



EMN-WB Roundtable Discussion

Circular Migration: A New Paradigm?

28 September 2021, 1:30 PM CET

1 BACKGROUND NOTE

Seasonal migration has been one of the key legal migration avenues for the global poor and unskilled, and a crucial source of labour for many middle and high-income countries. While critique is still voiced concerning a potential risk of workers overstaying their permits, local wage depression and the risk of labour exploitation, seasonal migration schemes have to date been the largest single category of regulated circular migration.

When managed well, circular migration can bring benefits to all: receiving countries can meet labour market shortages in sectors where it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract native workers; origin countries are able to use the safety valve of overseas employment for workers for whom their own domestic environments are unable to provide enough economic opportunities, resulting in skill enhancements since circular migrants are more likely to transfer skills and knowledge, the spreading of access to livelihoods, higher earnings for migrants, greater socioeconomic stability, and remittances. Given these overwhelming benefits, it would be timely to explore whether circular migration could also be applied to other sectors, both low and high-skilled and of long-term migrants, (by allowing them longer absence periods without losing their status).

While most destination countries view permanent migration of low-skilled workers as undesirable, the settlement of highly skilled migrants is often encouraged. An important criticism of this approach has been that of 'brain drain', but what if this could be converted into 'brain circulation'? What are the conditions under which highly skilled labour migrants would be willing to move temporarily between a destination country and home? Bilateral policy approaches such as skills and talent visas, young professional exchange programs, twinning schemes, or regional approaches such as the EU Mobility Partnerships have been tried, but have they succeeded? Do any of them have the potential to reach the scale of seasonal migration schemes?

The session will aim to have a constructive conversation with a group of diverse stakeholders on the following practical questions:

1. Guest worker programs have had a long history, not all have shown stellar successes, so what are the lessons we can draw from previous experiences? What are some of the best practices in terms of design on cost-sharing, worker selection, preparation, return?
2. What are some of the best practices in terms of ethical recruitment, protection of worker rights, reducing vulnerability, providing social assistance/insurance, emotional care and support for workers who face family separation?
3. Can the circular migration model of seasonal migration be applied to other sectors to ensure brain circulation instead of brain drain?

2 SPEAKERS

- **Salima Bensalem**, Head of International Placement Division, Agence Nationale de la Promotion de L'Emploi et des Compétences (ANAPEC)
- **Dr. Richard Bedford**, QSO, FRSNZ, CNZM - Professor Emeritus, University of Waikato
Auckland University of Technology
- **Kate Hooper**, Policy Analyst, Migration Policy Institute (MPI)
- **Dr. Vasanthi Venkatesh**, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor Faculty of Law; Co-Director, J4MW-Windsor Law Migrant Farm Worker Legal Clinic
- **Anna Wittenborg**, SICA Portfolio Director and Permanent Representative to El Salvador, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- **Dr. Sunday Onazi**, Head of the International Labor Migration Desk, Nigerian Ministry of Labor and Employment
