

South to South Migration in Asia: Opportunities, Challenges and Policy Implications  
for the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable  
Development

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**Abstract**

Migration between developing Asian countries is common and contributes substantially to the economic growth. This ‘South to South’ migration also poses particular challenges particularly in regards to the conditions faced by migrant workers. This chapter examines ways to improve migrant workers’ experiences in South destination countries from the safety, security and income perspectives while examining the different priorities of labour-sending versus labour-receiving countries. It also explores the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the context of South to South labour migration in Asia.

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# 1 Introduction

International labour migration presents numerous opportunities and challenges for both sending and receiving countries, migrants, and their families. According to the United Nations (UN), in 2015 there were over 244 million international migrants in the world (United Nations, 2016a) with 64 per cent of this group, totalling 157 million, originating from middle-income countries (United Nations, 2016b). The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates 150.3 million of those migrants are migrant workers (ILO, 2015) and 53 percent live in the global North, or developed regions, such as North America (76 million) and Europe (54 million). Between 1990 and 2013, the number of international migrants worldwide rose by over 50 percent to over 77 million and much of this growth occurred between 2000 and 2010 (United Nations, n.d.). Some 4.6 million migrants were added annually between 2000 and 2010, compared to an average of 2 million per annum during the period 1990-2000 and 3.6 million per annum between 2010-2013 (ibid). Of the 53 million international migrants added in the North between 1990 and 2013, 42 million or 78 percent were born in the South (ibid). In the global South or developing regions, the migrant population growth results mainly from the South. Compared to South-North movement, South-South migration flows continued to grow and exceed South-North migration in total volume. In 2015, 90.2 million international migrants born in developing countries were living in other countries in the global South, while 85.3 million born in the South lived in countries in the Global North (IOM, n.d.). A significant common denominator between these diverse migrant populations is the need to acquire financial resources and the desire to channel portions of that to family members.

Remittances are a vital international labour migration product totalling USD 435 billion in 2014 (World Bank, 2014). Six of the top ten remittance recipient countries are in Asia: India (USD 71 billion), China (USD 64 billion), Philippines (USD 28 billion), Bangladesh (USD 17 billion), Pakistan (USD 15 billion), and Viet Nam (USD 11 billion) (World Bank, 2014). For some countries, remittances constitute a significant proportion of gross domestic product (GDP). For example, Tajikistan (42 percent), Kyrgyz Republic (32 percent), and Nepal (29 percent) are countries where remittances as a proportion of GDP are among the highest in the world (World Bank, 2014). For these countries, international migration is currently necessary for economic sustenance as well as growth.

Despite the benefits remittances yield to the economies of countries of origin, they come at a cost measured in personal safety, security, and welfare of the migrant workers themselves when they are in the countries of destination. Their working conditions are often challenging and frequently unsafe, and migrant workers have little access to social services such as healthcare and other public services including education for their family members. The current weakness in migration governance, labour laws, and social protection mechanism for migrants moving within south-south migration corridors contributes to these challenges.

The formal labour migration process remains time-consuming, expensive and complicated. This causes many migrant workers to choose irregular migration channels over the legal channels, increasing the vulnerability of migrant workers. Migrant workers should be accorded the same protection as native workers, but this does not always happen in practice (Article 6 of ILO Convention 143) (ILO, 1975). However, for many receiving countries, this particular Convention has not catalysed the creation of adequate national policies and practice. The differences in the protection-related labour market regulations remain a challenge for migrants working within the South-South corridor.

In Asia, due to economic and demographic disparities, as well as geographic and cultural proximities, migrants move to the growing economies that are represented by Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs).<sup>2</sup> Among the NICs, India, Malaysia and Thailand also receive large numbers of foreign workers from other NICs as well as from developing countries in Asia. For instance, Malaysia receives large numbers of foreign workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Myanmar and India. Thailand is a destination for neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, as well as Bangladesh and India.

The goal of this chapter is to identify Asia-to-Asia migration policy gaps, especially in relation to the challenges faced by migrant workers, and present suggestions on how the SDG provide guidance to address these issues. The chapter conducts a desk review of various scholars' publications to address the issues of migrant safety, security, and income. The chapter examines discussions surrounding the SDGs and how these relate to the challenges faced by migrant workers.

This chapter discusses the safe working and living conditions faced by migrant workers in developing Asian destination countries. For those migrants with irregular status, the

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<sup>2</sup> China, Indonesia, India, Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand

human security issues are even more serious. Migrant workers frequently lack access to social security, and there are few prospects for job training or skills development, along with little overall job security. Migrant workers seek employment abroad in order to earn a better income since, in many cases; migrant workers receive higher wages than what they would receive in their home countries. Migrant workers, however, often face problems such as delayed payment, debt bondage, and confiscation of personal documentation as a result of unethical recruitment and employment practices.

