

Experts' workshop on SDG indicator 10.7.1 Guidelines for measuring recruitment costs

International Labour Organization
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SUMMARY

A consultation workshop on the measurement of SDG indicator 10.7.1 on recruitment costs was held in New Delhi, India, on April 25. The workshop brought together researchers, statistical experts and implementers of recruitment and migration cost surveys from nine different countries in South and South East Asia, including two National Statistical Offices (NSOs): the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics (DCS).

Given that this workshop was planned back-to-back with a training on the use of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) software for a set of upcoming ILO/KNOMAD recruitment costs surveys, the purpose of this workshop was twofold. On the one hand, participants discussed benefits, challenges, and opportunities of different means of measuring worker-paid recruitment costs. On the other hand, the workshop was also intended to explore means of ensuring that upcoming recruitment costs surveys contribute to the development (design, testing, etc.) of a set of guidelines for measuring the SDG indicator 10.7.1.

Discussions were based on a draft set of guidelines being produced by an ILO statistical consultant, Mr Eivind Hoffmann. This draft builds on previous experiences of KNOMAD migration costs surveys as well as other types of surveys.

Participants were welcomed to the workshop by Ms Dagmar Walter, Director of the ILO in India. She emphasized the importance of country-level ownership of the SDG indicators, and stressed the implications of this work at the international level, drawing connections between the collection of data on recruitment costs with the ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative and with the wider consultations on the Global Compact for Migration.

Mr Devi Prasad, Director General of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) of India started the discussions by sharing the experiences of India in collecting data on immigration. He discussed some of the challenges and lessons learned over the past decades, stressing the difficulty of identifying a suitable sample frame with which to identify returned migrants. The identification of worker who cross open borders (f.e. With Nepal) informally, and the lag of production of migration statistics (e.g. from population censuses) were raised as important challenges still to be overcome.

Mr Jesse Mertens continued the session and set the stage for the remainder of the day's discussion with a brief overview of the work done by the ILO and by KNOMAD to date on recruitment costs and on the conceptual and methodological considerations for developing an SDG indicator.

Subsequent sessions focused on identifying challenges and lessons learned from KNOMAD survey exercises, on the different modalities NSOs can use to identify an appropriate sampling frame, and on next steps for the development of the Guidelines.

With regard to sampling frames, the day's discussion centred on intercept vs tracer methods. The intercept method intends to identify locations where potential migrants congregate and approach

them there through random selection. This approach can be done through for instance random household sampling in districts with high shares of migrant workers, in places (particularly in country of destination) where migrants live or spend free time, or in places of transit, such as airports or bus stations, or during travel. The tracer method requires a pre-existing sampling frame, such as a register of workers going abroad or having returned to the country of origin. Most of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities shared by participants can be distinguished by fundamental differences in these sampling approaches. Challenges and opportunities posed by either approach vary widely depending on national circumstances (intercept methods might work better in situations/places where migrants are strongly concentrated, or here transit points are few and well controlled, while tracer methods might work better in places with pre-existing registers of migrants or a pre-existing sampling frame that can be supplemented to include or over-sample types of dwellings or regions with a larger representation of the target population than elsewhere).

One experience described was that the use of migrant registers in the Philippines turned out produce response rates too low for successful data collection, and so the research team resorted to intercepting respondents at specified locations. Airports were too numerous to cover completely, so re-deployment registration and re-integration offices were used to intercept workers.

In India, on the other hand, approaching returnees at airports was more successful, given that many flights arrive at night, stranding travellers until the next morning. This leads to a captive audience from which to intercept respondents. A similar approach was used in Nepal, though not necessarily among flights arriving at night. The quality of responses was often low as well. When a respondent was unavailable, responses given by family members were sometimes used, but it was found that family member rarely had sufficient information available.

A final approach to surveying recruitment costs was taken by the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), which included several questions on migration and recruitment costs in their Labour Force Survey (LFS). This was also suggested by other participants as a viable alternative strategy to ad-hoc surveys. One of the main challenges of this approach was the cost of oversampling migrants and the, still, relatively low rates of response among migrant workers – in some cases so low (particularly for even more narrowly defined groups of migrant workers), that representativeness of samples became relatively weak (i.e. the estimates would be very imprecise).

