



WorkPass EU

A European Migrant Visa for Economic
and Social Resilience

Abstract



Europe faces a growing skilled labor shortage, exacerbated by demographic shifts and an aging workforce, placing increasing pressure on social security systems. At the same time, migration remains a politically sensitive issue, often dominated by crisis narratives rather than structured, long-term policy solutions. While the European Union's New Migration Pact introduces stricter regulations and improved coordination mechanisms, it lacks a dedicated strategy to attract and integrate skilled workers. This paper explores the potential of a European Migrant Visa, modeled on successful programs in Canada and Australia, to create a demand-driven, structured pathway for labor migration. By aligning migration with sectoral and regional workforce needs, such a system would enhance competitiveness, strengthen social security contributions, and reduce irregular migration by providing clear legal pathways. A coordinated EU framework—while maintaining flexibility for member states—could transform migration into an economic asset, fostering long-term stability and resilience across European economies.



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Introduction



From Migration Crisis to Economic and Social Resilience

A skilled labour shortage is threatening industries across Europe, while aging populations are straining social security systems to their limits. The pensions of younger generations hang in the balance, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of Europe's welfare state.

Migration could provide a much-needed solution. Yet, the topic has been highly politicized, often weaponized in public discourse through waves of misinformation and disinformation. Despite this, the European Union has taken an important step forward with the adoption of the New Migration Pact. This framework introduces stricter rules and aims to establish a more coherent and collaborative approach to managing migration. Key elements of the pact include faster asylum procedures, the fair redistribution of asylum seekers among member states, and agreements with third countries to streamline the return of those without legal grounds to stay. The EU is now considering even tougher measures, including the establishment of detention centres and expanded repatriation agreements, signalling a shift toward more restrictive policies.

Nevertheless, migration is a natural and enduring phenomenon that will persist regardless of regulation. Left unmanaged, it can lead to social tensions, a rise in informal or precarious labour, and heightened political polarization. Europe is neither an isolated island nor an impenetrable fortress—turning inward is not an option. The only viable path forward is to manage migratory flows effectively, creating a system that serves both the economy and the welfare state while upholding humanitarian responsibilities. With a regulatory framework now in place, Europe has an opportunity to go further—using policy innovation to transform migration into a tool that benefits all. One forward-looking option is the creation of a European working visa scheme for skilled labour. Modelled on existing long-term residency programs such as the American Green Card, Canada's Express Entry, and Australia's SkillSelect, a European Migrant Visa could help address labour shortages in key industries while ensuring a steady flow of social contributions to support public welfare systems.

Europe can move beyond crisis-driven security narratives, embrace a pragmatic approach to migration, and build a future where economic growth and social security are safeguarded for generations to come.

Existing Frameworks: Lessons for a European Migrant Visa



The American Green Card is a well-known example of a long-term residency program with pathways to citizenship, offering a structured way to attract skilled workers. However, while it provides a model for granting work and residency rights, it may not be the most suitable example for Europe's immediate labour needs due to its broader focus and complex application process. Unlike the Green Card, which often relies on family sponsorship and employer-driven petitions, Europe requires a more agile system that directly responds to labour shortages across different member states.

A potentially better example for the European context is Canada's Express Entry program. This system targets skilled workers through a points-based mechanism, prioritizing candidates based on age, education, work experience, and language skills. It allows for a tailored approach to labour shortages, aligning immigration flows with economic and regional demands. Additionally, Canada's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) gives individual regions the flexibility to recruit workers based on local labour market needs. This decentralized element could serve as an inspiration for an EU-wide framework that maintains a degree of national discretion while ensuring a coordinated European approach.

Australia's SkillSelect system also provides valuable insights, as it similarly employs a points-based model that prioritizes economic contributions while integrating regional labour demands. Unlike a rigid quota system, SkillSelect uses an Expression of Interest (EOI) mechanism, where candidates submit their profiles and receive invitations based on labour market demand. This responsive approach ensures that skilled migration aligns with actual economic needs rather than arbitrary caps.

While the American Green Card has its merits, the Canadian and Australian models offer more dynamic, demand-driven, and adaptable frameworks that may be better suited to Europe's labour market challenges. Both systems provide a balance between economic imperatives and national flexibility, a structure that the EU could adapt to account for its diverse member states and their varying labour needs. A European working visa scheme inspired by these models could ensure a steady influx of skilled workers while preserving flexibility for national governments to shape their own priorities within a common EU framework.