In order to maximize the gains from migration, it is essential to improve the well-being of migrant workers in countries of destination. Ensuring the welfare of migrant workers leads to work efficiency and greater production whereas human and labour rights violations negatively affect the workers and their families as well as the reputations of labour-receiving countries. On the one hand, countries of origin have a better understanding of migration as part of the global development agenda than countries of destination. Countries of origin are developing sustainable ways to utilize migration (and the remittances that result from this migrations) for their own national development goal, and they have a growing understanding regarding the link between migration and development. However, for many countries of destination, incorporating migration within the global development agenda does not align with their national priorities when migrant workers are only considered a temporary solution to labour shortages in order to accomplish time-bound tasks. In recognition of this discrepancy, this chapter highlights the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup> message about the importance of recognizing the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development, not only in the countries of origin but also in destination countries. It further discusses the need to capture migration in a regional economic development context rather than being defined as South-South migration and achieving this will require an enhanced level of cooperation between labour sending and receiving countries.

If the policies of labour-sending and receiving countries converge and are reflective of the SDG's and relevant Conventions, migrants and mobile populations will benefit from an improved standard of physical, mental and social wellbeing, which enables them to more substantively contribute towards the social and economic development of their home communities and host societies (IOM, 2013c). As stated by the World Health

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<sup>3</sup> World leaders adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit (United Nations, 2015a)

Organization (WHO), “addressing the health needs of migrants can improve their health status, avoids stigma and long-term health and social costs, protects global public health, facilitates integration, and contributes to social and economic development” (WHO, 2010). Policies tend to emphasize the contribution of migrants through remittance flows rather than focusing efforts on ensuring the well-being of migrants during the employment. Addressing both elements is critical to maximizing the effectiveness of migrants’ performance and the development outcomes of labour migration.

## **2 Migration Experiences in the context of Safety, Security, and Income in Countries of Destination**

South-South migrant workers in Asia are primarily engaged in low-skilled work such as construction, heavy industry, plantations, agriculture, fishing, food processing, forestry, and domestic services. Such occupations are so called “3D” jobs— dirty, dangerous and/or difficult (Koser, 2010). Due to the nature of work, these jobs are not popular among nationals. They tend to pay relatively low wages with poor employment conditions and have no or little opportunity for skills development or upward mobility.

Even when working in environments with a higher propensity for exploitation, some migrant workers have positive experiences while others are markedly different. The following section provides a desk review of various scholars’ publications about migrants’ experiences, particularly in relation to migrant safety, security, and income, and to highlight policies which improve the conditions of migrant labour.

### ***2.1 Safety of Migrant Workers***

What kind of safety concerns do migrant workers face in the South destination countries and what impact does migration have on families left behind? There are two primary settings where migrants may face safety concerns: the workplace and living place.

For the workplace, every country has occupational health and safety (OSH) standards. South-South migrant workers are frequently based where OSH standards are poor or not applied to them. Safety levels can significantly differ according to the categories of migrant workers’ occupations.

Safety concerns and exposure greatly depend on the work settings and type. For example, construction and farm workers may work long hours in the heat and dust in contrast to domestic workers. Domestic workers normally work in the house, and they often end up working longer hours with minimal rest due to the fact that they live on-site with their bosses. Workers in the agricultural sector, animal husbandry, and forestry work are exposed to animals, insecticides, harmful chemical compounds, and dust and heat exposure. Manufacturing and construction workers such as bricklayers, blacksmiths, drivers, and plumbers, the risks are associated with the use of construction tools, heavy lifting, handling hazardous chemicals, electrical hazards, and fire hazards. Service sector workers tend to face long working hours using sharp objects with minimal rest.

Migrants often have poor living conditions. Low minimum wages, long working hours and family obligations force workers to minimize their daily expenditures impacting on their quality of life. IOM's *Fishermen's report*, conducted in 2007, interviewed migrant fishermen and revealed the living conditions of fishermen:

“Living quarters on fishing boats are extremely cramped, divided into squares for the crew, providing enough room to sleep but little space for much else. No toilets exist on small- or medium-sized fishing boats, and the need to conserve fresh water and food on long trips means both hygiene and nutrition are poor” (IOM, 2011).

