

Selection of economic migrants for admission is one of the key choices in migration policy. Many OECD countries have found their selection systems to be less flexible and efficient than hoped for, or underperforming in attracting the right candidates. Looking for solutions, several have turned to the most recent innovation in this area, the Expression of Interest (Eoi) system. Eoi, first introduced in 2004 in New Zealand and later in Australia (2012) and Canada (2015), allows countries to create a pool of qualifying applicants and to filter and select them according to different parameters, to improve selectivity and responsiveness to economic and policy objectives.

*This edition of **Migration Policy Debates** reviews experience of Australia, Canada and New Zealand with the implementation of the Expression of Interest system. It identifies where the innovation of the Eoi model lies, and discusses how and under which circumstances Eoi can be adapted and adjusted to achieve the objectives set by economic migration policy in other OECD countries, especially in Europe.*

The Expression of Interest Model: What Lessons for Migration Management in the EU and elsewhere?

Key findings

- The Expression of Interest model (Eoi) is a tool to manage selection under specific immigration programmes. It can select migration candidates for multiple programmes, at different skill levels, for temporary or permanent stay.
- Eoi involves a two-step selection mechanism, with pre-selection into a pool and final selection from the pool. Selection at both steps uses a changing set of parameters, weights and ranking to respond to shifting economic and policy priorities. Since only selected candidates are “invited” to apply, Eoi reduces backlogs and allows flexible prioritisation of the best candidates in cases of oversupply.
- Eoi infrastructure requirements include a framework for standardized assessment of pool admission credentials (e.g., educational qualifications, language, and other human capital criteria), a governing body, and an automated system for pool management and issuance of invitations to apply.
- Eoi allows different stakeholders to play an active role in the selection process: employers, applicants and – where applicable – local authorities.
- Eoi works only when immigration authorities monitor results and adjust parameters accordingly.
- Eoi is versatile and applicable to very different national contexts. Current systems in New Zealand, Australia and Canada differ in complexity, in the number and types of supported programmes, the role of employers and local authorities in the selection process and the functioning of the pool.
- Eoi’s prioritization mechanism could replace lotteries and first-come, first-served selection in capped and overloaded immigration programmes – such as the H-1B visa in the United States.
- Eoi’s platform approach serving multiple stakeholders and programmes could be adapted in different forms at the EU level. A recent study for the European Commission tested various possible scenarios:
 - An EU-wide pool of pre-screened highly skilled candidates could serve existing national or EU schemes. This could improve efficiency in international recruitment across the EU by expanding the talent pool and reducing labour market information barriers.
 - A more advanced adaptation could involve sector-specific pooling and matching, with ranking and prioritization of candidates according to standard criteria, to create EU-wide pools of migrants with specific in-demand skills.
 - An EU wide supply-driven migration stream for very highly qualified candidates to be offered a residence permit or job search visa.
- The Eoi as implemented elsewhere could not be directly transposed to the EU. Nonetheless, specific elements of the Eoi (e.g. the pre-screening and pooling) could be adapted to the EU context and help improve the quality of international employment matching and facilitate access to foreign skills by the full range of European employers.
- Other OECD countries considering use of EOI as an advanced management system for merit-based migration must take into account necessary infrastructure investments as well as their capacity to adjust parameters quickly and frequently.

What is EOI and how does it work?

