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► Lessons Learned

Work in Freedom Programme

Outreach to migrant women in areas of origin

April 2021





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Outreach to migrant women in areas of origin

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Table of Contents

Women and girls on the move in South Asia	5
What is the Work in Freedom programme?	6
What are these lessons about?	7
Notes on interpreting the lessons.....	7
Conventional practices	7
Other practices.....	8
Lessons learned on migratory trends.....	11
Lessons learned on political economy considerations	29
Lessons learned on the relationships between development actors and migrant women	39
Lessons learned on institutional skilling programmes for migrants.....	47
Lessons learned on village- or neighbourhood-level outreach.....	59
References.....	76

Background

Women and girls on the move in South Asia

For millions of poor people in South and West Asia, migration is perceived as a pathway to something better. As the shift from rural and transition economies to a globalized economy is in full swing, the jobs and trades of yesterday are receding, but the jobs of today are yet to fulfil the promise of better livelihoods for all those who remain in poverty. The poor move in all directions in pursuit of jobs, and the patterns and periodicity of their movements are all but linear. Nonetheless, mobility is lived and experienced differently depending on whether one is, for example, a man or a woman, a migrant or not, and so on. For some, mobility is unrestricted, and yet for others, it is tolerated but closely choreographed by highly gendered and socially hierarchized norms and rules. While many poor are able to improve their livelihoods in the same country or abroad in spite of such adversity, many concurrently face abuses in their jobs, including practices that amount to forced labour.

What is the Work in Freedom programme?

Work in Freedom (WIF) is a ten-year development cooperation programme that was started in 2013 and is funded by UK Aid. It adopts an integrated and targeted approach in developing practices and multisectoral policy measures that reduce women's vulnerability to trafficking in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and in selected destination countries (India, Jordan, Lebanon and some Gulf countries). To address these challenges, the Work in Freedom Programme has been implementing a series of interventions engaging migrants, civil groups, businesses and regulators in a collaborative effort to begin addressing multiple facets of forced labour in areas with high outflows and inflows of low-income women migrants, especially in sectors where women's share is increasing, such as care work and manufacturing. Interventions and work of the programme include: (1) outreach to migrant women in areas where they come from; (2) worker empowerment interventions and employer advocacy; (3) improving practices related to recruitment and working and living conditions; (4) law and policy work; and (5) research.

What are these lessons about?

This document describes the lessons learned so far from the programme. This edition was preceded by an earlier edition of Lessons Learned in October 2017, followed by another one in February 2019. Over time, the programme has expanded its work and documented new learnings. This new edition focuses particularly on the outreach to migrant women in areas where they come from. It lists and describes the nature of both conventional and non-conventional interventions and reviews some of the assumptions behind the rationale for these interventions.

Each lesson is presented with the title of a general finding, followed by the description of that finding, a section describing how the finding was identified, implications for future programming, and suggestions for better practices. Each general lesson is based

on feedback from the programme's practitioners as documented in progress reports, monitoring and evaluations, or in separate research commissioned or related to the programme.

Notes on interpreting the lessons

Throughout the implementation of the programme, the ILO and its partners have learned several lessons in different areas of its work. The most significant ones are explained herein. Each of these lessons is connected to a specific intervention that was designed as part of an overall framework of interventions. None of these lessons should be read in isolation from the others.

Conventional practices

The following three main types of practices are also common among most anti-trafficking and safe-migration programmes. They were also supported or implemented by the WIF programme:

- ▶ **Format of lesson learned**
- ▶ **Title of main finding**
Description of main finding
- ▶ **How was the finding identified?**
Description of how the finding was identified based on practice or research. Links to references
- ▶ **Practical lessons for programming**
Implications of the finding on specific areas of conventional programming

1. **Project targeting:** This consists of the identification of locations from which women migrate. The selection of such locations is usually based on official records of outward female or general migration, perceptions and motivations of regional authorities documented by development actors, and adjustments undertaken by social workers based on participatory rural appraisals (PRA) and other field observations. The identification of such locations is supposed to ground some or most of the activities of the other types of local practices.

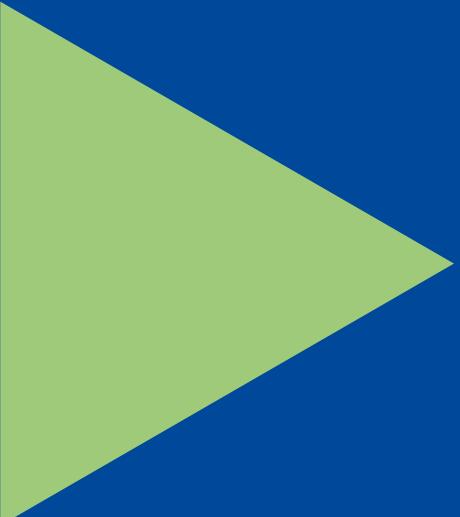
- 2. Pre-departure orientation and training (PDOT):**
A PDOT is undertaken in institutional settings. It is based on a curriculum and is conducted through didactic methods, seeking to transfer knowledge from an instructor to migrant women about specific women-trafficking risks, legal channels for safe migration and work, helpline contacts, language and cultural tips, and job-specific occupational skills. This training takes place in training centres usually situated in villages or *bastis*, provincial towns or capitals. These PDOTs often involve a partnership between a government authority and a private or public recruitment and employment agency.
 - 3. Resource and facilitation centres (RFCs):** These centres are usually established at the district or local block level in locations where migrants tend to converge in order to depart towards their labour destinations. They are often referred to as migrant resource centres. These centres are meant to be a “one-stop shop” where migrants can get comprehensive information and advice about migration and work. These institutions may be run by government departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, or a combination of these.
- 1. Direct outreach and interaction between social workers and women considering paid employment and migration:** This usually happens through door-to-door visits by social workers. During such interactions social workers listen to questions from the visited women and provide counselling and referral advice, connecting and facilitating their access to public or other services, providing advice on local paid employment options, alternative livelihood activities, and so on. This type of activity is demanding as it requires that social workers spend individual time listening and counselling each woman, and also that they be able to follow up in facilitating referrals. In order to ensure the buy-in of the community leaders and the men of these families, interventions usually include local meetings with them. In addition to this, special events are often organized around a specific theme, such as Women’s Day, Migrant’s Day, and so on.
 - 2. Support for trade unions to reach out to migrant women workers and making migrant women workers members and active participants and representatives of a union:** They enrol interested members, provide orientation meant to strengthen members’ capacity to negotiate and advocate for workers’ and other common protection needs. Collectives that are formed may consist of women’s support groups in areas from which women tend to migrate, collectives of returnee women, collectives of agricultural workers, cohorts of migrant workers

