

COLOMBO PROCESS

EMPOWERING MIGRANT WORKERS WITH ADEQUATE ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES THROUGHOUT THE MIGRATION CYCLE:

A SNAPSHOT OF COLOMBO PROCESS MEMBER STATES ACHIEVEMENTS



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PRODUCT SUMMARY

This publication was produced in the framework of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) funded project “Strengthening Governance of Labour Migration in South and South East Asia” (GOALS). Jointly implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in close cooperation with the Colombo Process Member States, the overall objective of GOALS is to ensure that labour migration is safe, orderly and regular for all women and men from the Colombo Process Member States through strengthened collaboration and effective labour migration governance. These were discussed and agreed at the last meeting of the Thematic Area Working Group which took place in Colombo in December 2023.

INTRODUCTION

This product aims to showcase the Colombo Process Member States' achievements and progress towards empowering migrant workers with adequate access to information, social protection mechanisms and inclusive services to enhance labour migration governance within their constituencies. Following a brief summary of the Colombo Process objectives, thematic area working groups and working modalities, this product focuses on the work carried out by Colombo Process Member States in advancing pre-departure orientation (PDO) and empowerment for migrant workers to ensure safe and decent work and optimize their migration and employment experience.

After outlining the relevance of PDO and empowerment for effective labour migration governance, this product paints a picture of the key achievements and progress undertaken by Colombo Process Member States in their respective contexts; looking at:

1. **Effective dissemination of information on safe and decent labour migration,**
2. **Gender-sensitive access to social protection mechanisms throughout the migration cycle; and**
3. **Gender responsive and inclusive support and services to empower returning migrant workers and their families.**

Building on the work already carried out by Member States to ensure safe and decent labour migration for all, this product then proposes a series of key recommendations for stronger labour migration governance in the areas of migrant workers' orientation and empowerment throughout the migration cycle.



Credit: Petr Sevcovic

THE COLOMBO PROCESS

The Colombo Process is a Regional Consultative Process on the management of overseas employment and contractual labour for countries of origin in Asia. It was established in 2003, in response to calls from several Asian labour-sending countries, who increasingly recognized the need for optimizing the benefits of organized labour migration, whilst protecting their migrants from exploitative practices in recruitment and employment.

The aim of the Colombo Process is to provide a forum for its members to:

1. **Share experiences, lessons learned and best practices on overseas employment,**
2. **Consult on issues faced by overseas workers, labour sending and receiving states, and to propose practical solutions for the wellbeing of overseas workers,**
3. **Optimize development benefits from organized overseas employment and enhance dialogue with countries of destination; and**
4. **Review and monitor the implementation of recommendations and identify new action points.**

The current membership of the Colombo Process consists of 12 Member States (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam) and Observer Countries. Under the leadership of the Chairing country, the Colombo Process Member States regularly meet for Senior Officials' Meetings and Ministerial Meetings, to advance their commitments to the four principal objectives and thematic foci of the Colombo Process.

Acting upon the agreement reached by the Colombo Process Member States in November 2015, IOM has established and has been operating the Colombo Process Technical Support Unit since January 2016, through its country office in Sri Lanka. The Unit supports South and South East Asian governments in pursuing the goals and actions currently agreed in the five thematic areas of the Colombo Process. Five TAWG have been activated for each of the thematic priorities commonly agreed by Member States, namely: PDO and empowerment, skills and qualification recognition, fair and ethical recruitment, remittances and labour market analysis. Each of these working groups periodically set their own specific objectives and workplans and is voluntarily joined by Colombo Process Member States for which the thematic area is a relevant priority.