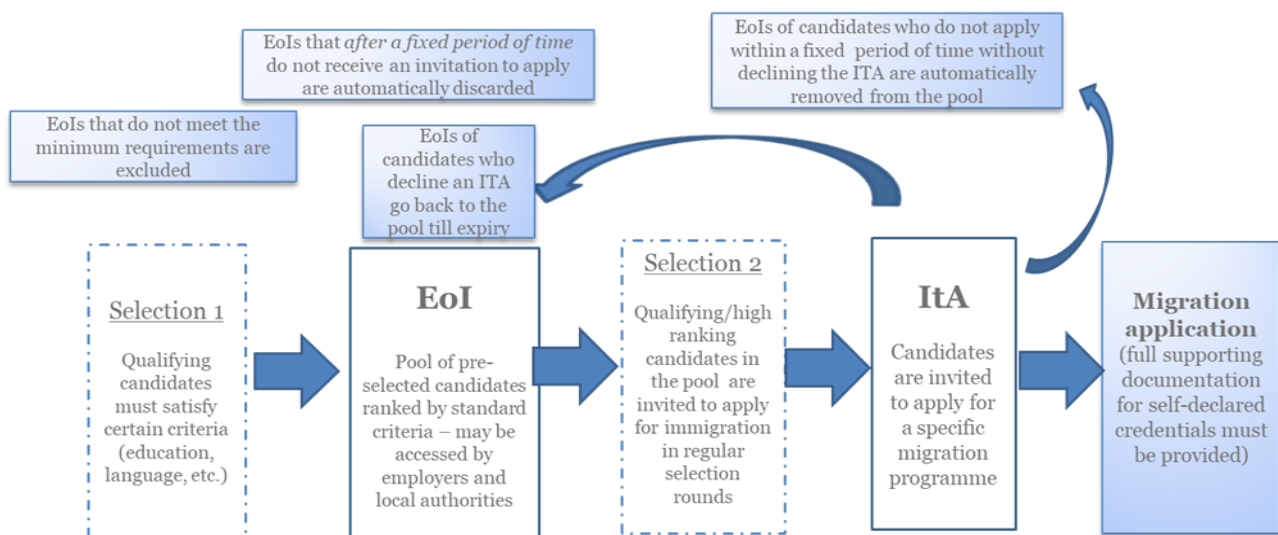
Eoi is a tool for migration management to support selection under specific migration programmes. It involves a two-step selection process (Figure 1). In the first step, potential migrants **express an interest** in migrating to the specific destination country by submitting their profile electronically. Those who meet minimum requirements are admitted into a **pool**, where they are ranked according to a point-based system (PBS), and from which, in a second instance, they may be selected and receive an **invitation to apply** (ITA) for one of the migration programmes served by the Eoi system.

The Eoi pool offers a basin of pre-selected candidates to migration authorities and, in some cases, employers who can tap into it to meet economic or demographic goals. It allows dynamic prioritisation of selection

among eligible candidates. Criteria to enter the pool and to be invited to apply can be adjusted easily in response to shifting economic landscapes or policy priorities. Migration authorities decide the frequency of draws from the pool and the number of ITAs issued at each round, based on targets and other policy objectives. The points threshold required to issue an ITA may vary as a function of the number of places available in each draw and the profile of the candidates in the pool at that exact moment. Among the pre-selected migration candidates, only the ‘best’ ones are invited to apply.

Candidates exit from the pool either because they receive an ITA, or because they have not been selected after a period of time. There is no guarantee that anyone in the pool will be invited to apply, nor are candidates bound to accept an ITA.

Figure 1: Generic model of Expression of Interest (EOI)



Source: OECD secretariat

Where, why and how Eoi has been implemented

Three countries have implemented an Expression of Interest system so far: New Zealand, Australia and Canada. These countries (often referred to collectively as *settlement countries*) share an active and long-term approach towards the management of economic migration, which is used to meet both economic and demographic goals. They have traditionally admitted economic migrants on the basis of human capital attributes (e.g. qualifications, work experience, language proficiency, age – all assessed through a PBS), and offer immediate permanent residence or clear pathways towards it. These countries also monitor the functioning

and outcomes of migration systems and adjust parameters accordingly.

Eoi is not a migration programme itself but a **tool to improve migration management** under existing programmes. All three countries introduced Eoi to improve application management. Prior to Eoi, administrations processed all applications meeting minimum criteria in the order in which they were received (“first come, first served”). Since candidates were eligible even without a job offer, and the countries were attractive, backlogs occurred (up to six years, in Canada), leaving many excellent candidates stuck in the queue, increasing the workload for authorities and causing frustration among all stakeholders. Employer

sponsors lamented long delays for recruits stuck in queues.

The systems in New Zealand, Australia and Canada differ in complexity and the number and types of supported programmes (Table 1). The three systems also differ as to the level of involvement of regional authorities and employers in the selection process.

