

# Addressing Skills Development to Improve Access to Foreign Skills

June 2021



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## Prologue

*Post COVID we don't know how the world may emerge. It depends on us – we could have a more cooperative world or a more competitive one and nationalistic. Economic recovery will neither be U or V shaped but in fact K shaped with some industries and countries recovering well and others just going more down.*

- Inspired by several economists<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Singh, A. Didar, 2021, Reflecting on the global economy, in Journal of Indian Ocean Studies, vol 29, no 1, Prints Publications, New Delhi

## Acknowledgements

The present publication is authored by Dr. A. Didar Singh, independent researcher (PhD, Former Secretary General of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries, he is also a former civil servant of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) who retired as Secretary to Government of India in the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Dr Singh also served as member of the ILO Global Commission of the Future of Work (2016-18)). Special thanks and recognition must be acknowledged to the participants of the study for the expert advice and updated information on the current conditions of the legal immigration frameworks on skills mobility.

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The Business Advisory Group to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), endorsed at the 2015 GFMD Summit in Istanbul, brings the voice of business to the forum and to international debates on migration. Participation in the Business Advisory Group is open to all companies and business associations that share its goal: promote more transparent, effective and humane migration policies, taking into account labour market needs.

The Business Advisory Group on Migration is housed at the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the largest network of the private sector in the world.

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## Introduction

The world is changing fast and so are the methods and techniques to operate worldly affairs. New emerging realities demand a new set of systems and values. The world has witnessed several stages in the development of technology and today we are in the midst of 'Industry 4.0' or the fourth industrial revolution, which includes recent technologies like AI (artificial intelligence) and machine learning and specifically the ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). The world of work too is undergoing rapid and deep changes brought about by technological development, demographics, globalisation and climate change<sup>2</sup>. These trends are affecting the composition of employment, the nature of the tasks carried out at work and the skills required in the labour market. They are also putting enormous pressure on traditional education and training systems, calling for improved quality and new approaches to lifelong learning. Skills development can help turn these challenges into opportunities.

As the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and Deloitte recent report<sup>3</sup> on skills has stated: the future of work is changing and major modifications will be needed in the skills required by the labour market, where the global workforce needs to be aware and active with the right skills through formal and informal lifelong learning. Towards this end the IOE, through the Business Advisory Group on Migration has commissioned a Research Paper to assess how labour migration governance should address current and future skills gaps, skills recognition, and skills development, to improve access for private sector to foreign skills. The aim of the paper is to look at the importance for governments to work with the private sector to understand changing patterns, structures, practices and conditions of employment. This is the study done for the initiative.

To do so, we first set the context and clarify the significance of the study and then elaborate on the methodology we have followed for the research. It's important to explain (which we next do) on what we mean by 'skills' especially foreign skills and set these in the context of migration (including return migration). We then speak about the impact of the present COVID pandemic on migration and skills. We present the findings from the survey/questionnaire we did for this study and in the last section of the report we present the Conclusions especially on the Policy implications of this issue.

## Context and Significance of the Study

The reality of the market is that Employers are finding it more difficult to find recruits with the right skills. In an ILO/IOE survey done with 500 C-Suite executives located in 15 different countries, the report effectively identified a fifth trend: the shortage of skilled labour.<sup>4</sup> The study further noted that a large proportion of businesses in the United States of America (61%), Brazil (70%), India (66%) and Germany (65%) agreed that businesses are looking for quite different skills in new recruits than three years ago and several other countries like Bolivia, China, South Africa and Malaysia also reported on difficulties in

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<sup>2</sup> These are indeed the megatrends of Future of Work. The ILO/IOE flagship report found a 5th megatrend: shortage of skills: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/areas-of-work/WCMS\\_679582/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/areas-of-work/WCMS_679582/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> IOE-Deloitte, 2020. Future Skills Assessment Report, September 2020, IOE, Geneva

<sup>4</sup> ILO/IOE report, 2019, Changing Business and Opportunities for Employer and Business Organisations

recruiting people with the right skills required. It makes it imperative therefore to further examine this issue.