Other practices

In addition to the conventional intervention practices described above, the Work in Freedom programme has implemented some non-conventional intervention practices:

- migrating to similar destinations, or collectives of women workers in specific or varying occupations.
3. **Pre-decision orientation sessions (PDOS)** are meant to affect the behaviours of aspiring migrant women by exposing them to information that can prepare them for migration before they migrate. They take place in villages or bastis. The key actor in these types of interventions is usually a social worker who lives in the same location or near the women with whom they work. The social workers are either workers of an NGO, members of a local trade union, and/or extension agents of government schemes or services meant for local populations. Pre-decision orientation sessions are usually accompanied by community briefings meant to explain the purpose of PDOS to other members of the community and ensure that they do not feel left out. The Work in Freedom programme was among the first programmes to roll out this type of intervention; however, today such interventions are common among other anti-trafficking and safe-migration programmes.
4. **Capacity-building of social workers and local women leaders (CBSW)** consists of supporting capacity development and other measures for social workers to be able to work with aspiring migrant women. It can involve training, learning and exchange visits, and in case they are not directly employed by the programme, advocacy to ensure that their work is fully recognized and remunerated by respective institutions. The capacity of social workers is important for the success of many other types of interventions listed here. These interventions may also involve capacity development programmes, involving locally elected officials, on women's employment, mobility and empowerment.

At the end of this compendium of lessons learned, better practices and recommendations are listed.



Lessons learned on migratory trends



Statistics on women's migration can mask its geographical and social heterogeneity in countries of origin.

Specific "pockets" from where women have been migrating in large numbers can get submerged in the midst of more conservative areas from where women do not necessarily migrate. Likewise, the specific social identity of migrating women can be submerged under characterizations that assume that many women in those areas are migrating, even though only women from specific social backgrounds are migrating.

Migration policies and practices that apply a one-size-fits-all approach to all regions or social groups can end up promoting migration in areas from where women do not migrate, or promoting it in a social environment that dangerously stigmatizes them, and hence generate new risks. Conversely, in areas where most women are already experienced migrants, training on the same issues does not make sense and can be a waste of resources and of the migrants' time.

Context of how lesson was learned

At least three studies that were related to the programme enabled the programme to identify this lesson.

1. Evaluation report undertaken by the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) with the support of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM): *Women Migrating in India: Evidence from Odisha*, 2019, by Indrani Mazumdar, N. Neetha, Indu Agnihotri and Gayatri Panda.

2. ILO-commissioned study involving primary and secondary research: *In the shadow of the state: Recruitment and migration of South Indian women as domestic workers to the Middle East*, 2020, by Dr Praveena Kodoth, Centre for Development Studies (CDS).
3. ILO-commissioned study involving primary and secondary research: Migration and Gender: Survey on contrasted patterns in five districts of Bangladesh, 2021 (upcoming publication), by Dr Thérèse Blanchet and Hannan Biswas, Drishti Research Centre.

Implications of lesson for future programming

It is important to assess the possible heterogeneity of women's migration and employment patterns, whether migrant and worker awareness is really needed, and if so, what type of awareness is in demand and how it can be delivered without causing harm. Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches, such as PDTs, common curricula, pre-departure or pre-decision manuals with common knowledge that is supposed to be inculcated to all. Instead, tailor communication content and methods to the specific individual demands of women seeking information about jobs, mobility or other local resources. This can be done in collaboration with employment information centres and/or well-informed social workers (e.g. Anganwadi, ASHA and other such workers) with a nuanced understanding of their localities, provided they have the time and resources to do so.



Migration of women depends on the specific context of patriarchy and how women's mobility, work-seeking and distress is socially appraised and mediated.

The more women's mobility and work is restricted and socially stigmatized, the more women will simply not migrate or, if they are desperate to leave, migrate suddenly and secretly to avoid stigma. For those who have never migrated, migrating all of a sudden can be risky even if staying back is equally undesirable.

Context of how lesson was learned

In the process of planning information sessions with women in areas they were presumed to migrate from, social workers realized that stereotypes of women's migration, work and distress varied significantly within and across districts, blocks and villages. In some areas, or among certain social groups, the notion that a woman could work outside the home or migrate is unacceptable and associated with socio-economic status. In such areas, the phenomenon of migrating and working women is seen as shameful. However, the fact that women work or migrate is seen as a tolerated necessity. Evaluators of the programme also highlighted how the acknowledgement of "distress" is socially mediated; in other words, it is appraised in a specific social context.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Training that is perceived to be on migration or work can further aggravate social stigma that can impact women's mobility, work and gender roles.

Depending on levels of patriarchal stigma, it is important to manage public perceptions about the training that is provided. Portraying it as being about women's health and livelihoods tends to generate more acceptance.



Public discourse on women's migration tends to infantilize and victimize migrant women from low-income households and mask diverse migration trends and experiences.

Public discourse on women's migration in countries of origin tends to depict and treat all women from low-income households who migrate as inexperienced and unknowledgeable. For example, policies specific to each country in South Asia restrict women's overseas labour migration and impose mandatory pre-departure orientation and training (PDOT). These policies often assume that, contrary to men, adult women cannot manage migration on their own and should be restricted or taught how to migrate. Such practices often contradict constitutional rights and are in violation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Contrary to the narrative that migrant women are uninformed, many women interviewed in destination countries were rather well informed in the context of work even if they could not change much about it, and many had migrated multiple times. Life and income options at home can involve challenges that outweigh the risks of women's migration. While migrant women workers may face significant challenges abroad, their migration demonstrates their own preferences and assessment of risks.

Context of how lesson was learned

While several international bodies have highlighted how mobility restrictions on women violate international human rights standards, the programme reviewed the effectiveness of policy restrictions on women's mobility (ILO 2017) and the political economy behind mobility restrictions (ILO 2021). The former study found that mobility restrictions had been ineffective, while the later study found that mobility restrictions on women were a reflection of patriarchal stereotypes that tended to be magnified by anti-trafficking narratives.

Regarding women's own experiences, WIF commissioned research on migrating women in both countries of origin and destination (Kodoth 2020; Blanchet 2021). This research showed that many women had migrated multiple times to similar or different locations, hence depicting a pattern of circular international migration, not to mention circular internal migration that has been well documented in some countries, like India (Mazumdar et al. 2019). While some South Asian women engaged in domestic or garment work abroad may be first-time migrants, most tend to have migrated multiple times.



