

**NINTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat  
New York, 17-18 February 2011

**DECENT WORK FOR ALL<sup>1</sup>**

*International Labour Organization (ILO)*

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

## **Decent Work for All**

Work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives.

Each year, millions of women and men leave their homes and cross national borders. Many seek higher wages and better opportunities, but many others are forced to migrate because of famine, natural disasters, violent conflict, persecution or simply a lack of decent work in their home country. At the same time, in major destination countries increased demand for skilled workers, reluctance of local workers to accept certain low-skilled jobs, population decline and population ageing act as strong drivers.

ILO estimates that some 105 million of the total 214 million people living outside their countries are economically active, engaged in the world of work<sup>3</sup>. Despite the positive experiences of migrant workers, a significant number face undue hardships and abuse in the form of low wages, poor working conditions, virtual absence of social protection, denial of freedom of association and workers' rights, discrimination and xenophobia, as well as social exclusion.

Migration poses a number of significant development and governance challenges along with opportunities, including labour and skills mobility, retention and training of skills, employment generation, provision of social protection and social security. Migrant worker issues should be seen in the context of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, which applies to all workers. Decent jobs are jobs which have fair and acceptable conditions of work. The ILO decent work agenda is put into practice in four interlinked categories: rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue, all of which apply to migrant workers just as any other workers.

The ILO is the United Nations agency with constitutional mandate to protect migrant workers. It has been dealing with labour migration issues since its inception in 1919 and has pioneered international Conventions to guide migration policy and protection of migrant workers. ILO adopts a rights-based approach to labour migration and forges its action on a tripartite dialogue, involving governments, workers' and employers' organisations. Implication of workers' and employers' representatives as well as of migrant workers' transnational associations and the civil society is especially important to the development of sound and fair labour migration policies and their effective implementation.

<sup>3</sup> ILO: International labour migration: A rights-based approach, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2010

## **The development of indicators measuring the impact of international migration**

Statistics are vital to generate relevant and meaningful data on international migration, to assist in formulation and analysing of migration policy as well as measuring the impact of international migration in countries of origin and destination. Such data provide meaningful information for the analysis of the social, demographic and economic impacts of migration in both origin and destination countries<sup>4</sup>.

Relevant indicators for measuring the impact of international migration are, to mention a few, foreign participation in the work force; gender distribution in sectors of the work force, distribution of foreign born workers in occupational sectors; employment and unemployment rate among foreign born; temporary or permanent residence and/or citizenship; precarious (ie short term) employment; integration indicators such as access to citizenship; education levels of foreign born; social protection/social security coverage; education levels of foreign born and discrimination rates.

Household surveys can provide important data on the determinants and consequences of international migration. The ILO has developed a module on international labour migration, which can be included in household surveys, and are currently working on developing a module focussing on access to social security.

Policies to maximise the development benefits of international migration requires joint responses. Labour migration takes place between developed and developing countries, and among developing countries, with similar as well as different challenges.

The countries from which the migrants come and those in which they work, have a shared responsibility to protect the labour and human rights of migrant workers. Development gains from migration, for both countries of origin and destination, and the protection of the rights of migrant workers are inseparable. Today it is recognised that migrant workers contribute to development in origin countries in several ways, such as by alleviating pressures on labour markets, sending remittances home, acquiring increased skills and making investments. In destination countries, they contribute to development by meeting the demand for workers, improving labour market efficiency, increasing the demand for goods and services, and contributing their entrepreneurial skills.

The protection of the rights of migrant workers is essential at all stages of the migration cycle; before they leave their home countries, while they live and work in countries of destination, and after they return to their country of origin.

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive analysis of international migration statistics, see ILO: International migration statistics, Guidelines for improving data collection systems, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1997 and Wickramasekara and Hoffman: ILO activities on international migration statistics, paper prepared for Coordination meeting on international migration, 2002.

Policies on labour migration in countries of destination will have an effect on the development potential in countries of origin, and vice versa<sup>5</sup>. At the overall policy level, origin countries can enhance benefits from migration by integrating and mainstreaming migration into national employment, labour market, development and poverty alleviation plans and policies; ensure coherence and coordination of policies among different ministries and agencies, and engage in consultative processes involving all stakeholders, including social partners and migrant associations and Diaspora communities. Countries of destination can support capacity of origin countries to integrate migration into development plans and frameworks; ensure policy coherence between migration, aid and trade policies; document and disseminate the contribution of labour migration and migrant workers to host countries; expand avenues for admission of developing country nationals, especially low-skilled, with adequate safe guards for their protection.

Below are two specific examples of policy measures that can enhance the development impact of international migration:

**Remittances are one relevant policy area related to migration and development.**

Countries of origin can provide an enabling policy environment for financial inflows and their use and provide incentives for migrant savings and utilisation of remittances for productive investments. Countries of destination can ensure good working conditions, especially adequate wages and their payment on time; lower remittance transfer costs through regulating financial intermediaries and encouraging competition; ensure access of all migrant workers to remittance channels, irrespective of status and provide information on safe and low-cost remittance channels. As pointed out above, protection of the rights of migrant workers is essential for harnessing the development benefits of migration, and as such is also crucial to remittances and other contributions they make.