Add to this the present spread of COVID-19 which has created an unprecedented global health pandemic, resulting in a global economic crisis. This crisis has impacted businesses of all sizes in different ways – from closure to grappling to stay afloat to changes in business models – resulting in job losses. This unprecedented crisis is not only changing skills mobility trends, but also raising concerns, whether the changing demand for global skills can be met by business when and where needed. The rise in digital remote work, necessitated as a measure to contain the pandemic, can be expected to continue into the recovery period and beyond. Megatrends like digitalisation and shifts towards a services economy that were already underway before Covid-19 have been accelerated. These trends mean that some industries face decline whereas others are developing more, impacting the demand of labour and skills, and thus migration.

This research focuses on identification, recognition, and development of skills to improve business access to foreign skills. This paper informs on how labour migration governance should address current and future skills gaps, skills recognition, and skills development, to improve access for private sector to foreign skills. (The concept of foreign skills used in this paper basically refers to any skill that is not local including skills required by migrant workers as they emigrate overseas).

## **Methodology and Data Collection**

This paper has relied on a Literature review and a questionnaire-based survey. Not only has information been taken from the literature review but the response to the questionnaire has provided further data for analysis. This paper is qualitative and analytical in nature and therefore has relied on auxiliary sources such as books, research articles, and various national and international reports. Information from various authentic websites was also referred to, to collect information for secondary research. As mentioned, this paper is also built on a questionnaire-based survey and the responses to the questionnaire have provided data for the analysis (see the questions in annex).<sup>5</sup>

To meet the objectives of the paper, an online survey was conducted in April 2021 on foreign skills and migration during the on-going COVID 19 pandemic. After initial interviews with experts, the questionnaire was divided into two parts; where the first part was about general information about the respondents and the second part was focused on skills recognition, future skills gaps and skill developments etc. A total of 30 responses were collected through a sampling method, where respondents were primarily policy and business experts from various parts of the world. Renowned experts were also interviewed. The data has been systematised and analysed through a statistical tool. Also, the identity of respondents has been anonymised, to protect their confidentiality.

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<sup>5</sup>See the questionnaire here <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1IVZ6GCVcYcTlYl4gM28zezeKFqP0GIFjfmArIb3ixuc>

## Understanding 'Skills/Higher Skills/Foreign Skills'

Equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and those of tomorrow is one of the core concerns for all stakeholders. The globalization of markets is accelerating the diffusion of technology and the pace of innovation. New occupations are emerging and replacing others. Within each occupation, required skills and competencies are evolving, as the knowledge content of production processes and services is rising. Flows of highly skilled labour occur within a new global division of labour which has resulted from the restructuring of the world economy. New technologies have revolutionised both processes and products, altering the equation between capital and labour.

While we see migration involving all types and levels of skilling for migrants, there is a definitive demand in most countries for the 'high skilled'. Despite different ILO ISCO standards defining skills at different levels, there is uncertainty on what is 'highly skilled'. It is clear that they do not constitute a homogeneous group, although in broad terms they may be described as professional, managerial and technical (PMT) specialists. Currently, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is being used to include apprenticeship training, vocational education, industrial arts, technical education, technological-vocational education, occupational education, vocational education and training and career and technical education. Acquiring skills involves several efforts which include (BRICS, 2016):

- **Up-skilling:** Companies will have to up-skill their workforce via in-house or external training centres. Such policy also needs an option where workers/employees (including migrant workers could ask for special training to upgrade their skills as required in a new job overseas that they are trying to access). Obviously, company policy would need to allow for this.
- **Re-skilling:** Industry 4.0 is expected to result in job displacement to a certain extent. Several jobs will cease to exist. And several new jobs will be created. Companies will have to make the investment in re-skilling of the labour force to prepare for this expected shift. As mentioned above, individual workers also need to have the option to opt for certain training for re-skilling or up-skilling.
- **Continuous Learning:** Technologies will become obsolete at a faster rate. Continuous professional development strategies (also referred to as 'lifelong learning') will be required to easily adapt to the changes that technological advancement brings. A lifelong learning approach should help future workers adjust to coming technological changes. This will prevent the high social costs of the complex and disruptive changes of digital transformation and allow society to maximize positive economic effects.
- **Mindset change:** Given that the labour force will have to adapt to a number of changes, they will resist and oppose implementation of newer technologies. This will require companies to plan for mindset change (including attitude) of its employees to facilitate smooth transition to advanced manufacturing processes. Such attitudinal change is certainly required for migrant workers also.
- **Government Initiatives:** Among the several initiatives, we need also note that many governments and institutions are also putting in place robust systems to review their education/training initiatives and ensure that these are adapted to the changing realities and needs of the day. (India for example, has recently put forward a new National Education Policy 2020 after due review of the past initiatives).

