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MILESTONE 113

STATE OF THE ART REPORT ON METHODS AND TOOLS FOR RESEARCHING EMPLOYERS' PRACTICES AND SKILLS TRANSFERABILITY ACROSS BORDERS

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Abstract

The paper examines the state of the art on employer practices and skills transferability across borders. As background, it acknowledges the existing obstacles to cross-border skills transferability, to underline the necessity of further research on the topic, especially from a micro-level on the labour demand side (i.e. on employers' decisions and practices). To inform future research on the topic, first, the paper reviews the empirical literature on employer practices in cross-border hiring, highlighting what methodologies are used for investigation in this field. Second, it explores EU instruments that employers can use to improve their practices and lower existing barriers to skills transferability across borders and discusses how these instruments can serve research on the topic. The paper concludes that, despite certain limitations are to be taken into account for each of them, several methods and tools are available to progress research in this field, including those offered by EU instruments for skills transferability across borders, such as the EURES job portal.

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1. Introduction

Globalisation and the European single market make labour mobility key for economic growth in the European Union (EU). Labour mobility, from within and outside the EU, transfers skills across borders to feed in the production process, increasing its output and productivity. It allows workers to be employed where their skills are better remunerated and companies to access a larger pool of competences and knowledge to meet their production needs (OECD, 2012; Cedefop, 2014).

For the purpose of this paper, transferable skills are defined as skills that are applicable to different tasks and jobs for which the level of applicability varies according to economic, legislative, geographic and other contexts (European Commission, 2011). Skills transferability then refers to the ability to transfer one's skills across occupations, sectors or, as in the specific interest of this paper, countries. In turn, skills transferability relates to skills shortages, at aggregated level, or skills mismatches, at individual level. The former describes a situation when employers cannot find fit-to-the-job workers, given adequate standards of wage and working conditions (Quintini, 2011). The latter refers to when there is a poor fit between a worker's qualifications and skills and those required by their job (McGuinness and Sloane, 2011; OECD, 2013). When labour mobility works well, allowing skills to be transferred properly, it can minimise these problems. A good balance between the skills acquired by individuals and those needed in the job - and in the labour market overall - is essential to recoup investments in human capital and generate economic growth in socio-economic systems (Froy, 2013).

Over the last decade, intra-EU labour mobility has continuously increased, reaching up to 17.6 million mobile workers within the EU28 in 2019. This figure means that 4.2% of the total EU working-age population lives and/or works in a Member State that is different from that of birth. Moreover, 1.9 million of foreign-born workers are posted workers, who do not go through a cross-border hiring process but still transfer their skills across countries because their employer sends them to work abroad on a temporary basis (European Commission, 2020). Action has been taken on the European level to make labour mobility smooth and fair for both employers and employees. For example, since 2005, the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications¹ ensures the recognition of professional qualifications for certain groups of workers and adds up to the broader European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning adopted in 2008². The 1996 Posting of Workers Directive³ and its Enforcement Directive⁴ adopted in 2014 establishes a set of core rights to which posted workers are entitled. The European Labour Authority (ELA)⁵ was created in 2019 with the goal of supporting Member States to enforce rules on EU labour mobility effectively, including the provision of information to workers and companies on their rights and relevant services for cross-border hiring. These initiatives contribute to creating a clearer framework for skills transferability across EU countries. Beyond labour mobility within the EU, migrant workers from extra-EU countries, such as Eastern European countries that are not part of the EU, as well as countries in other continents⁶, have also a central role in transferring skills that can make the

¹ See: [Directive 2005/36/EC](#).

² See: [Recommendation 2008/C 111/01](#).

³ See: [Directive 96/71/EC](#).

⁴ See: [Directive 2014/67 / EU](#).

⁵ See: [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1149](#).

⁶ All countries outside of the European Unions are referred to as extra-EU countries, see [Eurostat](#)

European economy and society thrive. The 2015 European Agenda on Migration⁷ recognizes the contribution of international migration to addressing skills shortages and foster economic growth in the EU, providing a framework for the EU initiatives in the field of extra-EU labour migration.

Despite increasing interest and actions of policy makers for labour mobility, the recognition of skills and qualifications across borders remains a challenge, hindering the potential of cross-border skills transferability. The multifaceted nature of skills even questions the extent to which skills can be fully recognised and transferred across borders (Damas de Matos, 2014), or whether qualifications are good-enough predictors of skills to this aim (Quintini, 2011). For this reason, further investigation is needed on workers and employers' agency regarding skills transferability, to ultimately inform on what tools can help employers in evaluating and transferring skills across borders. Many factors on both - the supply and demand side of the labour market - influence labour mobility and migration across borders, impacting on the transferability of skills. The literature on workers' decisions to move abroad – i.e. the so-called push and pull factors for migration (IOM, 2019) – is relatively extensive. By contrast, while surveys show that employers are generally reluctant to recruit from abroad (OECD, 2019), employers' practices and decisions when hiring across borders remain little investigated.

This paper focuses on this latter aspect. It aims at providing a state of the art on employers' practices in cross-border hiring for skills transferability, to identify research methods and tools, as well as how these could be developed to gain further knowledge and foster skills transferability across borders. The paper is based on desk research. It reviews the literature on skills transferability across countries, within and beyond the EU, focusing on the labour market demand-side, at microeconomic level – i.e. on employers. In addition, it explores EU instruments that support employers when hiring from abroad, also considering how these provide additional tools to research on this topic.

The paper is structured as follows. First, major obstacles to skills transferability across countries are discussed referring to the literature, to provide relevant context and illustrate why it deserves attention. Second, the literature on employers' practices in cross-border hiring is reviewed, with the aim to assess the empirical evidence on such obstacles and identify through which methods and tools the investigation in this field has proceeded. Third, EU instruments are reviewed, pointing out how these can facilitate skills transferability across countries and feed into further research on the topic. The paper concludes by summarising the main obstacles and practices for skills transferability across countries, as emerged from the state of the art, by pointing out how EU instruments have addressed them and by outlining what tools and methods are available for further research.

2. Imperfect skills transferability across countries

Skills transferability across countries is deemed important to address skills shortages in the hosting economy, as well as to use individual's human capital where it is more productive and thus more remunerative, reducing skills mismatches. However, the literature has pointed out that this is not always the case. There are obstacles, mainly of institutional nature⁸, that limit the extent to which skills are transferable across countries. These obstacles make employers, especially in the EU, struggle

⁷ See: [COM/2015/0240 final](#).

⁸ Here institutions are defined as the entire set of rules that form a society, being those formal or informal (Hodgson, 2001).

in attracting international talent (OECD, 2019), hamper the potential of skills transferability to reduce skills shortages and sometimes worsen skills mismatches in the labour market.

