



International
Labour
Organization

CONCEPT NOTE

Consultation on Labour Migration

Advancing resilient, inclusive and sustainable policies and institutions in India

Promoting Decent Work for All

28 - 29 July 2022

**SILVER OAK
INDIA HABITAT CENTRE**

BACKGROUND:

In today's highly globalized world, labour migration¹ is a key policy priority. People migrating for work make important contributions to the growth and economic development of people and nations. Evidence suggests that when labour migration is well-governed, fair, and effective, it can deliver benefits and opportunities for migrant workers, their families, and sending communities alike. It can balance labour supply and demand, help develop and transfer skills at all levels, contribute to social protection systems, foster business innovation, and enrich communities both culturally and socially.

For Indians, migration - both international and internal - is not a new phenomenon. Migration for work has historically been a path to prosperity for millions of Indians. It serves as a major coping, wealth accumulation means, as well as adaptive strategy for the poor and marginalized in India². In recent years, given that employment growth has been uneven and varied across States, foreign employment destinations have acted as a crucial safety valve for

¹Based on UNDESA's [International Migrant Stock](#), 2019, the ILO estimated the total number of international migrant workers to be approximately 169 million-ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers Results and Methodology Third edition, 2021. From a national lens, In India, as per the Census 2011, it is estimated that there are over 456 million migrants, of which, over 41 million migrants reported work as their reason to migrate.

² The Road map for Development of Policy Framework for the Inclusion of Internal Migrant Workers in India, 2020, provides a comprehensive overview of internal labour migration in India on including migrant workers in the development processes including the policy and programmatic interventions in the country. [wcms_763352.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

the Indian labour market. Millions of low and semi-skilled Indian workers³ through international migration offer an alternative livelihood option to what is available at home. Today, India is the largest migrant sending country in the world⁴, and is the largest recipient of remittances⁵. While international migration from India has been significant, the magnitude of labour migration within the country has been much more staggering. Migrant workers contribute to 10 per cent of India's GDP serving as the backbone of several economic sectors, including construction, textile and apparel, domestic work, fishing and fish processing, mining, and quarrying, and even agriculture (Road map, 2020).

COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECT ON LABOUR MIGRATION:

Globally, the world of work has been severely affected by COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic bore devastating consequences on migrant workers and their access to decent work, further amplifying existing inequalities. Migrant workers were confronted with a myriad of challenges that included health shocks and risks, job and income losses, partial or non-payment of wages and limited access to healthcare. Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 on women migrant workers appears to have intensified already existing vulnerabilities, as they are over-represented in low-paid and low-skilled jobs and have limited access to and fewer options for support services (ILO Global Estimates, 2021). Job losses in destination countries for international migrant workers whose families were left behind, were exposed to food insecurity and other financial risks. Within India, the lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID-19 revealed that a majority of workers-mostly in precarious employment situations-were unable to access the Public Distribution System (PDS)⁶, regular transport means to return home or immediate relief access through governmental interventions. In response Governments- both Central and State- embarked on the roll-out of a slew of assistance measures. For instance, international migrant workers seeking to return home benefitted from the 'Vande Bharat Mission'⁷, Government of India's largest repatriation exercise, ever. To address the plight of stranded migrants within the country, state governments intervened with Shramik special trains and buses to help them reach their hometowns.

³.Millions of semi-skilled and low-skilled Indians make the Gulf Cooperation Council a destination to seek work. In response to question #1358 raised the Rajya Sabha in December 2021, the Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan stated that approximately 8.7 million Indians reside in the Gulf Countries, which is the largest receiving region of Indian workers abroad. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) consists of six Middle Eastern Countries -Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman.

⁴ The [International Migration Stock](#) estimates India to send approximately 17.86 million migrants in 2020. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020

⁵ According to the World Bank, in 2021, India was estimated to receive approximately \$87 billion in remittances.- [Migration and Development Brief 35](#) .

⁶ The Public Distribution System (PDS) evolved as a system of management of scarcity through distribution of food grains at affordable prices. Over the years, PDS has become an important part of Government's policy for management of food economy in the country. PDS is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central Government under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution and the State/UT Governments.

⁷ Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) is the massive repatriation operation planned by the Indian government to bring back stranded Indians in different parts of the world in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. In a Lok Sabha question addressed to the Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs, Shri. V Muraleedharan, said that the number of Indian nationals repatriated under VBM was 3.09 crore. [QUESTION NO.4973 INDIANS REPATRIATED UNDER VANDE BHARAT MISSION \(mea.gov.in\)](#)

Going forward, Governments – both central and state – need to address the challenges facing both international and internal labour migrants by including them in health services, reintegration, skills development and recognition of prior learning, fair recruitment⁸ in the aftermath of COVID-19, other social programmes, and protecting them from discrimination.

