

LOW AND SEMI-SKILLED WORKERS ABROAD*

CHAPTER 3

1. Introduction

The world appears to be on the threshold of a new era in temporary labour migration programmes, characterized by more sources and destinations of migrant workers at all rungs of the job ladder (Martin, 2003b; Abella, 2006). Current temporary labour migration programmes aim to add workers temporarily to the labour force, but not settlers to the population. This may seem surprising, since programmes such as the Mexico-U.S. Bracero and the German *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) programmes ended when destination country governments were persuaded that large numbers of temporary migrant workers adversely affected local workers and could result in migration getting “out of control”.¹

In a world of persisting demographic and economic inequalities and better communication and transportation links, young people in particular want to cross national borders for higher wages and better

opportunities. There is general agreement that the world is about to enter a new stage in international labour migration, with more labour migration sources and destinations and migrants employed in a wider range of industries and occupations.

The improved management of labour migration in the 21st century is likely to require temporary migrant worker programmes that include economic incentives to encourage employers and migrants to abide by programme rules. For example, employer-paid taxes on migrant earnings that finance the restructuring of migrant jobs can allow the programmes to shrink over time, while the refunding of worker-paid taxes can encourage migrants to return home as programme rules require while providing funds to stimulate economic development and to reduce the incentive to emigrate in the future. Adding such economic mechanisms could help to better align temporary labour migration programme objectives and outcomes, and convince industrialized countries that such programmes will not turn into furtive “side door” or de facto permanent immigration, but lead to more border gates being opened for regular migrant workers.

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¹ It is generally agreed that the Bracero programme sowed the seeds for later irregular Mexico-U.S. migration (Martin, 2004: Ch. 2), and that Germany faces major integration challenges with settled Turkish guest workers and their families (Martin, 2004: Ch. 6).

This chapter focuses on low and semi-skilled² migrants moving from developing to industrialized countries, such as from Mexico to the U.S. There is also a significant flow of low and semi-skilled migrant workers to a wide range of middle-income developing countries, including Argentina, Costa Rica, Malaysia, South Africa and Thailand. These labour flows are similar to those that take workers to developed countries, but differ in that many migrants sometimes fill jobs that are vacant because previous workers emigrated to richer countries, for instance when Poles migrate to the United Kingdom and their jobs at home are then taken up by Ukrainian migrants.

The chapter begins by addressing some key definitional issues, such as the notion of low and semi-skilled migrants and temporary labour migration. It then provides an overview of global and regional distributions of temporary migrants with particular reference to low and semi-skilled workers. The remaining parts of the chapter discuss some of the key policy challenges for temporary labour migration programmes to operate effectively in the 21st century and on a larger scale, and to increase their economic gains for all stakeholders, namely for migrant workers and countries of origin and of destination. Such challenges include the problems of economic distortion and dependence that can be traced to migrants and the “numbers versus rights” conundrum. These questions are also considered in more detail in Part B of the Report, especially in Chapter 11.

² See also Section 2 on definitions.

2. Definitions

While it is fairly straightforward to define skilled or highly skilled migrants by reference to university or tertiary education and years of professional experience (see Chapter 2), the notion of low or semi-skilled employment is more nebulous and more difficult to define in any meaningful way. Put simply, as such workers fall outside the definition of skilled and highly skilled, this often means that in the immigration context they do not qualify under ordinary work permit schemes or points systems regulating admission to a country for the purpose of employment.³

This chapter and the Report in general use the terms “low” or “semi-skilled”, but the notion of “unskilled” is deliberately avoided on the grounds that most workers, regardless of the nature of their tasks, have some basic skills, or that, indeed, as some commentators argue, the skills they have acquired are being grossly undervalued, as illustrated in Textbox 3.1 in relation to labour migration to Southern Africa. Yet, the positive correlation between the level of education and income can be observed on nearly all labour markets and is universally acknowledged.

³ For example, under the ordinary work permit scheme in the UK, this means determining **either** that the job requires the following qualifications: (i) the equivalent of a UK degree-level qualification; (ii) the equivalent of a Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification relevant to the post to be filled; or (iii) a HND qualification not relevant to the post on offer plus one year of relevant full-time work experience at National/Scottish Vocational Qualification (N/SVQ level 3 or above - **or** the job requires the following skills: 3 years full-time specialist working experience for the type of job for which the permit is sought (UK, 2008). To apply as a skilled worker under the Canadian points system, the applicant must have work experience of Skill Type O (managerial jobs), A (professional jobs) or B (technical jobs and skilled trades) as determined by the Canadian National Occupational Classification (NOC) (CIC Canada, 2007).

Textbox 3.1

Labour Migration in Southern Africa: A Case for the Review of the Concept of Low and Semi-skilled Migration

Cross-border migration for the purpose of employment in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is a long-standing historical phenomenon and continues to be one of the primary features of migration in the region generally. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the countries of Southern Africa have been sending and receiving migrants primarily to work in the mining industry. While most migrants initially moved independently, this was considered unprofitable by the mining industry, and a system of contract labour migration was set up to ensure a regular and reliable supply of migrant workers to the mining centres in the region, including Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. While the mining industry was and continues to be the major employer of migrant workers, commercial farms and plantations, as well as the construction, domestic and services sectors are also employers of significant numbers of migrant workers. In some cases, the contract labour system had been extended to these sectors as well.

Most of the migrant workers in these sectors fall into the categories commonly described as “low-skilled” or “semi-skilled”. However, not only are these categories perhaps outdated as descriptive of the nature of and the level of skill often required by the migrants employed in these sectors, but they also devalue the contributions of migrant workers to the economies of the countries in which they work.

It is often assumed that temporary or contract migrant workers only supply manual labour to make up the numbers of people required to work in the mines and in the agricultural, construction and services sectors. However, in part due to the nature of the contract labour system and also as a general phenomenon, many of these migrant workers return at least annually to work in the same sectors and have over time, developed considerable skills and expertise in their jobs. For example, when the South African Government attempted to reduce the number of migrants working in the mines, the mining industry protested against this move, making the argument that it would be difficult to replace the accumulated skills and experience that have been built up amongst regular migrants who return to the same jobs year after year.

The inherent danger in describing temporary and contract migrant labour as “low-skilled” or “semi-skilled” does not only have to do with devaluing the contribution of migrants, but it also implicitly suggests that the migrants themselves are inferior, which in turn, feeds into the perception that migrant workers are poor and uneducated manual labourers who compete unfairly with nationals for available jobs. It is true, of course, that many employers prefer to hire migrant workers because it is cheaper to do so and migrants are generally more exploitable, but this has to do with the lack of protection mechanisms and measures for migrant workers, rather than being a reflection of their actual levels of skills, competencies and experiences.

Despite the deeply entrenched nature of labour migration in the SADC, governments have tried and continue to try and put a stop to it, if not in practice, at least rhetorically. In most cases, however, attempts to curb regular migration in these sectors have had unintended consequences and in particular, have led to increased irregular migration and heightened anti-migrant sentiments.

Perhaps the time has come for a reconsideration of the concept of “low-skilled” or “semi-skilled” migration. At some point, it may have been a useful classification or description of particular categories of jobs held by migrants, but it has now become equated with the devaluing of these jobs and the contributions of migrants. It also has the connotation that the migrants who occupy these jobs are themselves inferior and less deserving of the protection and opportunities afforded to migrants who are considered “highly-skilled”.

This is, of course, not just a problem in Southern Africa, but is in fact magnified when the arguments presented here are considered and applied on a global scale, particularly in terms of migration from developing to developed countries.

Source: Vincent Williams, *Southern African Migration Project (SAMP)*.

There seems to be no widely accepted definition of temporary labour migration. Abella (2006: 4) suggested a definition based on a destination country's perspective and considers "temporary migrants" as "those whose legal status is temporary, regardless of the amount of time they may actually have stayed in a country". It goes without saying that this is a very wide definition and would apply to an

extremely broad array of different movements, conditions and durations, [including] *au pairs*, seasonal workers,⁴ trainees, intra-corporate transfers, contract workers, working holiday makers, exchange visitors, highly skilled professionals, cross-border service providers, installers, performing artists and sportspersons, etc. (OECD, 2007: 51).

3. Global and Regional Distribution of Temporary Migrants with Particular Reference to Low and Semi-skilled Workers: Flows and Stocks

3.1 Global Distribution

Today, the world community consists of some 200 countries with their respective annual per capita incomes in 2004 ranging from less than USD 250 to over USD 50,000 (World Bank, 2006b). Such economic differentials provide a significant incentive, especially for young people, to migrate in pursuit of higher wages and better opportunities.⁵ In 2004, one billion people, or one-sixth of the world's population, lived in the 30 high-income

⁴ Seasonal labour migration is also by definition temporary in nature, and many of the policy issues discussed below and in Chapter 11 in relation to temporary labour migration, apply to mobility for the purpose of seasonal employment, which, however, has certain distinguishing characteristics. Importantly, seasonal labour migration comprises particularly short-term movements (3-9 months), which are dependent on the natural rhythm of the seasons, such as sowing and harvesting time in agriculture, and demands for workers in the hospitality sector especially during peak periods in the year (e.g. ski resorts in the winter, coastal resorts in the summer months in Europe).