Damas de Matos (2014) highlights several factors that affect the extent to which workers can transfer their skills abroad. First, formal qualifications acquired in the country of origin may not be recognised in the country of destination. In particular, access to certain professions may not be allowed without a national qualification (see also OECD, 2019). Second, the work experience and educational level of foreign-born workers may be judged less usable or less reliable than those of native workers, given that educational systems and labour markets are heterogeneous across countries. Third, these obstacles may be exacerbated by insufficient knowledge of the language of the country of destination. The need to fulfil visa criteria or other immigration policy requirements to enter the country of destination constitute a further obstacle to skills transferability (see also OECD, 2019). Finally, foreign-born workers may face discrimination from employers. This happens either because of pure prejudice or because immigrant status and foreign qualifications are perceived as correlated with lower productivity, which in turn is related back to language or cultural differences, as documented by some of the literature reviewed in the next section (See also Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016).

2.1 Overeducation of foreign-born workers

Pointing to the less-than-perfect skills transferability across countries, skills mismatches are more likely for workers who have moved across borders, than for native workers. Limited recognition of foreign qualifications between countries, in particular, lowers an individual's returns to education and leads to overeducation i.e. a situation where a worker's educational qualifications are higher than those required by their job. In many cases, mobile and especially migrant workers may have higher education or more work experience than their job requires. In other cases, however, such workers could compensate for the limited level of education or transferability of qualifications with higher ability and motivation to learn, leading to undereducation i.e. a situation where a worker's educational qualifications are lower than those required by their job (Chiswick and Miller, 2009).

The empirical literature⁹ has extensively documented overeducation of foreign-born workers compared to native-born workers. The former are more likely to be overeducated than the latter, receiving lower returns to education in terms of occupational attainment and other labour market outcomes. Damas de Matos and Liebig (2014) estimate that in Europe, the overqualification rate of foreign-born workers is on average 12% higher than for native-born workers. This result is almost entirely driven by workers with foreign qualifications, pointing to the fact that limited recognition of qualifications across borders leads to skills mismatch. In fact, the authors find that 25% of immigrants with tertiary education reported that they had applied for a formal recognition of their qualification in their new country of residence. Among workers that submitted such an application, the rate of overeducation compared to native workers was two thirds lower than for immigrants who had not done so. Similarly, Aleksynkah and Tritah (2013) estimate that across Europe, 22% of immigrants face overeducation, compared to only 13% of native-born workers- Moreover, 16% of migrant workers have qualifications that are significantly lower than those required for their job.

Higher overeducation of foreign-born workers in comparison to natives is a consistent pattern across countries. Nonetheless, there is significant heterogeneity in overeducation rates depending on the destination and origin country (Damas de Matos, 2014; Damas de Matos and Liebig, 2014). This

⁹ See Damas de Matos, 2014 for a comprehensive literature review.

points to the fact that institutional arrangements and cultural proximity play a role in the process of skills transferability. To reinforce this argument, Visintin et al. (2015) find that differences in the rate of overeducation between native and non-native workers are not only related to the country of residence but also to the combination of country of origin and destination. For example, workers from EU15 countries that move to another EU15 country or a non-EU European country (i.e. Russia) have only a slightly higher incidence of overqualification in comparison to their native counterparts. By contrast, workers from other EU countries have higher overqualification rates than natives in all the countries of destination (including EU15), but in Northern-American and Oceanian countries.

Damas de Matos and Liebig (2014) also highlight the role of language in limiting skills transferability. In their study, 21% of immigrants report a lack of knowledge of the local language as their main difficulty in finding a job, regardless their level of education. The issue applies especially for immigrants with foreign and, particularly, extra EU qualifications¹⁰. Indeed, the literature shows that in most countries, overeducation of foreign-born workers decreases over the time they are in the country of destination, as language skills, country-specific work experience and general knowledge about the country increase (Damas de Matos, 2014). This indicates that overeducation of foreign-born workers may be temporary and linked to cultural barriers. Labour market entrants could take jobs that require less, or sometimes more, education than what they attained, with the intention of gaining experience for future job mobility in the country of destination (Chiswick and Miller, 2009).

2.2 Qualifications as a limited proxy for skills

Imperfect skills transferability is not only due to limited recognition of qualifications. It relates also to the fact that means to measure and recognise skills are limited, in general, and especially in cross-border hiring processes. Qualifications are most commonly used as a proxy for skills in the literature, as well as in the hiring process (Bills, 2003). In particular, if employers use qualifications as a signal in the hiring process, they will rely more on these when less is otherwise known about applicants (Capelli and Keller, 2014), as it seems to be the case for foreign-born candidates, with whom cultural proximity might be limited. Yet, qualifications have their limitations.

To begin with, there are difficulties in assessing the quality of foreign qualifications, even if these are recognised in the country of destination. The heterogeneous quality of educational systems across countries and the country-specific human capital – i.e. including knowledge of institutions, culture, customs and networks – mean that qualifications obtained abroad are not fully comparable with domestic qualifications in terms of productivity (Ferrer and Riddell, 2008; Nielsen, 2011).

More fundamentally, in general, qualifications are an imperfect proxy for skills, for several reasons, as pointed out by Quintini (2011). First, the level of performance and field of study are heterogeneous within qualification levels. Grades (i.e. performance indicators) and field of study (i.e. knowledge indicators) are often overlooked in the literature as proxy for skills, while these are commonly considered in the hiring process (Di Stasio and van de Werfhorst, 2016). Second, qualifications only reflect skills developed in formal education and training. As such, they lead to the neglect of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, for example through on the job experience, which are very important forms of learning for adults (Fialho et al., 2019). Especially, qualifications

¹⁰ Individuals' characteristics can also influence skills transferability, overeducation being higher among foreign-born female workers, as well as among those that move abroad for humanitarian or family reasons (Damas de Matos, 2014; Damas de Matos and Liebig, 2014).

do not reflect non-cognitive skills¹¹, which are rarely validated, certified and recognised in the labour market (Kautz et al., 2014). Third, some of the skills captured through education and training that led to certain qualifications may be deteriorating over time, being less indicative for senior job positions.

This does not mean that qualifications are a useless measure of skills, but, rather a limited one. Any measure of skills can only offer a partial view, as skills are multifaceted, multidimensional. Qualifications are likely to reflect competencies, such as information processing and subject-specific skills (OECD, 2013). Yet, alternative measurements of skills are still rare, both in the labour market and in labour market research. To be more informative, analysis of skills mismatches, shortages and transferability needs to be complemented with other measures of skills, in addition to qualifications, such as data on tested or assessed skills and non-cognitive skills.

While this research field is still scant, advances have been made by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) allows for measuring skill levels in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in adults¹². This contributes to identifying skills mismatch at individual level and skills shortages at aggregate level.

