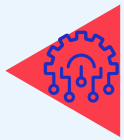




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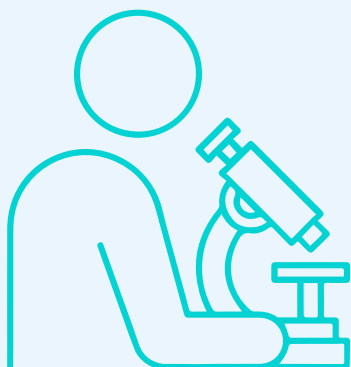
## ▶ How digital technology can protect migrant workers from forced labour and exploitation



### Digital technology can be a game changer in migrant worker protection

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- ▶ Where to start?
- ▶ What digital products are already out there?
- ▶ How to make sure that technology delivers real benefits?



*New research under the ILO Fair Recruitment Initiative provides answers*

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## ► Background

The development of information and communications technologies (ICT) has been unprecedented since the onset of COVID-19, resulting in new digital products such as apps, websites and web portals, internet radio, electronic tickets and more. At the same time, the pandemic has increased risks of exploitation for vulnerable workers worldwide – not least for international migrant workers, numbering 169 million by end 2019.<sup>1</sup>

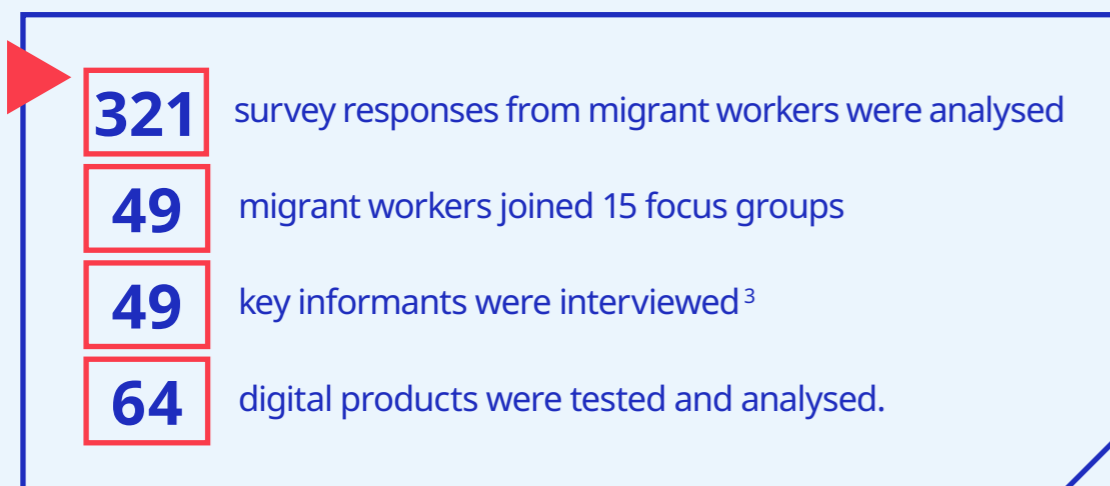
The current global focus on building back better provides an opportunity to harness the power of digital technology to make safe labour migration a reality. As part of its Integrated Programme on Fair Recruitment (FAIR), and under the framework of the [Fair Recruitment Initiative \(FRI\)](#), the ILO partnered with the United Nations University Institute in Macau to better understand why and how migrant workers use digital technology.<sup>2</sup>

## ► The Study

### How can digital ICT facilitate safe labour migration and fair recruitment?

To answer this question, a mixed-method study was carried out during the second half of 2020. It included a desk review, a survey, focus groups, key informant interviews, and a landscape analysis of relevant existing digital products.

Data collection focused on potential, current and returned migrant workers from Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka who had migrated, or were intending to migrate, to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (China) or to Malaysia, and who had access to a mobile device.



1 ILO, [Locked down and in Limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment](#), Geneva, 2021.

2 ILO, [Use of digital technology in the recruitment of migrant workers](#), Geneva, 2021.

3 Key informants worked for inter-governmental organizations, trade unions, recruitment agencies, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and national governments.

## Digital products can facilitate all steps of the journey

### Pre-Recruitment / Recruitment



- ▶ Licensing of recruitment agencies
- ▶ Posting jobs online and searching for jobs online
- ▶ Connecting with prospective workers
- ▶ Migration-related information dissemination

### Deployment



- ▶ Migration information management systems/integrated border management
- ▶ Translation services
- ▶ Automated document processing and applications
- ▶ Contract integrity
- ▶ Pre-departure orientation training

### Employment

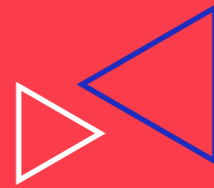


- ▶ Worker voice tools and remote inspection / audit
- ▶ Online grievance mechanisms
- ▶ Provision of consular services
- ▶ Transfers or remittances

### Return / Reintegration

- ▶ Job matching and skills recertification or training

# Lessons for design, development and promotion



*Based on the research findings, an effective digital product for a migrant worker...*



## works on a mobile phone

Mobile phones are the devices most accessed by migrant workers.



## can be accessed even where connectivity is poor and/or intermittent

The product must function, for instance, in rural villages.



## features information from a trusted source

Migrant workers ranked misinformation as the top-rated concern associated with using digital technology. They trust friends, family, and recruitment agencies more than online sources.



## features the right information for the right audience

The information featured can, for instance, be broken down by migration stage, adapted to specific migration corridors, in languages spoken by the migrant workers, and more.



