

Regional Programme on Migration

FACT SHEET

In recent years, 2.6 to 2.9 million workers in Asia-Pacific have left their homes each year to work abroad. The majority of these workers are unskilled, many are irregular migrants, and an increasing number are women. The consequences of these trends on the economies of the concerned countries are huge. Uneven development of countries in the region, differences in age structures, sharply declining cost of travel, and changing aspirations brought about by higher incomes and greater education, among others, are stimulating greater mobility.

The ILO's Constitution gives the organization the mandate to develop norms on the treatment of workers employed in a country other than their own. In carrying out this mandate it has developed standards specific to migrant workers (Conventions 97 and 143) and provides technical assistance to member-states in enhancing their capacities to manage the cross-border movement of workers and address the worst outcomes of human trafficking, including adult forced labour and the worst forms of child labour. The ILO's most recent initiative is the development of a rights-based Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration – a non-binding instrument which comprises a set of principles and best practices that have been formally vetted by ILO's constituents.

International migration policy is still largely set by destination countries, which decide who to admit and for what purposes. But many countries have found that it is better to manage migration in cooperation with countries of origin, through various types of international agreements. The most comprehensive international agreement is the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration. This highlights principles and guidelines to help countries develop more effective labour migration policies.

The ILO is unique in that it is a tripartite organization, representing governments, workers and employers' organizations. It can thus help build consensus among the social partners in countries of origin and destination to develop the policies and programmes that meet the demands of the economy while minimizing the negative consequences on the conditions of employment of native workers. In this way, countries can try to ensure that migrant workers do not displace national workers and are not subjected to unfair treatment or abuse.

In Asia-Pacific the ILO is delivering its technical cooperation programme on migration in cooperation with organizations like ASEAN, ADB, IOM UNESCAP and UNDP, and with many important institutions like ISEAS in Singapore, Singapore Management University, Centre for Development Studies in Kerala, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Scalabrini Migration Centre, Centre for Population Studies in Mahidol University, and the Centre for Study of Global Movements in Monash University, among others. An ILO website offers analysis on international migration in the region by specialists in a variety of policy issues. This website will soon launch a regional data base on migration. Technical assistance to countries has covered a variety of issues, from establishing systems for recognizing skills to promoting agreements to enable migrants to obtain old-age benefits under social security.

The ILO has organized a number of roundtables at which countries of origin and destination have discussed issues of common interest. It has done so in cooperation with other regional institutions to encourage them to accept and integrate ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration into their own programmes. The ILO has an agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council to enhance existing cooperation and consultation between the two organizations on the best ways to develop labour rights and implement labour standards for foreign workers. The ILO recently assisted the ASEAN Secretariat in establishing a regular 'ASEAN Forum on Labour Migration'. The Forum is envisaged to be an annual activity under the auspices of the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Conference.



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The ILO has assisted with the international networking of trade unions in the receiving countries and their sending countries. It has, for example, helped link Malaysia's MTUC with unions in Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Viet Nam, and the Philippines; and the Korean trade unions with those in Viet Nam, the Philippines and Thailand. The ILO also helps unions and other organizations establish national mechanisms for social dialogue on migration. In addition, the ILO facilitates the participation of social partners in international forums and prepares relevant educational materials.

The ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific has launched a regional programme to promote cooperation among member states in addressing the challenges of migration. The European Commission is supporting this effort with financial contribution to a 3-year project based in Bangkok. The project is being implemented in partnership with UNIFEM. The Programme focuses in particular on:

In countries of employment:

- Sharing knowledge about managing labour shortages and admission of foreign labour;
- Examining employment and working conditions in economic sectors known to harbour large numbers of irregular migrant workers, including those in the worst forms of child labour and adult forced labour;
- Promoting 'best' practices to ensure decent work and equal treatment of migrant workers;
- Encouraging social dialogue on migration and integration issues;
- Sharing best-practice approaches to undocumented migrant workers; and
- Promoting greater coverage of migrant workers under labour laws and social security systems.

In countries of origin:

- Promoting sustainable policies and programmes on foreign employment, especially adjustments to greater mobility of workers;
- Documenting and exchanging information on effective policy tools and strategies for protecting migrant workers and maximizing gains from migration;
- Promoting codes of best practice in recruitment; and
- Strengthening capacities of social partners for dialogue on migration issues.

WHAT IS NEEDED

Assistance sought relates to:

- Helping communities of origin design schemes for making use of skills acquired abroad and investing remittances;
- Establishing a network of national and regional centres which can work together to address a variety of issues on labour migration;
- Strengthening capacities of national authorities in Pacific island countries to plan, manage, and monitor the temporary migration for employment of their workers;
- Preparatory activities involving Australian universities and scholars in developing baseline information to ensure appropriate interventions and better monitoring of project impact throughout project life.

For more information, please visit:
<http://www.ilobkk-migration.org/>

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