



SKILLS FOR MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT

KEY FINDINGS

There were around 164 million migrant workers in 2017. This policy brief explains why action is needed to improve skills development and recognition in the context of migration and what specific measures can be taken to facilitate the labour market integration of migrant workers.

- ▶ The main challenges migrants face in accessing quality training and decent jobs include the under-utilization of skills, a lack of employment or training opportunities, lack of information, and exploitation of low-skilled workers.
- ▶ To address these challenges, countries need to strengthen skills anticipation systems to inform migration policies, increase access to education and training, and establish bilateral or multilateral recognition of qualifications and skills.
- ▶ Skills partnerships along migration corridors – between and within regions, and between employers' and workers' organizations – are also essential in facilitating peer learning and contribute to fair migration for all.

SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT AND THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION

In an ever-changing world with increased globalization and technological developments, migration is a significant issue not only for the individuals themselves, but for the labour markets of countries of origin, destination and transit. Managing migration effectively is a priority for both countries of origin and countries of destination. In September 2016, Heads of States at the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.¹ The Declaration sought to ensure fair migration for all by: supporting countries of destination to integrate migrants in ways that benefit both migrants and host societies; combating xenophobia, racism, and discrimination; and strengthening the global governance of migration through the development of a global compact for migration and a global compact for refugees.

Subsequently, in 2017-18, a range of intergovernmental consultations occurred for the planned adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.² Objective 18 of the compact calls on member states to “invest in skills development and facilitate recognition of skills, qualifications,

and competences” through building bilateral and global skills partnerships.

LABOUR MIGRATION TRENDS

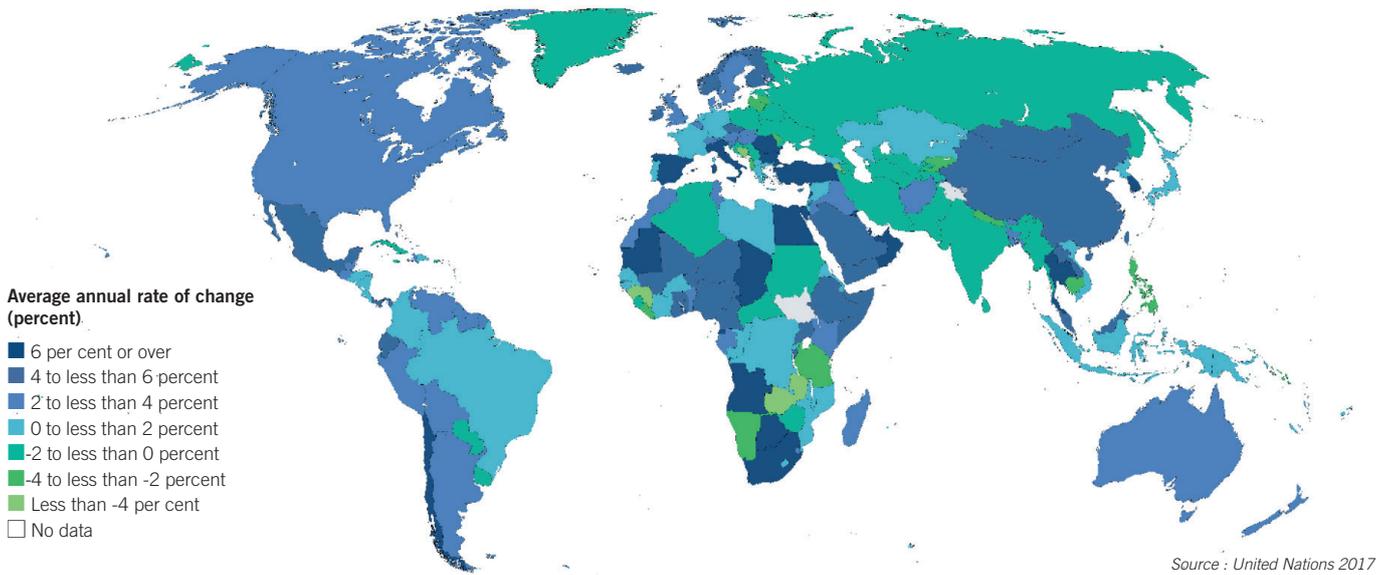
The number of international migrants and refugees is growing rapidly. Between 2000 and 2017, it increased in 172 countries worldwide, reaching 258 million up from 173 million (an increase of almost 50%). Moreover, in many countries and across all regions, the pace increased considerably with 21 countries recording an average annual growth rate of 6% or more (UN, 2017) (see figure 1). According to recent ILO estimates, around 60% of all migrants are actively participating in the labour force and hence are migrant workers (around 164 million³). Women comprise 41.6% of all migrant workers (ILO, 2018). Labour migration is a phenomenon that concerns all regions of the world. Yet, approximately 46.9% of migrant workers are concentrated in two broad sub-regions, namely North America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe, followed by the Arab States with 13.9% (ILO, 2018) (see figure 2).

