

Summary Report

Thematic Workshop on Labour Migration and Skills

Thursday, 3 May 2018
Salle XXI, Palais des Nations, Geneva

1. Introduction

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2017-2018 Co-Chairs, Germany and Morocco, in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), convened a GFMD Thematic Workshop on Labour Migration and Skills at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 3 May 2018. The workshop saw the participation of more than 100 policymakers and practitioners in the field of international migration, representing over 60 UN Member States and international organizations, civil society and the private sector.

The workshop was organized to inform the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) negotiations with knowledge and ideas, based on experiences and good practices from different parts of the world, which reflect the perspectives of various stakeholders including policy makers, workers' and employers' representatives, as well as women and men migrant workers.

The main goals of the workshop were as follows:

1. To discuss and make concrete proposals on how the Global Compact for Migration can take forward the commitments and actions laid out in Objective 18;
2. To explore the role of the GFMD in showcasing state-led initiatives and experiences regarding the implementation of skill partnerships;
3. To foster cooperation in the establishment of a Global Skills Partnership by bringing together all relevant stakeholders to discuss skills development, anticipation and recognition for migrant workers.

The workshop explored a number of issues, including how the GCM can take forward the commitments laid out in Objective 18 (*“Invest in skills development and facilitate recognition of skills, qualifications and competences”*) and the role of the GFMD in the implementation of partnerships to this end. In terms of the way forward, speakers saw the formulation of a global skills partnership as a viable option to promote investments in skills development in countries of origin, anticipate demand for skills in countries of destination and origin, and establish credible assessment and certification systems for the recognition of prior learning and mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.

2. Main Themes and Structure

In his report, “Making Migration Work for All,” the United Nations Secretary-General points out that *‘If Member States open more diverse and accessible pathways for regular migration at all skills levels, meeting the demands of properly managed labour markets, combined with inter-State cooperation on matching the supply and demand for foreign workers, there would be fewer irregular border crossings, fewer migrants working outside the law and fewer abuses of irregular migrants.’* (para. 37, page 9, A/72/643). The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants states that a future Global Compact for Migration should include, among other elements, the: ‘(w) Recognition of foreign qualifications,

education and skills and cooperation in access to and portability of earned benefits' (page 23, A/RES/71/1).

Labour migration can be a vehicle for responding timely and effectively to labour supply and demand needs, for stimulating innovation and development in countries of origin, transit and destination. As different migration patterns exist in different parts of the world, there should not be a one-size-fits-all solutions to address labour-related issues in migration.

Against this backdrop, four mutually related workshop sessions were organized to unpack the challenges and opportunities as to labour mobility, exchange good practices to foster recognition of skills and qualifications, and establish a global skills partnership. The four sessions were as follows:

- Session I: Understanding Skill Demands for Labour Mobility
- Session II: Responding to Skill Demands for Labour Mobility and Local Labour Markets
- Session III: The Recognition of Skills and Qualifications
- Session IV: The Way Forward towards a Global Partnership on Skills and Migration

Each session was chaired by a Member State representative and included a number of experts serving as panel speakers from the governments, international organizations and the private sector to help frame and guide the discussions. At the end of each session, a rapporteur summed up the discussions as well relevant programs and practices that emerged from the panel.

3. Session highlights

3.1 Opening Remarks

Leading this year's GFMD process, **Mr. El Habib Nadir**, Moroccan GFMD Co-Chair, opened the Thematic Workshop, stressing that international migration is a natural and inevitable phenomenon and therefore, regional and global integration is important. In response to the increasing demand for skilled labour in many countries of destination, he argued that it is imperative to consider temporary migration as a viable solution in this regard. Governments, as well as employers' and workers' organizations, should therefore cooperate closely to formulate effective approaches addressing labour migration challenges such as irregular migration, informality and the lack of integration among migrant workers.

On the same note, **Mr. Sönke Lorenz**, representing the German GFMD Co-Chair, recalled the New York Declaration as a strong signal of the international community for better governed international migration. To meet the growing skills demand, countries have to invest not only in up-skilling and re-skilling of native workers, but in the acquisition of skilled workers from abroad. This requires, first and foremost, the recognition of foreign qualifications to ensure demand-oriented migration whilst increasing access to equal opportunities and global social mobility. To this end, he elaborated on Germany's so-called "Recognition Act" (entered into force on 1 April 2012), which simplifies and standardizes procedures for the evaluation of foreign professional or vocational qualifications, opening such procedures to migrants.

