Labour migration statistics

What is at stake?

One of the most important resources of a country is its labour force. With populations growing and labour participation rates shrinking in richer countries of the world and demand for labour from globalized labour markets increasing, the influence of labour migration on the size and composition of a country's work force is becoming increasingly and undeniably palpable. A good understanding of the labour force (skills, occupations, working conditions, etc.) is critical for developing effective labour market policies, but also to advance inclusive and equitable economic, social and migration policies. Such policies are complex and require reliable quantitative and qualitative data. Furthermore, labour migration statistics are needed, not only for informing policy debates at the national, regional and international levels, but also for formulating, implementing and evaluating labour migration policies which address the real effects of migration on labour markets and national development.

However, comprehensive and comparable official national statistics, as well as reliable estimates at the regional and global levels of the economically active migrant population, are still largely lacking, and short-term migration (i.e. migrating for less than 12 months) remains difficult to capture with existing means. Access to essential age and sex-disaggregated data, data on labour market needs, occupations and skills, working conditions and wages, and the social protection of migrants remain very fragmented and unreliable at national, regional and international levels. Measuring the real situation of labour migrants and properly examining the effectiveness of policies requires more and better quality quantitative information.

> ### ILO's support to its constituents
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> The ILO supports the collection, compilation and sharing of statistics on the topic of labour migration, and can provide tailored technical assistance to National Statistical Offices to develop or expand labour force surveys and other means of collecting sound labour migration statistics based on international standards and common methodologies. The ILO works closely with all its national partners to encourage the alignment of their work with existing ILO tools and methodologies.

Towards better labour migration statistics: What do we need?

- International standards and definitions, and common methodologies and approaches on labour migration statistics need to be developed in coordination with national and supra-national statistics-collecting and standard-setting bodies, such as the International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

- Improved capacity of national statistical offices to collect and analyse labour migration statistics and apply them to labour migration policy.
  - Improved capacity at the national level to perform Labour Force Surveys (e.g. through sampling and questionnaire design or strengthening information and communications technology resources available at local and national levels), especially in countries where no LFS exists yet.
  - Improved quality of data from multiple national data sources in order to produce more reliable global and regional estimates of labour migration.
- Better coordination between users and producers of labour migration information, involving social partners when determining national and international data needs.
- Mainstreaming labour migration issues in Labour Force Surveys and national censuses.

Fitting labour migration statistics into a fair migration agenda

Improving the information and knowledge base on global trends in labour migration is a key issue for the ILO, and forms an integral part of the ILO's commitment to the "protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own" (ILO Constitution, 1919, Preamble, Recital 2). The ILO's work on labour migration statistics is also in line with the ILO Director-General's call for a Fair Migration Agenda (2014). In order to encourage fair, evidence-based policies that promote the rights of migrants, as well as equality of treatment, improved recruitment practices, stronger linkages between employment and migration policies, and enhanced participation of ILO constituents in migration governance and reinforced multilateral partnerships, it is of vital importance to not get led by quick readings of available evidence or popular opinion, but to draw on a strong empirical knowledge base.

The **ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (2006**) reaffirms that: "Knowledge and information are critical to formulate, implement and evaluate labour migration policy and practice and therefore its collection and application should be given priority" (Principle III: Global knowledge base).

The **UN High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (2013)** called for more data on international migration. For this, labour migration data will be of key importance. Better information and data are needed on new and emerging trends in order to illustrate how ILO rights-based migration policies can ensure migration becomes an enabler for development.

What type of data is needed?

- ✓ Statistical information on labour migrants' demographic and socio-economic characteristics over time
- ✓ Share of migrants in the total work force
- ✓ Occupations and skills
- ✓ Economic sectors
- ✓ Status in employment
- ✓ Working conditions (working hours, wages, rest periods and other contractual conditions, etc.)
- ✓ Social security coverage
- ✓ Emerging changes in existing and new flows
- ✓ Causes of labour migration
- ✓ Contribution to/impact of labour migration on sending and receiving countries (labour markets, remittances, share of GDP, job creation, poverty reduction, human development, etc.)

The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), held in October 2013, adopted a Resolution concerning further work on labour migration statistics, which recommends that the Office:

"(a) set up a working group with the aim of sharing good practices, discussing and developing a workplan for defining international standards on labour migration statistics that can inform labour market and migration policy; (b) prepare a progress report for discussion to the next ICLS".

The Conclusions of the ILO's 2013 Tripartite Technical Meeting on Labour Migration recommended to strengthen data collection, research and capacity development in order to facilitate evidence-based policy-making and to develop tools for dealing with the internationalization of labour markets to the benefit of all. It also called for promoting harmonization of statistical methods and concepts on international migration and the exchange of knowledge on labour migration among countries.

ILO standards and tools

ILO international labour migration module

- It is a flexible tool which can be attached to Labour Force Surveys, tailored to specific country needs with up to 200 questions, with a view to gathering information on various aspects of labour migration.
- 2006-2009: The module was pilot-tested in Armenia, Ecuador, Egypt and Thailand.
- 2011-2012: The module was pilot-tested in Moldova and Ukraine.

The module provides very useful insights at the national level, but there is an urgent need for harmonized questionnaires using common concepts and definitions in order to improve the validity, reliability and comparability of migration data at the international level.

ILO Labour Migration Database (http://laborsta.ilo.org)

- This database was developed in 1998 on the basis of a joint annual questionnaire on international migration developed by ILO, EUROSTAT, the United Nations Statistics Division, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
- It includes information from 94 countries.
- The data are spread over 12 basic tables containing estimates of demographic stocks/flows and labour migrant stocks/flows, mostly disaggregated by sex and age.

While it is the only global statistical database on international labour migration, the information it contains needs updating, as the latest data result from 2006. As mentioned above, a lack of common definitions makes cross-country data comparison difficult.

The ILO, through the ASEAN TRIANGLE project, has made efforts to reinvigorate this data collection process in the ASEAN region. During Phase 1 of the initiative, data have been collected from all ASEAN member States for the period 2006 to 2012. Phase II will collect data for 2013 and address identified need for capacity building to improve data collection.

ILO standards and tools (continued)

Global and regional estimates of migrant workers

- ILO estimated the economically active population among the total number of international migrants (based on UN estimate of total stock of migrants) at global/regional level in 2000.
- The estimate was updated in 2007 and 2010.
- The ILO developed a methodology for a global estimate of migrant domestic workers in 2013, which will be tested and refined in the 2014-15 biennium, so that it can serve as an important new tool for governments, international agencies and other stakeholders to better understand this sector of the labour market and the protection needs of these workers.

New regional and global estimates of migrant workers need to be prepared based on sound methodology and reliable quantitative data.

Additional ILO resources can be found at http://www.ilo.org/labourmigration.