▶ 20th American Regional Meeting

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Technical note for the interactive tripartite dialogue of Thursday, 2 October 2025

▶ Towards Fair Labour Migration in the Americas: Strategic Priorities 2023–2030 for Transforming Commitments into Action

Objectives

- To share the main advances and challenges in the implementation of the Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility 2023–2030, a comprehensive framework promoted by the ILO based on an analysis of the trends, flows and characteristics of the migrant and refugee population in the main migration corridors that impact the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- To identify structural and emerging challenges of labour migration and propose policy guidance and coordination to transform them into opportunities for decent work and social cohesion.
- Highlight the added value of tripartism and social dialogue as drivers of safe, orderly and regular labour migration based on decent work and social justice.

Context

1. The Americas region experiences an intense and diverse migration cycle, with intraregional and extra regional flows that combine labour migration, forced displacement, transit and returns. Over the last decade, this mobility has undergone significant changes both in quantitative terms – reflected in the increase in migratory flows from, to and through the countries of the region – and in qualitative terms, with changes in demographic composition, trajectories and structural characteristics.

2. The current characteristics of the migrant population in the region can be summarised as follows:

(i) the majority of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean originate from the same region;

(ii) the majority of migrants are adults of working age and are therefore economically active;

(iii) migration is increasingly a family phenomenon involving unaccompanied minors;

(iv) there is a high percentage of female migrants; and

(v) a significant percentage of the migrant population are refugees or asylum seekers.[1]

3. Traditionally, Canada and the United States of America stand out as the main destination countries in the region. However, the number of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean has doubled in the last decade, [2] from 8.3 million in 2010 to 16.3 million in 2022. [3] This increase is largely explained by the exponential rise in refugees and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela over the last decade, which by May 2025 was estimated at 7.9 million worldwide. Of these, approximately 6.9 million people (86 per cent) have found a new destination in countries in the region, mainly in Colombia (2.81 million), Peru (1.66 million), Brazil (680,000), Chile (669,000) and Ecuador (440,000).[4]

4. Another distinctive feature of the current scenario is the increase in the number of returning migrants. Unlike traditional migratory movements, today returns – whether forced or voluntary – have taken on a central role. In 2024 alone, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimated that Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras received approximately 319,000 returnees from the United States.[5] Returns introduce specific tensions in terms of socio-economic integration, community reintegration and access to rights, issues that are rarely considered in traditional migration management frameworks. This includes economic, social and psychosocial challenges, such as stigmatisation, cultural uprooting and, in some cases, language barriers.

5. On the other hand, irregular migration, which had reached high levels mainly in the Central American corridor in recent years, showed a significant decline in 2024. Since 2022, more than one million crossings through the Darién Gap (between Colombia and Panama) have been recorded. However, between December 2024 and January 2025, some of the lowest monthly migration figures since 2022 have been recorded.[6]

6. In general, the proportion of male and female migrants in the main destination countries in Latin America and the Caribbean is similar, and they are mostly a young population. In several countries, the percentage of migrants of working age (15 to 64 years old) exceeds that of native-born persons.[7]

7. In terms of professional profiles, intraregional migrants generally have educational levels similar to or even higher than the average for host communities. Many of these people are young people with a complete secondary education, and a growing number have university degrees. A notable case is that of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, who have a high level of education compared to other migrant groups. For example, in countries such as Argentina,

[1] ILO, 2023. *ILO Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023–2030.*

[2] IOM, 2024. *Migration Trends in the Americas Report, the most notable flows for the period October–December 2024.*

[3] Selee, A., V. Lacarte, A. Ruiz Soto, D. Chaves-González, M. J. Mora, A. Tanco, "In a Dramatic Shift, the Americas Have Become a Leading Migration Destination", in *Migration Policy Institute Journal,* April 2023.

[4] R4V (2025). Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean.

[5] Migration Policy Institute, 2025. The Forgotten Side of Deportation: *The Cost of Ignoring the Reintegration Challenges of Returnees*.

[6] IOM, 2024. *Migration Trends in the Americas Report, the most notable flows for the period October–December 2024*.

[7] Inter-American Development Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations Development Programme (2023). *What is the situation of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean? Mapping socio-economic integration*.