हिंद घरेलू कामगार सम्बंध

सम्बन्धित हिंद मजदूर सम्बंध

HIND GHARELU KAMGAR
SAMBANDH

AFFILIATED HIND MAZDOOR SANGATHAN

Implications of lesson for future programming

This lesson has multiple implications: (1) restrictions on women's mobility tend to be promulgated in the name of preventing trafficking. In reality, they only add to the vulnerability faced by migrant women and should hence be discontinued; (2) pre-departure policies and programmes tend to assume that all women are inexperienced or unknowledgeable, treating them all like first-timers. Such training is irrelevant for the more experienced women; (3) even first-timers will tend to be somewhat better informed in areas where circular migration is prevalent, and they may hence have different information needs; and (4) an apparent place of origin may also be a destination or transit location

for internal migrants coming from the hinterland. Awareness-raising regarding work and employment may therefore vary significantly, if at all needed.

At a minimum, pre-departure information should be made non-mandatory for those who have already migrated and should be delinked from other related conditions for migration. Sessions for migrant women should take into account variable experiences on migration. The method of outreach should tap into the knowledge of experienced migrants who can be hired and trained as facilitators for group communication rather than enforce didactic education by trainers who have never migrated.



The histories of circular labour migration trajectories are variable and include rising and waning periods of migratory movements along recurrent pathways.

In areas with high outflows of migrant women, histories of previous women's paid employment, perceptions of women's work and mobility, gender relations, agrarian change and struggle, and previous migration affect migratory movements for work. In destination areas with inflows of migrant women, public policies related to care and demographics influence the demand for paid care work. The presence of manufacturing sectors with gendered hierarchies can influence the demand for machine operators which nationals prefer to avoid. Histories of previous male and female migration, occupation-specific labour and gender relations, bilateral agreements, labour recruiter and employer preferences, and other similar factors influence migratory movements for work in different ways. One or several of these factors may prompt a sharp rise or decline in migration from specific countries of origin.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme has been reviewing literature and assessing historical trends of women's migration, employment and labour relations in specific locations. These studies show a variety of factors, listed above, that underpin migration, employment and labour relations (Bosc et al. 2021; Sehgal 2020).

Implications of lesson for future programming

The content of awareness sessions for migrants could take into account the specific histories of migration and labour relations in common destinations to enable migrants to know what has worked or not and what to do to improve their labour migration experience. These histories can be documented and shared with new migrants so that they are aware of previous struggles, worker achievements and failures.

महाराष्ट्र विद्यमान एवं लोक
(भटगांव, परसांचोला, संस्कृता तथा
संस्कृत एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा के लिए)

(મટગાંદ, પરસાંખોળા, કંદાઈપાણી, શાંકાબહુદી, એટ એલ્યુસિનિયમ કામપની લિલિટેડ, જાલાંડ કાર્પોરેશન, સોશિલ સિવિલ કોર્પસ આ માટે)

प्राह्णांशुल विकास (प्राह्णांशुल विकास) प्राह्णांशुल विकास (प्राह्णांशुल विकास)



Interventions to promote safe migration are ineffective and unsustainable as long as causes of distress migration are not addressed.

Markets favour taking advantage of distress migrants to access cheaper labour, rather than hiring more expensive local labour. It is therefore important to develop interventions that, on the one hand, reduce distress migration and so make migration a real choice, and, on the other hand, provide incentives that equalize the value of foreign and host labour.

Context of how lesson was learned

In many communities where the programme supported outreach work, multiple and varying distress factors were prompting women to migrate. Providing information about accessing entitlements of any sort was simply insufficient as it was clear that agrarian and environmental distress would persist. Referring women to occupations where working conditions are notoriously poor also poses a moral dilemma. Information campaigns for communities to access their rights cannot replace responsible development policies.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Migration information campaigns should not be used as a way of entirely replacing peace-building and responsible inclusive development policies and programmes in areas where distress migration is taking place. Programmes that acknowledge structural motives underpinning migration are more likely to facilitate access to relevant information, resources or public services that alleviate the need to migrate in distress.



The cost of “blue collar” international migration for women tends to be lower than that for men in the region.

Generally, the cost of migration for women who migrate to low-income jobs overseas was lower than that of men. An important reason is the high demand for care work in many destination countries.

Context of how lesson was learned

Several stakeholders, including recruitment, and employment-agency associations openly state that the demand for domestic workers is high and hence employers bear the cost of migration both as a result of demand-and-supply dynamics and due to regulations restricting the charging of fees. The programme conducted a survey and found that women workers were charged considerably lower recruitment fees compared to men (Blanchet and Biswas 2020).

Implications of lesson for future programming

Public discourse on migration costs tends to extrapolate the high cost of men’s migration to women as well. This is misleading, as we have seen. It is important to gender-disaggregate data and analysis on migration, including analysing supply/demand data by sector and gender, and also go deeper into family compulsions (for instance, the high cost of male migration is often cited as a reason for women in the family to migrate).



Migration through formal channels and/or migration to formal work does not guarantee protection from labour abuses.

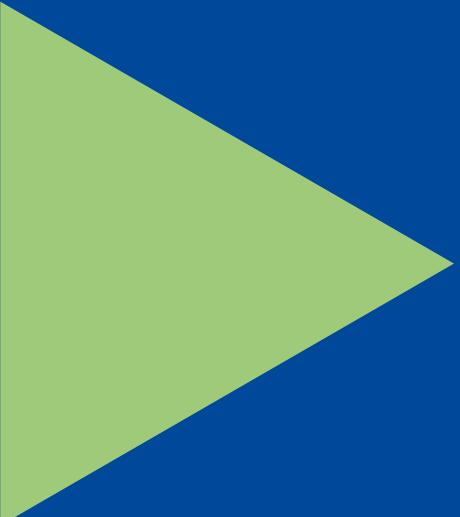
While migrating through informal channels involves risks, legal channels into formal work situations can also lead into abusive labour situations. For example, sponsorship systems bestow on employers overwhelming power to expose a migrant worker to criminal proceedings, while lawsuits on labour abuses rarely come to a conclusion, and even if a decision is made, it is rarely in favour of migrant workers. Formal wages for migrant workers are often legally set below national minimum wages. Entering formal labour relationships, hence, does not necessarily protect a migrant worker from abuse.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme observed that migration information awareness promoted by authorities in countries of origin often claimed that migrant women would be protected if they followed formal migration channels. A review of jurisprudence on labour abuses in areas of destination revealed that this was misleading.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Programmes and policies should be careful not to promise migrant workers that following formal migration channels in formal settings will necessarily protect them from labour abuses.



