

# Transnational Skill Partnership between Germany and Vietnam: Stakeholder Perceptions on Costs, Benefits, the Role of Skills Development, Partnership and Sustainability <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the preliminary results of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam country case study conducted as part of the research project Sustainable Labour Migration implemented by the University of Applied Science Bonn-Rhein-Sieg. The project focuses on stakeholder perspectives on countries of origin benefits and the sustainability of different transnational skill partnership schemes. Existing and ongoing small-scale initiatives indicate that opportunities exist for all three types of labour mobility pathways, from recruiting youth for apprenticeships and subsequent skilled work to recruitment and recognition of skilled 'professionals' certificates for direct work contracts to initial vocational education and training programs in a dual-track approach. While the latter has the highest potential to be more beneficial than other approaches, pursuing and supporting the scaling up of all three pathways in parallel will have additional, mutually reinforcing and supporting effects. The potential for benefits over and above those already realised by existing skill partnerships appears high, especially considering the favourable framework conditions specific to the long-standing German-Vietnamese relationship. If the potential of well-managed skill partnerships was realised, such sustainable models of skilled labour migration could serve as a unique selling point in the international competition for skilled labour.*

## Key Words:

*skill partnership, labour migration, Vietnam, vocational training, sustainability*

## 1 Introduction

At the international level, there has been an increase in the recognition that labour migration channels need to be developed based on the labour market conditions of all involved countries. This is where the model of transnational skills partnerships comes in. Generally, these agreements between at least two countries focus on skills development

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and migration opportunities, not one or the other. The attention to these partnerships is grounded in the United Nation's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) refers to the Global Skill Partnership (GSP) model as the only specific policy tool in Objective 18, number 34 e. Specifically, the GCM calls on States to

"[b]uild global skills partnerships amongst countries that strengthen training capacities of national authorities and relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions, and foster skills development of workers in countries of origin and migrants in countries of destination with a view to preparing trainees for employability in the labour markets of all participating countries" (United Nations, 2019: 26).

The GSP model was initially introduced by Michael Clemens of the Center for Global Development (Clemens, 2015). Since then, a range of different interpretations and definitions has evolved. The evidence base on transnational skills partnerships, their implementation and their impacts is, however, still limited. Few practical examples have actually been implemented, especially of a proper GSP approach where training takes place in the country of origin to prepare a group for the domestic labour market and another group for migration to the partner country. One such example is a pilot program currently implemented between Vietnam and Germany with the support of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in cooperation with the Directorate Vocational Training of the Ministry for Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in Vietnam. This is done within the larger Partnership Approaches for Development-oriented Vocational Training and Labour Migration (PAM) project. In the pilot's dual-track approach, vocational training in the metal processing profession is implemented and certified in Vietnam in line with a training standard adopted from Germany. The away track provides an enriched qualification for migration, while the home track targets local skills needs. Overall, there is an explicitly intended development impact for the country of origin through knowledge transfer, the further development of vocational system structures and increased employability of the workforce for careers at home.

Between December 2020 and August 2022, the Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences (H-BRS) conducted a research project on 'sustainable and socially acceptable labour migration management', funded by a grant from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through a grant provided by the GIZ Program Migration and Diaspora. The research focused on three countries of origin (Kosovo, Georgia, and Vietnam) and specifically analysed the perceptions of benefits and sustainability of managed transnational labour migration schemes among the main stakeholders involved. The pilot project between Vietnam and Germany was one of the case studies analysed within the project. Based on desk review and stakeholder interviews conducted within this framework, this paper presents the initial findings of this study concerning the types and incidences of cost and benefits, the role and relevance of skills development for increased benefits, and the potential for sustainability of particular skill partnership approaches.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the research context regarding the relationship between Vietnam and Germany in the past decades, focusing on labour migration and the specific case study. Section 3 then presents the methodology employed to collect and analyse the data used in this paper. After that, the main findings are discussed in Section 4 before Section 5 puts forward recommendations and Section 6 concludes.

## 2. The Relationship between Vietnam and Germany with a Focus on Labour Migration

The history of migration between Vietnam and Germany began in the 1950s. Following the end of the Vietnam War, most of the estimated 38,000 Vietnamese migrants came to the Federal Republic of Germany as political refugees. With approximately 66,000 workers, the Vietnamese comprised the most significant proportion of contract workers in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Most Vietnamese contract workers were employed in the industrial sector in East Berlin, Cottbus, Leipzig or Chemnitz. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, just under 90,000 contract workers in the GDR were affected by sudden unemployment and uncertain residence status. The employment contracts, some of which were limited until 1995, lost their validity with reunification, so many contract workers saw themselves forced to return to their home countries due to their sudden unemployment. By the end of 1990, only about 28,000 of the 90,000 former contract workers were still in Germany, most of them Vietnamese. Following the reunification, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam soon established diplomatic relations. Since the end of the Cold War, political-diplomatic relations between the two countries have changed significantly. For Vietnam, the first visit of a President to Germany in 2015 was a message affirming Vietnam's consistent policy of considering Germany as its most important and long-term partner, wishing to comprehensively promote and deepen the relationship between the two countries into an extensive strategic partnership (ASA-FF, n.d.; Ha & Thach, 2021; Schaland & Schmiz, 2015).

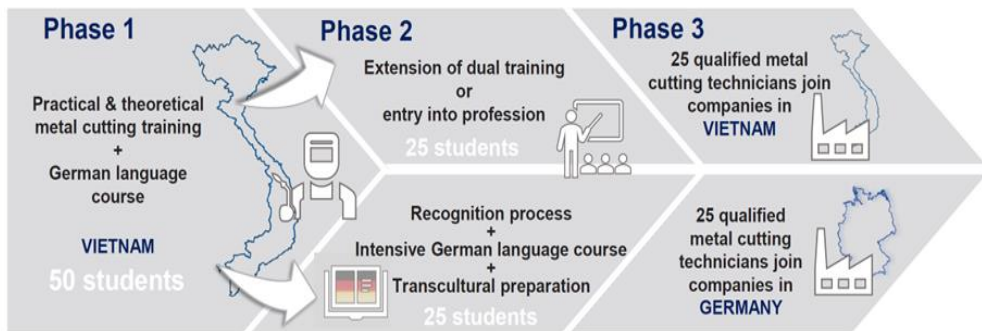
Today, the German government identifies Vietnam as a "Global Partner" in development cooperation under the new "BMZ 2030 Strategy". Since 1990, Germany's development assistance for Vietnam has been allocated to priority areas of Vietnam, with the current focus on the fields of vocational training, energy and environment (Ministry of Planning and Investment Vietnam, 2021). Vietnam's Vocational Education and Training Strategy 2021-2030 provides a strong foundation for linking the vocational education and training (VET) system development with the Socio-economic Development Plan and international labour markets and benchmarking it against international quality standards. The recent decision to transfer and pilot 22 German occupational standards and grant more autonomy to selected high-quality VET institutes indicates the importance of benchmarking VET programs against international standards, making it a more attractive career path for Vietnamese youth.

