



International Labour Office

International Migrant Workers in the Mining Sector

by

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This study is part of a larger ILO effort to close knowledge gaps regarding labour issues in economic sectors where migrant workers can be found in considerable numbers, such as agriculture, construction and mining.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report entitled *International migrant workers in the mining sector* seeks to draw attention to the wide range of issues raised by the presence of foreign migrant workers in the mining industry, as well as to the very different contexts in which labour migration to this economic sector takes place. The question of international migrant workers in the mining sector covers a wide variety of patterns of mobility and, as well, raises political, legal, economic and social issues with consequences which have clearly not attracted the attention they merit. The report provides an overview of this theme but also aims to point to certain areas where information is either lacking or very fragmentary and consequently merit close attention and which clearly need further research. In order to do so, the report firstly underlines the main characteristics of the mining sector and its impact on employment. Second, a brief review of the literature on international migration is provided in order to highlight the gender and skills dimensions of migrants in current migratory flows, as well as certain of the main theoretical concepts which are proposed to apprehend these issues. In order to give a very brief overview of the very wide variation of situations pertaining to this subject across the world, this section concludes by presenting examples of academic studies and certain key trends they identify in three regions: Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The third section, which is the core of the report, illustrates the wide range of migration patterns related to the mining industry by exploring 6 national case studies which are Australia, Chile, Zambia, Mali, Papua New-Guinea and New-Caledonia.

Based on interviews with selected employers, government representatives and unions, as well as on the literature review which was conducted, this report reached a series of observations and conclusions, many of which were formulated by those interviewed, including the following:

- There is a very important lack of information concerning the number and working conditions of migrant workers in the mining sector at a country and regional level, and this is especially the case concerning low-skilled migrant workers. When data exists, the information it provides is often very fragmented and incomplete.
- When analysing international labour migration in the mining sector, it is relevant to consider also migration flows that are stimulated indirectly by mining activities because the mining industry is a sector in which direct employment multiplies indirectly the number of jobs created and these are at times and, in certain circumstances, likely to be filled by migrants from neighbouring countries.
- There is a need to distinguish between the migration of low-skilled and skilled labour in the mining sector, as the latter is most often regulated both with regard to legal migratory status and working conditions and the former much less so and in certain cases not at all.

- Among low-skilled migrant workers, there is also a need to distinguish between individual migrants and those who are hired and migrate temporarily as members of crews of workers.
- Migrant labour tends to be most present and involve the highest numbers during the construction phase of a mine's life.
- Temporary foreign labour is, in general, more vulnerable to the risks of employer exploitation than local members of the permanent work force.
- Temporary migrant workers are not always paid at current market rates for the work.
- Temporary skilled migration must not be a path to divert attention from the importance of improving working conditions in order to attract local workers and from attention which must be given to the need for local training.
- Temporary skilled migration must not become a substitute to permanent migration.
- Concerning the situation of low-skilled migrant workers, there is much that the stakeholders concerned could and need to do, for example mining companies should provide fair wages and decent and safe living conditions; should not discourage workers' unions and should ensure that they respect the human rights, particularly the labour rights, of their employees. As opposed to the situation of skilled workers where this area is usually carefully regulated, with regard to low-skilled migrant workers, governments need to ensure that they have regulations in place to protect the rights of migrant labour in their countries and ensure that they enforce these regulations.
- There is need to enhance cross-border cooperation among the States and also among the communities affected by migration.
- There is also need to strengthen the institutional capacities of the services responsible for security, health and environmental control in the artisanal mining areas.
- Issues concerning low-skilled migrant workers in the mining sector are often inextricably linked to issues of social and economic development in the countries of the sub-regions from which they originate. Consequently, they raise the broader question of the viability of current development patterns and strategies to ensure the livelihoods of the people of the countries and regions concerned. For this reasons, it is recommended in the report that the ILO encourage the creation at the level of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) of a sub-regional partnership on issues concerning development and migration, specifically with regard to the mining sector.

- As migrant workers in this sector are particularly vulnerable, specific measures need to be taken such as providing facilities at borders for migrants and victims of trafficking. Special attention needs to be given the situation of youth and women. For example, information drawn from the situations in West Africa and New Caledonia suggests the need to devote an increased budgeted amount to promoting women's rights in government agencies and NGOs with regard to the elimination all forms of discrimination against women among migrant workers in the mining sector. There is also need to conduct further research related to sex migration around mining site.

It is hoped that although the overview provided in this report remains brief and in many ways incomplete, the observations and recommendations provided will serve to underline the urgent importance of devoting much more close attention to the issue of migrant workers in the mining sector.

For more information visit the ILO topical portal on Labour Migration
<http://www.ilo.org/migration>

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