Training and skills development is understood in broad terms, covering the full sequence of life stages and involving all workers at all skill levels. Basic education gives each individual a basis for the development of their potential, laying the foundation for employability. Initial training provides the core work skills, general knowledge, and industry-based and professional competencies that facilitate the transition from education into the world of work. Lifelong learning maintains individuals' skills and competencies at work, as technology and skill requirements change. Different countries focus on different elements as they see relative strengths and weaknesses in their own skills development systems, and as they learn more about innovations and the experience in other countries. The future prosperity of any economy does depend on good governance and an enabling environment for business to grow, thrive and innovate for which success of the economy depends ultimately on the number of persons in employment and how productive they are at their work or business. Available evidence firmly establishes that the requirement is a combination of good education with training that is of good quality and is relevant to the labour market (G20, 2010).

- It empowers people to develop their full capacities and to seize employment and social opportunities;
- It raises productivity, both of workers and of enterprises;
- It contributes to boosting future innovation and development;
- It encourages both domestic and foreign investment, and thus job growth, lowering unemployment and underemployment;
- It leads to higher wages (which result in a higher standard of living and the lifting of several people out of poverty);
- and it is broadly accessible and expands labour market opportunities and reduces social inequalities.

## **Migration**

Both developed and developing countries around the world implement policies to deal with the impact of skilled migration. The available evidence suggests that the overall economic impact of migration is positive for both countries of origin and countries of destination. Migration can play a critical role in economic growth and development, including by helping to fill labour market shortages and by providing jobs and sources of revenue for individual migrants and their families. The immigration policies of developed countries generally facilitate movement, however, the developed countries might: encourage temporary and return migration; control recruitment from at-risk countries; establish best practices; regulate recruitment agencies; and establish bilateral agreements to 'manage' migration. Skilled emigration from developing countries can stimulate economic growth, but significant outflows create concerns about a "brain drain." Expatriate organizations and mechanisms of technology transfer are important, as are means of facilitating remittances or investments. Education, training, and targeted economic development may actually increase skilled migration in the short-to-medium term, but these are the best means of addressing developing country skill shortages over the long run.

We need Policies that allow immigrants to fill labour shortages, create jobs, increase labour force participation rates, and increase incomes for natives. When policies restrict immigrants from filling



shortages, economic opportunities are lost. When policies lower barriers to business ownership, immigrants invest in their host economy, hire natives, and boost economic growth. Even when countries are not successful at attracting skilled workers back home, migrants abroad can invest and generate flows of knowledge, information, foreign direct investment and trade to and from the 'home economies', especially from less developed regions, and several countries have instituted policies or programmes, to encourage the return of their citizens.

The core of the interest in the migration of the skilled is economic. Modern industries and services increasingly rely upon the acquisition, deployment and use of human expertise to add value in their operations (Salt, 1997). Where this expertise is not available locally, employers frequently search for it abroad. They do this in a number of ways: direct recruitment from the external labour market (ELM); from within their own corporate internal labour markets (ILMs); by acquiring businesses overseas; through partnership agreements or joint ventures; or from specialist recruitment firms. The consequence is that the economically more developed countries routinely exchange high level skills, while increasingly the less developed world is being brought into skill exchange and "brain drain" networks (Salt, 1997).

## **Returning Skills/Migrants**

It is believed by many people that international migration is a one-way movement. However, migration is a dynamic process and there is increasing evidence of frequent returning skills. Return migration—temporary overseas migration followed by a return to the country of origin—includes not only migrants on a temporary visa (such as workers on work permits and students), but also migrants on permanent visas who decide to return home after spending time abroad. Many developing countries are also interested in attracting back their compatriots, in particular the highly educated, to benefit from the skills and experience acquired abroad. The human capital, financial means and social norms acquired by return migrants constitute an important source of development for origin countries.

Returning skills or migrants are of potential benefits to the country of origin. These migrants work abroad, acquire new skills and increase their income. It helps them to accumulate savings and assets and when they return, they transfer both the financial and human capital accumulated abroad to the country of origin. Return migrant households are also more likely than non-migrant households to run businesses. Returning professionals with technological, managerial, marketing or scientific competencies often create new companies, transfer knowledge and increase the human capital stock in their country of origin. Return migrants help shape the public discourse, by transforming the local environment and questioning traditional approaches. However, their actual influence is based on their individual characteristics and their migration experience, as well as the size of the return migrant community in a given locality.

