



**NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE
FOR THE HOME AFFAIRS FUNDS**

Subject: Launch of the call for expression of interest under the Specific Action “Support to consular services from Member States for Talent Innovation and Talent Partnerships” under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) – Reference AMIF/2026/SA/2.1.1

By the present note, the Commission launches a call for expression of interest for Specific Action “Support to Member States consular services for Talent Innovation and Talent Partnerships”, in line with the actions listed in the above-mentioned Commission financing decisions and work programmes.

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2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Specific actions will be implemented by one or more Member States participating in the Fund via funding received in addition to the allocation under their Fund programmes.

Funding for specific actions is added to the Member States' programme allocations by means of a programme amendment. That additional funding is earmarked for the specific action concerned and shall not be used for other actions in the Member State's programme, except in duly justified circumstances and as approved by the Commission through the amendment of the programme.

Whereas the regular EU co-financing rate under the Member States' programmes will not exceed 75% of total eligible expenditure, projects implemented under specific actions may benefit from an increased co-financing rate of up to 90% of the total eligible expenditure.

The specific action must be implemented by the Member States in accordance with the AMIF ⁽²⁾ Regulation and the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) ⁽³⁾.

As regards the value added tax (VAT) eligibility regime, Article 64 (1)(c) of the CPR provides that VAT is not eligible, except:

- (i) "for operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT);
- (ii) for operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT) where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation".

3. CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

3.1. Indicative budget available

The indicative amount envisaged for this call AMIF/2026/SA/2.1.1 is EUR 80 million.

Indicatively, the budget of the call will be divided as follows:

- Lot 1 Talent Innovation: EUR 40 million;
- Lot 2 Talent Partnership: EUR 40 million.

The requested amount (i.e., the Union contribution to the Member State's AMIF programme under the Specific Action) must be between **EUR 3 million and EUR 4 million** per application.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.

3.2. Background for the specific action

3.2.1 EU legal and policy framework

In the last years, the Commission has put forward a set of legislative, operational and forward-looking measures, placing labour mobility and talent attraction, as well as educational and training pathways, as a strategic element for the Union's competitiveness and strategic autonomy, and aiming to position the European Union as the most attractive destination in the global competition for talent.

The **Pact on Migration and Asylum** reaffirms the importance of attracting skills and talent to the Union, while the **European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy**⁽⁴⁾ sets out a clear direction for the next five years, with a focus on labour and talent mobility to boost competitiveness.

The Union *acquis* provides a framework to attract and retain talent from third countries. Directive (EU) 2016/801 ('Students and Researchers Directive')⁽⁵⁾ harmonises the conditions of entry and residence for students and researchers, facilitating mobility and post-study and research opportunities; Directive (EU) 2021/1883 ('EU Blue Card Directive')⁽⁶⁾ establishes common rules for the admission and rights of highly qualified workers.

Attracting international talent for innovation and competitiveness is also one of the key objectives of the **EU visa policy strategy**⁽⁷⁾, which sets out a framework for a visa policy that advances Europe's long-term interests, by strengthening security across the Schengen area, fostering EU prosperity and competitiveness, and projecting Europe's position and resilience on the global stage.

The **Commission Recommendation on attracting talent for innovation** highlights that attracting and retaining third-country nationals with specialised skills or strong innovation potential, including researchers, students and graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), highly qualified and skilled workers, startup founders, and innovative entrepreneurs, is essential for maintaining the Union's economic growth, competitiveness and technological leadership.

Moreover, recent initiatives aim to promote structured cooperation frameworks with partner countries, notably with the establishment of **Talent Partnerships**.

Talent Partnerships represent mutually beneficial partnerships established between EU Member States and a Partner country on a voluntary basis and aiming to achieve the

⁽⁴⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, COM(2026) 45 final.

⁽⁵⁾ Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing, OJ L 132, 21.5.2016, p. 21 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/801/oj>).

⁽⁶⁾ Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC, OJ L 382, 28.10.2021, pp. 1–38 (ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2021/1883/oj>).

⁽⁷⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on EU visa policy strategy, COM(2026) 43 final.

following overarching objectives: (1) strengthening collaboration with partner countries on migration management, including on return and reintegration, as part of a comprehensive approach to migration management; (2) reinforcing labour mobility and attracting skilled talent to the EU while avoiding brain-drain and boosting the EU's competitiveness; and (3) fostering development cooperation and targeted investment to enhance employability in countries of origin, including via skills development and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) investments.