¹ <http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>

² <https://www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/07/migration.pdf>

³ The ILO's global estimates have been calculated based on 258 million international migrants (UN, 2017) plus about 19 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018). Of these total 277 million migrants roughly 60% are considered migrant workers.

Figure 1. Average Annual Rate of Change (%) in the Global Migrant Stock 2000-2017

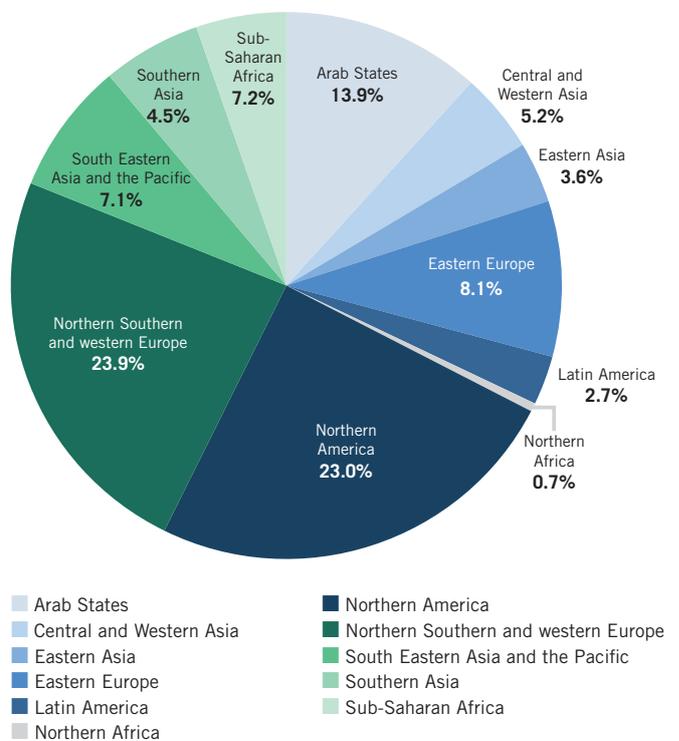


WHY ACTION ON SKILLS IS NEEDED

Migration can be a vehicle for responding timely and effectively to labour supply and demand needs. Migrants, at all skills levels, broaden the pool of available skills. Larger labour supply, in turn, may lead to better skills matching which translates into improved productivity. Indeed, in countries of destination – developed and developing alike – migrants have been shown to make important contributions to economic development and to a diverse workforce. Migrants tend to have higher labour force participation rates (ILO, 2018), make positive net-contributions to fiscal revenues (OECD/ILO, 2018), and increase incomes and employment for nationals (Foged, Peri, 2016). Moreover, diaspora networks can stimulate trade and foreign direct investment by removing informational and cultural barriers (Javorcik et al. 2011). Finally, remittances support migrants’ families in countries of origin to start businesses or invest in education and training (World Bank, 2016).

To reap the benefits of migration, however, states need to enable migrants and refugees to integrate into the labour market and society through access to employment opportunities that reduce their vulnerabilities and support local economies and enterprise development.

