International Labour Organization

Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) between selected African countries and destination countries

Perspectives from countries of origin

© International Labour Organization 2026.
First published 2026.

Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International. See: creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0. The user is allowed to reuse, share (copy and redistribute), adapt (remix, transform and build upon the original work) as detailed in the licence. The user must clearly credit the ILO as the source of the material and indicate if changes were made to the original content. Use of the emblem, name and logo of the ILO is not permitted in connection with translations, adaptations or other derivative works.

Attribution – The user must indicate if changes were made and must cite the work as follows: ILO, *Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) between selected African countries and destination countries: Perspectives from countries of origin*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2026. © ILO.

Translations – In case of a translation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This is a translation of a copyrighted work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This translation has not been prepared, reviewed or endorsed by the ILO and should not be considered an official ILO translation. The ILO disclaims all responsibility for its content and accuracy. Responsibility rests solely with the author(s) of the translation*.

Adaptations – In case of an adaptation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This is an adaptation of a copyrighted work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This adaptation has not been prepared, reviewed or endorsed by the ILO and should not be considered an official ILO adaptation. The ILO disclaims all responsibility for its content and accuracy. Responsibility rests solely with the author(s) of the adaptation.*

Third-party materials – This Creative Commons licence does not apply to non-ILO copyright materials included in this publication. If the material is attributed to a third party, the user of such material is solely responsible for clearing the rights with the rights holder and for any claims of infringement.

Any dispute arising under this licence that cannot be settled amicably shall be referred to arbitration in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The parties shall be bound by any arbitration award rendered as a result of such arbitration as the final adjudication of such a dispute.

For details on rights and licensing, contact: rights@ilo.org. For details on ILO publications and digital products, visit: www.ilo.org/publns.

ISBN: 9789220437735 (print); 9789220437742 (web PDF)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54394/00034922

The designations employed in ILO publications and databases, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the ILO concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. See: www.ilo.org/disclaimer.

The opinions and views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions, views or policies of the ILO.

During the preparation of this work, the author utilized Claude, an AI-assisted writing and analysis tool developed by Anthropic, to support the structuring of the comparative matrix used to review and compare the content of bilateral labour migration agreements. The analysis, interpretation and final drafting were carried out by the author. Following the use of this tool, the author carefully reviewed, verified and edited all content as necessary, and assumes full responsibility for the document/publication's content. No material subject to intellectual property rights, including third party material, was used without acknowledgment and permission.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the ILO, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Cover photo: © Hemanth Madupu / ILO, 2022

Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) between selected African countries and destination countries

Perspectives from countries of origin

ILO Regional Office for Africa

Table of Contents

Acronyms **7**
Executive summary **8**
Why BLMAs matter 8
What the assessment covered 9
Main findings 9
1. Introduction **13**
1.1. Background and objectives **13**
1.2. Scope and definition **14**
1.3. Methodology **17**
2. Mapping of the BLMA landscape **19**
2.1. Overview of agreements reviewed 19
2.2. Mapping of identified agreements 20
3. Preparation and negotiation of BLMAs **24**
3.1. International guidance on BLMA preparation and negotiation 24
3.2. Initiation of negotiations 25
3.3. Stakeholder consultation and tripartite involvement 27
3.4. Role of international organisations and development partners 29
3.5. Negotiation dynamics 31
3.6. Choice of legal instrument: BLAs versus MoUs 32
4. Substantive content of BLMAs **33**
4.1. Recruitment governance and contracting 35
4.2. Worker protection and employment conditions 38
4.3. Dispute resolution and grievance mechanisms 40
4.4. Return, repatriation, and reintegration 41
4.5. Access to social protection and portability of benefits 42
5. Implementation in practice **44**
5.1. The gap between signed agreements and operational implementation 44
5.2. Dissemination, awareness, and accessibility of agreement content 45
5.3. Role of recruitment agencies in implementation 46
5.4. Gender dimensions of implementation 47
5.5. Pre-departure orientation: variable quality and fragmented delivery 47
5.6. Welfare monitoring and grievance mechanisms in practice 48
6. Monitoring and follow-up **51**
6.1. Joint monitoring committees: design and formal provisions 51
6.2. Joint committee functioning in practice 52

6.3. Data collection, reporting, and evaluation 53
6.4. Transparency and access to monitoring information 54
6.5. Social partners and the monitoring gap 54
6.6. The revision and renewal of agreements 55
7. Cross-cutting insights 56
7.1. Legal form and practical effectiveness 56
7.2. Sectoral concentration in domestic work 57
7.3. Gaps in gender-responsive design 57
7.4. Information asymmetries and transparency gaps 58
7.5. Complementary governance by non-state actors 59
7.6. GCC and European models: diverging approaches to BLMA governance 60
8. Recommendations 61
8.1. Strengthening the preparation and negotiation phase 61
8.2. Improving the substantive content of agreements 63
8.3. Operationalising implementation 64
8.4. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation 65
8.5. Enhancing the role of social partners 66
8.6. Regional coordination and collective approaches 67
Annex: List of Key Informant Interviews 69
Bibliography 70

▶ Tables and Figures

Table 1. Agreements reviewed 15
Figure 1. Overview of BLMAs 19
Figure 2. Signed government-to-government BLMAs 20
Table 2. Mapping of BLMAs 21
Table 3. Coverage of selected ILO-priority indicators across 18 signed BLMAs 33
Figure 3. Indicator-level distribution coverage across 18 signed BLMAs 34

Acknowledgments

This paper was prepared by Eleonore Thenot-Habtu, consultant for the ILO, under the overall guidance of the ILO's FAIRWAY team led by Amish Karki, Chief Technical Adviser.

The ILO would like to express its appreciation to the colleagues who provided valuable technical guidance and comments, including Theo Sparreboom, Ryszard Cholewinski, Samia Kazi Aoul, Katerine Landuyt, Paul Tacon, Siham Nuseibeh, Olukemi Osoba, Aida Awel, Guité Diop, Augustine Erameh, Vanessa Leigh, Uchechukwu Hilary-Ogbonna, Grace Orshio, Wycliffe Ouma Opara and Diana Rutechura (all ILO). The team further acknowledges the valuable contributions of representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society organizations, regional economic communities (ECOWAS and EAC) and other partners who provided feedback during the consultation and validation process.

This publication was made possible through the support of several ILO labour migration programmes, including FAIRWAY II funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); FMM West Africa II funded by the European Union (EU); the Action for Improving Labour Migration Governance in Nigeria (ACTION) Project funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) under its Centres for Migration and Development (ZME) Programme; and the Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) Programme, Phase II, funded by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK-FCDO). The paper was edited and designed by Pauline Delrue.

Acronyms

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BLA	Bilateral Labour Agreement
BLMA	Bilateral Labour Migration Agreement
BRMM	Better Regional Migration Management programme
COTU-K	Central Organization of Trade Unions – Kenya
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FENASOL	National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Unions in Lebanon
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFBTU	General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Migrant Worker Resource Centre
NEA	National Employment Authority
NLC	Nigeria Labour Congress
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
UAERA	Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies
UAE	United Arab Emirates

International Labour Organization

Executive summary

Key points

- Bilateral labour migration agreements are increasingly used by African countries of origin and destination countries to structure cooperation on labour mobility, recruitment, worker protection and regular migration pathways.
- The existence of a BLMA does not automatically translate into effective governance or protection outcomes. Agreement texts vary considerably in scope, legal form and operational detail, and important provisions on recruitment costs, wage protection, dispute resolution, social protection and monitoring are not always sufficiently clear or enforceable.
- Implementation remains a major challenge. In several corridors, the gap between signed agreements and their practical application is linked to weak dissemination, limited worker awareness, uneven pre-departure orientation, limited welfare monitoring and under-functioning joint committees.
- Social partners can play a stronger role throughout the BLMA lifecycle, including preparation, negotiation, implementation, monitoring and worker support. Trade union cooperation arrangements also offer practical channels for support and referral in destination countries.
- Greater coordination among countries of origin, including through Regional Economic Communities such as IGAD, the EAC and ECOWAS, could support common minimum standards, peer learning and more consistent approaches to BLMA negotiation, content and implementation. The report identifies RECs as possible entry points for advancing regional dialogue, developing shared baseline standards and institutionalising peer learning on BLMAs.

Why BLMAs matter

Bilateral labour migration agreements have become an important tool for governing international labour migration. They are used by countries of origin and destination to define responsibilities, structure recruitment processes, facilitate labour mobility and establish cooperation mechanisms on the protection of migrant workers.

For countries of origin, BLMAs are often seen as instruments to expand regular migration pathways, improve oversight of recruitment practices and strengthen protection frameworks for nationals working abroad. For destination countries, they can support labour market planning and provide a framework for more regular and orderly labour migration.

However, BLMAs are not self-executing instruments. Their effectiveness depends not only on the quality of the agreement text, but also on how they are prepared, negotiated, implemented, monitored and revised. The assessment therefore examines both the substantive content of agreements and the institutional arrangements that shape their implementation in practice.

What the assessment covered

This assessment reviewed bilateral labour migration agreements involving seven African countries of origin – Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda – with destination countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jordan and Lebanon, as well as selected European countries for comparative purposes. The review covered signed agreements, draft texts and ongoing negotiation processes where documentation was available.

The assessment uses the term "bilateral labour migration agreement" as an overarching category covering legally binding bilateral labour agreements, memoranda of understanding and other bilateral cooperation arrangements regulating labour migration. It also considers selected cooperation arrangements between workers' organisations.

The analysis combines a desk review, agreement mapping and targeted key informant interviews. It applies the main dimensions of the ILO-IOM BLMA Joint Assessment Tool,[1] focusing on preparation and negotiation, substantive content, implementation arrangements, and monitoring and follow-up.

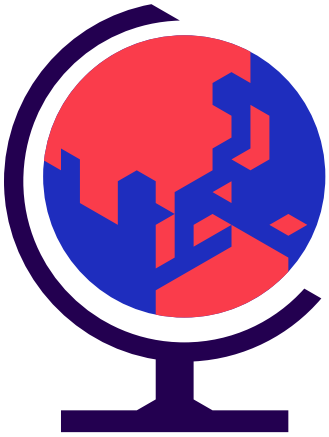
Main findings

The BLMA landscape is expanding, but remains uneven

Across the seven African countries covered by the assessment, the BLMA landscape is evolving. A total of 28 agreements were reviewed based on available documentation, including 20 signed agreements. These include legally binding bilateral labour agreements, memoranda of understanding and two cooperation agreements concluded between workers' organisations.

The reviewed agreements are concentrated in the Africa-GCC corridor. Agreements with European partners remain comparatively limited, with only Ethiopia and Kenya having concluded agreements with European destinations in the reviewed sample. Most agreements regulate labour migration in general terms, while a smaller group is sector-specific, including agreements focused on domestic worker recruitment and healthcare workforce mobility.

This uneven landscape matters for policy and implementation. GCC-oriented agreements make up most of the reviewed sample and often focus on regulating recruitment and protecting specific categories of workers, particularly domestic workers. European-oriented agreements are fewer and more recent and tend to place greater emphasis on broader mobility partnerships, skills matching, qualification recognition, circular migration, data protection and information-sharing. This diversity suggests that BLMAs should not be treated as a uniform category. Their objectives, structure and operational implications differ depending on the corridor, sector, legal system and bargaining context.



[1] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.

Preparation and negotiation processes need stronger evidence and consultation

BLMA negotiations are often initiated in response to practical and diplomatic factors. In the reviewed corridors, negotiations were commonly driven by destination countries approaching countries of origin, or by the scale of existing labour migration flows to a particular destination. Labour market data, skills assessments and forward-looking analysis appear to play a role in some cases, but less consistently. This has implications for how agreements are prepared. Countries of origin need strong baseline positions to ensure that discussions are not limited to facilitating recruitment, but also address worker protection, fair recruitment, implementation arrangements and monitoring.

A key issue is the extent to which preparation and negotiation processes draw on actors beyond government. While BLMAs are negotiated between States, their implementation depends on a wider set of institutions and stakeholders, including workers' and employers' organisations, recruitment regulators, recruitment agencies, labour attachés, consular services and migrant worker support structures. Their involvement is not always systematic, particularly once negotiations move beyond initial consultation or technical review.

This matters because these actors often hold practical information that is essential for effective agreement design. Social partners can provide insight into workplace risks, employment conditions, dispute resolution and sector-specific protection needs. Recruitment regulators and recruitment agency associations can help identify recurring issues linked to recruitment costs, contract processing, platform requirements, documentation and contract substitution. Labour attachés, consular officials and migrant worker support services can provide information on the types of complaints and protection gaps that arise after workers are deployed.

Stronger baseline positions, supported by evidence and broader consultation, can help countries of origin enter negotiations with clear priorities and a better understanding of the measures needed to make agreements operational after signature.

Agreement content contains useful provisions but protection gaps remain

Most reviewed agreements include provisions on recruitment governance, employment contracts, the responsibilities of competent authorities and grievance mechanisms. However, the level of detail varies considerably. Some agreements set out only broad commitments, while others define more specific obligations or procedures. Across the reviewed agreements, several protection areas remain insufficiently detailed or operationalised, including recruitment cost allocation, wage protection, contract enforcement, occupational safety and health, access to complaints mechanisms and remedies, and gender-responsive protection.

Domestic work features prominently in the reviewed sample, with several agreements focused specifically on domestic worker recruitment. This sectoral concentration is significant because domestic work is often associated with heightened protection risks, including isolation in private households, limited access to labour inspection, dependency on employers and barriers to seeking assistance. At the same time, gender responsiveness is largely absent from the reviewed agreements, including in domestic work agreements, which rarely address how risks and protection needs may differ for women and men migrant workers.

Implementation is the central challenge

A recurring finding is the gap between the existence of signed agreements and their implementation in practice. Even where agreements include useful provisions, their impact depends on whether institutions, procedures, resources and accountability mechanisms are in place.

Several implementation challenges emerge across the reviewed corridors. Agreement texts are often not widely disseminated or easily accessible to workers, recruitment agencies, social partners or frontline

officials. Pre-departure orientation is often fragmented or variable in quality. Welfare monitoring and grievance handling remain uneven, especially once workers are in destination countries. Recruitment agencies play a significant role in practice, but their responsibilities under BLMAs are not always clearly regulated or monitored.

Implementation also depends on institutional capacity. Labour attachés, embassies, consulates, migrant worker resource centres, recruitment regulators, trade unions and civil society organisations can all contribute to worker protection, but their roles need to be clarified, which requires BLMA implementation frameworks.

Monitoring and follow-up mechanisms need to be made operational

Many BLMAs provide for joint committees or similar bilateral mechanisms. These can be important spaces for reviewing implementation, addressing disputes, exchanging data and revising agreements. However, the assessment finds that such committees do not meet regularly, have clear mandates or produce accessible monitoring information.

Data collection is also insufficient. Monitoring systems should capture not only deployment numbers, but also complaints, contract violations, recruitment abuses, occupational injuries and repatriation cases. These data should be disaggregated by sex, age, sector and destination where possible.

Monitoring should also involve social partners. Trade unions and employers' organisations can help identify gaps between agreement texts and workplace realities, contribute to policy review and support outreach to migrant workers.

Social partners and non-state actors provide complementary protection channels

The assessment highlights the potential role of social partners throughout the BLMA cycle. Governments could move beyond ad hoc consultation and involve trade unions and employers' organisations more systematically in preparing negotiating positions, reviewing draft texts, participating in advisory or monitoring structures, and informing periodic reviews.

Trade union-to-trade union cooperation arrangements can also complement state-led protection systems. For example, such arrangements can support legal assistance, referral mechanisms, community-based outreach and access to support in destination countries. These forms of cooperation are particularly valuable where migrant workers face barriers to access formal complaint mechanisms.

Regional coordination could strengthen countries of origin

Several stakeholders highlighted the potential value of greater coordination among African countries of origin. Such coordination could begin with common minimum standards that countries seek to uphold across bilateral processes.

Possible areas for common positions include minimum working conditions, rest periods, access to health insurance, leave entitlements, prohibition of recruitment fees charged to workers, protection against abuse, access to grievance mechanisms and repatriation safeguards.

Regional Economic Communities, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), could provide useful platforms for peer learning, technical exchange and the development of standard clauses or model provisions. Regional coordination could also help reduce competitive pressures between countries of origin and avoid a race to the bottom in negotiated standards.

Policy directions

- **Strengthen preparation before negotiations:** Countries of origin should strengthen negotiating frameworks by defining clear baseline positions, including non-negotiable provisions on core protection issues. These should be informed by evidence on labour migration flows, sectoral demand in destination countries, skill profiles, welfare outcomes and consultations with social partners, recruitment agencies and other relevant stakeholders.
- **Embed core protections directly in agreement texts:** BLMAs should include minimum operational standards, including prohibitions on passport retention and confiscation of identity documents, standard employment contracts, clear allocation of recruitment and deployment costs in line with the employer-pays principle, wage and working time provisions, rest periods, accommodation, end-of-service entitlements, structured grievance mechanisms and repatriation provisions. Where model contracts are used, they should be annexed and agreed as part of the negotiation process.
- **Operationalise grievance mechanisms and implementation arrangements:** BLMAs should be accompanied by implementation frameworks, such as annexes or joint operational plans, setting out responsible institutions, recruitment procedures, pre-departure preparation, contract verification, complaint handling, return procedures, timelines, indicators and resource requirements. Grievance mechanisms should identify the competent institutions, procedures, indicative timelines, escalation pathways and the role of embassies or labour attachés.
- **Improve dissemination and worker awareness:** Signed BLMAs should be published in accessible formats and languages, shared proactively with social partners, recruitment agencies and civil society organisations, and incorporated into pre-departure orientation. Workers should receive practical information on the rights, entitlements and complaint channels provided under applicable agreements.
- **Strengthen monitoring, data and review:** Joint monitoring committees should be made functional through clear mandates, regular meetings, designated secretariats, dedicated resources and written reporting on deployment data, complaint outcomes, implementation challenges and agreed actions. Review and renewal processes should be linked to implementation evidence, including sex-disaggregated data on deployment, complaints, welfare outcomes, return, occupational injury and compensation.
- **Formalise the role of social partners:** Workers' and employers' organisations should be more systematically integrated across the BLMA lifecycle. This may include contributing to negotiating positions, reviewing draft texts before signature, receiving signed agreements, participating in joint monitoring committees, and providing input to periodic reviews.
- **Support trade union cooperation and complementary worker support mechanisms:** Trade union-to-trade union cooperation arrangements can complement state protection systems by supporting legal assistance, community-based support, referrals and worker outreach. In contexts where trade union activity is restricted, worker community organisations and diaspora networks may also be explored as complementary partners for protection and support.
- **Advance regional peer learning and common minimum standards:** Countries of origin could explore common non-negotiable minimum standards for BLMAs, promoted consistently across bilateral processes. RECs such as IGAD, the EAC and ECOWAS could support this agenda through regional dialogue, peer learning, shared analysis of existing agreements, standard-provision language, peer review mechanisms, comparative review of joint committee functioning, and training for labour attachés and diplomatic staff.

▶ 1 Introduction

1.1. Background and objectives

Bilateral labour migration agreements (BLMAs) are an increasingly prominent governance tool used by countries of origin and destination to structure cooperation on international labour mobility. In line with the ILO-IOM Joint Assessment Tool, BLMAs are broadly understood as arrangements between two States that describe the respective responsibilities and actions of each party in governing labour migration, encompassing legally binding bilateral labour agreements (BLAs), memoranda of understanding (MoUs), and other bilateral cooperation instruments addressing labour mobility.[2] Global guidance on BLMAs emphasises that such instruments may address a range of migration governance objectives, from matching labour supply and demand to improving worker protection, enhancing regular migration pathways, and strengthening bilateral cooperation frameworks.[3] Historically, bilateral labour agreements emerged as State-led mechanisms to organise labour mobility and recruitment. Over time, they have increasingly been framed as instruments to protect workers' rights, improve recruitment practices, and advance broader migration governance objectives. The global guidance notes that more recent BLMAs increasingly pursue multiple policy objectives, including labour market regulation, development cooperation, and broader migration governance goals.[4] At the same time, existing analyses highlight that the content, legal nature, and implementation modalities of these agreements vary widely across regions and corridors, which may contribute to differing levels of alignment with international labour standards and diverse operational outcomes.[5]

Within the Africa-GCC corridor, BLMAs have gained particular relevance. Labour migration flows have increased, alongside strong demand for workers in sectors such as construction, hospitality and care services, including domestic work, as well as ongoing policy efforts to strengthen regular migration governance.[6] For countries of origin, BLMAs are often viewed as instruments to expand regular migration pathways, enhance oversight of recruitment practices, and improve protection frameworks for nationals working abroad. For destination countries, such agreements can support labour market planning and facilitate structured cooperation with countries of origin and promote regular and orderly labour migration channels. By contrast, the European agreements covered in this assessment reflect a different policy logic. While they represent a smaller and more recent subset of the reviewed instruments, they tend to focus more on broader mobility partnerships, skills matching, qualification recognition, circular migration, or migration-management cooperation. This indicates that BLMA dynamics are not uniform across destination regions and need to be interpreted in light of distinct legal, institutional, and labour market contexts.