The original and simplest application of EoI is in New Zealand, to manage the Skilled Migrant Category (its permanent economic migration programme), and one of its investor categories. Australia (*SkillSelect*) and Canada (*Express Entry*) use EoI to serve more migration streams, either on a compulsory or on an optional basis.

While New Zealand keeps EoIs in the pool for six months, *Express Entry* retains them for a year and *SkillSelect* for two years (Table 1). However, Canada and Australia allow candidates to upgrade their profiles while in the pool – for instance, if they get sponsorship, additional education, foreign qualifications recognition, family changes etc. Candidates have an incentive to upgrade their profiles even after admission to the pool, to increase their point scores and chances of selection through sponsorship. In practice, though, this depends on how competitive the second selection is compared to the first selection.

Involvement of regional authorities in EoI

In Australia and Canada, regional authorities can access the pool and nominate suitable candidates under regional migration streams.¹ In both countries, regional nomination guarantees pre-selected candidates in the pool that they will be invited to apply at the next ITA round, though the prioritization mechanisms vary.

In Canada, provincial nomination gives the greatest point premium (600 out of total 1200 points) in the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS). In practice, it guarantees that nominated candidates score higher than all other candidates in the pool and receive an invitation to apply under the Provincial Nominee Programme (PNP)

¹ In Australia, the Skilled Nominated Visa (subclass 190), the Business Talent Visa (subclass 132), and the Business Innovation and Investment Visa (subclass 188) require nomination from an Australian State or Territory government authority. The Skilled Regional Visa (subclass 489) Invited Pathway also requires regional nomination but sponsorship by a relative is also possible – yet only the first case guarantees an ITA. An EoI is required for admission

in the next ITA round. Since *Express Entry* is optional for PNPs, this prioritization mechanism is meant to encourage Provinces and Territories to use the EoI system for immigrant selection. Australia requires regional nomination for ITA issuance for a number of streams for which *SkillSelect* is compulsory. Moreover, for candidates for the General Skilled Migration visa categories, nomination by a State or Territory guarantees that they will be picked in the next invitation round.

Employers in EoI: matching and selection features

Express Entry also encourages employers' involvement in immigrant selection, through job-matching features embedded in, or linked to, the EoI pool.² Employers are able to access the EoI pool of labour migration candidates – or part of it – to look for candidates for vacancies. Australia initially granted some employers access to the *SkillSelect* pool, but ceased this access in April 2018. In Canada, the pool is not a matching platform. *Express Entry* pool members who lack an employment offer are encouraged to register in Canada's Job Bank, managed by the Canada Employment Insurance Commission. Job Bank has two separate sections, one for Canadian citizens and residents and one for *Express Entry* candidates. The Bank automatically matches *Express Entry* profiles with suitable job postings from Canadian employers, which have gone unfilled for 30 days (a virtual labour market test). Candidates may subscribe to alerts. Through Job Bank, Canadian employers may search *Express Entry* job-seeker profiles and sponsor suitable candidates. *Express Entry* initially granted 600 points for a qualifying job offer from a Canadian employer, guaranteeing or strongly prioritising ITA issuance over non-sponsored candidates. This was later lowered to 200 points for Senior Management jobs and 50 for other high skilled jobs.

Quebec also uses an Expression of Interest system to select applicants for its Regular Skilled Worker Program (QSWP), the Province's largest permanent immigration programme for economic migrants (Box 1).

under these schemes. In Canada, the Provincial Nominee Programme uses EoI on an optional basis.

² In New Zealand, employers do not have access to the pool. A separate job matching platform, *SkillFinder*, facilitates the matching between local labour demand and foreign supply.