The analysis of PIAAC results (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2016) shows effectively how qualifications are predictors of skills only to a limited extent. First, while educational attainment is positively related to skills proficiency, the level of skills proficiency varies markedly within levels of educational attainment. This is observed both within and across countries. Importantly, holding the level of education constant, the average level of skills proficiency is different from one country to another. This demonstrates that qualifications are not particularly accurate when evaluating workers' skills from other countries. Second, there is little overlap between skills mismatch based on the indicators of assessed skills, as in the PIAAC survey¹³, and educational mismatch, based on qualifications. The majority of the over- or under-educated workers are well matched to their jobs in terms of their skills, though not necessarily in terms of their field of study. Finally, skills mismatches have a weaker effect on wages than educational mismatches. This could suggest that in practice employers can screen and match new hires' skills to occupations, rather than relying only on qualifications, though this process may be costly. Employers need to invest additional human resources effort to decipher the lower-quality signals from qualifications and adapt job requirements to candidates' skills (Quintini, 2011).

With regard to skills of foreign-born workers specifically, further analyses of the PIAAC results (Bonfanti and Xenogiani, 2014; OECD, 2018) show that the literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills of foreign-born adults are on average lower than those of the native-born adults. This is observed in all countries, with levels of literacy and numeracy extremely low for foreign-born workers in some European countries. PIAAC data can also be used to directly compare the incidence of skills mismatches between the native or non-native adult population, and thus give an indication of skills transferability across countries (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2016). Overall, while foreign-born workers are more likely to be overeducated than their native counterparts, they are less likely to be over-skilled

11 Kautz et al. (2014: 13) define non-cognitive skills as "personal attributes not thought to be measured by Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests or achievement tests. These attributes go by many names in the literature, including soft skills, personality traits, non-cognitive abilities, character skills, and socioemotional skills. [...] "Skills" suggests that these attributes can be learned".

12 The PIAAC provides an assessment also of non-cognitive, behavioural skills, although the assessment is task-based [PIAAC Pilot Study on Non-cognitive Skills](#) was carried in 2017 to test the measurement properties of non-cognitive skills. Moreover, the OECD is conducting seminal research on non-cognitive, socio-emotional skills through its [Study on Social and Emotional Skills](#), to assess how educational systems can support their development.

13 Skills mismatch is measured by comparing an individual's score to the minimum and maximum scores achieved by workers in the same job who report that their skills are well matched to their job.

or differences are insignificant. As for qualifications, language barriers influence these results, since the survey is conducted in the language of the host country.

In addition, the PIAAC asks workers about their subjective perception on whether they feel that they could cope with more demanding tasks in their jobs, or whether they feel they need further training. The picture varies across countries, with differences between foreign- and native-born in some countries, but not in others. Once the country of origin and the level of assessed skills are taken into account, there is no significant difference remaining in the majority of countries (OECD, 2018).

These analyses of the PIAAC results show that skills transferability across countries is a complex phenomenon. It is necessary to examine different dimensions of skills. A thorough, transparent assessment of skills by employers in cross-border hiring practices, beyond the signals of qualifications, could improve outcomes of skills transferability for individuals, companies and the economy at large.

3. Literature review on employers' practices in cross-border hiring

The literature on skills transferability across borders has largely investigated the factors that drive workers' decisions to move, focusing on the supply side of the labour market. Most of this literature focuses on skilled individuals (i.e. medium or highly qualified) and establishes that these decide to move where they expect the highest returns to their skills, net of migration costs (Damas de Matos, 2014). Decisions to move abroad are driven by employment opportunities, especially in the case of intra-EU mobility. In 2014, within the EU, 40% of mobile workers from EU countries indicated employment as their main reason for moving, as compared to 30% of non-EU migrants with medium to low education and 25% with high education (OECD, 2019). Tuccio (2019) explains that talented workers are motivated by employment and earnings opportunities but also by non-pecuniary motivations and amenities in the country of destination. Non-pecuniary factors include the taxation and welfare system, the skills environment and the dynamism of the economy, the inclusiveness of society, the quality of life with regard to the environment and services, prospects for political and economic integration and the family environment.

In a macroeconomic perspective, to match inward labour flows with the skills demand in the labour market, several countries have put in place policies imposing selective criteria on migration flows (OECD, 2019). Yet, the extent to which more selective countries are effective in attracting skilled migrants is uncertain (Damas de Matos, 2014). Although migrants admitted for work tend to be more educated and have higher language skills than others, the influence of selection mechanisms on skills transferability across countries may be limited, given the geographical and historical determinants of migration. Moreover, such selective policies do not apply to intra-EU labour mobility.

Factors that drive decisions in cross-border hiring have to be further investigated on the microeconomic level, to better explore the demand side of the labour market in skills transferability across countries. Companies are essential actors in the acquisition, development, recognition and

assessment of skills in European countries and these actors face the serious challenge of the assessment of transferable skills in new hires (European Commission, 2011).

3.1 Empirical evidence

Recruitment is the start of the employment relationship and is a fundamental determinant of inequality, opportunity and organisational attainment. In the hiring process, employers use several positive and negative screens, including education, job history and cultural and social capital (Bills et al., 2017). Hiring processes, however, are limited by informational, social and socio-cognitive impediments limiting the ability of firms to identify, attract, select, compensate and on-board external candidates in an optimal manner (Capelli and Keller, 2014).

These impediments are particularly high in the case of evaluating skills of new employees from abroad. As outlined in the previous section, there are several reasons to expect employers to have difficulties in evaluating the skills of non-native workers. These reasons include lack of familiarity with foreign credentials, lack of knowledge of the country of origin and insufficient recognition of worker's qualifications (UNHCR, 2018; Zikic, 2015). Beyond this general acknowledgement of existing barriers in cross-border hiring, there is a gap in the literature related to the ways in which companies screen and recruit workers from abroad. Little is known on how they recognise and understand individual differences among them and develop human resources management strategies to facilitate transfers and utilisation of their knowledge and skills (Guo and Al Ariss, 2015; Zikic, 2015). In this sense, migration studies and the human resources literature have tended to remain separate (Guo and Al Ariss, 2015). Yet, some studies exist and enable to draw the state of the art on employers' practices in cross-border hiring for skills transferability.

Some of these studies have used **employers' surveys** for empirical analyses. Bossler (2016) uses the IAB establishment panel, a large annual survey of German companies carried out by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), to examine firm policies and personnel development. The survey contains some information to explore companies' determinants for hiring skilled workers from abroad. The findings show that firms that have a more international workforce, export more and have foreign ownership are more likely to recruit from abroad. While the indications of this study on employers' hiring practices for skills transferability across countries are rather general, they point to the strong role of attitudinal factors, linked to company's characteristics and culture. Although based on qualitative data, Almeida et al. (2019) confirm this role, identifying the cultural capital of the recruiters as a key influence on their evaluation of migrant candidates and their skills. The organisational values and recruiters' exposure to diverse cultures can influence assumptions about the value of international qualifications and work experience. In particular, in Almeida et al. (2019), some countries were considered as more 'reliable' with regard to foreign qualifications, which appeared to be related to familiarity with country context.