German and Vietnamese stakeholders only recently started piloting small-scale formalised programs on recruiting skilled labour and migration. Mainly focused on recruiting healthcare workers or candidates for apprenticeships in Germany in different occupations, these approaches preceded the German "Skilled Immigration Act" of 2020. More recent initiatives for training and recruitment of skilled workers and apprentices are also implemented in line with the provisions of the Act and expand to other vocational shortage profiles (Bildungswerk BAU Hessen-Thüringen e.V [BiW], 2021; GIC-AHK Vietnam, 2021; GIZ International Services, 2021).

This study focuses on the pilot program implemented by BMZ/GIZ as part of the PAM project mentioned in the introduction. Its explicit goal is to make migration paths sustainable and development-oriented through multi-stakeholder partnerships and customised mobility approaches. In a "dual track" approach in Vietnam, 50 young persons

are being trained in metal cutting. This pre-existing two-year program is aligned with already developed Vietnamese curricula benchmarked against the corresponding German qualification. As can be seen in Figure 1, about 25 of the 50 students are anticipated to be taking the "abroad track" to Germany with the aim of full recognition of their qualifications after receiving B2-level intensive German language training integrated into the curriculum. The other students are anticipated to remain in the "home track" with basic German language training and support packages for transition into the local labour market (GIZ PAM, 2021). This is an example of a GSP or type 3 model in the classification of Sauer and Volarevic (2021), which is the most ambitious and complex and has not been widely applied (Adhikari et al., 2021; Azahaf, 2021; Sauer & Volarević, 2021), making this an interesting case study to understand how stakeholders perceive it.

**Figure 1: Qualification and Mobility Scheme in Metal Cutting**



(GIZ, 2022)

The PAM project applies a vocational training and work approach for development-oriented migration between Vietnam and Germany. It is implemented in Vietnam with the MoLISA, Directorate of Vocational and Education Training (DVET). Vocational training activities are conducted in cooperation with LILAMA 2 International Technology College and private sector enterprises in Vietnam and Germany. Fifty youths were selected for the program and are currently being trained for 18 months at LILAMA 2 College, in line with the Vietnamese occupational standard for Metal Cutting Technicians for graduation on intermediate diploma level (meeting the requirements of MoLISA Circular No.03/01.03.2017/TT-BLDTBXH) (GIZ, 2020). The technical and vocational training is complemented with modules on German language skills, soft skills and intercultural awareness. The migrating graduates will be supported to get their Vietnamese certification officially recognised in Germany against the German target standard of skilled metal workers, specialising in cutting procedures (Fachkraft für Metalltechnik in der Fachrichtung Zerspanungstechnik), which is a 24-month dual vocational training program. Additionally, PAM establishes mutual learning, dialogue and networking formats between Vietnam, other partner countries and Germany on the topic of vocational training and sustainable labour migration (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung [BIBB], n.d.a; GIZ, 2022).

### 3. Methodology

At the centre of the conceptual framework for the overall research project was the link between various migration dimensions along the migration cycle and across the spatial

dimension of countries of origin and destination (e.g., Katseli et al., 2006). In the absence of a general theory of migration (Castles, 2019), we take a middle-range perspective in our analytical model, which mainly builds on the prior work of Erdal et al. (2018) as well as on Betts and Collier (2018). Following Castles (2019, p. 1569), we try to provide an overarching and integrative framework instead of focusing on either structural forces or individual motives (and aspirations) to explain specific migration decisions. Congruent with our understanding of sustainability, we apply a transnational perspective in our analytical framework to emphasise and analyse migrant agency without being “structure-light” (Bailey 2001: 421). We apply this perspective in order to incorporate our perception of skilled labour migration not as an irrevocable process but rather as repeated pluri-local transactions and practises related to people, state and non-state organisations and resources across state borders (Faist et al. 2013: 1). By this, migrants and non-migrants create and sustain social relations across borders (Faist et al. 2013: 8). Consequently, settlement and interconnectedness along the country of origin and the country of destination dichotomy need to be focused on. The framework of transnationalism allows us to go beyond methodological nationalism “(...) to capture a sense of how migration is experienced across two countries” (Raghuram 2008: 83) and to focus on cross-border interconnections and institutions at various analytical levels, as well as their potential to contribute to sustainable development.

This, therefore, also guides the methodology used for the Vietnam case study and this paper specifically. The overall research question focuses on stakeholders' perceptions of costs and benefits, the role of skills development and partnership, and aspects of sustainability in managed skilled labour migration programs. More specifically, the research questions of this paper are as follows:

- *Overall research question:* How do stakeholders perceive the sustainability of the skills partnership between Vietnam and Germany?
- *Sub question #1 on costs & benefits:* How do stakeholders perceive this scheme's realised and expected costs and benefits?
- *Sub question #2 on skills:* How do stakeholders assess the potential of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to make labour migration beneficial for all?
- *Sub question # 3 on partnership:* How do stakeholders assess the partnership underlying the labour migration scheme?

The initial research design of the Sustainable Labour Migration project was adapted to the COVID pandemic-induced restrictions and eventually implemented jointly with the National Economics University Faculty of Human Resource Economics and Management Hanoi. An in-depth literature review was followed by a series of semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders representing the private sector, public ministries and agencies, civil society and international donor organisations involved in managed labour migration or the specific skill partnership pilot project. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility to encounter actor-specific narratives not foreseen in the interview guide.

All interviews' joint objective is to assess the stakeholders' perceptions. For this, the research questions were translated into a menu of 47 interview questions using the following categories and elements of the migration cycle: icebreaker, introduction,

motivation and aspiration, pre-departure preparation in the country of origin, selection, recruiting, placement, preparation & skills development, arrival and onboarding in the country of destination, living and working in Germany, return and reintegration. Cross-cutting topics along the migration cycle were covered by questions relating to overall costs and benefits, skills, partnership, and sustainability. The below Table 1 presents a summary of the stakeholders interviewed.