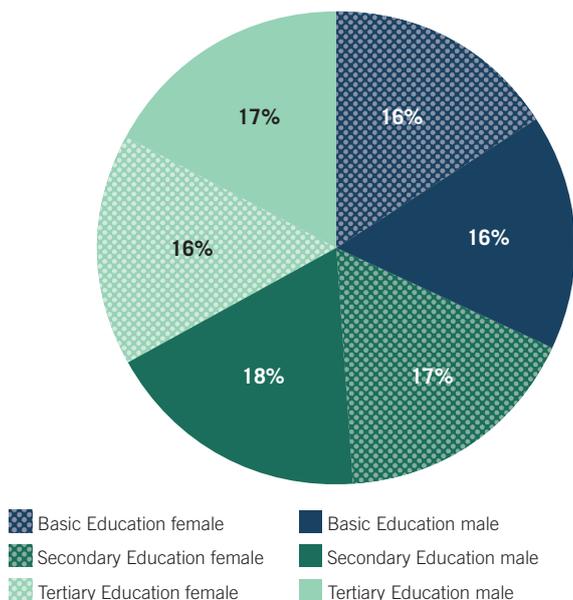
Figure 2. Migrant workers by sub-region



Reason 1: The under-utilization of migrants' skills in countries of destination contributes to brain waste

Skilled and highly-skilled migrants make up the majority of the global migrant population (see figure 3).⁴ However, their skills and qualifications are often under-utilized as they work in jobs for which they are overqualified. This skills mismatch may have several causes.

Figure 3. Foreign-born population by level of educational attainment



Source: OECD DIOC-E Database

Recent migrants may lack crucial labour market information as well as the personal and professional networks or social capital to gain access to suitable employment. Many may have acquired their skills informally, or possess qualifications that are not recognized in countries of destination. Discrimination may also prevent migrant job seekers from accessing decent jobs and limited language skills may impede the full utilization of other skills. According to ILO research, skills recognition processes in destination countries are still at early stages of development or limited to certain occupational groups. Often, if services exist, they are not known to migrants (Branka, 2016). Finally, female migrants, who tend to be equally educated (see figure 3), are more likely to be overqualified for the work they do than their male counterparts (Sparreboom, Tarvid, 2017).

Reason 2: A lack of employment opportunities in countries of origin contribute to brain drain

Many countries, especially small countries in Africa, are experiencing acute shortages of highly-skilled professionals due to a lack of attractive employment opportunities. Even if skilled individuals are able to find employment in their home countries, better pay, working conditions or social security in countries of destination may attract them. This so-called “brain drain” puts a strain on social services such as health and education and reduces the pool of skilled workers across the board.

⁴ Due to a lack of coherence, quality and comparability of national migration databases, obtaining information on the level of education or skills of migrants can be challenging especially in developing countries. To date, the OECD has compiled global data on migrants' education levels in 2001 and 2011.

Reason 3: Weak skills development systems and policies constitute a push factor

Moreover, skills development systems in countries of origin are often underdeveloped, underfunded, supply-driven and irresponsible to labour market needs, or access to training is restricted for certain disadvantaged groups. An additional issue is that life-long learning systems are not sufficiently developed or completely absent. Therefore, migrants – especially highly-skilled migrants, who constitute 27.8% of the global migrant population – may seek education, training and employment elsewhere.

Reason 4: Low-skilled migrants are vulnerable and at risk of exploitation

Due to tighter restrictions on unskilled labour migration in many countries of destination, low-skilled individuals are also more likely to migrate irregularly. As undocumented migrants, they are especially vulnerable to exploitation since they fear job loss, incarceration, and deportation. Therefore, they tend to work in the informal economy, where they lack access to social and legal protection. Moreover, they are likely to work in sectors or occupations that are more dangerous than others, often serving as the labour force that fills the “3-D” (dirty, difficult, and dangerous) jobs.

Reason 5: A lack of systematic information on skills prevents mutual benefits from migration

A critical obstacle to overcoming the above-mentioned challenges is the absence of a systematic approach to data collection and analyses on migration, especially with regards to migrants' skills. In countries of origin, limited information is available on local labour market needs (structural or temporary) in different economic sectors and occupations, and on skills shortages, particularly in the private sector. Therefore additional knowledge should be acquired on the skills available in countries of origin at all levels (low, medium and high skilled) and how to match them to the needs of destination countries so that both countries benefit.

