

HARNESSING LABOUR MIGRATION TO RESPOND TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LABOUR MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY AND CONTRIBUTION TO GREEN TRANSITIONS

OVERVIEW

The important role of labour migration¹ and skills in climate change adaptation and mitigation policies is increasingly being recognized by the international community. By harnessing regular labour migration pathways, people affected by climate change can increase their resilience and prevent or mitigate situations of climate induced displacement in the future. Additionally, skills mobility partnerships and other skills programmes for migrant workers can contribute to developing an international workforce that is capable of supporting a green and just transition in line with the commitments contained in international agreements.

At the same time, climate change can also exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and place additional layers of vulnerabilities on migrant workers, increasing the potential for exploitation

and abuse at all stages of their migration journeys. In this context, identifying contextual risks and reinforcing principles of ethical recruitment and employment across migration corridors that are impacted by climate change is critical to reduce (mal)adaptive vulnerabilities and to improve migrant worker protection.

This policy brief presents an overview of labour migration as a climate change adaptation strategy, along with how migrant workers can contribute to the green transition in both the country of origin and destination, which are illustrated by a set of projects that highlight practical examples of these connections. To maximize the benefits of labour migration in the context of increasingly adverse climate impacts, a set of recommendations for policy makers is provided.



Rural lifestyle on islands in the Pacific Ocean is being threatened by the impacts of climate change © IOM/Muse Mohammed

¹ This paper uses the term ‘labour migration’ throughout, to refer to movements of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment. Labour migration also constitutes a sub-set of ‘labour mobility’, which can encompass not only geographic mobility of workers (movement across geographic locations) but also occupational movement (along the occupational

ladder). In the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), migration is understood as a type of human mobility, alongside displacement and planned relocation, and refers to more-or-less voluntary movements of persons, either from one State to another, or within their own country of residence.

PART ONE: LABOUR MOBILITY SUPPORTING GREEN TRANSITIONS

In absolute numbers, green transitions are projected by the ILO to lead to the creation of 25 million, and the loss of 7 million jobs by 2030, of which 5 million are re-allocatable.² New jobs will be spread across many occupations, although the ILO estimates that most jobs will be created for building workers, labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport, workers in market-oriented skilled agriculture, and metal and machinery workers. Both the skill and workforce gaps mean that concerted skills and labour measures will be required. These clear needs also suggest that green transitions can simultaneously address humanitarian and labour market needs by establishing labour migration pathways that are more accessible to and inclusive of vulnerable populations displaced by climate change, in particular through temporary, seasonal and circular opportunities for regular migration.



GREEN TRANSITION

25 million jobs created by 2030.³



LABOUR SHORTAGE

30 million open jobs in the 30 largest economies in the world.⁴



GREEN JOBS

Creation of 30 million jobs in the renewable energy sector⁵, and 27 million in the agriculture sector.⁶



YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

75 million unemployed youth in 2021, with the highest rates in Africa.⁷



River erosion in Bangladesh leading to displacement of the community © IOM/Amanda Nero

² International Labour Organization, *Skills For A Greener Future: A Global View* (Geneva, 2019).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Boston Consulting Group and International Organization for Migration, *Migration Matters: A Human Cause with a \$20 Trillion Business Case* (2022).

⁵ International Energy Agency, *The importance of focusing on jobs and fairness in clean energy transitions* (Paris, 2021).

⁶ McKinsey, *Food and agriculture* (2022).

⁷ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022. Investing in transforming futures for young people.* (Geneva, 2022).

Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Global youth unemployment is approximately three times the adult rate and circa 75 million young people were unemployed in 2021.⁸ With contemporary education and training, young people are however well-placed to fill new jobs created by green transitions and futureproofing these transitions will therefore necessitate measures specifically targeted to support youth employment in the green context. Fundamental changes, such as the transition towards low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies, have the potential to leave people behind. This means that a *just* green transition, that is conducted in a fair and inclusive manner, is vital. In jobs terms, this means “greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind”.⁹ In this context, it is important to recognize that the green transition will require some jobs to change substantially, while others might disappear completely.¹⁰

Box 1: MOVE_GREEN (E)Co-development for innovation and employment in green and circular economy between Andalusia and Morocco

MOVE_GREEN is a pilot circular labour mobility scheme established in 2021 between Andalusia (Spain) and Northern Morocco focussed on the renewable energy and green economy sector¹¹ in the framework of EU Pilot Projects on Legal Migration. It aims to address the three challenges of climate change, youth unemployment, and irregular migration between Morocco and Spain.¹² The

scheme allows Moroccan workers to work in Spain, including skills and training components in professional skills, renewable energy, the green economy, and Spanish that aim to increase their employability in Morocco following the scheme. The scheme includes a reintegration component, aiming to help participants (re)integrate into the Moroccan labour market. The pilot will conclude in 2024.