Interviews in Vietnam were a mix of online and face-to-face interviews due to the pandemic context. Where permission was granted, interviews were recorded, translated and transcribed. Some interview partners were interviewed more than once, while the average interview time was 90 minutes. Interviews in the presence of the H-BRS researcher were conducted with interpretation. Interviews with Vietnamese stakeholders were conducted and – where recording was agreed to – transcribed in Vietnamese and translated into English. Interviews with international stakeholders were conducted and transcribed in English for coding.

The interviews that related directly to this particular pilot approach faced some limitations. At the time of conducting interviews with stakeholders, the PAM implementation process was at an early stage. This means that interviews with directly and indirectly involved stakeholders needed to be conducted following the official approval and communication thereof to concerned stakeholders. Consequently, apart from interviews with direct partners and beneficiaries, most interviews were kept more general on experience with managed labour mobility programs in Vietnam. Interviews with directly concerned stakeholders needed to focus on expectations towards and perceptions of the potentials of the concerned program rather than on actual experiences throughout the migration cycle. The project was yet to identify future employers in Germany to recruit graduates. Hence, no interviews could be conducted with this group of key stakeholders.

The initial explorative data analysis, the findings of which are presented here, follows the method of content-structuring qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2018; Mayring, 2015). Further in-depth data analysis applying MAXQDA tools was part of the initial design, but due to delays caused by the pandemic could not be implemented within the time frame of the research project. Therefore, this paper offers preliminary results and recommendations from the literature review and interviews conducted before finalising the rigorous data set analysis.

**Table 1: Stakeholders interviewed in Vietnam by institution**

Institution	Function
The Office of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)	Deputy Chief of Office
Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)	Director General; Deputy of Taiwan, Europe, Americas Division; Head of Legal & Inspection Department
Department of Formal Training, Directorate of Vocational Education and Training, MOLISA	Director
Institute for Labour Sciences and Social Affairs (ILSSA), MOLISA	Deputy Director General
Center of Overseas Labour (COLAB), MOLISA	General Director

<b>Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs</b>	Deputy Director
<b>Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Dong Nai Province</b>	Deputy Head of Labour Policy
<b>Vietnam Association of Mechanical Industry (VAMI)</b>	President
<b>Vietnam Association of Manpower Suppliers (VMAS)</b>	Vice President
<b>Vietnam Association of Manpower Suppliers (VMAS)</b>	Vice Chairman, Secretary General
<b>GIC-AHK Ho Chi Minh City</b>	Project Manager – Hand in Hand for International Talents
<b>GIC-AHK Ho Chi Minh City</b>	Consultant – ProRecognition project
<b>ISHISEI Vietnam, HCMC</b>	Deputy General Director
<b>Hanoi Liaison Office of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, MV Ministry of Economics, Employment and Health</b>	Adviser to the Office (Staff of the Office)
<b>GIZ PAM Vietnam Component GIZ TVET Reform Program</b>	GIZ Advisor GIZ Team Leader Policy Advice
<b>GIZ TripleWin Project</b>	Project Officer
<b>International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai</b>	Rector
<b>International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai</b>	Students of PAM Metal Working pilot program
<b>International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai</b>	Student of PAM Metal Working pilot program
<b>International Technology College LILAMA 2, Dong Nai</b>	Student of PAM Metal Working pilot program

## 4. Preliminary Results from the Country Case Vietnam

### 4.1 Findings from the Desk Review

#### 4.1.1. Institutional Coherence for Migration and Development

With MoLISA being the umbrella Ministry for the three closely interrelated policy fields of the labour market, vocational education and training, and migration, the already existing key governance structures in the centrally governed system have a high potential for policy coherence. With the Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) at the centre of migration management, substantial and recent progress has been made regarding an improved legislative framework, with further regulatory documents currently being developed. The Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education (2021-2030) refers to the potential for skilled migration in several fields of action. However, despite attempts to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) into national development plans at the overarching policy and strategy level, the strategic nexus and potential of labour mobility for economic and social development do not feature or at least only implicitly. Policies on migration also do not feature explicitly but also do not appear to have been mainstreamed into other policy fields. In its 2018 Voluntary National Review of the SDGs, Vietnam's report refers to (legal) migration under SDG 10:

"Regarding migration and movement of people, Viet Nam is participating in the consultation to develop the content of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, proposed by the UN in September 2016." (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2018).

Apart from this, no further actions are mentioned.

The Resolution on the five-year Socio-economic Development Plan for 2021-2025 (National Assembly, 2021) also remains largely silent on labour mobility policies and strategies. It only indirectly refers to the potential in section

"3.6. Improving the quality of human resources together with promoting innovation, application and robust development of science and technology: (...) effectively attract and promote the participation of brilliant scientists and experts who are foreign nationals or overseas Vietnamese"

and in section

"3.8. Promoting the cultural values, the human strength of Vietnamese people and the strength of the all-people national unity, the social progress and justice, improving the people's life, ensuring the harmonious connection between economic development and cultural or social development: (...) Continue to perfect policies and laws on population, make effective use of the golden population structure."

Vietnam already requested to be included in the 2023 Voluntary National Review process of the UN High-level Forum on Sustainable Development (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2022), which may provide a good opportunity to further strengthen the nexus between existing migration and development policies and strategies, possibly including the Green Growth Strategy (Socialist Republic of Vietnam – The Prime Minister, 2021).

#### *4.1.2 The Financial Cost of Migration*

Evidence from research on the costs and benefits of migration are scarce for Vietnam and mainly analyse labour export schemes of the early 2000s, which have since improved their terms and conditions in both sending and receiving countries. The Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs (ILSSA) conducted a survey in 2011 with employees that had worked in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia and who had returned between 2004 and 2008. The report concludes that "labour export" resulted in economic benefits to workers in terms of higher incomes and savings. It also found contributions of labour export to the transformation of the employment structure of returning workers, away from agricultural, low-paid, and informal jobs. Further-more, it found significant improvements in workers' foreign language and technical skills, working style and social awareness (Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs [ILSSA], 2011).

A 2017 ILO/IOM study conducted in July–August 2016 with a total of 1,808 return migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar and Vietnam found that migration can have a significant impact on poverty reduction within the South-East Asia region, reducing those living below the poverty line by double digits (11%) from before to after migration. The results were particularly positive in Vietnam, where poverty was found to be reduced by 17%. The study also found that most migrants were employed in agriculture before migration (52%) and that working abroad proved more effective in facilitating the industrialisation of the workforce in some countries than in others. Vietnam was most successful in this regard, with 27% of migrants shifting from agriculture into manufacturing and other sectors upon return (Harkins et al., 2017a).