⁵ Young people are most likely to cross borders as they have invested the least in jobs and careers at home and have the most time to recoup their "investment in migration" abroad.

countries with a gross national income of USD 32 trillion, representing four-fifths of the global wealth of USD 40 trillion.⁶ The resulting average per capita income of USD 32,000 in high-income countries was 21 times the average USD 1,500 in low and middle-income countries, and this 21:1 ratio has remained stable over the past quarter of a century (Martin et al., 2006).

Migration is an age-old response to variations in economic opportunity, security and other factors, but the crossing of international borders is a relatively recent phenomenon, as international borders have multiplied along with the sharp rise in the number of independent states making up the international community as it is known today.⁷ The number of international migrants has also doubled during the past two decades to 191 million in 2005 (UN, 2006). As shown in Table 3.1, some 62 million migrants moved from South to North, i.e. from a developing to a developed country; 61 million moved from South to South; 53 million from North to North; and some 14 million migrants moved from North to South.⁸

Table 3.1:

Migrants in 2005 (millions)

Origin	Industrialized country	Developing country
Industrialized country	53	14
Developing country	62	61

Source: UN, 2006.

Given that about half of these migrants are absorbed into the labour force of the destination countries,

⁶ At purchasing power parity (PPP), which takes into account national differences in the cost of living, the world's gross national income was USD 56 trillion, including 55 per cent in high-income countries.

⁷ From only a small number of recognized independent states at the beginning of the 20th century, the number of countries making up the international community as we know it today has risen to 193 by 2007, when the CIA World Factbook listed 193 "independent states", one "other" and six other entities (CIA, 2007).

⁸ These are stock estimates in 2005, meaning that migrants may have arrived recently or decades ago.

the 60 million migrant workers in high-income countries account for an average of 12 per cent of the local labour force (ILO, 2004). The labour force distribution of the 31 million migrant workers moving South-North is quite distinct from that in destination countries: 40 per cent of the 3.2 billion workers worldwide are in agriculture, 20 per cent in industry and construction, and 40 per cent in services (World Bank, 2006b), and migrant workers from developing countries largely originate from societies characterized by this 40:20:40 distribution. In industrialized countries only about three per cent of the total workforce is in agriculture, 25 per cent in industry and 72 per cent in services (OECD, 2005). However, a look at the distribution of migrant workers in these countries shows 10 per cent to be in agriculture, 40 per cent in industry and construction, and 50 per cent in services (OECD, 2006) (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2:
Migrants and Local Workers by Sector, Percentage Distribution

	Agriculture	Industry	Services
Industrialized countries	3	25	72
Developing countries	40	20	40
Migrants in industrialized host countries	10	40	50

Note:

Industry includes construction.

Sources: OECD (2005), (2006), World Bank (2006b).

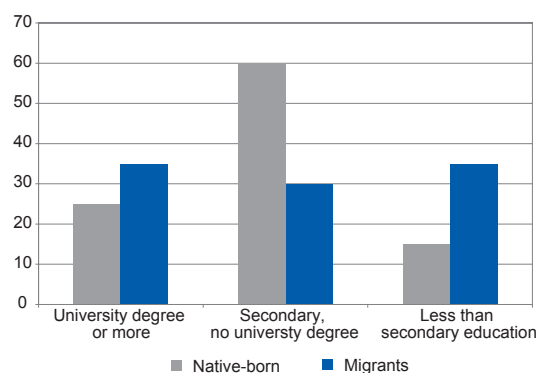
The difference in migrant worker distribution reflects the three types of employers and respective demands for migrant workers in: (a) sunset industries – e.g. agriculture, light manufacturing, garment industry; (b) industries that cannot be moved – e.g. construction; and (c) services at all levels of the skills ladder, from IT and health care to domestic work and janitorial services.

Migrant workers from developing countries who move to industrialized countries also have personal

characteristics that differentiate them from native-born adults. The best single determinant of individual earnings in industrialized countries is years of education. In most developing countries, the distribution of adults by years of education has the shape of a pyramid, a few well educated persons at the top and most workers with less than a secondary-school certificate or high-school diploma grouped near the bottom.

A graph showing native-born adults in high-income countries by years of education has a diamond shape. About 25 per cent have a college degree, 60 per cent a secondary-school certificate and 15 per cent have less than a secondary certificate or high-school diploma. Migrants from developing countries in industrialized countries differ from both adults at home and abroad, as their distribution resembles an hourglass or barbell shape when arranged by years of education. About 35 per cent have a college degree, 30 per cent a secondary school certificate and 35 per cent less than a high-school diploma (Figure 3.1). International migration from developing to industrialized countries takes persons from the top and bottom of a pyramid distribution and adds them to the top and bottom of a diamond-shaped distribution.

Figure 3.1:
Native-born and Migrant Adults in Industrialized Countries by Education, 2005 (percentage)



Migrants from developing countries drawn from the top of the education pyramid are often professionals and students, and most have become legal residents of industrialized countries. Over the past two decades, almost all industrialized countries have made it easier for foreign professionals to enter as students (see Chapter 4), temporary workers and settlers. However, most of the world's workers and most of the world's migrant workers have low skills, and a crucial labour migration issue is whether and how to move more low-skilled workers from developing to industrialized countries.

3.2 Regional Distribution

While most temporary labour migration flows are from developing to the developed OECD countries in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and in East Asia, i.e. Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), significant regular movements also occur between developing countries, particularly from the countries of South and Southeast Asia to the oil-producing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States (UN DESA, 2004) and within Southern Africa, and Latin America.⁹

According to OECD statistics, the number of temporary work permits issued to foreign workers admitted for employment in a number of OECD countries has increased steadily since 2000. From 2003 to 2004, temporary entries for work increased by approximately seven per cent (OECD, 2006), and these levels remained largely unchanged during 2005 with the admission of some 1.8 million temporary migrant workers into OECD countries (OECD, 2007).¹⁰ Table 3.3 indicates the entries of temporary workers

to selected OECD countries in the principal categories. While highly skilled migrants are more likely to be found in the intra-company transfer and general temporary workers category, low and semi-skilled migrants dominate in the seasonal workers, working holiday makers and trainees categories. Working holiday makers are a specific group of short-term entrants essentially to Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and are discussed in Chapter 5. As far as trainees are concerned, traineeships in Japan and the Republic of Korea have often been considered "a disguised form of lesser skilled migration" (OECD 2007: 52). In Japan, a growing number of such trainees stay for further employment after their traineeship ends (32,000 in 2005), while in South Korea the introduction of the employment permit scheme, which is mainly aimed at low-skilled occupations, means that admissions for temporary work are now taking place through this channel (60,000 in 2005) (OECD, 2007).¹¹

Except for GCC States, where the foreign population outnumbers citizens,¹² stocks of temporary foreign workers are generally small relative to the size of the destination country's labour market (Nonnenmacher, 2007).

While globally the ratio of female to male migrants is almost 50:50, the ILO (2003) observes that, in recent times, the majority of women migrants are engaged in temporary labour migration, with the Middle East (including the GCC States), East Asia and Southeast Asia as the major poles of attraction. Female labour migration is characterized in particular by its concentration in a very limited number of female-dominated (essentially lower-skilled) occupations associated with traditional

⁹ A snapshot of temporary labour migration trends and data in specific world regions with a focus on low and semi-skilled workers is provided in the sub-sections below. Supplementary information is available in the Regional Migration Overviews in the final part of the Report.

¹⁰ These figures, however, do not cover the free labour mobility of EU nationals within the EU, including the recent large movements from the new accession countries, or temporary movements associated with the free movement of workers agreement between the EU and Switzerland (OECD, 2007).

¹¹ See also Chapter 8, which discusses the historical problems with the industrial trainee system (since phased out and replaced by the employment permit system) in South Korea in terms of increased irregular labour migration.

¹² For example, Ruhs and Martin (2006) observe that migrants constitute over 95 per cent of Kuwait's private sector labour force (citing statistics of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies; see <http://www.kibs.org/eco/ecokmain.htm>).

gender roles, such as domestic (see Textbox 3.2) and “entertainment” activities. Moreover, “while these jobs do not necessarily have to be exploitative, the circumstances of the job itself often lead to a high degree of vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, even forced labour and slavery.” (ILO, 2003: 11).

Textbox 3.2

Women Migrants in Domestic Work

To give an idea of the significance of women migrants in domestic work, some figures are quoted here: in Hong Kong SAR, migrant domestic workers numbered more than 202,900 in 2000; between 1999 and June 2001, 691,285 Indonesian women left their country (representing 72% of all Indonesian migrants) to work mainly as domestic workers abroad; in Malaysia, there were 155,000 documented (and many more undocumented) migrant domestic workers in 2002; in Italy, 50 per cent of the estimated one million domestic workers are non-EU citizens, and in France over 50 per cent of migrant women are believed to be engaged in domestic work.