Through an *ad-hoc* survey of Swedish employers, Lundborg and Skedinger (2016) examine employers' attitudes towards hiring refugees, though not migrants at large. They find that only a minority of employers had to spend more resources on screening refugees than for native applicants. However, firms that screened more carefully and invested additional resources were more likely to have a positive experience with hiring refugees. While offering insights limited to a specific subsample of migrant workers, this study demonstrates the value of directly asking employers about their experience with evaluating skills of migrants, as well as the positive outcome of tailored hiring practices for evaluating skills of foreign-born workers.

Regarding employers' practices to hire refugees specifically, also the OECD/UNHCR (2018) scan existing practices and provide recommendations based on good practices identified through qualitative research methodologies, such as regional forums and further consultation with employers, refugees and other stakeholders. The majority of studies that examine employers' practices when hiring from abroad rely indeed on **qualitative research methodology**. A comparative study by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2013) uses seven country case studies to investigate information channels most commonly used in hiring migrants from outside the EU. The study finds that employers may use a mix of different methods to advertise job vacancies and identify migrant candidates with appropriate skills, including personal and professional networks, recruitment agencies and intermediaries, job offers in the media, job fairs and national Public Employment Services (PES) or lists of jobseekers compiled by national consulates abroad. The most prominent channels vary by country. When hiring from abroad, the difficulties employers face are complex administrative procedures associated with recruiting abroad, but also other informational barriers as mentioned in the previous section. Employers find it difficult to identify candidates with the right skills and to recognise their qualifications. Moreover, behavioural factors such as a lack of intercultural knowledge and implicit stereotypes play a role. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are particularly affected by these barriers, given their limited resources to dedicate to recruitment practices. Large firms tend to have access to professional recruitment processes and a wider range of channels, while SMEs rely mainly on informal processes. As such, they can less easily assess migrant candidates, particularly for skilled workers and seasonal employment, where qualifications have to be verified and validated, to comply with migration policies.

Other qualitative studies have looked at employers' practices for skills transferability in multinational companies, but largely focused on expatriation and international mobility (e.g. Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016; Collings and Isichei, 2018). A contribution by Sparrow (2007), however, explores multinationals' international recruitment more generally. This study is based on interviews within four multinational companies based in the UK, which recruit highly skilled international workers for the domestic or overseas labour market. Large firms such as these tend to have specific human resources departments dedicated to international recruitment. For these companies, establishing that prospective employees have the necessary skills and level of knowledge comparable to domestic qualifications, including language proficiency, is key. To this end, bodies are set up for skills assessment, taking into account cross-cultural differences and the local setting. These results confirm that large companies have much greater resources to assess skills of foreign workers, going beyond the signals given by qualifications or previous work experience. Indeed, multinationals do not face specific information obstacles and their recruitment practices do not differ substantially when recruiting from abroad (IOM, 2013).

In some cases, qualitative studies have taken a sectoral approach. For example, through comparative desk research, Fellini et al. (2007) examine recruitment strategies in the construction industry in six European countries. Hiring from abroad is mainly motivated by labour shortages in the domestic market and a desire to reduce labour cost. Labour migration is more common in less regulated labour markets and countries with a larger irregular economy and a higher presence of foreign workers. Moreover, employers state that language and culture are factors that affect recruitment, particularly on construction sites where safety is a concern. This study is relevant because it highlights that in countries where there is a large presence of unauthorised non-EU migrants, and especially in sectors where there are many small, family-run companies, networking and informal processes play a greater role than formal recruitment practices. In other countries, direct recruitment from abroad can rely on networks, for hiring skilled workers through formal processes or hiring from neighbouring countries in general.

Almeida et al. (2012) examine employers' screening and recruitment of skilled immigrants in Australia. The analysis draws on interviews with employers in the IT and accounting sector, supplemented by secondary analysis of policy documents, organisational websites and other existing data. Several organisational characteristics influence how employers approach hiring international migrants. The process can be outsourced to an external consultant or conducted in house. Recruitment consultants tend to be more positive in screening and assessing immigrant professionals. A successful placement at an appropriate skill level depends, however, on whether employers see consultants as experts on evaluating overseas work experience. When companies do the recruiting themselves, they tend to place greater emphasis on local skills and experience. Confirming the mentioned obstacles to skills transferability, the authors also find that employers have difficulties in assessing overseas work experience and checking references. This makes hiring immigrants less likely, particularly under time constraints. Cultural factors and existing local networks also play a role in the recruitment process, which may disadvantage migrants. In another study, Almeida and Fernando (2017) show that in accounting, employers prefer local qualifications and experience given the importance of country-specific knowledge. This shows that employers' attitude towards non-local experience depends on the sector.

Other studies have combined surveys with qualitative interviews. For example, Khoo et al. (2007) use a mixed data collection methodology, conducting a small exploratory survey of employers and in-depth interviews, to focus on common recruitment practices for temporary skills migration in Australia. Their results highlight the pivotal role of personal, ethnic or business networks and overseas offices in cross-border hiring. By contrast, migration agents and advertisements were less used. A study by North (2007) combines a postal survey of employers and follow-up unstructured interviews in New Zealand. The results shown that immigrants were often recruited to meet labour shortages and the vast majority of companies had no policy regarding immigrant recruitment. Barriers to hiring immigrants included lack of domestic work experience and qualifications, which resulted in greater difficulty in verifying work experience. When recruiting, employers would tend to adopt a path of least resistance and minimise risk by not hiring immigrants that were competing with natives. This study suggests that employability of foreign workers could be improved through recognised qualifications, comparability of work experience and references, and a CV format focused on the particular job and familiar to the domestic employer.

Raux (2019) investigates hiring practices for high-skilled immigrants in the United States (US), using **innovative data sources such as online job postings**. Although the study does not go into the details of recruitment practices, the results establish that the main motivation for recruiting from abroad is a long job posting duration, which is proxy for skills shortages in the local labour market. By contrast, the study does not find evidence of employers turning to the international labour market driven by labour cost saving motivations. The study also points at significant heterogeneity among employers regarding difficulties faced in the recruitment process and how these are addressed.

