

BRIEFS

Global Skill Partnerships: A Proposal for Technical Training in Settings of Forced Displacement

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The world urgently needs innovation to shape how international migration happens. Today people who are forcibly displaced are seen and treated largely as a burden, not as a resource that can bring shared benefits. A new type of private-public partnership can offer new opportunity for some of those who are forcibly displaced. It can be called a Global Skill Partnership, and this note illustrates how it might work for Syrians displaced into Turkey.

Turkey hosts around 3 million of the 5 million Syrians who have been internationally displaced since 2011. The large majority of those in Turkey live in urban and peri-urban areas, not camps. But their access to labor markets is limited, rendering many skilled and semi-skilled workers without an avenue by which to meaningfully contribute to the local economy or build their own self-reliance. This is a missed opportunity.

Of Syrians arriving in Greece in January 2016—including some whose country of first asylum was Turkey—79 percent polled by UNHCR reported having obtained a secondary or tertiary degree. Hundreds of Syrians have trained as nurses in Turkey, where they are allowed to provide health services to other displaced Syrians.^{[1] [2]}

Many of these same people could be a valuable resource for the future of Europe. Within a decade, Europe will require hundreds of thousands more nurses than it is likely to train.^[3] Nurses will and must move in large numbers to Western Europe from other countries, including those in surrounding regions. With the right policies in place, officials could ensure benefits to both regions, as nurses trained in Turkey could help fill a growing labor gap in Western Europe, while securing safety and opportunity for themselves and their families.

A new type of private-public training partnership is key to meeting all of these goals. This note discusses an example for nurse training, but the model could be used for other types of mid-level technical training as well. In this setting, a Global Skill Partnership is a bilateral agreement designed to facilitate the training in nursing, at institutions in Turkey, of displaced Syrians living in Turkey. Some graduates of such training migrate to work in Germany—either temporarily or permanently—while

others remain to work in Turkey, and eventually in Syria should they choose to voluntarily return in the future. Those who migrate to Germany would typically earn several times more than those who do not,^[4] because their economic productivity is vastly greater at the destination than at the origin.

Not only are destination-country wages higher, but origin-country training costs are lower. Just a small part of this dual arbitrage opportunity can finance training for migrants *and* non-migrants. The gain can be captured either by destination-country governments, by the employers, by the migrants (as a kind of student loan), or some combination of these.

Here is one example of how a Global Skill Partnership might work:

Zahra and Manal are two young Syrians who train as Registered Nurses in Diyarbakır, Turkey. Zahra plans to work in Germany, Manal plans to work at first in Diyarbakır, and possibly later in Syria. Training each of them costs \$7,000, and neither can afford it. A private hospital group in Germany finances all of Zahra's training and almost half of Manal's, for a total of \$10,000. In return, Zahra commits to work within its hospital network for at least four years. With just 10 percent of Zahra's earnings over that period, she pays back the entire \$10,000.

Observe the consequences: Germany gains a nurse (Zahra), with precisely the in-demand skills needed to integrate quickly, with net earnings several times higher than what she could earn in Turkey. The German employer ends up with no net expenditure on training and gains a profitable employee. Turkey *gains* a nurse (Manal) with a sizeable free scholarship. Two low-income Syrian refugees get professional careers that are otherwise inaccessible. Turkey expands the capacity and quality of its nurse training facilities, creating benefits that spill over into the rest of the health sector. A future, more stable Syria has a stronger human resource based of potential returnees to draw upon. And there is no net cost to the German or Turkish governments. Other benefits to Turkey could arise if Zahra chooses to remit some of her earnings to family remaining in Turkey, or return one day to work in Turkey.