Lessons learned on political economy considerations



While public narratives claim that pre-departure policies and programmes are needed to protect migrant workers, in reality, migrant workers' interests tend to be crowded out of these institutional programmes by other competing and more powerful interests of employers, recruiters and local authorities, hence leaving little, if at all any, space for migrant workers to voice their views and learn about negotiation and organizing practices to defend their labour and human rights.

Outbound employment regimes are set in areas where the transition from rural economies to a globalized economy is in full swing. Traditional habitats in resource-rich areas are often vacated in order to enable new infrastructure investments and industries. Similarly, traditional agriculture employing large populations is often replaced with intensive industrial-style monoculture agriculture that employs fewer people, leaving the rest unemployed. Unless other jobs are created, these new industries and agriculture practices on their own are unable to create sufficient jobs to replace old ones that were characteristic of rural livelihoods. Depending on the intensity of capital-investment processes and ensuing agrarian crises, they trigger varying degrees of migration outflows.

As political contestation to the lack of jobs and the need to migrate rises, policymakers eventually try to establish consent-seeking mechanisms to ensure that outgoing

populations can be sent as migrant workers to other sites of global production with the promise of better opportunities and remittance-earning potential for their relatives. This is where private economic actors requiring low-income labour in distant locations collaborate with local policymakers to collectively pool, acculturate and prepare workers for their future labour needs outside the district, state or country. The main target of such policies are women, indigenous and other marginalized populations from low-income households. This happens in classroom-type settings in different types of "pre-departure" or skilling programmes. The challenge with these outbound employment regimes is that the economic and political actors controlling the training spaces share both economic and political incentives not to highlight decent-work deficits in destination areas and not to impart collective-bargaining skills that could enable better working conditions. Hence, these training



programmes, while offering some technical skills, can still end up developing subservience to future abusive employment conditions in the name of empowerment.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme sought to introduce changes in the way these regimes were operating. The concept of “pre-decision orientation” was developed in the design stages of the programme as a more nuanced response to information needs of migrant women, compared with the mainstream institutionalized pre-departure training programmes that are now common in most countries or states of origin. The general assumption was that interventions targeting people likely to migrate at an early stage of the process were more likely to create space for soft-skill acquisition and rights awareness than those held in institutional pre-departure settings, where instruction tended to be supply-driven and focused on specific migration procedures, rules and conduct expected from migrant workers. These spaces in villages were found to be more enabling, although lessons from this were also drawn (see other lessons). With regard to institutionalized pre-departure programmes, the programme attempted to review the curricula and the profile of instructors, and introduce new methods, including recognition of prior learning. Overall, while some specific training programmes were improved, the general culture of these skilling programmes did not change. Some of the challenges included having sufficient space to discuss common worker grievances or negotiation strategies, and the logistics of training and

accommodation during the training tended not to take into account of gender needs and concerns.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Policymakers could consider policies that offset inbuilt structural incentives that characterize current outbound employment regimes. Such policies could include creation of local decent-work options, or establishing robust systems of public scrutiny of workers’ working and living conditions.

Risk analyses and mitigation should be underpinned by strong political-economy analyses of labour migration. While dismantling pre-departure institutions may not be possible in the short term, at the very least, pre-departure training should be critically reviewed from a do-no-harm lens. For example, institutional training should include checks and balances ensuring that training is voluntary, that it is conducted by experienced migrant women workers rather than by recruitment agencies, and that it engages seasoned social workers who are from the same socio-economic background as the trainees. Training should include space for experienced migrant women to speak.



The choice of locations to promote migration tends to be guided by political considerations, which don't always relate with migration trends.

Policies promoting migration tend to occur in areas where there is competition for local resources. For example, indigenous communities using forest or public lands sought by other economic actors tend to be targeted for outward migration to vacate those areas. In other cases, low-income groups may be targeted for outward migration from certain locations in order to relieve political pressures that can mount as a result of lack of livelihood options, mass unemployment and social unrest.

Context of how lesson was learned

The selection of locations to undertake pre-decision orientation sessions is usually based on official records of women's migration or general migration, perceptions and motivations of regional authorities documented by development actors, and adjustments undertaken by social workers based on participatory rural appraisals (PRA) and other field observations. The programme conducted monitoring and evaluation assessments, which highlighted that women did not always migrate from areas recommended by local and regional authorities and sometimes even places recommended

by local civil society partners. The evaluation of the programme's work under its first phase in Odisha showed that some of the villages that were chosen did not include significant out-migration (Agnihotri et al. 2019).

Implications of lesson for future programming

Interventions seeking to reach out to potential migrant women should be aware of political motivations for choosing such locations so that interventions neither facilitate displacement nor promote migration.



Safe migration interventions tend to be ineffective in preventing the violation of women's rights.

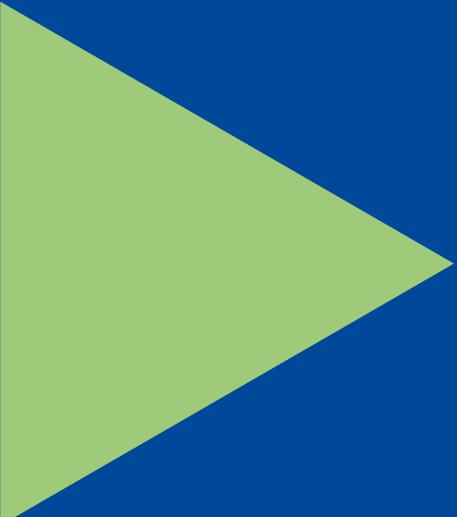
While safe migration programmes can be helpful, in patriarchal contexts, the concepts of safety and protection tend to exclude women's agency. Protection measures for women tend to be designed without the leadership and participation of migrating women and their representatives. This inevitably leads to policies and practices that disempower them from the exercise of their rights (for example, restrictions on mobility) rather than empowering them.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme initially interacted with constituents who claimed to have had experience in safe migration and anti-trafficking information campaigns. However, the strategies that were proposed sought to restrict women's mobility through different means rather than address the reasons why women migrated and support the migration when it was a choice.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Anti-trafficking and migration programmes should review the suitability of the framework of safe migration as an appropriate lens to address women workers' vulnerabilities. Instead, programmes should consider frameworks that enable women's emancipation, such as programmes supporting informed mobility by choice – not simply by referring to other options but by removing structural obstacles that impede choices.



**Lessons learned on the
relationships between
development actors and
migrant women**



Recognizing how different forms of discrimination are perpetrated against migrant women workers is critical for better anti-trafficking interventions.