Since 2023, the EU and its Member States have launched Talent Partnerships with Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Nigeria and Senegal have been identified as potential future partner countries. Each of the five Partnerships is tailor-made to the needs of the participating Member States and of partner countries: it is based on agreed objectives (e.g. increasing availability of data on labour market needs, facilitating recognition of skills to support mobility, alignment of curricula and TVET trainings), as well as on agreed sectors and professions identified as matter of priority. EU funding has been mobilised including via AMIF and NDICI Global Europe to support the operationalisation of the Partnerships.

The relevance of this topic is shown by the fact that many key initiatives that the European Commission has put forward recently introduce a strong focus on talent attraction. The **Union of Skills** ⁽⁸⁾ outlined key deliverables at Union, national, regional and local levels with the objective of attracting and retaining skills from third countries to address shortages and developing talent in the Union. The '**Choose Europe for Science**' initiative ⁽⁹⁾ promotes Europe as a destination of excellence for international students, researchers and professionals. In this context, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** are a key instrument for attracting and retaining international talents in Europe, supporting the training and career development of researchers from all over the world, at all stages of their careers.

Scaling up Talent Partnerships is a priority identified in the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy for the period 2025-2029 ⁽¹⁰⁾.

3.2.2. Current challenges and gaps in Member States' capabilities

By 2050, Europe's working population will decrease by more than thirty million people. The ageing population combined with growing skills shortages affect various occupations and sectors across all skills levels, with nearly half of European small and medium companies (SMEs) (46%) facing difficulties in finding workers with the right skills ⁽¹¹⁾. While mobilising the potential of the Union's workforce remains essential, attracting innovative third country nationals at all skill levels, from high to medium and low-skilled workers, is also necessary to ensure a sustainable talent pipeline that

⁽⁸⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Union of Skills, COM(2025) 90 final.

⁽⁹⁾ Choose Europe for Science initiative: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs#choose-europe-for-science-new>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, COM(2026) 45 final.

⁽¹¹⁾ Eurobarometer on '[Barriers for European SMEs in recruiting workers from outside the EU](#)', June 2026

strengthens the Union's competitiveness and enables progress on putting its strategic priorities into practice.

Granting long-stay visas is an essential pre-requirement for any legal mobility to the EU. Therefore, to facilitate legal migration/labour mobilities to the EU, a timely issuance of long-stay visas/residence permits by Member States becomes a paramount pre-condition for legal mobility. In practice, granting long-stay visas/residence permits to third country nationals often entails lengthy procedures and third country nationals might face difficulties to access Member States consulates in partner countries as well as a lack of information on the relevant procedures. This in turn undermines the effectiveness of national efforts to attract and retain talent from third countries, the relevant Union framework and initiatives like Talent Partnerships, and the attractiveness and visibility at global level of Member States and the Union in general.

Fast, transparent, and predictable admission procedures are essential to attract international talent. Improvements in the organisation of such procedures, even if small, are therefore important.

As to the nature of the improvements, following informal consultations, Member States noted the following challenges regarding consular activities in this area: lack of adequate staff and training to process applications, including for applications stemming from highly qualified profiles and international talent, studying, researching and working in innovation-related fields, as well as a need for support in improving or developing digital tools, to increase the number of applications initiated and processed remotely, rather than in-person. Addressing these challenges would contribute to faster procedures.

When it comes to **innovation-intensive sectors**, labour and skills shortages have almost doubled since 2015 and are projected to persist, with more than half of new job openings by 2035 expected to require highly skilled profiles. This shows the economic rationale and overall pertinence in making additional efforts in this area.

While **Talent Partnerships** have become an increasingly well-established instrument, their full potential is not yet realised, and several implementation challenges remain, including the challenge of granting long-stay visas/residence permits in a timely manner to ensure labour mobility to the EU based on labour market's needs and involving EU employers to facilitate the matching between third country nationals and employers. Mobility opportunities under existing schemes often remain insufficiently scaled up and, in some cases, fragmented, while the development of new schemes requires stronger coordination and sustained political commitment. There is a momentum also for more Member States to join the initiative as part of the Team Europe approach, including by bringing existing bilateral cooperation with partner countries under a wider Talent Partnership umbrella.

