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Effective enforcement of labour standards: governance, labour inspection and the protection of migrant workers

1. Introduction: Enforcement in a Changing World of Work

As the world of work evolves, enforcing labour standards has become critical for effective labour governance. Changes in how work is organised, such as increased subcontracting and global supply chains, the growing use of labour intermediaries, temporary migration schemes, digital management tools, non-standard jobs, and ongoing informality, are reshaping how labour laws are applied¹. At the same time, economic, social, and health crises have made compliance more difficult and increased pressure on labour administration systems. It is increasingly clear that while labour laws are essential, the real challenge lies in ensuring that they are effectively followed in workplaces. As a result, enforcement is now central to discussions on job quality, fair mobility, productivity, competitiveness, and social justice.

Labour inspection and labour administration play a crucial role in this context. ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) and ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) -both Governance (or Priority) Conventions- define labour inspection as a public function that ensures compliance with laws on working conditions and worker protection. The ILO Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) defines labour administration as all public activities related to national labour policy. Taken together, these three conventions place enforcement within a wider system that includes law-making, implementation, dispute prevention and resolution, and cooperation with employers' and workers' organisations. Therefore, effective labour inspection depends not only on

¹ General survey on the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and the Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) <https://www.ilo.org/resource/general-survey-2024-labour-administration>

inspectors' powers and resources, but also on the overall strength of labour administration and governance systems².

Migration adds another important dimension. The ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) promotes fair labour migration and equal treatment between nationals and regular status migrant workers in areas such as wages, working conditions, trade union rights, accommodation, social security, access to justice, amongst other rights. The ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) addresses irregular migration and illegal employment while affirming the basic rights of all migrant workers. These standards require a balanced approach to labour mobility that combines protection³, regulation, and enforcement, especially in situations involving recruitment fraud, informality, health and safety risks, wage violations, and limited access to remedies.⁴ At the same time EU legislation requires Member States to transpose and enforce legislation relevant in this area⁵. Furthermore, under EU policy coordination processes such as the European Semester, Member States receive tailored guidance through Country-Specific Recommendations and related policy assessments on socio-economic, employment and fiscal policies. This guidance may include measures aimed at strengthening public and labour market institutions and promoting the labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups.

These matters are closely linked to current policy developments in Europe. The consultation documents on the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act and Fair Labour Mobility Package both suggest that effective enforcement is considered essential to ensuring that rights, mobility, and fair competition work effectively in practice.

In this context, the ILO supervisory system plays an important guiding role. In 2026, both the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations⁶ and the Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference mark their centenary. A century of ILO supervision has demonstrated that international labour

² International Labour Organization (ILO), Labour administration topic portal Labour administration | International Labour Organization ILO, Labour Inspection topic portal <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/labour-inspection>

³ ILO topic portal on labour migration <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/labour-migration>

⁴ While C81 has been ratified by all EU Member States, C129 has not been ratified by Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, yet. C150 has been ratified by: Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:1:::

⁵ Relevant legislation includes the EU Adequate Minimum Wage Directive, the EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions, the EU Employers Sanctions Directive.

⁶ 2026 Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/ilc/ilc114/application-international-labour-standards-2026>

standards are effective only when implemented through national laws, institutions, and practices. It also underscores the continuing importance of this supervision in guiding governments on labour inspection, labour administration, equality of treatment, and the protection of migrant workers.

This paper explores effective enforcement across four key areas. First, it examines enforcement as a governance issue, including the role of social partners and access to justice. Second, it analyses how regulatory systems balance enforceability, worker protection, and compliance. Third, it reviews factors affecting the enforcement of labour laws for migrant workers. Finally, it considers the role of regional and international cooperation. Together, these issues can be viewed in light of EU initiatives including the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act and the Fair Labour Mobility Package.