Colombia and the Dominican Republic, a large proportion of them have completed higher education.[8]

8. It is also noteworthy that the migrant and refugee population plays a significant role in the economies and labour markets of host countries. Currently, migrant workers make up 5 per cent of the global workforce, equivalent to 167.7 million workers. Of this total, North America receives 22.6 per cent, while Latin America and the Caribbean are home to 4.7 per cent. Thus, the region of the Americas as a whole receives 27.3 per cent of the world's total migrant workers, who are mainly employed in the agriculture, industry and services sectors among others. [9]

9. Likewise, a high participation of migrant workers in care work has been identified, representing 18.9 per cent of the sector, which shows a predominance of migrants in essential and decisive tasks in boosting employment and development in destination communities.

Main challenges and issues in labour migration and mobility in the Americas

Gradual growth in mixed migratory movements

10. In most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the main motivation for migrating has historically been associated with the search for job opportunities and higher incomes to support themselves and their families.[10] While this continues to be one of the main reasons for these figures, other factors must now be added to the equation: violence, socio-political conflicts, climate change and family reunification, among others.[11]

11. The migration crisis has diversified the migrant groups seeking international protection and has forced the adaptation of the legal categories attributed to people in situations of mobility and a comprehensive approach to their movement. The political, regulatory and institutional framework that must respond to all this diversity in migratory movements requires tools to address the particularities of the reasons for migrating and the needs for protection.[12]

12. The emergence of new migratory profiles—such as irregular migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and returnees—introduces additional complexities that challenge the response capacity of States.[13] The reality of this growth and diversification of human mobility in the region poses significant challenges for the articulation of coordinated and structural responses in destination countries.

[8] See ILO reports on refugee and migrant women from Venezuela in Argentina, Colombia and the Dominican Republic produced in 2024.

[9] ILO, 2024. *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers*, p. 24.

[10] ILO, 2016. *La migración laboral en América Latina y el Caribe. Diagnóstico, estrategia y líneas de trabajo de la OIT en la Región.*

[11] ILO, 2024. Policy brief: *Human mobility and labour migration in Latin America and the Caribbean – Movements, trends and governance challenges*.

[12] ILO, 2024. Policy brief: Human mobility and labour migration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

[13] On the concept of socio-economic integration, see: ILO and UNDP (2021). *Migration from Venezuela: opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional socio-economic integration strategy*.

High rates of informal employment and limited access to social protection

13. By 2024, the ILO Labour Overview Report estimates that the average rate of informal employment in the region will be 47.6 per cent,[14] which highlights the persistence of a structural challenge that limits access to decent work. Within this complex phenomenon, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to these conditions, among other things because of their irregular migration status and administrative, economic and procedural limitations to regularise their status.

14. Access to social protection is a key component of decent work and formal working conditions. Despite advances in access to social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean over the last three decades, gaps in coverage and sustainability issues persist.[15] In 2021, only 64.3 per cent of the population in the Americas had access to at least one social protection benefit.[16] The situation is even more critical for migrant workers, who face specific obstacles such as restrictive legal frameworks, lack of coordination between countries of origin and destination, and their insertion into sectors with low social security coverage and high levels of informal employment, such as agriculture, domestic work and construction.[17]

Irregular migration and informal employment

15. Irregular migration and informal employment are two sides of the same coin. Without regular migration status, migrants cannot enter formal employment; conversely, labour markets and jobs characterised by informality feed and reproduce irregular mobility. Some studies suggest that the main cause of irregular migration is the strict entry rules of destination countries, which impose bureaucratic and administrative obstacles that make it difficult for people to maintain or obtain regular migration status. [18]

Insufficient policies for the socio-economic integration of migrants

16. Without extensive experience in integration policies in the region, migrants often find themselves in situations of socio-economic vulnerability. Structural obstacles such as difficulties in the recognition and certification of skills, and exclusionary practices, have limited access to social services and decent employment. [19] These conditions are even more difficult for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, who are vulnerable due to persecution or the conditions that forced them to leave their places of origin.[20] In addition, as they are classified as humanitarian subjects, the measures implemented do not aim at their integration, but rather at meeting their immediate needs and the expectation of their return.[21]

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[14] ILO, 2025. *2024 Labour Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean*, p. 58.

[15] ILO, 2023. *2023 Labour Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean*, p.111. Executive summary in English.