In general policy discourse, discrimination is often referred to in euphemisms that undermine the possibility of understanding how it happens. However, it is the varying forms of discrimination that explain why women and girls choose to migrate and the treatment they face during the different stages of the migration cycle. Discrimination is often based on gender, caste, class, age, occupation, language, race, and religion among other factors. Varying combinations of discrimination generate visible and invisible barriers that compound women's and girls' difficulty in accessing public entitlements, training opportunities, jobs, and fair and equal compensation and treatment throughout the migration cycle. Recognizing how these forms of discrimination are manifested and interact is critical for more successful interventions.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme has partnered with NGOs and trade unions to provide referral services for migrant workers. In spite of referrals, many prospective migrants are often unable to access entitlements unless they are accompanied by social workers who can assist them in overcoming the discriminatory behaviours of duty bearers. This becomes all the more difficult when discrimination is trivialized and legitimized in public

political discourses. In such cases, it is hardly possible for a young woman from a minority group to access her entitlements without the backing of civil groups. Discrimination in wages against migrant women as compared with host community workers is common. Several studies commissioned by the programme point to the prevalence of women from Adivasi, Dalit or minority backgrounds in the lower rungs of supply chains where discriminatory abuses are more frequent.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Programming should include measures that deliberately tackle exclusion and facilitate access to rights and entitlements for populations who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. Working and evaluating with organizations managed by and for those who are discriminated against is more likely to yield results. Leveraging international instruments such as the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), or the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is helpful. Rights-based women worker groups are usually better able to address these discrimination issues rather than migration, trafficking or traditional labour actors.



While training for migrant women on negotiation and other transversal skills can be very useful if undertaken in informal settings, it does not – on its own – impart the life skills that can help in mitigating common migration or work challenges.

Transversal and attitudinal skills are easier to acquire for those who have had prolonged exposure in social settings involving cross-gender, cross-class and multicultural social and economic relationships. It is more difficult for those who have had limited exposure relating or transacting with people from other social and economic groups, genders or cultures, dealing with more powerful individuals or authorities, or have lived in prolonged isolation with limited social contacts (such as those in purdah or *ghoongat*). They are less likely to quickly relate the knowledge and information they hear in a training or awareness session to their own lives or to a potential situation they may face when they migrate or work. This, however, should not be interpreted to mean that pre-migration orientation should focus primarily on vocational training instead, as that too has its limitations, as explained in other lessons.

Context of how lesson was learned

Expectations of development actors about pre-migration training for migrant women tend to assume that such training is sufficient for them to be protected. Such perceptions overlook the positionality of migrant women workers and the fact that migrant workers do not have the same social capital as officials in international organizations or NGOs would tend to have. While

pre-departure orientation training tends to leave limited space for negotiation skills, when such training is provided, many development stakeholders had inflated expectations about the outcomes of such training.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Orientation, training and information sessions should be need-based and adapted to the type of social exposure that women have had. Social workers or instructors should be sensitive to the social and gender barriers that can prevent assimilation of information and knowledge. They should be ready to accept that some women may not need any of the training that is offered, and some may need it more than others. Even when training is provided, it does not mean that results are measurable.



Migration and anti-trafficking programmes should be aware of the social distance that separates migrant women workers and those who decide and implement such programmes at various levels.

The economic and social realities determining the lives of migrant women workers and those who decide and implement migration or anti-trafficking programmes tend to be very different. Perceptions of opportunity depend not only on wealth, but also on the social capital of individuals and groups, as well as on varying socio-cultural and linguistic referents.

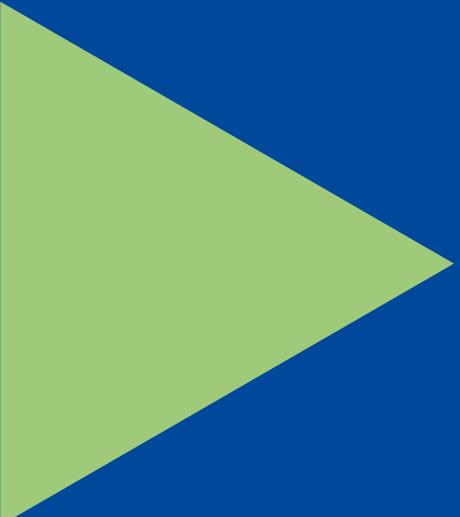
Context of how lesson was learned

Those who decide and implement migration or anti-trafficking programmes tended to be from very different socio-economic backgrounds compared to migrant women workers. They often assumed that what they are capable of perceiving or doing for themselves can, to a reasonable degree, be transferred to migrant workers through simple communication or educational means. However, evaluators found that such information or even skills could be meaningless for a migrant worker facing asymmetrically more powerful employers, recruiters or officials who can simply intentionally, or even unintentionally, ignore them because they share different socio-cultural and linguistic referents, or because their attention to migrant workers is determined by very different temporal and spatial habits and world views. Likewise,

migrant women workers were found to have a very pragmatic understanding of how to effectively deal with challenges they face, which staff of different organizations could not have conceived. The differences were particularly stark when it came to dealing with laws. Programme implementation staff tended to view the law as enabling, while migrant workers tended to view it as disabling.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Donors, international organizations and non-government organizations should acknowledge the social distance that exists between them and migrant women workers and seek ways to reduce that distance by having more direct interaction with each other and create space for migrant women workers to exchange and voice their views on how to deal with common challenges.



Lessons learned on institutional skilling programmes for migrants



While it is important that policies aspire to individual choice in migration, it is equally important that they not assume that much individual choice always exists in migrating, or that individual cases of empowerment through migration in themselves justify the upscaling of interventions to a policy level.

At a collective level, migration interventions should be cognizant of structural factors, such as the agrarian crisis, and patterns of exclusion from development, which allow little choice for those who are marginalized to seek livelihood alternatives elsewhere. For extended families in patriarchal contexts, the decision to migrate tends to be made *for* migrating women and not *by* migrating women. The discourse of choice and decision-making tends to assume that individual choices will make a significant difference in migration outcomes, but there was insufficient evidence to prove this. Another trend that was observed by the programme was that individual cases of empowerment were used to justify in themselves larger-scale interventions, without taking into account collective trends and structural factors. Similarly, individual cases of exploitation were used by authorities to justify mobility restrictions. That said, individual cases of migration can test the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of existing policies.