2. Effective Enforcement, Role of Social Partners and Access to Justice

Enforcement should be seen as a broad interconnected system rather than a single action. It includes promoting compliance, preventing and correcting violations, deterring wrongdoing, and ensuring access to remedies. While labour inspection is central, it is only one part of a wider system that also involves courts, tribunals, dispute resolution bodies, social dialogue institutions, and employers' and workers' organisations. Together, these actors determine whether labour regulations are respected in practice.

Low compliance with labour legislation can result from many factors, such as limited resources, weak detection, unclear rules, long supply chains, weak worker representation, poor complaint systems, or insufficient penalties. Improvements usually come from combining different tools, including targeted inspections, advisory services, stronger worker voice, agreements between social partners, simpler complaint systems, and better access to justice.

2.1 Measuring Effectiveness

Measuring effectiveness is key to understanding how well this system works. Traditional approaches often focus on outputs, such as the number of inspections carried out or sanctions imposed, or even on inputs, such as the number of inspectors⁷. However,

⁷ Guidelines on general principles of labour inspection. ILO (2022): "4.1.8: ... A ratio exclusively based on the number of labour inspectors per thousands of workers does not take into consideration all the elements identified by Article 10 of Convention No. 81 and should not be used as a benchmark."

<https://www.ilo.org/publications/guidelines-general-principles-labour-inspection>

ILO research⁸ adopts a broader approach, using indicators of activity, effectiveness and efficiency, and impact on compliance with labour legislation where “activity” encompasses the broad range of inspection actions, not only inspection visits and sanctions. Impact indicators aim to capture behavioural change beyond inspected workplaces, although measurement remains complex due to attribution challenges. The main aim is to assess whether enforcement leads to behavioural changes and improved compliance.

This broader view is further strengthened by the ILO study on indicators of good governance of labour⁹, which highlights the three key United Nations pillars of effective governance in public administrations¹⁰, namely effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness. It shows that the quality of labour inspection cannot be separated from the overall quality of labour administration. It also emphasizes that social dialogue and inclusiveness are central, not secondary to effective governance.

From a policy perspective, the consequences of effective enforcement go beyond compliance with the law to support fair competition, productivity, formalization, and social cohesion. Although sometimes seen as a cost for businesses, poor working conditions and accidents and occupational diseases carry major social and economic costs, whereas better working conditions and well-designed OSH prevention can improve performance, reduce absenteeism, lower health-related costs and strengthen business reputation¹¹.

2.2 Social Dialogue and Access to Justice as Pillars of Enforcement

Effective labour governance relies not only on the existence of sound legal frameworks, but also on the mechanisms that ensure their practical application and enforcement. In this regard, social dialogue and access to justice play a central role in bridging the gap between law and practice. By fostering cooperation among governments, employers, and workers by promoting collective bargaining and by enabling individuals to effectively claim their rights, these mechanisms contribute to more responsive, inclusive, and enforceable labour systems.

Social dialogue contributes to compliance in at least four ways. First, it improves regulatory design by ensuring that rules reflect workplace realities and sectoral conditions. Second, it helps prevent disputes through negotiated solutions and workplace-level cooperation. Third, it strengthens worker voice, making non-compliance more visible and

⁸ [Study of the Impact of Labour Inspection actions on compliance with labour legislation | International Labour Organization](#)

⁹ [Indicators and methods for measuring effective governance in the field of labour administration | International Labour Organization](#)

¹⁰ <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa/principles-effective-governance-sustainable-development>

¹¹ [Responsible business conduct | International Labour Organization](#)

easier to address. Fourth, it can support the implementation of labour law by mobilizing employer associations and trade unions as channels for dissemination, guidance, and early correction. Indeed, strong collective bargaining and active trade unions help monitor workplaces internally, which lightens the burden on often understaffed labour inspectors, although the legal status and enforceability of collective agreements vary across EU Member States and weak enforcement of collective agreements remains a concern in some contexts. This is why cooperation with social partners is embedded in the labour inspection conventions and highlighted in the ILO's labour inspection guidance.