Finally, some studies in the field of behavioural economics use **randomised experiments** to discover to what extent foreign-born workers face discrimination in cross-border hiring process. The results of these studies vary, with some finding evidence of discrimination and others less so (Damas de Matos, 2014). Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003), for example, document racial discrimination in the US labour market, based on African American *versus* White sounding names on fake candidates' profiles. A recent meta-analysis of 43 studies looking at the impact of race and ethnicity on call back rates finds that almost all studies find evidence of discrimination (Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016). However, the study finds that discrimination is lower in German-speaking countries where more detailed information for applications is required. This would suggest that the extent of discrimination can be reduced with better information on applicant credentials. Nevertheless, overall there is no

significant difference in call back rates between first- and second-generation applicants, the latter being more likely to have local schooling. Some individual country studies, by contrast, indicate that discrimination can be related to whether qualifications and work experience are acquired domestically or abroad. For instance, in Sweden, whether education was acquired abroad or in the host country explains 23% of the difference in call back rates between immigrants and native-born workers (Carlson and Rooth, 2006). Similarly, Oreopolous (2009) finds that in Canada, domestic diplomas are preferred, even if foreign diplomas come from a top institution. Such results indicate that employers have preferences in favour of domestic educational qualifications, potentially due to difficulties in evaluating foreign qualifications, as pointed out in a previous section, particularly if they are risk averse. In this way, existing studies can help to draw conclusions on employer attitudes towards hiring from abroad, though they do not explore cross-border hiring practices in detail.

3.2 Methods and tools

In sum, data on employers' practices when evaluating skills of migrants is rather limited and leaves room for further research. Drawing from the literature review, this research could rely on several methodologies and data sources.

Qualitative methods, such as interviews and guided discussions (i.e. workshops, focus groups, dialogue forums), are the most common in the literature. They appear useful to investigate in detail an underexplored topic such as recruitment practices, to dig into behaviours, attitudes and informal arrangements that drive these practices. However, their scope remains limited, given the time-consuming nature of these tools. It is particularly hard to run these type of studies across several countries. When this happens, the financial and time investments are even higher, as research teams have to be present in several countries or travel around, as well as speak national languages. This makes difficult to have cross-country comparative studies relying on qualitative methods. Furthermore, the nature of the data and the non-representativeness of the sample makes the findings and conclusions of the studies that rely on qualitative methodologies hardly generalisable.

Randomised experiments with employers currently used to test discrimination can also be a useful tool. To inform on employers' practices in cross-border hiring, however, such experiments could be designed to investigate specifically which criteria are applied to evaluate the skills in the profiles of foreign-born candidates, beyond establishing whether these candidates face discrimination in the labour market. Yet, as any behavioural experiment, this risks to be an expensive and time-consuming tool and thus may be difficult to implement widely. Another promising avenue could be vignette surveys that combine survey techniques with randomization through presenting respondents with hypothetical scenarios and situations. This could be less expensive and time-consuming than a traditional randomized experiment thanks to a standardised format that can be easily modified and tailored by researchers to respond to the specific research question in each study. However, results based on hypothetical scenarios may somehow fail to completely capture real-world situations, to the same extent of randomised experiments on the ground.

Employers' surveys appear a valid tool to widen the scope of research into hiring practices, including when involving foreign-born workers. The literature has shown the use of national employers' surveys and *ad-hoc* employers' surveys, which in some cases also complement qualitative methods. To expand the scope, a rough scanning of existing employers' surveys has identified several European and international employers' surveys. These include the European Company Survey, the Continuing Vocational Training Survey, at European level, and the World Bank's Enterprise Survey and STEP Skills Measurement Program – employers' module at international level. Other examples

at international level, developed by private organisations, are the employers' surveys used for the World Economic Forum's report on the future of jobs (WEF, 2018) and the annual Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report (Deloitte, 2019). However, none of these surveys collect any information on cross-border hiring practices, and often not even on hiring practices in general. While the newest version of the European Company Survey, to be released in 2020, will contain some information about what characteristics employers value in hiring¹⁴, information on cross-border hiring is not available. The employers' module of the STEP Program contains general information on companies' share of foreign workers, the skills and qualifications of the current workforce and desired skills in new hires. However, the survey is available for low- and middle-income countries only. The OECD is also introducing an employers' module to the PIAAC survey, with the aim of improving the identification of skills gaps¹⁵. While this module will include a set of desirable questions on talent recruitment and retention, there will be no specific questions on cross-border hiring. Overall, therefore, employers' surveys tend to lack information on hiring practices in general, and for foreign workers in particular. In the future, existing employers' survey could include data collection on this topic, or new pilot surveys could be developed to this end.

The literature review has also pointed to the possibility of using web-based data sources to look into employers' hiring practices, in particular for cross-border hiring. Recently, there has been an emerging literature examining web-scraped data hailing from job portals or online labour platforms. While existing studies cannot directly tell much about employers' practices in cross-border hiring, they provide a methodology on how to use this data for investigation cross-border practices. In addition, they can give indications about how employers value certain skills that might be relevant for skills transferability. A better understanding of this assessment could help to move beyond qualifications as the main proxy for skills. For instance, Fabo et al. (2017) investigate the importance of foreign language skills in the labour market of Central Eastern Europe using 74,000 online advertisements in popular job portals. Kureková and Zilinčíková (2016) use job portal data to directly investigate the impact of previous mobility/migration experience on the attractiveness of job candidates in Slovakia and draw inferences on employer perceptions of foreign work experience based on this. These studies provide some indication into employer responses to certain skills and to foreign work experience, which are relevant in skills transferability processes. In the future, studies using data from job portals could be designed to investigate more directly the experiences and skills of foreign workers and how these are valued by employers. This could be achieved by directly comparing job portal data of native and foreign-born applicants and the success rates of these applicants. Research could take into account the different qualifications, skills and other information available in the applicants' profiles and put them in relations with job vacancies and success rates in the screening, at least in the first phases. This would allow to gauge whether employers evaluate foreign-born applicants differently and what are the determinants for successful applications from foreign-born workers (i.e. under what conditions skills are successfully transferred in cross-border hiring practices). Job portal data could also be used to investigate the content of job advertisements in-depth to examine if the skills demanded by employers are transferable across borders, including an analysis of language skills required, and to what extent local qualifications are required or equivalent qualifications are mentioned in job vacancies in cross-border hiring.

Data can be scraped also from online labour platforms. Such platforms are relevant to skills transferability across borders, as online labour platforms are global, and employers have to evaluate workers with whose backgrounds they are unfamiliar. For instance, a study by Kässä and Lehdonvirta (2019) investigates voluntary skills certification schemes in an online freelancing labour platform.

¹⁴ More information is available on webpage for the [European Company Survey 2019](#).

¹⁵ More information is available on the webpage dedicated to the [PIAAC design - Main elements of the Survey of Adult Skills](#).

