



# Labour Migration Highlights No. 6

## Labour migration and skills matching

### What is at stake?

Labour migration can be a vehicle for responding timely and effectively to labour supply and demand needs, for stimulating innovation and development, as well as for transferring and up-dating skills. Designing and implementing sound labour market information systems, including accurate labour market needs assessment and skills anticipation, and putting in place processes for skills recognition is important to prevent brain waste and deskilling, poor labour market integration and deterioration of working conditions for all workers. Access to skills recognition processes, especially for low- and medium-skilled migrant workers, is often limited. Migrants frequently encounter difficulties in articulating their experiences from the destination countries into better human resources development opportunities on their return.

Skills identification and anticipation are a challenge throughout both origin and destination countries. There is no uniform definition of “skills”. In many countries, “skills” are defined in terms of occupational skills and/or educational attainment levels. Similarly, there is no single methodology for skill needs analysis; however, what has proved to be useful from the experience of major destination countries (e.g. the European Union Member States) is a holistic approach: a combination of qualitative analysis (e.g. case studies, focus group discussions) as well as quantitative data (e.g. surveys, skill audits, model-based projections). Long-term skill forecasts are usually carried out at the national level, whereas short-term forecasts are conducted at the regional or local levels, often through the network of the Public Employment Services (PES).<sup>1</sup>

In many origin countries, skill forecasting methods are either non-existent or implemented on a limited basis, often due to data scarcity. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of labour markets due to economic globalization and the presence of a large informal sector make the exercise of skills identification and skills matching even more challenging for both potential and return migrants.

### The ILO's approach

Qualification recognition remains an open issue. At national level, providing capacity building for data collection and skill needs analysis should be an integral part of the overall efforts to improve the labour market information systems. This will assist origin countries to have more effective and efficient employment and training policies. Here, the main targeted institutions should be the ministries of labour, the public employment services and the national statistical offices.

<sup>1</sup> R. Kolyshko, F. Panzica, A. Popa and N. Popova: *Research and Analysis on Vacancies and Skills Needs in the EU, Moldova and Ukraine*, ILO, Budapest, 2013.

Further, public employment services play an essential role in job search and job-matching processes, and the ILO has been delivering capacity building for improved counselling services for job seekers, including potential and return migrants. Private recruitment agencies can also have an important responsibility in the matching process for labour migration. Therefore, it would be necessary to carry out up-to-date analysis at the country level on the functioning of these entities and provide policy recommendations for improvement of the relevant legislative and operational mechanisms.

Moreover, work for improving skills identification and matching should be combined with broader efforts to enhance coherence among employment, skills and migration policies, with the active participation of government institutions and the social partners. These coordinated efforts will also result in a better information exchange between the education system and the labour market, thus providing the basis for up-to-date skills information and forecasting.

In recent years, National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) have been seen as an instrument for harmonizing highly heterogeneous skills development systems, as well as a tool for facilitating educational mobility across the entire education and training system. The ILO advises first a careful assessment of the feasibility of NQFs in every specific country context. A milestone in this direction has been the ILC report from 2008 on skills and productivity.<sup>2</sup> Further, in 2010, the ILO conducted a research programme entitled "The implementation and impact of National Qualification Frameworks",<sup>3</sup> focused on the experience of developing and implementing NQFs in 16 countries world-wide. The research demonstrated mixed international experience on the impact of NQFs. National authorities often underestimate the cost and complexity of implementing comprehensive NQFs and frequently the degree of employer involvement in their development – an essential factor for the good functioning of NQFs – is low. The research also shows that social dialogue is often overlooked in designing, implementing and evaluating NQFs in the 16 countries of the ILO study and hence poses challenges for the implementation of NQFs.

There has been some acknowledgement that the contribution of NQFs to education systems (expanding pathways) may have better empirical foundation than has yet been documented in terms of labour market outcomes. However, ILO research points to the fact that the impact of designing and implementing NQFs on the relevance of training programmes for the labour market is not always obvious.

## ILO's mandate and tools

Skills development, training organizations and training delivery systems should be strengthened by promoting a life-long learning approach, as highlighted also by the **ILO Recommendation on Human Resources Development, 2004 (No. 195)**. This frame should be translated at system level by designing and implementing policies aimed at identifying occupational requirements, which can be translated into occupational and educational standards. The success of these policies depends on the endorsement of the tripartite constituents; therefore provision of adequate capacity building to them is crucial.

**ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (2006):** "promoting the recognition and accreditation of migrant workers' skills and qualifications and, where that is not possible, providing a means to have their skills and qualifications recognized" (Principle VI – Prevention of and Protection against Abusive Migration Practices).

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_092054.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_092054.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS\\_126589/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS_126589/lang--en/index.htm).