---

[2] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[3] United Nations Network on Migration, *Global Guidance on Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2022.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] World Bank, *Emerging trends in bilateral labour migration agreements*, 2023.
[6] United Nations Network on Migration (Arab States Regional Review), *Session 3: Protecting and Empowering Migrant Workers and Operationalizing their Role in the Sustainable Development Process in Countries of Origin and Destination – Background Note*, Regional Reviews, 2024.

Despite the proliferation of BLMAs, existing literature and global guidance note that the presence of an agreement does not automatically translate into effective governance outcomes.[7] Agreements vary significantly in scope and operational detail, and the extent to which they incorporate key protection measures such as wage protection, dispute resolution mechanisms, or social security provisions remains uneven. Moreover, good practices embedded in agreement texts, even when the texts are legally binding, do not necessarily guarantee effective implementation in practice, underscoring the importance of systematic assessments that examine both substantive provisions and implementation in practice.

Against this backdrop, the present assessment aims to provide an analytical review of BLMAs concluded or under discussion between selected African countries of origin and destination countries. Building on the ILO-IOM BLMA Joint Assessment Tool and relevant international guidance, the report seeks to:

- Map and analyse the existing landscape of BLMAs within the selected migration corridors.
- Assess the substantive content of reviewed agreements against international standards and good practice principles, including provisions related to recruitment governance, worker protection, dispute resolution, return and reintegration, and social protection.
- Examine institutional arrangements related to preparation, negotiation, implementation, monitoring, and follow-up mechanisms.
- Identify cross-cutting insights, good practices and operational considerations to inform policy dialogue, regional cooperation, and evidence-based recommendations to strengthen BLMA governance, including options that may support the development of common approaches among African countries of origin where relevant.

The report's findings are intended to support informed dialogue among governments and social partners, contribute to ongoing ILO technical assistance, and inform future programming aimed at promoting fair, safe, and regular labour migration pathways.

1.2. Scope and definition

For the purposes of this assessment, the term bilateral labour migration agreement is used as an overarching analytical category, consistent with the ILO-IOM Joint Assessment Tool[8] and broader ILO terminology.[9] It encompasses BLAs, MoUs and other bilateral cooperation arrangements regulating labour migration. In addition to government-to-government agreements, the assessment also considers cooperation arrangements between workers' organisations (trade union-to-trade union agreements) and arrangements involving recruitment actors.[10]

The assessment focuses on BLMAs involving seven African countries of origin: Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda. Destination countries covered in the review include GCC countries, as well as Jordan and Lebanon. For comparative purposes, the assessment also analyses several BLMAs with selected European countries. Table 1 below provides the list of signed agreements reviewed. In addition, a few draft agreements were also reviewed to provide indicative insights into emerging trends in negotiation practices and policy priorities. These drafts are not listed individually, given the sensitivity of ongoing negotiations and the fact that their provisions are not fixed and may evolve before adoption.

[7] ILO and IOM, *Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements in African Union Member States: Taking Stock and the Way Forward*, 2019.
[8] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[9] ILO, *Addressing governance challenges in a changing labour migration landscape*, Report IV, International Labour Conference, 106th Session, 2017.
[10] Two trade union-to-trade union MoUs were reviewed: the Memorandum of Understanding between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) (2022), and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Organisation of Trade Unions of Kenya (COTU-K) and the National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Unions in Lebanon (FENASOL) (2022).

▶ **Table 1. Agreements reviewed**

Countries	Type of agreement	Version reviewed	Year	Full title
Ethiopia-Lebanon	BLA	Signed version	2023	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lebanon and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on the employment of Ethiopian workers in Lebanon
Ethiopia-Jordan	MoU	Signed version	2023	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on Employment of Ethiopian Workers
Ethiopia-KSA	BLA	Signed version	2017	Agreement on the employment of domestic workers between the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ethiopia-Kuwait	MoU	Signed version	2024	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Kuwait on the Employment of the domestic workers
Ethiopia-Qatar	BLA	Signed version	2012	Agreement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Qatar concerning the employment of Ethiopian manpower in the State of Qatar
Ethiopia-UAE	MoU	Signed version	2018	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the United Arab Emirates on the employment of Ethiopian workers in the UAE
Kenya-Germany	BLA	Signed version	2024	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on comprehensive migration and mobility partnership
Kenya-Austria	MoU	Signed version	2024	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the Government of the Republic of Austria on cooperation in the field of mobility and migration
Kenya-UK	BLA	Signed version	2021	Bilateral agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for collaboration on healthcare workforce
Kenya-Qatar	BLA	Signed version	2012	Agreement between the State of Qatar and the Government of the Republic of Kenya concerning the regulation of manpower employment in the State of Qatar
Kenya-KSA	BLA	Signed version	2015	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on recruitment of domestic workers
Kenya-UAE	MoU	Signed version	2018	Memorandum of Understanding on labour cooperation between the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Government of the Republic of Kenya

COTU-FENASOL	MoU	Signed version	2022	Memorandum of Understanding between Central Organisation of Trade Unions Kenya (COTU-K) and National Federation of Workers and Employee Trade Unions in Lebanon (FENASOL)
NLC-GFBTU	MoU	Signed version	2022	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Nigeria Labour Congress and the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) on advancing trade unions' effective contributions to the defence, protection and promotion of the human and labour rights of migrant workers
Tanzania-KSA	BLA	Signed version	2023	Agreement on workers' recruitment between the Government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania
Tanzania-KSA	BLA	Signed version	2023	Agreement on domestic workers' recruitment between the Government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania
Tanzania-Qatar	BLA	Signed version	2014	Agreement between the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Government of the State of Qatar concerning the regulation of employment of Tanzania citizens in the State of Qatar
Tanzania-UAE	MoU	Signed version	2023	Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation of the UAE and the Prime Minister's Office - labour, youth, employment and persons with disabilities of the United Republic of Tanzania and the President's Office - labour, economic affairs and investments of the revolutionary government of Zanzibar in the field of manpower
Uganda-Jordan	BLA	2016 signed version	2016, renewed in 2020	Bilateral Agreement Between the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Republic of Uganda governing the Recruitment and Employment of Ugandan Migrant Workers
Uganda-KSA	BLA	Signed version	2017, revised in 2023	Revised agreement on recruitment of domestic workers between the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of the Republic of Uganda and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Total number of agreements reviewed				**20 including 18 government-to-government agreements**[11]

Certain instruments identified during the mapping phase were excluded from the analytical scope of this report. These include:

- Tanzania – Iran, 2024 Memorandum of Understanding, excluded as it falls outside the geographical and thematic scope of the labour migration corridors examined in this assessment; and
- Côte d'Ivoire – France, 1995 Convention, excluded as it does not constitute a BLMA within the framework applied in this study.

[11] Including draft agreements, the total number of BLMAs reviewed is 28, of which 26 are government-to-government agreements.

1.3. Methodology

This assessment combines desk-based analysis with targeted consultations and applies the analytical dimensions of the ILO-IOM BLMA Joint Assessment Tool, focusing on preparation and negotiation processes, the substantive content of agreements, implementation arrangements, and monitoring and follow-up mechanisms.

Desk review and document analysis

A structured desk review formed the core of the assessment. In line with the working definition set out above, the review covered BLMAs, understood as including BLAs, MoUs and other bilateral cooperation arrangements regulating labour migration, identified within the selected migration corridors. Available texts were compiled and analysed. The desk review also drew on international guidance, policy literature, and relevant ILO project documentation to situate the agreements within broader labour migration governance frameworks.

Agreement mapping and analytical matrix

An agreement overview matrix was developed to map the landscape of instruments identified across the corridors and to support systematic comparison of their content. The matrix captured key characteristics of each agreement, including instrument type, legal status, year, thematic scope, and institutional arrangements. Detailed content analysis was conducted only for agreements to which documentary access was available, while the broader mapping also records instruments for which texts could not be obtained.

Key informant consultations

Targeted key informant interviews (KIIs) complemented the desk review. Initial consultations were conducted with ILO focal points covering specific countries or sub-regions to clarify institutional contexts and validate preliminary findings. Additional KIIs were undertaken with stakeholders identified through ILO networks, including government representatives, workers' and employers' organisations, and, where relevant, other actors involved in labour migration governance at national or regional level.

During the data collection phase, coordination was initiated with an IOM consultant conducting a parallel assessment of BLMAs involving Kenya with the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This coordination focused primarily on interview planning and stakeholder engagement, with the objective of avoiding duplication of outreach and minimising consultation fatigue among shared stakeholders. Interview coverage and analytical findings for the present assessment, however, remain independent.

The full list of interviews is provided in the Annex. These discussions helped contextualise how agreements are prepared, implemented, and monitored in practice.

Validation workshops

Two online validation workshops were held in May 2026 with government and regional stakeholders, and with non-governmental actors, including social partners and recruitment-related stakeholders. The workshops provided an opportunity to present and discuss the draft findings, gather feedback on the analysis, and identify areas where the final report could be clarified or complemented, particularly in relation to regional coordination and follow-up priorities.

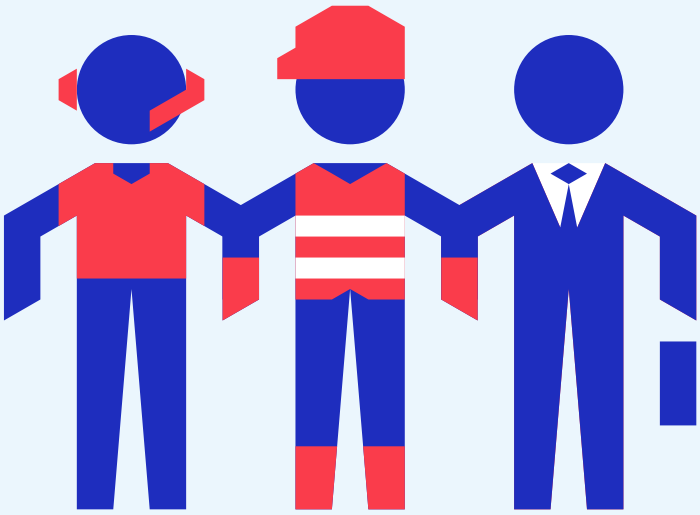
Analytical framework

The assessment applies the core dimensions of the ILO-IOM BLMA Joint Assessment Tool, focusing on:

- Preparation and negotiation processes;
- design and substantive content of agreements;
- implementation arrangements; and
- monitoring and follow-up mechanisms.

Limitations

The analysis is primarily document-based and reflects the availability and quality of accessible agreement texts. In several instances, only draft versions were available, which may not fully reflect final or current negotiated provisions. In addition, engagement with recruitment actors remained limited, and consultations with destination-country stakeholders were not included within the scope of this assessment, which limits the extent to which implementation dynamics could be examined from both sides of the corridor. Finally, interviews were conducted remotely and within a limited timeframe, which may have restricted the diversity of perspectives captured.



▶ 2 Mapping of the BLMA landscape

2.1. Overview of agreements reviewed

The mapping exercise identified a broader range of bilateral labour migration instruments across the selected corridors (see Table 2 below), including signed agreements, draft texts and ongoing negotiations.

While this mapping provides an overview of the evolving BLMA landscape, the detailed analysis presented in this report focuses on a subset of 28 agreements for which a copy was available. Unless otherwise indicated, quantitative references in this section relate to this reviewed sample.

▶ **Figure 1. Overview of BLMAs**

Across the seven African countries covered by this assessment (Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania), a total of **28 BLMAs (including 20 signed BLMAs, presented in Table 1)** were reviewed based on available documentation. These include both BLAs and MoUs signed by governments, as well as two cooperation agreements concluded between workers' organisations.

In terms of legal form, **19 of the reviewed instruments are BLAs, while nine are MoUs,** including two between trade unions and seven between governments. BLAs therefore represent the dominant legal

format among the agreements analysed, although MoUs remain widely used for cooperation on labour mobility, migration governance, or institutional coordination. Implications related to the type of agreement are discussed further in this report.

Sectoral focus varies across agreements. While most instruments regulate labour migration in general terms, **seven agreements in the reviewed sample are sector specific. Six focus explicitly on domestic worker recruitment,** namely those concluded between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kuwait, Kenya and Saudi Arabia, Tanzania and Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia and Uganda and Saudi Arabia. In addition, **one agreement – between Kenya and the United Kingdom – is sector specific to the healthcare workforce.**

Geographically, the reviewed agreements are strongly concentrated in the Africa-Gulf corridor. Agreements with European partners remain comparatively limited. **Only two African countries in the sample – namely Ethiopia and Kenya – have concluded agreements with European destinations, representing four agreements in total** (Ethiopia-Italy MoU; Kenya-Germany BLA; Kenya-Austria MoU; Kenya-United Kingdom BLA).

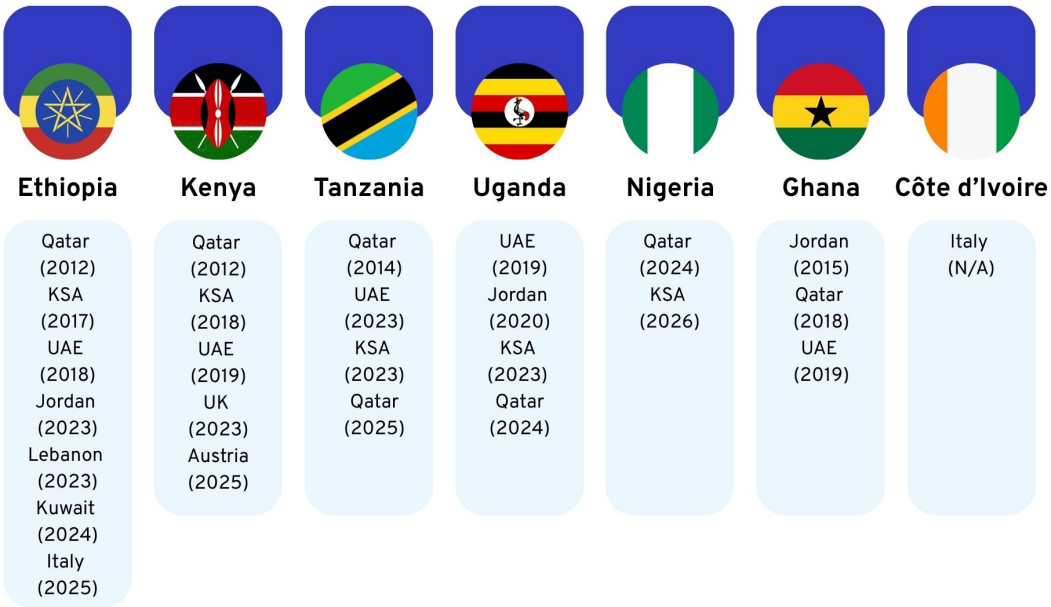
The reviewed agreements span more than a decade, with the earliest instruments in the sample dating from 2012. Of the 28 agreements reviewed (23 effectively signed), **seven were concluded between 2012 and 2017, while 16 were signed, revised, or drafted from 2018 onwards.** Within this group, 13 agreements date from 2020 or later, indicating a recent increase in bilateral engagement on labour migration across the countries covered by the assessment.

2.2. Mapping of identified agreements

Table 2 provides an overview of government-to-government agreements reported by stakeholders or identified through desk review, including instruments in force, draft agreements, and arrangements under discussion, irrespective of whether full texts were available for review.

The graphic below provides a visual snapshot of the signed government-to-government agreements identified across the seven countries covered by the assessment, prior to the more detailed mapping presented in Table 2.

▶ **Figure 2. Signed government-to-government BLMAs**



▶ Table 2. Mapping of BLMAs

Country	Côte d'Ivoire	Ethiopia	Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Tanzania
GCC, Jordan and Lebanon							
Bahrain	No	Negotiations ongoing	No	Negotiations ongoing (Draft – unsigned)	No	Negotiations ongoing	No
Jordan	No	2023 MoU (revision of 2012 MoU) In effect	2015 MoU	Negotiations ongoing (Draft – unsigned)	No	2020 BLA (revision of 2016 BLA suspended in 2019) Suspended	No
Kuwait	No	2024 MoU (domestic workers) In effect	Negotiations ongoing	Negotiations ongoing (Draft – unsigned)	No	Negotiations ongoing	No
Lebanon	No	2023 BLA In effect	No	No	No	Negotiations ongoing	No
Oman	No	Negotiations ongoing	No	Negotiations ongoing (Draft – unsigned)	No	Negotiations ongoing[12]	No
Qatar	Negotiations/ discussions reported	2012 BLA In effect	2018 BLA (ratified in November 2025)	2012 BLA	2024 BLA	2024 BLA (not yet implemented)	2014 BLA In effect
Saudi Arabia	Negotiations ongoing[13]	2017 BLA (domestic workers) In effect but negotiations are on-going to review and sign additional BLAs	No	2017 BLA (domestic workers) Revised Draft – unsigned	2026 BLA (domestic workers)	2023 BLA (domestic workers), revision of 2017 BLA In effect	2023 BLA (domestic workers) In effect 2023 BLA (workers recruitment) In effect
United Arab Emirates	No	2018 MoU	2019 MoU	No	No	2019 MoU (further information required)	2023 MoU In effect
Europe							
Austria	No	No	No	2024 MoU (migration cooperation)	No	No	No
France	1995 Convention concerning the movement and residence of persons In effect	No	No	No	No	No	No

[12] ILO, *Enhanced stakeholder coordination for improved labour migration in Uganda*, 2024.
[13] ILO, *Étude sur le cadre légal et réglementaire encadrant le recrutement et le placement des travailleurs migrants en Côte d'Ivoire*, 2026.

Country	Côte d'Ivoire	Ethiopia	Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Uganda	Tanzania
France	1995 Convention concerning the movement and residence of persons In effect	No	No	No	No	No	No
Germany	No	No	Negotiations ongoing	2024 BLA (migration comprehensive partnership)	No	No	No
Italy	Agreement reported; date/type not available	2025 MoU (migration and mobility)	Negotiations ongoing	No	No	No	No
United Kingdom	No	No	No	2021 BLA (health professionals)	No	No	No

Other cooperation arrangements related to labour migration

In addition to formal BLMAs concluded between governments, interviews conducted during this study revealed the existence of several other cooperation arrangements between non-state actors. These initiatives often aim to address practical challenges in labour migration governance, facilitate coordination across migration corridors, or compensate for perceived gaps in formal bilateral frameworks. Three main types of arrangements emerged from the interviews:

- Cooperation between trade unions
- Cooperation between recruitment agencies' associations
- Government-to-company mobility partnerships

Trade union cooperation agreements

Respondents in Kenya and Nigeria reported the existence of cooperation agreements between trade unions in countries of origin and destination. These arrangements aim to strengthen collaboration between labour organisations in addressing issues related to labour migration and migrant worker protection.

For example, the **Central Organization of Trade Unions of Kenya (COTU-K)** concluded a memorandum of understanding with the **Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Unions in Lebanon (FENASOL)** in October 2022. The agreement focuses on strengthening cooperation between the two trade union organisations, promoting the protection of migrant workers' rights, and supporting decent working conditions. It provides for activities such as the exchange of delegations, joint awareness campaigns on migrant workers' rights, training and orientation activities, and the establishment of information and support structures for migrant workers.[14]

[14] Memorandum of Understanding between Central Organisation of Trade Unions Kenya (COTU-K) and National Federation of Workers and Employee Trade Unions in Lebanon (FENASOL).

