of long-term residence schemes[113]) or unrestricted work rights. These approaches typically include faster routes to securing status, removing single-employer restrictions[114] and allowing in-country immigration status changes between residence categories.[115]These measures reduce uncertainty and facilitate long-term settlement.

Several countries simplify administrative transitions by allowing applicants to remain while their applications are processed,[116] facilitating changes between residence categories, creating progression routes between permit types (e.g. the Netherlands' pathway from a start-up residence permit to a self-employed residence permit) and issuing permits with longer validity.[117] Some countries also provide more favourable pathways to secure or permanent residence for specific categories of skilled third-country nationals. For example, Ireland allows Critical Skills Employment Perit holders to transition to Stamp 4 residence permission after two years, compared with five years for General Employment Permit holders, providing greater flexibility in accessing the labour market. Ukraine reports that designated highly qualified specialists may be granted permanent residence directly. These measures aim to reduce administrative barriers during key transition points.

5.3. Family reunification and spousal employment

Recognising that decisions to remain are often taken at household level, 11 EMN Member Countries[118] report having introduced or planned measures to support accompanying family members. These include simultaneous family applications,[119] and immediate family reunification supporting their integration into the host country.[120] While such measures are commonly reported for highly skilled migrants, including EU Blue Card holders and researchers, some countries extend specific benefits to other categories. Ireland has progressively expanded this access, first extending it to spouses and de facto partners of General Employment Permit holders and then to their dependent children aged 16–18. Germany complements its research recruitment programmes, including the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship, with Welcome Packages providing dual career support and language training (see Box 3).

102 EE, IE.
103 EE, FI, FR.
104 EE (graduates are also exempt from the immigration quota).
105 CZ, EL, LT, NL, PL, SK.
106 CZ, EL, NL, SK
107 EL, SK
108 NL
109 EL
110 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, IE, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and UA.
111 AT, CZ, EE, IE, NL, SI.
112 EL, IE, NL.
113 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, IE, LV, NL, PL, SI, SK and UA.
114 AT, BE, IE.
115 AT, CZ, EE, IE, NL, SI, SK.
116 EE, IE, NL, SE.
117 CZ (EU Blue Card valid for up to three years).
118 AT, BE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, NL, SE, SK.
119 AT, IE (Critical Skills Employment Permit holders), SK.
120 EE, FR, IE, NL, SK.

Employer and civil society initiatives complement these public measures by supporting the integration of accompanying family members. EMN Member and Observer Countries report initiatives such as career guidance,[121] job matching,[122] networking opportunities[123] and language training.[124] Although evidence on outcomes remains limited, these initiatives illustrate that partner integration strongly influences long-term settlement decisions.

5.4. 5.4 Innovation and entrepreneurship

Another approach to retention means of retaining talent focuses on entrepreneurship, investment and participation in innovation ecosystems. Nine EMN Member Countries[125] report start-up, entrepreneur and innovation-focused residence pathways, typically issued for one to two years and linked to an assessment of the proposed business or innovation. However, the majority of these schemes appear designed to attract rather than retain talent.[126] Only Greece, the Netherlands and Spain report some evidence of their contribution to long-term retention.

Three EMN Member Countries[127] confirm adapting these pathways to encourage longer-term establishment. For example, the Slovak Republic applies lower financial requirements to innovative founders, Spain operates a fast-track procedure for entrepreneurs, researchers and highly qualified professionals, and Greece links renewal of its Startup Golden Visa to continued investment and job creation.

The wider innovation ecosystem is also used to support retention through investment incentives, research and innovation funding,[128] incubation and acceleration programmes that support individual start-ups or businesses,[129] innovation clusters that connect multiple organisations and stakeholders,[130] and favourable expatriate tax regimes.[131] However, only limited evidence is available on the effectiveness of these measures. The Netherlands alone reports evaluating these measures, finding both its pilot scheme for essential start-up personnel and its 30% tax ruling effective in attracting highly skilled migrants. Evidence of their contribution to long-term retention remains limited, however.