## is regularly updated and well maintained

This appears obvious, yet several of the products identified by the research were out of date and/or malfunctioning.

Because there are a lot of posts that are really just scams, people just wanting to make money off you online, so it's hard to trust online sources.

► Migrant worker from the Philippines

Smart phones and apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Viber enable us to constantly be in touch with our family members and friends at home and abroad.

► Migrant worker from Sri Lanka



## is strongly promoted to the target audience

Migrant workers need to know where and how to access the product. To build trust, the promotion drive should include information on the developer and the source(s) of the content featured. Traditional, offline methods of raising awareness (for example radio, posters) should be maintained for those who have limited access to digital ICT.



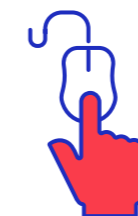
## taps into migrant workers' heavy use of social media

Many migrants predominantly use their device to stay in touch with friends and family, with Facebook being the most popular app used among the migrants in the study. Social media networks should systematically be part of digital outreach.



## is accompanied by digital literacy skills training

Many migrant workers have low digital literacy. As a result, they are often not aware of the broad range of services available online. Digital literacy and digital safety skills training could be included in pre-departure orientation and training.



## does not reinvent the wheel

There are many useful digital products out there already which would benefit from stronger promotion. These products can be used as they are, or else can provide inspiration for a new product. Digital technologies and information systems used by different government agencies should be interoperable and integrated.



## involves migrant workers in product design and development

Migrant workers should be consulted to ensure uptake and sustainability. As end users, they have the hands-on knowledge of the problems the new product aims to fix.

## ▶ Behaviour change is key to success

Migrants who participated in the study reported gathering a wide range of information related to their journey and employment, including documentation, information on salary, accommodation, and contracts. Yet half (49%) said they did not use digital technology at all to do so. The top reasons mentioned were a lack of knowledge on sources to consult, and the belief that other sources (such as family, friends or recruitment intermediaries) are more reliable.

This suggests that even if migrants had universal access to network coverage, local language content, and the right digital products, they might still not consult these. To realise the full potential of digital technology for migrant workers, the design, development, and promotion of the products must change migrant workers' existing knowledge, information-seeking behaviour, and perceptions in relation to digital technology.

## ▶ The limits of digital technology

While digital products undoubtedly have the potential to make labour migration safer and more effective, they cannot resolve many structural challenges. Effectiveness is influenced by a wide range of factors, including migration infrastructure, migration corridors, gender, and occupation.

To make the most of digital technology, it needs to be integrated into a wider set of actions that promote an enabling environment for skills enhancement, access to decent work and to safe and regular migration. Without this, it risks further marginalizing the most vulnerable, including those with low literacy levels and little to no digital access.

## ▶ Ten digital products for inspiration

The impact of digital technology on labour migration remains unclear. However, digital products have demonstrated important benefits in assisting recruitment-related stakeholders at different stages of the migration journey. Digital technology can also supplement, grow, and improve already existing services by driving reach, coordination, and integration.



### 1. Raising awareness: *Migrants as Messengers*

A peer-to-peer awareness-raising campaign that empowers young people in West Africa to make informed decisions about migration.



### 2. Sharing information: *Shuvayatra*

A migration corridor specific app that provides Nepali migrant workers with tools and information to plan travel and work, including:

- ▶ Practical financial information;
- ▶ Information on changes in government rules and procedures;
- ▶ Information on services offered by Nepali embassies abroad;
- ▶ Contact information for migration-related organizations;
- ▶ Stories and advice from other Nepali migrants.



### 3. Matching workers and employers: *SIRA App*

This app links returned migrant workers in Ethiopia with employers. Importantly, the app works in settings of limited internet access as well as offline.



### 4. Worker reviews of employers and recruiters: *Contratados*

An online platform where Mexican migrant workers anonymously post and read reviews of recruiters and US employers, thereby improving transparency. The platform also hosts a repository of information on workers' rights and relevant news stories and resources.



### 5. Combining outreach with online reviews: *Recruitment Advisor*

A global platform listing more than 10,000 recruitment agencies. Governments provide a list of licensed recruitment agencies to be shared on the website. Users anonymously post feedback and rate their experiences. Recruitment Advisor's coordination teams in the Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Hong Kong, and Bahrain reach out to workers to raise awareness of their rights and to promote use of the platform.



## 6. Accessing financial services: Instapay eWallet

This app for migrant workers in Malaysia comes with a linked Mastercard. Users can send and receive digital payments (including wages and remittances), withdraw cash from ATMs and purchase mobile reloads, all without the need to open a bank account.



## 7. Sending back remittances: PickRemit

This global app helps migrants make the best choice by comparing different providers. It has detailed information on exchange rates, service fees, transfer speeds, type of service provider, how the transaction is paid for, and more.



## 8. Reporting grievances: Together

This e-platform and mobile phone app provides migrant workers in Kuwait with information on their rights. Workers can submit complaints about rights' violations and directly connect with lawyers and legal advisors.



## 9. Identifying exploitation: Apprise

This app supports frontline responders such as labour inspectors, NGO workers, and law enforcement officers to identify victims of forced labour and human trafficking in the fishing and seafood processing sectors, as well as the entertainment industry. It uses a series of sector specific yes/no questions in popular migrant worker languages, then calculates a vulnerability score to inform next steps.



## 10. Supply chain auditing: eMin

A blockchain-based platform that stores information about employment contracts, migration costs, and recruitment experiences. The information is uploaded by migrants to a transparent and immutable ledger. Companies can use the information to audit their supply chains.

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