This is especially important considering the role that labour migration is likely to play in filling labour and skills gaps, with migrant workers often exposed to exploitation. Nevertheless, labour migration will be a necessary component of realising green transitions and from a short-term perspective it has the potential to plug labour gaps and accelerate the green transition.¹³ From a longer-term perspective, labour migration strategies and programmes have the potential to be developed so that the skills necessary for green transitions are cultivated and integrated in labour migration pathways. This would create regular labour migration channels aligned with labour market needs specific to green transitions that could also be inclusive of vulnerable populations, including those affected and displaced by climate change.

⁸ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022. Investing in transforming futures for young people*. (Geneva, 2022).

⁹ International Labour Organization, quoted by United Nations Development Programme, *What is just transition? And why is it important?* (2022).

¹⁰ Burning Glass Institute, *Growing Quality Green Jobs* (2023).

¹¹ Migration Partnership Facility, *(E)Co-development for innovation and employment in green and circular economy between Andalusia and Morocco (MOVE_GREEN)* (Brussels, 2021).

¹² Mason, N., I. Gençsü, J. Feyertag, and A. Löwe, *Migration for climate action: How labour mobility can help the green transition*. Working Paper. ODI (London, 2022).

¹³ Ibid

Box 2: Migrant workers and the green transition in Brazil

An ongoing pilot project by IOM aims to build capacity and improve socio economic integration for Venezuelans in the renewable energy sector in Brazil. The renewable energy sector in Brazil is experiencing major labour shortages, and in a response to this, the pilot aims to reskill Venezuelan workers to fill some of the labour gaps. Workers undertake an extensive training course that addresses skills required in, for example, the solar power industry. The pilot also includes components for migrants' personal development, such as supporting workers to build confidence in job interviews and establishing themselves as autonomous workers, with a focus on women.



Basic English language training for Venezuelan migrants provided by IOM © IOM/Ramiro Aguilar Villamarín

Communities and countries that rely on the labour migration of its population can also strategically utilise these pathways by providing access to relevant education and skills training to workers. If migrant workers return to their communities and countries of origin, benefits can be harnessed through skill and knowledge transfer, whilst diaspora members can be agents of change in green transitions. Skill Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) form a model where the development of skills for migrant workers is central with an emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration. In this model, trainings do not only provide opportunities for the destination country, but also build skills that directly impact local communities positively.

Diaspora contributions can be economic, but may also involve the transfer of knowledge, potentially through organised skills and knowledge exchange programmes.¹⁴ The human, social, and cultural capital within diasporas can indeed play a crucial role in propelling the green transition forward. For instance, diaspora members can take the lead by establishing environmentally friendly business ventures in their countries of origin. Moreover, the integration of traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices from their cultures can significantly enhance and diversify local green transition strategies in countries of origin and destination. Additionally, their efforts to raise awareness about pressing environmental issues, advocate for essential policy changes, and foster transnational partnerships can all contribute substantially to the advancement of green initiatives.

¹⁴ For example, under the European Union Diaspora Facility's 'Diaspora Professionals 4 Development' (DP4D) programme, the project 'Piloting digital learning on agri-food business and environmental informatics in Ethiopia leveraged the knowledge and skills of diaspora professionals to develop an e-learning curriculum on agri-food business and environmental informatics.