Context of how lesson was learned

From the start of the programme, the notion that it could influence decision-making was an important assumption

behind the design of “pre-decision” orientation sessions in villages. During its third year, the programme also advocated to replace the paradigm that was used to define these types of programmes from “safe migration” to “migration by choice”. While the aspiration for migration to remain a choice should remain important, in practice, it became questionable whether the choices that the programme could influence would truly alter the decision to migrate. That said, participants of these orientation sessions did recognize the value of the content of these sessions, as can be seen in this video: *Learning with Community Workers: Understanding Change from the Perspective of Community Workers*.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Policymakers should not take it for granted that migrants have room to decide whether to migrate or not. Therefore, policymakers should realistically assess structural factors behind migration, otherwise policies may be misleading. Programmes and policies are more effective when they are based on collective evidence of labour migration trends and tested against individual experiences.

Venue - OMR International,
St. Thomas Road, Chennai



Formal settings for pre-migration orientation sessions with migrant women can inhibit the communication of important information.

While it is important for migrant workers to be familiar with the formal procedures governing migration status and employment in their destination country, it is also important for them to hear from experienced migrant women practical tips on how they dealt with the different sponsors and how they managed difficult situations. Learning about such matters or learning to negotiate with employers or recruitment agents is difficult in an institutional context that incentivizes subservience to future employers and is financed, in some way or other, by recruiters.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme was asked to review multiple pre-departure and orientation training curricula and training sessions. In addition to this, evaluators in the first phase of the programme reviewed the pre-decision orientation sessions that the programme organized in non-formal rural settings. In all countries of origin, it was found that

discussions about the experiences of migrant women and the negotiation tips they could offer were unlikely to take place in formal settings, while such discussions were more likely to take place in informal settings, provided social workers knew how to foster such discussions.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Practical information is best delivered in informal settings where experienced migrant women feel at ease to speak their minds and social workers can encourage them to recount their experiences and share practical tips. Learning about negotiating with labour recruiters is easier in informal settings where recruiters and formal instructors of a different social background are absent.



Pre-departure orientation and training (PDOT) tends to avoid practical content that helps migrant women deal with specific working and living conditions, such as non-payment of wages, how to deal with harassment, how to demand for days off or leave, how to deal with passport confiscation, and so on.

It is important that practical information on overcoming common work-related difficulties be provided in PDOT sessions. While most PDOT programmes provide information on the laws and policies that govern labour migration, the information tends to be theoretical. In reality, there is often a significant gap between what laws and regulations say and their application. Practical tips based on the actual experience of migrant women on dealing with common issues, such as non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, harassment, days off and termination of contract for emergency reasons, are rarely provided in formal PDOT sessions.

Context of how lesson was learned

As with the previous lesson, the programme was asked to review multiple pre-departure and orientation training curricula and training sessions, and found informal settings, facilitated by social workers, best for conversations on practical issues and tips. The ILO's Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families also found that "transversal skills are rarely factored into skills' building programmes and

when they are, usually avoid the labour dimension such as learning to negotiate working and living terms and conditions with employers" (Tayah 2016).

Implications of lesson for future programming

Raising pre-departure awareness should go beyond legal awareness for migrants and include specific measures based on recurrent challenges in working and living conditions that experienced migrant women workers deal with. As mentioned in the previous lesson, such practical information is best delivered in informal settings where experienced migrant women feel at ease to speak their minds and social workers can encourage others to recount their experiences and share practical tips. Learning about negotiating with labour recruiters is easier in informal settings where recruiters and formal instructors of a different social background are absent.



The undervaluation of paid domestic work is directly linked to it being stereotypically associated with women's unpaid housework. It is important that policymakers and development projects question categorizations that link paid domestic work directly or indirectly to occupations outside labour laws, to the lowest incomes and to unskilled occupations.

Significant literature exists that demonstrates how the undervaluation of domestic work is linked to traditional stereotypes of women's unpaid housework (Budlender 2011) and how care work imposes a financial penalty that contributes to gender inequality (Folbre 2018). Even so, in many countries, law, policy and administrative frameworks tend to take it for granted that paid domestic work does not fall under labour laws, is associated with the lowest incomes and/or considered unskilled work.

Context of how lesson was learned

The programme found that women domestic workers were excluded from recourse to labour laws, defined as unskilled and fit only for the lowest wages right at the policy level, by most countries covered by the programme. This was in spite of the existence of studies linking the undervaluation of paid domestic work to women's unpaid housework.

Implications of lesson for future programming

It is important to review categorizations linking domestic work, directly or indirectly, to the lowest incomes and to unskilled occupations. Otherwise, those categorizations enable the reproduction of gender inequalities. Migrant women domestic workers have significant unrecognized unpaid and paid care work experience, therefore recognition of prior learning should be standardized and facilitated by authorities, employers and worker organizations.



Pre-departure skilling is more effective when women worker organizations are involved.

While vocational and life-skill training through private and national skills-training institutions can reach greater numbers of people, the way the training is conducted, and its content, can mislead migrants and aggravate the risk of trafficking, in spite of technical assistance. These institutions tend to prioritize foreign employment over other considerations. Discussions on the real working and living conditions of workers or involvement of workers' organizations is limited and would undermine the very incentives under which they operate. Disengaging from providing technical advice would also be irresponsible as constituents demand it. An do-no-harm approach should be followed, where training is shortened and staggered between pre-departure and post-arrival stages and where women worker organizations are involved.

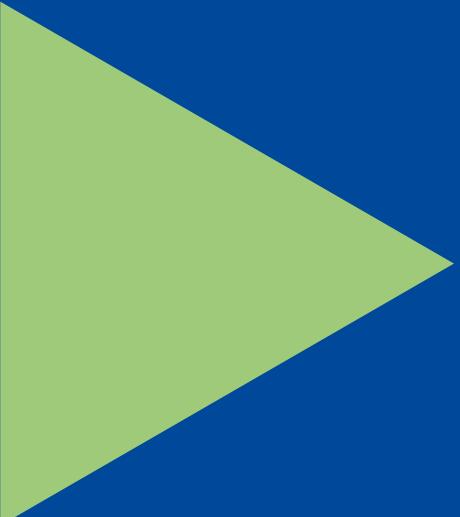
Context of how lesson was learned

At the request of government constituents, the programme collaborated in reviewing pre-departure curricula for migrant workers. As the programme reviewed pre-departure skilling processes, it was realized that the content of the training tended to omit information on working conditions abroad and

portrayed a rosy picture about possible earnings. Skilling institutions needed to justify their funding by meeting targets of the number of people they trained and got employed. Recruitment agencies would often omit information about working conditions abroad. As a result, the programme suggested the agencies involve migrant worker organizations in training programmes to try to ensure that a more realistic picture of working conditions abroad is provided.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Consider different ways to involve women worker organizations, such as unions, in skilling processes as they are more likely to provide information that can be useful for workers.