They find that obtaining skills certificates increases worker earnings. This effect is driven by decreased employers' uncertainty about performances, as certificates function as a signal of performance. In a similar vein, Pallais (2014) gave ratings based on performance to a randomly-selected sample of workers on online labour platforms and found that more information about worker quality makes workers more valuable to firms and increases their labour market prospects. While these studies do not give direct evidence about employer practices in hiring workers from abroad, they show that employers value having clear performance indications when hiring internationally. The methodology used in these studies could be scaled up and designed to explore in further details what information is valued by employers, in which way and through which practices.

4. EU instruments for skills transferability across countries

As pointed out at the beginning of this paper and reinforced by the review of the empirical evidence, skills transferability across national labour markets can be hampered by several factors. Informational barriers, for example on qualifications, make the evaluation of applicants' profile more difficult when from abroad. Institutional barriers make it more complicated for employers to hire cross-border, especially in the case of workers that come from outside the EU, for whom migration policy requirements apply more strictly (OECD, 2019). Interplaying with these two main barriers, cultural barriers, including language, make employers more reticent to hire from abroad because they perceive it riskier than turning to the domestic labour market.

With free movement of workers within the EU single market as guiding principle, the EU has sought to address these obstacles by several instruments. For example, it has fostered transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications across Member States (Deane, 2005). Transparency of qualifications has been coined as an important principle or "mantra" (Elken, 2015: 720), included in the Bologna Declaration¹⁶ and the Lisbon Agenda, to increase intra-EU labour mobility (Elken, 2015). Although applicability to workers that come from outside the EU remains limited (OECD, 2019), the EU instruments contribute to reducing employers' lack of information, distrust and risk perception regarding foreign qualifications, by providing a common framework and terminology to evaluate applicants' education. The EU efforts to reduce informational barriers have gone beyond qualifications, providing common frameworks to evaluate skills, even if acquired outside formal education, and to display work experience. Moreover, EU initiatives have been developed to facilitate not only intra-EU labour mobility, but also to support employers to deal with institutional and informational barriers when hiring from outside the EU (OECD, 2019).

4.1 Instruments

To allow easier recognition and evaluation of foreign qualifications across Member States, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning was adopted in 2008. It

¹⁶ The [Bologna Declaration](#) of 1999 set as first objective the "adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees [...] in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system":

enhances the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications within the EU. As such, it fosters trust in foreign qualifications during cross-border hiring processes. The EQF serves as a ‘translation grid’ between national qualifications systems, to ensure a fair evaluation of qualifications by the recruiters or the employers (or education institutions) across borders. Employers can better assess qualifications from other EU countries and institutions, even if they do not know them, by comparing these qualifications with national qualifications, to which they are familiar. The logic behind the EQF is to create a ‘single qualification area’ for both workers and employers (Elken, 2015).

The EQF includes eight levels of qualifications. It encompasses all education levels, including qualifications awarded by the formal education and training system of a country, as well as those awarded by accredited private bodies and international sector organisations. It also encompasses qualifications obtained to validate learning that occurs outside formal education – i.e. non-formal and informal learning, although efforts are still ongoing for a comprehensive mapping of these qualifications at national level. The EQF works in combination with national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), in which qualification documents (e.g. diplomas) issued by competent authorities have a reference to the respective EQF level. The EQF includes quality assurance principles for qualifications referenced in NQFs and the EQF (European Commission, 2018).

To make qualifications more understandable for employers, the EQF levels are described in terms of learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills and competences that the qualification holder is expected to have. Having learning outcomes explicitly listed, employers can determine more accurately whether a person’s qualifications are suited for the job and match the needs of the company. This bridges the gap between education and employment and create a common language to increase the attractiveness of foreign qualifications (Elken, 2015; Cort, 2010; European Commission, 2018).

In particular, some professions require a professional qualification recognised by the national authorities in charge. This proved to be a major barrier preventing cross-border hiring and an impediment to free movement of workers in the European single market. Therefore, the efforts on **the recognition of professional qualifications** were strengthened in 2013 following an evaluation of the 2005 Directive on professional qualifications. The main goal was to simplify and further harmonise the recognition rules to make the recognition process faster, simpler, more accessible and more transparent. Key amendments to the Directive include the creation of the European Professional Card. The card is obtained through a digital procedure and consists in an electronic certificate. It allows to obtain recognition of qualifications quickly and in a simpler manner than before. This procedure is available for care nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, real estate agents and mountain guides; however, it has benefitted these professionals to different extents (Adamis-Császár, 2019). The revision of the Directive also includes better access to information and the recognition processes through Single Points of Contact established in each Member State. Between 2014 and 2016, an evaluation was conducted to report the list of regulated professions in each country and barriers that limit access to these professions. As result, the European Commission set up a database of regulated professions in the EU and an interactive map to learn more about access requirements, increasing transparency on national regulations. The database gathers information on regulated professions, statistics, contact points and lists competent authorities.

To make sure that the EQF is accessible and useful for employers (and others actors) and to facilitate the recognition of professional qualifications within the EU, the ENIC-NARIC¹⁷ network was created. It supports the recognition of academic and professional qualifications and gives information on candidates’ qualifications and on recognition procedures on demand.

¹⁷ ENIC: European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility; NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centre.

However, it is hard to measure the impact on cross-national mobility that derives directly from the EQF (Bohlinger, 2019; Cedefop, 2018) as very little data are available on that matter. Bohlinger (2019) also recalls that the EQF approach overlooks that international portability of qualifications is often limited by other types of barriers. For example, assessment of foreign qualifications is influenced by perceptions of the relative prestige of countries and foreign institutions (Drowley and Marshall 2013). Regarding recognition of professional qualifications, in particular, regulatory barriers remain. Information on regulatory requirements in the EU Regulated Professions Database, as well as in equivalent national websites is often incomplete. Moreover, the low level of awareness among professionals has considerably constrained the efficiency of these initiatives (Adamis-Császár, 2019). These limitations remain even higher in the case of extra-EU qualifications (OECD, 2019).

To allow comparability and assessment of skills beyond qualifications obtained through formal education and training, Europass is an online portfolio of documents that aims **to present skills in a multidimensional way**. As such, it supports cross-border labour mobility, increasing the comparability and transparency of qualifications, but also of skills and work experience (European Commission, 2013b). It displays knowledge, skills and competences acquired through academic, professional or volunteering experiences in a standardised and clear manner recognised throughout Europe (Calzolari, 2016; European Commission, 2013b). This addresses employers' time constraint, lack of trust and potential cultural barriers in international recruitment processes, as it provides a uniform reference to evaluate applicants (Calzolari, 2016).

