



International
Labour
Organization



Labour Migration and Development

Setting a course for the future



Decent work for migrant workers...

Demographic trends, economic inequalities and the quest for decent work, combined with vulnerability to political and environmental crises, will continue to drive labour migration for decades to come. Correspondingly, labour migration governance that focuses on the protection of men and women migrant workers, while addressing labour market needs, will become increasingly important to achieving equitable, sustainable, and inclusive development. At the United Nations General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development on 3-4 October 2013, the ILO is seeking to upgrade the work of the multilateral system for a framework that is truly respectful of principles and rights at work.

The ILO partnership



The ILO works with governments, employers' and workers' organizations to improve labour migration policies that can achieve more equitable development. These include many activities at the country, regional and global level, ranging from reducing discrimination in access to employment and promoting labour market integration through innovative public education campaigns; exploring how using remittances to form cooperatives can help create new enterprises; to encouraging recruitment practices that are in line with international standards and respect migrants' human and labour rights.

...while addressing labour market needs



International migration is growing in volume and complexity. The ILO estimates that more than 50 per cent of the 232 million international migrants today are economically active—together with their families, migrant workers comprise more than 90 percent of this total. Nearly half are women who increasingly migrate for work, and one in eight are youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Even those fleeing persecution, armed conflict and environmental disasters may finally end up in the labour market. Accompanying family members and those migrating as students may also seek work eventually, either as employees or in self-employment.

Migrant work and labour migration governance are at the centre of development issues. Twenty years ago, south-to-north migration predominated. Today, regional migration between developing countries now exceeds migration to developed countries. Migrant workers contribute to the economic and social development of both the countries of origin and destination.

The creation of decent jobs is key to equitable, inclusive and sustainable development that results in economic growth, and the reduction of poverty and income gaps. Correspondingly, as more people cross borders to work in the coming years, international migration policies that protect the rights of migrant workers during all stages of the migration process will be essential to achieving economic growth in both origin and destination countries.

Practical steps can be taken to enhance the welfare of migrant workers and respect for their rights and dignity. Differentiated demographic and income trends are adding to migratory dynamics and on the present course, the pressures will become even stronger.

**ILO Director-General
Guy Ryder**

The world of work must be adequately reflected in and mainstreamed into global debates on international development. In this context, the ILO's unique tripartite structure, its process of social dialogue and international labour standards constitute major assets to address labour migration from rights-based and development perspectives. The ILO will lead the Global Migration Group (GMG) in 2014 to help chart its future strategy for action in light of the outcomes of the UN General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, and in the context of the post-2015 UN Development Agenda.

Strengthening linkages between labour migration and development

The labour and skills of migrant workers are a valuable resource for both destination and home economies and societies, helping to ensure the functioning of their labour markets. They help create jobs in destination countries by consuming goods and services and paying taxes, and sustain social security systems with their contributions. They spur development with their enterprises and strengthen ties between origin and destination countries through the transfer of technology and skills, opening of trade opportunities for new goods, and sending remittances for child health and education.

Yet recent debate on how best to harness the financial flows from migrant labour comes dangerously close to viewing migrant workers as a commodity or worse—in the case of unscrupulous agents—bartered, trafficked and traded.

Policies on migrant labour often fail to recognize migrants' contributions and may not acknowledge that migrants' labour rights are also human rights and should be protected.

Little attention is paid to the social costs of family separation and impacts on families left behind. Moreover, the capacity of migrant workers to send remittances home depends on the cost of transferring money to their families, whether their wages are fair, are paid regularly, or at all, in countries where they work. At the same time, if countries of origin impose heavy liabilities on migrant workers through excessive fees and high migration costs, this also reduces the benefits of working abroad.

Labour migration policies need to include a migrant-centered approach that incorporates a rights-based framework in order to maximize development outcomes. Better harmonization of employment, social protection, and labour migration policies with development planning is crucial.

Equitable and well-structured systems of labour migration and mobility are critical to realizing sustainable and inclusive development. More work is needed at national and regional levels to ensure that labour migration policies guarantee non-discrimination and equal treatment between nationals and migrant workers, particularly in agriculture, domestic work and construction sectors that involve higher risks to migrants in terms of recruitment processes, working conditions, wages, and social security.



If well governed, with full respect for rights, international migration can foster economic, social and political progress and innovation, such as empowering women, advancing gender equality and reducing the potential detrimental effects of population aging.



Equal protection for migrant workers of all skill levels



Migrant workers have the right to non-discrimination, and equality of treatment and opportunities with nationals in respect of their living and working conditions.

The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration provides a valuable guide to linking migrant rights with development, focusing on such themes as decent work, governance of migration, and protection of migrant workers.

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Migrant workers, especially if they are women, young people, or ethnic or racial minorities, may be exposed to abuse, exploitation and discrimination when migrating or working—particularly if in low-skilled or irregular work. They often lack access to reliable information about terms and conditions of employment, fundamental rights at work, face exorbitant recruitment fees or risk being trafficked or pressed into forced labour. Migrant children are especially vulnerable to exploitation as child labour.

In destination countries, migrant workers often take low-skilled jobs in the informal economy and experience gender, ethnic, racial or other forms of inequality. They may not be covered by national labour laws, face poor or unsafe working and living conditions, and low or unpaid wages. Access to basic services, job mobility, pensions, and—especially for their children—health care and education may be denied in law or practice. The danger of work-related accidents, injuries and deaths may increase their risk of poverty.