Box 1: Quebec's expression of interest system

Under a 1991 Canada-Québec Accord, the Province of Quebec enjoys autonomy in the design of its own immigration policies. The introduction of the Eoi system in Quebec in September 2018 was meant primarily to better align intake of permanent economic immigrants with the needs of the local economy and to improve their integration outcomes. Interested candidates for the QSWP must file an electronic profile through the [ARRIMA](#) portal. Unlike all other existing Eoi systems, all Eoi candidates above the age of 18 are pre-selected. Eoi profiles are organised in two distinct pools: one for candidates residing in Quebec on temporary work or post-study permits and candidates residing outside Quebec who have a valid employment offer in the Province; and a one for foreign residents lacking a job offer. Both pools share the same ranking criteria based on human capital and skills transferability characteristics. Selection for an ITA is based on pool ranking. Quebec may decide to prioritize candidates in the first pool, notably those with a valid employer offer for a region outside a metropolitan area or for an in-demand occupation (trades). Pool profiles can be updated and expire after one year. Unlike other existing Eois, an ITA is not the last step of selection. An ITA allows candidates to apply for a Quebec Selection Certificate (CSQ). Those granted a CSQ still have to meet QSWP specific criteria and score a pass-mark on a PBS combining human capital and demand-driven criteria, along with experience in Quebec, to receive a permit. In February 2019 the Quebec government put forward a bill which, if approved, would increase the French language premium and other integration-relevant factors within the Eoi ranking system.

What lessons can be drawn for migration management?

Eoi cuts backlogs and allows prioritization in cases of oversupply

In New Zealand, Australia and Canada, Eoi's 'two-step by invitation' selection reduced backlogs and relieved administrative burden.

Processing times dropped, especially for the top-ranking candidates. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) processes 80% of complete *Express Entry* applications in six months – 50% faster than before the immediate introduction of the system, and a much larger improvement for specific programmes. Six months is also

the average processing time for applications under the Skilled Migrant Category in New Zealand. In Australia, successful independent candidates under *SkillSelect* received a visa in four to six months - as compared to up to three years previously.³ High-ranking applicants are now able to avoid a queue, although the lowest-ranked applicants may still spend months in the pool before selection – if they are selected at all.

Administrative burden has also dwindled. By changing the size and frequency of draws from the pool, immigration authorities can match the volume of applications examined to their processing capacity. In Canada, the *Express Entry* pool is now the main source of permanent residence applications for the economic immigration category. In 2017, 109 500 applications were received and 93 596 visas issued. Moreover, unselected Eoi profiles automatically exit the pool at expiration, alleviating the administrative burden of reviewing applications only to reject them.

Eoi allows flexibility in migration management

Eoi doesn't just improve caseload management. It allows immigration authorities to quickly adjust immigrant intake to changing policy priorities and economic conditions. Multiple system parameters can be tweaked - from pre-selection requirements used to admit candidates in the pool, to weighting and ranking criteria used to sort candidates out of the pool, to the frequency and size of draws, and the order of draws by programme served. Moreover, adjustments do not require legislative changes and can be implemented swiftly.

Overall, compared to a scheme-specific PBS, Eoi allows a greater range of parameters to be adapted. When Eoi serves multiple programmes, changing Eoi parameters changes the pool for more than one programme at the same time without requiring programme reforms. As with the PBS, however, for Eoi to perform as intended, government must constantly monitor system implementation and results and adjust parameters accordingly.

³ OECD (2019), Building an EU Talent Pool: a new approach to migration management for Europe

Table 1. A comparative overview of the EoI systems in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada

	Migration streams served	Electronic or Paper ?	Pre-selection criteria (pool admission)		Candidates may update their profile	Expiration of profile (months)	Selection criteria (ITA issuance)	Months to apply after ITA
New Zealand	<i>Skilled Migrant</i>	E/P	Meet requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> occupational profile; qualifications; age; Language 	and score 100 points on “hybrid” human capital and demand factors PBS	N	6	Score ≥ 160 points on the PBS (same PBS as for pre-selection)	4
	<i>Investment 2</i>	E/P		and score 100 points on a PBS	N	6		4
Australia	<i>General Skilled Migrant</i> (visa subclasses: 189; 190; 489P)	E	Meet requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> occupational profile; skills assessment; age; language 	and score 65 points on “classic” human capital factor PBS	Y	24	189/489: rank highest in pre-selection PBS 190/489: State or Territory nomination	2
	<i>Business Talent</i> (visa subclass 132)	E	Meet requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assets/capital; age; language 		Y	24	Sponsorship by State/Territory or Austrade	2
	<i>Business Innovation and Investment</i> (visa subclass 188P)	E	Meet requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assets / business history; age; language 	and score 65 on a PBS (points for human capital and business factors)	Y	24	Sponsorship by State / Territory or Austrade	2
Canada	<i>Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP); Canadian Experience Class (CEC); Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP)</i>	E	Meet requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eligibility for at least one stream* (includes Language and educational credentials assessment) <p>*CEC and FSTP = list of requirements; FSWP “hybrid” human capital and demand factor PBS</p>		Y	12	Rank highest (above floating cut-off score) on the common CRS Or nomination by Provinces or Territories	2