For all these reasons, many countries across the world are seeking policies and strategies to improve the development and utilization of skills and the employment prospects of migrants.

WHAT ARE THE MOST PROMISING POLICY OPTIONS?

Migrants are a heterogeneous population. Besides differing in age, gender, cultural background, education and skill level, the challenges that migrants face vary by migration corridors. Some may be internally displaced or become refugees due to violence, conflict or the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. Many benefit from formal bilateral or multilateral arrangements for migration, while others migrate irregularly. Some are voluntarily or forcibly repatriated to their home countries.

Any intervention aimed at improving the employment outlook for migrants – in both countries of destination and origin – needs to devise appropriate and targeted responses on the basis of migrants' diverse situations and the contextual specifics of different migration corridors.

Moreover, governing labour migration implies the adoption of a broader strategy to strengthen coherence among employment, education and training, and migration policies (Popova, Panzica, 2017).

1. Strengthen skills anticipation systems to formulate migration policies that meet skills demand

Labour market information systems (LMIS) provide governments, employers and workers with information about labour market trends, employment opportunities and skill shortages. Skills identification and anticipation systems embedded in LMIS can inform migration policies about skills demand in countries of destination and of origin so that migration is beneficial for both. LMIS also provide a link between the labour market and education and training institutions, which need to adapt programmes to meet the current and future skills needs of employers. At the local level, employment services may be the primary conduit for labour market intermediation between workers and employers, while the task of collecting more extensive LMI may fall to other institutions such as national statistical offices or sectoral bodies.

Box 1. Building capacity to analyze migration related skills needs in Moldova and Ukraine

In the EU-funded project “Effective Governance of Labour Migration and its Skills Dimensions”, the ILO, in cooperation with the Ukrainian State Statistics Services, conducted a labour force survey that included migration survey modules. An important capacity-building activity involved harmonizing data collection methodologies with ILO and EU standards.

Furthermore, the ILO analyzed vacancies and skills needs in the EU, Moldova and Ukraine. A corresponding report provided an in-depth analysis of the situation and particular challenges of Moldova and Ukraine, such as the frequent over-qualification of Ukrainian migrants in countries of destination, and the comparatively low contributions of the current education system to the labour market prospects of Ukrainians in their country of origin. In order to address the issue of skills matching and contribute to the overall relevance of education and training in Moldova and Ukraine, 15 occupational profiles and standards were developed in selected economic sectors characterized by high emigration.

Finally, the project collaborated with diaspora associations to identify channels for distributing information on job and business opportunities in Moldova and Ukraine. This helped returning migrants to acquire critical information about job opportunities at home, a particular challenge in the EU-Moldova/Ukraine migration corridor.

Broadly, skills anticipation refers to a strategic assessment of future skills needs in the labour market – such as skills for the green transition, economic diversification, and demographic and technological change – using consistent and systematic methods. However, the anticipation of future skills demand is challenging. Many countries lack the institutional capacity to provide coherent data, identify the most appropriate methodologies, and involve all relevant stakeholders. These challenges are especially pronounced in developing countries which tend to have larger informal economies.



A joint ILO/OECD/ETF/Cedefop stakeholder survey (2017), found that there are significant barriers to translating skills needs information into policy and practice. The way skills are measured and defined may not match with variables in the policy-making domain: results may be too or not sufficiently aggregated; quantitative and qualitative components may not balance well; and data, especially in developing countries, are often unreliable and inaccurate, if not outright absent.

Besides providing capacity-building to the main target institutions such as ministries of labour, public employment services, national statistical offices and social partners, successful interventions should include seeking cooperation with other partners such as private recruitment agencies or diaspora networks to ensure relevance, take-up, and the effective dissemination of the generated information (see box 1).

2. Increase migrants' access to education and training

Strong education and training systems support societies in developing relevant and quality skills and improving access to employment and decent work.

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems vary greatly around the world. Generally, TVET provision relates to a wide range of occupational fields. As part of lifelong learning, it can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels, and includes work-based learning and continuous training. In order to enhance migrants' access to education and training, providers can also offer incentives such as quotas or subsidies.