**Migration policy should be closely linked to domestic labour market and employment policies.** Migration often serves as an instrument to adjust the skills, age, gender and sectoral composition of national as well as regional labour markets. For many developing countries the migration of skilled workers is a big challenge<sup>6</sup>.

A major force driving migration today is a lack of decent work opportunities at home. From the ILO point of view migration is clearly a matter of fundamental labour rights, labour market dynamics and socio-economic growth and therefore a critical pillar to decent work, job growth and development in general. The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, which provides guidelines for policies and action in the field of labour migration,

<sup>5</sup> For more on the shared responsibility for maximizing development benefits, and relevant policy responses, see ILO: International labour migration: A rights- based approach, pp 183-185.

<sup>6</sup> For a study on skilled migration and its impact on developing countries, see for example Lowell and Findlay: Migration of highly skilled persons from developing countries: Impact and policy responses- Synthesis report, International Migration Papers No.44, ILO, Geneva, 2002.

specifically points out that “the contribution of labour migration to employment, economic growth, development and the alleviation of poverty should be recognized and maximized for the benefit of both origin and destination countries” (Principle 15).

Targeted labour market policies are likely to produce positive effects on local development, especially if they take into due account the actual and potential degree of population mobility and the specific national and international labour markets needs. Active labour market policies in countries of origin - such as vocational and skills training and education programmes and job search assistance, targeted at prospective as well as returning migrants, are if administered through solid and well-resourced public employment services likely to produce positive development effects.

### **Recent capacity building initiatives on international migration and development, including training programmes**

ILO has provided capacity building to its constituents on issues related to labour migration for decades. In collaboration with the ITC ILO Training Centre in Turin, Italy, ILO is conducting training courses on labour migration in English, Spanish and French, with plans of expanding to Arabic. These include 2 week courses on international labour migration, as well as more specific courses, such as the extension of social security to migrant workers and their families, labour migration statistics and reintegration of returning migrant workers. ITC ILO also designs training activities to suit particular requests, such as region-specific courses for developing and transition countries.

The objective of the courses is to help build the capacity of officials from various institutions dealing with labour migration, such as representatives from workers' and employers' organisations, NGOs, migrants' associations, international development agencies, regional economic communities and research institutes. By bringing together these various stakeholders, the courses seek to enhance knowledge sharing and cooperation among the parties concerned and enhance the capacity of key actors involved in migration issues to better understand labour migration challenges and opportunities in a changing global economic and social context.

The summer of 2011, ITC ILO will conduct a “Labour Migration Academy”. This course covers a wide range of migration cross-cutting themes such as protection, governance and development. At the end of the workshop, participants will be able to: identify key issues and policies regarding global and regional labour migration, in particular from a gender perspective; promote migration-development linkages and rights based approaches to labour migration policies and programmes at national and regional and international levels; recognize the special roles of employers' and workers' organisations in the development of labour migration policy; taking into account the positions of the social partners in resolving critical issues on labour migration; analyze and use the ILO Conventions and other mechanisms and procedures for protecting migrant workers' rights and deepen and master the “Decent Work” approach in the context of migration.

## **Any other major initiatives on international migration and development**

One example of ILO's major initiatives on international migration and its positive impact on development currently being implemented is the MIGSEC Project titled "Strategies for extending social security to migrant workers and their families from and within Africa" (2008-2011). The project aims to assist governments, in consultation with the social partners, namely employers' and workers' organizations, to map out national and regional social security strategies for migrant workers and their families. As part of its activities, MIGSEC is working with the Micro Insurance Innovation Facility (a joint initiative of the ILO and the Gates Foundation) on examining mechanisms for extending social security coverage to migrant workers' families left behind in origin countries, through health micro insurance initiatives financed by remittances from Senegalese and Malian migrant workers abroad.

In order to extend social protection to African migrant workers, the ILO is also providing technical assistance to the EAC Secretariat in developing a legal instrument (directive or regulation) to coordinate the social security systems of the East African Community (EAC) member states. The common market protocol guarantees the free movement of labour and the right of establishment to all citizens of the EAC member-states. In order for these rights to be fully realized, there is need to coordinate the social security systems of the EAC member-states to ensure that workers and self-employed persons who move between countries will be able to exercise their rights to social security in all the countries in which they work.

Among other initiatives, the ILO is currently conducting is the establishment of effective rights-based and gender-sensitive labour migration policies in countries of origin and of destination, using the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (under the ILO Plan of Action for Migrant Workers). Examples of best practices include the handbook on Establishing effective labour migration policies in countries of origin and destination, Equality in diversity Practitioners handbook on discrimination and integration and the Action guide on protection of women migrant workers; on line International Labour Migration database covering 106 countries; series of International Migration Papers and Perspectives on International Migration; and module in household surveys to collect information on international migration sex-disaggregated in order to facilitate analysis with a gender perspective. All this complemented by a number of research and developing project proposals on issues related to migration and local economic development; climate change, environmental degradation and green jobs; labour migration statistics and labour migration governance.