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Technical Note:

Labour Mobility and Regional Climate Adaptation

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In the context of climate change, migration is most often viewed as an adaptation failure. Yet migration can be an important adaptive response for people facing slow-onset environmental changes or disasters. ILO's past experience has shown that labour mobility, when adhering to international labour standards, can support countries impacted by extreme weather events and play an important role in future development. For example, the ILO's work in the Pacific has helped Small Island States utilize voluntary and regular migration pathways as climate adaptation strategies. When regular migration channels are available, migration can be used to boost resilience in migrant-sending communities through the generation of remittances, the transfer of knowledge and skills and the development of networks that can lead to entrepreneurship and new markets. The first priority of adaptation planning must be to build community resilience. In tandem, consideration should be given to the impact of labour mobility on such efforts. Targeted mobility schemes that reflect the current and future skills needed in a transition to low-carbon, resilience economies have potential to engage youth to develop and make the best use of their skills and capacities. At the same time, migration may reduce population pressure on climate-stressed environments and could benefit destination countries by helping to fill labour shortages.

The links between environmental change, migration and displacement are complex. Focus is often placed on addressing key drivers of migration such as conflict, poverty and economic inequality. Demonstrating the drivers of climate variables other than rapid onset natural disasters, such as related to desertification and drought, are more difficult to establish. In the case of slow onset events, climate variables interact with other key drivers and exacerbate vulnerability by compromising the capacity to prevent, cope with and recover from hazards. Well-managed and rights-based labour mobility and adaptation policies can provide an opportunity to boost resilience and enhance development while reducing the risk of future displacement. However, the contribution of labour mobility pathways has yet to feature as an element in adaptation planning and represents a largely untapped mechanism in this regard. Those who must migrate due to climate vulnerability may be forced to enter irregular channels of migration or take work in the informal economy where they have an increased risk of exploitation and abuse.

Out of the total 232 million international migrants, ILO estimates that 207 million are of working age (15 years and over) and 73 per cent, or 150 million, of them are working or economically active.¹ It has been estimated that in the Pacific region alone, well-formulated labour mobility pathways could accommodate 240,000 more Pacific Islanders by 2040 and generate an additional US\$10 billion of income.² The additional income would be a welcome asset in regions that struggle to develop alongside the severe effects of hurricanes, droughts, floods, coastal erosion and sea level rise.

To fully leverage the development of decent work opportunities abroad, a growing number of Pacific island countries have begun establishing national labour migration policies, or action plans that reflect the needs of populations heavily impacted by climate change variables. The ILO provides

¹ International Labour Office (2015) ILO Global Estimates on Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology.

² Curtain et al (2016) Pacific Possible Labour Mobility: The Ten Billion Dollar Prize. World Bank Group



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technical support to help these countries meet their development objectives including through, for example, the training of officials from Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru to identify potential decent work opportunities abroad. It has also worked closely with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to carry out labour market assessments to inform evidenced-based labour market policies and programmes.³

Capitalizing on migration's adaptive potential can begin only if labour mobility is governed in a manner that meets international standards, fills genuine labour market shortages, and protects the rights of migrant workers. As the UN specialized agency with the mandate to promote and protect social justice in the world of work, the ILO is well positioned to work alongside States and Regional Groups to consider the role of labour mobility within climate adaptation strategies, and in contributing to a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies.

Given an increased focus on labour migration at the regional level, it may be beneficial to examine the role of climate change is motivating human mobility within the region, and whether regional cooperation on climate-induced migration could benefit development objectives--- of sending and receiving countries, and the local communities they originate from and to which they migrate. Well-coordinated adaptation strategies can help to create enabling environments for regional investment, jobs and entrepreneurship. When they work in tandem with labour mobility policies, they also open opportunities for diaspora investment and sustainable job creation when migrants return.

Where migration is already occurring from climate affected areas, developing regular channels of migration to help those suffering economic hardship due to natural disaster or long-term climate damage can help to avoid climate-related migrants entering into the informal economy or exploitive forms of employment abroad. In order to harness the adaptive capacity of labour migration, member States and Regional Groups, may consider taking steps to:

- Develop a research agenda and adapt corresponding methodology to better understand how climate change variables are impacting labour migration at a regional level. Research areas could include market assessments in climate vulnerable sectors and/or regions, the development of labour migration information systems with a focus on data collection in climate-affected regions and value chain development in climate-affected sectors.
- Facilitate the sharing of research findings through national and regional consultations, including to consider how migration policies and frameworks may be linked within climate adaptation programmes, including for example, appropriate bilateral and/or regional labour migration agreements.
- Undertake pilot programmes in a bilateral or regional context that could help to contribute guidance for good practice on the adaptive potential of labour mobility.

³ For further detail see: ILO Suva (2016) Fiji Creating Quality Jobs: Employment Diagnostic Study, ILO Suva (2015) Situational Analysis of Employment in Nauru



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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION TOOLS AND MECHANISMS TO LEVERAGE LABOUR MOBILITY AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY

The following tools, mechanisms and guidelines have been developed by the ILO through decades of experience working on issues of social justice in the world of work.

Uphold labour market standards for all workers.

- Recommended Resource: ILO Conventions *C143 Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions)* and *C97 Migration for Employment Convention (Revised)*, ILO (2015) *Migration*

Evaluate and reflect the labour market needs of both sending and receiving communities.

- Recommended Resource: ILO Suva (2015) *Situational Analysis of Employment in Nauru*, ILO (2016) *Guide on Measuring Migration Policy Impacts in ASEAN*

Account for a range of uncertainties concerning the impacts of climate change on regional labour markets.

- Recommended Resource: ILO (2016) *A just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All*.

Improve vulnerable local communities' access to decent work opportunities.

- Recommended Resource: ILO Solomon Islands (2015) *Cash For Work and Natural Disaster Recovery*, ILO Asia and the Pacific (2011) *Community contracting initiatives in calamity-prone areas*

Diversify income earning activities and sources of income.

- Recommended Resource: ILO (2013) *The Community Work Programme: Building a Society that Works*

Support the regeneration of climate affected lands in sending countries.

- Recommended Resource: ILO (2011) *Local investments for climate change adaptation: Green jobs through green works*

Capitalize on existing regional knowledge and competencies to teach new skills that migrants can easily apply at home.

- Recommended Resource: ILO, OECD (2011) *Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Job-Rich Growth in Asia: Strategies for Local Employment, Skill Development and Social Protection*.