5.5. Welcome and integration infrastructure

Ten EMN Member Countries[132] complement immigration pathways with practical integration support. The most common approach is the establishment of one-stop service centre models,[133] bringing together immigration, tax, social security and other settlement services through cooperation between public authorities and, in some cases, extending support to accompanying family members. The Slovak Republic has integrated these functions by locating its service centres within the authorities responsible for residence matters, allowing immigration and settlement support to be delivered through a single point of contact.

Language training is another recurring retention measure.[134] For example, the Czech Republic reports occupationally targeted language courses for foreign healthcare professionals after their arrival into the country, the Slovak Republic provides some language programmes adapted to shift-working patterns, while the Austrian province of Upper Austria offers free pre-graduation language courses for international STEM students, job-specific language courses and on-the-job German language training within companies. Latvia grants foreign academics a transitional period before national language proficiency becomes mandatory, with institutions required to provide language learning opportunities. The Netherlands reports that demand for courses exceeds supply, highlighting that the availability of a measure does not necessarily ensure access.

5.6. Engaging employers and civil society in retention

Employers and civil society organisations play an important role in talent retention, including by supporting the labour market and social integration of the third-country nationals and their families. Employers can contribute to retention by facilitating access to employment opportunities, supporting career development and fostering inclusive workplaces.

Ten EMN Member Countries[135] explicitly report measures for these actors, such as support for settlement and integration of international workers and their families. Sweden reports that employers with previous experience recruiting international talent are considerably more likely to recruit internationally again, suggesting that organisational capability may reinforce future recruitment and retention.

Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania and the Netherlands identify employers as key actors in talent retention. Countries have introduced a range of targeted measures to support employers in attracting and retaining international talent. These generally fall into three categories: guidance and practical support for employers;[136] recognised-sponsor frameworks providing simplified immigration procedures in return for defined compliance obligations;[137] and initiatives matching skilled migrants with employers.[138] One prominent example of a job-matching mechanism is Belgium's Leuven MindGate initiative (see Box 6).

121 AT, ES, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL.
122 AT, BE, DE, ES, FI, FR, NL, SE.
123 AT, DE, EE, ES, FI, LU, NL, SE, SK.
124 AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, IE, LU, NL, SE, SI.
125 AT, CY, EE, EL, ES, IE, LT, NL, SK.
126 AT, CY, EE, IE, LT, SE, SK.
127 ES, EL, SK.
128 CY.
129 HU, NL and RS.
130 FR, HU, NL, SE.
131 ES, FR, IE, NL.
132 AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, LT, LU, NL, SE, SK.
133 BE, EE, FI, FR, LT, LU, NL, SE, SK.
134 AT, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LV, NL, SI, SK.
135 BE, CZ, EE, ES, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI.
136 EE, LT.
137 NL.
138 BE, EL.

Box 6: Belgium: Retention through employer collaboration

Belgium's Leuven MindGate initiative enables participating employers to share, with candidates' consent, profiles of pre-screened candidates who were not hired by that employer but who may be suitable for vacancies with other employers in the same labour market. It aims to improve talent matching between employers and skilled workers, reduce talent loss and strengthen regional talent retention. The pilot involves 15 companies and is scheduled for evaluation at the end of 2026.[139]

Beyond EMN Member and Observer Country examples, Canada's place-based immigration programmes combine recruitment, settlement and retention objectives within a single framework. They explicitly engage employers, community organisations and settlement providers throughout the migration journey (see Box 7).

Box 7: Canada: Place-based approaches to talent retention[140]

Canada's Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP)[141] and Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP)[142] illustrate how attraction and retention can be integrated within a single policy framework. These programmes were developed to address labour shortages, population ageing and low immigrant retention in specific regions by combining immigration pathways with settlement and integration support tailored to local labour market needs.

A distinctive feature of both programmes is the active involvement of employers, local authorities and community organisations. Employers help to recruit newcomers and connect them with settlement services, while participating communities support integration through local networks, employment opportunities and practical settlement assistance. The programmes are designed both to attract talent and to encourage longer-term settlement.