Source: Adapted from ILO (2003:11) (footnotes omitted).

Table 3.3:

Entries of Temporary Workers in Selected OECD Countries by Principal Categories, 2003-2005 (thousands)

	Trainees			Working Holiday Makers			Seasonal Workers			Intra-company Transfers			Other Temporary Workers		
	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005
Australia	6.9	7.0	7.0	88.8	93.8	104.4							56.1	58.6	71.6
Austria	1.7	0.8					17.5	15.7		0.2	0.2		10.5	9.8	
Belgium							0.4	1.0	2.7				1.2	0.5	2.8
Canada							18.7	19.0	20.3	3.8	4.2	4.5	52.1	55.8	
Denmark	1.4	1.5	1.9										3.6	3.4	2.6
France	1.0	0.5	0.4				14.6	15.7	16.2				10.2	10.0	10.5
Germany	2.3	2.3					309.5	324.0	320.4	2.1	2.3		43.9	34.2	21.9
Italy				0.1	0.3	0.4	68.0	77.0	70.2						
Japan	64.8	75.4	83.3							3.4	3.6	4.2	143.7	146.6	110.2
Republic of Korea	55.8	46.7	51.6							7.8	8.5	8.4	7.2	8.3	11.9
Netherlands													38.0	44.1	46.1
New Zealand	2.0	2.4	1.8	20.7	21.4	29.0			2.9				40.3	43.7	44.3
Norway	0.5	0.5	0.3				17.9	25.4	20.9				2.5	2.1	1.1
Sweden							7.3	4.9	5.9				2.6	3.4	2.2
Switzerland	0.4	0.4	0.3							14.4	7.5	1.8			
United Kingdom				46.5	62.4	56.6		19.8	15.7				98.0	113.4	111.2
United States ¹³	1.4	1.4	1.8				29.9	31.8	31.9	57.2	62.7	65.5	192.5	221.8	218.6

Note:

The categories of temporary workers may differ from one country to another. Only the principal categories of temporary workers are presented in this table. Data on temporary workers generally do not cover workers who benefit from a free-circulation agreement.

Source: OECD (2007: 52), compiled from residence and work permit data.

¹³ Author's note: Temporary migrant-trainees in the U.S. are not comparable to trainees in other countries, particularly Japan and South Korea.

(a) East and Southeast Asia and the Middle East

The growth in the numbers of temporary migrant workers can be seen across East and Southeast Asia and the Middle East. In Japan, 146,000 temporary workers were admitted in 2004 compared with 114,300 in 2000, although in 2005 admissions dropped to 110,200 (OECD, 2007). However, the numbers of trainees admitted has risen steadily (54,000 in 2003; 75,400 in 2004; 83,300 in 2005) (OECD, 2007). Stocks of temporary foreign workers in East Asia have also risen, particularly in South Korea and Taiwan Province of China, where they rose by half, and then doubled respectively between 2000 and 2004 (Abella, 2006: Table 3.4). In Japan, however, the total number

of foreign workers, including various categories of temporary migrants, is relatively low and estimated at around 650,000 by the end of 2005, or less than one per cent of the labour force (OECD, 2007). Table 3.4 includes estimates of undocumented migrants who are prevalent in many low and semi-skilled employment sectors (e.g. construction) in Malaysia and Thailand.

In the GCC States the number of overseas contract workers rose by 2.5 per cent annually between 1985 and 2000, though this rate of increase is relatively small compared with the rates of expansion from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s (Abella, 2006; Table 3.4).

Table 3.4:**Temporary Foreign Workers in Asian Destinations (stock estimates)**

Country of Employment	1985	1997	2000	2004
East Asia¹				
Brunei			80-90,000	
China		82,000	60,000	80,000
Hong Kong SAR		171,000	217,000	217,000
Malaysia		1,720,000	800,000	1,359,000
Republic of Korea		245,000	285,000	423,000
Singapore			612,000	580,000
Taiwan Province of China		246,000	327,000	600,000
Thailand		1,126,000	1,103,000	1,624,000
Viet Nam			30,000	
West Asia^{1 2}				
Bahrain	99,000		180,000	
Jordan			35,000	
Kuwait	574,000		976,000	
Lebanon			75,000	
Oman	91,000		55,700	
Saudi Arabia	2,722,000		3,060,000	
United Arab Emirates	784,000		1,300,000	

Notes:

¹ For East Asia, the figures include work permit holders and estimates of undocumented migrants. For "West Asia", only work permit holders are recorded.

² "West Asia" is the region referred to in the original Table - it denotes Arab Mashrek countries and GCC States covered in the Middle East Migration Overview (see the Asia Overview).

Source: Adapted from Abella (2006), citing sources from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), OECD (2003) and Hugo (2005).

Israel is also a significant destination for temporary foreign workers, who, since the early 1990s, have been admitted to replace Palestinian workers. At the end of 2003, official estimates counted approximately 189,000 such migrants, with many employed in low-wage and low-status jobs. Over half of the migrant workers in Israel come from Southeast Asia: about 50,000 from the Philippines, employed mainly in home healthcare, 30,000 Thai migrants mostly working in agriculture, and 15,000 Chinese migrants in construction. There are also approximately 65,000 foreign workers from eastern Europe, with over half from Romania working by and large in construction. One-third of the migrants are women employed chiefly in the home healthcare sector (Kruger, 2006).

**(b) Established countries of immigration:
Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the
United States**

In the admission systems of established countries of immigration, which are primarily geared towards permanent migration for employment, temporary labour migration remains nonetheless an important feature with the objective of filling labour shortages in specific sectors (Table 3.5). In the periods 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, these countries received approximately 1.14 and 1.24 million temporary migrant workers (including dependants) respectively, and their numbers are rising steadily.

Table 3.5:

**Temporary Migration for Employment to
Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United
States, 2004-2006**

	2004-2005	2005-2006
Australia ¹	100,758	118,181
Canada ²	93,481	99,141
New Zealand ³	118,460	142,536
United States ⁴	831,715	883,706

Notes:

¹ Figures for fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, respectively, relating to the issue of temporary resident visas (skilled visa, social and cultural, international relations and other), but excluding working holiday visas (see Chapter 5).

² Figures for 2004 and 2005, respectively.

³ Figures for fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, respectively, relating to work applications and including young persons employed under Working Holiday Schemes with specific countries, which are described in Chapter 5. These include principal applicants and secondary applicants. The applications also include individuals who apply for more than one visa or permit in a given year.

⁴ Figures for fiscal years 2004 and 2005, respectively, including spouses and children, but excluding intra-company transferees (L-1 visas) and foreigners coming to the U.S. for work-and-learn experience (exchange visitors – J-1 visas).

Sources: DIMA (2006), CIC Canada (2006), Immigration New Zealand (2007), U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics (2006).

Although seasonal labour migration is not a common occurrence in the Asia-Pacific region, in April 2007 the New Zealand Government started a bilateral Seasonal Labour Scheme for Pacific Islanders, in partnership with the World Bank. It aims to enable up to 5,000 low-skilled and semi-skilled Pacific Islanders to take up specific agricultural jobs left unfilled by local workers (see Textbox 3.3).

Textbox 3.3

Expanding Job Opportunities for Pacific Islanders through Labour Mobility

In a world of rapid globalization, the economic competitiveness of a number of countries is coming under increasingly severe strain owing to their limited territory market size and remote location, while rapidly eroding trade preferences also no longer suffice to support competitiveness. Furthermore, international economic aid, which had enabled the development and construction of local infrastructure and the delivery of important services, may no longer be able to mitigate their growing cost disadvantages. Hence, for small and remote island economies to be viable, economic integration and export diversification – particularly in niche markets able to overcome the limitations of small size – are important. Facilitated labour mobility may be considered as responding to such a niche market.

Indeed, labour mobility is important and also urgent for the Pacific Island countries, where unemployment and population growth are high and job creation is limited by the combined challenges of demography, size and geography. With burgeoning youth populations (now nearly 40% of the total) and scant employment opportunities, the risk of social instability is also growing. Better opportunities for local labour, particularly at the lower segment of the labour market, would expand available job opportunities for Pacific Islanders and help to provide development benefits to the country of origin. Migration policy is no longer a matter of domestic policy, but an international development issue with potentially very positive outcomes for the poor if appropriately designed and implemented.

The recent migration report by the World Bank (2006) provides a detailed analysis of the opportunities and constraints to labour market integration in the Pacific region. First, the report makes demographic projections that indicate a coincidence of excess supply of labour in the Pacific Island economies with an excess demand for labour in many industrialized countries in and around the Pacific region. This can set the stage for the potentially mutually beneficial movements of labour in the region.

New household data collected for the report show that remittances have helped to reduce poverty and improved income distribution in Fiji and Tonga. Remittances are used to finance education and to seed-fund the launch of a business activity, as well as serving as a form of social protection and providing a consumption cushion for the poor and vulnerable populations. Non-migrant sending households also benefit from incoming remittances through the expansion of the local economy and productive capacity. In addition to being a source of remittances, evidence from other parts of the world shows that low-skilled labour mobility may help to improve social equity in countries of origin, reduce social tensions and create a larger constituency for economic growth and governance reform.

