

# Unlocking Cruise Jobs for Central American Workers

**SUMMARY:** Labor Mobility Partnerships (LaMP) envisions a pilot project to catalyze a new labor mobility pathway for the cruise industry in Central America. This proof-of-concept project will eliminate immediate constraints to training and labor mobility for Central American cruise job candidates. Project components include an industry designed training program, safe and efficient job placement activities, and a solution for long-term financing of the total training and certification costs required for working aboard cruise ships. In doing so, this pilot can demonstrate the viability of a Central American program to meet cruise labor needs and showcase the economic potential that cruise jobs offer to workers from this region. The project will lay the groundwork for placing tens of thousands of cruise workers from Central America in years to follow.

Innovations for Labor Mobility Series N° 1

## I. CONTEXT & MOTIVATION

In the Central American countries of Guatemala and El Salvador, 30% to 50% of people live in poverty. These individuals desperately need better job opportunities, and often face the impossible choice of economic destitution or irregular migration. The cruise industry may offer an alternative path. Cruise lines are still looking to ramp-up operations following the COVID-19 operational halt, with industry insiders citing a need to hire 150,000 workers globally. Guatemala and El Salvador are well positioned – by proximity and capabilities – to competitively deliver workers to maritime industries, especially to U.S. cruise companies via C1/D “crew” visas. These visas represent a safe and legal occupational mobility channel that can alleviate pressures for irregular migration. Central American countries are working to build their capacity to help as many workers as possible take advantage of cruise opportunities. However, preparing thousands of workers to meet the industry’s specific skills requirements is currently a challenge. Solving this issue would provide workers with access to jobs that pay multiples of current salaries in Northern Central America.

## II. CHALLENGE & OPPORTUNITY

To reach the magnitude of job openings in the cruise industry, Central America requires a scaled market solution to train and prepare a qualified workforce. Existing

government training programs are subsidized and generally do not have the capacity to achieve large scale. Yet without subsidies, preparation for a cruise industry job involves high training costs for individuals. Many workers do not have the means to afford the full up-front costs. Even for workers who can afford cruise job training, lack of information about the return on investment has muted worker interest. Without a clear demonstration that cruise trainings result in successful job outcomes, there is little incentive to invest.

If Central America is to open the door to transformative cruise job opportunities for tens of thousands of vulnerable people, it requires a sustainable, scalable market solution for proper skills and English language training that reliably results in successful placement and retention of workers in cruise jobs.

## III. PROPOSED SOLUTION

*A long-term, large-scale training-to-cruise jobs pathway for Central American workers.*

This program would accelerate the emergence of sustainable and scalable private sector solutions that can capture the potential of maritime mobility to offer a path to economic stability for workers in Central America.

The program would consist of three components:

**1. Quality cruise job readiness training.** Adequate training and certification can provide access to jobs that generate better income for workers and satisfy labor needs of the cruise industry.

Training developed by providers with close links to the cruise industry can ensure higher placement rates for graduates. Training content may include aspects such as:

- Preparation for life on board
- Fundamental English language and cruise terminology
- Technical skills & practical experience for cruise jobs

Providers such as Aquila and Work Without Borders are two examples of promising partners in the region.

**2. Localization of training knowledge.** The exchange of knowledge and know-how between cruise industry experts and local training organizations can build local capacity and support program scalability. Exchange occurs through collaborations where cruise industry experts provide expertise and links to jobs, and local institutions provide training facilities and operational support. It can also occur through more structured avenues such as train-the-trainer models.

**Sustainable financing solution for students.** A student-friendly mechanism to finance up-front training costs will help students invest in their economic futures, guard against loan sharks and exploitative recruiters, and ensure a sustainable financing model for the training program in the long run.

To jump-start this program, proof-of-concept is required to attract the attention of major cruise lines and to give job seekers confidence that their investment (of time and resources) will result in a cruise job.