Canada places a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. Regular assessments of programme outcomes are used to measure recruitment and retention performance and identify factors associated with longer-term stay, including access to employment, community attachment, affordability and family or social networks. The Canadian experience highlights the potential benefits of combining immigration pathways with employer engagement, settlement support and systematic evaluation of retention outcomes.

Employer and civil society initiatives complement these measures by helping international workers and their families to settle into everyday life through relocation assistance,[143] mentoring,[144] social and cultural integration induction,[145] family assistance, guidance on international recruitment[146] and ethical recruitment partnerships.[147]

6. CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

6.1. Challenges in measuring retention

Six EMN Member Countries[148] explicitly refer to the lack of reliable data measuring talent retention. They commonly attribute this to the absence of exit checks,[149] fragmented administrative systems and legal or technical barriers that limit the ability to link and analyse information across government systems.[150] Luxembourg highlights the practical challenge of collecting information from individuals once they have left the country. Countries report that these challenges limit their ability to assess the drivers of retention, evaluate the impact of specific measures and determine whether retention policies are achieving their objectives.

6.2. Governance and implementation challenges

Seven EMN Member Countries[151] report that responsibility for talent retention is shared across multiple ministries, agencies and levels of government, making coordinated approaches difficult. Belgium and the Slovak Republic identify fragmented governance, limited coordination and the absence of long-term monitoring frameworks. Sweden highlights that its system involves several government functions, regional and local actors, as well as the private sector, including labour market actors. This diversity and complexity creates both possibilities and challenges when implementing policies.

Funding challenges are reported, but rarely as an isolated issue.[152] Countries generally link funding difficulties to fragmented governance,[153] short-term project financing[154]

139 Leuven Mindgate, 'Leuven Mindgate: Talent Seeker', n.d., accessed 7 October 2026.
140 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, '2023 Settlement Outcomes Report', 2023, accessed 14 September 2026.
141 Government of Canada, Atlantic Immigration programme, accessed on 22 October 2026.
142 Government of Canada, Rural and Northern immigration pilot, accessed on 22 October 2026.
143 EE, LT.
144 EE
145 PL.
146 IE.
147 BE.
148 FI, IE, LT, LU, NL, SK.
149 IE, LT, LU.
150 IE, NL.
151 BE, ES, FR, LV, NL, SE, SK.
152 LV, NL, SK and RS.
153 NL.
154 HU, LV, SK and RS.

and the absence of a single organisation responsible for coordinating retention policies.[155] More broadly, Hungary notes that EU talent instruments may reinforce regional disparities by concentrating resources and talent in well-established innovation ecosystems.

Implementation challenges are reported more frequently than concerns about policy design. These challenges can limit the effectiveness of retention measures by delaying international talent's transition into employment and longer-term residence. EMN Member Countries refer to challenges affecting the implementation of talent retention measures, including complex administrative procedures,[156] lengthy processing times, limited digitalisation[157] and low awareness of available immigration and integration measures among both employers and international talent.[158] For example, the Czech Republic highlights the limited digitalisation of immigration procedures, while France, the Netherlands and Slovenia refer to administrative complexity and lengthy procedures affecting access to residence and work-related measures. Lithuania and the Netherlands note that employers and international talent are not always aware of available support measures. Latvia reports that retention measures may exist but are not always easily accessible or understood by the international talent and employers they are intended to support.

EMN Member Countries[159] emphasise that many drivers of retention lie beyond migration policy. Competition from destinations offering higher wages, stronger career opportunities and larger labour markets is a particular challenge for smaller countries and those in Central and Eastern Europe.[160] Housing affordability and availability,[161] as well as social integration,[162] are also recognised as important influences on decisions to stay or leave.