While the economic benefits of immigration to destination countries are increasingly acknowledged, more immigration to industrialized countries, especially of low-skilled labour, is still a sensitive socio-economic and political subject. Most of these concerns can be successfully addressed through carefully designed labour schemes. The analysis in the report therefore draws on global experience and concludes that, for temporary worker schemes to be successful, especially for low-skilled labour, they should best be part of bilateral agreements, which allow a high degree of flexibility and can be adjusted to the needs of the parties involved. For such schemes to operate successfully, due attention will have to be paid to the '4 Cs': **Choice of workers** to ensure that their skills correspond to the jobs available, and avoid the hiring of overqualified workers likely to misuse the scheme; **Circular movement of workers**, allowing workers to go home, then return to their old or new, jobs, which helps to limit the incentive to violate the arrangement by overstaying; **Cost-sharing** by employers to reduce the financial burden of, for example, travel costs, for migrants and thereby making overstaying less attractive; and **Commercial viability** to ensure that the schemes remain private-sector driven (and not to fill quotas) and reflect labour market conditions in host countries.

The findings and recommendations of the report have been widely disseminated in the Pacific region following its release in August 2006. The New Zealand Government has taken the lead in launching a new Pacific Seasonal Labour scheme in April 2007. The new policy allows up to 5,000 low and semi-skilled Pacific Islanders to take up seasonal jobs in the horticulture and viticulture industries left unfilled by local labour. The World Bank has been working closely with the main stakeholders on the operational design of the bilateral arrangements and pilot schemes that incorporate and reflect best practice and the experience gained globally from similar temporary worker programmes. The World Bank, together with other donors, is currently coordinating technical assistance projects to strengthen the institutional capacities of member countries from the Pacific region to enable them to facilitate, regulate, manage and benefit from temporary labour migration. The Bank is also providing technical assistance to facilitate trade in the region; however, the liberalization of labour movements may actually be far more beneficial to some of the small and remote island economies than further trade liberalization alone. As a follow-up to the report, the World Bank is also leading a steering group with key stakeholders from the public and private sectors with the aim of further reducing the cost of remittance transfers that remain unduly high in the Pacific region.

Source: Manjula Luthria, Senior Economist, World Bank, East Asia and Pacific Region.

In 2005, most temporary migrant workers in Canada came from three EU countries; out of an EU-total of 17,447 migrant workers in Canada, 7,582 came from France; 7,263 from the U.K. and 2,602 from Germany; while 16,332 came from the United States and 12,610 from Mexico (CIC Canada,

2006), the majority of Mexican migrants being low-skilled agricultural workers employed under the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (Brem, 2006).¹⁴ Moreover, the Canadian Government recently introduced a new global Low Skill Pilot Project under its Temporary Foreign Worker Program, allowing the admission and employment of low-skilled workers for up to two years to fill pressing labour shortages, particularly in Western Canada. Employers have to obtain a positive Labour Market Opinion (LMO) (discussed in Chapter 11) that includes paying the same wage to migrants as is paid to other workers, generally more than the minimum wage. Furthermore, employers have to pay travel expenses to and from Canada and health insurance for their workers, in addition to confirmation of the availability of affordable and suitable accommodation (HRSDC Canada, 2007; Bart, 2007).¹⁵ While the changes to Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program have been welcomed by employers and their representatives, obstacles still remain to securing the rapid deployment of workers into jobs where there is a shortage of labour, such as backlogs in the processing of labour market opinions and visas, the difficulties for employers to find suitable low-cost accommodation for their workers and the costs of advertising the jobs to be filled and the paying of travel expenses (Carlson, 2007).

In the United States, the two largest entry categories of persons with temporary work visas¹⁶ in fiscal year 2006 were 431,853 persons in high-skilled specialty

occupations (H-1B visas)¹⁷ and 180,503 seasonal workers, comprising 46,432 agricultural workers (H-2A visas), 97,279 non-agricultural workers (H-2B visas) and 36,792 returning H2-B workers (H-2R visas) (U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007); these data record admissions, not individuals, so that the same person entering and leaving the U.S. within a year is counted more than once. In contrast to admission for permanent residence, where women predominate, men accounted for the majority of non-immigrant admissions in 2006 (53%) (U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007).

(c) Europe

In Europe, significant temporary labour migration flows are also taking place within the European Union, largely from the new central and eastern European Member States to Ireland and the U.K. The vast majority are from Poland, but significant numbers come also from Slovakia and the Baltic States, especially Latvia and Lithuania, with many taking up employment in low and semi-skilled occupations. Between 1 May 2004 and 31 March 2007, the U.K. registered a cumulative total of 630,000 work applications on the Workers' Registration Scheme. The highest share of approved applicants came from Poland (65% of the total), followed by migrants from Lithuania and Slovakia (10%).¹⁸ The largest share of registered workers were young (82%, aged 18-34), with a male:female ratio of 57:43. Over the same period, the top five sectors in which registered workers were employed

¹⁴ In 2004, 11,494 temporary workers from Mexico came to work in Canada (CIC Canada, 2006), and 10,777 were seasonal agricultural workers (Brem, 2006).

¹⁵ The Project was amended in February 2007 to enable employers to retain workers for a maximum two-year period instead of one year before the workers are required to return home. After a four-month interval at home, the worker may apply for a new work permit (CIC Canada, 2007; <http://www.cic.gc.ca/English/work/low-skill.asp>).

¹⁶ "Non-immigrants" in the U.S. are foreigners seeking to enter the country temporarily for a given purpose (e.g. tourism, business, study, temporary employment) (U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007).

¹⁷ In 2005, 65,000 H-1B visas were available for issue to first-time applicants, plus 20,000 visas for foreigners with advanced degrees from U.S. universities, and an unlimited number for non-profit institutions, such as universities. The H-1B visas are normally used up well before the end of the fiscal year. An Immigration Bill rejected by the Senate in June 2007 (the SKIL bill – Securing Knowledge, Innovation and Leadership) would have raised the cap for H-1B visas to 115,000 and then by another 20 per cent if all the visas were used up in the previous year (*Migration News*, 2007). As observed in Chapter 11, many H-1B visa holders are also sponsored by their employers for immigrant visas (i.e. Green Cards) (*Migration News*, 2006a; 2006b; 2007).

¹⁸ In 2006, 227,710 initial applications for registration were approved: 162,390 from Poland, 21,725 from Slovakia, 17,055 from Lithuania and 9,485 from Latvia (U.K. Home Office, 2007).

were administration, business and management (37%), hospitality and catering (20%), agriculture (10%), manufacturing (7%), and food, fish and meat processing (5%). "Administration" in the above list may be slightly misleading, as the majority of workers in this sector work for recruitment agencies and can therefore be employed in a broad range of occupations (U.K. Home Office, 2007).

A principal feature of temporary low-skilled labour migration in Europe is seasonal employment (Table 3.3), particularly to the southern European countries, Austria, France, Germany, Norway and the U.K. Germany, for example, has a relatively large-scale scheme that, on the basis of bilateral arrangements, provides over 300,000 seasonal jobs annually for a period of up to four months in the agriculture, forestry and hospitality sectors to migrant workers from central and eastern Europe (German Federal Ministry of Interior, 2007; Table 3.3). A recent development, undoubtedly related to the considerable out-migration from the new EU Member States to the former EU-15, is the growing labour shortage in central and eastern European countries, particularly in the low and semi-skilled sectors. The shortages of agricultural workers in Poland have led to the introduction of a policy in 2006 allowing farmers to recruit seasonal workers from neighbouring countries (Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine) for a period of three months within a six-month period without the need for a work permit (OECD, 2007).

In recent years, Italy has implemented labour migration schemes covering both temporary and seasonal workers. In the 2006 quota-setting decree, provision was made for the entry of 45,000 temporary migrant workers in the domestic and personal assistance sectors, and for an additional 50,000 seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism out of a total migration contingent of 170,000.¹⁹

¹⁹ Decree by Prime Minister DPCM No. 7 of 15 February 2006, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* (Official Journal) on 7 March 2007.

(d) Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa, most temporary labour migration is across borders and circular, involving also irregular movements (see Chapters 7 and 8). More reliable information is available concerning specific types of regular movements in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), such as contract labour migration to the principal mining centres in the region (Textbox 3.1). While labour recruitment figures for mines in South Africa for 1990-2000 show a decline in the number of migrants from all countries except Mozambique, there was an increase in foreign workers in the mining industry, from 40 per cent in the mid-1980s to almost 60 per cent in 2000. Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland are the three main countries of origin. In 2000, the numbers of migrants from these countries stood at 58,224, 57,034 and 9,360, respectively (Crush and Williams, 2005). According to more recent figures provided by officials from Swaziland, 13,000 of their nationals were working in South African mines in 2005 (MIDSA, 2007). In addition to mining, the principal sectors employing migrants in South Africa are construction, domestic services and factory work. Commercial agriculture is another important sector employing migrants both with and without authorization (Crush and Williams, 2005). Botswana and Namibia, both of which are experiencing rapid economic growth, are also important destination countries in the region, mainly for skilled migrants from other SADC countries (MIDSA, 2007).