Through peak-level social dialogue - understood as institutions and processes through which governments, employers' and workers' organisations negotiate, consult and exchange information on labour, economic and social matters - social partners can support compliance with labour legislation, in particular by taking part in the planning of the labour inspectorates¹².

Access to justice¹³ is equally essential. Workers must be able to claim unpaid wages, challenge unfair treatment or dismissal, seek compensation, and address abuses. Labour inspection can support workers by identifying violations and gathering evidence, but strong legal and administrative systems are also needed for remedy.

Barriers such as cost, lack of information, complex procedures, language difficulties, and fear of retaliation can prevent workers from seeking justice. These challenges are often greater for migrant workers¹⁴, especially when their legal status depends on a single employer. To address this, enforcement systems should combine simple and accessible administrative options, such as complaints and mediation, with formal legal processes when needed. Social partners and representative organisations can play an important role in helping workers navigate these systems and access their rights¹⁵. Effective access also requires practical support, including adequately resourced trade unions, works councils and representative organisations that can help workers understand and pursue their rights. Legal aid, cost-free or affordable labour court proceedings, and protection against retaliation are also important to ensure that workers can effectively bring claims and obtain remedies.

¹² <https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/social-dialogue-report-2024-peak-level-social-dialogue-economic-development>

¹³ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/access-justice>

¹⁴ ILO's 2024 report Justice across Borders https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/Standard%20publication_Justice%20Across%20Borders_EN_web__0.pdf

¹⁵ [Social dialogue for the governance of labour migration | International Labour Organization](#)

3. Designing Balanced Regulatory Systems: Administrative Burden, Effectiveness and Enforceability

A key challenge for policymakers is to design labour rules that both protect workers and can be enforced while supporting fair competition, competitiveness, and productivity. There are two main risks to avoid. One is having rules that are too weak or poorly enforced, which allows violations to go unpunished, shifts costs onto workers, and disadvantages businesses that follow the law. The other is having rules that are too complex or burdensome, making them difficult to understand, monitor, and apply in practice. Indeed, poorly designed rules tend to increase costs for compliant employers without improving protection for workers. The real issue is not whether regulation should be lighter or stricter, but whether it is clear and realistic.

This is why an “enforceability test” can be useful when designing regulations. Such a test would check whether rules are clear, whether compliance can be verified in practice, whether authorities have the necessary powers and resources, whether digital tools support compliance rather than add unnecessary reporting, and whether sanctions are fair but strong enough to deter violations.

This approach reflects broader OECD¹⁶ and ILO thinking which puts much emphasis on rules being clear, proportionate, and enforceable from the start. A similar view seems to be held in the recent European Commission Communication “A Simpler, Clearer and Better Enforced EU Rulebook”¹⁷ which advocates that laws should be “simple by design”, meaning easy to understand, implement, and enforce.

Recent EU announced initiatives aim to address this same challenge. The proposed Quality Jobs Act aims to improve working conditions, health and safety, and the application of workers’ rights while supporting a strong and inclusive labour market. The Fair Labour Mobility Package also seeks to modernise and simplify rules. Both initiatives highlight the need to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens without weakening protection, and to ensure that rules are more easily enforceable in a context of labour mobility, digitalisation, and changing forms of work.

¹⁶ [Regulatory Enforcement and Inspections \(EN\)](#)

¹⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/publications/simpler-clearer-and-better-enforced-eu-rulebook_en

3.1 National Approaches (Selected OECD Countries)

Experiences from high-income countries outside the EU shed light on how this balance may be pursued in practice.