In addition to jobs where living quarters are provided, or lack of other alternatives such as those working in the fishing industry, workers are constrained by their wage levels and have to share rented rooms with several other workers. The compounds are often found in close distance to the industrial parks where the infrastructure is undeveloped, lack adequate security during the evening, and rooms are often unhygienic and lack the design features to prevent flooding during the rainy season (ILO, 2012). Moreover, migrant workers have to pay above-average prices for electricity and water, meaning they have less money to spend on other necessities such as health services. These factors leave migrant workers weak, vulnerable to disease, and highly stressed (ibid).

## **2.2 Security**

Safety and security are inter-connected. Security is a broad concept, and it has various dimensions. There are two ways of looking at security in countries of destination: “migration as a security risk” and “security of migrants.” The securitization of migration was heightened after the 9/11 attacks and subsequent terrorist attacks. Many countries have tightened immigration controls, impacting of the opportunities for migrants seeking employment opportunities abroad (Pinyol-Jiménez, 2012). The security issue can be broken into three categories: human security, social security, and job security.

### **2.2.1 Human security**

Human security describes the well-being of human beings. In the UN General Assembly Resolution "Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome" on 10 September 2012, human security refers to:

“The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular, vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential” (United Nations, 2012a).

South-South migration brings specific human security concerns, and two groups which require specific attention are female domestic workers and irregular migrants.

Many women are engaged as domestic workers in developing countries within the South. There are 83,066 migrant domestic workers from Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and Myanmar registered with Thai authorities (ILO, 2013b; Huguet, 2014). Nepalese women travel to Gulf Cooperation Councils (GCC) countries as domestic workers (Kim, 2015). For example, in 2010 there were 310,402 female domestic workers in Kuwait (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012). Domestic work is considered an informal sector, where workers often work in a house isolated from other. The experiences of female domestic workers, however, are seldom brought into the broader discussions surrounding human security. Wickramasekara describes the human security issues of women domestic workers as:

Confinement to private homes, poor language skills, insufficient knowledge about their rights, and rules under some migration programs that allow

employers to confiscate passports or otherwise control the migrants' ability to stay in the country—all have led to sexual harassment and abuse. (Wickramasekara, 2002).

Many scholars raise similar concerns. For example, Castles and Miller in their *Age of Migration* quote Gumburd, saying that “women domestic workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse, and it is difficult to the authorities of their countries of origin to provide protection” (Gumburd, 2005; Castles & Miller, 2009).

Ratha and Shaw point out that women in South-South migration generally lack access to legal migration channels leading to human security vulnerabilities. Women have unequal access to formal migration channels—because they have less access to information, less education, and because there are fewer established migration routes and networks to serve them resulting in a high vulnerability to risk including trafficking. (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). Additionally, female domestic workers are charged high fees by recruitment agencies and often enter into a workplace without prior knowledge of working terms and conditions. The majority of them also have language barriers further isolating them from the society in which they work (ILO, 2013b; Huguët, 2014).

Human security concerns are linked to irregular migration. According to the ILO's report, irregular migration is believed to be particularly high in India and Pakistan, largely due to cross-border movements from Bangladesh into India and from Afghanistan into Pakistan (Wickramasekara, 2011). In addition, there is a high rate of trafficking of women and children across the border from Bangladesh and Nepal into India (ibid).

As a consequence of utilizing irregular routes, migrant workers are exposed to increased human security concerns while, at the same time, they are less likely to access formal complaint channels. Human trafficking and smuggling are considered a significant problem when it comes to ensuring human security in this region. Often women and young girls are promised lucrative jobs and better lives, only to find themselves becoming victims of trafficking and smuggling at a later stage of the migration process. For example, in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), all countries have cases of trafficking, but the largest trends can be seen from Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Myanmar to Thailand and from Viet Nam to Cambodia (Soda, 2009; ADB and IOM, 2013).



Lastly, human security concerns arise from discrimination or xenophobia toward migrant workers. Many workers suffer from discrimination based on skin colour, cultural differences, and ethnic or national origin, and this manifests itself in the forms of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, exclusion, violation of rights and ethnic and religious conflicts, both in the workplace and within society at large (ILO, 2007b). Violence toward migrant workers is unacceptably common. In Pakistan, official statistics show numbers of tribal and indigenous people migrating from the tribal areas in the Gulf countries (mainly construction sector) are largely undocumented migrant workers compared to other groups, and this is attributed to their lack of access to official channels of migration and official travel documents (ILO, 2007a).

