

Outcomes and conclusions of the seminar “Attracting and Retaining Talent for AI in Europe”

24 January 2024, Brussels

As Europe faces significant skills shortages in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the importance of attracting and retaining talent has gained prominence at both national and EU levels. Against the backdrop of the need to secure AI expertise in Europe and in line with the European Year of Skills ([Link](#)), the seminar served as a platform for presentations and in-depth discussions on the challenges and opportunities surrounding the human side of AI. The first session of the seminar presented the Zuse Schools of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence ([link](#)) and the Postdoctoral Networking Tour in AI ([link](#)) implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). This was followed by the second session, which focused on national and European case studies. In this context, the audience learned about Sweden’s International Talent Matchmaking tool implemented by Linköping Science Park ([link](#)), the EU Talent Pool recently proposed by the European Commission ([link](#)), the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Artificial Intelligence (EMAI, [link](#)) as well as the AI activities of the EuroTech Universities Alliance ([link](#)). The seminar ended with a wrap-up session, which recalled the main findings.

A key outcome of the conference was that it is crucial to put Europe on the map for international researchers in the field of AI, by

- (i) developing attractive and sufficiently funded higher education and research schemes as well as ambitious and competitive AI projects,
- (ii) creating robust and integrated networks and applying matchmaking mechanisms to bring people and institutions together in a targeted way,
- (iii) promoting the added value of Europe as a research and career destination in the field of AI and enhancing the visibility of research and training opportunities in Europe.

(i) The importance of targeted funding opportunities e.g. through scholarships, mobility funds and/or study waivers in specific AI-related research fields can serve as an incentive for international talent, including for candidates who are missing similar opportunities in their home countries or regions. Programmes offered at national level i.e. the DAAD’s Zuse Schools in Germany as well as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme at European level, help to attract international talent with a strong alignment to their specific research interests. When developing new schemes or improving existing ones, it is recommended to streamline application and administrative procedures to ensure a seamless entry into and a smooth participation in the programme. Flexibility in programme design and curriculum development is needed to continuously respond to and align with the swift pace of technological advancements. A fast-track approach for an integrated Master/PhD programme was considered essential for international competitiveness. Aspects that go beyond funding also determine the attractiveness of Europe as a study, research and/or work destination, e.g. by facilitating visa procedures and fostering a welcome culture.

When developing new or advancing existing approaches and initiatives, it is deemed beneficial to leverage the experiences and solutions deriving from existing relevant schemes as well as to benchmark European initiatives globally, to ensure that the European offers are sufficiently competitive. Existing programmes such as the DAAD's Konrad Zuse Schools of Excellence and its Postdoctoral Networking Tour in AI can be considered as exemplary models at national level that – together with other national and EU initiatives and projects e.g. under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and the Erasmus Mundus joint master programmes – serve for an exchange of good practices at international level, feeding into a consolidated European approach.

(ii) It was deemed essential to assume a holistic approach and embrace the entire talent cycle, from attraction and training to retention, while capitalising on the networking capacities of the whole ecosystem comprising Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), research institutions, and industry. Industrial partners should be actively involved in higher education programmes e.g. through integral research and integrated industry exposure, to meet industry needs and to increase international talent's awareness about career opportunities after graduation. Matchmaking and thematic alignment can bring together individuals, institutions and/or companies in a targeted way, ideally on a one-by-one basis. Good practice examples include DAAD's Postdoctoral Networking Tour in AI, which combines virtual networking weeks with face-to-face meetings and funded in-person weeks. The use of matchmaking tools can be beneficial as well, especially when synergies are created between the different levels (regional, national, EU). The EU Talent Pool proposed by the European Commission in November 2023 for example, could, if approved by the member states, well-implemented and complementary to already existing or emerging services at national level, facilitate access to job opportunities and enhance network visibility.

(iii) For a sound communication strategy, leveraging European networks such as the European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems (ELLIS, [link](#)) was discussed as an already existing and effective tool to promote career opportunities at international level. When promoting the added value of Europe as a place to study, research and work in the field of AI, e.g. by emphasising the importance of social and democratic values and high ethical research standards, local and European talent should not be left out as the most critical target group. Awareness about appealing opportunities and long-term perspectives are indispensable for the attraction and retention of talent, and can help mitigating the risk of losing emerging and future experts from Europe.

The seminar served as a catalyst for continued exchange and collaboration between stakeholders to meet the evolving skills demands in the AI landscape in Europe. The insights and recommendations gained can feed into further discussions about the development of international talent acquisition and retention strategies and the initiation or advancement of higher education funding and mobility schemes in the field of AI in Europe.