In Australia, the Fair Work Ombudsman combines education and guidance with enforcement. It provides employers with accessible online information and self-assessment tools to support voluntary compliance, while using complaints data and other information sources to identify higher-risk cases. Although employers are generally encouraged to comply voluntarily, serious or repeated violations are subject to stronger measures, including legal action. This combination of guidance, digital support tools, and risk-based enforcement illustrates how administrative burdens for compliant employers can be reduced while maintaining effective deterrence where it is most needed.¹⁸

Japan's Work Style Reform package shows how stronger labour protections can be combined with measures that ease adjustment for small and medium-sized enterprises. The reforms introduced firmer legal standards on overtime, annual leave and equal treatment, addressing long working hours, unpaid overtime, and disparities between regular and non-regular workers through binding legal obligations rather than voluntary commitments. At the same time, Japan recognised that smaller enterprises faced greater administrative and financial adjustment costs. SMEs were therefore granted longer transition periods for some requirements, including overtime caps and premium pay obligations, while the government provided guidance and technical support. Employer burden was addressed through phased implementation and differentiated timelines, not by weakening the standards themselves. Japan also incorporated negotiated compliance pathways. In areas such as the treatment of non-regular workers, compliance can be shaped through labour-management agreements that satisfy legal conditions. This allows flexibility in implementation while preserving minimum protections and avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. Institutional consultation through bodies such as the Labour Policy Council helped identify implementation challenges and involve employer and worker representatives in shaping detailed guidance. Labour inspection remains essential, but the Japanese model emphasizes that effective enforcement depends on clear rules, managed transitions and practical support for compliance. Japan's experience shows how standards can be maintained while reforms are phased, supported administratively and adapted through legally framed negotiated arrangements¹⁹.

¹⁸ <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/migration/725/compliance-and-enforcement-policy.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2025/054-05.pdf>
<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/12/navigating-work-transformation-in-japan/>

Singapore provides a distinctive example of how to combine strong labour governance with relatively low employer burden through sequencing. Rather than moving directly to binding regulation, it begins with tripartite guidance, advisory instruments, and implementation support. As expectations become clearer and practices mature, the state introduces stronger legal obligations and enforcement. This approach is reflected in tripartite guidelines that offer employers practical tools, clearer procedures, and time to adapt, making compliance more predictable while establishing a foundation for future regulation. Recent initiatives, such as the Workplace Fairness Bill and flexible work arrangements, emphasize internal processes, grievance handling, and procedural rights, allowing flexibility while ensuring accountability. Social dialogue plays a central operational role, with government, employers, and unions jointly shaping and implementing standards. This creates a layered compliance system combining guidance, support and enforcement. For labour inspection, it enables a more targeted focus on persistent non-compliance, reducing burden by lowering ambiguity rather than standards²⁰.

3.2 Key Comparative Insights

The experiences of Australia, Japan and Singapore highlight several common approaches to balancing effective enforcement with manageable administrative burdens. All three countries rely on differentiated and risk-based compliance systems. Australia and Singapore focus enforcement on serious or persistent non-compliance while reducing burdens for compliant employers, whereas Japan uses phased implementation and longer transition periods for SMEs without weakening substantive standards.

Labour inspection operates most effectively as part of a broader compliance system. Enforcement is complemented by guidance, digital tools, and implementation support. Australia relies on online guidance and self-assessment tools, Singapore emphasizes tripartite guidance and practical support, and Japan combines inspection with technical assistance and transitional measures for smaller enterprises.

The three countries combine strong legal standards with implementation flexibility. Japan's negotiated compliance pathways and phased reforms, together with Singapore's gradual progression from advisory guidance to binding obligations, show how governments can preserve regulatory objectives while allowing adaptation to operational realities. Australia similarly combines voluntary compliance measures with stronger sanctions for repeated breaches.

²⁰ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/labour-inspection-singapore>

<https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/employment-act/workright>

Finally, social dialogue, institutional coordination and administrative support are central enabling factors. Singapore's tripartite model and Japan's labour-management consultation mechanisms help reduce uncertainty and improve implementation. Overall, these experiences suggest that employer burdens are most sustainably reduced through clarity, predictability, phased implementation, and targeted enforcement rather than through lowering labour standards.