### **2.2.2 Social Security**

Social security provides an opportunity for a migrant to access social safety nets. It is a public policy measure aimed to protect members of society from economic and social distress (ILO, 2010). Instead of focusing on the traditional notion of national security, social security focuses on the individual; and holds a person-centric approach that ensures human security. The ILO has a dedicated Convention on social security called C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and it states that “social security is the protection that society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner” (ILO, 2003). The Convention has nine components: medical care, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, employment injury benefit, family benefit, maternity benefit, invalidity benefit, survivor’s benefit, and standards to be complied with by periodical payments (ILO, 1952).

Migrant workers undertaking South-South migration in Asia often lack access to social security. There are no standardized social security schemes in many countries of destination for migrant workers; it varies from country to country as well as employer to employer. Prohibitions on the entry of family members and limitations on the reproductive health of migrant workers, for example, are often specified in Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between countries of origin and destination. Malaysia is a good example where many migrant workers in plantation industries are insured for occupational health and injuries. However, migrant workers’ families do not

receive any health insurance or access to other critical services such as education as many family members are undocumented.

Studies, including those from Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)'s work in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore, have investigated migrant workers' access to social security. They note that migrant workers may either directly or indirectly be denied access to social protection by their home state or destination country, or they may be employed in informal or other sectors of the economy which make them ineligible for full social protection. In addition, there is often a large gap between migrants having rights to social protection in theory and gaining access to those rights and benefits in practice (MFA and FES, 2011).

According to an ADB and IOM joint publication, many migrant workers from Cambodia to Thailand complained about limited access to health services, which is especially worrying given the long working hours in unhygienic environments, and extreme temperatures faced (ADB and IOM, 2013). The complaints contradict the law which states that migrants registering for a work permit are required to pass a health screening for seven diseases / health conditions (Tuberculosis, malaria, elephantiasis/filariasis, syphilis, leprosy, drug addiction / alcoholism, and intestinal worms), and once his/her health status is approved, he/she receives a health insurance card that links his/her health insurance benefits to the hospital where he/she underwent the health screening and registered (Press, 2014).

There are three major reasons why is it difficult for migrants and their families to access health services despite Thailand's universal health care for migrant workers. Firstly, migrant workers cannot afford to pay for health services. The cost of modern health systems in Asia is often very high and, therefore, unaffordable for many migrants (United Nations, 2012b). For example, the health exam, which migrants must undergo annually, costs Thai Baht (THB) 600<sup>4</sup>, and migrants are also required to pay an annual fee of THB 2,200<sup>5</sup> (Press, 2014). The fee is often paid in advance by the employer and then deducted from the migrant's wages. For some migrants, this amount might be a burden, especially if employers refuse or delay payment. Secondly, a fear of deportation deters migrants with irregular status from accessing health services. Other times

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<sup>4</sup> Equivalent to USD 16.60

<sup>5</sup> Equivalent to USD 60.86

documentation to prove regular status has been seized by employers resulting in the same fear (ADB and IOM, 2013). Lastly, migrant workers may be hesitant to go to clinics or hospital as they cannot speak the language of the destination country. An IOM study assessing the health vulnerability of migrants in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan identified the high costs of health care and language barriers as key reasons why migrants fail to seek appropriate health care while abroad (IOM, 2015). 49 percent of Bangladeshi and 32 percent of Pakistani migrant workers found healthcare unaffordable in destination countries, and consequently many chose to abstain from both treatment and health insurance (ibid).

While migrant workers are often not entitled to social benefits in countries of destination, they also risk losing social benefits from their countries of origin as many do not pay taxes while working abroad. The ILO describes the conditions of migrant workers with regards to social security as follows:

They may contribute to social security schemes, either in their home countries or countries of destination, but may not receive any corresponding benefit. They may face constraints in the portability of these rights. Schemes may have long residency requirements, making it difficult for temporary migrants to claim their benefits, effectively amounting to exclusion from any form of social protection when engaged in temporary or informal work (ILO, 1952).

This is an issue which needs to be raised by countries of origin. Currently, there are insufficient policies in countries of origin to protect social benefits of migrant workers and their families (at home or abroad).

### **2.2.3 Job security**

Many migrant workers in Asia engaged in South-South migration do not have job security. Migrant workers can easily be fired and have little opportunity to seek alternative employment after existing contracts end.

There are two ways to determine length and security of employment. One is through a government to government or multilateral agreement such as MOU, and another is through employment contracts. An MOU is often used to manage labour migration between countries and typically describes the period of contracts and limitations of contracts extension (Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, 2015).