Strengthening education and training service delivery for migrants is an important avenue for their economic integration. In countries of destination – provided migrants have access to education and training – TVET programmes can help migrants establish ties with the private sector and acquire skills that enhance employability. Employers exposed to migrants through TVET programmes may also change their perceptions of migrants' abilities, which helps promote social inclusion. Employers also benefit from a diverse workforce with diverse skills. With the active involvement of social partners and local communities, TVET institutions can operate flexibly, cost-effectively, and respond quickly to the needs of arriving migrants, with language skills being offered as a top priority.

Box 2. Promoting effective labour migration governance through skills training in Ethiopia

Following an exodus of irregular migrants and the forced repatriation of 163,000 Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia in 2014, the ILO initiated a set of interventions with the European Commission and the UK Department for International Development, to promote skills for migrant workers, among other interventions.

Besides supporting the revision of bilateral labour agreements, the ILO engages in capacity-building for key national TVET institutions. Instructors are trained to deliver entrepreneurship, motivational skills and pre-departure trainings, including legal rights, financial literacy, and vocational skills.

In addition to preparing migrant workers for departure, TVET centres also support those who are returning home. 2,700 returnees received psychological counselling, business skills, life skills, financial literacy and vocational training in the areas of construction, manufacturing, tourism, childcare, housekeeping, and farming. In the Oromia, Amhara and Tigray regions, an additional 9,300 returnees received entrepreneurial and motivational training. Finally, around 5,000 women and men received short-term vocational training in agriculture, construction, horticulture, furniture and garment manufacture. More than 70% of trained returnees and aspiring migrant workers re-integrated successfully and started income generating activities as wage employees or self-employed.

In countries of origin, TVET institutions can provide a variety of services in the context of circular or seasonal migration. These may include targeted technical and vocational training in occupations in demand in countries of destination, pre-departure training including intercultural and language training, informing migrants about their rights, and training in basic and core work skills including IT skills, creative thinking and teamwork. Upgrading training to the level demanded in countries of destination can also offer benefits to national skills systems, provided these higher level skills are also relevant for local labour markets. The higher costs often associated with these programmes should be shared between governments, employers and migrants, and not become a “backdoor” to the collection of recruitment fees. Employment services play an important role in providing career guidance and counselling for women and men interested in regular migration channels by referring them to relevant services, such as recognition of prior learning (RPL) or on-the job training.

Finally, it is crucial to keep in mind that some migrants may not prioritize skills training. Those who migrate due to economic hardship may be willing to accept any job that will generate income, rather than investing time in training. To incentivize participation among these vulnerable individuals, TVET providers may tailor the length and content of their programmes to migrants’ specific needs (see box 2) and target higher level skills to support career pathways.

Box 3. Options for recognition of qualifications

Countries (and employers) use different approaches for recognizing qualifications:

Comparison of qualifications. National recognition bodies compare training programme content and/or learning outcomes to national benchmarks and grant full or partial recognition based on this equivalence assessment (practiced in most OECD countries).

Reliance on reputable institutions. Recognition agreements for regulated trades and professions simply rely on the certification of the professional body in the respective partner country (such as ASEAN). Specific well-reputed national or international education and training providers or certification bodies may also be considered trustworthy and have their certificates recognized. Employers might also recognize apprenticeships or other work-based learning schemes from other well-known employers.

Issuance of joint qualifications. Groups of countries develop common qualifications (such as the Caribbean Community, CARICOM), or minimum joint requirements that leave room for national adaptation (Central American Network of Training Institutions) that are either directly recognized or require additional quality assurance rules for training and/or assessment bodies.

Quality assurance. In principle, recognition can be granted if the process of skills acquisition and certificate delivery is transparent and reliable. For example, partnerships between sectoral employer associations in two countries can facilitate recognition. Quality assurance also underpins the above-mentioned options.

3. Increase bilateral or multilateral recognition of qualifications and skills

In order to gain access to employment migrants not only need to possess relevant skills, but also need to be able to signal and validate these skills to potential employers. This means skills need to be transferrable and recognized, i.e. portable. The portability of skills ultimately depends on a trusted source of information. Therefore, recognition tends to be most successful when established through social dialogue involving governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations and education and training institutions. This is true for both formally certified qualifications and informally acquired skills.