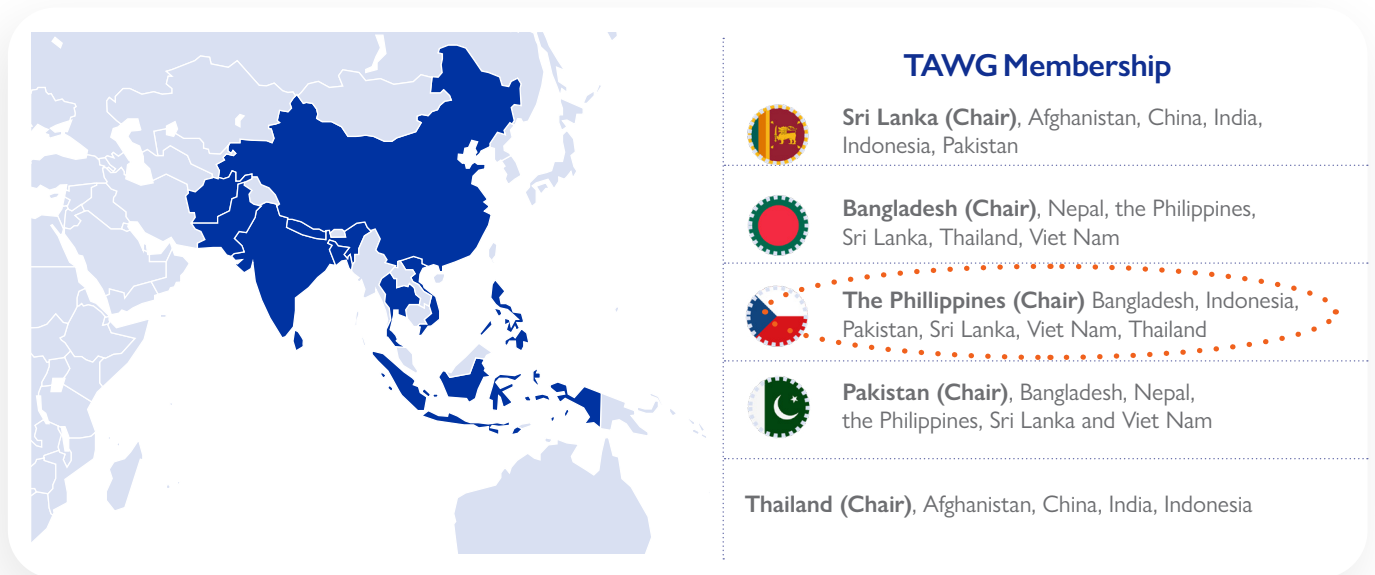
Figure 1.1 Colombo Process thematic priority areas and cross-cutting themes



A member of the working group chairs the meetings on a rotational basis. Since its inception, a total number of 31 thematic area working group meetings have been convened, bringing together representatives including Colombo Process Member

State representatives and observers, UN organizations, civil society organizations and trade unions, in an effort to enrich exchanges and ensure outcomes that integrate specialized expertise as well as the voice and needs of migrant workers themselves.

Figure 1.2 Map of the Colombo Process Member States



This product focuses on the work carried out by Colombo Process Member States under the PDO and empowerment thematic area working group.

THE COLOMBO PROCESS THEMATIC AREA WORKING GROUP ON PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The Member States party to the working group on PDO and empowerment (The Philippines as Chair, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam) have committed to creating awareness through effective information dissemination for migrant workers and their families in order to empower them and make informed decisions to maximize the benefits of migration. Under this overarching goal, Colombo Process Member States of this working group have worked to ensure (1) effective dissemination of information to migrant workers about safe and decent labour migration and (2) that migrant workers have adequate access to social protection mechanisms throughout the migration cycle and in a gender-sensitive manner. Since 2023, members of the PDO and empowerment working group have also committed to (3)

strengthening the accessibility and availability of gender responsive and inclusive support and services to empower migrant workers and their families. Since its inception, this thematic area working group has convened a total of six meetings, bringing together representatives from Colombo Process Member States, observer states, UN organizations and other international organizations, as well as civil-society organization and trade union representatives. The overarching goal, objectives and ongoing work carried out by Colombo Process Member States on PDO and empowerment, directly contribute to the achievements and acceleration of the following Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) and Objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM):



COLOMBO PROCESS MEMBER STATES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY, AND REGULAR MIGRATION

The achievements advanced by Colombo Process Member States under the working group on PDO and empowerment directly contribute to GCM **Objective 3** to provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration, including at pre-departure stage; GCM **Objective 16** to empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion; as well as GCM **Objective 21** to cooperate in facilitating [...] sustainable reintegration; and, GCM **Objective 22** to establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits.

Member States have actioned efforts to provide and disseminate accurate, timely, accessible and transparent information on migration-related aspects for migrant workers. Through PDO programmes, national campaigns and migrant resource centres (MRC) in origin countries, Colombo Process Member States offer open and accessible information points that make available relevant information, including on human rights and fundamental freedoms, appropriate protection and assistance, options and pathways for regular migration. Through community welfare attachés and overseas employment promoters deployed in destination countries, migrant workers also benefit from continuous access to information points along the migration cycle. Cambodia's labour migration policy, for example, foresees the establishment of Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) to strengthen the effectiveness of information dissemination in regards to safe labour migration and prevention of irregular and unsafe migration. These actions are in line with commitments espoused in GCM **Objective 3 c), d), e)** as well as GCM **Objective 16 b)**.

Colombo Process Member States also improved pre-departure, post-arrival and pre-employment orientation to migrant workers, to include aspects linked to financial literacy and planning as well as entrepreneurship, in view of strengthening workers' return and reintegration prospects. Such actions support the creation of conducive conditions for economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities, in order to ensure that migrant workers' reintegration in countries of origin is sustainable, in line with GCM **Objective 21 b), h)**.