Many countries of destination under South-South migration do not plan to bring foreign workers for the long term, and they try to reduce dependence toward foreign labours. In the absence of long-term commitments, another way to determine the length and security of employment is through employment contracts. Most employment contracts are short-term (six months to one year) and do not allow changes of employers. This means that migrant workers typically have to stay with the same employer until the contract ends or until they are eligible for a new contract with the same employer or a separate employer. In these conditions, the prospect of migrant workers improving their skills and developing their human resources in countries of destination is very limited.

### ***2.3 Income***

The income difference in countries under South-South migration is relatively small when compared to South-North migration. It is the availability of employment rather than significantly higher wages in destination countries (NICs) which is the key pull factor. A study conducted by Pearson, Punpuing, Jampaklay, Kittisuksathit & Prohmmo (2006) on the realities of young migrant workers in Thailand, 89 percent of domestic workers and 38 percent of agricultural workers are paid THB 3,000<sup>6</sup> or less per month, and some 41 percent of domestic workers receive THB 1,000<sup>7</sup> or less per month which is less than domestic workers with similar employment and below the Official Poverty Line of Thailand (Development Evaluation and Communication Office, 2004).

There are three significant problems that migrant workers face in terms of income within the South-South migration context: delays or failure in payment; high migration debt to income ratios; and the high costs of remittance.

Many migrant workers often face delays in payment (ILO, 2014) and many contracts do not mention when the payment will be made, particularly in the informal sector. Most domestic workers in Thailand, for example, do not even have contracts. Even if they do have contracts, payment terms are often not detailed. It has been reported that Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand often have to accept delayed payment or underpayment of wages (ADB and IOM, 2013). It is also difficult to seek legal recourse as many of the workers' travel documents are withheld (ibid). Without travel documents,

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<sup>6</sup> Equivalent to USD 75

<sup>7</sup> Equivalent to USD 25

the migrant workers are unable to prove their legal status and thus are not eligible for legal support. There are also cases of non-payment. A one-year research study on the level of labour exploitation occurring in four sectors in Thailand: agriculture, domestic work, fishing (fishing boats and fish processing) and manufacturing (textiles), presented the testimonial of a 17-year-old Cambodian female migrant domestic worker who said:

*“I worked for two years but never received any payment. I had to work all day. I couldn’t go to bed until 2 am, but would then have to get up again at 5 am. I didn’t have enough sleep. The employer was evil-minded, not only did he not pay me any money, but he also slapped, hit and pinched me. His wife laughed while he slapped me. She never tried to help. Their three children also hurt me; they were always telling lies to their parents and getting me into trouble (Pearson & Punpuing, 2006)”*.

It was also reported in the study that migrant workers are often financially sanctioned for ‘mistakes’ such as taking a sick day off, damaging stock or equipment, or for being tardy. Nearly 50 percent of all workers in the fishing sector received late payment, and 40 percent of them had pay subtracted for mistakes. In manufacturing, these percentages were 25 and 15 percent, respectively. Interviews with the workers revealed that these deductions are unsubstantiated. 18-year-old Karen male manufacturing worker reported being charged THB 180<sup>8</sup> for each trouser damaged, whereas some of the trousers were so cheap that they only sold for THB 50<sup>9</sup>, meaning that they had to pay almost 4 times the price of a product for their mistake (Pearson & Punpuing, 2006).

Secondly, many migrant workers are in debt due to high migration costs. Often international labour migrants have to work several months after arrival just to pay off the debts incurred by the migration process (Hugo, 2009). They are charged with high fees by recruitment agencies and often enter into a workplace without prior knowledge of working terms and conditions and with significant language barriers (ILO, 2013b; Huguet, 2014).

Some countries opt not to use private recruitment agencies as a way to reduce the cost of South-South migration. For example, prior to the signing of an MOU between

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<sup>8</sup> Equivalent to USD 4.50

<sup>9</sup> Equivalent to USD1.25

Bangladesh and Malaysia, the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers was an expensive procedure. Now the hiring process is based on government-to-government arrangements designed to improve recruitment in comparison to those operated by private agencies and middlemen. The MOU thus formalised the already existing strong bond between Bangladesh and Malaysia (Bhattacharjee, 2013).

Thirdly, net income may be reduced significantly by high remittance fees. An important contributing factor to high remittance prices is a lack of transparency in the market (Schmitz & Endo, 2011). It is difficult to compare prices because there are several variables related to financial transfers (ibid). The cost of a remittance transaction typically consists of a fee charged by the service provider and a currency-conversion fee for delivery of remittances in local currency to beneficiaries in another country. Other factors include exclusivity agreements that limit competition and limitations on access to payment systems that allow the service providers to dictate the transaction fees (ibid).

