

Addressing Health Challenges in Labor Migration: An Analysis of Existing Thematic Areas of the Colombo Process

The Need for 6th Thematic Area on Health

Health is a decisive factor in labor migration. Health can affect the opportunity to get selected and be employed productively and effectively as a labor migrant and also the ability of the migrant to reap the benefits even after return. Currently it is mainly seen as a pre qualification factor making it the responsibility of the labor migrant to be healthy.

Health of a person is a changing situation to which many external factors in the host country too will pose challenges. Whilst a healthy migrant will contribute to a more efficient and productive labor force, being healthy is the net result of positive health behaviors of the migrant as well as the availability of health services that can be accessed by them to maintain good health.

The report of the 3rd Senior Officials meeting of the Colombo Process held in Sri Lanka November, 2015 highlights the consideration of health of migrants in the context of sustainable development, both in sending and host countries and emphasized that health be considered within the existing thematic areas of the Colombo Process.

The matrix in Table 1 identifies how the Five Key thematic areas can address some of the health issues. A 6th column indicates areas that may not come under the exact definition of existing thematic areas. As focused action is required and many health considerations exist in all thematic areas a separate thematic area including all health concerns under one umbrella is more appropriate.

Conclusion: A dialogue on health within CP is recommended for labor sending and receiving countries to facilitate addressing health issues of labor migrants for sustainable development. A 6th Thematic area on Health would strengthen the dialogue.



Table 1: Matrix explaining the need for a new thematic area on addressing health issues in labor migrants

1	2	3	4	5	6*
Skills & qualification recognition process	Fostering ethical recruitment	Effective pre departure orientation and empowerment	Reducing the cost of remittance transfer	Enhancing capacities of CP participant countries to track labor markets and trends (Resource centre RC)	Reducing Hidden Costs related to Labor migration
<p>1. Skills for positive health to be recognized by sending and host countries (to prevent communicable disease, lifestyle related to prevent non communicable disease, coping skills related to mental health)</p> <p>2. Good Health is a prequalification for labor migration and pre departure Health assessments need to be standardized to ensure fitness for work (and will reduce deportation)</p>	<p>1. 'Ethical recruitment' should also include providing access to primary health care to maintain good health. (Employment agreements should indicate means for health access)</p>	<p>1. Inclusion of health orientation to improve knowledge, attitudes and practices that will empower migrant with skills to prevent communicable disease, adopt a healthier lifestyle that will protect from non communicable disease, improve personal hygiene, reproductive health and abilities to cope under stress</p>	<p><i>Negative health poses hidden costs that can reduce remittance and included in separate column</i></p>	<p>1. Sharing of health outcomes, health experiences from labor migration through the resource centers</p>	<p>1. Net financial gain can be reduced due to health and social issues related to migration. The 'hidden health and social cost ' is often not calculated. Measures to improve net gain have to be identified. Suggested interventions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improving health access to migrants and their families left behind b. improving skills on health in orientation programs c. standardizing Health assessment