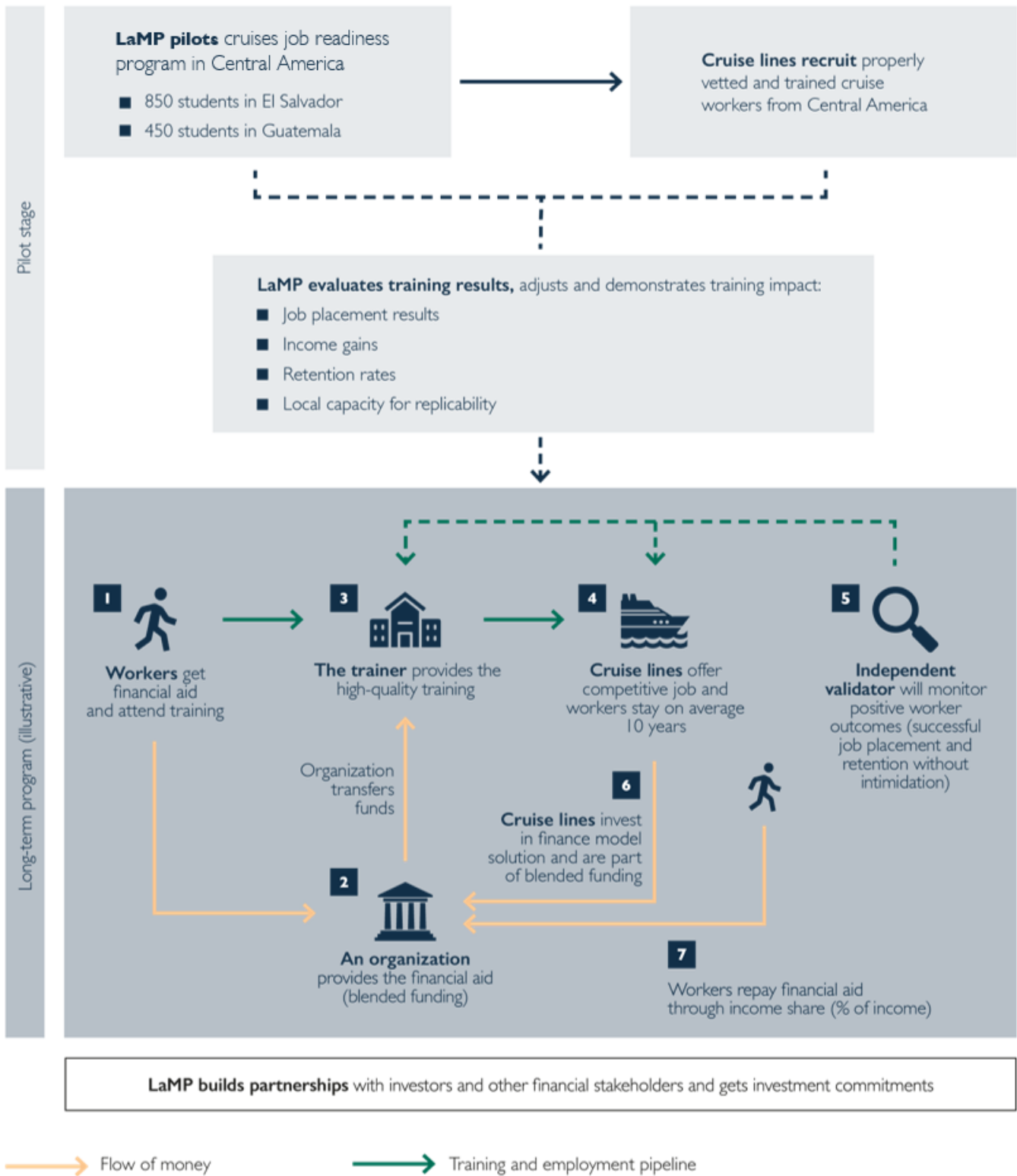
#### IV. PATH FORWARD

A job readiness training and job placement program that (1) demonstrates a clear value proposition to workers and employers, and (2) supports the emergence of financing mechanisms to address financial constraints and expand worker access.

LaMP has been awarded a grant to develop a proof-of-concept pilot during 2024 and 2025. The objective of this pilot is to place 100 qualified Guatemalans into jobs within the cruise industry and lay the groundwork for a large-scale, long-term pathway.

Stay tuned on the development of this pilot project and check out our website for progress and updates.

Illustrative visual of long-term cruise lines mobility pathway and intermediate pilot program



\*This project idea was identified as part of the pipeline of high-potential projects for new opportunities of labor mobility in IberoAmerica, which has received support from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. Design and pilot implementation will have the support from different donors.