

TRANSFORMING THE FIELD OF MIGRATION THROUGH COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Recommendations towards a connected
and resilient migrant workforce and
entrepreneurship ecosystem in Europe



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022 Hello Europe piloted its first Ecosystem Accelerator, a process that applies accelerator strategies to a given “ecosystem” (i.e. the actors and institutions involved in a topic or sector) in the field of migration. This first iteration focused on Migrant Entrepreneurship and Employment: an exciting, growing sector with a multitude of local and national solutions that are producing a positive and novel impact on society across Europe. It is also a field of action that has a series of key challenges around a lack of connectivity, knowledge exchange, data and shared resources.

The iterative process involved over 130 key decision-makers from social innovation, government, policy, corporate, academia, media and social sectors. A group of 16 engaged players deeply elaborated from April to June 2022 on the following four goals: (1) to assess the root causes of the lack of a well-articulated and connected migrant workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem in Europe; (2) to analyze the systems in which migrants operate as employees and entrepreneurs; (3) to co-design critical shifts to achieve system change and (4) to brainstorm on steps to collective action.

In the process, we have seen that migrant employment and entrepreneurship issues can hardly be separated and that both logics influence each other in terms of inclusion, qualification, innovativeness and participation. Therefore, hereafter, we refer to both the workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem¹, because they are closely intertwined. However, in main parts, this paper focuses on self-employment and business creation, and regards employment as a related field of action.

Four major root causes were identified as barriers to more effectivity in the workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem: (1) a lack of data and shared definitions of the diverse groups of migrant entrepreneurs to best measure and increase impact across geographies; (2) poor access to employment for people with migrant backgrounds due to complex and overly bureaucratic procedures, lack of hard and soft skills recognitions, little understanding of the concept of the “world of work” between companies and migrant employees, and difficulties for companies to properly assess and value migrant talent acquired along their employment biographies and in transit countries; (3) important barriers for migrant entrepreneurs to access funding and build social networks for their success, due to a fragmented and siloed support ecosystem with an excessive dependence on short-term public funding; (4) no connected, visible, recognized and effective migrant ecosystem in Europe, and therefore a lost opportunity for synergies, policy influence and availability of shared tools, resources and good practices.

¹ By a workforce ecosystem we understand an infrastructure for companies and employees that focuses on value creation for both. Such infrastructure consists not solely of the employers and the employees, but also of external organizations relating to employment and employability such as labor agencies, training institutes, suppliers and further. Additionally, an entrepreneurial ecosystem marks the support infrastructure of people who are entrepreneurs running a business or are simply self-employed. A start-up ecosystem is, thereby, regarded similar to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but less supporting the established entrepreneurs, but individuals who want to start a business. The umbrella of all these concepts is the innovation ecosystem, which is officially defined as the set of actors and activities being interrelated, being of importance for the innovative performance of companies or similar entities.

Diving deeper into each of these areas surfaced a series of specific needs in the sector and recommendations on how to get there. These conclusions are structured as “visions” of where a migrant workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem should be, the major steps to get there and, finally, specific actions to implement. **The visions and major steps are divided into four areas and summarized as follows:**

- 1) **Data and research in migrant entrepreneurship:** an understanding that is reframing migration narratives across Europe by generating data that is reliable, shared and useful for its stakeholders, is profound. This co-created ecosystem for migrants is not about collecting data on individuals but rather initiating a platform for exchanging what is already existent as a knowledge network. Steps to achieve this include data conceptualization, creating legitimate and protected ways to contextualize and share data, offering a multidisciplinary and multisectoral repository of studies on migrant entrepreneurship, and collecting, analyzing and illustrating the effects of migrant entrepreneurship and their contributions to sustainable development.
- 2) **A pipeline for receiving and retaining migrant talent:** a world where access to employment and employability for migrants is effectively facilitated, supported, all obstacles are removed and there is a welcoming culture for migrants to equally share a sense of belonging at the workplace. Steps to achieve this include effectively facilitating and supporting access to migrant talent and job opportunities at different levels and moments in employment process (entry, upward, encounters), introducing more inclusive hiring process, mobilizing, encouraging and supporting the private sector through organizational and multi-stakeholder bodies (such as the UN Global Compact), simplifying legal procedures to hire, and shifting mindsets among employees and migrants to internalize a welcoming culture and clear pathways to grow.
- 3) **Funding for migrant entrepreneurs and support structures:** an environment where migrants who wish to embark in entrepreneurship have the same financial access and levers as local entrepreneurs. To achieve this vision, vehicles that can elevate aspiring entrepreneurs with migrant backgrounds need to be created while working to reform the financial institutions that will ensure their full access and structural inclusion. Steps to achieve this are focused around creating a new social impact investment vehicle that incorporates and supports migrant entrepreneurs, and streamlining inclusion and diversity into all key legislation within sustainable finance policies. Such policies should also focus on the failure of a business and possibilities to overcome and restart again.
- 4) **Collaboration and partnerships:** a connected and resilient migrant workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem that easily collaborates, as a support infrastructure, to learn and improve its services in order to scale operations and enable as many interesting potentials to start a business. Steps to achieve this include creating a connected network of innovation, workforce, entrepreneurial and start-up ecosystems on the topic for knowledge exchange and funding support. It includes helping local ecosystems of any kind to learn and improve through good practice sharing, co-creating an action plan on how to work with the public sector to improve public-private-partnerships (PPP) in the sense of Triple or even Quadruple Helix, and developing special purpose vehicles to share project ownership.

When seen as a whole, the combination of these visions and steps to reach them may seem complex. However, there is a common thread being found running through them all, which involves building an interconnected and resilient, visible and functional migrant workforce and entrepreneurial **ecosystem, which has migrants at its core, and holding key leadership**, in order to create a culture and means to share resources and good practices, amplify voices across the continent, and show the positive impact these employees and entrepreneurs are creating.

We realize those reading this paper are, just like the ecosystem accelerator participants, coming from very different sectors and stakeholder groups and areas, and therefore the way you read and apply learnings will look different. **Our goal is, on the one hand, to enable you to see the whole picture better than before:** this is a complex system, and too often we are stuck in siloes or isolated units, unaware of the effects our work has on others and vice versa. Indeed, this shared vision is essential to an effective, impact driven migrant workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystem: **complex problems require collaborative solutions.** On the other hand, we hope you also see specific actions you can carry out or join with others in implementing.

We believe in a world where Everyone is a changemaker, and it is of essence that you give yourself permission to implement change from where you are, be it a corporate, public, academic or social setting, and contribute to build systems where people with migrant backgrounds can fully access new resources, spaces and tools to carry out dignified and empowered lives as changemakers.

For more information, or further updates on how to engage with the emerging solutions, drop us a note at helloeurope@ashoka.org or reach out to any of the participants in the appendix that might be potential allies.

About Ashoka

Ashoka builds and cultivates a community of change leaders who see that the world now requires everyone to be a changemaker. We are pioneering the Everyone a Changemaker world through our programs and networks in more than 90 countries, building and amplifying this global movement.

About Hello Europe

Hello Europe is an Ashoka initiative that aims to become a collective voice of innovative citizen solutions in the field of migration by (1) scaling proven solutions, (2) bridging the gap between social entrepreneurs and the public and policy sector, and (3) changing the narrative from migrants as takers, to migrants as makers.