RATIONALE FOR ‘NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON LABOUR MIGRATION’ AND ILO’S ROLE IN ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE LABOUR MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency with a constitutional mandate to protect “the interests of workers employed in countries other than their own”⁹. This led constituents of the ILO to develop specific international labour standards for the governance of labour migration and protection of migrant workers.¹⁰ The ILO promotes tripartite participation – governments, employers, and workers – in the formulation and implementation of labour migration policy and programmes at the national, regional¹¹, and global scale. The ILO in its work, addresses specific labour migration issues for both, men and women migrant workers¹².

The ILO’s Decent Work Team for South Asia and Country Office for India is exploring a strategic ‘*whole of society*’ approach to respond to the ILO’s Global Call to Action for a human centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The Call to Action builds on three thematic areas- inclusiveness, sustainability, and resilience. A **two**-day consultation with relevant stakeholders will aim to broaden the understanding of the existing challenges and opportunities around internal and international labour migration governance.

From an international labour migration standpoint, the consultation will provide the most relevant follow up to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) that concluded in New York on 20th May 2022. Stakeholders may further deep dive into the learnings, progress and recommendations made with regards to the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe,

⁸The [Fair Recruitment Initiative](#) (FRI) was launched in 2014 as part of the ILO Director General’s call for a Fair Migration Agenda. Since its launch, the FRI has been critical to ILO’s work in national and international recruitment of workers and has added renewed impetus and visibility to this important topic.

⁹ ILO, Constitution, 1919, Preamble, recital 2

¹⁰ Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) and its accompanying recommendation (No.86), the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 151), Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and other related instruments such as the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (2006), the ILO Fair Migration Agenda (2014), and the General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment (2016)

¹¹ An example of ILO’s operations in the regional framework is the [Governance of Labour Migration in South and South-East Asia](#) (GOALS) programme.

¹² [Work in Freedom](#). WIF is executed by the ILO along with tripartite stakeholders, sector specific affiliates and other UN agencies.

Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)¹³ and delve into the ILO's overarching commitments to achieving the GCM's objectives. On internal labour migration, the [“Roadmap for developing a policy framework for the inclusion of internal migrant workers in India”](#) and recently concluded project ‘Building an-evidence based policy alliance to support policy workers in India’¹⁴ would provide background and learnings to discuss a more holistic approach to internal labour migration governance.

Anchored in social dialogue and tripartism, this national consultation will also take into consideration International Labour Standards, the Decent Work Agenda¹⁵ and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This consultation will also provide sufficient opportunity and learnings to discuss a more holistic approach to labour migration governance with the participation of both Central and State governments. It would further provide an opportunity to identify more actors that have emerged in supporting labour migration during the COVID-19 crisis and how a more structured strategy will be effective in supporting India's internal and international migrant workers.

OBJECTIVES:

- Strengthening ILO's Decent Work and Fair Migration Agenda commitment in achieving 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Identify overarching gender responsive policy perspectives and opportunities for improvement in social protection, fair and effective labour migration frameworks, occupational safety and health (OSH), skills, data, reintegration etc.
- Advancing roles of Employers and Trade Unions in a post-COVID-19 scenario
- Explore engagement opportunities for civil society organizations, think-tanks, media, academia and other relevant stakeholders to support safe, orderly and effective labour migration policy making and governance.
- Establish a multistakeholder platform for knowledge sharing, support policy development and ILO's role in advancing labour migration goals.

¹³ The [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) is the first, inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. The GCM was adopted by Member UN States in December 2018.

¹⁴ Building an Evidence policy alliance to support Internal Migrant Workers in India, is the latest project supported by the ILO in partnership with implementing organizations, Aajeevika Bureau and Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development. The project focussed on advancing the five policy visions envisaged in the Roadmap (ILO,2020) through strategic interventions through corridor based approach research, developing legal justice tools and Workers' Facilitation Centre programmes.

¹⁵ Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. The Decent Work Agenda's four pillars include employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue.

PARTNERS:

Key partnerships beyond those with government at national and state level, and social partners, including international organizations; civil society organizations' research/academic institutions and development partners.

DATE AND LOCATION:

National Consultation on Labour Migration in India is scheduled for 28th and 29th July 2022 at Silver Oak, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

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