

## Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' (NSPA) views on the European Commission's initiative on EU Talent Pool

*The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the interests of the four northernmost regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland), the seven eastern and northernmost regions of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and South Savo), as well as the two northernmost regions of Norway (Nordland, Troms & Finnmark).*

### The NSPA Position

[The NSPA](#) welcomes the Commission's ambition to contribute to facilitating international recruitment with the initiative on EU Talent Pool, strengthening the EU's attractiveness to skilled workforce and helping employers to find the workforce they need.

The NSPA would like to highlight the following messages.

- The need of workforce is a joint European challenge that touches many sectors and professions. Tackling the issue together could be a more efficient approach compared to each Member State acting alone. The NSPA would like to highlight that there is a need for all workforce, including unskilled jobs. It is therefore important that the initiative looks to attract people with different skills, without making the scope too narrow.
- The NSPA supports the objective to use the initiative to complement the existing bilateral recruitment channels. It is crucial that the joint European actions will be planned in a manner that does not complicate the implementation of the existing national procedures. The initiative should look for solutions that can be shared within the European context, as well as solutions that recognise the specific characteristics and challenges of different regions, such as the NSPA.
- It is important to align the EU Talent Pool initiative with other initiatives aiming to tackle the need for skills and talent, such as the Harnessing talent in Europe's regions communication. The overall EU policy approach should be coherent regarding legal migration and talent recruitment.
- In order to facilitate the arrival of workforce, the EU should look for ways to make it easier for the potentially interested third-country nationals to handle the administrative requirements. Travelling between countries for example due to visa requirements takes time and effort.
- The process of linking interested third-country nationals and vacancies in the EU Member States needs to be transparent and reliable. It needs to be thoroughly considered how this process takes into consideration the recruitment needs but also the individual priorities.

### **Different skills needed**

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas are a key player regarding the objectives of the EU's green and digital transition. Together with rich natural resources, the regions have internationally acknowledged research institutions, innovative industries and a geographical location that is optimal for demonstration and pilot projects. Projects and development in these regions impact the whole Europe and are of vital importance regarding the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU Green Deal.

There is a growing need for workforce within the NSPA regions. With respect to the green transition alone, several significant investments in the regions will create a substantial number of new jobs in the near future. These will include expert positions, but also other types of vacancies. In order to be able to attract skilled workforce and to convince people to stay, the regions also need to be able to offer basic services. Creating certain jobs thus creates the need for other types of jobs. As a sparsely populated area the NSPA will need workforce for both. This is underlined also by the demographical situation of ageing population and shrinking labour force. Therefore it would be important that the scope of the initiative would not be too limited and that it takes into consideration the need for different types of skills.

Joint European actions are a good way to complement the existing national and regional initiatives. European cooperation brings added value and helps to strengthen the impact of the activities regarding talent recruitment. As needs and procedures may vary depending on the Member State, the initiative should emphasise the sharing of best practices and cooperation of national and regional level authorities. It would be beneficial to further add the sharing of best practices for example regarding the procedures for the recognition of qualifications.

Local and regional authorities within the NSPA regions have long-standing experience of supporting the local skills supply through collaboration with education providers, industry and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Based on this collaboration there is an extensive knowledge base available that could be very useful for the EU Talent Pool and other EU initiatives regarding skills and talent. The NSPA encourages the European Commission to take advantage of this and would also like to continue the dialogue with the Commission on international recruitment and helping employers to find the workforce they need.

### **Coherent policy and reliable mechanisms**

The EU Talent Pool links directly to several other ongoing EU initiatives. It is therefore crucial that the overall talent recruitment policy is developed in a coordinated manner and so that together with the EU migration policy it will form a coherent package. The EU Talent Pool pilot that was launched in October 2022 needs to be carefully analysed and evaluate the lessons to be learned. The pilot should have an important role regarding the developing of the initiative.

The initiative should look for ways to support third-country nationals to create contacts with EU employers and to tackle administrative requirements with respect to migration processes. In some areas it might be difficult and time-consuming to travel to a certain Embassy in order to respect the migration and visa procedures. It should be evaluated whether the EU could assist the Member States in this and whether there could be room for developing joint European movable recognition practices.

Supporting the involved Member States with their workforce needs should be the guiding idea of the initiative. The means could include legislation or non-legislative options. While a legislation brings clarity to procedures, it also sets the prerequisite to give clear and exact definitions to standards. It is important to make the decision on how to advance based on a clear analysis on the options. Regardless of the framework, the process needs to be transparent and clear also for the third-country national wishing to be recruited into the EU labour market.