CRS: Comprehensive Ranking System: a complex PBS attributing points for human capital, demand driven and policy driven factors

So far, Canada is the country which has made the widest use of the adaptability features of its EoI, notably shifting the size and depth of draws to ensure that not only employer-sponsored candidates were invited to apply. Amendments to the CRS were also introduced to adjust pool admission to policy objectives – such as expanding the French-speaking community outside Quebec or facilitating family reunification.

Changes implemented in New Zealand and Australia have mostly involved tweaking the PBS for pre-selection

into the pool. In these countries, the programmes served by the EoI have also evolved.

EoI can serve multiple migration streams and selection purposes

As Australia and Canada show, the same EoI pool can serve more than one economic immigration programme using the same admission and/or ranking criteria. The EoI pool in these countries has multiple entry and exit points (i.e. candidates may be admitted/invited to apply who

meet different sets of characteristics), and immigration authorities can select candidates for different purposes using the same comprehensive selection grid. Some candidates would owe their ITA predominantly to employer or regional nomination, others solely to their human capital characteristics, others to a balanced combination of supply and demand-driven factors.

A single EoI pool can cater to labour market needs at various occupation levels. In Canada, for instance, *Express Entry* is used to admit candidates in managerial, professional, and technical and trade occupations. Korea also applies an EoI-type of system for the selection of low-skilled workers under its Employment Permit System (EPS) (see Box 2).

Box 2 Two-step selection for less skilled workers

Korea has the largest low-skilled temporary foreign worker programme in the OECD, the Employment Permit System, introduced in 2005. It requires candidates to pass a Korean language test. More than 1.7 million candidates have taken this test since introduction. In recent years, basic skills assessments have been added. Candidates meeting language requirements and skills thresholds are admitted to a pool. The Korean public employment service (PES) uses language scores and skills assessment as well as other characteristics to select three candidates from the pool for each position available, and propose them to employers. Candidates selected by employers are invited to accept the position and are offered support in obtaining a work visa, as well as ongoing support during their stay in Korea. Fewer than half of all candidates in the pool end up selected.

See OECD (2019a)

A single EoI pool can serve at the same time long term economic and demographic goals – both at the national and local level – and more immediate employer demand.

Parallel EoI pools may also be created, which share some common selection features and the same infrastructure but serve distinct economic purposes – e.g. labour migration versus business migration – as in the case of Australia and New Zealand.

In New Zealand, between 2012-16 EoI was also to a specific category of the Family Stream, the Parent Category, for non-dependent parents for whom

admission is discretionary and subject to a numerical limitation.

EoI may support international job matching

Where the EoI pool comprises, or is connected to, a searchable database of job profiles (and listings), the system also may facilitate international matching between migration candidates and local employers.⁴ On paper, the availability of a basin of pre-selected candidates, whose education and language credentials have been cleared upfront, and who meet minimum immigration requirements, offers cost savings and efficiencies to employers in their quest for suitable international matches to their vacancies, and an alternative to costly private immigration consultants and recruitment agencies. Moreover, the immigration pre-clearance and sponsorship prioritization elements of the EoI pool reassure employers that candidates should be able to go through the immigration process quickly. This is a unique advantage for employers compared to existing private employment intermediation tools.