The numbers for both regular and irregular Asian migrant workers in the Southern African region are increasing, such as for Chinese workers in Lesotho's textile industry and Chinese, Indian and Pakistani workers in Swaziland and Tanzania, who appear to be filling jobs left vacant by both skilled and less-skilled nationals who moved abroad for employment. Mauritius is a country of both origin and destination for migrant workers (MIDSA, 2007; see also Textbox

12.2).²⁰ Labour migration in West Africa is more complex, and movements have fluctuated in recent times because of economic downturns in what were

until recently relatively prosperous countries and destinations for migrant workers (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria) and because of conflicts in others (e.g. Liberia and Sierra Leone) (Adepoju, 2005; see also Textbox 13.2).

²⁰ In Mauritius, labour shortages exist in the manufacturing and hotel industries. In March 2007, 29,400 work permits had been issued in Mauritius, mostly to Chinese and Indian nationals. However, the country is also undertaking a major 10-year reform programme to restructure the economy, which, according to World Bank estimates, will result in the loss of 12,000 low-skilled jobs. Consequently, the Mauritian authorities are looking to offer employment abroad for some of their nationals through bilateral temporary (circular) labour migration programmes (MIDSA, 2007).

Labour migration is also occurring within and to the Maghreb from sub-Saharan Africa, and it appears that most of these workers are either low or semi-skilled (see Textbox 3.4).

Textbox 3.4

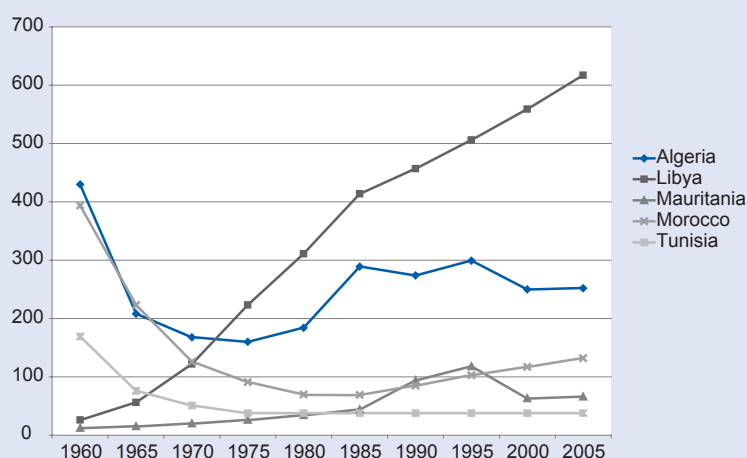
Mobility of Skilled and Low-skilled Workers from, within and towards the Maghreb

In the immediate post-independence era, most Maghreb countries faced an unbalanced labour market due to a surplus of relatively low-skilled and a shortage of qualified and highly skilled workers. Owing to geographical proximity and social and historical links, a number of Maghreb countries pursued an emigration policy with Italy, France and Spain, which went hand in hand with the recruitment of skilled foreign personnel to develop and manage services and enterprises. This arrangement was terminated in the context of Franco-Maghreb relations in 1973 against a backdrop of global recession. One year later, other European countries also ended the Maghreb labour migration programmes.

As concerns migration towards the Maghreb, 2006 United Nations data (Figure 3.2) show that out of a total Maghreb population of 90 million, over one million were migrants. This represented 1.23 per cent of the population in 2005, with female migration accounting for 40.3 per cent. Since the 1970s, Libya has been the country with the largest number of foreigners on its territory. In 2005, they numbered just over 600,000, or five per cent of Libya's population. Libya is still the leading destination country for migrants from other Maghreb countries.

Figure 3.2:

Evolution of the Foreign Population in the Maghreb from 1960 to 2005 (thousands)



Source: UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2006, Country Profile, World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database, <http://esa.un.org/migration>.

The 1989 treaty Establishing the Arab Maghreb Union (l'Union du Maghreb arabe) provides for the free movement of workers among the countries of the Maghreb. These countries have also ratified the Arab League agreement on the social protection of workers. But labour flows within the Maghreb are still limited (excluding cross-border movements). As there are no detailed statistics for Libya and Mauritania, the analysis that follows focuses on the central Maghreb: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

Estimates of migration within the Maghreb can be read in two ways. Data on the foreign population in the Maghreb indicate average mobility. Of an estimated total of 210,000 migrants in 2003, intra-Maghreb migration was estimated at an average of 42 per cent, though with fairly wide variations from one country to another: 59 per cent in Tunisia, 45 per cent in Algeria and 25 per cent in Morocco. Relative to the total Maghreb population abroad, the level of intra-Maghreb migration was very low. Out of an overall emigrant population of 4.7 million from the Maghreb, only 321,000 migrants had migrated to other Maghreb countries, or an average of 6.8 per cent. Tunisia had the largest (9.2%) and Algeria the lowest (3.3%) proportion of its migrants in the Maghreb.

Although no reliable data exist regarding the profiles of Maghreb workers in these countries, empirical observations made during the course of university exercises show that workers migrating to one of the countries in the Maghreb generally have an intermediate to low level of skills.

Workers migrating to Maghreb countries show two contrasting profiles and fall into two categories: those migrating from sub-Saharan Africa and those arriving from developed countries. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa go mainly to Libya and, as a second choice, to Algeria, more particularly to the *départements* of the Sahara. A recent study (CISP, 2006) on sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria shows that the migration patterns of sub-Saharan workers vary with their level of education. Those with lower levels of education choose to work in the Maghreb, while those who have completed secondary education are mostly in transit.

Migrants from developed countries, i.e. Europe and the United States, and from Asia or the Middle East, are usually qualified or highly skilled workers. The bulk of the European migrant workers are from France. Statistics on French citizens abroad show a renewed surge in French migration to North African countries. From 70,000 in 1984, the number of French migrants in North Africa fell to 46,000 in 2000, to rise again to almost 85,000 by 2005. The majority went to Algeria, where they currently number around 40,000, up from a mere 8,000 in 1995. Some 83 per cent of French workers are employed in the tertiary sector, 46 per cent are in top management or academia, and 18 per cent are entrepreneurs.

In recent years, Algeria has been recruiting skilled and highly qualified human resources, more specifically in connection with Asian enterprises engaged in construction and public works, and for its infrastructure building programme. As of June 2007, Algeria had 32,000 foreign workers, of whom 23 per cent were senior executives, 21.7 per cent managers and senior technical staff, 27.7 per cent technical staff, 25 per cent highly skilled workers and 1 per cent low-skilled workers. It is expected that at least another 20,000 foreign workers will be recruited under the scheme to build a highway linking the Tunisian and Moroccan borders.

This unprecedented pull effect of the Algerian economy on foreign workers may, in the right circumstances, lead to a further increase in intra-Maghreb mobility.

Source: Mohamed Saïb Musette, Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD), Algiers, Algeria.

(e) Central America, the Caribbean and South America

In Central America, the Caribbean and South America many low and semi-skilled workers migrate in an irregular manner (e.g. Nicaraguan migrant workers to Costa Rica, Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, and seasonal workers

from Bolivia and Paraguay to Argentina).²¹ There are approximately 500,000 migrant workers in Costa Rica (17% of the labour force), half of whom are there irregularly. Many of these workers come from neighbouring countries, particularly Nicaragua, and

²¹ Some of these movements are also described in Chapter 8.

are concentrated mainly in agriculture,²² but also in other low-skilled employment such as construction, tourism and domestic work. An estimated 50,000-80,000 women migrant workers work irregularly as domestic help in Costa Rica. In the Dominican Republic, there are a reported 500,000 to 700,000 mainly irregular Haitian migrant workers, the majority employed on sugar plantations, but increasingly also in the construction sector and, to a lesser extent, in service sectors such as tourism (Achieng, 2006). In the Bahamas, there are an estimated 40,000-50,000 Haitians or Haitian descendants, mainly in low-paid, lower-skilled employment in agriculture/landscaping, construction, domestic service and informal trading (Fernández-Alfaro and Pascua, 2006). Some of the labour migration in this region, however, is occurring on a regular and documented basis, such as the seasonal employment of Guatemalan agricultural workers in southern Mexico. Movements also occur from within the region to Spain, particularly from the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Ecuador, facilitated by bilateral arrangements (see Chapter 13). Regularization programmes are also a common feature across the whole region (see Textbox 8.3).

4. 21st Century Temporary Labour Migration Programmes

The major difference between past and current temporary labour migration programmes is their scope and purpose. During the U.S. Bracero and German guest worker eras, the general practice was to admit migrant workers under one major national programme. Today, most high-income countries have multiple programmes to admit foreign workers, front doors for immigrants, side doors for temporary workers and back doors for the unauthorized. The rationale for these programmes is straightforward: welcome skilled workers and allow them to settle,

but rotate low-skilled migrants in and out of the country.