4. Enforcement and Protection of Migrant Workers

The enforcement of labour standards is tested most clearly where workers face structural vulnerabilities, and this is particularly visible in the case of migrant workers. Migrant workers are often employed in sectors marked by informality, subcontracting and labour intermediation, and may face dependence on employers for legal status, language barriers, limited knowledge of their rights, and weak access to trade union representation. These risks often begin at the recruitment stage, where high fees and abusive practices can create conditions of debt and vulnerability.

Together these factors increase migrant workers' exposure to abuse, including forced labour, unpaid wages, unsafe conditions, discrimination, and lack of social protection. At the same time, they face major obstacles in seeking justice. The vulnerabilities are compounded by structural challenges that labour inspectorates face: difficulty identifying the responsible employer in long subcontracting chains or where employment relationships are disguised; variation in mandates over working conditions; limits to cross-border cooperation; difficulty sustaining sanctions against employers where workers are no longer available to support the case; persistent under-resourcing; and the assignment of immigration enforcement functions to the labour inspectorate.²¹

4.1 Normative and Supervisory Insights

The ILO's normative framework on the protection of migrant workers is set out in Convention No. 97 which requires equal treatment between regular status migrant workers and nationals in areas such as wages, working conditions and social security and Convention No. 143 which addresses migration in abusive situations and reaffirms the basic rights of all migrant workers regardless of migration status. Together, these instruments establish that international labour standards apply to all workers unless explicitly limited otherwise.

²¹ [ILO, Promoting Fair Migration: General Survey concerning the migrant workers instruments, ILC.105/III/1B, Geneva, 2016, paras 477–482.](#)

ILO principles stress that labour inspection should protect all workers, including those in irregular situations and that inspectors' primary role is to enforce labour rights, not immigration law²². Separating these functions can help build trust and improve enforcement outcomes. Yet in practice, ILO supervisory bodies have identified recurring problems²³, including lack of equal treatment in practice, limited access to remedies, and weak inspection coverage in sectors where migrant workers are concentrated. The ILO normative framework also highlights recruitment as a critical stage, with rules aimed at preventing abusive or fraudulent practices. Addressing these gaps requires enforcement systems to take a coordinated approach to strengthen inspections, complaint mechanisms, and access to justice together.

4.2 Trust, Firewalls and Data Protection

A central operational challenge is ensuring that migrant workers can approach labour authorities without the act of reporting itself triggering immigration consequences. Where workers anticipate that contact with the inspectorate may lead to detention, deportation or loss of work authorisation, breaches go unreported and the inspectorate's reach into vulnerable workforces is reduced. This has led to the adoption of "firewall" arrangements: a clear functional separation between labour law enforcement and immigration control, designed to ensure that workers can come forward without exposing themselves to migration-related sanctions.

The challenge has become more complex with digital systems, such as data-sharing between authorities and the use of analytics. These tools can improve enforcement but also raise concerns about sensitive data²⁴. Strong safeguards, such as limiting data use and protecting privacy, are essential. A lack of trust in the system discourages workers from contacting authorities, allows abuses to persist, and undermines a level playing field for employers across the labour market.

4.3 National Policy Approaches

²² See: [Belgium, CEACR, Convention No. 81, observation, 2012](#); [Romania, CEACR, Convention No. 81, observation, 2024](#); [Saudi Arabia, CEACR, Convention No. 81, observation, 2024](#); [Spain, CEACR, Convention No. 81, observation, 2014](#); General Survey on migrant workers, 2016, paras 477 and 481.

²³ Recent cases examined by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations: [Croatia](#), OBS 2023, [Jordan](#) OBS 2025, [Lithuania](#) OBS 2024 and [Italy](#) OBS 2022 that led to the Committee of Application of Standards [discussion](#) in 2023.

²⁴ [PICUM, Data protection and the firewall: Digital technology use by labour authorities and migrant workers' rights, 2026](#).