To empower migrant workers, Colombo Process Member States have established or strengthened mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits. They achieved this through strengthening national social protection systems and legislative and policy actions in line with **Objective 22 a)**, as well as through bilateral labour migration agreements and the development of standard employment contracts that include minimum social protection conditions, in line with **Objective 22 b)**. For example Nepal recently passed national policy frameworks that enlarge social security nets to encompass migrant workers in overseas employment.



RELEVANCE OF PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT FOR STRONG LABOUR MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

Pre-departure orientation programmes have grown in importance for migrant workers' protection and empowerment. These educational programmes provide reliable information to departing migrant workers that ease their transition into their country of destination and empower them to maximize the benefits of overseas employment. They are premised on two ideas: one is that the protection of migrants begins at home; the other is that reliable information builds an important foundation for migrant empowerment and protection. PDO can indeed work as a crucial tool to raise awareness among migrants and employers on migrant workers' rights and access to remedy, to reduce the manifold risks associated with international labour migration; while also ensuring understanding of their employment contract and the illegal character of recruitment fees. Beyond protection concerns, PDO programmes can also help address the workplace integration of migrants, align their skills with employer requirements pre-departure and thus enhance the productivity and employment experience of the worker abroad. They can also benefit destination countries as they can help them prepare arriving migrants and improve integration prospects for them; including through basic language training and sessions on interculturality.

The scope of such programmes is increasingly being expanded to support migrant workers' sustainable return to ensure a successful reintegration in country-of-origin communities, after their overseas employment has been completed. Access to information on labour market and investment opportunities at the pre-departure stage can support returnees in better planning their reintegration

process. In addition, financial literacy and budget management training at the pre-departure stage, including of remittances, can strengthen migrant workers' resilience and support financial planning for return. But to truly empower migrant workers, the dissemination of information needs to continue beyond the pre-departure stage and should be supplemented with adequate access to services, social protection and access to remedy throughout the migration cycle.

Because labour migration is gendered at all points of the cycle, it is also imperative for PDO and empowerment policies and practices to adopt a gender-inclusive approach that considers the integration and intercultural needs specific to women, but that also addresses gender-specific risks to abuse and exploitation that women migrant workers may face. As such, comprehensive and tailored information programmes and social support services such as those advanced under the Colombo Process working group, can fulfil an umbrella function for migrant workers at every stage of the migration cycle. Effective labour migration governance requires policies and institutional practices in labour sending-countries that facilitate the orientation and empowerment of migrant workers before their journey even begins but also throughout. In view of optimizing the outcomes of PDO and empowerment for migrant workers, policies and programmes should encourage multi-stakeholder engagement between labour-sending and receiving countries, as well as close collaboration with employers and hosting communities.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF COLOMBO PROCESS MEMBER STATES TO EMPOWER MIGRANT WORKERS WITH ADEQUATE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES

Colombo Process Member States' commitment to advancing the protection and empowerment of migrant workers through gender-responsive access to information, inclusive services and social protection mechanisms is evidenced by the plethora of initiatives, programmes and policy changes that Member States have spearheaded in recent years. The thematic area working group members have taken strides in strengthening policies and improving practices so that they are more responsive to the needs of migrant workers throughout their migration cycle; and adapted to changing realities on the ground. Working group meetings have served as a vehicle to mutually inspire Colombo Process Member States' national practices and harmonize certain policies at regional level, while maintaining momentum towards migrant workers' empowerment in the region.

Today, all concerned Member States offer PDO programmes that have been institutionalized within their respective labour migration policies, making them compulsory for emigrating migrant workers from the region. While some Colombo Process Member States have advanced more than others in digitizing their information delivery systems, within the context of PDO and beyond, all have committed to innovating their services by leveraging existing information and communication technologies. Similarly, governments have placed gender mainstreaming of PDO programmes at the top of their agenda, with some already implementing programmes tailored and targeted to women workers, while others are either developing them or building internal capacity to that end. Sector-specific approaches to PDO have also emerged, with the design and delivery of programmes customized for migrant workers in the domestic and garment

sectors. Overall, Colombo Process Member States continue to exchange and engage with fresh ways to strengthen their existing programmes and policies in view of effectively sensitizing prospective overseas workers on safe and decent labour migration.

When it comes to social welfare, most Colombo Process governments have adopted legislative changes and/or policy developments to better streamline migrant workers' welfare needs at all stages of the migration cycle. This has included the adoption of provisions linked to pension schemes, financial subsidies for business development and health coverage for workers abroad; notably for returning migrants including in emergency contexts (for example during the COVID-19 pandemic). A few Member States have also formalized this engagement by entering into Memoranda of Understanding and/or Bilateral Labour Agreements with countries of destination to ensure that minimum social protection standards are guaranteed for their nationals abroad.