[16] ILO, 2021. *World Social Protection Report 2020–2022*.

[17] IDB, 2023. *An opportunity for the migrant population in the labour market*.

[18] IDB, *An opportunity for the migrant population in the labour market*.

[19] Regional Coordination Group for the Brazil Action Plan (GAR PAB), 2017. *The Right to Work of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean*; Gandini, L., Vera, M., Zapata, G. (coords.), 2022. *Mobility and Covid-19 in Latin America: inclusions and exclusions in times of "crisis"*.

[20] Jacobsen, K, 2014. "Livelihoods and Forced Migration", in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*.

[21] Gandini et al., Mobility and Covid-19 in Latin America; Betts, A., 2023. "Socio-economic integration – what is it, and why does it matter?", in *Forced Migration Review,* Issue 71.

17. In the case of host communities, the absence of integration measures can increase social tensions[22] and inequality gaps, mainly due to limitations in accessing livelihoods, social protection policies and sufficient income to ensure quality of life and job and family stability.

Overqualification and difficulty in obtaining recognition of qualifications or work skills

18. Among the problems affecting migrants in this area are:

(i) lack of coordination between public employment services, companies and vocational and technical training centres, which results in training provision that does not meet labour market demand;

(ii) lack of qualifications or documents proving training or qualifications obtained in their countries of origin; and

(iii) lengthy and costly bureaucratic procedures that make it difficult to obtain recognition of qualifications or certificates and which sometimes mean that migrants have to wait years to have their qualifications validated, limiting their chances of finding work in their areas of expertise.[23]

19. These barriers reduce the possibilities for upward mobility and for taking advantage of migrant human capital in sectors with labour demand.

Coherence between labour and migration policies

20. The persistent challenges in the governance of labour migration highlight the urgent need for policy coherence—development, employment, migration, social protection—and for comparable and timely statistics to guide decision-making. The challenge is to ensure coordination between migration and employment policies for the integration of migrants into the labour market through decent work,[24] as evidenced by the increase in levels of irregular migration versus the high employment of migrants in key activities that stimulate the labour market, such as the agricultural and construction sectors.

Increased risk of child labour for children in situations of mobility

21. Despite the progress made in the last two decades, Latin America and the Caribbean still have persistent pockets of child labour that are difficult to eradicate. These pockets are mainly concentrated in rural and agricultural areas, indigenous communities, border areas and contexts of high informality and structural poverty, where precarious incomes and a lack of educational opportunities and social protection force many families to resort to the early incorporation of children into productive activities.

22. The context of human mobility and forced displacement also creates new risk scenarios, as millions of migrant children and adolescents are exposed to various forms of labour exploitation and abuse, without access to protection networks or stable educational opportunities.

23. In conclusion, labour markets in Latin America and the Caribbean face a dual task: (i) removing barriers to formalisation, access to rights and fair migration of migrants and refugees, and (ii)

[22] ILO, 2020. *Employment and decent work in refugee and other forced displacement contexts Compendium of ILO's lessons learned, emerging good practices and policy guidance*.

[23] ILO regional strategy on labour migration and human mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023-2030.

[24] ILO, Human mobility and labour migration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

harnessing their productive potential through labour integration with skills recognition, relevant training and social security portability agreements. The Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Mobility proposed by the ILO for the period 2023–2030, as detailed below, responds to this challenge with concrete lines of action agreed upon in a tripartite manner, anchored in fundamental principles and rights at work and in the pursuit of decent work and social justice.

Dimensions relevant to the world of work

24. Labour migration is directly related to the main axes of labour and productive development policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this regard, four dimensions are particularly relevant:

- **Decent work, formalisation and social protection:** the inclusion of migrants in formal and productive employment is key to reducing vulnerabilities, expanding social security coverage and strengthening social cohesion.
- **Social dialogue and tripartite governance:** Labour migration must be incorporated into the agenda of social actors, ensuring their presence in collective bargaining mechanisms, policy design and the formulation of sectoral and territorial agreements.
- **Just transition and labour mobility:** Productive, energy and digital transformations, as well as the impacts of climate change, influence the dynamics of mobility. The response must be proactive, with employment and protection policies that allow communities to adapt without resorting to precarious migration strategies.
- **Education, training and skills:** The validation of prior learning and access to technical and vocational training are an essential bridge to labour market integration, especially for young people and migrant women. Strengthening public employment services and regional cooperation in skills certification are crucial.

