



► ILO Brief

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ILO Guidance Note on Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs)

Key points

- MRCs provide critical information and services for migrant workers throughout the migration cycle
- The ILO supports the establishment and operation of MRCs in multiple locations in Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, Africa and Latin America
- This Guidance Note presents the key principles of the ILO approach, and provides insights for the establishment and operation of MRCs, capacity building of MRC staff, design and implementation of service provision, effective communications and outreach, and monitoring and evaluation and sustainability
- This Guidance Note draws on lessons learned and good practices from the operation of ILO-supported MRCs over a 10+ year period, as well as the [ILO ASEAN TRIANGLE MRC Operations Manual](#), and the outcomes of the MRC Symposium held in Entebbe, Uganda in September 2023

What is a Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC)?

Access to accurate information and support services are a critical measure to ensure fair recruitment and decent work and to facilitate access to justice mechanisms for migrant workers throughout all stages of the migration cycle. The right to adequate and free information and services for migrant workers is articulated in international labour standards and a number of international governance frameworks.¹ MRCs serve as one approach to consolidate information and services that has been taken

in a number of countries of origin and destination. Key features of MRCs include:

- A physical space, run by government, trade unions, employers, or civil society – or as a collaboration between stakeholders
- A centre that provides a range of information and services for migrant workers, members of their families and community – for potential migrant workers at the pre-decision and pre-departure stage; for migrant workers during the transit stage and at destination; and during the return and reintegration phases of migration

¹ Including the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), the General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, among others.

- Offer a wide range of services including structured group training sessions (such as pre-departure orientation or financial education); individual or family counselling; provide referral mechanisms based on migrants' specific needs (such as legal or health services) and provide in-house paralegal support or case management. When run by trade unions, they also serve as a key means to organize migrant workers
- Provide a space for soft skills, empowerment and community and network building activities
- Combine in-centre activities with outreach, networks of focal points, and campaign activities (for example via radio, social media, and community events)
- Conduct data collection and research to inform the activities of the MRC and to engage in policy advocacy
- Deliver information in a manner that recognizes the frequent gap between rights as expressed in law (on paper) and the reality experienced in practice by migrant workers
- Take a "harm minimization" approach to the provision of information and guidance (by focusing on reducing the negative impacts)³

Key elements of establishment and operation

Establishment and management

The establishment of the MRC is an opportunity to define its mandate, scope and objectives. MRC-style services can often start small, building on community-level activities or with the development of a help desk or network of focal points at a trade union, for example.

During the preparation phase, the MRC should develop a management and governance structure, and determine funding sources and budget, ensuring that there are funds for critical infrastructure including internet and electricity, physical spaces, IT resources etc. Migrant workers should be consulted during this phase of the MRC establishment, to ensure that it is needs-based and responsive, and that migrant workers are engaged as active agents within the governance of the MRC.

The MRC leadership should also undertake a needs assessment to determine the most critical areas of work, and map referral networks and mechanisms. Long term planning and vision can determine how the services can progressively be expanded.

As part of the mapping exercise, the MRC leadership should also seek potential partnerships – including with government, workers' organizations, employers' organizations, civil society organizations, and recruitment agency associations, among others. The MRC can work towards the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the MRC and these partners, to facilitate cooperation such as referral of migrant workers to and from the MRC. These partnerships may also support sustainability of the MRC (see below).

The ILO approach: Key principles

- Ensure that international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work² are the baseline for information and service delivery
- Recognize and promote the role of social partners and promote the organizing of workers
- Take a migrant worker-centred approach that recognizes the agency of the worker and empowers them to claim their rights
- Ensure that MRCs do not actively promote or discourage labour migration, but rather provide accurate and comprehensive information that allows the worker to make an informed decision
- Provide information and services free of charge and ensure accuracy and impartiality
- Protect beneficiaries' data and confidentiality
- Ensure equality of opportunity and treatment and gender responsiveness in all services
- Acknowledge that the MRC cannot provide all information and services to meet the often complex needs of migrant workers, and aim to address this by prioritizing certain services, being clear about the scope and limitations of the MRC, and having a strong referral network
- Work to challenge prevailing norms, practices and attitudes towards labour migration and migrant workers

² The five fundamental principles and rights at work are: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and a safe and healthy working environment.

³ For example, individuals seeking to migrate despite a migration "ban" should be given information about the current legislation, as well as strategies to ensure harm minimization to reduce their vulnerability if they decide to migrate.