The **Conclusions of the ILO Tripartite Technical Meeting on Labour Migration**, held in November, 2013, call for sound labour market needs assessment and skills recognition, including among other actions to “... explore mechanisms for mutual recognition of skills, and certification of credentials built on ILO experience and with the active involvement of the social partners; in this regard, seek to encourage and support existing institutions and initiatives that have the potential to facilitate labour market integration and improve skills matching”.<sup>4</sup>

Additional ILO resources can be found at <http://www.ilo.org/labourmigration>.

### *ILO's technical cooperation*

A recent example is the technical assistance delivered within the EU-funded ILO project “Effective Governance of Labour Migration and its Skill Dimensions”. In a recent labour migration survey carried out by the project in Ukraine, 23.7 per cent of Ukrainian migrant workers were engaged in occupations different from the one they had in Ukraine. Almost two-thirds of the labour migrants have completed general secondary education. Female migrant workers have higher levels of educational attainment than men; however, they are more often engaged in occupations of a lower status.<sup>1</sup> In a similar survey conducted in Moldova, labour migrants often occupy low-skilled jobs (42.3 per cent). Only 11.3 per cent of Moldovan migrant workers were able to get work in the same sector in which they worked prior to leaving their country.<sup>2</sup>

In order to address the issue of skills matching and contribute to improving the overall quality and relevance of education and training in Moldova and Ukraine for both potential and return migrants as well as the domestic labour force, the project worked for the establishment of a system for recognition of qualifications and validation of ‘non-formal and informal learning’.<sup>3</sup> In Ukraine, 15 occupational profiles were designed in tourism, construction and agriculture, in collaboration with the relevant government institutions and the social partners. Based upon this initial phase, it appears necessary to support the national stakeholders in establishing a normative framework for a consistent designing process of the occupational standards for all sectors as well as test the mechanism of the recognition of prior learning in other sectors. In Moldova, six occupational standards were developed for blue-collar jobs in the agriculture and construction sectors. This was coupled with the creation and capacity building of a team of national experts in the area of occupational standards, as well as the design of practical tools and recommendations for the amendment of the legal framework.

Another example of ILO technical assistance in the area of improved skills matching is the on-going assessment of skills and occupations in demand in countries of destination and linkages with training, certification and accreditation processes in countries of origin. The study covers seven major destination countries for migrant workers (India, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and four countries of origin (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan). The findings will be used to develop roadmaps for better alignment between training offer and skills demands.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For more information, please visit

[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/ed\\_protect/protrav/migrant/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_232352.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/ed_protect/protrav/migrant/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_232352.pdf).

The ILO has also provided technical assistance through the EU-funded project “Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families” to establish common domestic workers training curricula in the migration corridor Paraguay-Argentina. Both countries have ratified Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers, committing to improve their labour conditions. In this framework, the ILO has been providing support to the Ministries of Labour of Argentina and Paraguay to identify the skill needs of migrant domestic workers and to design a training model with a common curricula in both countries, to facilitate labour market integration of Paraguayan migrant domestic workers in Argentina. This process has been carried out in the framework of social dialogue and national stakeholders’ participation in the Equal Opportunities Committee in Paraguay and Argentina. Other examples of technical assistance in the field of labour migration and skills matching include the ILO’s work in Central America for regional certification of occupations (Proyecto Regional FOIL),<sup>5</sup> ASEAN Skills Development and Certification, etc.

In the ASEAN countries, the ILO has completed an “Assessment of the readiness of ASEAN Member States for implementation of the commitment to the free flow of skilled labour within the ASEAN Economic Community from 2015” with support from the Canadian-funded project “Tripartite Action for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in the ASEAN Region”. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 is expected to transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour, and a freer flow of capital. The assessment takes stock of developments on the AEC goal of the free flow of skilled labour and assesses the state of country programmes and activities with respect to promoting the mutual recognition of the skills of departing and returning migrant workers; identifies the issues and challenges in implementing AEC goals on recognizing the skills of migrant workers; and analyses the current skills standards and national testing and certification system that are in place for implementing the mutual recognition of skilled labour and promoting labour mobility throughout ASEAN. The assessment was validated in a regional meeting in September 2013 and concluded with ASEAN Member States adopting country level plans of action to take forward the recommendations of the report.

<sup>1</sup> Ukraine Labour Migration Survey, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Moldova Labour Migration Survey, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> B. Mansfield and N. Downey: *Proposals for the Design and Implementation of a System for the Validation of Informal Learning to Support the Process of Managed Migration: Options for Ukraine*, ILO, Budapest, 2013

<sup>4</sup> The study is undertaken by the EC funded South Asia Labour Migration Governance Project and in collaboration with the SDC funded Project to Promote Decent Work through Improvement of Migration Policy in Bangladesh and the GIZ.<sup>5</sup> ILO, *Developing with jobs*, forthcoming 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, please visit <http://www.emleo-foil.ilo.org/index.en.html>.

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June 2015