Finally, Colombo Process Member States have also focused their efforts in strengthening the accessibility and availability of gender responsive and inclusive support and services to empower migrant workers and their families, especially in ensuring sustainable return and reintegration of workers in their home country. This has included deployment of community welfare agents and labour attachés in destination countries as well as delivery of pre-return skills training and financial support. Other innovative practices, such as the establishment of 'mobile courts', have also been launched to increase and improve migrant workers' access to justice and remedy in remote and/or rural areas.

INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON SAFE AND DECENT LABOUR MIGRATION

Migrant workers often experience substantial barriers to integration in the destination country's workplace and within their hosting society at large. Many migrants are also not well informed regarding their rights and responsibilities under local

labour laws in countries of destination, thereby increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and breaches of labour contractual rights. In addition, migrants' lack of awareness of cultural norms and practices in countries of destination can lead



Credit: Kanchana Amilan

to social friction, miscommunication, and conflict with employers and local community members; all of which can negatively affect their migration experience and overseas employment. In view of empowering migrants to mitigate such potential effects and protect them against abuses, it is key to ensure that inclusive and effective information on safe and decent labour migration is conveyed to them early on in the migration process, notably through the implementation of comprehensive PDO programmes.

While all relevant Member States offer compulsory PDO to emigrating migrant workers, some have made policy and process advances that help to ensure and monitor that all emigrating migrant workers benefit from PDO programming. **Bangladesh**, for example, has developed an internal case management system that tightly links their immigration clearance process to PDO completion by way of digital PDO certification. This works as an effective check-and-balance mechanism that renders it difficult for PDO providers, recruiters and employers to circumvent PDO requirements for nationals set to work overseas. The number of PDO enrolments by Bangladeshi migrant workers has increased fivefold between 2020 and 2023. According to Viet Nam's regulations for PDO, aside from language and vocational training, recruitment agencies and service providers are required to offer prospective migrant workers knowledge on labour, criminal, civil

and administrative laws of Viet Nam and destination countries, covering insurance (social, health and accident-related) and compensation for migrant workers. National regulations, impose a total of 58 compulsory sessions on various aspects of PDO. Nevertheless, feedback assessments have shown that migrant workers' PDO experience is often limited to language training and orientation on destination countries' customs and traditions. Assessments have also pointed to false certificates being issued in cases where PDO was incomplete or not provided at all. To mitigate non-compliance by recruitment agencies with orientation training regulations, **Viet Nam** has introduced the imposition of sanctions; a process, which is enshrined in law and is supervised at governmental level. Such sanctions can range between USD 450 to 900 per case and act as a deterrent mechanism for PDO providers in the country.

While **Pakistan** does not currently possess gender-specific PDO programming, capacity-building sessions for key government officers were conducted by the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development and ILO to deliver effective gender-sensitive PDOs. In the context of its labour migration programme with Saudi Arabia, **The Philippines** has established a joint technical working group that convenes weekly to mutually exchange between country of destination and origin

representatives on the information needs of workers and government; they have also created a sub-committee for PDO for Filipino migrant workers. Through regular multisided collaboration with Saudi Arabia, The Philippines ensures alignment between migrant workers' needs, country-of-destination realities and country-of-origin requirements when it comes to information provision and delivery to labour migrants across the corridor.

Beyond PDO programmes, Colombo Process Member States have demonstrated creativity in the information delivery channels established within their contexts, targeting migrant workers at different stages of their migration. [Cambodia's Policy for Labour Migration in Cambodia 2019 - 2023](#) (Objective 1.6) foresees the establishment of Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) to strengthen the effectiveness of information dissemination in regards to safe labour migration and prevention of irregular and unsafe migration. Since the policy's release, a network of MRCs have been

inaugurated across the country and are managed in partnership with government institutions (under the auspices of the General Department of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training), trade unions and civil society organizations; and provide a range of services in countries of origin and destination alike. In **Pakistan**, MRCs are also running in collaboration with the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to provide reliable information on migration and support informed-decision making. The **Thai** Labour Administration under the Department of Employment has launched the [SMART TOEA](#) mobile application which works as an overseas employment e-service for Thai migrant workers. The mobile application provides real-time labour market information for nationals interested in working overseas, administrative and legal information on overseas employment as well as information linked to emergency preparedness in case of crises for workers abroad.