However, a country of origin can be benefitted from returning skills only if return migrants are successful overseas in gaining skills, knowledge, and savings and if the country of origin has appropriate policies to encourage investment by returnees and to optimally use their skills. For countries of origin, policy options include reducing red tape, providing information on investment possibilities, and establishing a favourable macroeconomic environment for investment.

Many Governments, especially from less developed regions, have instituted policies or programmes, to encourage the return of their emigrants. As UN research has shown, globally, some 72 per cent of Governments have policies to encourage the return of their citizens to their home country.<sup>6</sup>

## **Impact of Covid-19 on Migration: Requirement of Foreign Skills**

The unprecedented outbreak of the novel Corona virus or COVID-19 and its ever-increasing spread in some 200 countries worldwide has made it a global pandemic. Though countries/regions have been adopting various mechanisms to combat the Corona virus, however, the scenario confirms that the world will need to address, what is now be referred to as the pre and post COVID-19 world order. The Corona virus outbreak is severely disrupting the global economy and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) has opined that global GDP growth would dip from some 4 percent annually to one or even zero percent growth. The International Labour Organization (ILO) confirms the hardest hit industries by the COVID-19 crisis are accommodation and food services, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and real estate and business activities (ILO 2020).<sup>7</sup> Discussion and review about international migration in post COVID-19 has already been taking place among scholars, policymakers, and other stake holders. As Prof Rajan (Rajan, 2020) has recently argued: whenever a crisis unfolds, such as the Arab Spring, global financial crisis, or now COVID-19, destination countries usually announce short and long-term measures to restrict immigration to protect the local workforce. From the US to the Gulf this is playing out as knee jerk reactions completely forgetting the immense gains that immigration brought to their economies in the past. Once COVID-19 retreats, the demand to bring back the migrants will again create opportunities that sending countries will utilise. Maybe long-term effects are in the realm of speculation, however, as the world grapples with the containment of novel corona virus, it seems pertinent to understand the immediate and mid-term scenario in terms of the impact the pandemic will have on international migration and how it is going to affect technology as a support system of migrants and the process of migration.

Technological changes, from industrial robots to artificial intelligence and ongoing digitalisation, are reshaping labour markets and the geography of jobs. They are replacing specific work tasks or entire jobs, shifting the occupation structure of the labour market and the skills in demand. They are also boosting labour productivity and leading to the creation of new jobs that are complementary to these technologies. They are also creating new opportunities to decentralise jobs, production and public services, thanks to the rise of telecommuting, new production technologies, and e-services.

Although governments have sought to limit the impact of the pandemic on job losses through, for instance, short-term working schemes, there is a danger that unemployment levels might substantially increase over the coming months. (Though the latest assessment of economic prospects for 2021 and

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<sup>6</sup> UN, 2017, Population facts by UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division @ [PopFacts 2017-7.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> ILO has just adopted a resolution mentioning the hardest hit sectors: [https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/109/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS\\_806092/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/109/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS_806092/lang--en/index.htm)

2022 by the IMF and World Bank do see a marginal rebound in the global economy with improving job prospects but still below the pre-COVID days.)<sup>8</sup> So far, the pandemic's impact has been felt most acutely in those sectors where the need for social distancing has fundamentally affected business operations and consumer demand, such as hospitality, entertainment, leisure, and tourism. However, not all jobs are equally affected—some sectors are thriving or even growing faster in the pandemic. In particular, the number of online job openings for essential workers, such as hospital workers, employees of food retailers and warehouse personnel remained the same or increased even as policy makers in many countries severely limited economic activities and freedom of movement. Technical medical skills, such as Emergency and Intensive care, Medical support, Basic Patient Care, Radiology, Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Infectious disease or Mental and Behavioural health specialties are featured in many of the postings that saw a strong positive demand between March and November 2020 (OECD, 2021). All these are opportunities for migrants.

Governments have many innovative ways to upskill their migrant workers. For example, the Indian Consulate in Sharjah is running training programmes along with Sharjah University for upskilling blue-collar workers. Other Indian Embassies in the gulf are running similar initiatives as are some other countries like UK, US and Canada who impart e-learnings to their citizens overseas. Such initiatives are key to migrant skilling options and could be done across the world.

Also, along with the technical skills, 'communication skills' feature notably in jobs in high-demand. These 'soft skills' are the key in both normal and emergency periods. Being able to communicate effectively is crucial, especially in situations of emergency, when individuals may need to provide and receive precise instructions under pressure or may need to use new tools to communicate without physical interactions. Besides, other transversal skills such as being able to work in teams (teamwork), Basic Customer Service (being able to attend effectively to clients and possibly patients) or Detail-Oriented (paying close attention to all particulars when working on a task or project) are other transversal skills which will be widely required in jobs in the post pandemic era.<sup>9</sup>

## Findings

This section analyses the data collected from the survey and discusses the result. The evidence-based approach used here has relied on factual data to demonstrate the change in current and future skills, the potential skills gaps, and the importance for skills development to facilitate employing skilled foreign nationals. For example, bilateral, regional, or multilateral skills recognition agreements need to respond to realities on the ground.

While identifying the 'foreign or international skills', out of 30 respondents, 21(72 percent) mentioned that language and communication skills, cross cultural awareness, excellent networking abilities, and interpersonal influence can be considered as foreign or international skills, which will be in demand in the

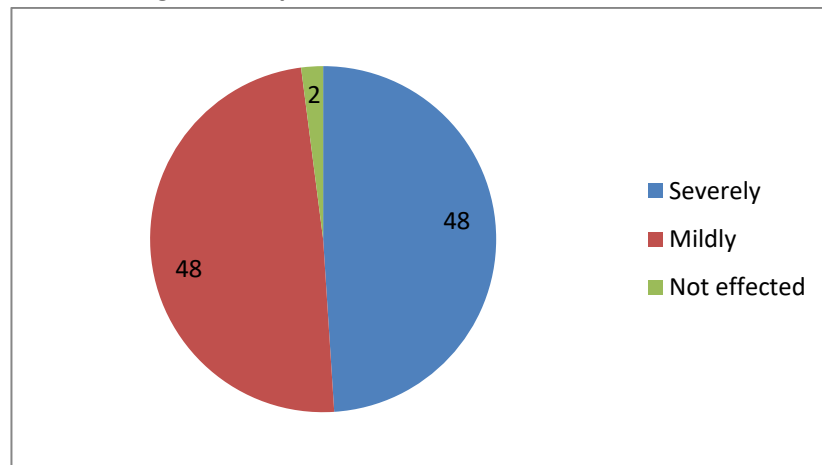
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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/06/08/world-bank-global-economic-prospects-2021>

<sup>9</sup> The World Economic Forum has also published skills graph outlining the future skills: [What are the top 10 job skills for the future? | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/articles/2020/07/14/what-are-the-top-10-job-skills-for-the-future/)

post-COVID period. Further, on the question of impact of COVID 19 on business, 14 respondents mentioned that the impact was severe whereas another 14 said that the impact of the pandemic was mild on their business (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Impact of COVID 19 on Business**



*Source: Survey*

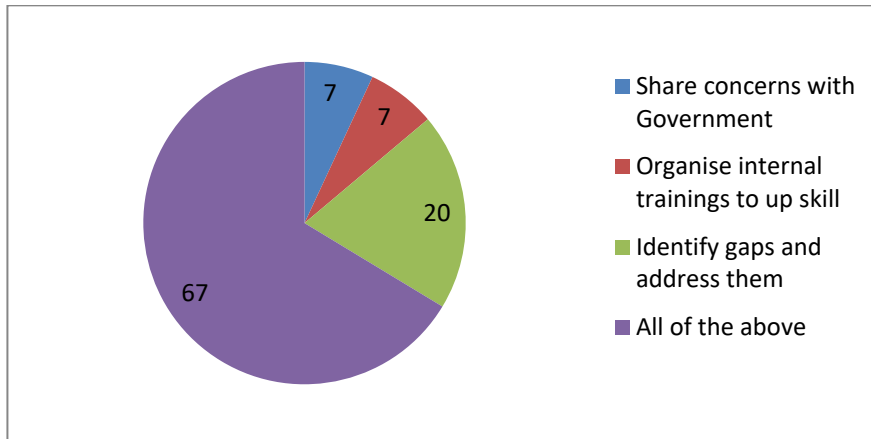
On the issue of role of organisations in skill up-gradation, 42 percent respondents said that their organisation is offering specific courses on required skills, whereas 21 percent respondents pointed out that providing professional training programmes by the organisations are of great importance. Further, 14 percent said that providing mentors to make the employees learn new technologies is an important action by the organisation to upgrade the skills of the workforce. One respondent said that the UK's Kickstart Scheme<sup>10</sup> is partly effective in upgrading skills, while another mentioned that Skilling on online basis and a hybrid model would be the best solution. Very few said that providing financial support and technical assistance by the organisations would be beneficial to the workers, particularly migrants.

38 percent respondents said that their organisations include other workers and possibly migrants in workplace-based training schemes, whereas 27 percent respondents denied any organisational support or training to migrant workers. On the question of how business can contribute to the labour market information system, 20 percent respondents said that business groups can identify the gaps and work in the direction to address them; however, 67 percent respondents said that concerns should be shared with the government and that enterprises should organise internal training to up-skill the labour force along with identifying the gaps and addressing them (see Figure 2). 45 percent of the respondents believed that there is an alignment between certification requirement and employment needs, whereas the other 45 percent denied it. 48 percent of the respondents said that there are some efforts being made towards the development of standards and guidelines for the recognition of foreign qualifications and non-formally acquired skills, whereas 24 percent denied any such initiatives.

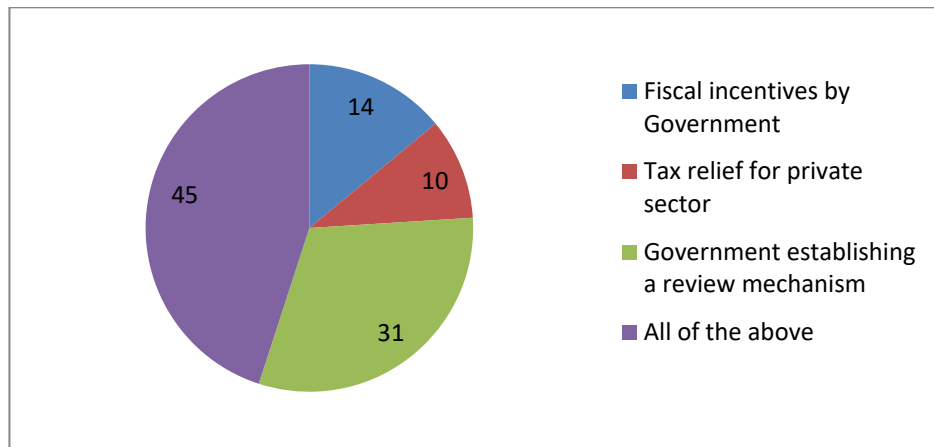
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<sup>10</sup> The UK **Kickstart Scheme** is a government initiative for providing a 6-month paid job with a local employer, funded by the Government. It provides a job opportunity and skilling for young people to gain experience of working in some of Britain's most exciting start-up companies.

**Figure 2: Business contribution to Labour Market Information System**



**Figure 3: Policy change to provide access of foreign skills to employees**



*Source: Survey*

On the questions regarding what policy change is required to provide access of foreign skills to employees, 31 percent of the respondents said that governments should establish a review mechanism, whereas 14 percent mentioned that fiscal incentives should be given by governments. 45 percent of the respondents agreed for both, including tax relief for the private sector.

The data collected from the survey was qualitatively analysed to meet the objectives of the paper. Most of the respondents agreed on the point that in post-COVID period high skilled jobs would be in demand. But they also indicated that there would be shortages in supply of skilled labour and many high skilled/ professional vacancies would be hard to fill in western countries.

## Conclusions and Policy Suggestions

Globalisation without new technology is unsustainable because you cannot just have more of the devastation of today. Poor developing countries just catching up with the developed West is no solution – and unsustainable. Our challenge today is to imagine and create a more prosperous and better post COVID world for migration. COVID has done that for all nations. Migration should benefit from that. A common destiny does not mean abolishing national identities. Countries fear that of migrants. It means that economic growth can benefit all, and migrants certainly can and do contribute towards that end. Global ecology and global pandemics require us to also globalise our politics. Now business must teach us that collaborating with all those that support the economy is the way forward - and migrants with the right skills assist in that.

As Harari has argued in his recent book<sup>11</sup> there are three terms or conditions around immigration: 1) host country allows the immigrants in; 2) in return the immigrants assimilate; 3) over time they become equal members of that society. This is simplifying the process and the debates around migration but essentially it implies that the host country is doing a favour to the refugees and migrants. Reality is that this is done basically so that the migrants become productive members of the economy – therein lies the rationale.

Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution includes a wide spectrum of technological advances across the value-chain. Industry 4.0 technologies (BRICS, 2016) – Automation / Robotics, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Additive Manufacturing, etc. – are revolutionizing traditional manufacturing processes. It has resulted in increased use of digital technologies. Because of this, the boundary between the real and the virtual world is increasingly blurring, giving birth to what are known as cyber-physical production systems. Experts believe (BRICS, 2016) that Industry 4.0 will result in an increase in labour productivity and in the quality of the products manufactured. It will increase the demand for quality products manufactured, rendering companies with no option but to increase capacity to meet the demand. There is a possibility that some low-skilled jobs will be eliminated, however, it is expected that an increase in capacity will have a positive effect on the creation of jobs, requiring higher levels of skills. Employees who became jobless due to elimination of low-skilled jobs need to be re-skilled or up-skilled to be prepared for the new requirements. Thus, the creation of new high skilled jobs is expected to compensate, to a large extent, for the elimination of low skilled jobs.

Initial research has shown that this is a very serious requirement for all business. COVID has only exacerbated the existing demands for skill development that were already becoming obvious with the rise of technology. The evidence-based approach used here has relied on factual data to demonstrate the change in current and future skills, the potential skills gaps, and the importance for skills development to facilitate employing skilled foreign nationals. For example, bilateral, regional, or multilateral skills recognition agreements need to respond to realities on the ground. Lifelong learning, upskilling, and vocational training schemes for migrants should be designed and implemented on the basis of real time information on labour market needs and practices. The migration systems need to adapt to the current

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<sup>11</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah (2018), 21 Lessons for the 21st Century: Amazon.in

and predicted future skills needs. Therefore, it is important for governments to consult with the private sector to understand the changing patterns, structures, practices, and conditions of employment, to ensure that relevant changes to the migration policies are carried out.

As stated, this study has shown that COVID has only intensified the existing demands for skill development that were already an imperative with the increase of new technologies. The COVID-19 impact on education also has implications for the future workforce. With school closures, e-learning has increased substantially. While this offers opportunities to develop or deepen digital skills, not every student (or migrant worker) is capable of going online. Despite the many hurdles and challenges, the Governments of labour exporting countries need to continue their efforts in re-skilling and up-skilling the workforce in the coming months. For the next phase, government and business need to focus more on demand-driven skill development, digital technology, and skills pertaining to Industry 4.0, in order to bring down the unemployment rate and reduce the demand gap for skilled workers. The demand for digital skills has grown rapidly over the past decades and will continue to grow. COVID-19 has rapidly accelerated the demand for digital skills, as a result of the need to adapt business models to expand online services and e-commerce, and the increased use of digital tools such as videoconferencing and online collaboration tools.

The role of government in policy setting is imperative. As mentioned in the questionnaire this would mean the government providing specific incentives for skilling. This could be in the form of yearly ‘skill-passes’ that workers could use to go for skilling classes. These would also involve providing incentives in the form of cash for skilling centres to impart such training. The second or other government policy intervention could be in the form of tax breaks to business for any skilling they impart. This should also be available to individual workers. In a nutshell the required skills post pandemic for migrant workers would be:

- a) A positive attitude towards their work and lifestyle. (A psychological necessity).
- b) Digital skills, essentially ICT familiarity and usage to meet the demands of the new information age, and
- c) Multi Trade skills – meaning that all workers must know more than two or three trades or skills to multi-task and make themselves indispensable. For example, a plumber needs to also be an electrician and a driver needs to also be a cook and a security guard etc.

The attempt here is to convey to all migrants that skills can be used to innovate and develop one’s career and are not limited by the parallel tracks of skills and migration, but they must go beyond that to create a future for themselves. Migrants must not only learn new ‘foreign skills’ but must also learn how to apply them in the real world. Literally for emigrants such ‘foreign skills’ would mean not only learning the new ‘foreign’ language of the country they are in but acquiring the needed skills required in that market.