These all-around benefits are possible for two simple economic reasons: 1) the labor of a nurse is worth enormously more money in Germany than in Turkey, and 2) it is much less expensive to train a nurse in Diyarbakır than in Germany. A Global Skill Partnership turns those two facts into an engine of human capital creation in both countries. And the framework could be flexibly adapted to different settings: First, Global Skill Partnerships could include nursing assistants and personal care workers, in addition to or instead of full professional nurses. Second, they could begin with health professionals, but the same framework could later be applied to various types of training to fill semi-skilled and skilled labor shortages in Germany. Third, the arrangement for graduates to live and work in Germany could be temporary or permanent, according to the needs of the destination country or even decided on an individual basis. The arrangement could also be linked to resettlement, providing Zahra permanent resettlement in Germany on the basis of asylum.^{[5][6]}

Global Skill Partnerships could also employ financing mechanisms different from the above example. Initial finance could come either from the German government, from private-sector employers, or both. Employers who cover refugees' training costs should be compensated either by a subsequent work commitment or by repayment following migration. Regardless, training under the partnership requires little or no up-front cost to students and is thus accessible to refugees of any income level. Training for refugees costs Turkish taxpayers nothing, reducing fears of "brain drain" or fiscal drain. Graduates who do not migrate pay much lower tuition, heavily subsidized by a small portion of migrant graduates' earnings.

Global Skill Partnerships can quickly become privately profitable and financially self-sustaining, with no ongoing cost to taxpayers either in Germany or Turkey. But they require initial investment, cooperation, and support from policymakers on both sides. This mutual support must arise from the prospect of mutual benefits. The gains for Turkey (and savings for Germany) largely emerge from conducting at least some of the nurse training in Turkey. The initial involvement of policymakers on either side, which may require multiple ministries to work together, can include the following:

- The destination country must work directly with employers to understand their unmet needs and design training around those highly specific needs; craft visa policy that allows graduates to reliably enter the country; and cooperate to seek repayment from any graduates who might not fulfill post-graduation work commitments.
- The destination country, origin country, and the relevant international bodies governing refugee response must coordinate and collaborate to determine the appropriate policies and asylum applications for refugees in the program. The GSP presents another resettlement avenue, and the relevant international bodies—and the destination and origin country governments—will need to ensure all legal requirements are met.
- Both governments must collaborate to ensure that graduates' qualifications and skills are recognized at the destination, with positive effects on the quality of nurse training in Turkey as facilities conform to German training standards.
- The destination country must regulate graduates' work commitments so that nurses are not bound to a single post for years, lest they be exploited. If employers finance training, there must be a mechanism for workers to "buy out" any work commitment to one employer so they can work for another.
- Both destination-country and origin-country governments will need to work closely with their health sectors: In the destination country, it will be critical to communicate to other nurses that Global Skill Partnerships are one of many tools to address long-term shortages that will end up improving the negotiating power of existing nurses, not harming them.

- In the origin country, it will be important to communicate to training authorities that Global Skill Partnerships assist in the net creation of nurses, rather than taking them away.
- Finally, startup capital from governments may be necessary to get Global Skill Partnerships off the ground.

Designed correctly, a Global Skill Partnership can provide both sides of Europe with nurses they need and good jobs for Syrian refugees and Turkish youth—without harming the public coffers or health systems of Turkey, nor exacerbating host community tensions. This solution also represents a considerably better method of strengthening Turkish health systems than blocking refugees’ right to work or preventing Turkish nurse migration, because Germany needs nurses and Syrian refugees and Turkish youths need skilled jobs. It is a better way to finance the training of migrant nurses than *ex post* aid payments, which may not go to finance nurse education and are vulnerable to political vagaries.

More details on the Global Skill Partnership idea, with examples of related arrangements around the world, are available here:
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40173-014-0028-z>

[1] UNHCR survey data among migrants arriving to Greece in January 2016, [reporting analysis](#) on the responses from Syrian and Afghan migrants.

[2] A [reported](#) 380 Syrian doctors, and more than 360 nurses and midwives have been trained in Turkey since 2016 to work in clinics across the country servicing Syrian refugees and expatriates.

[3] Consultants for the European Commission project that, in 17 years, the EU will need 590,000 more nurses than it will produce: Matrix Insight (2012), [EU level Collaboration on Forecasting Health Workforce Needs, Workforce Planning and Health Workforce Trends: A Feasibility Study](#), Brussels: European Commission, p. 13.

[4] The average salary in Turkey is about US\$750/month, Germany roughly US\$3,500 per month. A typical all-inclusive full-cost registered nurse training program in Turkey runs [US\\$7,000 or less](#).

[5] The European Union committed to admitting up to 72,000 Syrians from Turkey in 2016. Following the [30 March 2016 High Level Meeting](#) on global responsibility sharing around the Syrian crisis, overall (worldwide) resettlement places for Syrian refugees totaled 201,049.