

Inter-Regional Expert Forum on Skills and Migration in the South Asia – Middle East Corridor

25-26 July 2017 – New Delhi

Summary of Recommendations

The following represents a summary of the key recommendations that emerged from the Forum. It draws on the recommendations made by resource persons in their presentations¹, reflects the content of the plenary discussions, and was reviewed by a drafting committee formed from among the participants. The draft summary of recommendations was presented during the closing session of the Forum, and further inputs from a range of participants were incorporated into this document.

These recommendations can be taken up at the national level, in bilateral discussions, or through the regional processes of SAARC, the Colombo Process, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue and other fora. Elements of this document could also be reflected on in the upcoming consultations on the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration. They have been divided into actions at the national level and at the regional level. It is recommended that the actions proposed focus on a narrower set of mutually-agreed priority occupations.

The Forum acknowledged that skills development has the potential to deliver improved outcomes for migrant workers, their employers and countries of origin and destination. Skills training and recognition that is mutually beneficial will contribute to the achievement of national and regional objectives, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to get to that stage, more can be done in the following areas.

National level recommendations:

Collecting and sharing labour market information

1. Enhance efforts to share certain **labour market information** between countries or through the existing regional mechanisms, to monitor the occupation and the utilization of skills in the current labour market, and to identify occupations where skills are in demand.
2. Create opportunities and build the capacity of governments of countries of origin, including labour attaches and diplomatic missions, to collect information along commonly agreed parameters about **labour market needs**, prevailing wages in selected occupations, etc. – for the benefit of countries of origin and destination.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

3. Prioritize coordination among government agencies and international organizations to enable better inputs to state parties' efforts at **conceptualizing and institutionalizing RPL for migrant workers**. This is particularly important given the vast levels of informality that exists in the countries of origin, and especially for marginalized groups.
4. Develop or adapt existing tools for **public employment services (PES)** to assist with RPL of returning migrant workers and their reintegration into the national labour market, or their re-migration into a job in which these skills can be further utilized. In addition to RPL, a package of support for returned migrants could also include career counselling, support for entrepreneurs, links to networks of returned migrants, etc.

¹ All presentations and accompanying reference materials are available online.

5. Introduce authenticated **skills passports** or **certificates of employment** that outline the key tasks, responsibilities and competences of migrants while working abroad. This could facilitate reintegration at home or re-migration to the same or another country, and should draw on models that have been introduced in other countries and regions.

Dialogue platforms

6. In countries of origin, working with existing **working groups** on migration or on skills, hold special meetings on skills recognition systems for both outbound and returning migrant workers, inviting additional stakeholders from government and/or development partners as necessary. These working groups can provide inputs to national and bilateral programmes, including commissioning joint research, awareness raising campaigns, etc.
7. In countries of destination, establish a **network of employers** to engage in mapping occupational demand, and in the planning, awareness raising, implementation and monitoring of skills recognition systems. This could also be a means through which to explore incentive schemes and to build the business case for employer participation. The network should be comprised of enterprises from a range of sectors and of different sizes.

Capacity building

8. **Integrating soft skills with technical skills** In the process of skilling migrant workers, due attention should be paid to soft skills, workplace practices, rights at work, protection issues, basic language and IT literacy, etc. This could be delivered as part of a mandatory pre-departure orientation and continued in destination as part of a post-arrival orientation. There are ongoing efforts under the Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue that could be expanded.

Monitoring and Evaluation

9. Review existing or design a new set of **indicators for measuring outputs and impact** of the recognition system in relation to the expectations of workers, employers and the governments. An assessment procedure should be integrated into the regular quality assurance tool of the skills recognition system.
10. Conduct **short surveys among stakeholders** to determine their expectations, experience and the immediate outcomes of the recognition process, as well as regular tracer surveys. These should be sector- and gender-specific.

Regional level recommendations:

Research and analysis

11. Conduct research on the **sectoral context and human resource development strategies** of employers in destination countries. Key questions could include: What are the priorities for employers in terms of skills development? Under what circumstances do they value certification of skills enough to pay a premium? Where is the link between skills and productivity most evident and not dependent on multiple other factors? What adjustments do they want to see in the skills recognition process? What policy incentives would influence employers?
12. Conduct research from several countries of origin on the **role of training and testing centres in the placement of workers** overseas. What regulatory and operational procedures need to

be introduced or reviewed to ensure that these actors are liable, that workers are protected and this is not a backdoor means through which to extract recruitment fees?

13. Commission research to explore a more **holistic approach to skills recognition**, including the interlinkages between skills and recruitment, wages, productivity, competitiveness, immigration policy, technological advancement, etc.

Data collection and data sharing

14. Collect gender-disaggregated data on actual wages of migrant workers in different occupations. This should include any skill certification requirements to allow for a cost-benefit analysis of upskilling and testing. This information could be shared among countries of origin as a means to align dialogue with countries of destination, recruitment agencies, employers, workers, etc. It can also complement efforts to development and marketing of skills recognition systems.

Dialogue

15. Consider forming regional groupings of employers in different sectors to interface with the other actors in the skills recognition space, possibly through the existing regional processes. Lessons could be drawn from the *Employers for Integration* initiative established by the European Commission as part of the European Dialogue on Skills and Migration.

Regional benchmarking tool

16. Work with the SAARC Secretariat, and through the existing SAARC frameworks on education and on migration, to endorse the development of a South Asian Qualification Reference Framework. The Framework would function as a mechanism to enable comparisons of qualifications across SAARC Member States, also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in countries of destination. India's Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship offered to take the lead in the development of a regional framework.

In conclusion

These recommendations were proposed in an open forum and reflect the perspectives and priorities of a diverse set of stakeholders and experts. They do not belong to any one country, regional body or organization. Several of these have been already been identified by the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, the SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration, and the Colombo Process' Thematic Working Group on Skills. In order to advance these ambitious recommendations into action, a renewed effort of coordination within countries, among agencies and development partners, between countries, and between regions is required.