4. Recognize formally certified foreign qualifications

Countries have established a wide range of institutions and mechanisms for recognizing formal qualifications either unilaterally, bilaterally, or multilaterally (see box 3). While unilateral recognition by a single destination country is still the most common form,

complex certification procedures and competency tests in countries of destination may impose financial and time-related costs on migrants and tend to create an uneven playing field for migrant workers or refugees. Moreover, information on skills shortages in countries of origin is rarely taken into account and hence risks contributing to brain drain.

Good practices assembled by the OECD include establishing the right to assessment of qualifications, one-stop shops, linking partial recognition to bridging courses, fair treatment, employer engagement, ensuring that costs do not pose a barrier, and expanding bilateral and multilateral agreements (OECD, 2017).

Bilateral or multilateral Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) exist mainly in the area of regulated trades and professions⁵ and are based on formal agreements between countries of origin and destination. Sometimes they are promoted within the framework of trade agreements. MRAs are an important means of formalizing migration between countries of origin and destination, since they build confidence in the quality of other countries' education and training programmes. MRAs have been established mainly between neighbouring countries, and within the OECD. Building capacities to develop recognition systems and negotiate MRAs, supported by moving towards comparable occupational standards (see box 4), is an important area of intervention.

Box 4. Regional Model Competency Standards for domestic workers in ASEAN

Since 2000, the ILO has worked closely with the Korean government and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to support the formulation of Mutual Recognition Arrangements. Through these efforts a number of Regional Model Competency Standards have been developed for occupations relevant to migration.

These have since been utilized as a benchmark for national skills standard development in the region. The common efforts are continuously being scaled up to include a greater number of countries and of high but also low and medium-skilled categories of workers. Moreover, capacity-building activities facilitated by the ILO have led to regional cooperation among ASEAN member states offering technical assistance to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

In past decades, many countries established National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs). Assigning levels to different qualifications, NQFs connect broad levels of outcomes to different qualification documents in an effort to improve communication and understanding about formal qualifications. While national and regional qualification frameworks can provide an additional tool to help compare qualifications – provided that all concerned countries use similar level descriptors – mutual recognition does not require them. Moreover, newly emerging NQFs, often established on top of existing institutional arrangements, need considerable investments to gain the trust of labour market actors. Building on existing structures – starting from a sectoral or occupational level and continuously expanding efforts to define national or even regional competency standards in order to negotiate MRAs – may square better with the limited financial resources available in many developing countries.



5. Recognize informally gained skills

A relatively new area of intervention for national training systems is the recognition of prior learning (RPL). RPL is a process by which regulatory bodies and training institutions assess acquired skills, often gained outside of the classroom, against a given set of standards, competencies or learning outcomes (ILO, 2018). In addition to supporting the portability of skills of migrant workers, RPL systems can promote social inclusion by recognizing work and other learning experiences. They allow for non-traditional pathways to formal employment, which is especially relevant if women or men, either migrants or nationals, acquired their skills through non-formal or informal learning, or if certificates were lost. Moreover, through the identification of potential skill gaps, RPL can offer a pathway into further training and/or apprenticeships.

RPL systems require the development of standards and tools to assess skills, agencies to review documentation of work experience and/or qualifications, and the integration of RPL systems within the policy, legal and regulatory framework of formal education and training certification. Assessors need to be trained and assessment agencies accredited, ideally involving employers and their associations. In the face of what are often comparatively underdeveloped national training systems, quality assurance plays a central role in ensuring that RPL certificates have equal market value.

⁵ Such as accountancy, architecture, engineering, legal services, and medical and health-related services.

Box 5. Formalizing access to employment through RPL for Syrian refugees

In close collaboration with the Jordanian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) and funded by the US Department of State, the ILO is working to facilitate access to the formal labour market for Jordanians and Syrians through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

The RPL scheme includes a four-day theoretical training course provided by a recognized local institution, covering trade-specific content, occupational safety and health and basic labour rights, and a subsequent practical test, which can be repeated in case of failure after an additional day of training. The certificate obtained provides direct access to a formal work permit, which acts as the main incentive to participate in the scheme. To ensure the relevance of the intervention in the context of the Syria-Jordan migration corridor, the ILO and CAQA identified the construction, confectionary and garment sectors as priority areas for intervention. Large numbers of Syrians are already working in these sectors informally. Moreover, firms in these sectors are eligible for inclusion in the EU-Jordan trade agreement.