COTU-K also reported the existence of a cooperation agreement with a counterpart trade union in **Bahrain**;[15] however, a copy of this agreement was not available for review as part of this study. In addition, COTU-K representatives referred to ongoing discussions with trade union partners in other destination countries, including Germany.[16]

Similarly, the **Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC)** signed a memorandum of understanding with the **General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU)** in 2022 aimed at advancing the human and labour rights of migrant workers. The agreement promotes collaboration between the two organisations on fair recruitment, access to justice for migrant workers, and awareness raising on labour rights. It also envisages joint initiatives such as training, advocacy activities, and engagement in the development and monitoring of bilateral labour migration agreements.[17]

Interview evidence suggests that the implementation of these cooperation agreements remains uneven. While the Kenya-Lebanon agreement has enabled practical cooperation in areas such as awareness raising and assistance to migrant workers facing disputes with employers,[18] the Nigeria-Bahrain agreement has so far seen limited operational follow-up because of language barriers and logistical constraints affecting coordination between the organisations.[19]

Cooperation between recruitment agencies' associations

In addition to trade union cooperation, interviews also highlighted the existence of cooperation arrangements between recruitment agencies' associations in origin and destination countries. In Uganda, representatives of the **Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies (UAERA)** reported that the association has concluded memoranda of understanding with recruitment agency associations in **Jordan** and **Saudi Arabia**.[20] Although detailed information on the content of these agreements was not available for review as part of this study, interviewees indicated that they facilitate cooperation between recruitment actors operating along migration corridors.

Government-private sector mobility partnerships

In **Ethiopia**, government representatives also referred to cooperation arrangements with employers and employer organisations abroad, including a construction federation and a logistics company in **Germany**, as well as a mining company in **Sweden**.[21]

These arrangements were described as mechanisms to facilitate the recruitment of Ethiopian workers in response to specific labour demand from employers, including in sectors experiencing labour shortages. Although such initiatives differ from traditional bilateral labour migration agreements, they illustrate the emergence of additional mechanisms through which labour mobility may be organised.

Implications for labour migration governance

These examples suggest that labour migration governance across the corridors examined extends beyond formal bilateral labour migration agreements and also involves other cooperation arrangements between governments, social partners, recruitment actors and private employers.

---

[15] KII with trade union representative.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Nigeria Labour Congress and the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) on advancing trade unions' effective contributions to the defence, protection and promotion of the human and labour rights of migrant workers.
[18] KII with trade union representative.
[19] KII with trade union representative.
[20] KII with recruitment agency representative.
[21] KII with government representative.

▶ 3

Preparation and negotiation of BLMAs

3.1. International guidance on BLMA preparation and negotiation

International guidance emphasises that the preparation and negotiation of BLMAs should follow a structured and evidence-based process. According to the ILO-IOM assessment tool for BLMAs, the preparation phase is critical for defining policy priorities, identifying labour market needs, and establishing the issues to be addressed during negotiations with partner countries.

During this stage, governments are expected to gather information from multiple sources. These may include labour market assessments, diplomatic and consular reports, studies on migration trends, and consultations with relevant stakeholders such as employers' and workers' organisations, public employment services, and private recruitment agencies. Early engagement with these actors is considered important to ensure that agreements respond to labour market realities and can be effectively implemented.[22]

International guidance also highlights the importance of integrating **gender considerations** into the preparatory phase. Governments are encouraged to assess whether labour migration policies and labour market conditions affect women and men differently, and to examine possible gender-specific barriers to migration and employment. This may include analysing gender-disaggregated data on migrant workers, assessing equal access to training and employment opportunities, and identifying risks of discrimination or vulnerability faced by women migrant workers.

The ILO-IOM assessment tool proposes a set of **indicative indicators and questions** to guide this preparatory analysis. These include assessing whether gender-disaggregated baseline information exists on migrant workers, whether social partners and civil society organisations have been consulted, and whether relevant government institutions – including ministries responsible for labour, migration, foreign affairs, gender equality, and social protection – have contributed to the preparation of the negotiations.[23]

The negotiation phase itself is generally conducted by government delegations composed of representatives from relevant ministries, in particular those responsible for labour and foreign affairs, and sometimes other line ministries depending on the sectors concerned. Negotiations may proceed through bilateral meetings or exchanges of draft texts until a common understanding is reached and the agreement is ready for signature.

[22] ILO and IOM, *Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements in African Union Member States: Taking Stock and the Way Forward*, 2019.
[23] *Ibid*.

While negotiations themselves are typically conducted between governments, international guidance encourages broader consultation with social partners and other stakeholders during the preparatory phase. Such consultation can help ensure that agreements reflect labour market needs, incorporate relevant expertise, and support effective implementation once agreements enter into force.

3.2. Initiation of negotiations

The initiation of negotiations for BLMAs across the countries examined in this assessment is typically driven by a combination of labour market dynamics, diplomatic engagement, and efforts by governments to formalise existing migration flows and strengthen the protection of their nationals abroad. While the specific triggers and institutional arrangements differ between countries, common patterns emerge regarding the motivations for initiating negotiations, the actors involved, and the information used to inform the process.

Labour market demand and existing labour migration flows as primary triggers

In most countries studied, negotiations are initiated when governments identify significant labour demand in destination countries or when large numbers of their nationals are already migrating to those destinations. In such cases, bilateral agreements are viewed as mechanisms to formalise labour migration channels and address protection risks faced by migrant workers.

Uganda provides a clear example of this approach. Government officials reported that negotiations are typically initiated following analysis of labour market opportunities in destination countries, including demographic trends and labour shortages, often supported by information from diplomatic missions abroad. Agreements are also pursued in contexts where large numbers of Ugandan nationals are already present in destination countries, with the aim of establishing a framework to govern labour migration and address potential disputes or protection concerns.[24]

A similar rationale is evident in Tanzania, where agreements were largely initiated after significant numbers of Tanzanian workers had already migrated to Gulf countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. According to government stakeholders, the decision to negotiate agreements was motivated by the need to regulate these flows and ensure better protection for Tanzanian workers already employed in these destinations.[25]

In Kenya, the expansion of labour mobility agreements has also been closely linked to the government's broader labour migration strategy, which seeks to expand overseas employment opportunities while improving governance of recruitment processes.[26] Officials indicated that negotiations are frequently initiated to establish structured labour migration pathways and address concerns related to worker protection and recruitment practices.

Across countries, labour market demand therefore plays a central role in shaping the initiation of negotiations. In several cases, destination countries themselves actively approach origin governments to explore cooperation on labour mobility, particularly in response to labour shortages. This dynamic was reported in Uganda, where Austria initiated discussions, but also in other contexts such as Nigeria and Kenya, where agreements or negotiations with countries including Qatar, Germany and the United Kingdom were similarly driven by demand from destination countries. A comparable pattern was observed in Ghana, where officials indicated that negotiations are frequently initiated following outreach from destination countries through diplomatic channels, including in recent discussions with European partners such as Germany and Italy.[27]

[24] KII with government representative.
[25] KII with government representative.
[26] KII with government representative.
[27] KII with government representative.

Use of data and evidence to inform negotiations

Countries reported varying levels of use of labour market information and migration data in deciding whether to initiate negotiations. Uganda indicated that labour market analysis, demographic trends and information collected by diplomatic missions are key sources of evidence when identifying potential partner countries. These analyses are used to assess whether demand exists for Ugandan workers and whether negotiations would create viable employment opportunities abroad. Similarly, in Ethiopia, stakeholders reported that labour market assessments are used to identify demand in destination countries and inform decisions on whether to engage in negotiations.[28] Kenya reported using labour market data collected by the National Employment Authority, including databases of jobseekers and skills profiles, to inform negotiations and identify opportunities for skills mobility partnerships with destination countries.[29]

However, in other contexts, negotiations appear to rely more heavily on diplomatic engagement and observed labour migration trends rather than systematic labour market analysis. In Tanzania, government stakeholders noted that agreements were often initiated in response to existing labour migration flows rather than formal labour market assessments.[30]

These differences highlight variations in the extent to which evidence-based approaches inform the initiation of negotiations across countries.

Institutional leadership and coordination

Negotiations are led by government institutions, typically involving ministries responsible for labour and employment in coordination with ministries of foreign affairs. In Uganda, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development leads the negotiation process, working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant institutions, including immigration authorities and justice ministries. Consultations with non-governmental stakeholders are organised prior to negotiations. Similarly, in Tanzania, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) plays a central role in initiating and coordinating negotiations, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies responsible for migration governance, security, and anti-trafficking. In Kenya, negotiations are led by the State Department for Labour in coordination with the State Department for Diaspora Affairs and other government agencies. The National Employment Authority (NEA), responsible for regulating private recruitment agencies and supporting overseas employment programmes, also contributes technical input during negotiations, particularly in relation to labour market data, skills needs and recruitment procedures. Ethiopia follows a comparable approach, with the Ministry of Labour and Skills playing a central role in negotiating agreements with destination countries, alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and supported in some cases by technical inputs from international organisations and other government institutions. A similar inter-ministerial coordination structure is reported in Ghana, where draft agreements submitted by destination countries are reviewed by a technical committee bringing together representatives from the ministries of labour, foreign affairs, justice, and other relevant institutions.[31] In Côte d'Ivoire, stakeholders reported that bilateral labour migration negotiations are led primarily by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with limited participation from sectoral ministries.[32] In Nigeria, coordination is institutionalised through a Labour Migration Technical Working Group, which brings together government agencies and international partners to provide technical input, facilitate inter-agency coordination, and support the development and negotiation of BLMAs.[33]

[28] KII with government representative. See also: IOM and Altaï, *Labour Market Assessment of European Destination Countries for Ethiopian Migrant Workers*, 2024.
[29] KII with government representative.
[30] KII with government representative.
[31] KII with government representative.
[32] KII with government representative.
[33] KII with government representative.

3.3. Stakeholder consultation and tripartite involvement

Stakeholder consultation and tripartite engagement are widely recognised as important components of labour migration governance. International guidance emphasises that governments, employers' organisations, workers' organisations, and recruitment agencies should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the preparation and negotiation of BLMAs. Such engagement is considered important not only as a matter of democratic governance, but also as a practical precondition for effective implementation: actors excluded from the shaping of an agreement are poorly positioned to contribute to its operationalisation once it enters into force. In practice, however, the extent to which these stakeholders participate in the preparation and negotiation of agreements varies considerably across the countries examined in this assessment.

Across the countries examined, national labour migration governance frameworks formally recognise the importance of consulting social partners during the preparation of BLMAs. In practice, however, the gap between this formal recognition and what occurs during preparation and at the negotiation stage itself remains significant.

Nigeria offers the most structured example of social partner engagement at the preparation stage. A tripartite technical working committee on labour migration – coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment and including employers' and workers' organisations alongside civil society actors – provides a standing platform for engagement, and social partners reported having participated in template validation exercises linked to the draft agreements with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[34] However, this involvement does not appear to extend to the negotiation stage and following steps. Neither the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) nor the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association was represented in the delegations that concluded the agreements, and at the time of consultation neither organisation had received a copy of the signed text.[35] Social partners noted that they could not confirm whether the agreement reflected the template that they had reviewed, limiting their ability to assess whether their concerns had been incorporated.[36]

A somewhat structured, though still uneven, approach is observed in Ghana. Government stakeholders indicated that trade unions and employers' organisations have been involved in certain preparatory processes, including consultations linked to ongoing negotiations with European partners. A labour migration technical working group also provides a platform for stakeholder engagement at the national level. However, this involvement does not appear to be systematic, and participation varies across processes.[37]

In Kenya, social partners are not involved in the preparation, are not part of negotiation delegations and frequently receive limited information about agreements prior to signature.[38] Trade union representatives noted that this creates challenges downstream, when workers' organisations are expected to support implementation, awareness-raising, or follow-up in practice despite having had little or no role in shaping the agreements.

[34] KII with government representative; KII with trade union representative; KII with private sector employers' representative.
[35] KII with trade union representative.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] KII with government representative.
[38] KII with trade union representative.

In Ethiopia, the current approach places limited emphasis on tripartite involvement in negotiations, in contrast to earlier periods under which social partners were more directly involved in delegations.[39] Consultations during the preparation phase are primarily conducted among government institutions, with workers' and employers' organisations having limited and less systematic involvement.[40] A similar pattern is reported in Côte d'Ivoire. Stakeholders indicated that social partners seek greater involvement in the preparation of agreements and greater dissemination of concluded texts but are often not informed and have limited visibility over agreement content.[41]

In Tanzania, inter-ministerial coordination led by the Prime Minister's Office is the dominant mode of preparation. Social partner engagement remains relatively limited, and trade union representatives reported having little involvement in the development or review of agreement texts in practice.[42]

The overall pattern observed across countries is consistent: consultation may be formally recognised and, in some cases, implemented during the preparatory stage, but meaningful participation of social partners at the point where agreement content is finalised – in the negotiation process itself – remains very limited.

The involvement of recruitment agencies

Private recruitment agencies occupy a key position in the BLMA cycle. As the primary operational actors through whom labour migration is facilitated in practice, their conduct largely determines whether agreement provisions translate into actual outcomes for workers. However, interview evidence suggests that their involvement in the preparation and negotiation of agreements varies across countries and is often limited, uneven, or concentrated at later stages of the process. Agency representatives across several countries reported being informed of new agreements only after conclusion and noted that their operational knowledge of recruitment cost structures, destination-country platform requirements, and common points of contract violation is rarely drawn upon during preparation. For example, in Uganda, government officials described a preparatory consultation process that brings together a range of stakeholders before draft agreements are shared with destination countries.[43] In practice, however, representatives of recruitment agencies reported that their participation at this stage remains limited, and that their inputs are not consistently reflected in the final agreements.[44]

In Kenya, the National Employment Authority provides a partial bridging function, working with licensed agencies on oversight and contributing technical input on recruitment procedures and labour market demand. In Tanzania, recruitment agencies occasionally accompany government delegations on bilateral visits, reflecting their operational role.

[39] KII with ILO representative.
[40] KII with government representatives.
[41] KII with government representatives.
[42] KII with trade union representative.
[43] KII with government representative.
[44] KII with recruitment agency representative.

3.4. Role of international organisations and development partners

International organisations and development partners play an important role in supporting the negotiation and implementation of BLMAs in the countries covered by this assessment. Their contributions are primarily concentrated in four areas: technical assistance, capacity building, support to governance systems, and facilitation of regional dialogue. However, their influence over the final content of agreements remains limited, as negotiations ultimately take place between countries of origin and destination.

Technical assistance in the design and negotiation of agreements

International organisations frequently provide technical input during the preparation phase of BLMAs, particularly in reviewing draft agreements and advising governments on the inclusion of provisions aligned with international labour standards and good practices in labour migration governance.

Stakeholders in Ethiopia noted that the ILO has provided technical comments on draft agreements and occasionally supported negotiation missions through financial or logistical assistance.[45] However, stakeholders emphasised that while technical advice is often provided, the extent to which it is incorporated into the final agreements depends on the outcome of negotiations between the parties.

Similar forms of technical support were reported in countries such as Kenya and Ghana, where international organisations contributed to the review of draft agreements and provided guidance on provisions related to recruitment governance, worker protection and dispute resolution.[46]

In several countries of origin, this technical support has extended beyond ad hoc review of draft agreements to the development of standardised templates for bilateral labour agreements. In Ghana, for example, stakeholders reported that a national BLMA template was developed with support from the IOM and later revised, through a FAIRWAY-supported process, to strengthen its alignment with international labour standards. Such templates are intended to provide a structured basis for negotiations and to promote the inclusion of key protection provisions. However, their influence on final agreements remains contingent on the negotiation process, and stakeholders noted that alignment between template provisions and signed agreements is not always ensured.

Capacity building for government institutions

Capacity-building initiatives represent another major area of engagement for international organisations. Several stakeholders highlighted training activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of government officials and diplomatic missions to support the negotiation and implementation of BLMAs.[47]

For example, training sessions have been organised for labour attachés and diplomatic staff on labour migration governance and the implementation of BLMAs. In Ethiopia, training activities supported by international partners have included specialised courses on labour migration governance for Ethiopian diplomatic missions abroad, as well as regional training initiatives on BLMAs and migrant worker protection.[48]

Despite these efforts, stakeholders across several countries emphasised that negotiating BLMAs remains challenging due to the asymmetry of bargaining power between countries of origin and destination. Capacity-building initiatives were therefore seen as important tools to strengthen the negotiating position of countries of origin and to improve the design of agreements.

---

[45] KII with ILO representative.
[46] KIIs with ILO representatives.
[47] KIIs with ILO representatives.
[48] ILO News, *Ethiopia Strengthens Diplomatic Capacity on Labour Migration*, 28 April 2025.

Support to policy development and labour migration governance systems

Beyond specific agreements, international organisations also contribute to broader labour migration governance reforms that indirectly shape the negotiation and implementation of BLMAs. In several countries, development partners have supported the development of national labour migration policies, recruitment regulations and monitoring systems that provide the institutional framework for bilateral cooperation.

For example, in Ethiopia, stakeholders highlighted the development of digital tools and monitoring mechanisms aimed at strengthening oversight of recruitment practices and improving the reporting of abuses affecting migrant workers abroad.[49] Similarly, in Tanzania, international support has contributed to the establishment of labour migration governance systems as well as efforts to strengthen the regulation and monitoring of private recruitment agencies.[50] In Nigeria, development partners have supported the implementation of a national labour migration policy framework, including initiatives related to recruitment governance, codes of conduct for private employment agencies, and the integration of gender considerations into migration governance.[51] In Kenya, international support has also contributed to strengthening employment services and labour migration governance systems, including the modernisation of digital employment platforms and efforts to improve accessibility and inclusion in public employment services.[52] In Ghana, the ILO is supporting the review and development of the National Labour Migration Policy through multi-stakeholder consultations to inform priorities for the 2026-2030 policy cycle.

In addition, stakeholders across countries noted that international programmes have supported complementary measures such as pre-departure orientation, awareness-raising initiatives and training for recruitment agencies, aimed at improving migrant worker preparedness and promoting fair recruitment practices.[53]

Facilitating dialogue and regional cooperation

International organisations also play an important role in facilitating dialogue among countries of origin, particularly through regional platforms and cooperation frameworks. Regional initiatives such as the Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) programme[54] have supported knowledge sharing and peer learning among countries of origin, including discussions on negotiation strategies and common challenges encountered when engaging with destination countries.

Despite their active role in providing technical support and capacity building, international organisations have limited influence over the final outcomes of negotiations, underscoring that BLMAs remain diplomatic instruments negotiated between sovereign states. Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the content of agreements ultimately reflects bilateral negotiations between governments, often involving significant compromises. As a result, technical recommendations are often not fully incorporated into final agreements.

[49] KII with ILO representative.
[50] KII with ILO representative. See also: ILO News, *Tanzania Strengthens Labour Market and Migration Statistics Capacity*, 5 July 2025.
[51] KII with government representative; KII with ILO representative.
[52] ILO News, *Kenya puts inclusion and accessibility at the center of employment services with support from the ILO*, 22 August 2025.
[53] KIIs with ILO representatives.
[54] ILO Project, *Better Regional Migration Management*, 2022-2026.

3.5. Negotiation dynamics

Stakeholder interviews suggest that negotiations of bilateral labour migration agreements can be influenced by differences in the priorities and negotiating positions of countries of origin and destination. Stakeholders across several countries emphasised that the bargaining position of origin countries can be constrained by their strong interest in expanding overseas employment opportunities for their citizens, particularly in contexts of high domestic unemployment.[55]

These dynamics were highlighted in multiple interviews, where stakeholders noted that destination countries often exercise greater influence over the content of agreements. In some cases, destination countries present pre-drafted agreement templates or request modifications to draft texts proposed by countries of origin.[56] One interviewee reported limited scope to negotiate changes to proposed terms, highlighting the challenge of pursuing stronger worker protection provisions while maintaining access to overseas employment opportunities.[57]

Recruitment agency representatives similarly noted that agreements are often drafted in ways that favour destination countries, making it difficult to enforce certain worker protection provisions once workers are deployed abroad. According to these stakeholders, differences in negotiating positions could affect the ability to address issues such as contract violations, unpaid wages or repatriation procedures.[58]

In addition to asymmetries between countries of origin and destination, several stakeholders pointed to competition among origin countries themselves as an important factor shaping negotiation dynamics. Countries seeking to expand labour migration opportunities may compete for access to the same destination labour markets, particularly in the Gulf region. This competition can reduce the incentives for origin countries to adopt common negotiating positions or insist on higher standards for migrant worker protection.[59]

If one country refuses certain conditions or requests stronger protections, employers or governments in destination countries may simply recruit workers from another country willing to accept those terms.[60]

These dynamics complicate efforts to improve labour migration governance through bilateral agreements. While several stakeholders highlighted the potential benefits of regional coordination in strengthening the bargaining power of origin countries, concrete mechanisms for collective negotiation have not yet emerged. Discussions on regional cooperation have taken place within platforms such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), but the modalities for operationalising such coordination have yet to be clearly defined.[61]

Despite these challenges, governments of origin countries continue to pursue bilateral agreements as a key instrument for governing labour migration and improving protections for migrant workers. Even when the bargaining environment is uneven, stakeholders emphasised that the existence of an agreement can provide a framework for dialogue and dispute resolution that would otherwise be absent.[62]

---

[55] KII with government representatives; KII with ILO representatives.
[56] KII with ILO representative ; KII with government representative.
[57] KII with ILO representative.
[58] KII with recruitment agency representative.
[59] KII with government representative; KII with ILO representative.
[60] KII with government representative; KII with ILO representative.
[61] KII with ILO representative; KII with government representative.
[62] KII with government representatives.