Box 3: Leveraging diaspora for climate action

The ongoing IOM Diaspora for Climate Action (D4C) project aims to engage diaspora communities in the U.K. from Albania, Bangladesh, Ghana and Jamaica in the area of climate action, and specifically for strategic climate change documents like Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and National Climate Change Adaptation Strategies. Opportunities and challenges will be assessed through collaboration with national and international experts, after which initiatives,

guidance tools and coordination mechanisms will be developed to engage the diaspora in climate action in their countries of origin. A completed IOM project studied the potential impact of the Kyrgyz diaspora community to contribute to climate actions in Kyrgyzstan. This focused on the willingness of diaspora members to provide financial support as well as how they can contribute to developing relevant climate related documents such as NDCs and NAPs



The leader of the Honduran diaspora in Miami who promotes fundraising activities to support vulnerable communities in the origin country © IOM/Ismael Cruceta

PART TWO: LABOUR MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY

The latest IPCC report highlights the strong links between labour migration and adaptation to climate change. It cites evidence from almost all regions on Earth of livelihoods being impacted by climate hazards, driving people living in rural areas to diversify their sources of income, and accelerating livelihood transitions towards waged employment in urban centres and away from rural agricultural production.¹⁵ Labour migration is therefore one of the many ways in which people cope with or adapt to climate change impacts and offers a solution for people to move.¹⁶ The IPCC's analysis builds on over a decade of academic scholarship highlighting that people are not only displaced by climate impacts, but that people also utilise other mobility strategies, including labour migration, to respond to climatic changes.¹⁷

Box 4: Increased vulnerability of migrant workers employed on small-scale sugarcane farm in Thailand¹⁸

In Southeast Asia, people whose livelihoods are affected by climate change impacts may turn to established cross-border labour migration corridors to increase their income, especially when climate change impacts such as droughts and floods adversely affect agricultural livelihoods. In Thailand, many workers from designated border areas in Cambodia and Myanmar use Thailand's Border Employment Scheme or cross the border irregularly, and work on small-scale sugarcane plantations in designated Thai provinces. In a study commissioned by IOM, migrant workers working on smallholder sugarcane plantations have reported exploitative and abusive working conditions, such as long working days, wages below the legal minimum, an absence of written contracts, a dependence on employers, and the

withholding of personal documents. Moreover, the substandard accommodation in open-air structures on their employers' property and physical isolation increases their exposure to adverse climate change impacts such as rains, floods and heatwaves. These natural hazards not only put migrant workers at a direct risk of adverse climate change effects and deteriorate their living conditions further, but also impact their income when working is no longer possible because of the paid by piece principle instead of a fixed income. Additionally, safety risks associated with pesticides and fertiliser use, the burning of sugarcane fields prior to harvest, and the lack of access to protective equipment further increases the vulnerability of migrant workers.



A migrant worker on their way to an agricultural farm in Thailand © IOM/Javier Vidal

¹⁵ J. Birkmann et al., *Poverty, Livelihoods and Sustainable Development* in H.-O. Pörtner et al. (eds), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁶ IOM, *Thinking about Tomorrow, Acting Today: The Future of Climate Mobility* (Geneva, 2023).

¹⁷ Richard Black, Stephen R.G. Bennett, Sandy M. Thomas and John R. Beddington, Migration as adaptation, *Nature*, 478(7370):447-449 (2011).

¹⁸ Sara Vigil and Dayoon Kim, *International Migration in a Changing Climate: Insights from Malaysia and Thailand* (2023).

At the same time, as the evidence base grows, it is becoming clearer that labour migration has its limits as a climate adaptation strategy. Frequently labour migration constitutes more of a coping strategy, whereby households are only able to cope with adverse impacts in the short term and not successfully mediate climate impacts and improve their situation in the long-term, as adaptation suggests. Labour migration can also be maladaptive, whereby households may become more vulnerable, including to climate change impacts.¹⁹ Whether people are able to navigate the challenges of climate change and migration and utilise migration as an adaptation strategy is also intrinsically shaped by personal resources and capacities, including personal decisions regarding migration, skills, and available resources. Extrinsically, existing vulnerabilities can determine the ability of people to utilise labour migration, while migration also has the possibility to exacerbate these existing vulnerabilities.

A key determinant of adaptive capacity is access to and use of regular labour migration. Labour migration outside of regular channels carries an increased risk of exploitation and in the context of climate change, of maladaptation. Financial tools such as regular income (potentially transferred into remittances) and social protections are not the only tools that determine adaptive potential. Investing in skill trainings and recognition may help migrant workers to enter higher skilled jobs and integrate better so that their benefits from migration increases. It is also important to recognise that skills relevant for climate change adaptation can be acquired through labour migration and subsequently diffused to communities.