6.3. Cooperation and best practices

Systematic evaluation of retention policies remains limited. Finland is the only EMN Member Country to report a comprehensive evaluation framework with predefined indicators and regular monitoring of outcomes through its Talent Boost Programme (see Box 1). Elsewhere, evidence is generally limited to individual programme evaluations, project reviews, audits or partial monitoring exercises.[163]

Despite these limitations, several common themes emerge. According to France, Lithuania and the Netherlands, retention measures are more likely to be effective when they provide clear and predictable residence and career pathways, reduce administrative burdens, support smooth transitions from study/research to work,[164] and take account of family needs. Five EMN Member Countries point to collaboration between employers and educational institutions as an important element of effective retention strategies.[165] Lithuania and the Slovak Republic report that fragmented, complex or poorly coordinated measures, or those that are not easily accessible or well understood, are less likely to support long-term retention.

Available evidence suggests that retention statistics should be interpreted with caution. Higher retention rates do not necessarily indicate greater satisfaction or stronger integration. In some cases, individuals may remain because immigration rules provide limited alternatives rather than because they intend to settle permanently. Retention outcomes should therefore be considered alongside the wider policy and labour market context.[166]

EMN Member and Observer Countries highlight the value of exchanging experiences on talent retention. Rather than dedicated retention networks, cooperation mainly takes place through broader European migration, research and innovation initiatives, including the EMN, Horizon Europe, EURAXESS, the Talent Booster Mechanism and Talent Partnerships.[167]

Examples illustrate how this cooperation works in practice. Austria refers to a pilot Skills Mobility Partnership between Austria and Egypt within the framework of the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF). The EAGLE [168] project includes a Team Europe Task Force's to create a structured platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration for MPF projects operating in Egypt. Greece participates in the Talent Booster Mechanism through the regions of Peloponnese and Thessaly, exchanging data, policy experience and good practices with other participating EU regions. Greek stakeholders also participate in thematic working groups under the Harnessing Talent Platform, focusing on digital, health, R&I and territorial challenges and sharing approaches to creating inclusive environments that support talent retention. The Slovak Republic exchanges experience through EURAXESS, Erasmus+ and CEEPUS, while the Banská Bystrica region participates in the Talent Booster Mechanism, analysing talent outflow and attraction and connecting schools, companies and public administration. France contributes to EU discussions on talent attraction, legal migration and post-study and post-research pathways, sharing national practices on administrative support, employment transitions, intra-EU mobility and career security. France participates in Talent Partnerships with Morocco and Tunisia, holds observer status in the partnership with Egypt, and supports the EU pilot legal information office in India. EURAXESS, Horizon Europe and Study in Europe provide further channels for exchange with higher education and R&I stakeholders. France also draws on its *Bienvenue en France*[169] label and its updated 2023 Good Practices Guide to share approaches to improving the reception and support of international students.

155 NL, SK.
156 CZ, ES, FR, NL, SI.
157 CZ.
158 LT, NL.
159 CZ, EE, HR, HU, IE, LV, NL, PL.
160 CZ, EE, FR, HR, HU, LU, LV, PL.
161 IE, LU, NL.
162 AT, BE, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK.
163 CZ, EE, ES, FR, LV, NL, SK and RS.
164 AT, BE, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, IE, LU, LV, SE, SK (study-to-work or research-to-work transition mechanisms are reported but not explicitly linked to talent retention).
165 CZ, ES, FR, NL, LT.
166 IE, LT.
167 AT, EL, FR, NL, SK.
168 IOM Austria, EAGLE A Skills Mobility Partnership between Austria and Egypt , accessed 21 October 2026.
169 Campus France, Bienvenue en France, accessed on 21 October 2026.



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France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2

Germany www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/EMN/emn-node.html

Greece https://migration.gov.gr/emn/

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Georgia migration.commission.ge/

The Republic of Moldova bma.gov.md/en

Ukraine dmsu.gov.ua/en-home.html

Montenegro www.gov.me/mup

Armenia migration.am/?lang=en

Serbia kirs.gov.rs/eng

The Republic of North Macedonia https://mvr.gov.mk/

Albania

United Kingdom