In general, Vietnamese migrants had better migration outcomes than return migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao, or Myanmar. Vietnamese migrants reported positive improvements in income (91%) and savings (73%). On average, they spent a much longer



period working abroad (four years) than Cambodian migrants (one year). They were most successful at upskilling (31%). A few Vietnamese migrants (4%) faced difficulties upon return due to social, health, and psychological problems resulting from migration varied dramatically. However, this study also showed that Vietnamese workers had to pay the highest costs (USD 709) to work abroad compared to the other countries in the region. They also had to borrow the most (USD 1,044) and worked for the longest period (up to 11 months) to repay the debt. Over three-quarters of interviewed Vietnamese workers (77% male and 75% female) answered that their labour rights were violated abroad. Although Vietnamese migrant workers bring in new vocational skills from abroad (70%), only a small percentage can apply those skills back home (3%) (Harkins et al., 2017b).

At the same time, the temporary labour migration programmes with South Korean and Japan faced several challenges, particularly with a high rate of “runaway workers”. Ishizuka (2013) analysed the phenomenon in South Korea and Japan. The high rate of desertion was attributed, among others, to the high pre-departure cost, at the time being estimated on average to be as high as some 15 times as much as the average income of these workers in the respective countries, resulting in workers having to borrow the equivalent of nearly the total amount of the costs. Also, the ILSSA survey showed that up to 76% of migrant workers could not find a job after returning to Vietnam. The Law on Vietnamese migrant workers included provisions for employment support for returning workers at the time. However, in practice, local governments generally do not have policies supporting returnees or do not even know the number of returnees. This situation was also thought to drive more migrant workers to choose to overstay their contracts irregularly (Ishizuka, 2013). A 2017 ILO/IOM reported cost for Vietnamese migrants heading to Malaysia for employment of USD 1,166 (equal to 4 months of wages). The study also found that the financial inclusion of migrants in the South-East Asia region is very low, with a small minority of migrant workers opening bank accounts in their countries of origin (11%) or destination (22%). Vietnam was an exception in this regard, with 28% of the Vietnamese migrants having a bank account at home and 4% while abroad, which is largely due to a more formalised remittance market (Harkins et al., 2017a). The most recent World Bank (2021) report still reports high costs for Vietnamese workers heading to the Republic of Korea, incurring costs close to nine months of their salary abroad (over USD 9,200). Taking a cue from such findings, the government has since introduced several mitigating measures to address issues of illegal brokerage and other costs to migrants under newly signed temporary labour-sending agreements with its key destination countries.

#### *4.1.3 Promoting the Protection and (Re-)Integration of Migrants*

The South Korea-Vietnam Employment Permit System (EPS) is an example of a non-seasonal temporary labour migration program that operates through bilateral government-to-government memoranda of understanding (MOU) at the complete exclusion – in principle – of private sector recruiters or agencies, which is relatively rare, as much in the global context as in the Asian context (Kim, 2015, p. 1). The EPS was designed to stop corruption, extortion, and human rights abuses characteristic of private sector-based recruitment in the region. This is perhaps the most important and most promoted merit of the EPS. On June 23, 2011, the scheme was awarded the UN Public Service Award for increasing transparency and combatting corruption, primarily due to this exclusive government-to-government arrangement. EPS is a regime that allows Korean enterprises

with a shortage of domestic human resources to legally recruit foreign workers in small and medium-sized manufacturing industries with less than 300 regular employees and industries lacking workers, such as agriculture and livestock, fishery, and construction. The program has transparent procedures for recruiting, preparing, and sending qualified Vietnamese workers, ensures the basic rights, and applies relevant labour laws such as Labour Standards Law, Minimum Wage Law, and Occupational Health and Safety Law to foreign workers equally as domestic workers. According to Cho et al., the EPS achievements include significantly reducing the cost burden on migrants, improving transparency, reducing the proportion of overstays, and improving accessibility to worker protection (Cho et al., 2018; Kim, 2015). The study by Kim (2015) analyses in detail the strengths and weaknesses of the EPS as it was designed at the time of the study.

Initially, the migration cycle of the EPS was considered complete after the migrant worker returned to his or her home country. In the subsequent stage, the Korean government added a reintegration and co-development component to the EPS, the "Happy Return Program". This facilitates EPS workers' long-term employment or business start-up plans upon return. The EPS has evolved from a closed labour migration system centred on domestic labour dynamics and policies to a more open-ended, flexible instrument that extends Korean government involvement into the reintegration of migrant workers and responds to the prescriptive elements of the migration and development discourse. However, the analysis found that the

"(...) the greatest shortcoming of the EPS, from which all the other weaknesses originate, is the imbalanced distribution of resources and focus among the three stages (pre-admission, post-admission, return and reintegration) in which the social partners – in particular the labour unions – are largely absent" (Kim, 2015, p. 29).

According to Kim, the focus of both governments for the program lies on ensuring transparency and preventing corruption in the pre-admission and recruitment phase. The partnership structure for later stages is considered less clear, particularly regarding the roles of supporting non-governmental organisations. Kim hence advocates for more substantial involvement of workers and employers' organisations as formal partners (Kim, 2015).

Another example are memoranda of cooperation (MOC) on the mobility of workers and interns that have been concluded and reviewed between Vietnam and Japan. The most recent include the program on "specified skilled labour" (signed 01/07/2019) and the MOC of the programs of sending and receiving Vietnamese technical intern trainees to Japan that has been operating since 2006. With both MOCs, more favourable terms and conditions were complemented with elements to support the return and reintegration of Vietnamese participants of the programs.

The above examples indicate the overall importance that support to return and reintegration measures currently receive at the strategic and operational levels. Given that measures are easier to design and integrate into temporary schemes than in open-ended ones, this is certainly an area with the potential for stronger consideration of the potential for developmental effects in the context of managed labour migration programs.

#### *4.1.4 Development Impact of Diaspora Engagement, Skills and Migrants' Finances*

International migrant workers contribute significantly to the economic development of Vietnam through remittances (Anh & Anh, 2018). According to an assessment of ten years

of implementation of Directive No. 16-CT/TW (May 8, 2012) on "strengthening the leadership of the Party in the work of sending Vietnamese workers and experts to work abroad", MoLISA reported annual increases of about 7-10% of jobs being created. The income of workers working abroad is relatively stable, with an average of 200 million VND/year. On average, workers and experts each year send home about 10 billion USD, a 5-fold increase compared to the period before the directive was issued (MOLISA, 2022). The World Bank (WB) and World Bank forecast the financial remittances to Vietnam in 2021 at 18.1 billion USD, ranking 8<sup>th</sup> in the world and 3<sup>rd</sup> in Asia-Pacific, accounting for 4.9% of its GDP. In 2020, remittances to Vietnam amounted to 17.2 billion USD, ranking 11<sup>th</sup> globally (World Bank, 2021).