Regarding selecting a location for the MRC, an important consideration is accessibility – ensuring it is in a location that is safe, convenient, easily accessible by public transport, clear and welcoming for migrant men and women, including those coming from different regions. A further consideration would be placing the MRC in a location close to other labour migration services, such as passport or visa application centres. Consider the pros and cons of housing the MRC within a government building (see text box below), and the option for a “one-stop-shop”. Some MRCs may be housed at a border crossing to cater to this group of migrant workers.

Operations

It is advisable for MRCs to have an Operations Manual which guides MRC staff on all aspects of the work. The Operations Manual should be developed through a consultative process and go through a period of pilot testing. It should be designed in a way whereby it can be regularly updated to respond to emerging good practices, labour migration trends, changes in policy, and new areas of priority etc. The ILO has developed Operations Manuals which may be used as guides or reference material to be adapted to the national or local context. At this stage, the MRC may also develop the M&E Framework and Sustainability Plan (see below).

► Who runs the MRC? Situating MRCs within government providers: Pros and cons

While placing an MRC within a government service provider or building is a sign of political commitment and can ensure streamlining with other relevant services (such as passport applications), there are also a number of drawbacks. For example, the community may be hesitant to engage with a service provided by the government, as it may not be seen as reliable or trustworthy. An approach that found success was to ensure that governments are responsible for coordination, sustainability and legal status of the MRC, while the actual provision of services (face to face), is conducted by civil society, trade unions or community organizations.

Capacity building of MRC staff

The MRC is only as valuable as the capacity of its staff and the relevance of the information and services they provide.

Capacity building for MRC staff should take a dynamic, integrated approach, rather than rely on one-off training. Measures for regular trainings should be factored into the design and budget of the MRCs from the outset. Specialized training should be conducted on all aspects of services provided at the MRC (e.g. group training and individual counselling), and each time there is a new policy development. The MRC may establish mechanisms for quarterly refresher trainings, easily adapted training modules, and advocate for the inclusion of MRC staff on official policy teams.

Training must also include interpersonal skills and psychosocial training to enable MRC staff to interact effectively and sensitively with beneficiaries from different cultures, religions, education and literacy levels, and ensure gender-responsive services. MRC staff must be adequately trained to handle sensitive questions or cases of violence and assessment, including gender-based violence and harassment, and also to support migrant workers in situations of emergency or distress. It is highly recommended to maintain a gender balance among the MRC staff.

- The delivery of counselling and advice, in particular on legal and procedural matters, is a serious responsibility, and requires professionally and adequately trained staff with accurate information.

Alongside capacity building of staff, a comprehensive Operations Manual can serve as a foundational document for the MRC. MRC Operations Manuals⁴ and other tools should be developed through a consultative process with migrant workers and MRC staff, and allow adequate time for piloting and revision. Operations Manuals should be seen as “living documents” that are regularly updated with new information and modules – responding to the dynamics and complexities of labour migration. They need to include policy and legislation in the country of operation, as well as key countries of destination/origin.

- Consider developing a core Operations Manual with templates for addition of new modules, for example when a bilateral labour agreement (BLA) is signed with

⁴ For example: ILO (2014) [Migrant Worker Resource Centre operations manual](#)

a new country of destination, or when there is new health guidance etc. You can also consider developing the Operations Manual as an online tool or set of modules to allow for easy adaptation and updating. This approach will also allow the MRC to plan and respond to emergencies – for example mass deportations from a country of destination, or a health emergency.

The MRC may also consider partnerships with relevant organizations who can strengthen the capacity of MRC staff and the breadth of services offered – for example legal aid interns, students or volunteers.

Information and service provision

MRCs must establish a reputation as trustworthy and credible actors within the community.

Key messages and talking points

The MRC should work to establish clear, concise messages that are easily understood – including in multiple languages, and for various levels of literacy, and ensure that the messages delivered are consistent among MRC staff, networks and partners. Up to date information and expertise gives credibility and trust to the MRC and its work – critical for its effective functioning within the community. The MRC may choose to draft a set of Frequently Asked Questions to guide interactions at the MRC.

MRCs cannot provide all information about everything – this may also overwhelm migrant workers. It is critical to identify what are the needs of the migrant worker at the specific stage during their migration journey, and deliver information adapted to their context and needs.

- Countering misinformation and ingrained attitudes (such as payment of recruitment fees and related costs by migrant workers) is also an important aspect.