The ILO's approach to labour migration and mobility in the Americas

25. The ILO addresses labour migration and human mobility in the Americas on the basis of three distinguishing elements:

- **Tripartite structure:** the participation of governments, workers' organisations and employers' organisations enables consensus building and lasting solutions. Tripartite social dialogue and its institutions play a fundamental role in strengthening labour governance and building a more participatory future of work.
- **In-depth knowledge of labour markets:** the ILO's expertise in employment and labour policies ensures that migration is managed from a decent work perspective.
- **Normative mandate:** international labour standards ensure the incorporation of principles of equality, non-discrimination, freedom of association, collective bargaining, and occupational health and safety.

26. Based on the structural configuration described above, the ILO is pursuing two complementary lines of work in the region: (1) Governance of labour migration and expansion of regular employment channels in countries with a recognised demand for migrant workers, and (2) Socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees in countries receiving mixed flows, through public policies and trade union and business actions.

27. The vision that the ILO seeks to promote among its constituents is that labour migration is a complex political challenge for governments, requiring a balance between a multitude of different economic, social, political and cultural issues and interests. When properly managed, labour migration can contribute to the sustainable development of countries of origin, transit and destination, and can provide benefits and opportunities for migrant workers and their families. It can balance labour supply and demand, help develop and transfer skills at all levels, contribute to social protection systems, foster innovation and enrich communities both culturally and socially.[25] It is therefore essential to promote a real understanding of the labour market through the analysis of market statistics and the corresponding design of evidence-based public policies.

28. At this point, it is essential to refer to important initiatives promoted by the ILO within the framework of its institutional mandate, which respond precisely and decisively to some of the challenges described in this technical note. The main initiatives are detailed below:

- **Skills Passport: Regional Mechanism for the Mutual Recognition of Labour Skills Certification in Latin America and the Caribbean**

  The Skills Passport is an innovative regional instrument that will allow labour skills certifications issued in one country to be recognised by other Latin America and the Caribbean countries. It is a multilateral, tripartite and progressive model, inspired by and drawing on lessons learned from countries that have made significant progress in this area. By facilitating the mutual recognition of skills, the Skills Passport strengthens institutional frameworks and public policies that promote safe, orderly and regular labour mobility. It also contributes to expanding access to decent work opportunities, benefiting all actors in the world of work, with a particular emphasis on workers, employers and destination economies.[26]

- **Integrative Territories: toolkit for the inclusive local development of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and returnees together with their host communities**

  Strengthening the institutional, technical and financial capacities of local governments to effectively manage socio-economic integration processes, aligning action with local development planning, the provision of inclusive services and coordination with the private sector, is essential to generating opportunities for the mobile population and host communities, thereby promoting the economic development of the territory.

  The Integrating Territories initiative offers a concrete proposal to respond to the challenges faced by local governments through a Toolkit structured in five thematic modules that include a step-by-step guide, implementation examples and downloadable resources that facilitate its application and integration into local planning and management processes. The modules are: policies s for integration, social cohesion, productive fabric, employment and entrepreneurship, and education and health.

- **Regional Strategy for Socio-Economic Integration (ERISE)**

  The regional strategy, developed in 2021 by the ILO and UNDP within the framework of R4V and the Quito Process, is based on international labour standards and international human rights law. ERISE 2.0 is the updated version, to be published in November 2025, which seeks

[25] ILO, 2022. Practical guide on the development of labour migration policies.

[26] For more information, download the information brochure on the Skills Passport: Regional Mechanism for the Mutual Recognition of Labour Skills Certification in Latin America and the Caribbean.

to promote the economic and social integration of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and returnees in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a flexible tool for improving access to decent work, migration regularisation, social cohesion and the protection of rights. The update incorporates a governance model, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and a broader and more inclusive approach, so that it can be applied not only to the Venezuelan population, but also to other migrant groups in the region.

The Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023–2030 [27]

29. Taking into account the changing and complex context of the Americas in terms of migratory movements and their decisive impact on labour markets, the Regional Strategy emerges as an initiative that seeks to compile the strategic horizon for ILO action in the region and guide the organisation's technical assistance in the area of labour migration and human mobility, with a view to offering lines of action that support the approach to key challenges identified in the areas of protection, migration governance and development. The Regional Strategy is framed within nine strategic axes, five thematic areas and four cross-cutting approaches, based on three premises: tripartism and social dialogue, policy orientation and context specificity. The content of the axes is detailed below:

- **Thematic area 1 – Labour migration governance and policy coherence.** The objective is to strengthen the regulatory framework, institutional capacities and public policies. It includes mainstreaming in employment and social protection policies, training of constituents, inter-ministerial coordination and attention to return migration. It seeks, among other results, to improve the capacities of ILO constituents to address the issue of labour migration and human mobility, with a special focus on the rights and obligations of migrant and refugee workers.
- **Thematic area 2 – Fair recruitment.** Among other objectives, it seeks to promote regulatory reforms, strengthen labour inspection, improve public employment services, provide information and assistance to migrants, and train employers in fair recruitment practices.
- **Thematic area 3 – Access to employment and improved working conditions.** Actions in this area seek to strengthen legal protection and access to justice, design inclusive employment policies, promote formalisation, prevent forced labour and discrimination, ensure health and safety at work, and protect migrant children and adolescents.
- **Thematic area 4 – Labour mobility, training, certification and recognition of qualifications and prior learning.** This area focuses on facilitating socio-economic integration, recognition of qualifications, certification of skills, regional recognition schemes, cooperation with CINTERFOR, bilateral agreements and networking between trade unions.
- **Thematic area 5 – Social protection and social cohesion.** This area seeks to promote financial inclusion and access to credit, social security agreements for the portability of rights, social protection floors, work with civil society to prevent xenophobia and racism, and intergovernmental cooperation to regularise migration.

[27] ILO Regional Strategy on Labour Migration and Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean 2023-2030.

Cross-cutting approaches

- **Knowledge management and training:** improvement of statistics and data, cooperation with ECLAC, IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA, methodological harmonisation, use of big data, strengthening of work with National Statistical Institutions, among other relevant actors, to improve understanding of labour market behaviour and its interaction with migration.
- **Capacity building, partnerships and cooperation for development:** UN and civil society partnerships, participation of employers and workers in regional processes, mobilisation of resources, and emphasis on the importance of participation and support for the strengthening of international and regional consultative spaces (GCM, SACM, RCM and others).
- **Application and promotion of international labour standards:** promoting the ratification of relevant ILO conventions, particularly those that may affect migrant and refugee workers, including:
  - Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97);
  - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102);
  - Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118);
  - Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143);
  - Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157);
  - Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181);
  - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189);
  - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190);
  - those that promote gender equality, such as the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183);

  as well as regional cooperation against forced labour and trafficking, and the recognition of rights in regional integration.
- **Gender and intersectional approach:** measures that seek to reduce gender gaps, generational approach, statistical disaggregation, leadership of migrant women, production of evidence on discrimination and violence.

Lines of action to transform commitments into action

30. In order to advance the implementation of the Regional Strategy, priority lines of action are proposed that articulate the national, regional and inter-institutional levels:

- Harmonise national regulatory frameworks with ILO international conventions and ensure their effective implementation through robust labour inspection systems.
- Strengthen interministerial and inter-institutional coordination to ensure coherence between employment, productive development, migration and social protection policies.
- Consolidate bilateral and multilateral labour migration agreements that ensure fair recruitment, portability of rights and access to basic services.

- Promote South-South and triangular cooperation, with an emphasis on the exchange of good practices and the use of regional information and monitoring tools.
- Promote inclusive policies with a gender and intersectional approach that specifically address the needs of migrant women, young people, indigenous peoples and people of African descent in mobility.
- Mobilise sustainable financial and technical resources, in partnership with development partners, the private sector and organised civil society.

Suggested points for discussion

- How can we ensure that labour market actors play a more prominent role in the formulation of national policies and bilateral agreements on labour migration and fair recruitment?
- What concrete measures are needed to expand the formalisation and coverage of social protection for migrant workers?
- How can social dialogue and collective bargaining mechanisms be strengthened in contexts with high migrant participation?
- What regional experiences can serve as a reference for promoting safe and fair labour migration agreements?
- How can the inclusion of migrant women and young people in employment, vocational training and entrepreneurship strategies be ensured?
- What role can regional cooperation play in addressing mobility linked to climate change and productive transitions?