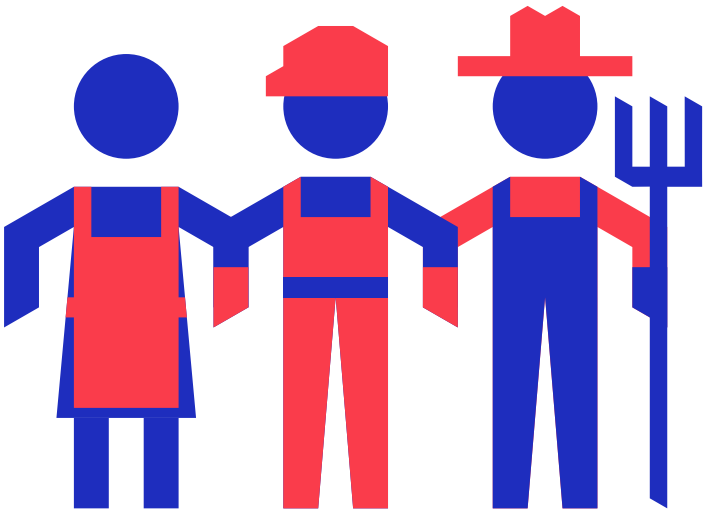
3.6. Choice of legal instrument: BLAs versus MoUs

Another key feature of bilateral labour migration governance in the countries covered by this assessment is the diversity of legal instruments used to formalise cooperation between countries of origin and destination. While BLAs are often presented as the preferred instrument for regulating labour migration, some countries instead rely on MoUs or other forms of non-binding cooperation arrangements.

In practice, the distinction between BLAs and MoUs is not always clear-cut. Several stakeholders noted that MoUs may contain provisions similar to those found in BLAs, including commitments related to recruitment procedures, worker protection, and dispute resolution. However, MoUs are generally considered as not legally binding and more flexible, allowing governments to establish cooperation frameworks without the more complex ratification procedures associated with formal treaties.

Stakeholders emphasised that the choice between BLAs and MoUs is often influenced by the legal and political preferences of destination countries.[63] Some destination governments prefer MoUs because they are easier to adopt and amend, and do not require parliamentary ratification. In such cases, countries of origin may accept MoUs as a compromise in order to secure at least a basic framework for cooperation. Government officials also explained that MoUs are often used as an initial step in establishing cooperation, particularly where the other party favours more flexible arrangements. In some cases, MoUs are viewed as a pragmatic way to initiate cooperation while negotiations on more formal agreements continue.[64]

For several stakeholders, however, the practical effectiveness of an agreement depends less on its legal form than on its implementation. Even where agreements are formally binding, weak monitoring mechanisms and limited follow-up structures can undermine their impact in practice. Conversely, some MoUs have facilitated operational cooperation and improved recruitment procedures, particularly where they are supported by active joint committees or strong institutional coordination.[65]



[63] KII with government representatives.
[64] KII with government representative.
[65] KII with government representative; KII with trade union representative; KII with private recruitment agency representative.

▶ 4

Substantive content of BLMAs

The analysis below examines the substantive provisions included in the BLMAs reviewed in this study. The assessment is based on a comparative review of agreement texts, supported by a matrix summarising key provisions across agreements (see BLMA content matrix below). For analytical purposes, the provisions are discussed across five thematic areas: recruitment governance, worker protection, dispute resolution, return and reintegration, and social protection.

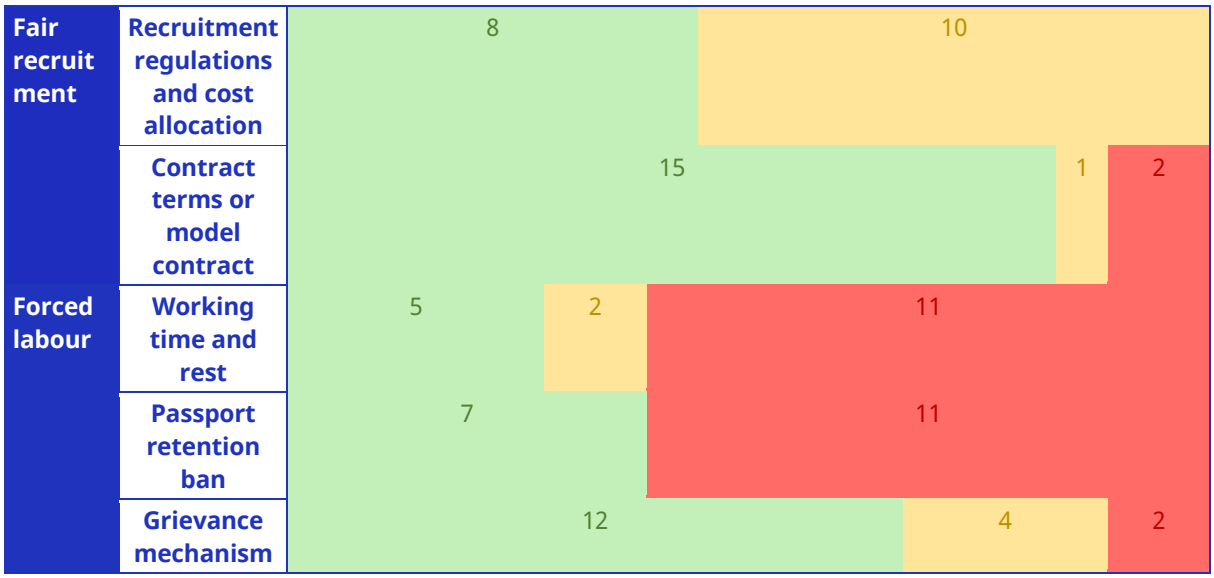
To complement the detailed analysis below, Table 3 and Figure 3 provide a visual overview of the coverage of five ILO-priority indicators across the 18 signed BLMAs reviewed. The coding is drawn from the full agreement matrix presented later in this section. Table 3 shows the coding for each signed agreement, while Figure 3 summarises the aggregate distribution of "Yes", "Partial", and "No" scores across the sample. These figures are intended as a comparative aid and should be read together with the narrative analysis, as they do not capture differences in legal precision, enforceability, or implementation.

▶ **Table 3. Coverage of selected ILO-priority indicators across 18 signed BLMAs**

BLA	Fair recruitment standards		Forced labour indicators		
	Recruitment regulations and cost allocation	Contract terms or model contract	Working time and rest	Passport retention ban	Grievance mechanism
Ethiopia-Lebanon (BLA)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
Ethiopia-Jordan (MoU)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethiopia-KSA (BLA)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Partial
Ethiopia-Kuwait (MoU)	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes
Ethiopia-Qatar (BLA)	Partial	Yes	No	No	Partial
Ethiopia-UAE (MoU)	Yes	Yes	Partial	No	Yes

BLA	Fair recruitment standards		Forced labour indicators		
	Recruitment regulations and cost allocation	Contract terms or model contract	Working time and rest	Passport retention ban	Grievance mechanism
Kenya-Germany (BLA)	Partial	No	No	No	Partial
Kenya-Austria (MoU)	Partial	No	No	No	No
Kenya-UK (BLA)	Partial	Partial	No	No	No
Kenya-Qatar (BLA)	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kenya-KSA (BLA)	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenya-UAE (MoU)	Partial	Yes	No	No	Yes
Tanzania-KSA general (BLA)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Tanzania-KSA domestic (BLA)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Tanzania-Qatar (BLA)	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tanzania-UAE (MoU)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Uganda-Jordan (BLA)	Partial	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Uganda-KSA (BLA)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

▶ Figure 3. Indicator-level distribution coverage across 18 signed BLMAs



4.1. Recruitment governance and contracting

International guidance emphasises the importance of regulating recruitment processes within BLMAs in order to protect migrant workers from abusive practices and ensure transparency in employment conditions. The ILO-IOM assessment tool for BLMAs identifies recruitment governance as a core component of such agreements, including provisions related to recruitment procedures, employment contracts, pre-departure training and protection against unfair recruitment practices.

In particular, international labour standards highlight the importance of ensuring fair recruitment practices, transparency in employment contracts and adequate preparation of workers prior to departure. Recommended provisions include the use of standard employment contracts specifying working conditions and wages, the regulation of recruitment agencies, the provision of pre-departure orientation and training, and measures to prevent migrant workers from bearing recruitment fees or related costs.

Recruitment channels and the role of private employment agencies

Among the 26 government-to-government agreements reviewed, provisions on recruitment channels are present in most agreements (22 instruments), although they vary significantly in depth and operational clarity. A smaller subset (**8 agreements**) includes more detailed and operational provisions on recruitment channels, specifying the roles of labour ministries, competent authorities, and licensed recruitment agencies, as well as procedures for submitting and validating recruitment requests. Such structured and operationalised frameworks are found in the Ethiopia-Jordan (2023) MoU, the Ethiopia-Lebanon (2023) BLA, the Uganda-Jordan BLA, the Ethiopia-UAE MoU and the Tanzania-Qatar agreement (albeit in a more limited but still procedural form).

These agreements typically include:

- A formal recruitment process (government-to-government or via authorised agencies),
- specification of the roles of key actors (ministries, employers, recruitment agencies), and
- minimum content requirements for recruitment applications.

By contrast, **14 agreements** contain **partial** provisions, consisting mainly of general references to recruitment "in accordance with applicable laws," cooperation between competent authorities, or requirements that recruitment be conducted through licensed or authorised agencies, without clearly defining how recruitment is operationally organised. This category includes for instance the Kenya-Qatar BLA, the Ethiopia-Qatar BLA, as well as the Ethiopia-KSA BLA and the Tanzania-KSA agreements, which combine substantive provisions on agency regulation (including licensing, cost control, and sanctions) with limited procedural structuring of recruitment channels.

A third group (**4 agreements**) contains **no meaningful provisions on recruitment mechanisms**. These are BLMAs signed with European countries (e.g., the Kenya-Germany agreement, the Kenya-Austria MoU, the Kenya-UK healthcare agreement, and the Ethiopia-Italy MoU). These instruments reflect broader labour mobility, skills partnership, or migration governance frameworks rather than detailed provisions on labour migration governance.

Clear and operational provisions regulating the role of **licensed private employment agencies (PEAs)** are found in a more limited subset of agreements. These include the Ethiopia-Jordan MoU, the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA, the Tanzania-KSA agreements (both general and domestic workers) and the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU. These agreements go beyond mere reference to agencies by including, to varying degrees, provisions on licensing requirements, the use of authorised agencies, exchange of approved agency lists in some cases, regulation of recruitment costs, prohibition of worker-paid fees, and sanctions for non-compliance.

In contrast, in a substantial share of the agreements that mention recruitment mechanisms, the role of private agencies is either absent or framed in only general and non-operational terms, typically limited to references to "authorised" or "licensed" intermediaries without further regulatory detail. This is the case, for example, in the Ethiopia-Qatar BLA and the Kenya-Qatar BLA.

This gap is particularly significant given that private recruitment agencies are the primary operational actors in most of the labour migration corridors covered, yet their roles, obligations, and accountability mechanisms remain under-specified in a large share of the agreements reviewed.

Recruitment fees and the employer-pays principle

Among the 26 government-to-government agreements reviewed, **15 include some reference to the allocation of recruitment costs, of which 10 contain relatively clear employer-pays provisions and five address recruitment costs only partially.**

The strongest employer-pays formulations among the signed agreements reviewed are found in the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (Art. 21), which commits the parties to jointly identify and itemise recruitment and deployment costs. Several agreements – particularly in Africa-GCC corridors – contain partial provisions, typically requiring employers to bear certain costs (such as return travel or specified recruitment expenses) while remaining silent on other elements of the recruitment cycle, particularly pre-deployment costs. This category includes the Tanzania-Qatar BLA (Art. 8), which limits employer obligations largely to travel-related expenses and explicitly excludes costs such as passport processing or deposits.

A distinct category is represented by agreements that do not allocate recruitment costs between the parties. This includes the Ethiopia-KSA BLA, which refers to the need to control recruitment costs but does not specify the allocation of costs between employers and workers. The same applies to the Ethiopia-Jordan (2023) MoU and the Kenya-UAE MoU, which do not contain explicit provisions on recruitment cost allocation.

One of the drafts reviewed refers to the need to control recruitment costs but does not specify the allocation of costs between employers and workers, as well as the Ethiopia-Jordan (2023) MoU and the Kenya-UAE MoU, which do not contain explicit provisions on recruitment cost allocation.

Finally, labour mobility-oriented agreements – particularly those with European partners, such as the Ethiopia-Italy MoU and the Kenya agreements with Germany, the United Kingdom, and Austria – do not address recruitment cost allocation at all, reflecting their broader focus on labour mobility, skills development, and migration governance rather than the regulation of recruitment practices.

Crucially**, none of the agreements fully operationalise the employer-pays principle as set out in the ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment,** although some agreements **operationalise cost allocation at contract level.** While some instruments move towards this standard, no agreement provides a comprehensive and enforceable schedule of all recruitment-related costs across the full migration cycle, nor do they specify binding ceilings for cost items or establish robust verification and complaint mechanisms for cost-related violations. The Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA provides one of the most detailed contract-level allocations of cost items but still permits cost-sharing and lacks enforceable limits or comprehensive coverage.

Employment contracts

Among the 26 government-to-government agreements reviewed, **18 include provisions outlining requirements for employment contracts.** This reflects a broad recognition that standard employment contracts are a foundational element of worker protection. However, coverage varies significantly in what "contract requirements" entail in practice.

Eight agreements include annexed model or standard employment contracts, including the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA, the Ethiopia-UAE MoU (with two separate contracts for domestic and private sector workers), the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU, the Tanzania-Qatar BLA, two of the reviewed drafts, the Kenya-KSA agreement and the Kenya-Qatar BLA. These annexed contracts typically specify wages, working hours, rest periods, accommodation, and end-of-service obligations in greater operational detail than the agreement text itself. In some cases (notably the Ethiopia-UAE MoU), the annexes also incorporate key elements of applicable destination-country labour legislation, providing workers with a more comprehensive reference framework.

By contrast, **several agreements refer to a standard or model contract without including it in the agreement text available for review.** In some cases, the agreement appears to envisage the later adoption of such a contract; in others, it refers to an annexed model contract that was not included in the version accessed for this assessment. This is the case, for example, for the Ethiopia-KSA BLA and the Ethiopia-Qatar BLA. In both situations, the absence of the contract text from the reviewed document limits the ability to assess the actual content of the employment standards envisaged.

Contract substitution (e.g., the replacement of a worker's pre-departure contract with inferior conditions upon arrival) is **explicitly prohibited in 10 of the 26 agreements.** The clearest formulations are found in the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA ("unless the changes serve the interest of the worker"), the Ethiopia-UAE MoU (which provides for a unified contract framework) and the Tanzania-Qatar BLA (Art. 11). The remaining agreements contain no explicit prohibition of contract substitution, representing a significant gap given that contract substitution is consistently identified in key informant interviews as one of the most prevalent forms of abuse affecting migrant workers in Gulf labour migration corridors.

Pre-departure orientation

Provisions on pre-departure orientation (PDO) or closely related forms of pre-departure training/information appear in **15 of the 26 agreements.** However, the quality of these provisions varies considerably, and no instrument in the reviewed sample establishes a minimum content standard, specifies a minimum duration or establishes PDO as a jointly designed activity.

Some of the most operationally developed PDO provisions include the Uganda-Jordan BLA (Art. 15), which explicitly assigns responsibility to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and requires all workers bound for Jordan to undergo pre-departure orientation training. The Ethiopia-UAE MoU (Art. 7) is the only instrument in the sample to require both pre-departure orientation and occupation-related training as distinct components. Several GCC agreements – including the Ethiopia-KSA 2017 BLA, both Tanzania-KSA instruments, and the Uganda-KSA 2023 agreement – frame orientation primarily in terms of compliance with destination-country laws, customs, and traditions rather than as a rights-based pre-departure orientation. While this is not without value, it falls short of the rights-based orientation that international guidance recommends. Eleven instruments – including the Ethiopia-Qatar BLA, the Tanzania-Qatar BLA,[66] all three Kenya European agreements (UK, Germany, Austria), and the Ethiopia-Italy MoU – contain no PDO provision at all.

[66] The Ethiopia-Qatar BLA as well as the Tanzania-Qatar BLA limit themselves to requiring the provision of basic information to workers on working and living conditions prior to departure, without establishing structured orientation or training programmes.

None of the reviewed instruments specifies the content of PDO programmes in detail, including whether orientation should address gender-specific risks faced by women migrant workers. In practice, the design of PDO curricula is typically determined at the national level rather than through BLMA provisions. However, the absence of guidance in the agreements means that gender-specific risks – particularly those affecting domestic workers – are not systematically addressed through the bilateral framework.

4.2. Worker protection and employment conditions

International labour standards – including ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97),[67] Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143),[68] and the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189)[69] – establish the principle of equal treatment for migrant workers with nationals and set minimum standards for working conditions, rest time, wages, health and safety, and freedom of association. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies a range of protection provisions that comprehensive BLMAs should include. Against this framework, the reviewed sample shows uneven coverage, with notable gaps concentrated in the areas of working hours, wage protection, passport retention, and occupational safety and health.

Working hours and rest periods

Provisions on working hours and rest periods are present in **eight of the 26 instruments,** with a further **five containing partial provisions.** Among the signed agreements reviewed, the clearest quantified provision is found in the Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU, which provides for eight hours per day and 48 hours per week (Art. 18). By contrast, other signed agreements address the issue in less precise ways. The Kenya-KSA standard employment contract provides for at least nine continuous hours of daily rest and one rest day per week but does not specify maximum daily or weekly working hours. The Tanzania-UAE MoU requires the employment contract to include working hours and days but does not itself set limits. Likewise, the Ethiopia-UAE MoU regulates employment conditions through the employment contract and applicable UAE law rather than by setting quantified working-hour thresholds in the MoU text itself.

A further group of agreements contains partial provisions, typically referring to working hours and rest periods through general clauses on employment conditions or through reference to applicable national labour laws. These include, for instance, the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA and the Uganda-Jordan BLA.

Fifteen instruments contain no explicit provision on working hours, including the Ethiopia-KSA BLA, the Tanzania-KSA general workers agreement and all European agreements. The omission is particularly significant for domestic worker-specific instruments, where, although destination-country legislation may provide for maximum working hours or related protections, the absence of a clear textual baseline in the agreement itself reduces transparency and may make it more difficult for workers and implementing actors to identify the applicable standard in practice.

Wage protection

Provisions on wage payment and wage protection are present in a majority of the 26 instruments reviewed, although their level of specificity varies considerably. A subset of agreements – approximately eight to ten instruments – contains more detailed and operational provisions, while others include only general obligations regarding wage payment. The most developed formulations are found in instruments that either specify a minimum wage or establish payment mechanisms in operational terms. The Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU specifies a minimum wage of USD 275 per month (Art. 12), making it the only instrument in the reviewed sample to include a numeric wage floor in the agreement text itself. The Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (Art. 16) provides for monthly salary payment into a bank account, with options for payment in Lebanon,

[67] https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312242
[68] https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312288:NO
[69] https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460:NO

Ethiopia, or cash, and requires written receipts. The Ethiopia-UAE MoU references the UAE Wage Protection System (Art. 14). The Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU and the Tanzania-UAE MoU (Art. 3d) also include explicit provisions relating to wage payment or protection.