The Europass portfolio is a collection of five documents. Two of them are freely accessible online and can be completed by candidates: **the Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV) and the Language Passport**. Thanks to these documents, employers can scan skills, qualifications and experiences of candidates. In particular, the Europass CV template fulfils several functions that can help employers. Thanks to the template, CVs can be compared more easily and quickly, even if from abroad. CVs can also be uploaded into databases thanks to the 'Europass to spreadsheet' tool, an application that aggregates the content of Europass CVs in an Excel sheet (Cedefop, 2017). The Language Passport provides a self-evaluation grid using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It also provides the opportunity to list the certificates awarded to the candidate and describe linguistic and cultural experiences linked to learning the language. As mentioned previously, lack of language proficiency is an important barrier preventing cross-border hiring. Providing clear evaluation criteria for language skills contribute to lowering this barrier.

The three other documents of the Europass Portfolio are issued by education and training authorities. The **Europass Mobility** describes skills acquired through experiences abroad. The **Certificate Supplement** for holders of vocational education and training certificates and the **Diploma Supplement** for holders of higher education degrees provide proof of these qualifications. These documents contain detailed information of the learning outcomes of each qualification and experience certified. Proof of evidence can be uploaded as attachment to the CV, including scans of qualifications, certificates, course transcripts, NARIC statements of comparability, proof of employment and reference letters. Digitally-signed credentials are being introduced in Europass, to provide proof of a learning achievement. These are released directly by the awarding body and can substitute paper certifications, enhancing trust in the proof of evidence provided (European Commission, 2019b).

The European Commission (2013b) considers that Europass has been a quite successful tool. Between February 2005 and November 2019, 150 million Europass CVs have been created online. Visits to the Europass portal and CVs generated online increased by around 13 % in 2019. However, the Commission acknowledges that, despite being recognised in 34 countries, the Europass Portfolio

is not well known by employers and the wider public, and especially among the low-skilled segments of the workforce (European Commission, 2013b). It might also be less suitable for some sectors such as the creative industry or communication, in which having a standardised CV can be a disadvantage and recruitment processes follow slightly different procedures and assessment of candidates' profiles.

To have a common framework to evaluate some key skills beyond qualifications, the Europass CV includes sections on digital and language skills. These sections provide a self-assessment grid based, respectively **on the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.0) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**.

The DigComp 2.0 is an instrument for (self) assessment, validation and recognition of digital skills. It provides a conceptual understanding of digital skills and a common terminology for employers to assess the digital skills of applicants (Beblavý et al., 2019). It builds on five competence areas: information processing, content creation, communication, problem solving and safety. The candidate can choose from three levels of proficiency – i.e. basic, independent or proficient user, relying on examples of real-life situations for the self-assessment.

The Common Reference Framework for Languages (CEFR) provides reference for employers to judge the candidates' language skills. It distinguishes different language abilities – i.e. spoken interaction, spoken production, writing, listening, and reading. The CEFR aims precisely at increasing transparency of language skills by providing an international standard for assessment. It describes language ability on a six-point scale to evaluate different levels of proficiency. Language proficiency requirements to work in a country are increasingly more and more based on the CEFR.

To facilitate both intra- and extra- EU labour mobility and skills transferability, the EU fosters networks of national and regional organisations. These networks address information deficiency and time constraints faced by employers when having to investigate foreign credentials in the profiles of candidates from another country. They also provide guidance and information on the cross-border recruitment process (European Commission, 2013a). In particular, **the European Network of Public Employment Services (EURES)** facilitates cross-border hiring thanks to a thousand advisors, in national and regional centres, available to answer specific questions.

EURES addresses several barriers preventing cross-border hiring mentioned in this paper, such as costs of screening applications and identifying the right skills profiles among foreign candidates (European Commission, 2013a). It provides a free service of matching companies' job vacancies with candidates' CVs on the online EURES job mobility portal. Both vacancies and CVs can be uploaded on the online portal and then matched. This can be of valuable help particularly for SMEs who struggle to find the time to screen foreign applications with unknown qualifications and often have to rely on more informal processes to recruit abroad (IOM, 2013). EURES provides support also in navigating the administrative procedures for hiring from abroad. These also represent an impediment for employers, especially for SMEs, in cross-border hiring, increasing administrative burdens and waste of time in recruitment (OECD, 2019). EURES' support is for before, during and after the recruitment process. It includes legal and administrative advice, information on equivalence of qualifications, facilitation of video-conferencing for interviews, organisation of job fairs, like the European Online Job Days, advising on training opportunities and follow-up of new employees.

The services provided by EURES are under monitoring and evaluation as part of the Single Market Scoreboard. Employers' access to EURES could be strengthened by increasing awareness about the services provided. In December 2017, around 10,700 employers were registered, among which 28%

were from Germany. This is nevertheless a significant increase compared to previous years, when employers registered to EURES services were 6,800 in 2016, 5,600 in 2015 and 3,000 in 2014¹⁸.

4.2 Relevance for research

The instruments reviewed can not only support and improve employers' practices by lowering different types of barriers. As they become increasingly used by employers, the tools and concepts that these instruments offer can feed into further research on the topic. Despite the progress, however, the use of some of these instruments among European employers is still rather limited. This might be due to several reasons, among which the OECD (2019) reports persisting limitations in cross-border labour market matching, such as costly and lengthy procedures to hire from abroad, cultural differences and limited opportunities for face-to-face interviews. Overcoming these barriers is indeed the aim of these instruments but this is likely to happen through a gradual and long-term process. Therefore, even if these tools are interesting data sources in many regards, researchers willing to rely on them in their analysis should take into account in their research design their potential bias towards certain groups of employers or job seekers, which may lead to lack of representativeness, and include other data sources or mitigation measures.

For example, the EQF is an important reference in studies that investigate skills transferability across countries, because the level of skills of mobile and migrant workers is very often defined according to the level of their qualifications in EQF (e.g. European Commission, 2020). The EQF is also a key component in the development of the European multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). This classification allows for comparing and analysing labour market information. It provides a taxonomy for occupations, qualifications and skills that is used for data analysis, including from online vacancies (European Commission, 2017; Cedefop, 2019).

The frameworks for conceptualisation and measurements of specific skills included in the Europass portfolio instruments, such as the DigComp2.0 and the CEFR, can serve to a similar aim. They can provide a reference to collect data on these skills and compare these data in labour market studies (e.g. Beblavý et al., 2019), including those that analyse how these are transferred across borders.