**Lessons learned on village-
or neighbourhood-level
outreach**



As promoted by civil society organizations, international organizations and the government, migration awareness tends to be supply-driven and rarely includes representative voices of those it is intended for.

At the local level, development actors promote various competing themes of civic awareness that “target” vulnerable groups and especially women. These consist of supply-driven information about trafficking, migration awareness, women’s empowerment, health awareness, employment, education, vocational skills, disaster-risk management, and so on. While much of this can appear helpful, in reality, messages can also saturate attention, confuse and contradict the needs of migrant women, not least in the field of migration, human trafficking and employment. Much of this information tends to leave out the representative perspective of migrant workers. These messages carry content from people who are not migrant workers but claim to care about them.

Context of how lesson was learned

It was only after the programme collected numerous testimonies of workers through research and interviews that it was realized that much of what migrant workers had related in such testimonies and interviews rarely figured in information designed for migrant workers. In fact, personnel in charge of designing the content were more concerned with reproducing messages about the dangers of human trafficking or reproducing

content that specific government officials thought was important, such as “legal versus illegal channels” of migration. Practical information on dealing with difficult employers, embassy staff and so on was seldom provided.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Rather than create an additional layer of supply-driven awareness-raising for women, it is important to acknowledge and strengthen the capacity and means of existing social workers (such as community workers, midwives and others) to do their jobs effectively. Giving them space to listen to the needs of local women and tailor responses to their demands is important. Explaining the interconnection between access to local resources, healthcare, jobs, migration or women’s rights is important so that they do not all appear as separate streams of information.



Conventional safe migrations interventions tend to either prevent migration or promote it. Both can be harmful. From both a programme and policy perspective, it is important to neither stop women from migrating nor encourage them to migrate.

Two opposing patterns tended to prevail in some programme areas of origin of migrant women. The conservative approach was represented by conventional anti-trafficking NGOs that inflated the risks of trafficking and failed to see that women needed jobs to make ends meet. The liberal approach was represented by some migrant-rights NGOs who exaggerated the benefits of migration and minimized its risks. In short, conventional anti-trafficking NGOs tended to advocate for migration prevention, while some migrant-rights NGOs tended to promote migration. There was limited space for nuanced awareness-raising, which could be perceived as a threat to the agendas of both types of NGOs. In the end, the conventional migration-prevention approach infringed on the mobility rights of women and generated obstacles that forced migrant women to seek risky alternatives when they had no other option to migrate. The liberal approach encouraged women to migrate even when doing so could cause more harm to some migrant women.

Context of how lesson was learned

At the beginning of the first phase of WIF, the programme had planned to support anti-trafficking committees in villages of origin. As some of these

committees had been established by government and other anti-trafficking organizations, the programme reviewed these practices. It was quickly realized that the members of these committees, however trained they were, tended to apply class and gender prejudices by intercepting migrating women in the name of protecting them from trafficking, even when those women really needed to migrate. Later, the programme rolled out pre-decision orientation sessions in villages of origin to encourage dialogue on migration, employment and other matters between social workers and aspirant migrant workers. Many of these sessions were implemented by migrant-rights organizations. After an evaluation took place, it was realized that the very presence of some of these organizations was tacitly encouraging women's migration as a solution to unemployment, while glossing over the lack of bargaining power migrant women have in sponsorship contexts.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Interaction sessions between social workers and women should ensure that the form of outreach and its content does not seek to prevent migration or promote it. A do-no-harm approach is important.



Participative appraisals and vulnerability mapping are important for migration-related interventions in areas of origin and destination.

While participative rural appraisals (PRAs), vulnerability mapping (VM) and participative mapping of power structures are all techniques that are commonly used in local social-development programming, they are not that common in migration-related interventions or anti-trafficking programmes.

Context of how lesson was learned

Several partner organizations which used PRAs and other similar methods to understand the gender dynamics of social development and migration at the village level were better able to manage the risks more effectively. For example, if harassment was an issue for many who were migrating, the social worker, together with the NGO, could attempt to leverage social pressure to curtail it. Likewise, if control of land or water resources by some was the cause of the exclusion of others, migration could be made more of a choice by finding mechanisms to provide access to such resources, rather than talking only about migration risks.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Donors and organizations designing and implementing migration or anti-trafficking programmes should consider using PRAs and similar methods before they start local interventions. Such methods are helpful in designing and ensuring more responsive and contextualized interventions.



Quantitative targets undermine effectiveness of interventions. While quantitative targets are expected by government authorities and donors, they incentivize a supply-driven bias in interventions.

While quantitative targets are expected by government authorities, they incentivize a supply-driven bias in interventions. Community workers pay more attention to complying with delivery targets with schedules and deadlines to deliver sessions in multiple villages rather than listening, understanding and responding to the population's needs and adjusting their work accordingly.

Context of how lesson was learned

At the beginning of the programme, high quantitative targets were set for the numbers of potential migrant workers that interventions would reach out to in areas of origin. As a result of these high targets, partner organizations tended to ensure that their social and community workers covered a wide range of villages to deliver specific messages without necessarily taking the time to listen, understand and respond to the concerns of the people who were likely to migrate. This affected the effectiveness of interventions, as the messages were often seen to be incongruent with community needs. For example, in some villages people were migrating because of irrigation problems, yet the community outreach kept focusing on encouraging migration while ignoring irrigation issues. The programme, therefore, subsequently reduced targets in order to ensure that community workers spent sufficient time understanding

their areas of work in more depth and tailored their work to the context of each village. As community workers spent more time understanding the context of the villages where they worked, it became clearer that their role was not only to provide information on migration, but to also be catalysts in improving the lives and mobility of women.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Programmes seeking to inform inhabitants about their rights when they migrate would be better advised to ensure that their respective community workers invest time in understanding the reasons why people migrate, and tailor their interventions accordingly rather than seek to upscale mass awareness campaigns that will not be effective. It is important to ensure that quantitative programme targets do not undermine the time required by social workers to understand and listen to women they engage in order to be more responsive to them.



In order to better reach women who may migrate, the content of the information shared with them should not exclusively focus on migration.

Prospective migrants are usually those who cannot access basic services in their communities. Intensive two-way communication is necessary with populations who are usually excluded or unable to access basic services in their communities (for example, women, Dalits, Adivasis and other minorities). They need to be able to explain the local circumstances of why they are unable to access these services and participate in strategizing effective local solutions to overcome such barriers. For example, community-based organizations can consult marginalized groups in order to make it possible for Dalit and Adivasi women to access local employment options, social protection, health and education services, agriculture extension services, foreign employment options, local political representation, and so on. When this happens, migration is often no longer necessary as local livelihood options become possible.