By contrast, a smaller group of agreements contains only general or partial provisions, typically requiring employers to pay wages in accordance with the employment contract without specifying payment modalities, enforcement mechanisms, or protections against unlawful deductions.

Among sector-specific domestic worker agreements – covering workers particularly exposed to wage-related abuses – wage protection provisions are more frequently included but often remain limited in scope and lack robust enforcement mechanisms. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies wage protection, including timely payment, prohibition of unlawful deductions, and, where applicable, minimum wage coverage, as a core element of comprehensive BLMAs.

Accommodation

Provisions on accommodation are present in 11 of the instruments reviewed, although their level of specificity varies considerably. However, only a smaller subset contains more detailed provisions, while the majority address accommodation in more general terms.

The Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU (Art. 6) clearly requires the employer to provide food, clothing, and housing. Other draft instruments also include relatively detailed provisions by requiring accommodation or an accommodation allowance to be specified in the employment contract. One of the drafts reviewed refers to workers' living quarters or accommodation conditions more indirectly, through monitoring obligations or general provisions on working and living conditions.

Other agreements – including the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA, Ethiopia-Jordan MoU, Ethiopia-UAE MoU, Tanzania-Qatar BLA, Kenya-Qatar BLA, and the Kenya-KSA agreement – also include accommodation provisions, although typically in more general terms. In several instruments, accommodation is addressed indirectly through model employment contracts or general clauses on working conditions, without specifying minimum standards or enforcement mechanisms. Only a smaller group of agreements contains no reference to accommodation. The absence or weak formulation of accommodation provisions is particularly significant in domestic worker agreements, where employer-provided housing is a central aspect of working and living conditions.

Passport retention prohibition

Prohibition of passport confiscation or retention is present in **only 11 of the 26 instruments.** This is one of the most significant protection gaps identified in the sample, given that passport confiscation is consistently identified in KIIs and in broader research as one of the most common mechanisms through which migrant workers – and particularly domestic workers – are trapped in exploitative employment situations. At the same time, the absence of an explicit clause in an agreement does not necessarily mean that no prohibition exists in practice, since destination-country legislation may also regulate or prohibit passport retention.

Clear prohibitions are found in both the Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU (Art. 10), the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (Art. 8), the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU (Art. 6-7), both Tanzania-KSA instruments (including the general workers agreement, Art. 4.4) and the Kenya-KSA agreement (Art. 15 of the standard employment contract). One specific draft includes a strong formulation prohibiting "unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on movement, non-payment of wages, threats, and physical or sexual abuse" (Art. 8-2).

The Ethiopia-KSA 2017 BLA, the Uganda-KSA 2023 agreement, the Tanzania-Qatar BLA, the Ethiopia-UAE MoU and all Kenya European and GCC agreements except Kenya-KSA contain no passport retention clause.

Occupational safety and health

Occupational safety and health (OSH) provisions are among the least well-covered indicators in the reviewed sample, present in **only three instruments, with four further partial provisions.** Explicit OSH provisions are found in the Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU (Art. 10), the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (Art. 15) and the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU (Art. 6), which include provisions on medical insurance or health coverage, treatment in case of illness or work-related injury, and compensation including disability. Partial provisions are found in the Uganda-Jordan BLA (general employment conditions reference) and the Kenya-KSA agreement (Art. 9 of the standard contract: employer bears expenses for medical treatment).

The other instruments – including all Tanzania agreements, the Uganda-KSA 2023 agreement, the Kenya-Qatar BLA, and the Kenya-Germany and Kenya-Austria agreements – contain no explicit OSH provision. This is a significant gap: the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) requires that States take measures to ensure OSH protection for domestic workers on comparable terms to other workers, and the absence of OSH provisions in instruments covering this sector leaves a major accountability vacuum.

Non-discrimination clauses

Non-discrimination and equal-treatment clauses are present in a limited number of instruments (10 instruments), but their scope varies. The strongest formulation is found in the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU (Art. 5), which explicitly prohibits discrimination and refers to international law. The Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (Art. 8), the Ethiopia-UAE MoU (Art. 8), and the Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU (Art. 10) contain narrower equal-treatment clauses, guaranteeing Ethiopian workers treatment no less favourable than that accorded to other foreign workers engaged in the same employment, rather than equality of treatment with nationals. The Kenya-Germany agreement contains a non-discrimination commitment in its preamble – the strongest gender framing in the sample – but this does not translate into an operational article.

No instrument in the reviewed sample includes gender-specific non-discrimination provisions addressing the particular risks of discrimination faced by women in domestic work – such as unequal pay compared to other migrant workers, exclusion from standard labour law, or discrimination based on pregnancy.

4.3. Dispute resolution and grievance mechanisms

Provisions on grievance mechanisms and dispute resolution for individual workers are present in **21 of the 26 government-to-government instruments reviewed.** The most common formulation across the sample – found in agreements such as the Ethiopia-Qatar BLA, the Kenya-Qatar BLA, the Tanzania-Qatar BLA, and the Kenya-KSA agreement – provides that complaints should be lodged with the Ministry of Labour or competent authority in the destination country for amicable resolution, with referral to the competent judicial authorities if a settlement is not reached. While this formulation establishes a nominal complaint channel, it generally specifies **no timeline, procedural steps, or obligation for the destination-country authority to respond within a defined period.**

More developed grievance provisions are found in a smaller subset of agreements. The Ethiopia-Jordan 2023 MoU (Art. 11) provides that complaints should be filed with the Ministry of Labour, with the Ethiopian Embassy notified and unresolved cases referred to judicial authorities. The Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU includes provisions ensuring access to consular services and legal assistance (Art. 6). The Ethiopia-UAE MoU provides that complaints may be lodged with the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, with the Ethiopian mission providing legal assistance and referral to judicial institutions where cases remain unresolved. One of the drafts reviewed contains a more operationally detailed grievance provision, committing both parties to support the worker's access to the appropriate court to obtain redress and providing for conciliation efforts by the competent authorities before judicial referral.

A different approach appears in several agreements with Saudi Arabia, which commit the destination country to endeavour to establish a **24-hour assistance mechanism for domestic workers** and to facilitate the expeditious settlement of cases involving violations of employment contracts. This is the case for the Uganda-KSA and Kenya-KSA agreements. These formulations appear less legally binding than direct procedural obligations but signal a policy commitment to providing operational support mechanisms for workers in distress. The Ethiopia-KSA 2017 agreement also includes a reference to a 24-hour assistance mechanism, although it remains one of the few worker protection provisions in this instrument.

By contrast, European mobility agreements generally lack explicit worker grievance mechanisms and do not establish clear, accessible procedures for migrant workers to lodge and resolve complaints. Some include references to remedies in cases of exploitation or institutional cooperation frameworks. For example, the Kenya-Germany agreement provides for counselling, access to support services, and remedies and compensation for victims of exploitation, forced labour, and trafficking, but it does not establish a clear, accessible procedure through which individual migrant workers can lodge and pursue complaints.

4.4. Return, repatriation, and reintegration

Return procedures and repatriation costs

Return procedures are explicitly defined in about half of the reviewed instruments (13 agreements), with varying levels of detail. More developed examples include the Kenya-Germany BLA, which contains provisions on safe and dignified return, readmission procedures, modes of transportation, and the allocation of transport and transit costs between the parties.

Provisions allocating **repatriation costs** typically specify which party bears the cost of return travel at the end of the contract period. These clauses often reflect standard recruitment contract templates used in GCC countries. For example, the Tanzania-Qatar BLA (Art. 8), the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA (model contract), the Kenya-KSA agreement (Art. 18 of the standard employment contract), the Kenya-Qatar BLA (Art. 8) and the Kenya-KSA agreement specify that the employer is responsible for the cost of return travel upon completion or termination of the employment contract.

Beyond end-of-contract return travel, a notable provision found in some agreements – including the Ethiopia-Kuwait and Ethiopia-Jordan agreements – concerns repatriation in cases of illness, work injury, or death during the contract period. These clauses typically require the employer to cover associated transport or repatriation costs and, in some cases, to coordinate related formalities. The Ethiopia-Kuwait agreement goes further by expressly addressing the return of the worker's body and personal effects in the event of death. By contrast, several instruments contain only limited or general provisions on return procedures. The Uganda-Jordan agreement, for example, addresses return only indirectly or relies on employment contracts and national legislation.

Reintegration

Reintegration support is among the least addressed substantive provisions in the reviewed sample. Only **two of the 28 instruments** contain an explicit reference to reintegration support. This includes the Kenya-Germany Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership (Art. 10), as well as the Kenya-Austria MoU (Paragraph 4), in the context of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes for persons returning from irregular stay, rather than return at the end of a regular labour migration cycle.

The remaining agreements, including all GCC-oriented agreements and other European cooperation instruments reviewed, do not contain provisions addressing reintegration support, skills recognition upon return, or labour market re-entry assistance.

This represents a notable gap when assessed against international guidance. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies labour market reintegration as an important component of the labour migration cycle that BLMAs can address, including through provisions related to recognition of skills acquired abroad, training opportunities, and job placement support upon return. The limited attention to reintegration provisions observed in the reviewed agreements reflects a broader pattern in which BLMAs focus primarily on regulating recruitment and employment abroad, rather than addressing the labour migration cycle as a whole.

4.5. Access to social protection and portability of benefits

The reviewed BLMAs rarely address social protection portability – defined as the ability of migrant workers to maintain, accumulate, or transfer social security entitlements across international migration cycles – in a substantive way. None of the 28 instruments analysed establish mechanisms allowing migrant workers to transfer or aggregate social security contributions between countries. This is not unexpected, as portability of social security rights is usually governed through separate bilateral social security agreements or national social security frameworks rather than through BLMAs themselves.

Article 10 of the Ethiopia-Jordan MoU requires medical insurance for domestic workers and provides for the registration of workers other than domestic workers in the Jordanian Social Security Corporation, including coverage for end-of-service entitlements and compensation for work-related injury, including disability. However, these provisions operate within the host-country system and do not create bilateral coordination mechanisms for the transfer, aggregation, or export of social security rights between countries.

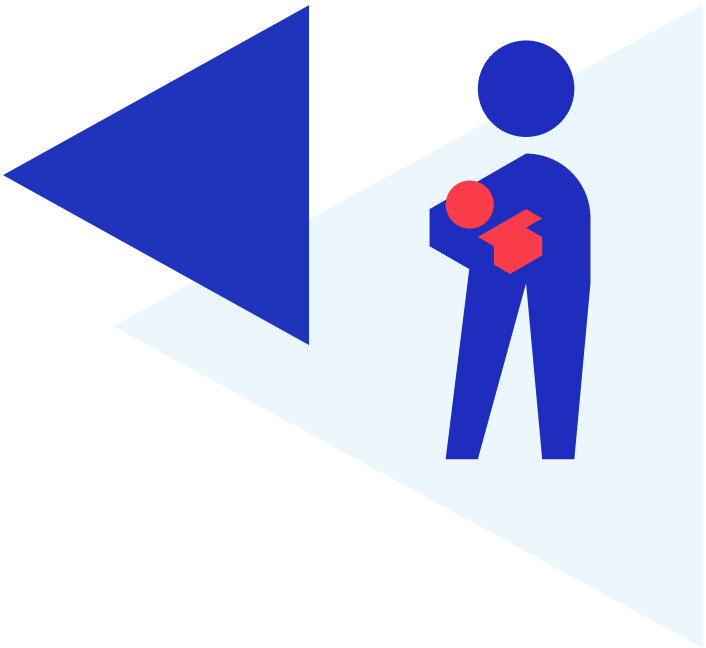
Some of the draft agreements include provisions related to the recovery of worker social security contributions, which represent the most developed formulations on this issue within the reviewed sample, although they do not establish portability mechanisms. One in particular provides that where a worker contributes to a fund during the course of employment, the worker shall receive the accumulated contribution in full prior to departure. It further states that workers shall enjoy rights to social security on terms applicable to nationals of the employing country. Similarly, another draft allows workers to transfer savings from their wages in accordance with financial regulations of the country of destination and provides for the refund of contributions with interest when a worker withdraws from the scheme.

The remaining instruments contain **no provisions addressing social protection portability.** Several agreements – including the Kenya-Germany agreement – include general references to equal treatment in the host country. Such provisions may in principle extend to access to social protection under the national legislation of the destination country. However, they do not establish bilateral coordination mechanisms between social security systems and therefore do not prevent the interruption of contribution histories when migrant workers move between countries.

A limited number of agreements include provisions related to **health protection during the employment period,** although these provisions vary considerably in scope and legal formulation. In some cases, the obligation appears directly in the agreement text. For example, the Ethiopia-Lebanon BLA requires employers to provide medical insurance as well as allowances and compensation for work-related injury, including disability. Similarly, the Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU includes explicit provisions requiring employers to ensure access to health insurance or medical care during the employment period. In other agreements, however, health protection is addressed more indirectly, for example through model employment contracts or general references to working conditions.

Other agreements refer more generally to **medical treatment or healthcare obligations** rather than insurance coverage. In these cases, employers are required to ensure access to medical treatment for workers during employment in accordance with national labour legislation in the destination country. While such provisions may contribute to immediate health protection during employment, they are better understood as employer-liability or employment-related welfare measures than as social security benefits in the stricter sense. They are typically tied to the individual employment relationship, limited in duration, and do not reflect core social security principles such as solidarity in financing, predictable and periodic benefits, or broader State responsibility for protection.[70]

Structural constraints also affect the feasibility of portability arrangements in several labour migration corridors examined in this study. In many GCC countries, migrant workers have limited or no access to national social insurance systems, whether on the basis of nationality, employment status, or sector of employment, which limits the scope for bilateral coordination of contributory benefits.[71] Domestic workers may face additional exclusions under labour or social security legislation. Nevertheless, the near absence of portability provisions – or even exploratory language on social security coordination – across the reviewed agreements suggests that this issue has not yet been systematically addressed within bilateral negotiation frameworks.



[70] ILO social security standards and related guidance distinguish social security coordination from employer-liability or ad hoc employment-related benefits. Relevant principles include equality of treatment, maintenance of acquired rights and benefits abroad, maintenance of rights in the course of acquisition, determination of the applicable legislation, as well as broader features of social security systems such as collective financing and guarantees, periodic and predictable benefits, and general State responsibility for the due provision and administration of benefits; see, in particular, the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102); ILO, *Migrant access to social protection under Bilateral Labour Agreements: A review of 120 countries and nine bilateral arrangements*, 2017; and ILO, *Review of National Social Protection Legislation and Legal Frameworks for Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries,* 2023.
[71] ILO, *Review of National Social Protection Legislation and Legal Frameworks for Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries*, 2023.

▶ 5 Implementation in practice

The ILO-IOM joint assessment tool identifies implementation as the phase during which the obligations set out in a BLMA translate – or fail to translate – into concrete changes in labour migration governance, recruitment practices, and migrant worker protection. The assessment tool emphasises that implementation should be understood as covering the full labour migration cycle, from the selection and pre-departure preparation of workers through to their deployment, welfare abroad, and eventual return. It further highlights the importance of adequate dissemination of agreement content, meaningful involvement of social partners and recruitment actors in operationalising provisions, and the existence of functioning grievance and redress mechanisms accessible to migrant workers.[72]

Drawing on key informant interviews conducted with governments, employers' organisations, workers' organisations, and private recruitment agencies across the seven countries covered by the assessment, the analysis below examines how agreements function in practice and identifies the main gaps between commitments on paper and governance realities on the ground.

5.1. The gap between signed agreements and operational implementation

Across all countries studied, stakeholders consistently identified a substantial gap between the existence of a signed BLMA and its effective operationalisation in practice. In Ethiopia, for instance, stakeholders noted that the signing of an agreement is frequently treated by the government as the primary objective of the bilateral engagement, with comparatively limited attention to the administrative, institutional, and financial prerequisites for implementation.

Stakeholders in Kenya similarly emphasised that BLMAs need to move beyond their formal adoption to function as fully operational systems, supported by structured monitoring frameworks, detailed implementation guidelines, and clearly measurable protection outcomes.[73] A comparable perspective was expressed in Uganda by representatives of recruitment agencies, who highlighted the limited involvement of key implementing actors in the design of agreements. This points to a broader disconnect between the outcomes of bilateral negotiations and the practical realities faced by those responsible for implementation.[74]

Implementation can be further delayed by administrative and technical prerequisites that are not resolved at the time of signature. In Uganda, deployment under the agreement with Qatar – signed in 2024 – had not yet commenced at the time of the interview, pending completion of the necessary administrative and technical arrangements.[75] Similarly, Kenya's 2017 agreement with Saudi Arabia became operational only in 2019, following a period of training and systems integration linked to the digital Musaned platform used by

[72] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[73] KII with government representative.
[74] KII with private recruitment agency representative.
[75] KII with government representative.

Saudi Arabia for the registration of domestic workers. Nigeria faces comparable pre-conditions for beginning recruitment under its recently signed agreement with Saudi Arabia, which requires Nigerian private employment agencies to be formally listed on the Enjaz platform before deployment can commence.[76]

A similar gap is evident in Ghana, where several agreements have been signed but not operationalised. Stakeholders reported that the memoranda of understanding concluded with Jordan (2015) and the United Arab Emirates (2019) have not been implemented in practice, largely due to delays in establishing the necessary institutional and operational arrangements, including joint committees.[77] While the bilateral agreement with Qatar was ratified in 2025 and is expected to enter into implementation in the near future, this case illustrates the extent to which the conclusion of an agreement does not guarantee its operationalisation.

These experiences highlight that the implementation clock begins not at the moment of signature but only after a series of administrative requirements have been met.

5.2. Dissemination, awareness, and accessibility of agreement content

A significant and recurring finding across all countries is the limited dissemination of bilateral agreement content to the stakeholders most responsible for implementation, as well as to migrant workers themselves. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies the dissemination of agreement content as a critical implementation measure, emphasising that migrant workers, social partners, and recruitment actors need access to agreement texts in order to understand and act on their provisions.[78]

In practice, agreement texts are rarely made publicly available and in several cases are not shared even with key institutional partners. In Ethiopia, stakeholders acknowledged that neither social partners nor many ministry officials have access to signed agreement texts.[79] In Ghana, the signed BLA with Qatar does not appear to be widely accessible beyond government institutions.[80] In Nigeria, social partners had not received a copy of the recently signed agreement with Saudi Arabia at the time of the interviews, despite having contributed to the template validation process several years earlier.[81] Côte d'Ivoire offers a further example of limited dissemination, as final BLMA texts appear to be held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not widely circulated to sectoral ministries or social partners, which constrains both awareness of agreement content and the ability of other institutions to contribute to implementation and follow-up.[82]

These patterns of restricted access are not without consequence for protection outcomes. While governments sometimes argue that agreement content is confidential,[83] this directly undermines the purpose of the instrument: workers cannot benefit from provisions they are unaware of. Trade union representatives in Kenya further noted that even for agreements where texts are publicly available online, the absence of an operational implementation framework means that workers and agencies lack clear guidance on how provisions are to be applied in practice.[84]

Limited awareness is also a structural challenge for migrant workers at the individual level. Several stakeholders – including both trade union and recruitment agency representatives – reported that most migrant workers have no knowledge of whether their country has concluded an agreement with their destination country, still less of the specific protections it may contain. Pre-departure orientation programmes, where they exist, do not systematically include information on the content of applicable BLMAs.

---

[76] KII with government representative.
[77] KII with government representative.
[78] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[79] KII with government representative.
[80] KII with ILO representative.
[81] KII with trade union representative; KII with private sector employers' representative.
[82] KII with government representative.
[83] KII with ILO representative.
[84] KII with trade union representative.

While access to agreement texts is often restricted, some countries have taken steps towards partial publication. For example, certain agreements are publicly available through government or partner-country platforms, such as the Kenya-United Kingdom agreement published on official UK government websites,[85] and selected agreements made available through Kenya's National Employment Authority.[86] However, such practices remain inconsistent, and many agreements are not systematically published by the countries that have signed them. In other cases, the existence of agreements is publicly reported through official communications or media coverage – as observed in Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya – but without corresponding access to the full text. As a result, public awareness of agreements does not necessarily translate into transparency or accessibility of their content.