The countries with the most prominent Vietnamese diaspora populations are the United States (1.2 million), France (250,000), Australia (200,000), and Canada (151,000). The Vietnamese populations in these countries are representative of the majority of the diaspora who left under the conditions of the post-1975 refugee exodus and are characterised by permanent resettlement patterns rather than temporary migration. The majority of remittances also come from these countries. The normalisation of economic and diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam since 1995 has helped to strengthen the flows from there (Chuyen et al., 2008).

Regardless of the motives for emigration, the Government of Vietnam has recognised the importance of Vietnamese expatriates for the country's economic development, over and above remittance payments. It also focuses on knowledge and technology transfers as well as direct investments made by returning Vietnamese. Some of these return to Vietnam temporarily, as shown by individual initiatives by medical professionals who operate on children during their free time in Vietnam or volunteer as guest lecturers. As a result, the Vietnamese diaspora is an important social and cultural link and is increasingly involved in development cooperation, also in the case of Germany (Schaland & Schmiz, 2015; 2017).

One of the key tasks in the Politburo's Conclusion 12-KL/TW is to "continue to raise awareness and sense of responsibility in the effective implementation of the policy of great solidarity in Vietnam," thereby

"promoting the great strength of national unity, encouraging and creating conditions for the Vietnamese people to make active contributions to national construction and defense" (Politburo, 2021).

On January 14, 2022, the Investment Support Forum for Overseas Vietnamese (Invesfov) was launched as one measure to operationalise this conclusion. Established by the Association for Liaison with Overseas Vietnamese, the forum is set to attract more resources from Vietnamese abroad and create optimal conditions for them to contribute more to national development (Vietnam Plus, 2022). However, the engagement by the Government of Vietnam with the diaspora appears still far from its strategic potential and is mainly focused on attracting academics and scientists back to Vietnam.

## **4.2 Preliminary Findings from the Field Research**

### *4.2.1 Overall Costs and Benefits along the Migration Cycle*

The key stakeholders of the pilot program consider the highest potential benefits to be realised by the future migrants or trainees that remain in Vietnam, followed by benefits

allocated to prospective German employers eventually receiving the trained Vietnamese graduates. Generally, Vietnamese key stakeholders have a comparative view of potential or expected benefits, contrasting the ongoing pilot program with existing temporary labour migration schemes with Asian industrialised countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Japan or Malaysia.

"I see that the greatest interest is not for the nation, nor the school, nor for the participants, but the greatest interest is the benefit of Vietnamese people who go there to work safely, with high income. That is the biggest benefit and I find this to be a really humane program." (V006, 176)

The overall perception and notion of the Government of Vietnam regarding the benefits and costs of outward labour migration was nicely summarised by one official:

"...the perspective of the PM [Prime Minister] is that workers can be wherever they want, they all contribute to enriching our country by enriching themselves. I think that is a very liberal mindset, as Vietnam now has demand for skilled labour, but many that studied abroad and stayed, and they contribute like many successful scientists in many prestigious universities around the world are Vietnamese. That is proof for how we can still benefit from those resources abroad, and they do not necessarily have to return to Vietnam." (V014, 20)

Like in other countries, emigration from Vietnam is still widely perceived as a necessary form of employment creation, with the acknowledged side effects of losing, usually low to medium-skilled, workers. So, overall, labour migration is considered an opportunity for migrants and a potential benefit to the country in the long term. With the overall positively changing socio-economic context, increasing skilled employment opportunities at home, and overall industrial growth, reasons to migrate are considered to remain a temporary issue. Skilled migration to industrialised countries, including destinations in Europe, is therefore seen as having a high potential to create more benefits for Vietnam if managed at a medium scale.

By design, skills transfer and mutual learning from other countries of origin is prominent in the Vietnam PAM pilot project, and key stakeholders perceive skills transfer as beneficial. The in-principle importance of skills transfer, particularly through returning migrants from existing temporary labour migration schemes with Asian countries, which feature some built-in instruments to support returning contract workers, was highlighted by many interviewees. However, the experience with technical design and implementation of return programs for open-ended programs like the pilot project – such as incentive payments, civil society and, in particular, Diaspora networks, career and reintegration guidance – seemed somewhat limited.

#### 4.2.2 Pre-departure Phase

The pilot program could build on long-term partnerships and investments in the TVET sector in general and the selected occupational profile in particular. Hence, the PAM pilot "development" costs for the VET program can be considered "marginal" in an economic sense, i.e., they were limited to adaptations and enrichments of already existing and tested cooperative vocational programs (previously implemented with German FDI companies in Dong Nai). During the implementation, operational costs are incurred for the use of machinery, consumables, depreciation, etc. For the metal cutting profile, this is certainly a relevant cost factor. While workshop equipment and material cost seem similar to Germany, the Vietnamese partner estimated the overall program cost to be about half of the cost of a similar program in Germany, indicating an overall benefit and comparative

advantage for implementation in Vietnam:

"But when the students who have already completed the program join the market, it is certain that the benefits will be much greater than the costs. And if the students go to Germany for training, for example, they need 35-50 thousand EURO to complete the training within two years. However, if in Vietnam, now I am building the program with only about 18-20 thousand EURO. The program we are building now is about a year and a half, so it costs less than 10,000." (V006, 79)

The institute also appeared to have the sufficient (possibly excess) capacity in terms of material and personnel resources, so no additional investment into these two cost positions needed to be made to realise the specific course at this small scale. This was indirectly confirmed by one official, who estimated the overall VET system to operate at about 75% of its capacity:

"Definitely yes, as we have spare capability, occupational education system now can train high-quality programs, meaning their capability is unprotested. The national scale has only trained about 2.5 million, 500.000 of which are in intermediate graduate school and about 2 million in beginner graduate school. In reality, we are only training at about  $\frac{2}{3}$  productivity, if the organising systems of occupation orientation for students after high school is good, then the occupational education system can completely take care of the demand." (V014, 10)

Apart from covering part or all of the developmental cost for the additional, non-VET modules, the project also decided to cover some positions typically charged to or provided by other sources. For the pilot phase, the cost of integrated language, soft skills and transcultural training is borne by the project. At the point of interviewing, it was not yet defined how these cost elements would be reallocated post-pilot. However, these elements, together with some administration and transportation costs will be subject to negotiations of prospective employers' contributions.

