

Consultation of Senior Labour Officials

Development of a Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework and Action Programme

29 -30 July 2025 (Virtual)

Background Note

Introduction

CARICOM Heads of Government, at the 19th Special Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the CARICOM Community on Security in February 2019, mandated, “the CARICOM Secretariat, along with CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), to collaborate with the relevant United Nations (UN) Agencies on the development of a Regional Migration Policy.”

This collaboration, which has seen the critical support of the International Organization for Migration, has already facilitated the development of the draft CARICOM Regional Migration Policy Framework (CRMPF), which will, in turn, help inform the crucial development of a Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework and Action Plan (RLMPF-AP). The development of this has commenced through the assistance received from the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In January 2025, the CARICOM Secretariat, CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) Unit, and the ILO, launched a comprehensive labour market assessment of CARICOM Member States. The assessment examines economic, employment, labour, and migration trends to identify the opportunities and challenges Member States face in expanding productive employment while facilitating regular labour migration and deeper economic integration across the region. The draft CARICOM labour market assessment report is in its final stages and provides key data, insights and recommendations for the development of the CARICOM RLMPF-AP.

The RLMPF-AP will be developed through consultations with social partners, CARICOM Member States and other key stakeholders, with the aim of promoting labour mobility, decent work and economic integration. It will be informed by regional frameworks and international standards on migration governance and the protection of migrant workers, including the:

- ▶ Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community including the CSME;
- ▶ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- ▶ Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration;

- ▶ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families;
- ▶ Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97); and
- ▶ Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143).

The Consultation of Senior Labour Officials will serve to share and discuss the findings of the CARICOM labour-market assessment report and present the draft CRMPF. Importantly, input will be gathered for the development of the CARICOM RLMPF-AP.

The expected outcome of the Consultation is that the defined priorities of Senior Labour Officials should be included in the CARICOM CARICOM RLMPF-AP.

Informing CARICOM's Labour Migration Policy Framework: Lessons from CRMPF and the ILO Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean

The ILO Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023-2030, was endorsed by 37 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean. It captures and mirrors the labour migration priorities expressed by leaders at the 12th Subregional ILO Meeting of Caribbean Ministers of Labour in 2023. It is therefore proposed that the RLMPF-AP is structured around the five thematic pillars of the Strategy. The thematic pillars are:

- (i) Labour migration governance and policy coherence;
- (ii) Fair Recruitment;
- (iii) Access to employment and improvement of working conditions;
- (iv) Labour mobility, Training, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning; and
- (v) Social protection and social cohesion.

This background note provides an overview of the five thematic pillars and contains key findings and recommendations from the labour migration governance (LMG) assessment component of the CARICOM labour-market assessment report, as well as the draft CRMPF. Each pillar contains questions that participants are encouraged to reflect on prior to the Consultation and discuss at the Event. Moreover, this background note concludes with overall questions on the CARICOM RLMPF and LMG Assessment to help participants prepare for the Consultation. Feedback on these questions at the Consultation will assist in finalizing the CARICOM labour-market assessment report and developing the CARICOM RLMPF.

Pillar I. Labour migration governance and policy coherence

The draft CRMPF recognises the crucial role that labour mobility plays in the economic and social development of CARICOM Member States by filling labour market gaps, boosting skills

transfer and remittances and enriching cultural diversity. At the same time labour mobility intersects with challenges such as job displacement, brain drain; integration barriers, irregular migration, human trafficking, and exploitation.

The LMG assessment emphasises the importance of regional coordination and dialogue to facilitate the benefits of labour mobility and develop regional solutions to common challenges. Strengthening regional coordination and information sharing on skills supply and skills gaps and Labour Market Information System (LMIS) data, where available, could facilitate skills matching and filling labour market gaps. The draft CRMPF supports such coordination and recommends implementing the CARICOM LMIS to improve data-driven decision-making. It also recommends implementing mechanisms for labour market assessments, effective skills matching and providing opportunities for upskilling and retraining to ensure migrants' skills meet labour market demands.

Strengthening regional coordination should also aid the ongoing efforts for the harmonisation of CSME legislation and the standardisation of the implementation of Community decisions at the national level. Strengthening and improving the harmonisation of the practices and procedures will empower CARICOM nationals to know and use their opportunities for free movement under the CSME. Increased labour mobility under the CSME would contribute to meeting labour market needs and the development of the region.

A regional labour migration dialogue process which forms part of the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework can facilitate discussions and development of regional policies. It could also facilitate the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning between CARICOM Member States, which is expected to strengthen labour migration governance.

Moreover, effective labour migration governance at the regional and national level requires common objectives that are anchored in a labour migration policy, or a related policy, such as a migration policy. Labour migration objectives and policies should be developed through a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach, which involves all relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies whose work touch on labour migration; social partners; civil society; migrants or their representatives; recruitment agencies and academia. These different stakeholders contribute different insights, experiences and knowledge and ensure a comprehensive approach to labour migration management, which promotes its development impact and strengthens the integration and protection of CARICOM-origin nationals and migrants and their contribution to society.

A whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach to labour migration policy development and implementation should lead to synergies and policy coherence between the various sectors that touch on labour migration. To ensure policy coherence, labour migration objectives also need to be captured in related policies, such as policies on development,

education and trade. In addition, policy coherence needs to be facilitated through continuous coordination during the implementation of related policies.