Communications messages may aim to go beyond basic awareness raising and adopt behaviour change communications methods to be more concrete and effective. Understanding people's specific knowledge, attitudes and practices around a certain topic can ensure development of powerful messages that elicit social and behaviour change in a meaningful way. For example, if the MRC seeks to encourage migrant workers to migrate

through a registered recruitment agency, they should conduct a mapping to understand:

- What is the current level of knowledge, attitudes and practice on the topic among potential migrant workers?
- What are the specifics of the desired behaviour change? For example, for migrant workers to understand the benefits, to research recommended agencies, to enter into an agreement with the recruitment agency, to request receipts for payments of recruitment fees and related costs? etc.
- What are the existing barriers to choosing a registered agency? Consider explicit and implicit barriers
- Who/what are trusted sources of information on the topic? Consider individual messengers as well as media

With this in-depth understanding of the audience and intended behaviour change, key messages can be developed, tested, implemented and measured for impact.⁵

► Communication: Addressing challenging contradictions in the migration experience

- Regular migration does not always guarantee decent work...
- Employment contracts are not always effectively enforced in the country of destination...
- The national law prohibits charging of recruitment fees and related costs to the workers but in practice many migrant workers pay large amounts...

Consider how you will address the many contradictions and sensitivities in communicating on migration.

Types of services provided at the MRC

MRCs may deliver a range of services for migrant workers, their families, and members of the community. For example:

- Deliver structured group training programmes e.g. pre-departure orientation training, "Start and Improve Your Business" training for entrepreneurs, language training, and financial education courses. These may be provided in-house by the MRC, or by partners (the MRC can facilitate the referrals)

⁵ For IOM (2018) IOM X C4D Toolkit: A step-by-step guide to applying Communication 4 Development (C4D) to counter-trafficking activities

- Deliver individual or family counselling – tailored counselling to inform decision making
- Establish referral mechanisms to refer migrants (and members of their families and communities) to specific services based on their needs. MRCs should have a mapping of relevant services (e.g. legal services, skills training, health services, services for women, financial services), with up to date contact information
- Provide information and updates on licensed private recruitment agencies, and support migrant workers to understand their employment contracts and rights and responsibilities
- Provide in-house paralegal support – receive and process individual or group complaints
- Organize migrant workers and increase their participation in union activities
- Community outreach, outside the MRC physical space (see below)
- Support return and reintegration of migrant workers, including referral for skills recognition and job matching, as well as family and community reintegration
- Provide emergency support for migrant workers in distress. Particularly in the case of returning migrant workers, MRCs may be the first point of contact for distressed migrant workers in an emergency situation

Training and counseling should be based on relevant national laws and policies as well as international human rights frameworks, and employ appropriate teaching methods suited to the audience. The MRC staff should be able to adapt their training and communication techniques to ensure inclusion of a wide group of beneficiaries. ILO research has found that peer-to-peer learning and informal sessions led by community leaders are the most effective at reaching migrant workers and leading to behaviour change. Many MRCs have also found success in engaging returnee migrant workers as peer educators.

Taking the MRC beyond the physical space

For outreach, programmes such as partnership with existing groups, development of a network of community-level focal points or the establishment of a “mobile” or travelling MRC allow the MRC to reach a broad range of workers – critically at the pre-decision making phase. MRC staff may also choose to do outreach at job fairs, schools

and universities, cultural/religious events, or public employment services.

Regarding online activities, MRCs may choose to establish an online presence through a dedicated website, mobile application or social media page. Online activities may include hosting a live Q&A session. Sharing of messages via local radio stations and street theatre or storytelling programmes have also been used by MRCs to promote their services.

A combination of a physical MRC, outreach at the community level and through online activities will enable a more comprehensive approach to information and services that can support the migrant worker during the pre-decision phase, keep the connection while they are in the destination country, and support them upon return.

Developing information and communication materials

MRCs should also develop some printed or online outreach materials to raise awareness about the MRC, share key messages and provide migrant workers with contact information for support in the country of destination and upon return (such as hotlines or websites).

- The first step is to determine what materials are already available from government, social partners or civil society. If a gap is identified, developing new materials should be considered
- Secondly, identify the target audience and best way to communicate with them. You may need to develop different messages and dissemination channels for different groups of migrant workers. Considering resources, you may need to prioritize
- Consider what information will be most valuable to migrant workers at different stages of their migration, and what will be most useful in an emergency. For example, materials that are to inform decision making and those that are for migrant workers to use once in the destination country will highlight different information
- The information materials need to be strongly linked to the “key messages” or FAQs (see section above). Materials should consider different literacy levels of the target audience, and adopt use of local languages and images as necessary. They should be practical and problem-solving

- You may consider developing the materials in partnership with relevant stakeholders for efficiency and consistency of messaging
- A dissemination strategy should be developed, and monitored for impact

The role of social partners

Social partners – workers’ organizations and employers’ organizations – can play a key role in the establishment and operation of MRCs.

