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Public attitudes towards migrant workers in Asia

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Public attitudes play an important role in shaping policy towards migrant workers and have an impact on the status and well-being of migrants. Although governments and international organizations often point to the mutual benefits of migration for countries of origin and destination, studies have shown that the public generally hold negative perceptions of migration and migrant workers. The public's fears and apprehension are particularly intense in light of the global economic downturn and jobs crisis. This paper looks at the knowledge and attitudes of the public in Asian host societies to migrant workers drawing upon the International Labour Organization (ILO) research conducted in four countries in Asia. The paper also presents various studies and research findings from across the world and further explores strategies for influencing public attitudes and promoting integration. The ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2007) recognized the need to promote harmony and tolerance in destination countries towards migrant workers and following this, the 4th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (a meeting of member states, trade unions, employer organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Southeast Asia) in October 2011 put forward specific recommendations to promote a positive image, and the rights and dignity of migrant workers in the region.

Keywords: public attitude; migrant workers; host society; migration policy; cooperation

Introduction

Although international organizations (like the International Labour Organization [ILO], International Organization for Migration and World Bank among others) and migration policy forums (such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Abu Dhabi Dialogue and ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour) emphasize the mutual benefits of well-managed migration for countries of origin and destination, studies from around the world show that the public generally hold negative perceptions of migration and migrant workers. The public's fears and apprehension are particularly intense in light of the global economic downturn and jobs crisis.

The ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration calls for governments, workers' and employers' organizations to promote social inclusion and prevent discrimination against migrant workers. In Asia, there is also an obligation in the ASEAN Declaration on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers to work towards the achievement of harmony and tolerance between receiving states and migrant workers.

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Contributions to this paper were also made by John Gee, the moderator of an online discussion forum on AP-MAGNET, in August 2011

Attitudes in host societies matter because they contribute to an environment in which discrimination and the unfair treatment of migrant workers are tolerated. In addition, public attitudes, and the real and perceived impact of immigration, play a role in shaping policy, which may further curtail the rights of migrant workers. The contribution of women and men migrant workers needs to be highlighted in order to generate a more positive and accurate image of migrants in host societies.

This paper looks at the knowledge and attitudes of the public in Asian host societies to migrant workers. It draws on the *ILO Four-Country Study on Public Attitudes to Migrant Workers* (ILO ROAP, 2011), and is supplemented with information from additional resources, including an online discussion forum with practitioners from around the region.¹

The survey shows some commonalities and differences between the four countries: Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand. For example, most people acknowledge the need for migrant workers in certain sectors, but have limited knowledge of or support for the rights of migrant workers.

Following a presentation of various studies and research findings from Asia and Europe, strategies for influencing public attitudes and promoting integration are explored, drawing from examples from around the world. This paper is intended to serve as a reference material for policy dialogue at national, bilateral and regional levels on promoting a more positive image of women and men migrant workers, in line with the contributions they make.

A global debate

The debate over migration and migrant workers is occurring all over the world, and is particularly intense in light of the global economic downturn and jobs crisis. In most host countries, the predominant, or at least the loudest, views aired on migration and migrant workers tend to be unfavourable. However, many governments in countries of origin (and some in destination countries), international organizations and a number of researchers have pointed to the net positive impact of migration, for countries of origin and destination (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2009). It is argued that

the gains to lowering barriers to emigration appear much larger than gains from further reductions in barriers to goods, trade or capital flows – and may be much larger than those available through any other shift in a single class of global economic policy. (Clemens, 2011)

The arguments vary from country to country, depending on the structure of the economy, history, homogeneity of the population and the ‘types of fear and apprehension that migration arouses’ (Beutin et al., 2006). This apprehension tends to focus on the presence of migrants, either through legal or irregular channels; the impact on the economy, employment and wage levels; and the effect on society and social infrastructure. None of these views are static; they are frequently influenced by changes in economic, social and personal conditions. At present, the global economic downturn is a decisive factor influencing attitudes.