Pre-departure trainings in third countries remain fragmented and disconnected from the other Talent Partnership initiatives at times. Integrating them in the initiative would enhance the effectiveness of the measures.

Addressing all the above elements will be essential to enhance the overall effectiveness and impact of Talent Partnerships which are also the objectives Lot 2 of this call on Talent Partnerships.

3.3. Scope and purpose of the specific action

3.3.1 Objectives of the specific action

The call aims to (i) support international talent attraction for innovation, in line with the Commission Recommendation on attracting talent for innovation and the EU Visa policy strategy, as well as the ‘Choose Europe for Science’ initiative and relevant Union-funded Programmes, such as Erasmus+ or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; and to (ii) support better talent attraction of third-country nationals, for Member States participating in Talent Partnerships with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The specific objectives of the call are:

- **Lot 1 – Talent for Innovation:** increasing consular capacity and setting up fast-track procedures for the processing of long-stay visas and/or residence permits of third-country nationals with strong innovation potential, including researchers, students and graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), highly qualified workers, startup founders, and innovative entrepreneurs.
- **Lot 2 – Support to Talent Partnerships:** supporting the operationalisation of Talent Partnerships by increasing Member States’ consular capacities for processing and issuing labour mobility visas in partner countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh), and/or developing, improving and implementing pre-departure measures for migrant workers under existing or future Talent Partnership labour mobility cooperation (projects, bilateral schemes, etc).

3.3.2 Indicative activities under the specific action

Member States can propose to implement one or more of the activities listed below to **reinforce consular offices**, as long as they are clearly linked with the overall objective in section 3.1.1. for Lot 1 and Lot 2:

- **Human resources:** provision of funding for additional staff to process long-stay visa and/or residence permit applications in consulates worldwide, including through the deployment of staff to perform targeted tasks to support the consular offices, particularly in locations receiving high volumes of applications and during seasonal peaks;
- **Capacity building and training:** Elaboration, preparation and delivery of trainings, including through the development of training and methodological material for consular staff on processing of long-stay visas and/or residence permits, development of online courses with a final assessment of acquired knowledge,
 - as well as **for Lot 1**, the development of specialised expertise on handling applications from highly qualified candidates and innovative profiles;
- **Digitalisation:** support the development and/or improvement of digitalised application procedures (including digital identification of applicants), as well as tools to improve the integration of information systems;
- **Innovative tools:** support the development and implementation of safe, transparent and ethical new technologies and artificial intelligence tools to support the processing of applications (e.g., large language models, chatbots, automatic data and document processing, decision support systems);

- **Equipment:** support the development and/or improvement of new equipment to facilitate and speed up the long-stay visa and/or residence permit processing of applications in relevant consulates, including tools useful in collecting biometric data;
- **Fraud detection and verification of documents:** setting up and strengthening tools for automated fraud detection to support the staff in assessing the authenticity of submitted documents;
- **Cooperation among authorities:** support the development of tools to enhance coordination and communication between consular services and other authorities involved, such as relevant national/regional authorities competent for visa processing/issuance and relevant third parties, in case of subcontracting to external actors to improve the timely processing of applications. Other stakeholders involved are partners in the area of employment,
 - As well as **for Lot 1:** higher education institutions, research organisations, innovation actors (e.g. certified incubators, accelerators, innovation agencies, technology parks);
- **Cooperation among consular offices/resource sharing:** e.g. the temporary deployment of consular staff to another Member State's consulate where their own country is not represented, supporting the effective implementation of existing cooperation agreements between Member States and improving coordination.

Only for Lot 2

Creating or further developing **pre-departure measures** linked to **identified mobilities**: including language training (online or in the third country); labour market integration support (information on sectors with shortages, identification of skills, career guidance, etc.); support for skills and diploma recognition; cultural and civic training (including gender equality aspects); specific target group support (people with specific healthcare needs, etc.); ⁽¹²⁾Pre-departure measures under this specific action will need to be complementary to the measures funded under the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) and other sources of funding.

Activities funded by Lot 2 will need to be brought under the relevant Talent Partnership umbrella.

Applications cannot include activities that are part of an independent or bilateral national scheme not realised in the framework of the Talent Partnerships unless Member States decide to bring these cooperations under the Talent Partnerships umbrella.