5.3. Role of recruitment agencies in implementation

Private recruitment agencies are one of the primary operational actors through which the provisions of BLMAs are translated into individual recruitment and deployment processes. Despite their central role, recruitment agencies are often marginalised from the negotiation of agreements and subsequently face significant challenges implementing provisions they had no part in shaping.

In Kenya, recruitment agency representatives reported that they were generally not involved during the drafting of BLAs and were typically informed only towards the final stages of the process, when agreements were close to signature. They further indicated that some clauses in existing agreements have proven difficult to implement in practice, partly because recruitment actors were not consulted during the drafting stage.[87] In Uganda, a recruitment agency representative similarly reported receiving agreement texts containing provisions that do not fully reflect prevailing market conditions or that are difficult to enforce within the existing institutional frameworks of destination countries.[88] A private recruitment agency owner interviewed in Kenya provided an illustration of how labour market dynamics can diverge from agreed standards over time, noting that agreements may require periodic review to remain aligned with evolving labour market conditions. Specifically, minimum recruitment fees established under the Kenya-KSA agreement were reported to have been undercut by newer agencies entering the market with lower cost structures. The interviewee indicated that agreed minimum standards – including the minimum wage threshold for domestic workers – were not consistently observed, and that the consequences of non-compliance were borne disproportionately by established, licensed agencies that had invested in training and compliance systems.[89]

In Ethiopia, a private sector employers' representative articulated a broader structural concern. The interviewee noted that the combination of limited BLA enforcement and progressively higher compliance requirements for private recruitment agencies can create a situation in which agencies bear the financial consequences of gaps that might otherwise be addressed through a more robust bilateral framework. They further indicated that stronger BLMAs could help prevent such situations by reducing regulatory gaps and enabling governments and recruitment actors to contribute more effectively within their respective roles.[90]

At the same time, it should be noted that in some countries, recruitment agencies have developed alternative operational frameworks to compensate for absent or weak BLMA provisions. In Uganda, UAERA reported signing cooperation memoranda of understanding with recruitment agencies' associations in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. These private-sector arrangements facilitate operational coordination.[91] While such initiatives reflect pragmatic adaptation to gaps in formal governance structures, they also raise questions regarding the consistency of standards and oversight.

---

[85] GOV.UK, *Bilateral agreement between the UK and Kenya on healthcare workforce collaboration*, 2021.
[86] NEA, *Bilateral labour agreements*, N/A.
[87] KII with recruitment agency representative.
[88] Written exchange with recruitment agency representative.
[89] KII with private recruitment agency representative.
[90] KII with private sector employer's representative.
[91] Written exchange with recruitment agency representative.

5.4. Gender dimensions of implementation

While BLMAs sometimes cover sectors where women constitute a large majority (though not in all destination countries) of migrant workers – particularly domestic work – the specific protection needs of women migrant workers are not systematically reflected in either agreement content or implementation arrangements. One agreement nonetheless contains limited gender-aware language: the Ethiopia-UAE MoU refers to "gender-sensitive legal protection" in the context of cooperation to combat forced labour and trafficking. However, this remains a broad protective commitment rather than a detailed gender-responsive framework. Overall, the tension between the composition of labour migration flows and the gender-neutral or gender-blind character of many implementation provisions is a recurring finding across the consultations.

At the level of implementation, several stakeholders noted that well-documented protection risks – including contract substitution, passport confiscation, physical abuse, restrictions on freedom of movement, and limited access to medical care – continue to affect migrant workers in practice, particularly women employed in domestic work.[92]

In Ethiopia, experts also highlighted a structural gender imbalance within formal labour migration pathways. Because many signed bilateral agreements focus on domestic work – an occupation predominantly associated with women in some of the destination countries – men seeking to migrate through formal channels often face limited opportunities.[93] This dynamic may contribute to male migration occurring through irregular channels, creating a situation in which the formalisation of labour migration through BLMAs can inadvertently exclude a significant proportion of potential migrant workers on the basis of gender. The need to expand legal labour migration opportunities for men was therefore identified as an area for further consideration in future agreements.

Gender-responsive implementation also requires the systematic collection of disaggregated monitoring data. Across all countries studied, the availability of sex-disaggregated data on deployed migrant workers, complaints, and repatriation cases remains limited. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies gender-disaggregated data as a baseline requirement for assessing BLMA implementation; however, such data is not consistently captured within the information systems maintained by labour ministries and national employment agencies.

5.5. Pre-departure orientation: variable quality and fragmented delivery

Pre-departure orientation is addressed unevenly across the agreements reviewed, and in many cases, it appears only in the form of general training or orientation requirements rather than as a clearly defined PDO mechanism. Overall, where pre-departure preparation is mentioned in agreements, it is usually assigned to the country of origin and is rarely structured as a jointly designed, jointly funded, or operationally standardised activity. In practice, PDO frameworks vary substantially across and within countries. Kenya, for instance, has a relatively developed PDO framework, with the National Employment Authority (NEA) overseeing a system that includes both home care training – covering practical domestic skills, basic Arabic language instruction, and equipment handling – and a pre-departure orientation component addressing legal rights, financial literacy, embassy contacts, and emergency channels. NEA officials acknowledged, however, that quality inconsistencies persist across training providers, that curriculum standardisation remains an ongoing challenge, and that the link between PDO content and specific BLMA provisions is not yet systematically established.[94]

[92] KII with trade union representative.
[93] KII with ILO representative.
[94] KII with government representative.

Tanzania is in the process of developing a harmonised national PDO curriculum, with a draft prepared following an observation of Uganda's approach and consultations with multiple stakeholders. At the time of the interview, this curriculum had not yet been formally launched, and PDO training was being delivered through a combination of government services, private agencies, and trade unions, each using different content and formats. Trade union representatives noted that although several institutions – including recruitment agencies and trade unions – had developed their own PDO curricula, there was not yet a shared national framework, resulting in migrants receiving different training depending on the provider. The focal point emphasised that the establishment of a unified national curriculum would help standardise PDO delivery across actors.[95]

In Ethiopia, pre-departure training is provided through one-stop service centres across the country. However, respondents noted that awareness of migrant workers regarding the content of applicable bilateral agreements remains very low, and that the government has not consistently used PDO as a channel for disseminating BLMA content to prospective migrants.[96]

5.6. Welfare monitoring and grievance mechanisms in practice

As described in Section 4, BLMAs usually include provisions for the protection of migrant workers' welfare and for the resolution of disputes arising during employment abroad. However, these provisions are often framed in very general terms and vary considerably in their level of operational specificity. While some agreements designate competent authorities – typically labour ministries or courts in the destination state – they rarely specify timelines, procedural steps, escalation pathways, or remedies in sufficient detail for workers to independently activate the mechanism. Moreover, migrant workers are frequently unaware that such provisions exist, further limiting their practical accessibility.

The role of embassies and labour attachés

Diplomatic missions, particularly labour attachés, are the primary institutional interface between migrant workers and their country of origin once deployed abroad. Their effectiveness varies considerably depending on the volume of cases they handle, their geographic coverage and the resources available to them.

Some governments have introduced mechanisms intended to facilitate access to consular assistance. Kenya, for example, operates a 24-hour hotline through its embassy in Saudi Arabia specifically for Kenyan migrant workers, complemented by a distress reporting tool and a toll-free number managed by the National Employment Authority.[97] Tanzania has similarly established multiple contact channels, including embassies or consulates in Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, alongside direct telephone lines connecting workers to officials in its labour unit.[98] While these measures improve accessibility in principle, stakeholders consistently noted that they remain insufficient relative to the scale and geographic dispersion of migrant workers.

Geographic coverage, in particular, poses a major operational challenge. In Saudi Arabia, the presence of only one Kenyan labour attaché based in Riyadh, combined with the country's vast size, means that responding to cases can involve significant delays, with travel times to reach workers in distress sometimes extending to several days.[99] Similar constraints are evident in Uganda, where a single labour attaché in Riyadh is responsible for multiple countries across the Gulf and Middle East.

[95] KII with trade union representative.
[96] KII with ILO representative.
[97] KII with government representative.
[98] KII with government representative.
[99] KII with recruitment agency representative.

The implications of limited consular presence are especially evident in Uganda's engagement with Jordan. Although deployment under the Uganda-Jordan agreement was initially implemented, it was later suspended following a rise in worker complaints. Officials attributed this, in part, to the absence of a dedicated Ugandan diplomatic mission in Jordan. Instead, responsibility was assigned to the embassy in Saudi Arabia, which already covers several countries in the region. As a result, workers often depended on host country authorities to resolve disputes, an arrangement that stakeholders indicated was not always effective in addressing their concerns.[100]

Structural weaknesses in grievance mechanisms

Beyond the capacity constraints affecting embassies, grievance mechanisms embedded in bilateral agreements suffer from structural weaknesses that limit their utility in practice. The most common formulation across the reviewed sample is that complaints should be lodged with the labour authority in the destination state for amicable settlement, typically the Ministry of Labour, with unresolved cases subsequently referred to the competent judicial authorities. These clauses rarely specify procedures, timelines, escalation pathways, or remedies. The Ethiopia-UAE MoU goes somewhat further, providing that if a complaint submitted to the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation remains unresolved, legal assistance may be facilitated through the Ethiopian diplomatic mission and the matter referred to judicial institutions.

In Kenya, government representatives acknowledged this gap directly: provisions on grievances exist in agreements but 'lack operational detail', and the specific structure for filing a complaint (including who is responsible, how it is processed, and within what timeframe) is not captured in current agreements.[101]

In Ethiopia, a private sector employers' representative reported that although the government has developed a digital application and hotline intended to support migrant workers abroad, there is little evidence that complaints submitted through these channels lead to resolution and/or compensation.[102]

Trade unions have in some cases complemented formal grievance structures, particularly in destination countries where they maintain cooperation arrangements with counterpart organisations. For example, COTU-K's MoU with FENASOL in Lebanon has enabled Kenyan workers to access legal assistance and dispute resolution support through the Lebanese trade union federation, without requiring recourse to diplomatic channels. This arrangement allows unions in the destination country to engage directly with employers on behalf of workers, facilitating dialogue between local actors in ways that may be difficult to achieve through state-to-state mechanisms alone.[103] However, as discussed in Section 2, such union-to-union cooperation arrangements remain geographically limited and depend on the willingness and capacity of partner organisations in destination countries, many of which – particularly in parts of the Gulf region – operate under regulatory frameworks that restrict independent trade union activity.

[100] KII with government representative.
[101] KII with government representative.
[102] KII with private sector employers' representative.
[103] KII with trade union representative.

Social protection portability

Social protection portability (i.e., the ability of migrant workers to maintain, accumulate, or transfer social security entitlements across labour migration cycles) represents a significant gap. As noted in Section 4, none of the reviewed agreements contain enforceable portability arrangements, usually covered by separate social security agreements.

In GCC destination countries, migrant workers' access to social protection varies by country, employment category and benefit. While some benefits are available, including healthcare and employment injury protection, access to contributory old-age pension schemes remains generally restricted. The absence of coordination arrangements between origin and destination systems can therefore leave workers with gaps in their pension contribution histories and limited continuity of protection upon return. In Ethiopia, stakeholders explained that workers who contribute to pension savings before departure often see those contributions effectively frozen while they are abroad.[104] This situation applies for other countries of origin as well. In Tanzania, discussions on linking bilateral agreements to the National Social Security Fund are under way, but such provisions have not yet been systematically incorporated into signed instruments. The Trade Union Congress of Tanzania has initiated a separate effort to develop a scheme that would allow Tanzanian migrant workers to contribute to the national fund while working abroad, although this remains contingent on regulatory changes that have not yet been adopted.[105]

In several GCC countries, structural barriers also stem from the design of the kafala (sponsorship) system, under which workers' employment and residence status is tied to individual employers and access to entitlements is largely mediated through employer compliance.[106] This institutional arrangement creates significant practical obstacles to the enforcement of social security provisions, even where such entitlements are formally recognised. However, labour and migration frameworks in the region have undergone important reforms in recent years, with further efforts under way to strengthen their implementation. For example, in Qatar, reforms adopted between 2018 and 2020 removed exit permit requirements for most migrant workers and the requirement for an employer's No Objection Certificate to change jobs.[107]

[104] KII with private sector employers' representative.
[105] KII with trade union representative.
[106] ILO, *Employer-migrant worker relationships in the Middle East: exploring scope for internal labour market mobility and fair migration*, 2017.
[107] ILO, *Overview of Qatar's labour reforms*, 2022.

▶ 6 Monitoring and follow-up

The ILO-IOM BLMA Joint Assessment Tool identifies monitoring and evaluation as a distinct and critical phase of the BLMA cycle, closely connected to implementation. International guidance emphasises that bilateral agreements should include mechanisms for systematic monitoring of implementation, including joint committees tasked with reviewing progress, addressing emerging concerns, and proposing amendments where necessary. The tool further highlights the importance of independent evaluation, the use of monitoring data to inform policy adjustments, and the involvement of social partners, embassies, and other relevant actors in oversight processes.[108]

In practice, monitoring and follow-up represent the weakest link in the BLMA lifecycle across all corridors studied. Joint monitoring mechanisms are formally provided for in all signed agreements reviewed, yet their functioning is almost universally described as insufficient. This section examines the design and functioning of joint committees, the state of data collection and reporting, transparency challenges, and the role of non-state actors in oversight.

6.1. Joint monitoring committees: design and formal provisions

All signed agreements reviewed include a provision establishing a joint implementation or monitoring committee. These bodies are typically composed of representatives from relevant ministries on both sides, with a mandate to oversee implementation, address disputes, and propose amendments where necessary.

The ILO-IOM assessment tool's model terms of reference for joint monitoring committees envisage a body that meets regularly – normally every six months – with a rotating chairperson, a designated secretariat, and a mandate covering not only implementation oversight but also the interpretation of specific agreement clauses, the collection and dissemination of good practices, and regular reporting on outcomes.[109]

Meeting frequency is specified in all agreements: all but two set an annual schedule. The Kenya-UK bilateral agreement (Art. 7) and the Kenya-Austria MoU (Art. 9) establish a joint committee without specifying meeting frequency, leaving the operational rhythm entirely undefined. The Uganda-KSA 2023 agreement is the most ambitious in this regard: Art. 6 specifies quarterly meetings and requires the designation of a national contact point to facilitate inter-party communication. One of the drafts establishes a 'Joint Working Group' meeting annually, including through video conference.

[108] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[109] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.

6.2. Joint committee functioning in practice

Across the countries examined, interviews consistently pointed to a gap between the formal design of joint monitoring committees and their practical functioning. While such committees are established in most agreements, they do not always meet with the frequency envisaged in the texts. Even when meetings do occur, their outcomes are not consistently translated into systematic adjustments to implementation practices.

In some cases, the constitution of the committees can take several years. Government officials described the joint technical committee established under the Uganda-UAE MoU as having been formally constituted only recently – approximately five years after the agreement's signature in 2019 – with the delay attributed to the UAE's omission to communicate the names of its nominated committee members.[110] A comparable pattern was described in Tanzania. The Prime Minister's Office indicated that the joint technical committee established under the agreement with Qatar had not been formally constituted for several years following the agreement's signature in 2014. At the time of the consultations, the committee was only beginning to operate, following renewed bilateral engagement between ministers during a regional conference rather than through the agreement's own monitoring mechanisms.[111]

In Kenya, institutional stakeholders indicated that the primary challenge lies less in the formal establishment of committees than in sustaining regular meetings. Limited financial resources for convening sessions, particularly where travel is required, were identified as a key constraint. Government officials similarly noted that committee meetings often take place on an ad hoc basis rather than following the regular schedule envisaged in the agreements, and that coordination of meetings remains a persistent implementation challenge.[112] Regarding Saudi Arabia, Kenya reported that a period of intensified engagement in 2023 included regular virtual meetings, although this level of interaction was not sustained over time. Stakeholders in other countries reported similar experiences. In Uganda, representatives noted that meetings of joint monitoring committees rarely take place in practice.[113] Ethiopian stakeholders likewise observed that these committees are generally inactive and that limited follow-up mechanisms constrain their ability to support the effective enforcement of worker protection provisions.[114]

Consultations across the countries reviewed highlighted a broadly consistent set of barriers affecting the functioning of joint committees. Resource and budget constraints were the most frequently cited obstacle, particularly given the costs associated with international travel for in-person meetings and the absence of dedicated budget allocations for this purpose in many national labour migration programmes. Additional challenges include competing institutional priorities, the lack of a designated secretariat responsible for organising meetings and follow-up, and the difficulty of coordinating schedules across multiple ministries in both origin and destination countries. Stakeholders also pointed to slow responsiveness from some destination-country counterparts, which can contribute to delays in convening committee sessions.

[110] KII with government representative.
[111] KII with government representative.
[112] KII with government representative.
[113] KII with recruitment agency representative.
[114] KII with government representative.

6.3. Data collection, reporting, and evaluation

Effective monitoring of BLMA implementation requires access to systematic data on worker deployment, complaints, contract compliance, repatriation cases, and other indicators of agreement functioning. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators relevant to this purpose, including the number of workers deployed, the proportion who signed contracts before departure, rates of complaint and redress, and the outcomes of occupational injury compensation claims.[115]

It should first be noted that information-sharing obligations between the parties rarely appear in BLMAs. Such provisions are included in only seven of the agreements reviewed, including the Ethiopia-Jordan (2023), Uganda-KSA (2023), and the Kenya-UAE MoU. One of the drafts contains the most operationalised provision, requiring the parties to exchange updated lists of licensed employment agencies every six months. None of the agreements reviewed include provisions requiring the collection or reporting of sex-disaggregated data. Likewise, none establish sanctions or corrective measures in cases of non-compliance with agreement provisions.

Across the countries studied, data collection on these dimensions is at an early stage or largely absent. Most countries maintain some form of national labour market information system or external employment management system that tracks deployment authorisations and agency licensing. However, these systems are rarely integrated with post-deployment welfare monitoring, complaint tracking, or data on return and reintegration.

In Kenya, NEA has developed the NEAIMS system – the National Employment Authority Integrated Management System – which includes a distress reporting function and a toll-free hotline. Officials acknowledged that the current iteration requires workers to manually enter information, limiting uptake, and that a revised system allowing voice-based reporting was being developed. The Kenyan Embassy in Saudi Arabia has launched a separate 24-hour hotline, though its data is not systematically integrated into NEA monitoring frameworks.[116]

In Ethiopia, a government representative described a relatively advanced digital infrastructure supporting labour migration governance, including a Labour Market Information System (LMIS) that tracks deployment approvals, licensing renewals, and agency partnerships. According to officials, the system recorded approximately 470,000 deployment approvals in the seven months preceding the consultations. It also incorporates a monitoring dashboard linked to the One-Stop Service Centre (OSSC), which tracks registered job seekers at the local level. However, officials noted that monitoring workers' welfare after deployment abroad, as well as systematically capturing data on complaint outcomes, remains a significant gap. In practice, follow-up on implementation after agreements are signed is often limited, and mechanisms for tracking post-deployment outcomes remain underdeveloped.[117]

Across the countries consulted, no evidence was identified of a systematic internal evaluation of the functioning or outcomes of BLMAs. This apparent absence of evaluation reflects a broader pattern observed throughout this section: once agreements are signed, the institutional attention required to sustain regular monitoring and assessment processes is often limited.

[115] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[116] KII with government representative.
[117] KII with government representative.

6.4. Transparency and access to monitoring information

Transparency in the monitoring phase encompasses both the public accessibility of agreement texts – examined in Section 5.2 in the context of dissemination – and the availability of monitoring and evaluation reports to interested stakeholders. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies the public availability of monitoring reports as an indicator of good practice and recommends that monitoring and evaluation findings be used systematically to inform adjustments to agreements and their implementation.[118]

Across the countries consulted, no evidence was identified of regularly produced monitoring reports related to BLMAs. In cases where bilateral meetings between joint committees have taken place – such as Tanzania's engagement with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and Kenya's periodic meetings with the Saudi authorities – meeting outcomes do not appear to be systematically documented or shared with social partners and recruitment agencies. The absence of formal reporting mechanisms limits the extent to which information generated through bilateral engagement feeds back into improvements in agreement design or implementation, or the broader legal and policy frameworks on both sides of the corridor.

Stakeholders from social partner organisations and recruitment agencies in several countries also pointed to limited access to implementation information as a constraint on meaningful participation in governance processes. Without access to monitoring data, employers' organisations, trade unions, and recruitment agencies indicated that it is difficult to assess whether agreed standards are being met, identify systemic challenges requiring policy attention, or contribute effectively to discussions on implementation.