The EU instruments can also be a relevant source of data on cross-border hiring practices. The EURES job mobility portal contains relevant information on the European and international labour market. This data can be generated from the portal using web-crawling methods, as openly accessible (e.g. See Kurekova et al., 2016). It includes a significant amount of job vacancies and CVs, and how these are matched. It represents a good source of micro-level data on the content of job advertisements published for cross-border hiring. As such it provides information on employers' demand for skills and competences during cross-border hiring. It is also an interesting source of data to investigate recruitment outcomes, the extent to which cross-border hiring leads to skills match or mismatch between the supply and demand sides of the labour market (Kurekova et al., 2016). EURES has already been used for web-scraping to identify skills demanded in some low- and medium-skilled occupations and to understand employers' preferences in terms of cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Kurekova et al., 2016). The comparability of EURES data also offers significant advantages for comparative analyses, since vacancies and CVs uploaded follow the ESCO classification (Kurekova et al., 2016). To give an example on how these data can also inform on employers' practices in cross border hiring, the data provided by the portal could for example be used to analyse whether

¹⁸ More information available on the webpage: [Single Market Scoreboard - EURES](#).

information on foreign qualifications within the job application is an incentive to select foreign workers. Moreover, to get a more in-depth understanding of employers' cross-border hiring practices, EURES can provide a rich source of contacts for qualitative research. Qualitative data to collect through surveys, focus groups or interviews of EURES users and advisors can provide useful information. Indeed, EURES advisors answer employers' requests on legal and organisational aspects of hiring from abroad, and should thus have a good knowledge on their practices and views.

5. Conclusions

The paper highlights that, despite its importance to address skills shortages and mismatches, skills transferability across country is imperfect. Cultural and institutional barriers, such as language, cultural proximity and migration policies and regulations, limit the extent to which skills are transferable within and beyond the EU. Above all, informational barriers affect cross-border hiring practices. Informational barriers impact on transferability of qualifications, and the skills that they certify, because of limited comparability and recognition of foreign qualifications, especially from outside the EU. Informational barriers, however, also relate to the fact that qualifications, even when fully recognised across countries, do not necessarily provide a comprehensive and reliable measure of skills. This is the case especially in cross-border hiring processes, and especially for skills that are acquired outside formal education and training, for example on the job, and non-cognitive skills that are completely overlooked by qualifications. This is well documented by the analysis of PIAAC data comparing qualifications and skills levels, within and across countries.

All this highlights the importance of better investigating the mechanisms for skills transferability across borders, in particular by looking at employers' practices in cross-border hiring. This contributes to understand how employers, which are key actors in skills transferability processes, evaluate the skills to transfer from abroad, and where they need support to do so.

The literature review has confirmed that skills shortages are the main reason for employers to hire from abroad, in some cases complemented by the desire to lower labour costs. Yet, the review of existing studies has also confirmed that employers face significant obstacles when trying to transfer skills from abroad. These barriers are reported to be lack of information to evaluate qualifications and skills, administrative procedures to comply with the requirements of migration policies and regulations, and language and cultural barriers that are reckon to limit the exchanges with the prospective employees when they come from abroad. These barriers result in the reticence of employers to hire from abroad and discrimination towards foreign workers, which is documented in several studies. However, there is huge difference in employers' attitudes regarding hiring from abroad. The cultural and organisational values of the employers play a key role, with more international ones being more open and facing less obstacles to hire across borders. In particular, while multinationals do not face obstacles in cross-border hiring, SMEs are those that struggle the most to navigate this complex process. There is indeed heterogeneity across firm size and features regarding the practices and procedures that are developed to manage cross-border hiring. Large firms, especially if multinationals, have standardised procedures that allow to screen candidates and gain direct information about their skills and suitability to the job, going also beyond formal qualifications. More generally, employers outsource the recruitment process to external human resources agencies

or rely on private or public international networks, to seek support in this complex process. Yet, SMEs do not always have access to these resources. Also the external context, for example the country or the sector of operation, play a role in defining the practices that employers put in place in cross-border hiring. More informal practices are adopted in countries where migration happen outside formal channels or in sectors characterised by informal business and employment relations.

To face existing obstacles, support and improve employers' practices for skills transferability across borders, there are several EU instruments in place. The EQF and the system of recognition of professional qualifications, for example, can help to lower informational and institutional barriers regarding transferability of foreign qualifications. The Europass portfolio goes beyond qualifications and aims to lower informational barriers on skills in general, displaying skills in their multidimensionality, in a transparent and comparable way. This includes frameworks for assessment of skills that are important in the process of skills transferability, such as language. The EURES network and job portal support employers and job seekers in the process of matching vacancies and applications, as well as in navigating information and procedures for labour mobility and migration.

To support cross-border hiring and foster skills transferability across borders, further investigation is needed on employers' practices and decisions during this process. Research can rely on several methods and tools that have emerged in the state of art, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Qualitative methods can give detailed insights into how employers make cross-border hiring decisions. These methods are particularly suitable to underexplored topics, such as this one. However, their generalisability is low and their implementation require significant time. Experiments are a robust method. However, to inform on this specific research topic, they need to be further tailored, designed to address specific questions about employers' practices, rather than to generally test discrimination in the labour market. Moreover, also this tool requires high investment in time and costs if implemented widely. Employers' surveys have not been used much so far to investigate specifically into cross-border hiring, but could be a valuable tool in the future. Existing employers' survey have been mentioned, to point out where relevant questions could be integrated to collect information on this topic. Ultimately, a mixed methodology appears to be most appropriate as it could combine in-depth insight on hiring practices with more generalizable information. Data collection in this field could also explore innovative data sources, increasingly used in labour market research. Web-scraped data from online job portal and labour platforms, if collected *ad hoc* to investigate this subject, can provide relevant information about employers' attitudes and practices in cross-border hiring. In this context, the EU instruments developed to foster skills transferability across countries can also serve researchers. These instruments offer a valid tool to compare and analyse data on skills in studies on skills transferability across borders, as in the case of the frameworks such as the EQF, DigComp2.0 and CEFR, and are a source to generate such data, as in the case of the EURES network and job portal.

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InGRID-2

Integrating Research Infrastructure for European expertise on Inclusive Growth from data to policy

Referring to the increasingly challenging EU2020-ambitions of Inclusive Growth, the objectives of the InGRID-2 project are to advance the integration and innovation of distributed social sciences research infrastructures (RI) on ‘poverty, living conditions and social policies’ as well as on ‘working conditions, vulnerability and labour policies’. InGRID-2 will extend transnational on-site and virtual access, organise mutual learning and discussions of innovations, and improve data services and facilities of comparative research. The focus areas are (a) integrated and harmonised data, (b) links between policy and practice, and (c) indicator-building tools.

Lead users are social scientist involved in comparative research to provide new evidence for European policy innovations. Key science actors and their stakeholders are coupled in the consortium to provide expert services to users of comparative research infrastructures by investing in collaborative efforts to better integrate micro-data, identify new ways of collecting data, establish and improve harmonised classification tools, extend available policy databases, optimise statistical quality, and set-up microsimulation environments and indicator-building tools as important means of valorisation. Helping scientists to enhance their expertise from data to policy is the advanced mission of InGRID-2. A new research portal will be the gateway to this European science infrastructure.

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More detailed information is available on the website: www.inclusivegrowth.eu

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