#### ***2.4 Policies addressing migrant workers under South-South migration in Asia***

Unethical and corrupt recruitment practices place many workers in insecure situations (IOM, 2014a). Numerous shortcomings and gaps in the existing international legal framework have led to a lack of protection for migrant workers, especially in the informal sector where workers often face greater disadvantages and discrimination and are usually excluded from social security benefits and legal recourse (ILO, 2013c). Unregulated labour markets lacking formal human rights and employment protections in practice if not also in policy in countries of destination have made it easier for employers to exploit migrant workers (Cholewinski, 2005). Challenges such as the incompatibility of legislation; the lack of national labour administrations' financial resources to develop the protection instruments/social security schemes; and the lack of willingness on the part of some destination countries to ensure the protection of labour rights (ILO, 2006). Furthermore, unethical and corrupt recruitment practices have exacerbated violations of labour and human rights, increased debt bondage, and labour trafficking, and decreased the earnings of labour migrants (IOM, 2014b). When migrants leave their home countries in debt, the consequences are that they are forced to take jobs they do not want and are often subject to violations of their labour and human rights (ibid). These factors have made it difficult for migrant workers to enjoy protection from unsafe work environments, job insecurity, and unfair payment.

In Thailand, Malaysia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam and Cambodia, Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) and drop-in centres have been established with the support of trade unions and civil society organizations in the framework of ILO technical cooperation (ILO, 2013a). The purpose of the centres is to provide information, counselling and legal assistance to visitors; and to conduct outreach to migrant workers in their communities, churches, dormitories, and workplaces. The centres assist female and male migrants in resolving disputes with employers and lodging complaints with the authorities. They also train migrant community leaders to provide paralegal assistance to migrants. Migrants are also empowered as members of associations, networks and trade unions (ibid). In Thailand, IOM has developed policy recommendations for relevant ministries and has produced an "Employer's Package," which contains a handbook and audio-visual resources to educate employers and enable fair and better employment practices, including pregnancy-related rights (IOM, 2009). The package provides legal guidance to employers who hire migrant workers in order to enhance their awareness of migrant rights in the workplace (ibid), and there is a special focus on women workers' rights and their health and safety. Regarding maternity rights, a pregnant worker should not be asked to work between 10 pm and 6 am or to work overtime or on holiday. Women workers are entitled to up to 90 days of maternity leave for each pregnancy, and the package notes that employers are not allowed to terminate a woman's employment based on her pregnancy. Furthermore, the package highlights how migrant workers contribute significantly to the Thai economy and, therefore, deserve equal opportunities and treatment (ibid).

In terms of cooperation between countries of origin and destination, there have been efforts to standardize contracts in order to reflect international standards. For instance, an MOU between Malaysia and Indonesia has a provision requiring employers to sign contracts that specify the rights and obligations of both parties (Hugo, 2009). The MOU also prohibits the withholding of workers' wages. Some agreements also specify salaries; for example, in Malaysia, the salary of domestic workers should be between Malaysia Ringgit (RM) 400-500<sup>10</sup> (Hugo, 2009). Several countries in the region also have policies to allow migrant workers to open up bank accounts. A bank account is opened in the name of domestic workers by employers into which their full salary is to be deposited, and employment agencies are banned from taking a share (Hugo, 2009).

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<sup>10</sup> Equivalent to USD 96.81- USD 121.02

Both sending and receiving countries need to develop several policies to ensure that the sending countries' deployment procedures and receiving countries labour protection laws do not fall short in protecting migrant workers. In recognition of the valuable and contributory role migrants have, policy development and integration have been emphasized in Sustainable Development Goals; for example, Goal 8: promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all, and Goal 10: reduce inequality within and among countries which will be further discussed in the following section (United Nations, 2015a).



### **3 Migration and Development: the incorporation of migration agenda within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a framework for development that ended in 2015, mainly focused on national agendas of development with migration mentioned as an important source of development financing. The framework focused much less on the issues of safety, security, and income of migrants, especially in the South-South migration context.

Lately, however, global communities began to look at linkages between migration and development through the SDG discussions, with an understanding of the important contribution remittances have in the sustainable development of countries of origin. The Rio+20 outcomes initiated an inclusive inter-governmental process to develop SDGs. The final document of the Rio+20 Conference on SDGs, “The Future We Want,” focused on the integration of population trends and projections, including migration, in national, rural and urban development strategies and policies.

As the MDGs formally expired at the end of 2015, the United Nations has established global support for a new international development agenda called “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (IOM, 2013b). Guided by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration and Development, Mr. Peter Sutherland, this process has captured not only the contributions of migration through remittances to the economic development of countries of origin but also the need to improve the wellbeing of migrants at their destination.