3.4. Expected results following the call

The call invites Member States to address the current organisational, logistical and other challenges and gaps that consular services and other authorities face and thus allows Member States to reinforce their impact in third countries, for instance by increasing the number of long-term visas and residence permits for global talents that are processed; by

⁽¹²⁾ Pre-departure measures should be linked with future proven mobility of the participants to the EU (e.g. issuing of long-stay visas/residence permits, participation in mobility schemes, proof of employment in a Member State, etc.)

reducing their processing time; by prioritising digitalisation of procedures over in-person ones; and by overall facilitating mobility to the EU.

Projects implemented under Lot 1 are expected to ensure measurable improvements in the activities of consular staff in the third countries concerned, such as an increase in the number of applications of third-country nationals studying, researching and working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, startup founders and innovative entrepreneurs.

Projects implemented under Lot 2 are expected to lead to a) a higher number of third-country nationals from Talent Partnership countries moving to the EU for the purpose of work and b) increases in the number of Member States participating in Talent Partnerships and c) improvements in the operationalisation of Talent Partnerships with either new or expanded activities or more efficient existing activities. Concrete results of the projects will include faster and more efficient processing of long-stay visa/residence permits; increased mobility flows through both existing and newly developed mobility schemes and improved training programmes and support mechanisms for realizing the Talent Partnership. The development and scaling up of pre-departure training programmes will contribute to more effective labour market integration and longer-term outcomes.

4. PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION

4.1. Admissibility and assessment aspects

This call targets:

- For **Lot 1**: all Member States.
- For **Lot 2**: Member States which are partners in one or more Talent Partnerships **or** intend to bring their bilateral actions under the relevant Talent Partnerships' umbrella.

Geographical eligibility in third countries:

Member States can reinforce their consular capacity and other activities:

- For Lot 1: world-wide
- For Lot 2: in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh.

Member States can submit **one application per lot**. Under Lot 2 one application can target one or more third countries of existing Talent Partnerships (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh).

To be considered admissible, an application must:

1. be submitted within the deadline (see below) to the AMIF specific actions functional mailbox HOME-AMIF-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu,
2. consist of the official AMIF/2026/SA/2.1.1. Application Form for Lot 1 or Lot 2 attached to this note together with its annexes, which must be **readable** and complete (all fields necessary for assessment are filled in),
3. identify a project beneficiary (an entity) that will be responsible for the implementation of the specific action in the Member State (in the lead for the action)

4. be **submitted by the Managing Authority** on behalf of the entity in the Member State responsible for the implementation of the specific action,
5. **For Lot 2** – include a **declaration of intent** of the Member State stating that the activities funded with the call will be brought under the Talent Partnership umbrella.

DG HOME will assess admissible proposals based on the following criteria:

A. Relevance (30 points – minimum score 20 points):

1. Clarity and consistency of the objectives and scope of the application against the objectives and expected results identified in this call, including the geographical scope (applicable for Lot 2)
2. Added value of the activities in the application in terms of size of the target population and the employers to benefit and the scope of the improvements proposed to the current service offer
3. Feasibility of the activities proposed in the application, considering factors such as existing national capabilities, the interest of employers and the operational potential for enhancing cooperation between the Member State and the third country concerned
4. Coherence of the application with national plans and efforts to improve capabilities of consular services and scale-up Talent Partnerships

B. Quality and content (30 points):

1. Maturity of the application; appropriateness and feasibility of the design and planned implementation, considering the envisaged activities; methodology (including operational and financial management); organisation of work and strategy for project management and monitoring, evaluation; measures undertaken or envisaged to mitigate the identified risks
2. Cost-effectiveness, intended as the comparison between the costs involved and the actual results (e.g. number of long-stay visas and residence permits for global talents that are processed, increase of visas processed over time, number of mobilities foreseen, etc)

C. Impact (40 points):

1. The impact or effect of the application in relation to the objective of the call measured via feasible and SMART ⁽¹³⁾ targets, building on the description of the baseline situation
2. The sustainability of the activities funded via this call after the end of this specific action
3. **For Lot 1**, DG HOME will assign additional points to applications that include actions specifically aimed at facilitating and accelerating long-stay visa and residence permit procedures for third-country students and researchers selected under Union-funded programmes, in particular Erasmus+ and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. In line with the ‘Choose Europe’ initiative, these actions should address recurring administrative and consular