Mr. Moussa Oumarou, ILO Deputy Director-General for Field Operations & Partnerships, added that while it is well known that labour migration may provide a suitable instrument to respond to labour supply shortages in a timely and effective manner, many migrants remain unprotected from exploitative working conditions or face fraud and abuse in the recruitment process. To balance the challenges of addressing labour market needs and protecting individuals' rights, he underscored the need to strengthen coherence between employment policies, labour market needs assessments, and migration policies that are grounded in international labour standards.

3.2 Session 1: Understanding Skills Demand for Labour Mobility

Chair: *Mr. Ahmed Skim (Director of Migration Affairs, Morocco)*
Speakers: *Mr. Marco Taddei (Responsable Romand Union Patronale Suisse)*
Mr. Srinivas B. Reddy (Chief, ILO Skills and Employability Branch)
Mr. Ambet Yuson (Building and Wood Workers' International)

This session focused on the need for improved systems aimed at understanding the current and future skills demand in destination countries and matching systems in countries of origin. The panel, representing Morocco, an international organization and workers' associations, shared various opportunities and challenges relevant to the topic at hand, based on their respective personal and institutional experiences.

One of the challenges identified is for information on skills demand to be either non-existent or implemented on a limited basis in many countries, often due to gaps in available data. Data issues are further exacerbated by the dynamic nature of labour markets. Economic globalization and technological change, as well as the presence of large informal sectors pose additional challenges for skills identification and matching, and therefore also for migrant workers. In many countries of origin, systems for skills-anticipation remain unavailable, running the risk of brain drain and brain waste, and potentially increasing the “push factors” for irregular migration.

Despite these challenges, the discussion also showcased a number of opportunities and innovations. **Mr. Taddei** cited the Swiss Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), allowing EU citizens to live and work in Switzerland. This landmark legislation has led to an increase in qualified professionals across all skill levels mainly from neighboring countries. To improve skills anticipation for countries of origin, **Mr. Reddy** stressed the importance of skills needs assessment, using consistent and systematic quantitative and qualitative methods as a vital component of the existing Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS). Sharing on-the-ground experiences from the construction sector, **Mr. Yuson** underlined the need for direct recruitment and coordinated investments in vocational training and skills recognition procedures for migrant workers. The costs of such initiatives, he argued, should be shared between governments and employers in both countries of origin and destination.

3.3 Session II: Responding to Skill Demands for Labour Mobility and Local Labour Markets

Chair: *Amb. Socorro Flores Liera (Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UNOG)*
Speakers: *Amb. Deepak Dhital (Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UNOG)*
Mr. Joachem de Boers (Global Public Affairs Manager, World Employment Confederation)
Mr. Theodor Sparreboom (ILO Chief Technical Advisor, joint OECD-ILO EU-funded project on “Assessing the economic contribution of labour migration in developing countries as countries of destination”)

The second workshop session focused on how skill needs and gaps may effectively be addressed by both potential and return migrant workers. It also covered the importance of high-quality and relevant skills training in responding to dynamic skill demands in the context of rapid technological change. The panel—representing the Governments of Mexico and Nepal, ILO and the World Employment Confederation—shared the belief that flexible migration labour policies are needed to accommodate innovative and sustainable business models.

In terms of challenges, the speakers underscored that the skills of migrant workers are oftentimes neither well-articulated nor closely linked to the eligibility for employment in the countries of destination. When migrants work in developing countries, they tend to be overqualified for their job and often work in non-standardized forms of employment, thereby illustrating migrant workers' lower bargaining position. Moreover, in countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural disasters, labour

supply is likely to be affected. For instance, Nepal experienced an acute shortage of domestic labour in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake.

In response to these challenges, several innovative practices and policy recommendations were shared. **Amb. Dhital** discussed the creation of the Colombo Process, addressing the challenges in the Asian migration corridors in three thematic areas: (a) pre-departure orientation and training, (b) qualification and skills recognition, and (c) historical labour market analyses. He also articulated Nepal's attempt to establish a "migrant worker fund" which is mandated to repatriate stranded and sick workers and provide compensation to their families. For his part, **Mr. de Boers** articulated that creating policy frameworks recognizing both hard and soft skills is just as important as acknowledging the private sector's efforts to facilitate skills recognition and assessment. With regards to policy implications, **Mr. Sparreboom** shared some recommendations derived from his study on maximizing the contributions of migrant workers in developing countries — (a) monitor labour markets with a focus on migrants' rights, (b) further research and extending data coverage, (c) strengthen LMIS and incorporate data on migration more consistently, (d) and create greater awareness among host communities about the positive economic contributions of migrants.

