



International
Labour
Organization

FACTS ON *Labour Migration*

Millions of people worldwide are leaving their home countries every year in search of work. But many are not looking simply for better work. Propelled by poverty and insecurity, they are looking for any work.

Migration of labour is a key feature of globalization, and it makes a significant impact on the world economy. Every year, migrant workers send home to developing countries large volumes of remittances, – estimated at US\$160 billion or US\$250 billion with informal remittances in 2005 – to support their families and communities, while at the same time contributing to the economic growth and prosperity in host countries. Today's migrants face many challenges – including poor conditions of work and discrimination.

Migrant workers are increasingly in demand, not only for high-skilled information technology and professional jobs, but also for many of the low-paid, less skilled jobs in agriculture, cleaning and maintenance, construction, domestic service, and health care. Migrants are often relegated to the “three D” – dirty, dangerous, and degrading – jobs that national workers reject or are not available for. Many migrants work in precarious and unprotected conditions in the growing informal economy.

There is global consensus now on contributions of labour migration to growth and development in both source and destination countries. It contributes to home country development through worker remittances, the transfer of capital and skills through returning migration and transfers of skills and technology and investments by transnational communities abroad. Yet the loss of crucial skills (brain drain) from developing countries is a cause for concern.

Global labour mobility ensures efficient and optimal utilization of labour. But barriers are being erected to mobility between potential migrants and labour market demand for foreign labour in host countries. This leads to the unfortunate result of making smuggling and trafficking of human beings a highly profitable enterprise at the expense of gross violations of basic human and labour rights.

Labour migration policies that are not founded on a respect for human and labour rights can exact high costs on individual migrants and their home societies. There is evidence that 10-15 per cent of migration today involves migration under irregular situations – entering or working in countries without authorization. Irregular migration leads to high levels of exploitation, forced labour, and abuse of human rights.

The global challenge today is to formulate policies and mechanisms to regulate and manage labour migration and ensure that it contributes positively to development of both home and host societies and to the well-being of migrants themselves.

Key Statistics

- ◆ In 2005 there were 191 million migrants (persons living outside their country of origin or citizenship) which includes those migrating for employment, their dependants and refugees and asylum seekers.
- ◆ ILO estimated that 86 million of the 175 international migrants in the year 2000 were economically active – migrant workers, distributed as follows:
 - Africa: 7.1 million
 - Asia, including Middle East: 25 million
 - Europe, including Russia: 28.5 million
 - Latin America and the Caribbean: 2.5 million
 - North America: 20.5 million
 - Oceania: 2.9 million
- ◆ Women now constitute 49 per cent of migrants world-wide and more than 50 per cent in Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania.
- ◆ The US\$250 billion sent home by migrant workers is a larger sum than all official development assistance, and foreign direct investment.
- ◆ Developing countries lose 10 to 30 per cent of skilled workers and professionals through “brain drain.” LDCs are especially affected.
- ◆ There is a high level of labour market discrimination against migrant workers in industrialized countries. ILO studies showed that more than one in every three qualified immigrant applicants were unfairly excluded in job selection procedures.

The Decent Work Agenda

Decent Work is a development strategy that acknowledges the central role of work in people's lives: work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom to express concerns, opportunity to organize and participate in decision-making, and equal opportunity and treatment for all women and men. Decent work belongs at the heart of global, national and local strategies for economic and social progress. It is central to efforts to reduce poverty, and is a means for achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

Putting the Decent Work Agenda into practice is achieved through the implementation of its four strategic objectives with gender equality as a cross-cutting objective:

Creating Jobs – an economy that generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, job creation and sustainable livelihoods;

Guaranteeing rights at work – obtain recognition and respect for the rights of workers. All workers, and in particular disadvantaged or poor workers need representation, participation, and good laws that are enforced and work for, not against, their interests;

Providing basic social protection – marginalization and poverty mean that those most in need do not have minimum protection against low or declining standards of living; and

Promoting dialogue and conflict resolution – people in poverty understand the need to negotiate and know dialogue is the way to solve problems peacefully. Social dialogue, involving strong and independent worker's and employers' organizations, is central to increasing productivity and avoiding disputes at work, and to building cohesive societies.

The Role of the ILO

The protection of migrant workers and improvement of their working conditions have been concerns of the ILO since its establishment in 1919. The emergence of international labour migration as an important global phenomenon has called for an intensified ILO role in this area.

The 92nd session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2004 adopted by consensus a “Resolution and Conclusions concerning a fair deal for migrant workers in a global economy”. This decision noted that: “The ILO’s mandate in the world of work as well as its competencies and unique tripartite structure entrust it with special responsibilities regarding migrant workers. Decent work is at the heart of this. The ILO can play a central role in promoting policies to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of work-based migration.”

The ILC called on the Office and its constituents to carry out a Plan of Action on migrant workers; this plan includes strengthening ILO activity in these fields:

- ◆ Development of a non-binding multilateral framework for a rights-based approach to labour migration, taking account of labour market needs and sovereignty of States;
- ◆ Wider application of international labour standards and other relevant instruments;
- ◆ Support for implementation of the ILO Global Employment Agenda at the national level;
- ◆ Upholding social protection for migrant workers;
- ◆ Providing capacity-building, awareness-raising and technical assistance worldwide;
- ◆ Strengthening social dialogue;
- ◆ Improving the information and knowledge base on global trends in labour migration;
- ◆ Participation in relevant international initiatives on migration.

The Plan of Action is now being implemented. The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration will be promoted in all ILO labour migration activities.

For more information: **www.ilo.org/migrant**

Relevant Conventions

- ILO Convention No. 97 on Migration for Employment, 1949
- ILO Convention No. 143 on Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions), 1975
- 1990 International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

All International Labour Standards apply to all migrant workers regardless of status, except where explicitly exempted in a few ILO Conventions.

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