⁽¹³⁾ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

delays that may prevent those beneficiaries from taking up their studies or research activities in a timely manner

4. **For Lot 2**, DG HOME will assign additional points to applications which aim to increase the number of mobilities to the EU and that can demonstrate commitment on the side of the employers

4.2. Monitoring and implementation of projects funded under this Specific action

If their proposal is selected, applicants are expected to participate in **monitoring and dissemination activities**, including:

- Collecting and sharing information and data on project activities (participation of project beneficiaries in questionnaires, information and awareness-raising campaigns, studies).
- Workshops where Member States' projects would be presented and discussed with the aim of disseminating best practices in the Member States, including for specific sectors mentioned by the call.
- For Lot 2 projects, participation in relevant events such as the Talent Partnership Roundtables, business fairs, and other activities organised with the partner countries.

Member States must ensure respect for the horizontal principles described in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, including respect for fundamental rights and compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Moreover, Member States must ensure that the envisaged actions are not affected by a reasoned opinion delivered by the Commission in respect of infringement proceedings under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) that put in doubt the legality and regularity of expenditure or the performance of the actions (Article 11(6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1147).

4.3. Application procedure

Deadline for the application: Member States are invited to submit their applications **by 31/10/2026** at the latest, using the official AMIF/2026/SA/2.1.1 Application Form for either Lot 1 or Lot 2 attached to this Note, together with its annexes. The Member State can submit an application in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, it is strongly advised to use English for the entire application.

In line with the Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001⁽¹⁴⁾, any document held by the Commission, including documents containing sensitive information, may be subject to a request for public access. Therefore, if relevant, the Managing Authorities should submit each application in a separate email. Likewise, clarifications where needed/required per application should be sent in separate emails.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents

To ensure equal and fair treatment of the applications and allow the Commission to allocate at the same date all the available funding, DG HOME will assess all applications simultaneously. Therefore, applications submitted after the deadline will not be admissible.

The Members of the Committee for the Home Affairs Funds will be informed at the latest 10 working days before the deadline for the submission of the applications in case the deadline for the submission of applications is extended.

E-mail address for the application: The applications should be submitted to the AMIF specific actions functional mailbox HOME-AMIF-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu,. Member States may submit additional documentation if necessary.

No modification to the application is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed. However, if there is a need to clarify certain aspects or to correct clerical mistakes, the Commission may contact the applicant/ lead Member State during the evaluation process. A reply should be provided by the Member State within 3 working days from the request date.

Any requests for clarification of the Member States on this call for the expression of interest may be sent by **30.09.2026** at the latest, to the same AMIF specific actions functional mailbox HOME-AMIF-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu.

Requests should only be sent **by the Managing authority**. The Managing Authority has an important role to explain to the potential beneficiaries the applicable rules and specificities of the programmes in general and of a specific action in particular and to help prepare applications for a specific action. The Managing Authority should be the contact point and take the responsibility to review questions from potential beneficiaries and raise questions to or request clarifications from the Commission services where necessary. As projects under specific actions are managed at national level, according to national rules, specific questions on eligibility of costs should be addressed first to the Managing Authority.

To respect the equal treatment and transparency, the replies to the written requests for clarification received will be sent to all Member States, via HOME-AFFAIRS-FUNDS-COMMITTEE@ec.europa.eu

DG HOME will inform Member States of the outcome of the assessment of the applications towards January 2027.

5. AMENDMENT OF THE AMIF PROGRAMMES AND ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURE

After having been informed of the outcome of the call for expression of interest, each successful Member State shall submit to the Commission a request to amend its AMIF programme via SFC. The amended programme should include a short description of the specific action, adjust the output and result indicators, and include the costs and codes linked to this specific action (respectively in the description and under tables 1, 2 and 3 of the relevant specific objective, and table 6 of the programme).

Regarding the eligibility of expenditure ⁽¹⁵⁾:

Expenditure for the Specific Action “Support to Member States consular services for Talent Innovation and Talent Partnerships” will be eligible from the date of submission by the Member State of its request for amendment of the AMIF programme. The amended AMIF programme must include all the relevant types of interventions listed in Annex VI table 1 of the AMIF Regulation in table(s) 2.1.3 of the concerned specific objective(s).

Yours faithfully,

Silvia MICHELINI

⁽¹⁵⁾ Art. 63(7) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.