Both BBS and DCS showed a willingness to consider testing intercept and tracer methods for collecting data on recruitment costs. BBS has already started talks with the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) to use contact information in their register of expatriate workers to identify a frame of returnees, while in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) indicated their willingness to share relevant information from their register of workers with DCS for similar ends. It should be noted that, while DCS has indicated their willingness to take up work on recruitment costs, their staff are burdened with a heavy survey load this year, and as such, the start of data collection can only realistically start towards the end of 2018 or even early 2019. Concurrent surveys at airports, particularly in Sri Lanka, which has only one main international airport, could be used to test the intercept approach, or the so-called ‘traveller survey’. Testing the latter approaches remains contingent on the availability of funding from partner organizations.

In most past cases, surveys looked only for migrants with a regular migration status. In almost all surveyed countries, a formalized migration process following recruitment is implied, given that workers must register their recruitment with the home government. In discussions it was agreed that issues of irregularity, and the costs of informally recruited workers are likely best addressed through

qualitative means rather than the quantitative survey approaches described here. In those cases, discussing extreme values of recruitment costs might also be more informative in shedding light on the most extreme vulnerabilities of workers.

An important issue raised by many participants was the choice of focusing on recruitment fees vs migration costs. While the definition of recruitment fees and related costs is the subject of an ILO Tripartite Meeting of Experts in November, definitional issues lie at the core of survey design, and hence the indicator's interpretation, as well. For instance, if costs related to repatriation are to be included in the measured cost, sampling methodologies will have to focus on returnees in the country of origin, or workers who are about to depart from countries of destination. In the context of the upcoming KNOMAD surveys, recruitment costs are defined similarly to the way they have been defined by previous KNOMAD surveys, though the design is sufficiently broad and inclusive to be adjusted to include a more formal definition later. For the calculation of the 10.7.1 SDG indicator it is essential that the definition of 'recruitment costs' is precise and understood in the same way by all those reporting on this indicator.

An equally important point raised was the choice to focus on migration corridors as a basis for collecting information. It was argued that it is national policies, as much as particularities of corridors, which influence recruitment costs (there are cases where costs for workers from a particular origin country vary while wages stay the same across countries – suggesting destination policy differences). However, due to the difficulty of accounting for policy differences in estimating recruitment costs, and the difficulty of covering all corridors for a particular country of interest, it was agreed that the 'corridor convention' used in KNOMAD surveys remains the most easy to interpret and, where necessary, compare.

This decision is coupled with the discussion on which migrants to be covered by the indicator. In essence, all migrants should be covered, as the indicator framework intends to 'leave no one behind'. However, in practice this is challenging, given the broad range of sectors, occupations, and skill levels of workers going abroad in many contexts. Registration for workers in many Asian countries is limited to low-skilled workers, while higher skilled workers often find employment directly, i.e. without the involvement of an intermediate. The draft guidelines make clear that those responsible for formulating the indicator have to clarify the intended scope, including the intended worker coverage, in a manner that makes it possible to generate the statistics needed in a reasonably comparable manner across time and migration corridors. The focus on low-skilled workers of the proposed pilot surveys is in line with the focus of previous KNOMAD surveys, and where recruitment costs have been known to have the strongest impacts.

Finally, there was some discussion of means to address the cost implications of repeat migration. It is assumed that workers who are returning to work abroad in a known country of destination for a repeat spell will incur lower costs, on average, because they will have some support networks and lower transaction costs (important skills, such as language skills or knowledge of the local legal system, also help smooth repeat migration spells). Hence, the focus of the indicator should remain on the costs of the first migration/employment spell.

In summary, workshop discussions provided several very meaningful methodological insights into previous KNOMAD migration and recruitment cost studies, and their implications for the 10.7.1 indicator statistics. Most participants agreed that a methodology which is applied in all countries identically will run into difficulties when trying to identify a suitable sampling frame to produce representative statistics (it was nonetheless pointed out that, as long as methodologies are applied

consistently at the national level, any resultant measurement or selection bias will likely remain the same over time, and hence be ‘cancelled out’ when looking at trends or changes over time). Serious concerns were raised over the practical feasibility of an ‘intercept method’ survey of migrant workers while ‘in transit’. Though no such surveys have been implemented or evaluated by any participating agency, participants were concerned that such an approach would likely require onerous amounts of approval from both origin and destination country border management institutions as well as transit operators, costs of transporting researchers might be restrictively high, and it might be difficult to ensure respondents’ privacy and/or anonymity in such close quarters. NSOs present did express an openness to piloting both intercept (at airports, rather than in transit) and tracer methods in an effort to refine the indicator’s guidelines.



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