Credit: Najl Musthafa

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION FOR WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

Recognizing the specific needs of women migrant workers and the gendered nature of labour migration, **Bangladesh** offers a compulsory orientation and training programme for any women aspiring to work overseas. Delivered through Bangladesh's Technical Training Center, regulated by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, the training programme covers key aspects linked to terms of employment, women migrant workers' labour and human rights, migration and employment-related risks as well as information on referral services for inclusive support. The Bangladeshi Government has recently extended the training from 21 to 30 days. An evaluation module has also been recently included to assess women migrant workers' reception of the training and feed into the training's improvement for future iterations. Developed by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment with the support of UN Women and ILO, Bangladesh also provides two months-long training programmes for domestic workers migrating to Gulf Cooperation Countries (and caregivers who migrate to Japan and Hong Kong). The IOM has also supported the Government of Bangladesh in developing the Ready-Made Garments PDO for Jordan-bound Bangladeshi female migrant workers under IOM's CREST Fashion initiative. By adopting a sector-specific approach to PDO and information delivery, migrant workers benefit from a tailored understanding of labour exploitation risks and working conditions specific to their industry, enabling them to make informed-decisions and gain appropriate awareness on their worker and human rights pre-departure.

These activities directly contribute to the achievement of GCM Objective 3 Action points c), d) and e) and Objective 16 b).



SOCIAL WELFARE AND PROTECTION TO MAXIMIZE THE WELLBEING OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Although migrant workers contribute significantly to the economies of their host and home countries, they are often excluded from social protection coverage and thereby from the portability of their social rights. They may be denied access or have limited access to social security because of their status or nationality or due to the insufficient duration of their periods of employment and residence abroad. In addition, the absence of bilateral or multilateral agreements between labour-receiving and sending countries may prevent migrant workers from maintaining their earned benefits and benefits in process of acquisition. In view of supporting the extension of social protection to all, including to migrant workers, Colombo Process Member States have actioned policies and legislations or entered bilateral agreements to guarantee minimal social protection guarantees linked to health coverage and pension schemes, amongst other, for their nationals working overseas.

In December 2022, the **Nepal** Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security passed two [working guidelines](#) that enlarge social security nets to encompass migrant workers, informal workers and self-employed persons within Nepal and abroad. This policy development essentially allows migrant workers to enlist in the country's contribution-based social security system, enabling them to benefit from a series of social benefits. For migrant workers, these include accident and disability plans, support for dependent family members, old-age security plan, financial compensation in case of temporary work impediment due to sustained injury or disability; as well as coverage of funerary services in case of sudden deaths in the workers' family. Through dedicated Joint Committee Meetings, the Government is also planning to discuss and work with receiving countries to improve social security schemes for migrant workers, including through entering Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with different



Credit: Arun Prakash

countries. Most recently, the Government of Nepal has signed an MOU with Malaysia to guarantee minimum protection standards for Nepalese workers.

Sri Lanka established the ‘Employer-paid insurance scheme’ for migrant workers emigrating to the Middle East, according to which insurance is covered by employers for the first two years of employment (renewable). In September 2022, the Ministry of Labour and Foreign employment also introduced “**Manusavi**”, a social security contributory pension scheme for Sri Lankan migrant workers. Its objective is to strengthen the retirement prospects of those engaged in foreign employment and secure long-term livelihoods for them. In parallel, the Sri Lankan Government has also devised country-specific social protection systems for certain job categories and is currently foreseeing the revision of its Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act, revised in May 2023.

Bangladesh has amended its [Overseas Employment and Migrants Act-2013](#) in 2023. While the amendment focuses principally on the role and monitoring of subagents and intermediary entities on labour recruitment, it includes provisions for the introduction and facilitation of bank loans, tax concessions, savings, investments, financial assistance and scholarships for the welfare of migrant workers and their family members. It states that special financial and other welfare programs may be adopted to ensure respect, dignity, rights, safety and security, particularly of female migrant workers abroad. The Government is also considering additional provisions that would oblige embassies and consular services to report back on the health condition and welfare of female workers abroad within three months of their arrival to their employment country. Such practices could help generate transparency and accountability of employers abroad when it comes to protecting the health and safety of their migrant employees.

SECURING PAKISTANI WORKERS' SOCIAL PROTECTION THROUGH BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

In **Pakistan**, representatives of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD) established a national Committee to review existing Memoranda of Understanding and agreements with destination countries to align with the recommendations presented by the Sub-Regional Symposium on Bilateral Labour Migration Instruments (Kathmandu, May 2023). In that context, the government plans to strengthen provisions linked to social welfare and protection, and maximize benefits to workers.

A Memorandum of Collaboration was also renewed with the Social Security Organization of Malaysia PERKESO, which has currently over 62,000 Pakistani workers registered. Signed in July 2023 for a period of 3 years, the Memorandum of Collaboration aims to strengthen collaboration between the two countries in the realm of social security, particularly when it comes to enforcement, payment of benefits; as well as rehabilitation and prevention of workers' rights' violations.