The status of low-skilled migrant workers may worsen due to the current policy bias in favour of high-skilled workers in major destination countries. Yet demographic trends and structural changes in industrialized countries are increasing the demand for both high- and low-skilled migrant workers. What's more, not all labour market needs in destination countries are temporary. Thus, migrant labour is needed in the longer-term as well.

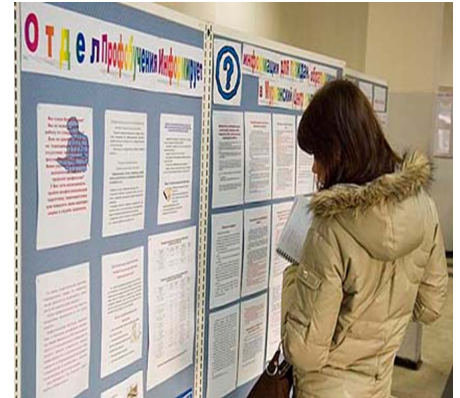
Development outcomes can be achieved more broadly, equitably, and inclusively if national policies incorporate the goal of decent work for all, implement ILO standards – including the ILO Conventions Nos. 97 and 143 specifically concerned with the protection of migrant workers as well as accompanying Recommendations Nos. 86 and 151 – and engage workers' and employers' organizations, migrant workers and other stakeholders directly impacted by such policies. Based on these standards, the ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (MFLM) provides non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights-based approach to actions that are supported by good practices.

Assessing labour market needs, recognising and certifying skills

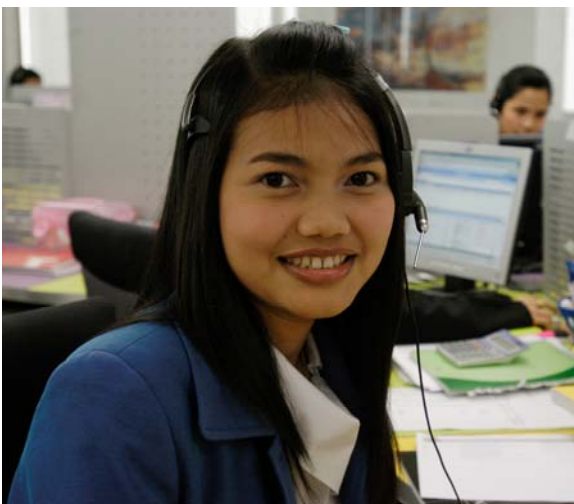
The demand for, and supply of, labour is becoming more international as millions may no longer be able to find jobs in their home labour markets and labour shortages increase in destination countries. Yet the lack of sound labour market needs assessments that can help policymakers ensure appropriate skills and jobs matching for migrant workers results in large numbers of migrant workers being employed in lower-level jobs. This can lead to de-skilling and “brain waste”.

Improved portability and recognition of skills helps migrant workers obtain employment that matches their qualifications and expertise. Governments have the primary responsibility, in consultation with workers’ and employers’ organisations, to ensure social inclusion and adequate access to appropriate skills development for productive and decent work.

To address these issues, the ILO supports needs assessments that reflect the overall state of the labour market. This includes understanding the unique industrial, occupational and geographic factors that generate jobs that can be filled by national workers, or if not, by migrants. In this way, the ILO helps increase labour market efficiency while also improving worker protection. The ILO also works at the regional level to develop technical labour certification standards and strengthen the capacity of public employment services in labour mediation, while helping countries better coordinate migration and employment policies, develop agreements for social security portability, and improve migration governance.



Until we recognize that labour migration governance that ensures better protection for migrant workers and their families is critical to development strategies, development will neither be sustainable nor equitable for millions of migrant workers worldwide.



International cooperation and social dialogue for promoting well-governed labour migration

International migration involves the interests of a variety of participants in the world of work, both within and between countries. Yet labour ministries, and employers' and workers' organizations, are often not effectively engaged in designing policies and strategies on both migration and development. They may lack the resources and technical capacities to participate appropriately in development of labour market information systems or providing social security coverage and rights-based bilateral and multilateral agreements for labour mobility.

The ILO approach to labour migration consists of balancing labour market efficiency and equity concerns by facilitating effective labour migration governance through informed policy debate; strengthening of institutional mechanisms; promoting policy coherence; and encouraging social dialogue that brings together governments, workers' and employers' organizations. This is the reason why including labour market institutions, world of work actors and social dialogue are so important to shaping balanced outcomes.

For example, to address the issues of migrant domestic workers who are particularly exposed to abuse and exclusion, the ILO has launched specific projects under the new ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C.189). The Convention entered into force on 5 September 2013 and includes specific provisions for migrant domestic workers (Articles 8 and 15). It has already had an impact: more national laws now cover domestic work, and practices and attitudes towards domestic work are changing – including in countries that have not ratified the Convention. New campaigns such as the International Trade Union Confederation's "12 by 12" campaign and the Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families run by the ILO and funded by the European Commission have been launched. The Convention features prominently in regional and global debates on international migration.





The road ahead

Decent work is a key driver of development, and the search for decent work is a key driver of migration. Moving forward in development means better understanding and addressing the needs of all workers, including migrant workers. Sustainable development serves as a durable engine for growth and innovation when it is inclusive, reduces the gap between rich and poor by providing jobs to match workers' skills at all levels, and provides decent wages and social benefits within environmentally sound, healthy, and equitable conditions of work.

Planning for a future that incorporates the rights of migrant workers and their families can better ensure that labour mobility is accompanied by inclusive economic development. Making our development goals more concrete, and bringing good practices of labour migration governance closer to the sight of those building for change will help make this vision of development a reality in the post-2015 world.

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