"It depends on how such a project is continued. I think it needs several rounds, more than just a pilot phase to really identify reliable partners. [...] It depends on who continues the program. Certain points would be distributed accordingly." (V016, 41-43)

The coverage for recognition of certificates and transportation costs to Germany had yet to be decided.

For the Vietnamese side, it was important to confirm the inclusive (of girls/women, poorer communicates, ethnic minorities) approach by means of ministerial approval before promoting it. To make it free and accessible for such groups but at the same time credible, it was important to promote it with an official quality "seal". As one stakeholder expressed it:

"In that program, students don't have to pay and have allowances during the course of study, and then they can go to Germany to work. Without the Prime Minister's approval, no one would believe that." (V006, 35)

Nevertheless, the expectation on the part of the Vietnamese stakeholders was relatively clear that redistribution of program costs will need to happen post-pilot or post-external project funding and that at least part of the cost could or should be borne by the students.

"When this program ends, I confirm [...] that LILAMA2 can train learners and students so that after graduation they can go directly to work in Germany. It shows that the training quality in Vietnam, especially at LILAMA2, ensures vocational training standards that allow entry into the global labour market. That's the thing I can confirm that those who want to go to Germany to

work after the project ends, should participate in this program and we will continue to implement this program. To ensure that, we will collect tuition fees from students, and not offer it for free as presently." (V006, 120-122)

This view was generally confirmed by national-level stakeholders, who considered students paying for programs at least in part both feasible and sensible to ensure the attractiveness of the program and sufficient commitment to the performance by the students.

"Actually, I don't think it's effective for students to study without fee. Because people don't pay, there is no motivation to learn it. [...] Payment is required. [...] don't give it all, people can just say yes and don't have to pay for it, what matters is the study spirit for people who want to go. [...] For example, people think this is a free program, so they get nothing from it [...] So you have to warn people, DON'T give it away. [...] At least including partial fee payment for student [...] It is an investment. When you pay for study, you know how to make a plan. If you don't pay, then you don't study, just come and play for six months or just leave when you're bored." (V001, 231-255)

As to the prospective contribution of German employers, expectations of the training institution were that these would and should shoulder the cost of training and preparation in Vietnam, but which cost elements and/or which concrete amount was yet to be clarified.

One expert in the field of labour export, but not involved in the pilot program, emphasised that the country of destination should bear the cost related to training for labour migration and the cost incurred by the country of origin prior to the specific labour migration program needs to be considered. Furthermore, social security costs in case of return at the retirement stage need to be considered.

"Germany wants us to train for them and send workers there, that's a different story. Germany has to invest to serve their demand, not Vietnam. Therefore, labour exporting countries like us are very disadvantaged because we are poor, have low wages, and have not enough jobs for workers, so we have to do vocational training to let workers go abroad to work. So, our country has to invest in training, workers go to work for foreign countries. We raise a person until the age of 20 and then teach them to study until the age of 25, they have a job. This process is extremely expensive but they go abroad to work. [...] For example, in our country, workers go to work abroad, then stay for the rest of their lives, that country has to take care of their pension insurance. However, if they go to work for 10 years and then return. At the youngest, healthiest time, they dedicate to foreign countries. When they are weak, they come back, the labour exporting country has to take care of their retirement ... that is a weakness that needs to be overcome." (V007, 50)

#### 4.2.3 *Arrival and Onboarding in the Country of Destination – Germany*

This phase is currently outside the time horizon of the commissioned PAM pilot project. No concrete plans were in place yet. Other stakeholders that are not directly involved with the pilot program, but have gathered experience with accompanying or advising professionals in their migration path stated a lack of support for this crucial phase in the migration process.

"...it is also about supporting the professionals not only with the recognition, but also with further steps. Because we have also noticed that the bridge between Vietnam and Germany has not yet been taken over by any institution. This means, for example, that the skilled worker is very well looked after here in Vietnam, but when he or she comes to Germany to integrate, there is no authority or institution that looks after this. [...] And some professionals have difficulty finding accommodation, they first have to find accommodation via Airbnb or in a hotel and then they

look for a flat. Or the GEZ fee comes, and the professional doesn't know what it's about in German either and just throws it away – and then they get the reminder and so on." (V010, 42)

#### 4.2.4 *Integration in the Country of Destination – Germany*

Longer-term integration measures were not the focus of the current pilot project partners, and stakeholder interviews did not contribute assessments to this dimension.

#### 4.2.5 *Return and Reintegration*

Stakeholders of the PAM pilot project had no concrete measures planned to address the return and reintegration phase. Generally, expectations were that if migrants returned, the benefits for the individuals and the country of origin would be higher than in existing temporary labour migration schemes.

Skills investments are anticipated to generate a positive return in the long run. Such benefits are clearly expected by directly concerned stakeholders on the Vietnamese side, in particular in comparison to existing temporary labour migration schemes with Asian countries that tend to be based on lower-skilled labour.

“When returning, they have two options. One is to look for work in foreign enterprises, the country where you have worked that have investment enterprises in Vietnam. For the second option, then can go back and then continue to stay in those countries. When they return, they will have some advantages. For example, they know the language of the country they have gone to, they learned the culture, working style, and discipline of that country, so it is easy for them to find a job when they come back to Vietnam. And of course, when they go to work abroad, it's also easy because they already have experience, so they don't have to retrain.” (V006b, 186)

One of the key benefits mentioned by several stakeholders of the piloted program is that it is open-ended without a return obligation. Stakeholders acknowledged that the current tendency for labour migrants is to seek long-term, permanent work in the countries of destination:

“Well, most Vietnamese people want to go abroad to work and settle for a long time, but especially going to Germany, I'm sure 99% of people will work and stay, then look forward to working there in the long term.” (V006b, 227)

Long-term effects were mentioned in the interviews; however, the emphasis was usually on short-term economic costs and benefits (with a focus on income, employment, and human capital effects), underestimating non-economic and long-term effects. Those with personal experience from temporary migration schemes also mentioned non-economic costs such as psychological effects, e. g., stemming from the absence from the family. Regarding understanding cost-benefit distributions among stakeholders, most interviewees implicitly or explicitly referred to the general triple-win narrative. The relative distribution of costs and benefits or the level of distributional inequality was rarely highlighted.