The “front doors” are for foreigners invited to reside permanently, mainly highly skilled or economic migrants. Australia, Canada and the U.K. select economic migrants primarily on a supply-side basis that emphasizes personal characteristics such as age, education and professional qualifications, while Germany and the U.S. favour a demand-side approach, selecting economically motivated migrants who have job offers. There has been some convergence between points-based or supply-side selection systems and employer-based or demand-side selection systems, as Canada awards points to foreigners with job offers and the U.S. makes it easiest for college-educated foreigners to obtain immigrant visas. Germany, on the other hand, requires payment of a threshold salary to obtain permanent residence on admission.²³

“Side doors” admit migrants for a specific time and purpose ranging from a few days for tourism to several years for work or study. Side doors were traditionally not explicitly linked to “front door” settlement channels, as reflected in rules requiring foreign students to return to their country of origin upon graduation. This has changed, and most industrialized countries now allow foreign student graduates to work after graduation and eventually to settle (see Chapter 4). Similarly, these countries often permit foreign professionals to enter as temporary workers and later settle as immigrants, making them in effect probationary immigrants. Migrants using the “back door” are foreigners who either enter a country without authorization, or who enter legally and subsequently violate the terms of their entry, e.g. a tourist accepting paid employment. In the U.S. and southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, many of the foreigners who eventually obtain the right to reside permanently (for instance through regularization programmes) arrive clandestinely or as authorized temporary entrants.

²² According to the Costa Rica Ministry of Labour and Social Security, in 2002-03 there were 50,400 seasonal migrants working in agriculture, of whom 40,900 (or 81%) were undocumented.

²³ These admission policies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.

Temporary migrant worker programmes in the mid-20th century were usually “macro” in the sense that there was one major programme per country, and the overall unemployment and job vacancy rate played a determining role in deciding the need for temporary migrant workers. Today’s multiple programmes are “micro” in aiming to respond to specific labour market needs, such as filling job vacancies in nursing and IT. Overall unemployment and job vacancy rates play only a small role in determining admission to these specialized sectors. Government employment services, which have shrunk in size, have less credibility in determining whether foreign workers are “needed” to fill job vacancies.²⁴

With admission procedures giving employers more say in deciding whether foreign workers are needed, employers have gained an important voice in admission policy. In many industrialized countries, if an employer decides that a college-educated foreigner is the best person to fill a vacancy, the hiring and admission procedure is relatively straightforward. For example, available H-1B visas in the U.S. are generally exhausted well before the end of the year, in part because the admission process is easy – most employers simply “attest” that they will be paying at least the prevailing wage to a college-educated foreigner who is filling a job normally requiring a college education. As a general rule, the admission procedures are more stringent for low-skilled workers. For instance, in Canada, employers wishing to hire low-skilled workers for employment in agriculture or under the new Low Skill Pilot Project discussed in Section 3.2(b) above, are still required to obtain a Labour Market Opinion from Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). However, in some regions, where labour market

information indicates that the demand for labour in particular occupations exceeds the available supply, the labour market test is relaxed considerably. For occupations found on Regional Lists of Occupations under Pressure, developed by HRSDC and Service Canada, employers do not need to conduct lengthy or comprehensive job search efforts before obtaining permission to hire foreign workers (HRSDC, 2007), with Labour Market Opinions issued for the number of workers required by a specific enterprise.

5. “Win-Win-Win” Migration: The Economic Argument for More Low and Semi-skilled Labour Migration

Moving low and semi-skilled workers from lower to higher-wage countries can be a “win-win-win” situation, with migrants benefiting from higher wages, destination countries from more employment and a higher GDP, and countries of origin from jobs for otherwise unemployed workers, remittances, and returns. The first two “wins” are well established, as migrants demonstrate a strong desire to go abroad by taking considerable risks to move to higher-wage countries. Most studies in destination countries conclude that the major beneficiaries of economically motivated migration are the migrants who receive higher earnings, and that the presence of migrants slightly expands economic output, albeit by depressing wages slightly (Smith and Edmonston, 1997).

The third “win”, the effect of emigration on countries of origin, has been in the spotlight as migrant numbers and remittances are rising rapidly. The Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM, 2005), the World Trade Organization’s GATS Mode 4 negotiations,²⁵ the UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development²⁶ and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)²⁷

²⁴ In the U.S., there are two major ways of determining whether an employer “needs” migrants. Under certification, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) controls the border gate, not allowing migrants to enter until the employer conducts recruitment activities supervised by DOL. Under the alternative attestation process, the employer controls the border gate, opening it by attesting that she is paying the prevailing wage, and DOL responds to complaints of violations.

²⁵ See www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/serv_e.htm.

²⁶ See <http://www.unmigration.org>.

²⁷ See Textbox Int. 2.

have recently lent support to the belief that more temporary labour migration from developing to industrialized countries can enhance “win-win-win” outcomes, citing remittances and the contributions of migrants who return and create new jobs at home, and the diaspora that maintains links to the country of origin (see Textbox 3.5).

Textbox 3.5

Promoting Temporary Labour Migration: Policy Response of the International Community

Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

“Temporary labour migration can work to everyone’s advantage if it is legal, protective and linked to real labour needs. It is a flexible way of meeting labour surplus and shortage across countries. Assuring legal access to a varied labour market, protecting the basic rights of migrants, especially women, and assuring temporariness of the migration are key to maximizing the mutual benefits. In the absence of a functional multilateral system, bilateral arrangements have been found to operate effectively in certain countries. Individual countries can also adopt institutional and policy frameworks that contribute to realizing the objectives of temporary migration. Joint arrangements between origin and destination countries, particularly for lower-skilled migrants, can help enforce the laws to protect temporary migrants and enhance their contribution to their families and home communities.”

GFMD (2008: 65).

UN Secretary General’s Report on International Migration and Development

“84. Temporary migration programmes are becoming more numerous. They are a response to the rising demand for labour in receiving countries. Although the number of migrants admitted under the more recent programmes is modest, there is potential for these programmes to result in beneficial synergies for migrants, countries of origin and countries of destination. Under such programmes, migrants benefit from having a legal status and countries of origin gain from remittances and the eventual return of migrants, provided the experience they gain abroad can be put to productive use at home. Receiving countries secure the workers they need and may enhance the positive effects of migration by allowing migrants to stay long enough to accumulate savings.”

UN (2006: 18).

World Bank

“Greater emigration of low-skilled emigrants from developing to industrial countries could make a significant contribution to poverty reduction. The most feasible means of increasing such emigration would be to promote managed migration programs between origin and destination countries that combine temporary migration of low-skilled workers with incentives for return.”

World Bank (2006a: xi).

ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration

“Chapter IX. Migration and development

...15. The contribution of labour migration to employment, economic growth, development and the alleviation of poverty should be recognized and maximized for the benefit of both origin and destination countries.

Guidelines

The following guidelines may prove valuable in giving practical effect to the above principles:

...

15.8. Adopting policies to encourage circular and return migration and reintegration into the country of origin, including by promoting temporary labour migration schemes and circulation-friendly visa policies.”

ILO (2006).

Global Commission for International Migration

“States and the private sector should consider the option of introducing carefully designed temporary labour migration programmes as a means of addressing the economic needs of both countries of origin and destination.”

GCIM (2005: 16).

International Agenda for Migration Management (IAMM)

Temporary migration

... “The effective management of temporary migration offers States the opportunity to channel migration to address a range of domestic needs and policy priorities, such as short-term labour market requirements or the acquisition or improvement of skills, knowledge and resources through training and work abroad. Different criteria and conditions may be developed for each temporary migration category. The key elements of a comprehensive and balanced temporary migration programme are that it is transparent, non-discriminatory, orderly, efficient, reliable and safe.

Effective practices in regard to temporary migration:

- Promotion of the use of certain forms of temporary migration, such as short-term and project-related migration, as a means of meeting labour market needs, improving the skills of nationals of countries of origin, especially developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- Facilitation of regular consultations on a bilateral or multilateral basis to identify and meet temporary migration needs through orderly channels, including through conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements.
- Identification of employment sectors that would be designated as suitable for temporary migrant workers.
- Definition of categories for temporary migrants according to specific intended objectives, for example business, family visit or study.
- Implementation of measures to enable and facilitate temporary migration and multiple short stays, including through efficient registration systems and delivery of multi-entry visas based on available technology and information sharing for tourists, business visitors, family visits and other temporary purposes.
- Provision of clear, accessible and user-friendly information on temporary migration opportunities and procedural requirements, migrant rights and responsibilities, as well as means to access such information, including through such services as migrant information centres.
- Implementation of temporary migration programmes which provide temporary migrants with a secure legal status, with rights and responsibilities that reflect their temporary status.
- Promotion and implementation of measures to ensure that temporary migration remains temporary, such as conditioning subsequent re-entry on timely return.
- For those States utilising temporary migration programmes as a possible route to permanent migration, articulation of clear conditions under which those who qualify can gain permanent status.
- Promotion of data collection and analysis regarding temporary migration.”

IOM/Swiss Federal Office for Migration (2005: 35-36).