Making migration part of the world’s development strategy will have a meaningful impact on the lives of migrants, affording them greater access to rights and the fruits of their labour...it could change public perception of migrants so that they are viewed as a blessing rather than a scourge (IOM, 2013a).

Migration has long been inadequately reflected in national and local development frameworks and broader sectoral policies (IOM, 2013a). Philip Martin, a well-known scholar on migration, says in his chapter on IOM’s post-2015 Migration and the United Nations Post-2015 Global Development Framework that migration was not included in

the MDGs as MDGs are an end rather than a means (Martin, 2013). This highlights the lack of any target setting on migration and development in the MDGs despite the fact that migrants faced, and are still facing, high costs and risks (Lönnback, 2014). Therefore, it has been seen as essential for the new agenda to set clear targets and mobilize global action to improve the quality of the migration process (ibid). IOM has expressed clear views on the benefits of the integration of international migration into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (IOM, n.d.), pointing to three key reasons: migrants are agents of development and they deserve to be considered if future development agenda are to be truly inclusive; migration produces tangible development outcomes at household and national level; in unregulated environments, migrants productivity is too often wasted.

At the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Commission, international agencies established the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators, an open working group on sustainable development to developing an indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals post-2015 and examine the ways in which international migration can be linked with the SDGs. Out of 19 focus areas, international migration has been linked to five specific SDG priority targets. The below table (Table 7) lists six proposed indicators of achievements that UN agencies and IOM have linked with the five SDG targets:

**TABLE 1 SDG TARGETS AND PROPOSED MIGRATION-RELATED INDICATORS**

Priority SDG target	Proposed migration-related indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.2: <i>Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</i></li> </ul>	Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 persons (5.2 and 16.2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.8: <i>protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious situations</i></li> </ul>	Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries and time lost due to occupational injuries, by sex (indicator 8.8.2), <i>disaggregated reporting by migratory status (citizenship status or nativity status)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10.7: <i>facilitate orderly, safe, regular</i></li> </ul>	International Migration Policy Index

<i>and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies</i>	(10.7 – priority 1) Recruitment cost born by employee as a percentage of yearly income earned in country of destination (10.7 - priority 2)
• 10.c: <i>by 2030, reduce to less than 3% the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5%</i>	Remittance costs as a percentage of the amount remitted (10.c)
• 16.2: <i>End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children</i>	Percentage of refugees and IDPs who have found a durable solution (16.1)

Source: (Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators, 2015)

These above targets and indicators were identified because there is growing evidence showing the significant impact a multitude of different issues has on the well-being, dignity, and development of migrants and the societies in which they live and come from. All parties engaged in the SDG process recognized that there must be clear measurements in order to have progress. A wide variety of data sources is used including information from criminal justice systems, various annual reports, databases, migration policy indexes, remittances costs identified through sophisticated formulas, and other means. This quantitative process will result in a more transparent way to measure achievement toward these collectively created goals.

## 4 Summary of issues

South-South migration continues to be a cornerstone for economic growth in new NICs in Asia. NICs are bringing foreign direct investment (FDI) to expand their infrastructure, which requires low-skilled workers on a large-scale. Meanwhile, these countries are concurrently trying to expand primary sectors such as the agriculture or fishing sectors. However, more working-age people in NICs tend to choose white collar jobs where they can use their knowledge obtained from higher education to earn higher salaries. This leads to a lack of blue-collar workers in sectors such as agriculture. However, there are more windows of opportunities for women in these countries to gain

employment in big companies due to increasing numbers of families in NICs hire domestic workers from abroad.

Despite the evidence of problems in countries of destination, countries of origin continue to promote their nationals to travel abroad for employment. For a number of countries, remittances often represent a significant share of GDP. Countries of origin set up Migrant Resource Centres to help prepare their citizens for working and living abroad through the provision of information and services for migrants on their rights, legal procedures, risks and documentation required. Many countries of origin in Asia have mandatory pre-departure orientation seminars to provide information to help migrants transition into the new communities and for them to be aware of their rights. Moreover, it is important to broaden the discussion to the integration of migration with development in countries of origin. More nations are trying to have cohesive migration strategies that are embedded in their development goals. Bangladesh incorporated migration into their national development goal. The Philippines lead on the promotion to promote investment with remittances. Nepal, Myanmar, and Cambodia set up migration policies in place to encourage their nationals to go abroad in a safe and orderly manner. Pakistan provides incentives for migrant workers to remit money through their domestic banks.