3.4 Session III: The Recognition of Skills and Qualification

Chair: *Amb. Ramses Joseph Cleland (Permanent Representative of Ghana to the UNOG)*
Speakers: *Mr. Alex Zalami (Advisor to the Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, UAE)*
Ms. Denise Jillions (Director of Credentialing Initiatives and Special Projects, Global Talent Bridge)
Mr. Jean-Christophe Dumont (Head of International Migration Division, Directorate for Employment, OECD)

The third workshop session centred on understanding the relevance of skills recognition and its impact on the labour market in the context of mobility. The speakers, representing the Governments of Ghana and UAE, OECD and Global Talent Bridge, unanimously agreed on the critical role of employers as a valuable partner in identifying skills needs and establishing frameworks for assessing foreign qualifications.

Citing the European labour market as an example, it was mentioned that 50% of migrants in the region are either inactive, unemployed or over-qualified in their jobs. This situation points towards a lack of accessible skills recognition services during the migration process. Furthermore, when considering the recognition of prior learning and determination of equivalence, challenges are bigger in low-education sectors because, unlike in the higher education sector, they do not benefit from autonomous institutions that have their own screening requirements.

In terms of opportunities, **Mr. Zalami** presented the case of the Governments of India and the UAE, which recently partnered to harmonize their systems of skills recognition and qualification. He stressed that a harmonized skills ecosystem between two or more parties should rest on a set of coordinated regulatory measures, aligned occupational standards, and policies designed to incentivize skilling, recruitment of skilled workers and the mobility of skilled and up-skilled workers. For her part, **Ms. Jillions** recommended that immigrants having relevant credentials and skills must be given pre-arrival connection to support services, skills assessment, contextualized language training, mentoring, on the job training or paid internships. Finally, **Mr. Dumont** presented ten key recommendations and best practices of OECD countries as to the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. These ranged from establishing one-stop-shops for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, assessing foreign qualifications prior to arrival, to expanding bilateral and multilateral agreements on mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.

3.5 Session IV: Way forward towards a Global Partnership on Skills and Migration

Chair: *Mr. Sönke Lorenz (German GFMD Co-Chair)*

Speakers: *Ms. Michelle Klein Solomon (Director, Global Compact for Migration, IOM)*

Mr. Menno Bart (Public Affairs Manager, The Adecco Group)

Ms. Michelle Leighton (Chief, Labour Migration Branch, ILO)

Building on the previous sessions, the final panel focused on actionable commitments on skills development and recognition to be included in the Global Compact for Migration. In this context, the added value of global skills partnerships as well as related challenges and opportunities in improving systems of skills anticipation and matching were discussed.

The panel emphasized that the Global Compact includes several aspects from which possible actionable commitments can emerge. However, such commitments need to be supported by well-prepared and functioning labour migration schemes and education systems. Formalizing migration corridors for low-skilled and informal occupations also remains a challenge, otherwise leaving migrants unprotected.

With a view to the way forward, **Ms. Klein Solomon** stressed the opportunities for promoting labour mobility in the context of the GCM. One possible way of implementing the Compact's 360-degree vision, is to address labour market needs by identifying places from which skills could originate, in order to subsequently invest in tailor-made education programmes. To formalize corridors for migrants working in informal settings, **Mr. Bart** shared some policy options, *inter alia*, the use of trusted employer programs, work authorization mobility, and increasing labour market participation of under-served populations (e.g. youth, women and minorities). Finally, **Ms. Leighton** stressed that it is high time to formulate a global skills partnership that can tackle skills recognition, collect data on national and regional skills demand and supply, as well as improve education and training systems.

3.6 Closing Plenary and Wrap Up

Speakers: *Mr. Sönke Lorenz (German GFMD Co-Chair)*

Mr. Sangheon Lee (Director, Employment Department, ILO)

Representing the German GFMD Co-Chair, **Mr. Lorenz** thanked the participants and closed the thematic workshop. He informed the participants that the final report of the meeting will be transmitted to the GCM Co-Facilitators in order to reflect the discussions in the latest draft. In closing, **Mr. Lee** emphasized the need for coordinated policy actions to address the structural determinants of migration, such as demographic change, technological advancement, climate change, and a lack of decent employment opportunities at home. He affirmed that the workshop provided a fertile ground for the exchange of information, knowledge and innovations, thereby providing valuable impetus for a continued conversation on how to best coordinate policy actions at the global level.