Feature	Green Card (USA)	Express Entry (Canada)	SkillsSelect (Australia)
Eligibility Criteria	Family sponsorship, employer sponsorship, diversity lottery, asylum/refugee status	Age, education, work experience, language skills, job offer (optional)	Age, education, work experience, language skills, state/territory nomination (optional)
Selection Process	Lottery (Diversity Visa), employer petitions, family sponsorship, asylum applications	Points-based ranking system (Comprehensive Ranking System - CRS)	Points-based system with Expressions of Interest (EOI)
Processing Time	Varies (months to years)	6 months (average)	Varies (typically 6-12 months)
Points-Based System	No	Yes	Yes
Employer Sponsorship Required	For employment-based Green Cards	No (but job offer increases points)	No (but employer sponsorship available for some visas)
Permanent Residency Pathway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flexibility for Regional Needs	No	Yes (Provincial Nominee Program - PNP)	Yes (state/territory-specific nominations)
Quota System	Yes (limits on number issued annually)	Yes (annual intake targets)	Yes (annual intake limits)
Integration with National Policies	Federal system with some state-level integration	Federal and provincial coordination	Federal and state coordination

WorkPass EU: How Would it Look Like?



A European Migrant Visa would provide a structured and demand-driven approach to attracting skilled labour, ensuring economic competitiveness while maintaining flexibility for national and regional labour markets. Drawing from successful models in Canada and Australia, this system would balance EU-wide coordination with national adaptability, creating a robust mechanism to manage migration for labour market needs.

1. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants would be evaluated based on a points-based system, ensuring that those with the highest economic potential are prioritized. The key criteria would include:

- Education Level – Higher education degrees in priority fields receive more points.
- Work Experience – More points for experience in high-demand sectors.
- Language Skills – Proficiency in an EU language (or multiple) improves eligibility.
- Job Offer (Optional) – While not mandatory, a confirmed job offer increases points.
- Age – Preference for younger candidates to maximize long-term contributions.

Additionally, fast-track options could be available for workers in sectors experiencing acute shortages, such as healthcare, technology, and construction.

2. Selection Process & Points-Based System

The visa system would function through an Expression of Interest (EOI) model, like Australia's SkillSelect. Applicants submit their profiles, and those with the highest scores are invited to apply for the visa. This ensures a dynamic, demand-driven approach rather than a first-come, first-served system.

Points would be adjusted based on sectoral needs, allowing flexibility for industries facing labour shortages. Additionally, regional incentives could be introduced—like Canada's Provincial Nominee Program—where certain member states or regions facing depopulation or economic decline could sponsor workers to relocate.

3. Permanent Residency Pathway

To ensure long-term integration, the visa would include a clear pathway to permanent residency for those who remain employed and contribute to the economy. The specific period required for eligibility would vary by member state, reflecting national policies on residency and naturalization. However, as a general guideline, after a set period of legal residence and employment (e.g., 5 years in some countries), workers could become eligible for long-term EU residence, facilitating workforce retention while respecting national differences in integration policies.



4. Flexibility for Sectoral and Regional Needs

The visa would allow both sectoral and regional flexibility, ensuring that different EU economies can address their specific labour market needs. Member states could designate priority sectors based on national labour shortages, while underpopulated regions could offer incentives to attract skilled workers.

This flexibility ensures that while the visa is an EU-wide framework, it respects national priorities and regional economic disparities.

5. Quota System Managed by the Council

To maintain a balanced and controlled migration flow, the European Council would set annual quotas based on economic forecasts and labour demand. These quotas would be distributed across member states, ensuring an equitable approach that considers national capacities and economic needs.

Quotas could be adjusted based on market conditions, allowing for scalability in times of economic growth or contraction.

6. Integration with National Policies

While the visa would be issued at the EU level, its implementation would be closely integrated with national policies:

- Member states could adjust points allocations to prioritize their specific labour market needs.
- Recognition of foreign qualifications would be harmonized to facilitate faster workforce entry.
- Coordination with social security systems to ensure proper contributions and benefits.

A European Migrant Visa would offer a structured, demand-driven solution to labour shortages while ensuring economic stability and social security contributions. It balances EU coordination with national flexibility, allowing for both sectoral specialization and regional adaptation. With a clear permanent residency pathway and a quota system managed by the Council, the visa would provide a sustainable framework for attracting and retaining skilled talent, strengthening Europe's workforce for the future.

Benefits of a European Migrant Visa



A European Migrant Visa would provide a structured, demand-driven approach to skilled labour migration, benefiting the EU in multiple ways. By balancing economic competitiveness, social security sustainability, and controlled migration flows, this system would address immediate labour shortages while strengthening Europe's long-term economic and social resilience.

1. Boosting Competitiveness and Economic Growth

Europe is facing severe labour shortages in key industries such as healthcare, technology, and construction. A well-managed migration system would:

- Provide industries with the skilled workers they urgently need, ensuring continued innovation and growth.
- Strengthen the EU's position as a global economic hub, making it more attractive for high-skilled talent.
- Help businesses scale and expand, particularly in sectors that rely on technical expertise.

By aligning migration with labour market needs, the visa would enhance Europe's global competitiveness and secure its economic future.