However, there is not currently enough incentive for countries of destination to systematically incorporate migration into their development planning. Destination countries under South-South migration have maintained a strict stance in keeping their migration policies temporary and primarily without consideration for the permanent (or long-term, temporary) stay of migrants.

SDG discussions have promoted the idea of decent work through improved working and living conditions of migrant workers. Currently, the migrants' conditions remain largely in the hands of the governments of countries of destination. Since labour migration is considered a temporary rather than a developmental the issue is not prioritized in the national development plans of labour-receiving countries which in turns does not promote a cooperative approach to enhance labour migration in the Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, it is unlikely that countries of destination will significantly change their policies to improve migrant workers conditions in their countries since they prioritize the development of local labour markets and labour market participation of nationals.

In light of the above, in order to move forward and improve migrant workers' experiences, both countries of origin and destination need to place migration in the context of SDGs. Countries of origin have a better understanding of migration as part of the global development agenda than countries of destination. Instead of merely maintaining a dependency on migration and remittances, countries of origin are finding a sustainable way to utilize migration for national development. In addition to income, countries of origin gain knowledge and experiences that migrants obtained from countries of destination. Countries of origin, however, may suffer from brain drain; the social costs of migration such as children are raised in the absence of parents, and negative experiences of migration such as injury, death, and exploitation of migrant workers.

For many countries of destination, migration is not part of the development agenda. Migrant workers are considered a temporary solution to labour shortages, and they may further be reduced due to technology improvements or population policies, though, in order to sustain their economic growth in the future, many destination countries will remain reliant on migrant workers. However, SDGs point strongly to the importance of recognizing the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development, not only in the countries of origin but also in destination countries (United Nations, 2015c) and efforts have been made to recognize migrant workers' socio-economic contribution toward countries of destination (ibid). Moreover, some countries of destination have begun to utilize trained migrant workers when they invest abroad. For instance, Korea's Employment Permit System has a 'happy return scheme' that rehires migrant workers who worked in Korea to then work in their countries of origin. In this way, skills and knowledge are transferred to countries of origin, and foreign investment then contributes to sustainable economic development in countries of origin. Countries of destination also benefit from having a workforce familiar with their system of operation.

There is still need to capture migration in a regional economic development context rather than South-South migration. South destination countries in the Asian region have achieved middle-income country status and assert their identity as such, not as the developing South. The concept of South-South migration emerged as a way to promote South-South cooperation for sustainable development. But it is important to ask whether the concept applies to the labour migration systems that have emerged in the Asian

region and, if yes, how long will the description be valid. It may be more fruitful to think of international migration in the Asian region as contributing to regional growth. Asia is becoming more connected with increased goods and trade crossing multiple borders, and an increase in people's mobility in the region. In the long run, people will go where there are opportunities, easier access to social security, a greater standard of safety, and the possibility of a higher income.

The regional formations within Asia-to-Asia migration are changing. In 2007, ASEAN signed a declaration to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers. The ASEAN Economic Community is moving to promote the mobility of eight professions of highly skilled within ASEAN namely doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, architects, accountants, surveyors, and tourism professionals (The Government Public Relations Department, 2013). In 2014, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) announced their commitment to promoting safe migration from the SAARC region to outside of the region (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, 2014). Currently, there are discussions to establish a declaration similar to Declaration of Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers of ASEAN. Increasingly government officials are becoming more familiar with international standards that should be applied to migrant workers. Increasing the voice of migrants and civil society organizations that play an important role to promote coordination between citizens and States also adds incentives for governments to improve their policies regarding migrant workers' environments.

As previously highlighted, in order to improve migrant workers' experiences, there needs to be greater cooperation between countries of origin and destination. Currently, there is a lack of global governance on international migration, where the numerous shortcomings and gaps in the existing international legal framework result in a lack of protection for migrant workers. The reality of international migration is that countries of destination are in a stronger position than countries of origin, and the two do not share the same agenda. Countries of destination have options to choose from in terms of sources of migrant labour, and unregulated labour markets in countries of destination have made it easier for employers to exploit migrant workers. Countries of origin are in weaker bargaining positions to ensure the rights of their nationals during their employment abroad.

Therefore, there is a need to increase the bargaining power of countries of origin. How? Countries of origin can unite and set a standard when sending their nationals abroad. However, in order to do that, they should not compete with each other but prioritize cooperation to improve their workers experience in countries of destination. They can standardize salaries, working conditions, and social benefits in countries of destination but this would require a level of collective bargaining and foreign policy alignment currently not in place.

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