Context of how lesson was learned

Most safe-migration programmes focus on providing potential migrants with information to migrate safely. Initially, many project partners within the programme did likewise. However, as awareness about the reasons why women migrate became clearer, it also became clearer that women wouldn't have to migrate if they had

access to certain types of information, services and jobs from which they tended to be excluded. The programme, therefore, not only seeks to provide information to potential migrants about migration and work abroad, it also focuses on ensuring that potential migrants are aware of other options that may result in them not having to migrate.

Given the informality of both domestic and garment work, a significant proportion of worker organizing happened outside the scope of established unions, and even counting the number of workers was a somewhat spurious concept as worker turnover was high, and their involvement in struggles was variable and selective. A complementary and perhaps better sense of the effectiveness of organizing could be gleaned from gender-sensitive assessments of industrial relations.

Implications of lesson for future programming

Safe migration programmes should consider reframing their focus to enable mobility by choice, hence enabling options for people to secure their livelihoods by staying or migrating. Providing information on local jobs or facilitating access to public services for women helps migration to be more of a choice and hence can reduce the vulnerabilities of distress migration.



The assumptions behind programmes seeking to inform or empower migrant women in areas from which they migrate should be carefully reviewed. The programme found that conventional interventions tend to assume that women have limited knowledge and skills and face a significant risk of human trafficking. That is often not true.

In South Asia, there are currently three significant funding and policy concerns supporting development cooperation that directly engages with migrant women in areas from which they migrate. There are (1) anti-trafficking and anti-slavery concerns, (2) safe-migration concerns and (3) women-protection concerns. In spite of notable agrarian, environmental and employment crises in South Asia affecting women in particular, government authorities, donors and development actors working on those issues do not significantly and directly engage with migrant women. Within and between each concern group there are variable ranges of perceptions and practices. Bureaucrats and other development actors who are part of these groups make assumptions on the causes of women's migration, the dangers of labour migration for women, the knowledge and skills of migrant women, the interest and choice they have to migrate, the areas from where they migrate, and the cost of migration for women, and so on.

Context of how lesson was learned

The preceding lessons learned are based on assumptions that are common among the three concern groups mentioned above. For example, Lesson Learned No. 20 explains how conventional safe migration interventions tend to either prevent migration or promote it, but both can be harmful.

Implications of lesson for future programming

It is important to carefully review common assumptions regarding women's migration for work. Many safe-migration practices and institutions tend to proclaim their interest to empower migrant women; however, there are significant vested motivations and interests behind some of these practices.

For example, institutional pre-departure orientation training for migration to low-income jobs tends to be ineffective, however, such interventions are difficult to dismantle as they are underpinned by a political economy that seeks to facilitate outbound employment and favour recruitment intermediaries and foreign



employers. In addition to questioning underlying assumptions, special efforts should be undertaken to ensure that such training is voluntary and delivered by and for migrant women workers. It would be helpful to advocate in favour of strengthening employment offices (such as labour exchanges and resource centres) so that they provide information on a needs basis. At a local village or basti level, interventions should strive to focus on facilitation of regular empowering conversations with women in areas where they are likely to leave in search of paid work. The content of conversations should be relevant to women's mobility, women's work and well-being, locally available resources and the political

context of migration. Methods should be interactive and should encourage communication and learning for both individuals and groups. Settings and training content are more effective when they are informal. Perceptions about training should be managed carefully depending on local stigma associated with women's mobility and paid work.

Table 1 illustrates how conventional interventions can be improved if common assumptions are questioned.

Table 1. Summary of characteristics of conventional practices versus better emerging practices

Characteristics of conventional practices	Characteristics of better practices
Pre-departure training and skilling programmes	
• Fixed content	• Content is flexible and adapted to demand
• Compulsory	• Voluntary and need-based
• Targets all migrating women	• Preference for first-time migrant women
• Formal settings	• Informal settings
• Methods are educational and didactic	• Methods favour dialogue and communication
• Content is delivered by male non-migrant instructors	• Content delivered by experienced migrant women workers
• Government-led but managed by labour recruiters	• Government-led but implemented by women's rights groups
• Aim is to develop subservience to future employers	• Aim is to empower women
• Content focuses on migration to destination area	• Content focuses on circular migration and employment
• Content focuses on labour migration rules	• Content focuses on challenging issues and negotiation skills
• Content promotes individual role models	• Content focuses on collective trends and experiences
• No practical content on working and living conditions	• Specific content on working and living conditions

Village- or neighbourhood-level outreach to women regarding migration

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Choice of locations influenced by political motives | • Choice of locations based on evidence of migration trends |
| • Content focuses on migration to destination countries | • Content sees migration as common circular trajectories |
| • Tacit purpose is to stop migration or promote it | • Neither stops nor promotes migration, do-no-harm policy |
| • Local anti-trafficking committees are a common practice among anti-trafficking groups | • Evidence exists that local anti-trafficking committees generate vulnerabilities, and it is better to dismantle them |
| • Targets only those who are potential migrant women workers | • Locations chosen where women migrate from in high numbers, but restrictions or requisites on women's participation are not imposed |
| • Purpose to influence decision-making about migration | • Purpose to organize empowering dialogue among women about choices of paid work and mobility |
| • One-size-fits-all content | • Content dependent on local context and demands of specific groups |
| • Content mostly focuses on formal migration procedures and occasionally includes soft skills or financial literacy | • Content focuses on women's work, mobility, well-being, dealing with gender stigma, access to resources, soft skills, navigating the migration cycle, and so on |
| • Voluntary peer educators | • Paid and experienced social workers from the village or neighbourhood |
| • Content is delivered through new NGO peer-educator | • Existing social workers do community interaction (and get paid accordingly) |
| • Educational didactic instruction, supply-driven | • Interactive dialogue and communication |
| • Presented to public as sessions about women's migration | • Presented to public as sessions about women's livelihood and well-being |

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Work in Freedom

Work in Freedom is an integrated development cooperation programme aiming to reduce the vulnerability to forced labour for women migrating for garment and domestic work. The programme works along migration pathways in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon and Gulf countries. It is funded by UK Aid from the Department of International Development. However, the views expressed in this policy brief do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

For more information please contact:

Igor Bosc

Chief Technical Advisor, Work in Freedom
ILO Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS)
Aresco Centre, Justinien St, Kantari
Riad El Solh 1107-2150
P.O. Box 11-4088 Beirut, Lebanon
E: bosc@ilo.org
W: www.ilo.org/forcedlabour