2. Strengthening Social Security Systems

With an aging population and declining birth rates, many EU member states face increasing pressure on their social security systems. A structured migration pathway would:

- Ensure new workers contribute to pensions and welfare programs, stabilizing national budgets.
- Reduce the financial strain on younger generations by broadening the tax base.
- Support public services, particularly in healthcare and elder care, where shortages are critical.

By integrating skilled workers into the labour market, the visa would help sustain Europe's social welfare model while addressing demographic challenges.

3. A Controlled, Predictable Migration Framework

Unregulated migration can lead to informal labour, political tensions, and economic uncertainty. A European Migrant Visa would:

- Provide a structured and transparent process, ensuring predictability for governments and businesses.
- Allow the European Council to manage quotas, adjusting migration flows based on economic needs.
- Reduce exploitation and illegal labour by offering clear legal pathways to employment.



This approach would replace ad-hoc responses with a long-term strategy, strengthening public confidence in migration policies.

4. Flexibility for Member States and Regional Adaptation

A European working visa would not be a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, it would:

- Give member states flexibility to define priority sectors and adjust criteria based on national labour market needs.
- Allow regions experiencing depopulation to attract skilled workers through targeted programs.
- Preserve national control while benefiting from an EU-wide framework, ensuring migration supports local economies.

By maintaining a balance between EU coordination and national adaptation, the system would be both efficient and politically feasible.

5. A Stronger, More Unified Europe

Migration remains one of the most divisive political issues in Europe. A proactive, well-managed approach would:

- Shift the debate from crisis management to strategic economic planning.
- Demonstrate that migration can be an opportunity rather than a burden.
- Strengthen European solidarity by providing a shared framework that benefits all member states.
- Reduce the capacity of bad-faith actors to use migration as a hybrid weapon by providing a clear, legal alternative that potential migrants are more likely to follow.

With coherent, forward-thinking policies, the EU can move beyond reactionary politics and establish itself as a leader in managing skilled migration. A European Migrant Visa is not just about filling labour gaps—it is about ensuring the EU remains economically competitive, socially stable, and politically resilient in the decades to come. By implementing a structured, adaptable, and demand-driven migration system, Europe can turn migration into a strategic asset that strengthens both its workforce and its future prosperity.



Aspect	Current Situation (No EU Migrant Visa)	After Introduction of EU Migrant Visa
Labor Market	Severe shortages in key sectors (healthcare, technology, construction) leading to economic stagnation.	Structured, demand-driven migration helps fill labor gaps, boosting productivity and innovation.
Social Security Contributions	Declining contributions due to aging population; increased burden on younger workers.	Steady inflow of skilled workers strengthens pension systems and social security contributions.
Migration Management	Fragmented national approaches; reliance on ad-hoc solutions and irregular migration pathways.	Harmonized EU-wide framework with national flexibility ensures predictable, managed migration.
Economic Growth	Labor shortages limit business expansion and competitiveness on the global stage.	Greater workforce availability supports economic growth, investment, and EU competitiveness.
Political Stability	Migration remains a divisive issue, fueling political tensions and populist narratives.	Reduced political tensions as migration is framed as a labor and economic policy issue rather than a crisis.
Integration with National Policies	Inconsistent policies across member states, leading to inefficiencies and lack of coordination.	Member states retain flexibility while benefiting from a coordinated, efficient migration strategy.
Public Perception of Migration	Highly politicized, often framed as a crisis rather than an opportunity.	More balanced and fact-based narrative as migration is seen as a tool for economic resilience.
Control Over Migration Flows	Lack of structured legal pathways incentivizes irregular migration and exploitation.	Legal, transparent pathways reduce irregular migration and limit the influence of bad-faith actors.

Conclusion



The European Union stands at a decisive moment in shaping its economic and social future. Labor shortages across key industries, coupled with demographic challenges, threaten Europe's long-term competitiveness and the sustainability of its social security systems. At the same time, migration remains a highly politicized issue, often managed through short-term crisis responses rather than long-term strategic planning. The introduction of a European Migrant Visa—such as the WorkPass EU—would offer a structured, demand-driven approach to attracting skilled workers, ensuring that migration serves as a tool for economic resilience rather than a source of division.

By learning from successful models like Canada's Express Entry and Australia's SkillSelect, the EU can develop a visa system that aligns migration with sectoral and regional labor needs. A points-based selection process, combined with national flexibility, would allow for a balanced system that benefits industries, supports social security contributions, and provides clear legal pathways for skilled migrants. Moreover, such a system would reduce irregular migration, counter disinformation, and limit the ability of external actors to exploit migration as a hybrid weapon against the EU.

With a coordinated, forward-looking migration framework, Europe can shift the debate from crisis management to economic opportunity. A European Migrant Visa would not only address immediate labor shortages but also lay the foundation for a stronger, more competitive, and socially resilient Europe. Now is the time to transform migration into a strategic advantage—ensuring that Europe remains a global leader in innovation, workforce development, and sustainable growth.

Contact



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