#### 4.2.6 *The Potential for Vocational Training in Making Labour Migration more Beneficial*

The principle potential for the development of enhanced integration of vocational training into migration schemes was recognised by almost all interviewees. The potential benefits were usually attributed primarily to the migrants and the receiving employers in the country of destination ("the different labour markets"), to which programs have to be tailored to match the demand. Even though high barriers exist in practice, all interviewed

persons' overall expectations were for positive contributions. Foreign language skills were often referred to as the biggest bottleneck for Vietnamese workers that want to migrate – particularly when it comes to German language requirements at the level required by the Skilled Migration Act. Table 2 below summarises the main barriers and potential for connecting skills development with labour migration in Vietnam.

**Table 2: Main barriers and main potential of skills development for sustainable labour migration with Vietnam**

<i>Vietnam-Germany transnational skill partnership</i>	
<b>Main barriers to skills development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited capacity of VET Institutes and system to train for a “dual track cooperative GSP” model at a large scale – particularly in finding sufficient in-company training places/firms for practical training.</li> <li>• Currently unknown “willingness to pay” of future German employers to contribute sufficiently and with a long-term perspective to the operationalisation of the model.</li> <li>• German language training and assessment capacity in Vietnam.</li> </ul>
<b>Main potential for skills development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option for moving from “Type 0” to establishing multiple managed and mutually beneficial mobility pathways of Types 1-3.</li> <li>• High potential to establish sustainable medium-scale “dual track cooperative GSP” programs with full recognition of qualifications in selected VET professions.</li> <li>• Medium-term potential for an increase in private sector-led initiatives that only require “start-up” accompanying technical and financial assistance</li> </ul>

Regarding mutual learning and the “import” of VET system elements from Germany to Vietnam, the Government of Vietnam has a clear policy and actively committed substantial resources to operationalise such learning and transfer from German VET institutions. Several interviewees identified sound expectations management as a precondition for implementing VET-partnership or GSP models. Despite its complexity, the potential of VET-partnership or GSP models was recognised as increased skill levels are expected to increase migrant agency, which is expected to generate increased benefits.

The generally complex process of skills recognition was highlighted by interviewees in Vietnam and confirmed by relatively low numbers of Vietnamese professionals succeeding in achieving full recognition of their certificates despite two dedicated German-funded projects (ProRecognition and Hand in Hand for International Talent). In the specific case of the PAM pilot project, preliminary assurance by a German Chamber involved in the transfer project for possible full recognition of graduates from that profile was already in place before the start and constituted a key selection criterion for the chosen pilot approach. The Vietnamese side's expectations were clearly towards a quasi “automatic” recognition due to previous assurances by German Chamber partners, but legally, each applicant will still have to go through an individual recognition process after graduating with the Vietnamese certificate.



The systemic differences in both VET systems (school-based in Vietnam and company-based in Germany) and curricular differences have been mainly overcome by the explicit transfer efforts before the pilot. However, despite the chosen adaptive process, this effectively meant a “one-way” transfer of key elements of the German dual system into the Vietnamese system, including occupational or training standards. In the process, there did not appear to be any built-in learning or adaptation efforts on the part of the German VET system.

#### *4.2.7 Stakeholder perceptions of the underlying partnership*

In Vietnam, the core partnership consists of the Department for Vocational Education and Training (DVET) of MoLISA, the LILAMA2 College and the GIZ TVET Program with the linked PAM project. The understanding and definition of partnership appear to be influenced by the mode of operation of bilateral development cooperation, i.e., a differentiation between political partner, implementing partner and others. Agreements or Governmental (Prime Minister) approval was key to the foundation of the formal partnership. Operationally, MoUs are the instrument of choice to agree on further details with the core partners and later extended partnership members or other “actors”.

“Regarding the partners: we would not be assigned to the GDVT as a program if we did not have the education component as an essential part of regular development-oriented labour migration. That's why it's essential for the partner. If this component were missing, we would be assigned to a completely different unit in the Ministry of Labour. [...] As I understand it [...] with regard to other cooperations on skilled labour migration, I think there is even more emphasis on providing training locally. Because often skilled workers who emigrate to other countries, like now to Japan, don't get these opportunities for career development because everything that happens in terms of certificates in the country is not recognised and not registered. [...] At country level – or at component country level it is Vietnam – it is MOLISA and then DVET, and the LILAMA College. Then we try to involve other actors as well. [...] I think companies will play a more important role in the next project phases. Companies in the country, companies in Germany. And in MOLISA, depending on how such a project or skilled labour migration cooperation between Germany and Vietnam would be structured, the responsible unit in MOLISA might no longer be DVET but DOLAB. We are now trying to keep them in the picture, because we have the migration component within the framework of our project.” (V016, 83-85)

Interviewees pointed to the importance of partnership as a precondition for sustainable labour migration programs. It seems that the complexity of partnership is generally underestimated. Empathy and trust have developed over a long period of cooperation in the VET sector before the pilot program. It is also expected, but not guaranteed by the main funder BMZ, that there will be a follow-on phase, which will then, in part, replicate and continue operations relating to the next migration phase of the first batch of students.

Statements of core stakeholders confirm the need for a long-term partnership that grows and extends to further partners over time, particularly when it comes to cooperation with the private sector.

“It depends on how such a project is continued. I think it needs several rounds than just a pilot phase to really identify reliable partners.” (V016, 41)

Stakeholders from Vietnam usually wished for governmental-level bilateral agreements on labour migration (BLMAs) to formalise the scope of the overarching cooperation at an appropriate level. Often, historical reference was made to the bilateral agreement with the GDR during the 1980s. At times, the wish for mutual recognition of professional

qualifications agreements was also mentioned or hoped for, as is in development within the ASEAN region. Concerning one of the early pilot projects to recruit graduated or graduating nursing professionals for apprenticeship training and work in Germany, one expert involved emphasised the interest on the part of the Vietnamese government to enter into a more formal – governmental-level – agreement:

"It's called an agreement, if based on the sense of an agreement, it's not an agreement yet, but it's called a joint statement or letter of intent. Referring to these documents in 2015, that is, after more than two years as a pilot project [...] a joint statement and letter of intent have been signed. But this is a common framework showing the goodwill of the two sides in cooperation in this field, not a government-level agreement, between representatives of MOLISA and the German Ambassador. Regarding the agreement, it must be made clear that this is also the intention of the Vietnamese side, which has been proposed many times to the German side. The Vietnamese side has always wanted a government-level legal framework. At least at the ministerial level of the management function on labour migrants between the two countries to create a legal framework to carry out this activity in a more methodical and quality manner, which the Vietnamese side has not yet met. Vietnam has proposed to the German side many times, as far as I know, but the German side thinks that everything should be done according to the law, there is no need to sign an agreement. But the law of Vietnam and the law of Germany besides the similarities, are different. It is better that the two countries should have an agreement, this has not been achieved, of course, it depends on the situation, and other factors [...] I also think that, firstly, in the current context, if the two sides do not take the necessary next steps, they will miss opportunities for cooperation in various fields. And if we do it in a floating way like today, it even brings many unnecessary negatives." (V015, 26 and 34)

This view on the hope for and expected benefits of a more formalised government-level partnership was equally taken concerning the PAM model when introduced.