So far, however, the international job matching features in existing EoI systems have been underutilized. Few Australian employers consulted *SkillSelect* profiles when this was possible. Canadian employers have also made little use of Job Bank to identify candidates in the *Express Entry* pool. There is a mismatch between the kind of vacancy in JobBank and the profiles of *Express Entry* candidates.⁵

EoI enhances selectivity in migration management, provided a competitive second step selection

The extent to which EoI improves the quality of admitted migrants depends on both the quality of the pool and the chances to receive an ITA while in the pool. When second step selection is more competitive than pool entrance screening, higher selectivity is guaranteed. This is the case in *Express Entry*.

While the criteria for admission in the *Express Entry* pool are roughly the same as they used to be under the different programmes served prior to its introduction, the dynamic CRS ranking system, a floating pass mark for second step selection, and the limited chances to obtain

⁴ For a discussion of the international matching features - and potential - of the EoI system see OECD (2019b)

⁵ From November 2016, non-sponsored candidates in *Express Entry* are no longer required to register in Job Bank, reducing the number of migrant profiles in Job Bank.

an ITA at each draw have led to a particularly competitive process. This in turn is thought to encourage candidates to validate high CRS point scores and upgrade their profiles while in the pool to improve their chances of getting selected. The downside of such a competitive mechanism, however, is that candidates who qualify for programmes with lower average score have struggled to get through the system. Dedicated ITA draws and, more recently, bigger and more frequent draws, rebalance selection and afford greater admission chances to these candidates.

In Australia and New Zealand, EoI has been applied in a less selective way than in Canada. Like *Express Entry*, *SkillSelect* automatically chooses the best-ranking candidates for skilled independent visas to receive an ITA first, as long as they have an occupation that is on the Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL). Yet, in 2012-14, all pool candidates who met the minimum PBS threshold had the same likelihood of receiving an ITA after five months (OECD 2018a). Top ranked applicants did receive an ITA more quickly than under the old system, but only by a few months. Since the minimum pass mark is enough to get an ITA eventually, candidates have little incentive to make extra efforts to validate higher points scores while in the pool.

In New Zealand too, most EoIs have so far had high chances to receive an ITA (OECD 2014). During the period 2004-18, 86% of EoI pool candidates received an ITA. This may also be a result of self-selection on the basis of their success chances. Recently, the pass-mark for receiving an ITA has been raised, suggesting a move towards a more competitive selection.

Does an EoI make a country more attractive?

Some OECD – and particularly European – countries struggling to attract highly skilled workers from abroad have looked at the EoI as a means to increase their chances in the global competition for talent. Yet nothing in the specific parameters of the EoI system guarantees such an outcome.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand were already among the most attractive destinations for international talent worldwide. In these countries, EoI was not meant to increase attractiveness for skilled workers from overseas, but rather to manage an oversupply of candidates. Populating the EoI pools has not been an issue of concern either.

Nonetheless, any system which improves the transparency and the efficiency of migration management helps overall attractiveness for highly sought-after candidates. Such migrants typically have multiple destination options, and high admission chances. All else being equal, a predictable and smooth selection process may be a strong determinant of their migration choices. Similarly, an efficient and time-bound migration management system may also encourage employers with hard-to-fill vacancies to address these through legal migration, while still protecting the local labour force from unfair competition.

In addition to transparency and efficiency, the distinctive pooling and matching features of the EoI model may reduce the opacity of labour market information and immigration procedures which have so far hampered international job matching through migration.

Moreover, as the experiences of Australia and Canada have shown, an EoI system allowing prioritization to pool candidates with regional sponsorship may enhance the relative attractiveness of peripheral destinations for international talent. Candidates who didn't consider such regions in the first place may be identified, nominated, sponsored and end up settling in these regions, at least temporarily.

Where does it make sense to adopt an EoI-type of system?

Existing EoI systems are compatible with multiple selection methods and migration categories, and can be used and adapted in different contexts. However, EoI requires substantial infrastructure and administrative capacity, so should only be considered where benefits outweigh costs.

To manage admission under capped or overloaded immigration programmes

Two-step selection by invitation has proven effective for managing migrant admissions in contexts of oversupply and where the “first-come, first-served” rule yields suboptimal selection. EoI could improve any immigrant selection system where candidate supply exceeds planned intake and/or administrative capacity.