Box 5: The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme

PALM is a managed labour migration programme that enables workers from 9 Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to work in the Australian agricultural sector and selected agriculture-related food product manufacturing sectors for up to nine months for seasonal jobs, or between one and four years for longer-term roles. The precursor programme to PALM (Seasonal Worker Programme, SWP) has empowered agricultural workers from Pacific

Island countries, most of whom are also small-scale farmers in their home countries, to adapt to climate impacts on return using techniques and skills learned in Australia, such as new crop tending techniques, working with farming technologies, larger-scale commercial farming methods, and farm management techniques²⁰. This was the case despite formal agricultural training not being provided.



Sea level rise and disasters threaten communities living on islands in the Pacific © IOM/Muse Mohammed

¹⁹ Kira Vinke, Jonas Bergmann, Julia Blocher, Himani Upadhyay and Roman Hoffmann, Migration as Adaptation? *Migration Studies*, 8(4):626-634 (2020).

²⁰ Olivia Dun, Natascha Klocker, Carol Farbotko and Celia McMichael, Climate change adaptation in agriculture: Learning from an international labour mobility programme in Australia and the Pacific Islands region, *Environmental Science & Policy*, 139:250-273 (2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. IMPROVE THE RECOGNITION OF THE LINKS BETWEEN LABOUR MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN POLICY FRAMEWORKS AT ALL LEVELS

- ▶ Consider relevant human mobility concerns, including the adaptive potential of labour migration in the context of climate change as well as its potential to drive green transitions, in all workstreams of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the work stream on climate adaptation.
- ▶ Explicitly include labour migration in State Party submissions to the UNFCCC, particularly in updated National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- ▶ Join up climate change adaptation and green transitions with labour migration concerns in reporting processes for all relevant international policy frameworks, including but not limited to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration.
- ▶ At the national level, link both climate adaptation policy and climate mitigation policy and planning for green transitions to labour and skills policies. Introduce clearly defined and regular communication channels and regular exchanges between the relevant (sub)national ministries as well as defined named contact persons within ministries.
- ▶ Include labour and skills components within the planning processes embedded in national climate change framework laws so that future labour and skills gaps can be identified and flagged to other parts of government.



Climate change changes herder movements, leading to conflicts © IOM/Natalie Oren

2. LEVERAGE THE POTENTIAL OF EXISTING LABOUR MIGRATION SCHEMES

- ▶ National governments should consider how existing labour migration schemes could be utilised by people affected by climate change as part a strategy to adapt to climate change, and whether these existing programmes could provide access to vulnerable populations to prevent future displacement in the context of climate change.
- ▶ Review existing labour migration schemes, including skills mobility partnerships and other skills programmes for workers, to find out whether existing schemes are having unplanned benefits for either climate adaptation or climate mitigation, with a view to exploring whether these benefits can be leveraged to respond to the climate crisis in a more structured way.
- ▶ Introduce explicit climate-related training and skills components into existing labour migration schemes, especially those schemes in sectors impacted the most by climate change (for example agriculture) or particularly important to green transitions (for example renewable energy). Work together with workers and employers to establish their training needs.
- ▶ Improve and expedite processes for recognising qualifications and skills of international workers so that they can more easily fill labour and skills gaps and access regular labour migration pathways.
- ▶ Develop skills development programmes that address anticipated skills gaps in the green transition, including re-skilling workers currently employed in carbon-intensive industries where jobs are projected to disappear, and make these programmes available to migrant workers.
- ▶ Ensure that workers using existing labour migration schemes are protected, that their human rights are upheld, and that they are afforded the full range of social security, pursuant to existing international agreements and labour standards.
- ▶ Create opportunities for diaspora members to act as agents of change in green transitions though their economic, human, social and cultural capital.



The 2023 International Dialogue on Migration on mobility and climate change © IOM 2023

3. CREATE NEW PATHWAYS FOR LABOUR AND SKILLS MIGRATION

- ▶ Establish new pathways for labour migration that are specifically aimed at filling labour and skills gaps in sectors relevant for green transitions.
- ▶ Tailor new pathways to attract individuals with expertise in areas such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and green technologies.
- ▶ Make new pathways for labour migration for green transitions available to youth and develop skills training options that are specifically designed to support young workers.
- ▶ Design access provisions that would allow people particularly affected by climate change to utilise the new labour migration pathways, including but not limited to pre-departure or on-the-job skills training and mentoring schemes.
- ▶ In designing new labour migration schemes consider not only the benefits for the local and national economy, but also for the worker and their community and country of origin, to increase the chances that labour mobility schemes can lead to increased adaptive capacity.