These activities directly contribute to the achievement of GCM Objective 22 Action points a) and b).



INCLUSIVE SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO EMPOWER RETURNING MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE MIGRATION CYCLE

Migrants are often found to face both social and economic challenges after returning to their home country, a circumstance that often pushes returnees to re-migrate for employment. This situation commonly happens either because of few employment opportunities in origin countries or because returning migrants lack the entrepreneurship skills and right networks to establish their own businesses. The difficulty for migrants to secure livelihood opportunities after their return and support their families, can often lead to stigmatization from communities of origin and psychosocial repercussions affecting returning migrants' mental health and social wellbeing.

While a myriad of initiatives and policies are in place to ensure the empowerment of migrant workers during migration and employment, opportunities to support the sustainable return and reintegration of migrant workers post-employment are often missed. While the successful return and reintegration of migrant workers can depend on various external factors (worker's time spent abroad, his/her resources and acceptance by community members, structural capacities and economic opportunities available in the country of origin) the provision of accessible information early on in the migration process and delivery of

inclusive services on country of origin labour market opportunities, skills training, financial literacy and budget management can come a long way. Policies and practices that guide workers in managing their remittance flows towards productive savings plans or that address remittance management from the recipients' side in communities of origin can also help secure starting capital for workers' or communities' business aspirations post-return. To ensure that labour migration is truly beneficial to migrant workers and their communities, return and reintegration provisions should be integrated into the very fabric of labour migration policies. Effective and sustainable labour migration governance should aim to ensure that migrant workers are able to secure their social and economic conditions in their home country not only for themselves but also their families; including through gender-inclusive services, soft-skills training, financial management and the provision of accurate and timely information on labour market dynamics and investment opportunities in country-of-origin contexts.

It is on this premise that Colombo Process Member States of the PDO and empowerment thematic area working group collectively agreed, in early 2023, to include this dimension within the third

priority of their workplan for the 2023-2027 Colombo Process cycle. Despite it formally becoming a priority only since 2023, Member States were already engaged in efforts to promote the sustainable return and reintegration of migrant workers in view of helping secure their livelihood in their home country. In **Indonesia**, for example, [Law on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers](#) (Article 34), prescribes that central and local government entities ensure the provision of economic protection for Indonesian migrant workers and their sustainable return and 'rehabilitation'; including through support in remittance management, financial education and literacy, and the delivery of entrepreneurship skills training. These policy provisions do not only empower migrant workers with new skills and budget management literacy, but can also significantly support workers in saving for and planning their reintegration upon completion of their employment abroad.

The **Bangladeshi** Government has recently acknowledged the importance of migrant workers' reintegration to ensure the full benefit of overseas employment for them. In 2018, it enacted the Wage Earners Welfare Board Act which formalizes the

government's commitments to the reintegration process of migrant workers as part of a holistic labour migration governance approach. Bangladesh's 8th [Five Year Plan: Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness](#) (2020 – 2025) has also committed to boost efforts on reintegration in their 10 points agenda on overseas employment. According to this plan, migrant workers are required to be sensitized in the initial stages of their migration – pre-decision and pre-departure – on possible opportunities for their reintegration. In the same spirit, the Government of Bangladesh is also planning to review its National Reintegration Policy for Migrant Workers in the course of 2024. **Viet Nam** has also recently enforced a new law which took effect in January 2023 whereby additional PDO modules were compulsory for migrant workers including on skills and employment opportunities for returnees. In **Pakistan**, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development has signed a memorandum of understanding with the German Development Agency (GIZ) during July 2020 to support returning Pakistanis to enhance their skill development for the purpose of re-integration in their home country and start-up business support with financial assistance.

THE PRODUCTIVE MIGRANT VILLAGE IN INDONESIA: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Since 2016, the **Indonesian** Ministry of Manpower and its partners have been implementing Productive Migrant Village Programme, an innovative initiative targeting prospective, existing and ex-Indonesia migrant workers and their families. The productive migrant village model is articulated around four key pillars to empower, protect, and serve migrant workers and their families starting from the village: 1) providing migration information and services at the village level, 2) developing productive community-based businesses, 3) facilitating the establishment of community care and growth processes through 'community parenting', and 4) facilitating the establishment and development of cooperatives/financial institutions within villages. Taken altogether, this model strives to create resilient village-ecosystems that are welcoming to returning migrant workers and support their psychosocial and economic rehabilitation in origin communities. Since the programmes' inception, the Indonesian Government has implemented the productive migrant village model in migrant-worker-sending communities to support workers' reintegration and prevent their re-migration through productive employment and community-building. Such models focus on the migrant workers' communities and families and help develop their capacity and awareness to make informed decisions in supporting the migrant worker in his/her own migration choices.