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (World Economic and Social Survey 2004: *International Migration*)

“It is widely recognized that a liberalization of the movement of people (workers and services providers) that is not for resettlement purposes would result in gains to the world economy and especially to developing countries. ... Improving the way temporary migrant flows are managed is a promising option. A step forward would be to implement such arrangements for the less skilled. (...) The movement of [less-skilled] workers from developing to developed countries promises to yield the greatest gains because this is where the difference between factor prices is largest and where there is considerable scope for movement.”

UN DESA (2004: 139).

Economists estimate that more workers moving across borders could significantly increase global economic output as workers would be placed where their productivity is higher. One of the first studies was conducted by Hamilton and Whalley (1984), who estimated that global GDP could double if migration were to increase sufficiently to equalize the marginal productivity of labour (and wages) between seven world regions that included 179 countries.²⁸ Even if migration were insufficient to equalize wages, global GDP would still increase significantly if there were more migration, since the initial migrants face the largest gaps in marginal productivity or wages and thus gain the most by moving.

In its Global Economic Prospects Report 2006 on *Economic Implications of Remittances and Migration*, the World Bank (2006a) estimated that if an additional 14 million migrants were to migrate from developing to high-income countries that would

generate a global income gain of over USD 350 billion, exceeding the anticipated USD 300 billion gain from completing the Doha round of trade negotiations.²⁹ The press release accompanying the report argued that more

managed migration programs, including temporary work visas for low-skilled migrants in industrial countries (...) would contribute to significant reductions in poverty in migrant sending countries, among the migrants themselves, their families and, as remittances increase, in the broader community.³⁰

If more labour migration produces “win-win-win” outcomes, how should it be organized? “Carefully” would seem to be the answer. The GCIM (2005: 79, para. 1.3) recommended “carefully designed temporary migration programs as a means of addressing the economic needs of both countries of origin and destination”. The need for a careful design of temporary migrant worker programmes is especially urgent in countries such as the U.S. and Germany, where governments have not had a great record of keeping temporary worker programmes true to their design as past programmes did not function as expected. An understanding of why

²⁸ In Hamilton and Whalley’s simulation, massive migration to equalize wages would have added USD 5 – 16 trillion to global GDP in 1977, when it was USD 8 trillion. Their simulation relied on a number of assumptions, including full employment of the world’s workers, who produced a single output with a CES production function (i.e. constant elasticity of substitution between labour and capital). They estimated differences in 1977 in the marginal productivity of labour across seven multi-country regions and assumed that these differences were due to migration restrictions. Migration that equalized marginal productivity and wages (factor price convergence via migration) would result in workers in destination countries losing and capital owners in these countries gaining, and the opposite distributional effects in countries of origin. (The full employment assumption is necessary to justify equating wages and marginal productivity; they assume that the wage:profit ratio is one in both rich and poor countries before migration barriers are lifted and that capital does not move even as labour migrates.)

²⁹ Two-thirds of this USD 300 billion gain would come from liberalizing farm trade.

³⁰ World Bank, “Migration Can Deliver Welfare Gains, Reduce Poverty, Says Global Economic Prospects 2006”, Press Release, 16 Nov. 2005, citing Uri Dadush, Director of the Bank’s Development Prospects Group.

temporary labour migration programmes tend to get larger and to last longer than originally intended is a prerequisite to designing programmes that can come closer to fulfilling the goal of adding workers temporarily to the labour force, but not adding settlers to the population.

6. The Problems of Distortion and Dependence and Possible Solutions

Temporary migrant worker programmes tend to get larger and to last longer than intended because of distortion and dependence. Most employers in the majority of host countries do not hire temporary migrant workers. Distortion means that the minority who do have access to a supplementary labour supply – those hiring temporary migrants – face generally limited supplies of low-skilled workers at home and almost unlimited supplies abroad.

Employers hiring temporary migrant workers often do so assuming that migrants will continue to be available and make investment decisions reflecting this assumption. Thus, farmers who depend on migrants may plant fruit trees in areas with few people, assert that they will go out of business without migrants to pick their crops, and resist efforts to reduce the number of migrant workers because doing so would reduce the value of their investment. This is economic distortion in that some employers face more stringent labour supply constraints than others. Employers relying on migrant labour can either avoid raising wages when local workers are no longer available or willing to do the work, or they can expand production because they are able to recruit migrant workers.

Dependence reflects the fact that some migrants and their families as well as their regions and countries of origin may assume that foreign jobs, earnings and remittances will continue to be available. If the opportunity to work abroad legally is curbed, but the “3 Rs”, i.e. recruitment, remittances and

returns, have not been set in motion to remove or reduce migratory push factors, migrants may continue to migrate to avoid a reduction in their income. Most researchers conclude that the U.S.-Mexico Bracero programmes sowed the seeds of subsequent unauthorized Mexico-U.S. migration, via distortion in rural America (the expansion of labour-intensive agriculture) and dependence in rural Mexico (population and labour force growth without economic development) (Martin, 2003b: Ch. 2).

The realities of distortion and dependence should encourage governments considering new temporary labour migration programmes to proceed cautiously, and to include economic mechanisms to minimize distortion and dependence. These mechanisms include taxes to encourage employers to look for alternatives to migrants and subsidies to encourage temporary migrant workers to return to their countries of origin as their contracts require.

Dealing with distortion requires recognition that employers always have choices when they make investments and fill jobs. By the time government is involved in a request for temporary migrant workers, the employer has usually found the migrants desired, so that a supervised period of recruitment usually fails to find local workers. Government employment services are ill suited to second-guess employers in such situations, which is one reason why labour certification processes (i.e. labour market/resident worker tests) can become very contentious, especially if unemployment rates in the areas where migrants will be employed are high.

Once the employers who turn to guest workers learn how to have their “need” for migrants certified, most assume they will be able to continue to hire foreign workers. As a result, investments in alternatives to migrants can dwindle, and distortions may increase as migrant-dependent sectors become isolated from national labour markets. For example, agriculture may not offer workers’ health insurance to its

employees because the young male migrants who dominate the seasonal workforce prefer cash wages to costly benefits, but this also makes farm work less attractive to local workers who are interested in benefits. Networks linking migrants and work places soon span borders as current migrants refer friends and relatives to fill vacant jobs. One result is that labour market information may flow far more freely from a migrant workplace to migrant countries of origin than to pockets of unemployment nearby.

International norms and local laws usually call for migrant workers to be treated equally, receiving the same wages and benefits as local workers. One way to minimize distortion is to realize that social security and health insurance payments increase the overall payroll expenditure of employers by 20 to 40 per cent. These amounts could be collected on migrant payrolls to level the playing field between migrant and local workers.

The employer share of migrant payroll taxes could be used to combat distortion through the restructuring of migrant jobs, such as promoting labour-saving mechanization. For example, in an industry such as agriculture, it is often hard for one farmer to finance or implement mechanization, since peach packers and processors want fruit that is either picked by hand or mechanically, but not both (Martin, 2003b: Ch. 8). Thus, a mechanization programme funded through payroll taxes could help to provide alternatives to migrants.³¹

Mechanization is not the only alternative to migrants. Sometimes local workers may be attracted to “migrant jobs” once they have been restructured, as has been the case with garbage collection in the U.S., whose labour force has been “renationalized” by switching to large containers lifted by a truck operator. In other cases, subsidized research could develop alternatives to

migrants, as when some elderly persons have in-home migrant caregivers and others use technology such as cameras linked to computers to live alone but under video monitoring that can summon help quickly. The universal truism is that wages held down by the presence of migrants will lead to more labour-intensive ways to get work done, and pressures to increase wages by the absence of migrants will encourage the development of alternatives to high-wage workers.

The other half of the equation involves giving migrants incentives to abide by the terms of their contracts, which usually require them to leave when jobs are no longer available or their work contract ends. To encourage returns, the worker’s share of payroll taxes can be refunded when the migrant surrenders his/her work visa upon return in the country of origin. Given the increasing global interest in using remittances to hasten development, governments and development institutions could match payroll tax refunds to support projects that create jobs in the migrants’ home country.

Minimizing distortion and dependence with taxes and subsidies will not have the desired effects on employers and migrants if unauthorized workers are readily available and labour laws are not enforced. Some employers hire unauthorized workers to save payroll taxes, and some migrants will resist departing when their work visas expire despite refund offers if they believe that they can continue to work abroad in an irregular status and have only few options to earn income at home. Thus, the enforcement of immigration and labour laws is a prerequisite to the development of temporary labour migration programmes that minimize distortion and dependence.

7. Numbers vs. Rights

The new approaches to the management of temporary labour migration give rise to a difficult discussion

³¹ To recognize that each sector is different, boards representing employers, workers and governments could decide how to spend the accumulated funds to reduce dependence on temporary migrant workers over time.

about possible trade-offs between migrant numbers and migrant rights. The demand for migrant workers depends in part on their cost, which in turn will partially depend on their rights. If migrants enjoy the “full rights” laid down in ILO and UN conventions, including the right to work-related benefits and family unification, their cost will be typically higher, and fewer will be sought by employers (Hasenau, 1991). On the other hand, fewer rights and lower costs can expand migrant numbers but also lead to a layered labour force and society (Ruhs and Martin, 2006).

