

Developing a standard methodology for assessing outcomes for migrant workers

The ILO provides advice to member States on the governance of labour migration to promote decent work for migrant workers, while benefiting both origin and destination countries. ILO efforts are based on international labour standards and on the 2004 Plan of Action on Labour Migration with the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration as its centrepiece. However, policy advice must be grounded in sound evidence-based knowledge and assessment of existing and evolving policies and practices arising in different countries/regions, a fact which is also underlined in the Multilateral Framework. Protecting the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own (as per ILO's Constitution) will only be possible if enough is known about what works where, how and why. For example, does the degree and form of tripartite participation in the design and implementation of labour migration programmes make any difference for the migrants?

It is therefore intended to (i) develop a standard methodology which will be used to document the impact of existing labour migration programmes/schemes on a range of variables that concern outcomes for migrant workers, namely wages, working time, skills development, and social protection; and (ii) test the methodology in two pilot case studies.

“Labour migration programmes/schemes” in this context are programmes set up in common by migrant origin and destination countries or unilaterally by destination countries, governing usually temporary stays of migrant workers, mostly concerning jobs that require mid-level or few skills, and oftentimes quota-based. They exist at the intra-regional level, as when Croatia and Germany agree that X number of nurses per year can receive work permits to work in German hospitals or Australia brings in workers from neighbouring Pacific islands to take up seasonal agricultural jobs. And they also exist at inter-regional level, as when Saudi Arabia offers job opportunities in the construction sector to workers from Bangladesh or X number of migrant domestic workers from Colombia have the right to work in Spain under an agreement between these two countries. As these examples illustrate, the methodology is not meant to assess outcomes for migrants in irregular situations and it is not meant to capture the whole range of immigration or emigration policies. It is also not meant to assess the impact of migration on the economies of the destination or origin countries; it will focus on the migrant workers and their migration experience and benefits from migration.

Are the protection and the rights under international labour standards and in particular ILO Conventions 97 and 143 enjoyed by the migrant workers who participate in the programmes? Is it possible to identify programme designs/policies that make the migration experience particularly beneficial or problematic for migrant workers (for example regarding

their treatment, skills development, and future economic prospects)? As of today, information to answer these questions cannot be collected in a systematic standardized way.

A mixed approach to examining outcomes will be used. Quantitative methods should be used as a starting point but they will have to be supplemented with qualitative analysis to arrive at meaningful results. For example, it may be possible in certain cases to compare statistically the wages and working times for migrant and local workers, thereby establishing whether or not a particular programme offers equal treatment. Migrants' earnings before and after the migration experience can be taken as a proxy for effective skills development; and the extent of social security coverage can be assessed in looking at legal texts. However, only surveys and interviews with migrants, their employers and other relevant stakeholders will bring out whether intervening variables come into play (such as inflation or occupational mobility re. the earnings) and whether migrant workers have made use of existing rights (e.g. they may not have known about social security arrangements and failed to make claims). A qualitative approach will also be required to document the degree and form of tripartite participation in scheme design and implementation. Qualitative results could be coded and subsequently subjected to further quantitative study, if appropriate.

This mixed approach will be used within case studies. Each case study will consist of a labour migration programme based on some kind of agreement (bilateral treaty, MOU, or similar) between an origin and a destination country. The standard methodology should permit to assess a wide range of schemes in different economic sectors and across all inter- and intra-regional migration corridors.

The standard methodology will be developed in collaboration with a research institute or think tank selected for its expertise on migration policy evaluation and experience with mixed approaches in terms of methodology. A priori, the two pilot case studies to test the methodology and address any shortcomings will be carried out in different migration corridors (regions) and concern two different economic sectors, to capture as many difficulties in data collection as possible.