These activities directly contribute to the achievement of GCM Objective 21 Action Points b) and h).



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Any comprehensive labour migration governance policy should place provisions that promote migrant workers' empowerment at their very core. While the empowerment of migrant workers starts with ensuring access to reliable, accurate and timely information on their rights, responsibilities and prospective country of origin contexts, the availability of gender-inclusive support services and social welfare mechanisms are key to their protection, well-being and long-term livelihood. Building on the vibrant policy landscape carved out by South and South East Asian governments in recent years and agreed workplan for the years to come, the following recommendations propose actions to bolster Colombo Process Member States' commitments and initiatives towards the empowerment of migrant workers for safe and decent labour migration.

1. Institutionalize, enforce and monitor the delivery of comprehensive, gender-inclusive and sector-specific pre-departure orientation programmes to empower migrant workers with reliable, accurate and timely information. Monitor the impact of these programmes on a regular basis - PDO programmes should aim to cover the labour migration process, local labour laws and workers' employment contract, intercultural and language training, referral to migrant-oriented services and support in destination countries; as well as skills development and training targeted towards migrant workers' successful return and reintegration. States are invited to encourage PDO-providers to enhance and supplement PDO with modules on crisis preparedness, management and emergency response. The design and delivery of PDO programmes and policies should engage country-of-origin and country-of-destination representatives, employers, trade unions and civil-society organizations as well as hosting communities and migrant workers themselves. PDO programmes and policies should be updated regularly through close multilevel and multisided collaboration. States are encouraged to promote shared responsibility of PDO outcomes between labour-sending and receiving countries as well as other stakeholders involved in the process. To the extent possible, Colombo Process Member States are encouraged to harmonize curricula and

improve the standardization of PDO across the Colombo Process region.

- 2. Recognize the importance of partnership with non-government entities in the delivery of pre departure orientation and in the raising of awareness on the rights and responsibilities of migrant workers.** This whole-of-society approach can underpin the development and implement many of the recommendations.
- 3. Leverage digital technologies and diversify information dissemination channels to migrant workers and their families, beyond the PDO context to ensure that they have accessible and reliable information throughout their migration and employment experience** - PDO programmes should aim to cover the labour migration process, local labour laws and workers' employment contract, intercultural and language training, referral to migrant-oriented services and support in destination countries; as well as skills development and training targeted towards migrant workers' successful return and reintegration. The design and delivery of PDO programmes and policies should engage country-of-origin and country-of-destination representatives, employers, trade unions and civil-society organizations as well as hosting communities and migrant workers themselves. PDO programmes and policies should be updated regularly through close multilevel and multisided collaboration. States are encouraged to promote shared responsibility of PDO outcomes between labour-sending and receiving countries as well as other stakeholders involved in the process. To the extent possible, Colombo Process Member States are encouraged to harmonize curricula and improve the standardization of PDO across the Colombo Process region.
- 4. To better protect and empower migrant workers during their migration and employment experience abroad, Member States are encouraged to deploy labour attachés and community welfare agents in countries of destination.** Labour attachés and community welfare agents can act as a trusted point of contact to migrant workers and serve as primary focal point to proactively engage with migrant workers and collect their feedback on their migration

and employment experience; and ensure that their labour and human rights are upheld. Such agents should be trained on local and origin labour laws as well as on emergency-preparedness and crisis response. Labour attachés can also help address migrant workers' needs and queries through referral to the appropriate services, including support in case of gender-based violence and are able to capitalize on consular services to promote their role and optimize migrant workers' exposure and access to them.

- 5. Develop and enhance data collection and management systems to capture accurate information on migrant workers' experiences and needs throughout the migration cycle, including returnee migrants.** Reliable and gender-disaggregated data is crucial for inclusive and evidence based policy making that addresses needs and realities on the ground. Member States are also encouraged to develop engagement strategies and mechanism to streamline the voice of migrant workers, including women and other marginalized groups in policy development, consultations, and reviews. To assess the effectiveness of their labour migration policies towards PDO and empowerment objectives, Member States are encouraged to conduct migrant workers' surveys to determine if empowerment has been achieved and distil lessons for future policy-making and approaches to PDO and empowerment.
- 6. Establish regional knowledge-management and capacity building mechanisms to facilitate mutual learning amongst Colombo Process Member States on issues linked to pre-departure orientation and empowerment and promote the replicability of good practices in different national contexts -** Colombo Process Member States recognize the invaluable added-value of engaging with one another on workers' empowerment, particularly in the context of the Colombo Process thematic area working group meetings. In view of further solidifying such fora and ensuring continuous knowledge and good practice exchange, Member States are encouraged to consider establishing a virtual communication platform that facilitates regular exchanges and national updates beyond the context of the punctual thematic area working group meetings. Colombo Process Member States are also encouraged to grasp relevant capacity-building opportunities to strengthen their work in this area. To

structure their objectives, Member States could jointly map and identify common knowledge and capacity gaps to address in the next Colombo Process cycle in the area of workers' PDO and empowerment.