The challenges identified above have prompted concrete policy responses. The following examples are drawn from high-income economies outside the EU where migrant worker protection has been the focus of recent reform.

Australia²⁵ introduced a package of reforms to protect temporary migrant worker in 2024 combining statutory safeguards with a structural reform of how cases of exploitation are reported and addressed. Under the new arrangements, workers are protected against visa cancellation where a breach of a work-related visa condition (such as working excess hours or for an unauthorised employer) is connected to workplace exploitation, certified by a participating government agency or by an accredited third party such as a trade union. This addresses a structural barrier under which workers reporting exploitation could face visa cancellation for the very breaches that exploitation had caused. The same package also broadens access to the enforcement system by enabling accredited third parties, such as trade unions, to support and certify workers' claims. An earlier reform also established franchisor liability, a form of accessorial liability, under which the parent companies of franchise networks may be held responsible for labour violations by their franchisees. This measure was introduced in part in response to documented exploitation of migrant workers in franchise settings.²⁶

In Canada²⁷, vulnerable migrant workers experiencing or at risk of abuse may apply for an open work permit under a programme established in 2019. The permit is available to workers holding employer-specific work permits, who would otherwise lose their lawful status if they left an employer engaged in abusive conduct. By contrast, an open work permit allows the worker to leave such a situation and accept employment with any eligible employer in Canada. Eligibility extends to the various forms of abuse recognised in the regulations, with the assessment threshold set at "reasonable grounds to believe" rather than the higher standard applied elsewhere in Canadian immigration decision-making, recognising the practical difficulty of proving abuse. Sanctions against non-compliant employers under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which include financial penalties and programme bans, also extend to the public listing of violations on a federal compliance register.²⁸

Japan's approach to migrant worker protection combines administrative support with structural reform of its labour migration framework. Multilingual hotlines and consultation

²⁵ [Australian Department of Home Affairs, Migrant worker protections; Australian Department of Home Affairs, Information for migrant workers.](#)

²⁶ [Fair Work Ombudsman, "85 Degrees franchisor penalised \\$1.44 million," media release, 5 June 2024.](#)

²⁷ [Government of Canada, Open work permit for vulnerable workers who are victims of abuse; Government of Canada, eligibility guidance for open work permits for vulnerable workers.](#)

²⁸ [Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, "The Government of Canada highlights reduced usage of Temporary Foreign Worker Program and increased penalties," news release, 6 October 2025.](#)

services are available to migrant workers on workplace issues. In June 2024, legislation was enacted to replace the existing framework, under which workers had been formally prohibited from changing employers for the duration of their training period, with a new framework taking effect in April 2027. Under the new framework, workers will be permitted to change employers within the same industry under specified conditions. The new framework also introduces stricter regulation of the intermediary bodies that recruit and oversee foreign workers, through a licensing regime, mandatory external auditors, and periodic inspections, and is designed to provide a structured pathway from entry-level work into longer-term skilled-worker status.²⁹

4.4 Comparative Assessments

The examples above point to several dimensions through which protection of migrant workers can be strengthened such as grievance mechanisms, immigration policy, and labour migration programme design. Reforms targeting only one of these dimensions leave the others as potential gaps through which protection may be undermined. Australia's reforms have broadened the channels through which workers can report, including through trusted intermediaries, while addressing the visa consequences that had discouraged reporting. Canada has updated immigration policy, allowing workers at risk of abuse to leave the dependent employment relationship. Japan has restructured the design of its labour migration framework, including the conditions under which workers may change employer. The transferability of these measures to the EU context depends on legal and institutional settings. Across systems, however, the experience of workers facing the greatest vulnerabilities offers a practical indicator of how an enforcement system functions in practice. Where those workers cannot safely reach labour inspection and labour justice, the credibility of the whole system is weakened.