4. PROTECTION AND PREVENTION OF EXPLOITATION

- ▶ While labour migration has the potential to be leveraged as a catalyst for just green transitions, the exacerbated risks for exploitation of migrant workers across climate-affected migration corridors must also be acknowledged and addressed.
- ▶ These potential risks of labour migration should be identified and accounted for by all relevant actors and the protection and prevention of exploitation of workers in all existing and newly developed schemes must be paramount.
- ▶ Strengthen regulation and protection for workers, including but not limited to workers in sectors relevant to green transitions and migration corridors impacted by climate change, to ensure that labour migration pathways facilitate safe migration and, in the context of climate adaptation, realise the best adaptive potential.
- ▶ Ensure the ethical recruitment of workers, protections at work, safeguarding of workers, and the integration of workers in the host community or country.
- ▶ Adapt labour laws and ethical recruitment principles for application to new and emerging industries, to ensure compliance with human rights and international labour standards for all workers and increase inspections to ensure enforcement.
- ▶ Require employers participating in labour migration schemes to do due diligence for compliance with principles of ethical recruitment both internally and across their supply chains, including by any recruitment agencies involved, and report on their treatment of workers to ensure that labour migration schemes are providing decent work and supporting a just green transition.
- ▶ Extend grievance and remedy systems to encompass the emergence of new labour migration pathways. These mechanisms should be accessible in languages understood by migrant workers, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed effectively.



Communities dependent on natural resources are vulnerable to climate change impacts © IOM/Andrea Empamano

5. CONTRIBUTE TO AN IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE BASE ON LABOUR MOBILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

- ▶ Model and publish projections for national labour and skills gaps that will emerge in pursuing green transitions and disaggregate projections according to priority sectors. These projections should be prepared and published in such a manner that they are useable for Ministries of the Interior and the relevant ministries concerned with labour and skills.
- ▶ Collect and publish age-disaggregated data on employment in green transitions, including of young migrant workers, to effectively monitor the employment of youth in green transitions and to be able to inform the future development of education and skills training specifically for young workers.
- ▶ Effectively monitor and publish evaluations of ongoing pilot labour migration schemes for green transitions so that other employers, ministries, and governments can learn from best practices and experiences gained.
- ▶ Support more research on the role of labour migration in green transitions, potentially through the identification of this priority in existing research funding programmes. Research findings should be actively fed into migration policy processes at both the national and international levels.
- ▶ Support research that aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of (mal)adaptation through labour migration and the risks of perpetuation of unethical recruitment practices across climate-impacted migration corridors so that the factors that determine the adaptive outcomes of labour migration can be better understood and future programmes can be designed to foster adaptation rather than maladaptation.
- ▶ Support research on how to increase the inclusivity of skill-specific labour migration schemes, for example whether skills training provision prior to labour migration could contribute to widening access.
- ▶ Support research in labour migration as climate adaptation in and between high-income countries. There is little awareness of these links and research focuses on labour migration from and between low-income countries. More awareness could be useful for engaging policymakers from high-income countries in policy discussions.

6. LEVERAGE SYNERGIES BETWEEN CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND CLIMATE MITIGATION THROUGH LABOUR MOBILITY

- ▶ Mainstream approaches that take a holistic view of climate mitigation for green transitions and climate adaptation, especially when labour migration is being focused on. Take every opportunity to focus on the synergies that can be found between climate adaptation and green transitions, not only for local and national economies but also for the worker, their families, and the community around the worker.
- ▶ Recognize that the challenges posed by climate change are multifaceted and interconnected. By integrating adaptation and mitigation strategies within labour mobility programs, a multifunctional response can be forged. This synergy not only has the possibility to enhance the adaptive capacity of migrant workers but can also advance the overall sustainability and resilience of host communities.



Upon return, migrant workers set up an ecological farm and involved the community through skills and knowledge transfer © IOM 2022



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