Under some programmes in Italy (work permit quota) and the United States (capped H-1B and H-2B), places available have often been exhausted in a matter of days

or hours, without ranking candidates.⁶ Long processing times have also resulted. This has sparked frustration among migration candidates and employer sponsors, generated mistrust in the legal migration system and even, in some cases, fostered illegal employment. When quotas are set below demand, a predictable prioritization mechanism avoids lotteries and other random selection tools.

While EoI has been primarily used for *skilled* economic migration programmes, the system is potentially applicable to management of less skilled economic migration categories and non-economic migration. One example is discretionary programmes for extended family, such as non-dependent parents, siblings and grandparents whose admission may be allowed in some countries.⁷

To encourage employer involvement in immigration management

Reducing uncertainty and wait time for employer-sponsored migrants facilitates employers' *recourse to* the legal economic migration system in response to labour shortages. So does offering bonus points or prioritization for qualifying employer sponsorship. EoI can help, provided that the programmes served also take in due account employer needs.⁸

More specifically, when information barriers prevent employers from considering recruitment of foreign workers, EoI pre-screening, pooling and matching features improve the quality of selected immigration candidates and the likelihood of optimal international employment matching.⁹

Going a step further, when employer sponsorship guarantees selection, employer involvement is almost tantamount to immigration management, if they can be convinced to search the pool.

To increase the appeal of less popular immigration programmes or local areas

EoI pool ranking and sorting systems can direct migration candidates to certain immigration programmes or local areas or regions in which they may not be interested or of which they are not aware.

Notably, in Canada, IRCC chooses the specific visa category for which an ITA is issued to EoI-pool candidates who meet the admission requirements for more than one programme. Selection favours the visa category for which the applicant requirements are the simplest and which is most easily processed. Candidates decide whether to accept the specific visa category for which they received an ITA.

EoI can facilitate redistribution of immigrants across a country's territory, and particularly, towards rural or remote areas struggling to attract workers or facing depopulation. The EoI pool offers regional authorities a larger basin of potential immigration candidates than the one composed solely of migrants who expressed interest in moving to a given regional area. Bonus points or prioritisation for regional government or employer nomination might also encourage candidates to seek sponsors there.

Does it make sense to adopt an EU-wide EoI system?

Since 2015, the European Commission has explored the potential for adapting elements of the existing EoI model to the European context, in a quest to improve the EU's legal migration framework (EC 2015).

The EoI as implemented elsewhere could not be directly transposed to the EU. In the EU, migration and employment management systems are run in very different ways across EU countries. Issuance of residence permits is the competence of Member States, which also have the prerogative to define the number of labour migrants to admit to their respective labour markets.¹⁰ National labour markets have different needs, structures and regulations, which translate into heterogeneous

⁶ In the United States, for instance, in 2017, 199 000 H-1B visa petitions were filed, for 85 000 places available.

⁷ Different categories of family migration and the rules applying to them covered in OECD (2017).

⁸ In Canada, bonus points for a qualifying job offer were conditional on a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), which kept many employers from sponsoring pre-selected foreign workers for

permanent immigration. The 2016 EoI reform introduced wide LMIA exemptions. See OECD (2019b)

⁹ OECD (2019b), chapter 1.

¹⁰ EoI in other countries leads to immediate permanent residence, which is almost unknown in EU Member State legislation and not contemplated in the EU legal migration framework.

labour migration policies. The EU is far away from having a harmonized information system on job vacancies.

Nonetheless, specific elements of the EoI could be adapted to the EU context. EU-wide adaptation of the pre-screening, pooling and matching elements of the EoI could improve the performance of the European labour migration system, without necessarily requiring substantive changes to the legislative framework.

The main reasons for considering adoption of an EU-wide EoI differ from the goals pursued by the countries that have so far implemented the system. For Europe, an EoI could primarily be used to improve the quality of international employment matching and ensure access to skills by the full range of European employers, attracting more talent – including in less competitive regions or countries.