5. Regional Cooperation and the International Dimension of Enforcement

Cross-border labour markets require cross-border enforcement tools. Recruitment may take place in one country, employment in another, and subcontracting chains may span across several more, often along recurrent migration corridors connecting sending and destination countries. Information, liability, and remedy therefore often become geographically fragmented. Regional and transnational cooperation between labour inspectorates can help close some of these gaps through information sharing, capacity building, exchange of methods, joint or concerted inspections and technical assistance.

²⁹ [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, "For Foreign Workers in Japan \(Information on Labor Standards\)"](#)

Within the EU, several institutional arrangements have emerged in response to these challenges. The Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee and the European Labour Authority support cooperation between national inspectorates in occupational safety and health and in the labour mobility field. The forthcoming Fair Labour Mobility Package, with a proposed extended and reinforced mandate for the European Labour Authority, aims to address these cross-border enforcement challenges.

5.1 Selected Initiatives

The ASEAN Labour Inspection Committee (ALICOM) provides a useful example of international cooperation to address shared enforcement challenges. Composed of senior representatives of the labour inspectorates of ten ASEAN Member States and convened under the ASEAN Labour Ministries' framework, ALICOM adopted a Work Plan for 2022–2030, aligned with the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers³⁰. The Plan sets out objectives including the sharing of inspection knowledge and concrete practices (for example on risk-based inspection planning and the inspection of hard-to-reach sectors), the strengthening of cross-sectoral coordination, the development of inspectorate capacity, and improved cooperation on cross-border cases. Specific activities include coordination between labour inspectors, recruitment agency regulators and anti-trafficking authorities; a regional forum on migrant worker protection; and technical advice to regional employer and worker organisations.³¹

REDIBIT, the Ibero-American Network of Labour Inspections, brings together inspection authorities from over twenty Ibero-American countries. Established in 2009, the network supports exchanges of experience, technical assistance, joint strategies for monitoring working conditions and modernisation of inspection systems. The network also supports coordinated inspection action. In 2026, REDIBIT launched a joint occupational safety and health campaign in the construction sector, involving inspection activities across participating Ibero-American countries and subsequent sharing and analysis of the results.³² The examples demonstrate that regional cooperation can support not only mutual learning, but also more coordinated inspection practices, greater consistency in enforcement approaches, and improved cooperation between labour inspectorates across countries.³³

³⁰ [ASEAN, ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, signed 14 November 2017.](#)

³¹ [ASEAN, ASEAN Labour Inspection Committee \(ALICOM\) Work Plan 2022–2030, July 2023](#)

³² [REDIBIT joint occupational safety and health campaign in the construction sector.](#)

³³ [OEITSS, REDIBIT page.](#)

6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

This analysis leads to several conclusions with potential relevance for policy development.

First, enforcement can be approached as a core element of labour market governance. Systems that invest in labour inspection and administration are better placed to support the effective application of labour rights, fair competition, formalisation and trust in labour market institutions.

Second, integrated approaches appear to strengthen enforcement outcomes. Labour inspection tends to be more effective when combined with complementary elements such as social dialogue, accessible complaint mechanisms, labour justice, data systems and cross-border cooperation. Approaches that emphasize effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness across the system are better positioned to deliver consistent results.

Third, the protection of migrant workers provides an important lens for assessing enforcement systems. Measures such as accessible and multilingual complaint channels, recruitment oversight, safeguards against retaliation and institutional arrangements that reduce dependency can contribute to more effective enforcement, particularly where trust in institutions is limited.

Fourth, approaches that combine clarity of rules with practical support for compliance appear to facilitate implementation. Simplified procedures, digital tools, advisory services and targeted inspection can help reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, while maintaining appropriate responses to serious or repeated non-compliance.

Overall, the experiences reviewed suggest that policies combining clear regulatory frameworks, supportive compliance mechanisms and credible enforcement provide a stronger basis for advancing decent work, social justice and well-functioning labour markets.