Granting free-trade access to the EU to firms that employ Syrians as at least 25% of the workforce incentivizes the government to issue work permits for migrants outside of the “kafala system”, in which a Jordanian sponsor agrees to pay the usually high fees for an official work permit. The practice is common in MENA countries and is associated with human rights abuses and bonded labour. Its circumvention can be considered a milestone for migrants in the corridor.

Quantitative evidence on the benefits of RPL is limited as many RPL programmes remain in pilot form and have not been scaled up to provide sufficient data on impact (ILO, 2018). Nevertheless, RPL presents a potentially significant tool for labour market actors, and in particular for migrants (see box 5).

FOSTERING SKILLS PARTNERSHIPS

International cooperation must consolidate national efforts in order for countries to formulate skill-needs oriented migration policies, increase migrant’s access to education and training, and strengthen bilateral or multilateral recognition of skills.

On the global level, sharing and continuously updating lessons learned, success stories and policy advice through tripartite dialogue can contribute to the generation of knowledge, the replication of good practices, the harmonization of international efforts, and the more effective allocation of resources, including through a Global Skills Partnership on Migration.

On a regional level, skills partnerships can help to expand mutual recognition and increase opportunities for regular, skills-led and mutually beneficial migration. Therefore, such partnerships can assist countries in meeting critical skills shortages and fostering broader regional integration and intercultural exchange. Countries

of destination can choose to invest in improved skills development in countries of origin to the benefit of people interested in migration and local economies alike.

Finally, at the country level, skills partnerships provide an important avenue for capacity-building initiatives in the areas of labour market information, skills development, certification and recognition. Moreover, they offer an opportunity to strengthen coherence between national skills, employment, migration, and development strategies. These may include industrial policy for growth and development, qualifying the roles of different actors in coordinating policy, and establishing objectives in terms of access to education and training for disadvantaged groups.

THE ILO'S ROLE

The ILO works with its constituents – governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations – to improve the employability of workers and those seeking work, the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, and the development prospects of economies and societies. All areas of the ILO’s work on labour standards, employment, social protection, and social dialogue are related to the topic of migration, enabling the ILO to address this multifaceted issue from many different technical angles. Currently the ILO focuses on:

- Promoting coherence among employment, education, training and migration policies
- Delivering technical assistance to reform and strengthen national skills policies and improve training systems for the benefit of migrants and non-migrants alike
- Strengthening labour market information systems to assess current skills demand
- Building capacity for the anticipation of future skills demand
- Facilitating skills recognition by developing regional model competency standards and assisting countries in developing bilateral and multilateral skills recognition arrangements
- Strengthening systems for the recognition of prior learning
- Leading the establishment of a facility for a Global Skills Partnership for Migration, intended to service member states in providing fair migration policies and effective skills development policies and programmes

In principle, all international labour standards, unless otherwise stated, are applicable to migrant workers. Many others also make explicit reference to migrant workers.⁶ In addition, the Migration for Employment Convention, 1949 (No. 97) and the Migration for Employment Recommendation, 1949 (No. 86) as well as the supplementary provisions on the Migrant Workers Convention, 1975 (No. 143) and the Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151) provide guidance on the content and reform of national migration policies and the recognition of qualifications. Finally, the “Human Resource Development Recommendation”, 2004 (No. 195) offers guidance on systems of education, training and lifelong learning.

Taken together, these standards and associated field experiences reinforce the need to strengthen efforts to address skills for migration and employment.

⁶ <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/standards/lang--en/index.htm>

KEY ILO RESOURCES

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For more information on links between education and training and productive and decent work, visit the **Global Public-Private Knowledge Sharing Platform on Skills for Employment**, initiated by the ILO and benefiting from the support and collaboration of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank.

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