

South Asia Centre for Labour Mobility and Migrants (SALAM)

1. VISION

To collaborate, create and disseminate knowledge, *South Asia Centre for Labour Mobility and Migrants (SALAM)* envisions promoting, understanding, strengthening research, enhancing teaching and capacity building to formulate evidence-based policy with an aim to protect migrants' rights and promote decent work for achieving integration of migration with sustainable development.

2. Background

Migration today is often linked directly or indirectly to the search for employment opportunities, to improve livelihood options and development outcomes for individual workers and their families. Despite the extensive benefits of labour migration stemming from the enjoyment of people's fundamental rights to movement, occupation, and work, extensive efforts are needed to improve governance of labour migration. Effective measures must be grounded in evidence. For this, data on labour migration and migrant workers in South Asia disaggregated by sex, occupation and several other variables is of utmost importance. This priority has been reiterated in national and regional discussions, and at the global level, in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration.

There have been numerous calls for more reliable, detailed and transparent information on international migration and labour migration in South Asia and at the global level. For example, SAARC drafted a Plan of Action on Labour Migration at a consultative workshop in May 2016¹, which outlined a commitment to information exchange and knowledge building on labour migration in the subregion. Specifically, the Plan of Action outlines a commitment to “strengthen the capacity of government authorities to respond to the needs as well as improve the policy impact of migration” through measures such as “the creation of a shared database or web portal with information about migration trends and patterns, policies, best practices, challenges, agreements/arrangements where possible”².

¹ *The Kathmandu Post*. 2016. “Members commit to improving protections for migrant workers: SAARC plan of action on migration”, 4 May. Available at: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-05-04/members-commit-to-improving-protections-for-migrant-workers.html>

² SAARC *Plan of action on labour migration*. Consultative Workshop on SAARC Plan of Action for Cooperation on Matters Related to Migration

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) also recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation at the global level. GCM was the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner, adopted by 152 states including all South Asian member states in December 2018.

With the adoption of GCM, UN Member States agreed to establish a capacity building mechanism that will also include a global knowledge platform that will help inform and support governments in the implementation of the GCM.

The conceptualization of the Centre is jointly initiated by three UN agencies namely ILO, IOM and UN Women under the GOALS (Governance of Labour Migration in South and South – east Asia) Programme with several rounds of discussion with International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, India and UN Agencies. IIPS is a premier institution in South Asia with a University Status. It has a Department of Migration and Urban Studies and has done considerable work – both of teaching and research- in the areas of migration and development. IIPS was also started as an UN supported organisation in the late 1950s. Presently, IIPS is an autonomous organisation which receives generous financial support from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India. The secretariat for the Migration Centre for South Asia will be located at IIPS with the support from UN organisations namely ILO, IOM and UN Women in collaboration with some of the leading institutions working on migration in different countries of South Asia namely:

- i) **Bangladesh:** Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU),
- ii) **Nepal:** Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM) at Social Science Baha
- iii) **Sri Lanka:** Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)
- iv) **Pakistan:** Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)
- v) **India:** International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS)

This will require to setting out its mandate, objectives, activities, expected outcomes and the management and sustainability of the Centre.

3. Objectives of the Knowledge Centre

The major objectives of the Knowledge Centre are to address knowledge gaps on labour migration in the five South Asian countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The available knowledge, information and data shows that there are huge gaps in each of the areas, and a comparative study of strength and weakness among South Asian countries needs to be constantly updated. Lack of data among the South Asian countries poses a serious challenge in the research and policy evaluation and its improvement. Thus, centre will try to develop a South Asian Migration Portal to fill this gap. It will also try to provide access to

knowledge and information to be used by South Asian policy makers and stakeholders keeping in view the origin countries' regional policy dialogue like the Colombo Process and SAARC, and destination countries' perspective embodied in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Further, the Centre will examine specific labour migration and mobility issues through a broader lens of decent work for migrant workers and the social, economic and political trends in the sub-region and beyond. Knowledge Centre will build a community of practices coming together to tackle a specific set of challenges on issues pertaining to labour migration.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify and conduct research to fill the knowledge gap on labour migration at national and regional level in the targeted five South Asian countries.
- To develop a Migration Portal as a repository of data and evidences on migration and related issues in South Asian countries with an emphasis on gender-disaggregated data and statistic and make it accessible to researchers and other stakeholders.
- To disseminate the research outputs through workshops and conferences.
- To publish working papers, research reports, newsletter, articles in peered review Journals, books etc.

To carry out capacity building programmes and provide training on concepts, measures, theories, research issues and various aspects of migration with special focus on young researchers in the targeted countries of South Asia

- To review existing policies of South Asian countries related to migrants, return migrants and provide policy recommendations to the respective Governments for protecting the migrants' rights.

4. Thematic Area Pillars of the Centre

Pillar 1: Labour migration policies

Pillar 2: Gender and migration

Pillar 3: Migration, health and Disaster

Pillar 4: Migration and development

Pillar 5: Drivers of migration

COVID-19 will be mainstreamed in all five thematic pillars.

5. Activities of the Knowledge Centre

- Establish links, collaborate with various existing institutions and create a space for constituents to engage with new research, so as to bring broader perspectives and empirical evidence to policy discussions
- Connect researchers and institutions in countries in South Asia working on themes that touch upon labour migration and will link to the research agendas identified through state-led regional consultative processes including the Colombo Process, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue and possibly SAARC.
- To provide internships and fellowships to young scholars to participate in capacity building programmes, learning and education.
- Identify important pillars in which the Knowledge Centre should focus on: The key pillars could be, Migration Policies, Gender and Migration, Migration and Health, Migration and Development, and Drivers of Migration. Sub-themes under each pillar would be identified.
- Collecting and compiling data on international migration from various countries of South Asia, develop and maintain a migration portal and making it accessible to researchers and other stakeholders.
- Carry out research on various issues of migration governance and migration policies.
- Carry out capacity building programmes for young researchers as well as government officials and policy makers, and provide training on migration concepts, measures, theories, research issues and various aspects of migration
- Reviewing existing policies of various countries to protect their migrants, return migrants and providing policy recommendations to the respective Governments
- Conducting meetings with collaborating institutions to review the progress and identify future areas of work.
- Conducting workshops/conferences/seminars to disseminate knowledge related to the proposed thematic pillars.
- Publication of research outputs in the form of newsletter/books/articles/ research papers.

5. Expected Outcomes

The centre is expected to fill up the knowledge gaps in areas of migration in general and labour migration in South Asia particularly in the countries of collaborating organisations. We expect to produce at least 10 research papers in next about two years. It will promote data sharing and collaborations not only in research but also in knowledge dissemination through website and publishing newsletters. It will also contribute in capacity building by organising workshops and lectures from leading experts on migration research and also provide opportunity of internship to the young and budding professionals.