6.5. Social partners and the monitoring gap

Despite the formal recognition of tripartite consultation in national labour governance frameworks, social partners appear to have limited involvement in monitoring mechanisms linked to BLMAs. Joint committees established under BLMAs are generally composed of government representatives, and stakeholders consulted in the study did not identify formal mechanisms through which workers' or employers' organisations could systematically contribute information to committee deliberations or request follow-up action.

This limited participation has practical implications. Trade unions operating Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) are among the institutions with the most direct access to information about the working conditions and welfare challenges faced by deployed workers. However, stakeholders indicated that this information is not consistently channelled into BLMA monitoring processes. In Kenya, trade union representatives noted that they had not been involved in the negotiation or oversight of bilateral agreements, which in practice limits their ability to contribute operational insights gathered through their support services.[119]

The experience of COTU-K's cooperation arrangement with FENASOL in Lebanon illustrates both the potential and the limitations of non-governmental monitoring initiatives. Through this partnership, COTU-K has been able to obtain operational information on the situation of Kenyan workers in Lebanon — including contract compliance, access to legal assistance, and patterns of employer abuse — that may otherwise be difficult for diplomatic missions to gather independently. At the same time, the absence of a formal reporting channel between COTU-K and the Kenyan authorities means that this information does not systematically feed into BLMA implementation processes or diplomatic engagement with Lebanon.[120]

---

[118] ILO and IOM, *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2019.
[119] KII with trade union representative.
[120] KII with trade union representative.

In Nigeria, social partners expressed cautious optimism regarding the potential for greater tripartite engagement in the future. They noted that the existing tripartite labour governance structure, supported by the ILO, had facilitated the involvement of social partners in the validation of agreement templates. At the time of the interview, however, it remained unclear whether this participation would extend to the monitoring phase of bilateral agreements.[121]

6.6. The revision and renewal of agreements

The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies revision and renewal as the final phase of the BLMA cycle, in which monitoring and evaluation findings inform adjustments to existing agreements. In practice, however, revisions to bilateral agreements do not appear to be systematically linked to monitoring or evaluation processes. Most agreements include standard renewal clauses – typically providing for automatic renewal unless a party provides written notice of termination within a specified period – but do not establish structured review mechanisms tied to performance assessments or implementation evaluations. At the same time, several countries, in particular Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, reported that they were in the process of reviewing or considering revisions to some of their existing agreements, often in response to emerging implementation challenges or changing labour market conditions.

In Kenya, NEA reported that a model BLA framework had been developed to guide the revision of existing agreements with GCC countries towards a more standardised template emphasising skills mobility partnerships and stronger worker protection provisions. However, progress in revising existing agreements has been gradual. The agreement with Qatar, originally signed in 2012, had not yet been formally revised at the time of the interview, although a draft revision had reportedly been prepared and was awaiting signature by both parties. Possible revisions to the agreements with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were also described as under consideration.[122]

In Ethiopia, revisions to certain agreements – including the agreement with Saudi Arabia – were reported to be under consideration. However, stakeholders emphasised that these processes are not grounded in systematic monitoring or evaluation.[123]

Tanzania similarly indicated that a revision of its BLA with Qatar was under discussion. Proposed changes include broadening the scope of the agreement and updating the composition and mandate of the joint technical committee. According to stakeholders interviewed, the original agreement had been negotiated in a different policy context and was considered relatively general in its provisions, particularly with respect to skills recognition and the varying conditions faced by different categories of Tanzanian workers.[124]

Uganda's experience with the agreement with Jordan illustrates a different type of challenge. In this case, the agreement renewed automatically when neither party issued a formal notice of termination, despite deployment having been suspended following a series of worker protection concerns. Uganda is currently preparing a bilateral mission to address the complaints as a precondition for resuming deployment.[125]

[121] KII with private sector employers' representative.
[122] KII with government representative; KII with ILO representative.
[123] KII with government representative.
[124] KII with government representative.
[125] KII with government representative.

▶ 7 Cross-cutting insights

The previous sections have examined the BLMA landscape, preparation and negotiation processes, substantive content, implementation, and monitoring across seven African countries. The analysis reveals a set of additional cross-cutting dynamics, concerning the relationship between legal form and practical effectiveness; the sectoral concentration of agreements and its implications; the lack of gender-responsive design; the structural role of information asymmetries; and the emerging complementary governance track represented by non-state actors.

7.1. Legal form and practical effectiveness

The distinction between legally binding BLAs and non-binding MoUs is often perceived – including by some governments and social partners consulted – as an indicator of the strength of worker protection. In practice, however, the assessment suggests that legal form is not a reliable predictor of operational effectiveness.

Several of the most operationally detailed agreements in the reviewed sample are formally MoUs. The Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU (2024), for example, includes detailed provisions on working hours, wage protection, passport retention, accommodation, grievance mechanisms – provisions that are absent from several agreements designated as legally binding BLAs. The Ethiopia-UAE MoU similarly includes model employment contracts for both domestic and private sector workers, detailed grievance referral pathways, and provisions on skills recognition, making it more substantively developed than several signed BLAs covering comparable corridors.

Conversely, some formally binding agreements provide only limited operational frameworks. The Ethiopia-Qatar BLA (2012), for example, is relatively short and does not itself specify working hours, wage levels, safeguards against passport retention, or social protection entitlements. The Ethiopia-KSA BLA (2017), though legally binding, similarly omits most specific worker protection provisions, providing no detail on wages, rest periods, accommodation, or grievance mechanisms beyond a reference to a 24-hour assistance mechanism. These observations concern the provisions of the bilateral instruments, which operate alongside the protections established by legislation in countries of destination. In Qatar, for example, national legislation provides for a minimum wage applicable to all workers, including domestic workers, regulates working hours, prohibits passport confiscation subject to provisions allowing custody with the worker's written consent, and establishes end-of-service entitlements.

These contrasts suggest that the practical effectiveness of an agreement depends less on its legal form than on the quality, specificity and enforceability of its provisions. The most consequential distinction may therefore lie less between BLAs and MoUs than between agreements that specify operational obligations with sufficient precision and those that articulate commitments in more general terms. Practical effectiveness also depends on how bilateral provisions interact with applicable national legislation and on the existence of functioning implementation, enforcement and monitoring arrangements. The assessment of BLMA content therefore needs to consider both the protections established under national law and the additional obligations and cooperation mechanisms provided by the bilateral instrument.

That said, legal form continues to matter in some respects. BLAs that have been ratified by parliament may create a more publicly accountable framework – including a requirement to publish the agreement – and can contribute to stronger political commitment to implementation. Agreements subject to ratification also involve legislative oversight that may improve transparency. These procedural differences are therefore relevant, even if they do not automatically translate into better outcomes for migrant workers.

7.2. Sectoral concentration in domestic work

Six of the agreements reviewed focus specifically on domestic workers, and the domestic work sector features prominently in the practical operation of most GCC-oriented agreements, including those nominally covering all workers. This sectoral concentration reflects underlying labour market realities – domestic work is the primary occupation for a large proportion of women migrating from the countries covered by this assessment to Gulf destinations – but it also has significant implications for the scope and quality of worker protection.

On one hand, domestic-worker-specific agreements can, when well designed, provide more tailored protection than generic instruments. The Ethiopia-Kuwait MoU and the Uganda-KSA 2023 agreement (and model contract) – both sector-specific – contain some of the strongest protection provisions in the reviewed sample, including provisions on working hours and rest periods (often specified in standard employment contracts), the right to retain travel documents, 24-hour assistance mechanisms, and employer obligations related to wages and accommodation.

However, the concentration of GCC-oriented agreements in domestic work also brings particular enforcement challenges linked to structural features of destination labour markets, including kafala (sponsorship) systems in some countries. Domestic workers are typically employed in private households, are often excluded from general labour law frameworks or covered under separate, less comprehensive regulatory regimes, and face structural barriers to accessing complaint mechanisms or changing employers.[126] The extent of these constraints varies across countries, and reforms such as those adopted in Qatar have removed important legal restrictions on labour mobility. Where sponsorship arrangements continue to restrict workers' ability to change employers or exercise their rights, they can complicate the enforcement of even well-designed bilateral provisions. These conditions create a governance gap in which text-based protections alone are insufficient to ensure effective enforcement.

A further limitation is the absence of gender-responsive provisions within domestic work agreements themselves. None of the reviewed agreements appear to include gender-specific risk assessments, provisions addressing sexual or physical abuse, or mechanisms for gender-sensitive complaint handling.

7.3. Gaps in gender-responsive design

Across all 28 agreements reviewed, gender-responsive provisions are either absent or limited to general non-discrimination clauses. No agreement includes a gender analysis in its preparatory framework, sex-disaggregated monitoring targets, or specific operational provisions addressing the differentiated risks faced by women and men in labour migration. The ILO-IOM assessment tool identifies gender-responsive design – including gender-disaggregated baseline data, gender-balanced negotiating teams, and gender-specific protection provisions – as a key element of good practice in the BLMA cycle. None of the reviewed agreements appear to meet this standard in full.

The pattern of gender-blind design does not appear to be incidental: it reflects the limited involvement of gender equality institutions and migrant-led organisations in the preparation and negotiation of agreements, the absence of gender-disaggregated data systems in most origin countries, and the tendency to treat domestic work primarily as a technical recruitment issue rather than as a broader human rights and gender equality concern.

[126] ILO, *Domestic workers in the Arab States*, N/A.

This gender imbalance also has implications beyond the protection of women workers. As noted earlier, the concentration of formal labour migration channels in domestic work – a sector that in some countries is dominated by women – is associated with more limited access to regulated pathways for men, who are more likely to seek employment in sectors that are less frequently covered by bilateral agreements. While the reviewed data do not systematically capture migration status, stakeholders noted that this imbalance may contribute to the use of less formalised or more precarious migration channels among men.[127]

Structural gender imbalances in agreement design are compounded at the implementation stage. The near-universal absence of sex-disaggregated data on deployment, complaints, and welfare outcomes makes it difficult to systematically assess how agreements are affecting women and men differently. Pre-departure orientation programmes, where they exist, are not consistently designed to address gender-specific risks. Grievance mechanisms do not include gender-sensitive procedures, and joint monitoring committees do not systematically include gender expertise or representation from women's organisations.

The Kenya-Germany partnership agreement stands apart from the rest of the sample in explicitly referencing gender equality and non-discrimination principles in its preamble, and in recognising that migrants may have different needs and experiences. However, these commitments are not operationalised in the body of the agreement.

7.4. Information asymmetries and transparency gaps

A recurring feature of BLMA governance across the seven countries studied is a tendency towards the concentration of information about agreements within a relatively narrow group of government actors, with limited access for social partners, recruitment agencies, migrant workers, and, in some cases, other public institutions. This opacity operates at multiple stages of the BLMA cycle and has implications for the quality and accountability of implementation.

At the implementation stage, the limited disclosure of agreement texts – documented across Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda – reduces the ability of social partners, recruitment agencies, and migrant workers themselves to understand the protections in place, the obligations of employers, and the available avenues for redress. Interviews further suggest that agreement content is often not systematically shared and that publicly accessible versions of signed agreements remain the exception rather than the rule.

At the monitoring stage, the absence of reporting requirements and publicly available documentation means that implementation challenges may accumulate without generating a structured institutional response. The ad hoc nature of joint committee meetings – which often respond to emerging issues rather than providing routine oversight – is partly linked to this informational gap: without systematic data on deployment, worker welfare and complaints, there is limited basis for regular monitoring and follow-up.

[127] KII with ILO representative.

7.5. Complementary governance by non-state actors

One of the findings from this assessment is that formal BLMAs may coexist with cooperation arrangements between non-state actors, including trade union-to-trade union MoUs, recruitment agency association agreements, and government-to-company mobility partnerships. These arrangements appear to have emerged partly in response to perceived limitations of formal BLMAs and partly as expressions of the operational relationships that underpin labour migration corridors.

The COTU-K-FENASOL agreement and the NLC-GFBTU MoU illustrate the potential of union-to-union cooperation to provide forms of worker support that state-level agreements may not fully provide, including legal assistance, referral to complaint mechanisms, pre-departure information, and community-based support in destination countries. These arrangements can also facilitate the exchange of information between origin and destination contexts in ways that may inform policy without relying solely on formal bilateral review processes.

At the same time, the implementation of these non-state arrangements is uneven, and their coverage is constrained by the regulatory environment in destination countries. GCC labour governance frameworks generally do not permit independent trade union activity in the sectors where most migrant workers from the assessed countries are employed. As a result, union-to-union cooperation remains limited in practice to corridors and sectors where counterpart organisations exist and are able to engage – such as Lebanon and Bahrain in the current sample – rather than Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or the United Arab Emirates.

Recruitment agency associations have also developed bilateral cooperation frameworks in some corridors – including UAERA's MoUs with Jordanian and Saudi recruitment agencies' associations – which facilitate coordination on recruitment processes, cost-sharing, and dispute handling outside formal governmental frameworks. While these arrangements may contribute to improved operational practices in specific contexts, they are not systematically subject to the same level of public oversight as government agreements and may not consistently align with the standards set in formal BLMAs.

Ethiopia's experience with government-to-company MoUs for skilled worker deployment to Germany and Sweden represents a further model. These arrangements operate alongside formal state-to-state processes and respond to specific employer demand, but they also raise questions regarding the consistency of protection standards and the accountability of destination-country employers in the absence of a formal bilateral framework.

Taken together, these non-state governance arrangements suggest that the BLMA landscape is more diverse than the inventory of formal government-to-government agreements alone would indicate. This has implications for both assessment methodology and policy design: effective governance of labour migration corridors may require engaging with the full range of bilateral and multilateral arrangements in operation, rather than focusing exclusively on formal governmental agreements.

7.6. GCC and European models: diverging approaches to BLMA governance

The assessment covers both GCC and European destination corridors, and the contrast between these two sets of arrangements highlights important structural differences in how BLMAs are designed, negotiated and implemented.

GCC-oriented agreements, which constitute the majority of the reviewed sample, tend to focus on protection provisions for specific categories of workers — most often domestic workers. They operate within differing national labour and migration frameworks, several of which have undergone reforms to ease restrictions on labour mobility. The scope of these reforms and their coverage of domestic workers vary across countries. Where kafala (sponsorship) arrangements continue to restrict workers' ability to change employers or exercise their rights, they can create structural barriers to enforcing bilateral protection provisions. Employer compliance and access to effective remedies also shape the protection afforded in practice.

European-oriented agreements represent a smaller and more recent subset of the sample and reflect a different policy logic. The Kenya-Germany partnership and the Kenya-Austria MoU are oriented towards skills mobility, qualification recognition, and circular migration pathways, rather than the regulation of specific occupational categories. One of the drafts reviewed is primarily oriented towards migration management and readmission, with labour mobility playing a more limited role – a feature that has been reported to create challenges in negotiations and to limit its practical relevance as a labour migration governance tool. European agreements are also characterised by stronger provisions on data protection and information-sharing, reflecting the broader EU regulatory environment, and, in the case of Kenya-Germany, by a reference to gender equality in the preamble.

In both cases, negotiation dynamics are often perceived as shaped by structural constraints, with destination country governments playing a significant role in shaping agreement content. Joint committees are formally established but do not always function with the intended regularity.

Both sets of agreements reflect distinct legal and institutional contexts and tend to place emphasis on different aspects of labour migration governance. GCC agreements tend to be more detailed in specifying minimum employment conditions. European agreements, by contrast, often operate within legal systems where labour protections are more extensively governed by domestic and, in some cases, supranational law. In the agreements reviewed, this is reflected in a greater emphasis on labour market access, mobility pathways, and skills-related cooperation, while detailed regulation of working conditions is less often set out in the agreement text itself.

▶ 8 Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to four primary audiences: governments of origin countries covered by the assessment, social partners and other national-level organisations involved in labour migration governance, the ILO and development partners engaged in the provision of technical assistance on BLMA governance and, where relevant, regional bodies. They are organised around the key phases of the BLMA cycle and the cross-cutting issues identified in the preceding analysis. They are grounded in the findings of this assessment and aligned with the ILO-IOM Joint Assessment Tool and relevant international labour standards.

8.1. Strengthening the preparation and negotiation phase

Strengthening the use of BLMA negotiating frameworks

Several countries of origin have developed standardised draft agreements or template provisions intended to guide BLMA negotiations and introduce greater consistency in agreement design. Kenya's use of a common draft structure across multiple GCC corridors, Nigeria's development of a draft BLA, as well as Ethiopia's practice of preparing draft agreements drawing on international labour standards and regional guidance, illustrate emerging efforts to systematise the preparation phase of negotiations.

However, analysis of the reviewed agreements suggests that the existence of such frameworks has not consistently translated into stronger or more protective negotiated outcomes. Key provisions, including those related to recruitment cost allocation, grievance mechanisms, working conditions, and enforcement, are either absent, weakly formulated, or left to be determined at a later stage (for example through model contracts that are not always annexed to the agreement). In practice, this indicates that template agreements sometimes function as procedural starting points, rather than as instruments that effectively anchor minimum standards in negotiation processes.

This points to a need to strengthen not only the availability of templates, but also their substantive content and operational use. In particular, countries of origin should explicitly define their baseline positions, including provisions that are considered non-negotiable – such as those addressing forced labour indicators, passport retention, recruitment cost allocation, access to grievance mechanisms and other Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work[128] – and ensure these are prioritised and retained during negotiations across different corridors. Moreover, such baseline positions should be publicly available, so that they can be shared across countries of origin and help prevent a race to the bottom in negotiation outcomes.

[128] The ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up is an expression of commitment by governments, employers' and workers' organizations to uphold basic human values - values that are vital to human beings' social and economic lives. It affirms the obligations and commitments that are inherent in membership of the ILO, namely:

1. Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
2. the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
3. the effective abolition of child labour;
4. the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and
5. a safe and healthy working environment.

In addition, the structure of many existing templates which defer key protection elements to model employment contracts to be agreed after signature may limit their effectiveness. Ensuring that core worker protection provisions are embedded directly in agreement texts, or that model contracts are systematically annexed and agreed as part of the negotiation process, could help strengthen the enforceability and clarity of agreed standards.

Development partners may support these efforts by complementing existing template development with more practice-oriented support, including comparative analysis of negotiated agreements, identification of effective clauses, and peer learning across countries. Capacity-building efforts could also place greater emphasis on negotiation strategies and trade-offs, helping negotiating teams to maintain core provisions while adapting to different destination-country contexts. Expanding participation in such support to include labour attachés, legal advisers, and other officials involved in negotiations may further strengthen continuity between preparation, negotiation, and implementation phases.

Integrate evidence into the initiation of negotiations

The extent to which bilateral negotiations are grounded in systematic labour market analysis varies across countries. Strengthening the use of evidence in the initiation and renewal of agreements could support more strategic engagement, including through the use of data on labour migration flows, sectoral demand in destination countries, and the skill profiles of potential migrant workers.

Ethiopia's use of embassy-based labour market reporting, combined with external analytical inputs such as sectoral demand studies, illustrates how diplomatic and analytical channels can be combined to inform negotiation priorities. In contexts where such data systems are less developed, there may be value in further investment in labour market information systems, including efforts to capture deployment and welfare outcomes disaggregated by sex, sector, and destination. This could also support more gender-responsive agreement design.

Expand stakeholder consultation during preparation

Consultation with social partners and other stakeholders during the preparation phase remains uneven across the countries studied. In many cases, engagement appears to be limited in scope or to take place at relatively late stages of the process. Expanding opportunities for structured input – including from employers' organisations, trade unions, recruitment agencies, and civil society – could help strengthen both the technical quality and the practical feasibility of draft agreements.

The Nigerian Technical Working Committee on Labour Migration provides one example of a more institutionalised approach, bringing together a range of stakeholders to contribute to the development and validation of draft agreements and template provisions that can inform negotiation processes.

In particular, recruitment agencies may offer valuable insights into the operational implications of specific provisions. In both Kenya and Uganda, representatives noted that certain clauses in existing agreements proved difficult to implement in practice. Such challenges might have been identified earlier through more systematic pre-negotiation consultation. Ensuring that draft texts are shared with relevant stakeholders at an early stage may therefore contribute to more realistic and implementable agreements.