Furthermore, labour migration governance should be informed by international labour standards and conventions related to the protection of migrant workers. The draft CRMPF specifically recommends the ratification and implementation of the migrant workers conventions (ILO C97 and C143) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The CARICOM regional labour migration policy framework should provide a harmonised framework for upholding these standards and preventing exploitation and human trafficking.

Pillar II. Fair Recruitment

The draft CRMPF recognises that concerns have been raised about the growing role of unscrupulous employment agencies, informal labour intermediaries and other operators acting outside the legal and regulatory framework that prey especially on low-skilled workers. It emphasises the importance of fair and ethical recruitment practices that safeguard migrant workers from exploitation and abuse to ensure decent work and maximise the socioeconomic contributions of migrants to their host and home countries.

In its Recommended Actions it calls on Member States to implement transparent and fair recruitment systems and robust laws that regulate recruiters and comply with the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment.

Member States should also apply Fair Recruitment Principles and Guidelines to labour migration agreements and programmes, including by providing clear information to migrants in a language that they understand.

The LMG assessment finds that CARICOM Member States are taking steps toward enhancing fair recruitment and protection of CARICOM-origin nationals and migrant workers and at least six Member States have laws in place which regulate recruitment agencies. It notes that awareness should be raised with CARICOM Member States on mainstreaming Fair Recruitment Principles into laws, policies and practice. Importantly, the labour migration programmes that Member States participate in as sending countries should comply with the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment.

Pillar III. Access to employment and improvement of working conditions

The draft CRMPF highlights the important role of public policies in creating employment, reducing informality, promoting social inclusion and facilitating migrants' access to decent work. It recommends building capacities to develop policies and programmes that promote

job creation and reduce informality, with a specific focus on addressing the needs of migrant and refugee workers. To promote the protection of CARICOM nationals and others, the LMG assessment underscores the need to raise awareness with Member States on ensuring that all migrant workers, regardless of their status, are protected by national labour laws.

The draft CRMPF calls for migrant and refugee workers' access to labour justice and judicial institutions to be improved, and the provision of labour inspection, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration services to be strengthened. Member States should launch awareness raising campaigns on forced labour, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace, as well as human trafficking and labour exploitation, and implement policies to prevent forced labour and facilitate decent work.

Member States should prioritise safe and healthy working environment and adopt the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). Moreover, Health Programmes should target migrant workers, especially those in high-risk sectors, to ensure their well-being and productivity.

Pillar IV. Labour mobility, training, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning

The draft CRMPF draws attention to the need to promote skills mobility to counter brain drain and advance brain gain and brain circulation. To bolster mobility, it recommends expanding the CARICOM Skills Regime to include additional categories of workers or implementing full free movement for all CARICOM nationals. In addition, the recognition of qualifications should be strengthened by aligning national qualifications frameworks with the CARICOM Qualifications Framework. The recognition of vocational skills should be advanced by investing in infrastructure and facilitating the full implementation of the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications system. Moreover, partnerships should be built between institutions to aid credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning.

The LMG assessment notes that differences in educational standards, curricula, and certification processes may hamper skills mobility or furthering education in host Member States. It recommends harmonising educational standards across the region to bolster labour mobility and the integration of migrants.

Furthermore, consideration is to be given to provide support to CARICOM nationals and migrants through access to finances and training to foster their contribution to development. The draft CRMPF recommends supporting migrant entrepreneurs with training, financial support, and start-up grants. The LMG assessment underscores the importance of access to financial services for CARICOM nationals and migrants to facilitate their integration, as well as their contribution to their host state through business development and their home country through remittances.

Pillar V. Social protection and social cohesion

The LMG Assessment finds that CARICOM Member States' laws, policies and practice provide varying degrees of social protection to CARICOM nationals. The CARICOM Protocol on Contingent Rights allows spouses and dependents of CARICOM nationals, moving within the CSME regime, to access work, as well as health and education services. However, the draft CRMPF highlights that accessing these rights is hampered by the Protocol's uneven application in Member States.

The draft CRMPF also points out that the effective functioning of the CARICOM Agreement on Social Security (CASS) is impeded by administrative complexities, differences in national legislation, and inconsistent implementation across Member States. The CASS facilitates access to social security benefits for insured persons, while they are working in another CARICOM Member State. All CARICOM Member States, apart from Haiti and Suriname, are party to the CASS, which aims to harmonise social security legislation across the region. The CASS also puts in place mechanisms for the portability of social security benefits in the CARICOM region.

The LMG Assessment observes that the provision of social protection to migrants from outside the region also varies across Member States. The draft CRMPF indicates that migrants face greater integration challenges than CARICOM nationals due to language barriers, cultural differences, and legal restrictions on employment. It states that successful migrant integration requires access to essential social services, equitable employment opportunities, and inclusive community engagement.

Questions

1. Are there challenges or priorities not covered in the five pillars of the ILO Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023-2030 that should be included in the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework?

The five pillars are Labour migration governance and policy coherence; Fair Recruitment; Access to employment and improvement of working conditions; Labour mobility, training, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning; and Social protection and social cohesion.

2. What mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure policy coherence between the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework and related sectors during its implementation?
3. How can we ensure that the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework promotes access to decent work for CARICOM nationals and migrant workers?

4. How can the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework advance skills mobility in the region?
5. What are the major social cohesion challenges in the region and how should they be addressed by the CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework?