

Summary Report

Asia Regional Workshop on migration

Business Perspectives on Skills Mobility: A roadmap to recovery. Focus on Asia

During May 18-20, 2021, the Business Advisory Group on Migration¹, together with the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), hosted a regional workshop for employers and governments in 14 Asian countries. Consisting of two parts, the objectives were to support employers in Asia in their outreach to governments on migration-related issues of priority to business (18-19 May – employers only sessions) and to foster and improve the dialogue and understanding between employers and governments on the same key migration topics (20 May - dialogue for governments and businesses). The Government of Indonesia co-hosted this dialogue.

Based on the 2020 Asian employers' declaration², the workshop was organized around three themes:

- 1) skills mobility frameworks that respond to labour market needs;
- 2) regulatory frameworks that promote and ensure responsible recruitment of foreign workers;
- 3) improved systems for identification, recognition, and development of skills to promote skills mobility.

These topics were aligned with the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) Objectives 5, 6 and 18, adopted by United Nations member States³.

The employers' sessions benefited from the expertise of the ILO International Training Center and the United Nations University and drew 20-30 participants each; the dialogue with governments attracted more than 50 participants from governments (Ministries of Labour and Foreign Affairs) and business leaders across the Asian continent. Employers' organisations, businesses and government representatives shared their best practices, challenges and discussed solutions to improve migration management in the region. This event served as a platform for exchange between the private sector and governments towards the implementation of the GCM and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Key takeaways:

- **Labour migration policies directly connected to labour needs:** As a result of the Covid-19 crisis, many countries are introducing new protectionist policies and tightening up existing immigration requirements, which has the effect of making it even more complex for companies to find pathways to effectively bring in foreign talent and/or to renew their work permits. Some of these measures are temporary, others seem to be long-lasting. For highly specialised skills, employers report a waiting time of two to three months to be able to get the trained/skilled specialist on board. Countries have not developed the ecosystem that would allow finding the needed skill in the local labour market.

Example: Vietnam. Decree 152 makes it very difficult to qualify for a work permit as applications are now being rejected if the degree specialty does not match the job title. Under this new approach, there is no flexibility for employees who have obtained different expertise from the subject matter of their degree during their career and have now taken on other key roles.

➔ **Employers call for a balanced approach which safeguards the health of the citizens, while allowing the movement of people to fill open vacancies. Administrative systems should be agile and adaptable to meet the fast-changing requirements of business.**

¹ More information about the Business Advisory Group on migration: www.business-migration.org

² "Migration policies in view of changing employment landscape", 2020

³ Link to the Global Compact for Migration: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195

- **Digitization:** The use of technology was accelerated in the past year. Technology simplifies and streamlines immigration, recruitment, and skills recognition processes. The increased use of digital tools brings transparency, efficiency, education, and speed in addition to reducing layers of bureaucracy, thereby extra costs, corruption, confusion, fraud and abuses.

Example: Indonesia is making good progress using technology to streamline immigration process steadily moving towards online processes and e-Visas now available for entry into Indonesia, avoiding thereby the possible health risks involved with in person applications.

➔ **Employers can support governments in identifying digital solutions to streamline immigration, recruitment, and skills recognition processes.**

- **Data collection:** Any effective migration policy is based on data and facts. More systematic data collection both on migration and skills shortages to understand the skills needs and anticipate these needs will be crucial to fill the skills gaps and avoid skills mismatch. This process will ensure that skills are used in positions needed, thereby increasing remittances for countries of origin and filling vacancies in the countries of destination.

➔ **Employers can partner with governments to work on up-to-date skills anticipation.**

- **One-stop shop:** The way governments are organized with various ministries in charge of migration and skills makes it challenging for employers to address the public authorities in an effective way. Improved transparency would help employers understand which authority is in charge and avoid unethical practices, which are detrimental to good business practices, and which discourage global companies from entering a market and creating employment opportunities.

➔ **Establishing a centralized desk (one-stop shop) for employers to reach out to governments would increase efficiency in the migration process.**

- **Regulating recruitment:** Reviewing and aligning national regulations with international standards on responsible recruitment will improve the predictability of recruitment channels for jobseekers, employers, governments, as well as recruiters. Standardization will help introducing new technologies, which in turn will improve the efficiency and predictability of recruitment trajectory and allow for better oversight and enforcement. Employers deplore the misalignment of regulations in the sourcing and destination countries, which makes it challenging to hire globally.

➔ **Assess the national regulation on recruitment and align with international standards to improve practices which will ultimately benefit all stakeholders.**

- **Public-Private collaboration in recruitment:** There is a strong role for public employment agencies involved in incoming and outgoing migration and often a disconnect between the public and private agencies. By strengthening the cooperation with private entities, public agencies will improve the understanding of the needs of workers and businesses to ultimately meet their objectives.

➔ **Improve the involvement of and consultation with recruiters, employers, and workers.**

- **Reintegration and access to returning skills:** Covid-19 has accelerated the return of migrants to their home countries, with the related challenge of reintegration to the local labour market. Employers need readily available pool of workers equipped with the right knowledge and skills to be employable and work in productive, secure jobs which contribute to the growth of enterprises

and the economies. In this regard, improved coordination/coherence of Technical and Vocational Education and Training systems, which are currently fragmented, would serve all stakeholders.

➔ **Establish upskilling and reskilling programs for local and migrant workers adapted to the needs of employers in both countries of origin and destination.**

- **Skills recognition:** The recognition of skills is a major challenge for employers when recruiting foreign talent. Skills categories established by public authorities very often do not match with employers' requirements. Mechanisms for mutual recognition of certified skills offer win-win solutions for employers, jobseekers, and economies at large.

Example Sri Lanka: The Skills Passport is the result of a collaboration between the Ministry of Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations, The Employers' Federation of Ceylon and the ILO. A returnee migrant worker can assert his/her expertise to gain visibility of potential employers in Sri Lanka by presenting a proof that is embedded with skills and qualifications of a worker, acquired informally, along with references. The passport allows both the employer and skilled workers of Sri Lanka to identify their experience under the national skills assessment systems, explore job opportunities with an adequate wage, decent work conditions and further training for reskilling and upskilling.

Employers pledged their readiness to work with governments on concrete solutions in implementing GCM objectives 5 on legal pathways, 6 on responsible recruitment and 18 on skills development, while acknowledging the various challenges that Governments face. They emphasized the need for **consistent dialogue** between government and employers, whether through existing formal national channels or through ad-hoc dialogues. **Building trust and understanding** will ensure frameworks that offer triple win solutions for employers, societies and migrants and contribute to promoting a positive narrative around global skills mobility.