To achieve these goals, there are several different scenarios for adopting EoI elements that have been tested in a recent study for the European Commission (OECD 2019b):

- The most basic adaptation would consist in the creation of an EU-wide pool of highly skilled migration candidates, to serve existing skilled labour migration schemes. Admission to the pool would be conditional on minimum qualification and language credentials and migration requirements, corresponding to these schemes. An employment-matching tool (either embedded in or linked to the pool) would facilitate sponsorship of pre-selected migration candidates by employers across the EU. Even in the absence of vacancy sharing, a pool might draw interest: candidates receiving a job offer would apply under the qualifying national legal migration scheme. This adaptation could reduce information barriers regarding the quality of employment credentials held by aspiring migrants, available vacancies, immigration requirements and procedures.
- A more ambitious scenario would create targeted EU-wide pools for specific sectors suffering severe shortages of local workers and/or with uniform credential requirements across the EU. Sector pools would allow ranking candidates against uniform criteria. Pooling demand would also be possible. Sectors where employment credentials are largely

international and industry-driven, such as the IT sector, would lend themselves to experimentation. Alternatively, in the context of migration partnerships¹¹, candidates could be trained from or for the pool, based on standard curricula.

- The third and most complete use of EoI at the EU level would require political consensus among EU Member States and legislative changes, as well as agreement on a broad set of complex system parameters, which are unlikely to be achieved in the near future. Two variants could be imagined:

First, applicants pre-qualifying for a new EU-wide permit, according to common admission criteria, would be admitted to an EU-wide pool. Selected applicants would enjoy free mobility across Member States. The existing EU Blue Card could be reformed to serve such a channel.

Second, an EU-wide supply-driven job-search stream could be created for very highly qualified candidates who would go through an EoI system based on human capital criteria. A fixed number of top ranked candidates in the pool would be periodically invited to apply for a visa or permit valid in all EU countries allowing unrestricted movement within the EU to seek a job along with the ability to take up qualifying employment in any Member State without returning to the home country. An ITA certificate issued by the central EU-level body managing the pool would provide grounds for the issuance of a permit or visa in any Member State. This would help attract candidates to the EU-wide EoI system while also enhancing intra-EU mobility of job seekers.

Adapting the EoI system at the EU level would have to overcome a number of serious barriers, and in the most advanced variant not even be possible under the current Treaties. Even the most basic adaptation requires complex and costly infrastructure. This would include an overall governing body responsible for design and oversight; separate bodies tasked with language and education pre-screening; employer accreditation; and a managing secretariat. Existing EU-wide bodies could perform some of these functions through a broader mandate, although they would have to win the trust and interest of employers and migration candidates.

¹¹ See OECD (2018b)

Is Eol applicable to the United States or elsewhere?

Eol has been used to reduce backlogs and shift from “first-come, first-served” systems to more selective prioritisation, introducing flexibility in selection for oversubscribed programmes. The United States, for example, has a number of oversubscribed temporary work visa programmes. This is the case notably of the H-1B Specialty Occupation visa which is processed through a lottery, once a year, even though applicants have very different characteristics and their jobs are in many different sectors, regions and at wide-ranging salary levels.

In this context, an Eol system could allow for rapid and continuous processing of applicants judged to be highest priority. However, Eol requires a solid management infrastructure, which is currently underdeveloped in many OECD countries outside settlement countries. More importantly, Eol systems work best when there is flexibility to change parameters in response to new circumstances. Most criteria for admission in the US are fixed in legislation, so establishing a PBS with the possibility for executive discretion in adjusting points, parameters and even frequency of ITAs would require a sea change in legislative approach.

Conclusion

The experience of countries that have adopted it, suggests that Eol can be a flexible, efficient and versatile tool to manage migration. In light of the possibility to customize Eol parameters to serve a variety of migration programmes, it could be adapted in different contexts.

Eol is presented as the most modern migration policy tool. While it cannot be copied in every country, many of the key principles which underlie the functioning of Eol systems – two-step selection case management, multiple stakeholders and programmes, pre-certification for a pool- can be picked up by policymaking for skilled migration in widely different countries and contexts.

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🔗 Useful links

www.oecd.org/migration

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This brief is based on the project "[A Comparative Report on labour migration policies and the role of 'Expression of Interest' models and matching mechanisms](#)", with the support of the European Commission – Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the EU.