Most international discussions call for more numbers as well as more rights, that is, more channels for temporary migrant workers to enter developed countries as well as securing all the rights provided for in the relevant ILO and UN instruments concerning migrants. In fact, most destination countries have not ratified either the ILO or the UN conventions protecting

migrant workers; therefore, the call for “more” migrants and more rights provides little guidance on how to deal with the trade-off in practice. For example, should the international community encourage the movement of more overseas contract workers to oil-exporting Gulf States even though the conditions of their employment may fall short of what is prescribed in ILO or UN conventions? Overseas contract workers earn more in GCC States such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates than they would at home, with the result that they may be able to improve significantly the welfare of their families in countries of origin (see Portrait 3.1), although they do not, as yet, enjoy equal treatment with nationals. Recent reforms in the United Arab Emirates aimed at improving working conditions have introduced summer sun breaks during the hottest part of the day, increased the number of labour inspectors and imposed financial penalties on companies that fail to pay their workers (DeParle, 2007).

Portrait 3.1

Dates for a Better Future

On a sunny morning in March 2007, two-year-old Fatema is seeing her father, Anwar, for the first time in her life.

Anwar left for Saudi Arabia for the first time in 2000. He is one of those fortunate enough who get to take leave to visit their home country every couple of years. His last visit to Bangladesh was in 2003.

He initially took the decision to seek work abroad after years of hardship in his village, where he struggled to make a living with a small piece of land he inherited from his father. Like thousands of Bangladeshis, he opted for temporary employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

Anwar remembers the first time he left Bangladesh. He arrived in Saudi Arabia and joined a *Khejur* (dates) packaging company. It gave him very little pay to start with, but it provided him with the hope of a better future for himself and his family.

Although living so far away from his wife, children and mother has been very difficult, he feels that this opportunity abroad has helped him raise and educate his four children, which he values greatly.

Being illiterate himself, he understands the importance of educating his children, particularly his daughters.

Anwar has been fortunate that his salary at the *Khejur* (dates) company increased over time. His employer, satisfied with his work, gave him additional responsibilities at the factory. With this he has repaid all his debts incurred to take up work in Saudi Arabia. It had cost him approximately USD 2,200 to first travel to Saudi Arabia for work.

In addition, with the money he has saved over the years, Anwar has also been able to rebuild and repair his home.

Although Anwar will have to leave Bangladesh again in three months, he hopes that some day he will be able to return to Bangladesh permanently, buy arable land in the village and live comfortably with his whole family.

Source: IOM Dhaka.

The presence of migrants in countries that restrict the rights of migrants demonstrates that many workers are willing to accept the trade-off between higher wages and fewer rights. The fact that overseas contract workers may pay up to 25 per cent of what they will earn to obtain a two-year contract to work in GCC countries suggests that the international community may want to focus more on the effective implementation of core human and labour rights in respect of migrant workers as well as the development of more comprehensive migrant rights conventions.

The fundamental dilemma is that inequality motivates migration, but migrant conventions and norms call for equality after arrival. This dilemma lies at the core of the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations, which aim to liberalize the movement of "service providers".³² If achieved, there could be "hundreds of millions" of additional migrants crossing borders to provide services.³³

In 2000, about one per cent of global trade in services involved GATS Mode 4, the "movement of natural persons" over borders. Many developing countries would like to see more Mode 4 movements, with some envisaging the goal of a "GATS visa" that would allow access to any WTO member country national for one to three years (Chanda, 2001: 648), so that refusal to allow entry and employment would be a reason to file a complaint with the WTO.

The "numbers versus rights" trade-off becomes clear when dealing with wage standards for GATS service

providers. ILO Conventions Nos. 97 and 143 call for wage parity for migrant and local workers. However, Chaudhuri et al. (2004) assert that equal wages would limit numbers: "Wage-parity (...) is intended to provide a non-discriminatory environment, [but] tends to erode the cost advantage of hiring foreigners and works like a de facto quota". Chanda (2001: 635) goes further, asserting that wage parity "negates the very basis of cross-country labor flows, which stem from endowment-based cost differentials between countries". In other words, if GATS opened new channels for migrants, would they be paid local minimum or prevailing wages, which may limit their numbers, or could they work for lower wages, which would presumably increase numbers?

"Numbers versus rights" raises other questions as well. Ruhs (2005) emphasizes that it is a human right to leave one's country, but there is no corresponding right to enter another country. As a result, the balance of power in determining whether either numbers or rights receive higher priority lies mostly in the more affluent destination countries, which have to answer questions such as whether to enforce the return of skilled migrants to avoid brain drain from countries of origin, or welcome skilled migrants to generate the maximum benefits from migration. Countries of origin largely react to these policies, making decisions about whether to facilitate labour emigration or attempt to prohibit or discourage migration to particular countries.

8. Conclusion

Economic theory suggests that workers who move from lower to higher wage countries are the major beneficiaries of temporary labour migration programmes, and that such labour migration increases global economic efficiency. There are many types of temporary labour migration programmes, ranging from those that admit temporary workers to fill temporary jobs, to those that admit temporary workers to fill permanent or year-round jobs, and those that admit probationary immigrants.

³² Services move across borders in four major ways or modes: Mode 1 (cross-border supply) occurs when the service rather than the supplier or consumer crosses national borders, as with call centres; Mode 2 (consumption abroad) occurs when the consumer travels to the supplier, as when a tourist visits another country or a patient travels abroad for medical services (see also Chapter 5); Mode 3 (commercial presence) reflects the movement of capital, as when a bank or insurance company establishes a subsidiary in another country; and Mode 4 ("movement of natural persons") involves the supplier travelling to the consumer of a service.

³³ In answer to the question, "Are we looking at tens of millions of people moving around in the future?" [under Mode 4], Abdel-Hamid Mamdouh, Director of Trade in Services at the WTO, said "Ah, yes - it could be hundreds [of millions] if we liberalize" (Zarocostas, 2005).

Governments with large numbers of unauthorized foreign workers often see temporary labour migration programmes for low and semi-skilled workers as the best compromise between the extremes of “no borders” and “no migrants”. The arguments for having such temporary migrant workers admitted via regular channels rather than unauthorized foreigners seem compelling. Employers argue that they cannot find local workers to fill vacant jobs at prevailing wages and working conditions, and many migrants want to work abroad for higher wages. To avoid having non-integrated second and third-generation foreigners, governments are often attracted to the concept of simply “borrowing” workers from lower-wage countries.

Earlier “guest worker” programmes ended under a cloud, as they lasted longer and became larger than anticipated, and resulted in significant settlement and family unification. To avoid the same fate with 21st century temporary labour migration programmes, it is important to develop more effective approaches to programme management to help ensure that temporary migrant workers do not become permanent features of the labour landscapes in countries of origin and destination. This could be done, for instance, by introducing economic incentives for return or offering attractive opportunities for investment in countries of origin.³⁴ Such policies might encourage industrialized countries to open more gates for low and semi-skilled migrant workers.

Well-managed temporary labour migration programmes benefit migrants and destination countries, but while remittances can contribute to poverty reduction (see also the discussion in Textbox 12.3), it is less clear whether such programmes taken as a whole can be a positive force for sustainable development in countries of origin. The ILO (2004: 30) reviewed the migration and development literature and concluded that “migration can, in some cases, contribute positively to development where a country

is already poised to develop; it cannot, however, create such conditions.” The World Bank’s 2006 Global Economic Prospects Report similarly asserts that “migration should not be viewed as a substitute for economic development in the country of origin [as ultimately] development depends on sound **domestic** economic policies.” (World Bank, 2006a: xi). These messages were also strongly echoed in the government-led discussions of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) (see Textbox Int. 2).³⁵

Potential conflicts of interest between countries of origin and destination highlight the need for dialogue and cooperation. Destination countries prefer the best and brightest workers, such as IT and healthcare professionals. Professionals earn more and can remit more, but may also find it easier to settle abroad, which is likely to reduce remittances in the longer term. It is not yet clear whether the advice being given to developing countries, “Don’t worry if your best and brightest leave because you will get remittances”, will eventually be as discredited as was the advice of half a century ago to speed up development by creating and protecting basic steel and other heavy industries behind high tariff walls.

Governments and international institutions advocating more 21st century temporary labour migration programmes for low and semi-skilled workers have not yet dealt with the fundamental dilemma that inequality motivates people to move, but most legal norms in developed countries as well as international standards call for equal treatment after arrival. Countries in which the equality norm receives least attention have the most migrants, as in the Middle East, while countries which adhere to the equality norm have fewer, as in Scandinavia. There are no easy or universal answers as to whether numbers or rights should receive higher priority, but one way forward is to think in terms of core rights that all migrants should enjoy. These issues are addressed again in Part B of the Report focusing on policy responses.

³⁴ See also Chapters 11 and 12 where these policies are discussed in a little more detail.

³⁵ These questions are discussed further in Chapter 12.

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