For trade unions, MRCs serve as an entry point to reach out and organize migrant workers, and to leverage the opportunity to provide paralegal services and facilitate access to social protection. They also serve as a channel for migrant workers to realise and exercise their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Many trade unions may choose alternatively to first establish a helpdesk or focal point for migration – this may act as a precursor to the establishment of an MRC.⁶

ILO research has also documented examples of how trade unions are engaging in effective regional activities. For example, through the signature of interregional MOUs which strengthen protection of workers throughout the migration cycle.⁷

Sustainability and Monitoring and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation framework and sustainability plan should be drafted at the outset of the establishment of the MRC.

► Key definitions

- **Monitoring:** A continuous process that can provide evidence that a policy or strategy is making progress towards its objectives or alternatively, having negative impact on migrant workers. Monitoring can also help MRCs to identify gaps and verify the effectiveness of the services
- **Evaluation:** A finite process that objectively and independently answers specific questions about a policy or strategy’s impact
- **Sustainability plan:** A roadmap for achieving long-term goals; a strategy to ensure effective continuation of services and activities

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) will allow the MRC to identify emerging trends and adapt MRC service provision accordingly – including by taking corrective actions as necessary. For example, it may identify that certain groups of migrant workers are not using the MRC services (such as women migrant workers with childcare needs, or migrant fishers). With this information the MRC may develop specialized services for such groups of underserved workers. M&E will also support the development of the evidence base for policy advocacy (see below). Effective M&E can also showcase the success and achievements of the MRC, which may be useful for resource mobilization efforts with government or international cooperation partners. It can also be an opportunity to develop case studies which highlight real world situations of migrant workers, which can be useful for training and communication purposes.

Steps in developing a M&E Framework may include:

- Develop a theory of change: An understanding of how activities can link to a desired outcome or change
- Develop performance indicators and identify the sources of information and data, using the SMART⁸ formula. Indicators may include for example, the number of workers who visited or used the MRC services; the number of migrant workers who migrate through a registered recruitment agency

⁶ See: ILO (2022) Trade union-led migrant workers resource centres in ASEAN and Jordan: Case studies for protecting and organizing migrant workers

⁷ ILO (2021) Meeting Report: ACTRAV Interregional Webinar: Sharing Good Practices of Migrant Workers Resource Centres as an Innovative Organizing Tool for Migrant Workers, August 2021

⁸ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely

following MRC training or counselling; the number of new partners collaborating with the MRC; the number of cases/complaints registered and resolved due to facilitation by the MRC etc.

- Undertake data collection and analysis, including by using standard templates and questionnaires, and ensuring the use of gender disaggregated data and gender analysis
- Develop the reporting schedule, including technical progress reports, case studies, testimonials
- Set the evaluation schedule, for example, 2 year and 5 year evaluations

The M&E Framework should also consider key elements of sustainability, ensuring that measures are taken for the long-term viability of the MRC. Partnerships with government can support the sustainability of the MRC. For example, an MOU between the Ministry of Labour (or other competent authority) to refer beneficiaries and promote the services of the MRC can support the MRC to reach beneficiaries.

Related to policy advocacy (below), the MRC leadership and partners may also advocate for inclusion of the establishment and operation of MRCs within the labour migration policy framework, in line with the principle of migrant workers' right to accurate information and services. This would provide a legal mandate for the MRC, and support resource mobilization and sustainability.⁹

► Creating the link between service provision and policy advocacy

MRC staff are frontline workers, having daily interactions with migrant workers and their families and communities, returnees, as well as recruitment agencies, informal intermediaries and relevant government agencies. They are vital source of information able to monitor migration trends, emerging areas of concern and collect up-to-date data (*see M&E section above*). It's critical and beneficial to all partners to create a link for information sharing between MRCs and policy makers. This can be achieved through establishment of reporting lines, quarterly meetings or positioning of MRC staff on policy groups or teams.

Key ILO resources and tools on MRCs

ILO (2023) [The Resource Centre for Migrant Workers in Tijuana, Mexico](#)

ILO (2022) [Trade union-led Migrant Worker Resource Centres in ASEAN and Jordan: Case studies for protecting and organizing migrant workers](#)

ILO (2021) [Meeting Report: ACTRAV Interregional Webinar: Sharing Good Practices of Migrant Workers Resource Centres as an Innovative Organizing Tool for Migrant Workers, August 2021](#)

ILO (2018) [Monitoring and evaluation training manual for migrant worker resource centres](#)

ILO (2014) [Migrant Worker Resource Centre operations manual](#) (update forthcoming in 2024)

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⁹ For more information see ILO (2018) Monitoring and evaluation training manual for migrant worker resource centres.