8.2. Improving the substantive content of agreements

Adopt minimum operational standards across all agreements

BLMAs intended to regulate recruitment and employment conditions could be expected to include, at a minimum: a prohibition on passport retention and confiscation of identity documents; a standard employment contract specifying wages, working hours, rest periods, accommodation, and end-of-service entitlements; clear allocation of recruitment and deployment costs in line with the employer-pays principle; a structured individual grievance mechanism specifying the competent authority, procedure, and indicative timelines for resolution; and provisions for the repatriation of workers at the employer's expense at the end of the contract.

The review of the 28 agreements in this assessment shows that these provisions are absent from a significant proportion of existing instruments – including several signed and in-force agreements covering major countries of destination. Priority may therefore be given to reviewing and where mutually agreed, updating older agreements. This broader recommendation is also consistent with ongoing regional efforts, including the development of the IGAD Regional Guidelines on rights-based bilateral labour agreements.[129]

Operationalise grievance mechanisms

Existing grievance provisions – typically framed as the right to lodge a complaint with the Ministry of Labour for amicable resolution – could be strengthened through more operationally detailed mechanisms. These may include, for instance: identification of the institution responsible for receiving complaints in the destination country, indicative timelines for response and resolution, escalation pathways to judicial authorities where settlement is not reached, and clarification of the role of origin-country embassies or labour attachés in supporting workers and provisions on access to legal assistance.

Joint committees could also be mandated to review complaint data at each meeting and report on the number and outcomes of cases handled during the preceding period, thereby strengthening the feedback loop between implementation and oversight.

Grievance mechanisms should also be designed to operate across borders, with clear responsibilities for origin- and destination-country institutions so that workers can pursue complaints before departure, while employed abroad, and after return, rather than only when physically present in the destination country.

Integrate gender-responsive provisions

Existing ILO guidance on fair recruitment – including the General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and materials developed under the Fair Recruitment Initiative[130] – highlights the importance of gender-responsive approaches, although these are not consistently operationalised in BLMAs.

The reviewed agreements contain limited gender-specific provisions beyond general non-discrimination clauses. Strengthening gender responsiveness could involve the inclusion of provisions addressing the specific risks faced by workers in domestic and care sectors, including rest periods, freedom of movement, and protection from abuse. It may also involve ensuring that complaint mechanisms are accessible in contexts where workers face constraints related to isolation, communication barriers, or employer control.

In addition, consideration could be given to promoting gender balance in negotiating delegations and joint committees, as well as to improving the availability of sex-disaggregated data on deployment, complaints, and welfare outcomes.

---

[129] IGAD, *IGAD Regional Guidelines on Rights Based Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs)*, 2021.
[130] ILO, *Fair Recruitment Initiative Strategy 2026-2030: The way forward, from policy to practice*, 2025.

Address the social protection portability gap

Provisions on the social protection of migrant workers remain largely absent from the reviewed agreements. In the short term, agreements could more consistently include provisions requiring employers to provide health insurance, work injury benefits, and invalidity benefits for the duration of employment where such coverage is not otherwise provided for under the law of the destination country – an obligation currently reflected in only a minority of instruments, and often through employment contracts rather than the agreement text itself. Clarifying workers' access to social protection benefits in destination countries, where applicable, could also strengthen protection frameworks. Such information could also be systematically incorporated into pre-departure orientation programmes, so that workers are aware of their entitlements before they leave.

As separate bilateral social security agreements offer a more appropriate vehicle for addressing portability, in the medium term, governments may wish to pursue bilateral social security agreements, alongside rather than within BLMAs. One option would be for BLMAs themselves to include a provision committing the parties to explore or negotiate a separate bilateral social security agreement, recognising that social security is often administered by institutions outside BLMA negotiation processes and requires more specialised inter-institutional discussions. Such efforts could draw on existing international frameworks, including the ILO Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157) and Recommendation No. 167, which provide a normative basis for coordination of social security rights. National initiatives – including efforts in Tanzania to link migrant workers to the National Social Security Fund, for example by enabling or facilitating their registration and continued contribution to the scheme while abroad, and trade union-led proposals for voluntary contribution schemes – may provide interim entry points by helping workers maintain or build contributory entitlements during periods abroad. At the same time, these measures should not substitute for broader bilateral or destination-country protections for migrant workers, nor shift responsibility for social protection disproportionately onto migrant workers themselves or countries of origin.

8.3. Operationalising implementation

Develop implementation frameworks as a standard component of each BLMA

BLMAs could be systematically accompanied, at the time of signature or shortly thereafter, by a bilateral implementation framework (for example, in the form of an annex or joint operational plan) specifying the institutions responsible for each aspect of implementation, operational procedures for recruitment, pre-departure preparation, contract verification, complaint handling, and return, indicative timelines and performance indicators, and the budget and resource allocations required.

The ILO-IOM Joint Assessment Tool's implementation checklist can serve as a useful reference point for developing such frameworks. Development partners may support governments in adapting this tool to produce standardised implementation annexes for new and revised agreements.

Invest in embassy and labour attaché capacity

The capacity of origin-country embassies and labour attachés in destination countries represents a key constraint on the effectiveness of worker welfare monitoring and grievance support. Governments could consider prioritising the deployment of dedicated labour attachés in high-volume destination countries, with clear mandates, resources, and reporting requirements. Uganda's current arrangement – with one labour attaché in Riyadh covering multiple countries – and the absence of a Ugandan mission in Jordan (identified as a contributing factor to the suspension of the agreement) illustrate the scale of the challenge.

Labour attachés could be systematically trained on the content of applicable BLMAs, complaint referral procedures, and gender-sensitive approaches to worker support. Regular reporting on complaint volumes, outcomes, and emerging protection trends could be institutionalised and shared with joint monitoring committees and relevant stakeholders.

Ensure public accessibility of agreement texts

Signed BLMAs should be systematically published, in accessible formats and languages, on the websites of relevant labour ministries and national employment authorities, and shared proactively with social partners, recruitment agencies, and civil society organisations. Where agreements include provisions on dissemination, these should be implemented systematically and their follow-up monitored and, in the case of BLAs, they should be treated as binding obligations.

Kenya's National Employment Authority already publishes some agreements online. Extending this practice to all agreements and encouraging similar approaches in other countries would improve transparency. Governments may also ensure that pre-departure orientation programmes consistently include information on applicable BLMAs, so that migrant workers are aware of their rights and entitlements prior to departure.

8.4. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation

Make joint monitoring committees functional

Joint monitoring committees could be strengthened through four practical measures. First, governments could designate a national secretariat responsible for organising committee meetings, preparing documentation, following up on action points, and maintaining records – as the Uganda-KSA 2023 revised agreement (Art. 6) already provides through its national contact point provision. Second, dedicated budget lines for joint committee operations – including travel, interpretation, and logistical costs – could be incorporated into national labour migration budgets. Third, committees could meet at least annually and produce a brief written report summarising deployment data, complaint outcomes, emerging implementation challenges, and agreed actions. Fourth, committee mandates could explicitly include the monitoring of gender-specific outcomes and the review of sex-disaggregated data.

An additional option would be to complement intergovernmental joint committees with broader multistakeholder monitoring arrangements, including social partners, civil society organisations, and recruitment actors, in order to strengthen feedback loops on implementation.

The ILO-IOM model terms of reference for joint monitoring committees (Annex VII of the Joint Assessment Tool) provide a practical template that could be adapted and incorporated as a standard annex to new and revised BLMAs.

Establish review mechanisms linked to implementation evidence

Standard automatic renewal clauses could be supplemented by provisions requiring a structured review of implementation performance prior to renewal. Such reviews could draw on data collected by joint committees, embassy reporting, and inputs from social partners, and produce documented findings to inform revisions to the agreement. Uganda's experience – where the Jordan agreement reportedly continued to renew automatically despite a suspension of deployment linked to worker protection concerns – illustrates the risks associated with renewal mechanisms that are not closely linked to implementation realities.

Countries may also consider reviewing and, where necessary, revising older agreements. The Kenya-Qatar 2012 and Ethiopia-Qatar 2012 BLAs, now more than a decade old, both predate more recent developments in BLMA design standards and have not been formally updated. As revised drafts for both reportedly exist, governments may consider prioritising their finalisation and signature.

Build sex-disaggregated data systems

Governments, with support from development partners, could invest in information systems that systematically capture sex-disaggregated data on deployment, complaints, welfare outcomes, and return. Ethiopia's Labour Market Information System may provide a model for tracking deployment at scale; a key challenge is extending such systems to capture post-deployment outcomes, including complaint resolution, repatriation cases, and occupational injury compensation. Kenya's NEA-IMS system, including its distress reporting function, provides a further building block that could be strengthened and replicated.

Joint monitoring committees could be explicitly mandated to collect and review sex-disaggregated data as part of their monitoring function. The ILO-IOM assessment tool's quantitative implementation checklist, which includes indicators such as the number of migrants facing abuse by sex and age, and the number receiving compensation for occupational injury, offers a standardised set of data points that could be incorporated into committee reporting templates.

8.5. Enhancing the role of social partners

Formalise social partner roles throughout the BLMA lifecycle

Governments could move beyond ad hoc consultation by more systematically integrating employers' organisations and trade unions across the different phases of the BLMA cycle. This may include contributing to the preparation of negotiating positions, reviewing draft texts prior to signature, receiving copies of signed agreements, participating in joint monitoring committees or dedicated advisory structures, and providing structured input to periodic reviews. Nigeria's Technical Working Committee on Labour Migration – where social partners were involved in the development of prototype BLA templates – provides an illustrative example of how such engagement can be organised in practice. Comparable approaches can also be found outside the reviewed sample, including agreements that involve trade unions on both sides of the corridor, such as the Germany-Philippines agreement.[131]

The ILO may support governments in strengthening these approaches through the development of standard consultation frameworks and through technical support and policy dialogue on the role of tripartite engagement in BLMA governance.

Support and scale up trade union cooperation arrangements

Trade union-to-trade union cooperation arrangements have demonstrated practical value in corridors where they operate. The COTU-K-FENASOL arrangement in Lebanon, for example, has reportedly enabled Kenyan workers to access legal assistance and community-based support mechanisms that complement state-level protection systems.

Development partners, including the ILO through programmes such as FAIRWAY and FMM West Africa, could continue to support and expand such initiatives by facilitating contacts between origin- and destination-country trade union organisations, providing financial and logistical support for the development and implementation of cooperation MoUs and supporting the production of joint information materials.

Particular attention could be given to corridors and sectors where trade union presence exists in destination countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, and European destination countries. In contexts where trade union activity is restricted, alternative models, such as worker community organisations and diaspora networks, may be explored as complementary partners for protection and support activities.

[131] United Nations Network on Migration, *Global Guidance on Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*, 2022.

8.6. Regional coordination and collective approaches

Develop common minimum standards for BLMA negotiation

Countries of origin could explore pathways towards the development of common non-negotiable minimum standards for BLMAs to be promoted in negotiations with destination countries. Such standards would not require collective negotiation but could instead define a set of core provisions, shared baseline positions, or model clauses that countries of origin seek to uphold consistently across bilateral processes. This could help mitigate competitive pressures between origin countries to undercut standards in order to secure access to destination labour markets.

Discussions on regional coordination have already emerged in several contexts. Stakeholders in Uganda, as well as in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania, highlighted the potential value of a more coordinated approach to strengthening their bargaining power vis-à-vis destination countries. At the same time, interviews indicate that such initiatives remain at an early stage, with no formal mechanisms for joint negotiation currently in place. Competition among origin countries for overseas employment opportunities was also identified as a constraint, potentially limiting incentives for deeper coordination. A more forward-looking perspective was expressed in Ghana, where stakeholders suggested that negotiating as a regional bloc – for example through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – could strengthen the bargaining position of countries of origin and reduce inconsistencies across agreements.[132]

However, consultations suggest that convergence may be more readily achievable around specific elements of agreement content. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – including the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – could provide entry points for advancing this agenda.

Stakeholders identified a number of areas where common positions could be developed, including minimum working conditions, such as working hours and rest periods, access to health insurance, leave entitlements, protection against passport retention, contract transparency, basic protections against abuse, and access to grievance mechanisms. The validation workshops also highlighted possible areas for more operational convergence, including model employment contracts, contract verification before departure, fair recruitment provisions, and clearer standards for monitoring and follow-up. While other elements, such as wage levels, may remain more context-specific, the identification of shared baseline standards was widely seen as a feasible starting point for coordination.

These efforts could draw on existing peer learning structures developed under programmes such as the Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) programme, as well as on broader normative frameworks – including the African Union Migration Policy Framework[133] and the IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework – which provide guidance on labour migration governance, including the use of bilateral agreements.[134]

Development partners, including the ILO, may support these processes through technical assistance, facilitation of inclusive dialogue, and the development of standard-provision language and peer review mechanisms.

---

[132] KII with government representative.
[133] African Union, *Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)*, 2018.
[134] IGAD, *IGAD Regional Guidelines on Rights Based Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs)*, 2021.

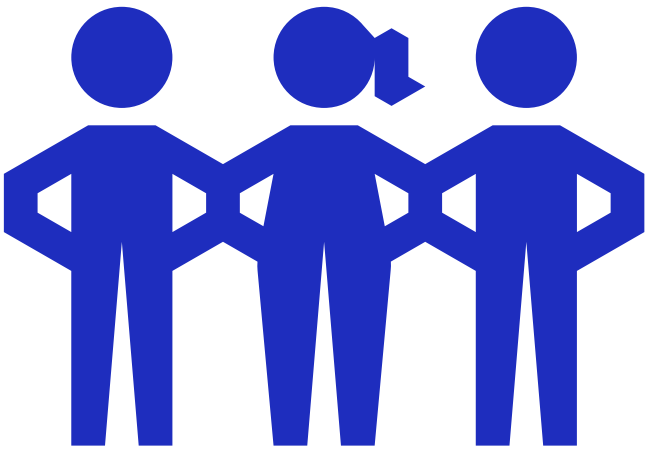
Strengthen regional platforms for BLMA peer learning

The Regional Training on Rights-Based Bilateral Labour Agreements held in Addis Ababa from 8 to 12 December 2025,[135] organised by IGAD and the ILO under the European Union-funded Support to Free Movement of Persons and Transhumance Phase II (FMPT II) and the United Kingdom-funded BRMM programme, provides a useful example of regional peer learning and capacity-building in practice. Such initiatives demonstrate the value of structured regional dialogue in strengthening technical understanding of BLMA design, negotiation, and implementation.

Sustaining and institutionalising these types of exchanges as a regular feature of regional labour migration governance could help strengthen continuity, knowledge-sharing, and collective capacity across countries. In this regard, regional platforms – including the IGAD, the EAC, and the ECOWAS – could provide entry points for embedding such peer learning processes within more permanent institutional frameworks. These platforms offer existing channels for dialogue, exchange of experience, and capacity-building that could be further leveraged to support improvements in BLMA negotiation, content, and implementation.

Potential areas of cooperation include:

- Shared analysis of existing agreements using the ILO-IOM assessment framework.
- Joint development of template provisions and model clauses for specific sectors such as domestic work, construction, and healthcare.
- Exchange on contract verification, fair recruitment provisions, and model employment contracts.
- Comparative review of joint committee functioning and monitoring practices.
- Coordinated training for labour attachés, diplomatic staff, and officials involved in BLMA negotiation, implementation and monitoring.



[135] ILO News, *East and Horn of Africa states advance rights-based bilateral labour agreements*, 24 December 2025.

Annex: List of Key Informant Interviews

Institution	Country	Key informant
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Kenya	Vanessa Leigh
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Tanzania	Diana Rutechura
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana	Uche Hilary Ogbonna, Augustine Erameh, Guite Diop
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Ghana	Kamil Abubakari
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Kenya	Wycliffe Ouma Opara
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Ethiopia	Aida Awel
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Nigeria	Olukemi Osoba
ILO (initial scoping discussion)	Uganda	Andrew Mukulu
Ministère chargé de l'intégration africaine en Côte d'Ivoire	Côte d'Ivoire	DJE Kouamé Olivier, Directeur du commerce, de la Libre Circulation et de la Coopération Transfrontalière
Nigeria Labour Congress/ Trade Union Congress	Nigeria	Eustace Imoyera James, Labour migration Focal Point, NLC HQ
Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association	Nigeria	Jennifer Yelwa, Membership executive / Coordinator NECA ICT Academy Abuja
Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment FMLE	Nigeria	Dr Sunday Onazi, Assistant Director, Dept. of Employment and Wages, FMLE
Central Organization of Trade Unions, Kenya (COTU-K)	Kenya	Teresa Wobuku, First assistant Secretary General COTU-K
Association of Skilled Migrant Agencies of Kenya (ASMAK)	Kenya	Monica Mwema, Secretary General
Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA)	Tanzania	Nasra Shargy, Labour Migration Focal Person
Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies	Uganda	Stuart Oramire, Executive Director
Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF)	Ethiopia	Dr. Dawit Moges, President, Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF)
National Employment Agency	Kenya	Winnie Helida Owaka, Coordinator
FIRST Reliable (private employment agency)	Kenya	Shukri Mohammed, Director and administrator
Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development	Uganda	Milton Turyasiima, Assistant Commissioner Employment Services and Hillary Talemwa, Head of the external employment unit
Prime Minister's Office - Labour, Employment and Relations	Tanzania	Jane Sorogo, Ag. Director of Employment Services Unit
Ministry of Labour and Social Protection	Kenya	Mr Festus Mutuse, Director Labour Migration
Ministry of Labour and Skills	Ethiopia	Amsalu Bashe, Head of Overseas Employment Desk
Ministry of Labour, Jobs and Employment (MLJE)	Ghana	Sandra Ofosuapea, Principal Officer
Ministry of Employment and Social Protection	Côte d'Ivoire	Christian Barou, Research officer in the office of the Director General of Labour

Bibliography

African Union. 2018. *Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)*.

GOV.UK. 2021. *Bilateral agreement between the UK and Kenya on healthcare workforce collaboration*.

IGAD. 2021. *IGAD Regional Guidelines on Rights Based Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs)*.

ILO. 1952. *ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention*, (No. 102).

ILO. 1998. Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up.

ILO. 2015. *Bilateral Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding on Migration of Low Skilled Workers: A Review.*

ILO. 2017a. *Addressing governance challenges in a changing labour migration landscape*, Report IV, International Labour Conference, 106th Session.

ILO. 2017b. *Migrant access to social protection under Bilateral Labour Agreements: A review of 120 countries and nine bilateral arrangements*.

ILO. 2017c *Employer-migrant worker relationships in the Middle East: exploring scope for internal labour market mobility and fair migration*.

ILO. 2023 *Review of National Social Protection Legislation and Legal Frameworks for Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries*.

ILO. 2024. *Enhanced stakeholder coordination for improved labour migration in Uganda*.

ILO. 2025. *Fair Recruitment Initiative Strategy 2026-2030: The way forward, from policy to practice*.

ILO. 2026. *Étude sur le cadre légal et réglementaire encadrant le recrutement et le placement des travailleurs migrants en Côte d'Ivoire*.

ILO News, *Ethiopia Strengthens Diplomatic Capacity on Labour Migration*, 28 April 2025.

ILO News, *Tanzania Strengthens Labour Market and Migration Statistics Capacity*, 5 July 2025.

ILO News, *Kenya puts inclusion and accessibility at the center of employment services with support from the ILO*, 22 August 2025.

ILO News, *East and Horn of Africa states advance rights-based bilateral labour agreements*, 24 December 2025.

ILO Project, *Better Regional Migration Management*, 2022-2026.

ILO Region portal, *Domestic workers in the Arab States*, N/A.

ILO and IOM. 2019a. *Tool for the Assessment of Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*.

ILO and IOM. 2019b. *Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements in African Union Member States: Taking Stock and the Way Forward*.

IOM and Altaï. 2024. *Labour Market Assessment of European Destination Countries for Ethiopian Migrant Workers*.

NEA, *Bilateral labour agreements*, N/A.

United Nations Network on Migration. 2022. *Global Guidance on Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements*.

United Nations Network on Migration (Arab States Regional Review). 2024. *Session 3: Protecting and Empowering Migrant Workers and Operationalizing their Role in the Sustainable Development Process in Countries of Origin and Destination – Background Note*.

World Bank. 2023. *Emerging trends in bilateral labour migration agreements*.

International Labour Organization
Regional Office for Africa
Plateau, CCIA Building
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
01 BP 3960 Abidjan 01

(+225) 20318900
iloafrica@ilo.org
https://www.ilo.org/africa