



Preparatory research project on the involvement of migrant workers and their families in the social and solidarity economy in Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Korea, and Viet Nam

ILO Labour Migration Branch – Cooperatives Unit

Background

Migrant workers and returning migrants are increasingly turning to cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy (SSE) enterprises to ensure they have full access to the development benefits of labour migration. In 2011, the ILO's Cooperatives Unit (COOP) undertook an initial mapping of cooperatives that were either established by migrants or supported migrants and their families through provision of services and found 48 such enterprises worldwide. Since then, more such examples have come to light, such as migrant domestic worker cooperatives¹, a cooperative business founded by former trafficking victims under the ILO project *Going Back, Moving On: Economic and Social Empowerment of Migrants*², *Viaggi Solidali*³, etc.

In light of these trends, the ILO's Labour Migration Branch (MIGRANT) and the ILO's Cooperatives Unit have been collaborating on an effort to improve understanding and policies benefitting access of migrant workers to cooperatives and other forms of social and solidarity economy (SSE) enterprises that can enhance livelihoods, social protection and economic development in the context of migrants' return and reintegration. We have developed a larger framework of action to pilot test in Viet Nam in the form of a proposed public-private partnership (PPP), *Improving the Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers under the Employment Permit System (EPS) through Harnessing the Development Potential of the Social and Solidarity Economy*, where there is current interest by ILO constituents and opportunity to collaborate with local social enterprise partners.

Rationale and objectives

This research project seeks will contribute additional needed research to better

¹ See for example, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/nyregion/cleaning-together-to-escape-day-labor.html?_r=1&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y

² http://www.ilo.org/asia/info/public/WCMS_183879/lang--en/index.htm

³ <http://www.viaggisolidali.it/>

understand the engagement of migrant workers with the social and solidarity economy and how it affects their return, reintegration, and/or empowerment in the following countries: Kyrgyzstan, Viet Nam – migrant sending countries – and the Republic of Korea – migrant destination country. The Republic of Korea was chosen on the basis of its well-developed institutional structure for temporary labour migration in the form of the EPS, especially the nascent return and reintegration component of the EPS—the Happy Return Program—which offers opportunities for capacity building through innovative partnerships that will also impact socio-economic development. The Happy Return Program currently offers returning migrant workers the possibility to secure employment with a Korean firm operating in their home country or receive vocational training that will aid them in opening their own businesses once back home. This proposal seeks to build the capacity of the Happy Return Program to also offer returning migrants the possibility to pursue entrepreneurial aspirations collectively and/or in a way that has positive social impact on their communities as a third option. Kyrgyzstan and Viet Nam were chosen because of their links to Korea and the EPS through bilateral agreements, which would facilitate data-gathering as well as project design and implementation.

The findings of the studies will ultimately lay the foundation for a broader set of activities to engage the public and private sectors in building skills and education of migrant workers, specifically through the proposed PPP project, *Improving the Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers under the EPS through Harnessing the Development Potential of the Social and Solidarity Economy*. As part of a broader project that seeks to empower migrants in a way that benefits the sustainable development of their local communities, this proposal will contribute to the momentum created by the UN General Assembly High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (3-4 October, 2013), especially the processes concerning knowledge and good practices sharing that feed into the High-Level Dialogue. And, since the proposed research will inform a PPP project, it is expected that the findings will also lay the ground for further studies into what can the role or added value of the private sector, given the current situation in relation to migrants' engagement in SSE enterprises upon return.

Research plan

The research will include the following:

- 1) *Methodology development*: A methodology to ascertain the extent to which migrants in Korea and returning migrants in the 2 pilot sending countries are engaging with and/or accessing the social economy in each country. The methodology will include a desk review, focus group interviews with migrant workers and SSE organisations, and expert interviews. It will give particular weight to sectoral analyses, identifying the sectors in which migrants' involvement with SSE is more pronounced and elements of market research, such as the feasibility and sustainability of migrant SSE organisations in each of the research countries and a needs assessment of each pilot market. It will also devise ways to measure if and how migrants' engagement with the SSE contributes to ensuring their protection and a smooth reintegration as well as to improving their terms and conditions of work, and where they fail to do so.
- 2) *Country of destination study*: This study will look at, among other further

questions to be identified, the numerical significance of migrants that are involved in SSE enterprises in the Republic of Korea; the sectors in which such SSE organisations are concentrated; the demographic profile of the migrants that are members, entrepreneurs or clients; the obstacles faced in setting up or becoming members of SSE organisations; and the opportunities and options available to integrate SSE-related training into the Happy Return Program of the EPS.

- 3) *Case studies of 2 pilot sending countries*: The research in the two pilot countries will focus on the reintegration of returning migrants and investigate their level of interest in joining or establishing an SSE enterprise; if, and how, the social economy has created employment for them, promoted their rights at work, extended social protection to them and their families, and contributed to the development of their local communities.

The research will look for answers to a range of relevant questions including, but not confined to, the following:

- What are the numbers and percentage or profiles of migrants who have returned and are involved in SSE organisations and in which sectors?
- Where are the business opportunities in each country, and what are the potential high-growth industries where SSE enterprises could thrive?
- What are the obstacles and challenges faced by returning migrants in becoming social entrepreneurs or members of SSE organisations in their home countries, especially in terms of legal and business literacy barriers and access to capital?
- How has, if at all, returning migrants' engagement with the social and solidarity economy created employment, promoted working and living conditions, and extended social protection to them and their families?

Results are expected by the end of 2013.