As the ILO recently in a paper has argued: Countries at all levels of development are finding that adequate education and skills can improve the employability of workers, the productivity of enterprises and the inclusiveness of economic growth. This realization has led to increased interest in the formulation of skills development policies to drive the change necessary to meet development challenges. Many of these policies, increasingly broad in scope and outreach, are underpinned by efforts to bring the world of

education and training and the world of work closer together. The recommendations could be outlined as follows:

- improve education systems by anticipating the skills needed in the near future, (make use of statistical offices, recruitment agencies, make full use of important role of employer organisations)
- link skilled migrants to available career guidance counsellors or offer them information (cooperation with embassies would be required)
- There is much added value of MOOC courses and/or micro credentials (mini or short-term trainings)
- There are also today several Global Skills Partnership for Migration (IOM/ILO/UNESCO/IOE/ITUC) and therefore the need to enhance cooperation between them and the formal education sectors in countries.
- Also active Labour Market programmes and public/private employment services can help skilled migrants
- There could also be more focused international students exchange programmes to address the growing needs of skills and similarly greater added value from company academies and trainings.

OECD a recent study has quantified the role of government in this initiative <sup>12</sup>. The actionable principles listed below build on the G20 Skills Strategy (2015a), adopted by the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers:

- Reaffirm the importance of a well-functioning and well-resourced education and lifelong learning system for promoting strong and inclusive growth;
- Underscore the importance of policy coherence through a whole-of-government approach and social dialogue; and
- Identify actions that countries could take to improve the contribution of skills to stronger and more inclusive growth.

Businesses when imparting training need to educate the workers to the changing environment. In fact, in these COVID times, businesses could offer free training in skills for workers as their contribution to the pandemic situation! Not all businesses of course, can afford this, but those that can (especially large enterprises), could do this as part of their CSR initiative offering training to say migrant workers located in their vicinity. MSMEs have a further challenge where we have the issue of SMEs retaining skilled migrants as these migrants are more attracted to working for larger companies later in their career, or to other companies in other countries within the same region. In a sense therefore, training in skills today could result in the migrants jumping ship in the future!

Based on this research, the principal conclusions (relevant for businesses and policy makers) could be summarized as follows:

- that skilling of workers (including migrants) especially in the area of 'soft skills' is key to the future and domestic structures of education and training must be attuned to the emerging requirements,

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<sup>12</sup> OECD, 2015, The actionable principles for a G20 Skills Strategy (2015a)



- that innovative ways for skilling must be taken up including such as embassies overseas taking up skilling initiatives for their migrant workers,
- that already migrants do provide for and fill labour shortages in several economies,
- and that return migration is beneficial for origin countries for which these countries must have conducive policies to attract the return migrants,
- that COVID 19 has had an adverse impact on the global economy but has only accelerated the trend that was already being seen. In fact, this pandemic has itself created a growing demand for several skills – especially in the health and digital business sectors;
- that the findings of the survey confirm that
  - a) COVID has impacted business
  - b) businesses and migrants do contribute to the Labour Market Information System and
  - c) governments must provide incentives for businesses and individual workers for further skilling.

The future is essentially moments that have not yet come! That is a lesson that COVID 19 is teaching us again and again. No one can predict the future expect to know that it will be different and yet rooted and grown from the moments of today. Business must therefore look for questions that ask what is different in their thinking today and how to apply it to develop a better tomorrow.

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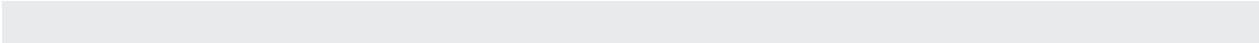
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## **Annex I: Questionnaire for the Survey**

1. What do you understand as 'foreign or international skills'?
  2. Has COVID 19 impacted your business (please give some details)
  3. Skills up gradation is an obvious requirement. What is your company doing about it?
  4. Does your training format provide for Inclusion of other workers and possibly migrants in workplace-based training schemes?
  5. Please comment on how business can contribute to the labour market information systems, especially on sector-wise data on skills mobility, skills availability, gaps and needs.
  6. Is there investment in global skills partnerships for mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies of domestic and migrant workers at all skills levels?
  7. Do you see an alignment of certification requirements with employer needs?
  8. Is there any move towards the development of standards and guidelines for the recognition of foreign qualifications and non-formally acquired skills?
  9. For example, is there an alignment of education, migration and employment policies to ensure holistic skills development programmes?
  10. Do you see a need for policy change and if so what? (Please comment on the role of business and Government).
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