- 7. Strengthen country of origin and destination mechanisms and processes to support easier access to justice and remedy, for migrant workers and to sensitize workers on available mechanisms to increase recourse rates to remedy.** Member states are encouraged to devise cross-border policies and closely collaborate with destination countries to ensure effective cross-jurisdictional approaches to migrant workers' protection. BLMAs or memoranda of understanding signed with countries of destination should include provisions that to support easy and effective access to complaint mechanisms and remedial measures for migrant workers in cases of rights-violations. Member States are also encouraged to include provisions that strengthen the capacity of labour attachés in destination countries to support workers and refer them to appropriate remedy mechanisms locally. In addition, regional, national and sub-national level communication strategies should be designed and implemented to create awareness amongst migrant workers, including undocumented workers, about available services for both judicial and non-judicial remedy.
- 8. Seek equal access to social protection mechanisms for migrant workers and consider the extension of direct financial support from the governments of countries of origin to migrant workers in times of crisis.** The experience of the Covid 19 pandemic has illustrated the need for new mechanisms for support in response to crisis situations.
- 9. Enter bilateral and multilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding with labour-receiving countries of interest to solidify labour migration governance through corridor- and sector-specific approaches, taking account of the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders in the negotiation and implementation of these agreements. These should streamline minimum guarantees around workers' protection and rights that are gender-inclusive and context specific; as well as social welfare and protection**

provisions to ensure sustainable and long-term benefits.

Such agreements should streamline minimum guarantees around workers' protection and rights that are gender-inclusive and context specific; as well as social welfare and protection provisions to ensure sustainable and long-term benefits. Guarantees should include health coverage that take into account gendered needs (including those related to reproductive and maternity health), insurance for migrant workers irrespective of visa status, benefits for family members, children, and persons with disabilities and the portability of their social rights. The [Global Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements \(BLMA\) Guidance](#) developed under the United Nations Network on Migration provides a useful model that Member States can build upon.

10. Institute unilateral mechanisms by countries of origin, where appropriate, to support workers protection and rights.

These measures would complement bilateral agreements and can include the introduction of social protection measures implemented by Countries of Origin.

11. Streamline return and reintegration provisions into national development planning and labour migration governance frameworks to maximize migrant workers' labour migration experience and ensure sustainable and successful reintegration into their home country.

Labour migration and development policies should take into account migrant workers' return and reintegration needs early in their migration process, including those linked to securing positive economic, social and psychological conditions for workers and their families. Member states are also recommended to develop policies that improve remittance outcomes for migrant workers and their communities, including through reducing transfer costs and leveraging technologies and transparent platforms for more effective remittance processes. Provisions that combat migrant workers' stigmatization through sensitization and awareness-raising, are also key in ensuring they are empowered in their return process post-employment

12. Strengthen cross-regional dialogue with countries of destination, including through regular engagement with existing regional consultative processes to facilitate joint advocacy on issues of common interest to Colombo Process Member States -

To ensure a holistic approach to labour migration governance and migrant workers' empowerment within the region, taking account of differing realities across the region, Colombo Process Member States are encouraged to engage in regular dialogue with other regional consultative processes to support the identification of common priorities, and to encourage inter-regional harmonization on PDO and empowerment policies and practices. Engagement with other regional consultative processes with homologous goals could also support knowledge-management and good practice exchange to improve and strengthen policies and practices within and across regions.

13. Leverage the rich experiences and exchanges among Colombo Process Member States to contribute to regional and global policy developments, including through joint submissions to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) and GCM Regional Review processes -

Member States are encouraged to advocate on issues common to the region and feed their own good practices and lessons learned into the periodic regional reviews of GCM implementation and the IMRF. The IMRF works as a global platform for Member States to exchange on gaps and challenges. Colombo Process Member States are well placed to jointly contribute with their recommendations and feed into global momentum to advance workers' welfare, protection and empowerment throughout the migration process.



Credit: Adam Vandermeer



COLOMBO PROCESS

EMPOWERING MIGRANT WORKERS WITH
ADEQUATE ACCESS TO INFORMATION
AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES THROUGHOUT
THE MIGRATION CYCLE

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