#### *4.2.8 Stakeholder Perceptions of Sustainability*

Across most interviews, arguments connected to sustainable labour migration referred to the balance and distribution of economic costs, the positive impact for countries of origin stemming from remittances, potentially returning migrants and skills transfer. For Vietnam, concrete benefits could already be realised – such as skills transfer through the VET cooperation and by increasing the attractiveness of the chosen profile of metal cutting for future VET students. For Vietnamese stakeholders, the focus on skilled migration matching international labour market demands and proper social security framework conditions were key factors mentioned for sustainability.

## **5 Recommendations**

The Vietnamese and German governments have committed to the goals and principles of the GCM. The guiding principle of Germany's future approach towards Vietnam should be establishing a more formalised partnership and specific overarching transnational governance framework for implementing key elements of the GCM and facilitating a long-term partnership to create sustainable labour migration pathways. As a point of departure, a government-level agreement on joint long-term goals, targets, and minimum standards could be concluded to enable the further development of these specific pathways flexibly and decentralised.

From the limited analysis of this study, it also appears that Vietnam still has much potential to leverage more strategically the synergies of different sector policies (vocational training, migration, industrial and social development) when it comes to

increasing the benefits and sustainability of outward labour migration for Vietnam. To realise such potential, more and continuous learning, collection of data and concrete evidence of the actual social and economic costs as well as actual and potential additional benefits of different forms of labour migration will be required. To realise such learning and turn it into a strategic approach domestically, inter-departmental dialogue formats could be established between concerned sector ministries and agencies on sustainable labour migration models. These exchanges could include MoLISA with its TVET and Labour Migration departments, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Key to this dialogue and process could be to identify and prioritise areas with a high potential for synergetic development between Vietnamese stakeholders as well as transnational stakeholders in Germany, Vietnam and possibly other supporting countries of destination.

Since 2013, with the publication of the “Strategy paper of the Federal Government on international vocational training cooperation from a single source” (Die Bundesregierung, 2013), the German government has attempted to follow a “whole of government” approach in the field of international vocational training cooperation. This strategic approach was re-emphasised with the 2019 updated “Strategy of the Federal Government for international Vocational Education and Training Cooperation” (Die Bundesregierung, 2019). The strategy covers all aspects of vocational education and training cooperation, including the “export of German VET services” (which could more comprehensively be addressed as trade in education services). Unfortunately, it does not mention or cover explicitly or implicitly the area of labour migration. A key recommendation at the German policy level would be to revisit the 2019 strategy to explicitly include the different pathways of skilled migration of the Skilled Migration Act (FEG) as part of the goals and governance structure of the strategy and the respective mandate of its implementing actors.

Stakeholders across the board have emphasised German language skills as one of the critical bottlenecks to increased awareness of possible VET and labour mobility pathways between Vietnam and German and successful participation in such mobility schemes. The earlier teaching German as a second or third language is integrated into the general Vietnamese school curriculum, the better the prospects for potential apprentices to choose one of the available migration pathways to Germany rather than other competing industrialised countries. For this to happen, Germany will need to keep increasing the network of competent local German language teachers – through the Goethe-Institut or other programs – at a much larger scale than is currently the case in Vietnam.

The research has also confirmed the high importance of accessible, transparent and targeted information on the different and complex mobility and labour migration pathways, emphasising the need for such information to be readily available to stakeholders from Vietnam. It is recommended to focus on enhancing the institutionalised availability of such information in the Vietnamese language with a particular focus on using existing officially curated platforms such as “Make-in-in-Germany”, “Anerkennung-in-Deutschland”, and “Deutschland.de”.

As a general recommendation, preliminary findings call for more and earlier incorporation of – in particular, destination country – private sector companies and/or their business membership organisations into pilot project design and governance structures. Such private sector participation will also be a key facilitating factor in mobilising private sector actors in the country of origin. They need to be aware of the potential benefits for its sector

development and play a crucial supportive role in "dual track" mobility programs. Internationally oriented private German providers of education and training services can also play a significant part in establishing sustainable cooperation models. Training institutions in Vietnam hope to improve their image through co-operation with German partners, and Vietnamese stakeholders generally hope that the country gains competence through qualified returnees. At a recent I-MOVE matchmaking event, German providers that can facilitate the recognition process in Germany through their accreditation for specific occupational profiles and can arrange concrete apprenticeship places were in particular demand (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung [BiBB], n.d.b; Kassberg & Dornberger, 2022).

## 6 Conclusion

Vietnam and Germany have a long and complex history of transnational relationships. Along with Vietnam's impressive economic development, these relations have intensified not only in the economic and development cooperation spheres but also in technical education and other fields. Findings of this study show the high potential and favourable framework conditions that Vietnam has to offer when it comes to establishing sustainable labour migration pathways with Germany. The Vietnamese government has expressed a clear interest in stronger cooperation with industrialised countries like Germany in this field. Germany is clearly viewed by all concerned country of origin stakeholders as an attractive country of destination – given its highly developed social protection and labour standards system and the options for open-ended residency. However, in reality, persisting bottlenecks (German language teaching capacities, recognition of Vietnamese vocational certificates) prevent Germany from becoming a destination of choice rather than a chance for skilled labour with a vocational professional degree or background.

Already established small-scale initiatives indicate opportunities for all three types of labour mobility pathways existing: recruiting youth for apprenticeships and subsequent skilled work, recruiting and recognising skilled professionals' certificates for direct work contracts, and setting up initial vocational education and training programs with a dual-track approach. While the latter has the highest potential to be comparatively more beneficial than other approaches, pursuing and supporting the scaling up of all three pathways in parallel will have additional, mutually reinforcing and supporting effects.

The potential for benefits over and above those already realised by existing skill partnerships appears high, especially considering the favourable framework conditions specific to the long-standing German-Vietnamese relationship. If the potential of well-managed skill partnerships is realised, such sustainable models of skilled labour migration can serve as a unique selling point in the international competition for skilled labour.

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