A poll in the United Kingdom found that 39% of Asian Britons, 34% of white Britons and 21% of black Britons wanted all immigration into the UK to be stopped permanently, or at least until the economy improved. The report reveals a clear correlation between economic pessimism and negative attitudes towards immigration. The more pessimistic people are about their own economic situation and their prospects for the future, the more hostile their attitudes are to new and old immigrants. (Townsend, 2011)

The American public remains largely divided in its views of the overall effect of immigration. Roughly as many believe that newcomers to the USA strengthen American society as say they threaten traditional American values. (Pew Research Center, 2006)

Within countries, individuals' attitudes towards migrant workers can be shaped by their income, age, sex, ethnicity, proximity to migrants, etc. The fact that some characteristics are associated (correlated) with particular attitudes does not necessarily mean that these characteristics are the primary cause of these attitudes (Crawley, 2009).

Why do attitudes matter?

Public attitudes have a great impact upon the status and well-being of migrant workers. Attitudes matter because they contribute to an environment in which discrimination and the unfair treatment of migrant workers are tolerated. Discrimination produces differential treatment in labour markets and denies equal opportunity, and can provoke conflict within the working population. In addition, day-to-day reactions towards migrant workers make a big difference to their feelings of acceptance or rejection.

Moreover, public attitudes can play a role in shaping policy and public opinion is often courted by lobby groups in order to secure legislative change. For example, in many countries there is a widespread impression that migrants are disproportionately responsible for crime; and legislation may be introduced that has little impact on crime rates, but stifles migrants' freedoms and rights. It is therefore important that attitudes should be informed and based on fact rather than on misinformation or misrepresentation.

A lack of accurate information and awareness on the part of the host society was identified as the most important challenge to addressing workplace diversity and anti-discrimination, according to the nearly 800 European businesses that replied to [a] 2005 questionnaire ... (Niessen & Huddleston, 2009)

Crucially, public attitudes have an impact upon the effectiveness of laws and regulations governing migrant workers. The public and the authorities would likely react very differently to a case of labour exploitation were the victim, a national or a migrant worker. Across the region, the laws designed to protect or benefit migrant workers are inadequately enforced. For example, practices such as paying migrant workers less than the minimum wage (where one exists) and employers holding migrant workers' passports, in order to control their movements, are widespread. Conversely, where the public's attitudes towards migrant workers include definite beliefs in fairness and justice for all, or for the sake of improving their country's international image, this can strengthen the readiness of political leaders and law enforcement authorities to act.

Findings of the ILO four-country study on public attitudes towards migrant workers

This section looks at some of the main concerns of the public in host societies in Asia with regards to migration and migrant workers, drawing on the ILO research conducted in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand (ILO ROAP, 2011). In each country, 1000 people were interviewed, with the sample controlled for age, gender and, in the cases of Singapore and Malaysia, ethnicity.

In general, there appears to be more knowledge and more positive attitudes towards migrants among the public in Korea and Singapore, than in Malaysia and Thailand. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Firstly, Korea and Singapore have been able to more effectively implement policies and systems on the admission and protection of the rights

of migrant workers. This is partially due to geography; Malaysia and Thailand have long borders with less economically developed neighbouring countries, and therefore a much higher number of irregular migrants. People often make a distinction between regular and irregular migrants, who are often seen as ‘deserving’ vs. ‘undeserving’.

Because of education levels in Korea and Singapore there appears to be a greater gap in the job and wage expectations of nationals and migrants. However, the two often work side by side in manufacturing in Malaysia and in construction in Thailand, so nationals may be more inclined to believe that migrants are depressing their wages. An argument could be made that the relatively high level of support for migrant workers in Singapore is because of the high number of skilled migrants or ‘foreign talent’. However, public discourse surrounding the presence of foreign talent in the labour market is often not positive, as they are seen to be unfairly competing against the local workforce.

Moreover, for several years there have been some efforts by the Government and social partners to promote understanding and integration in Korea and Singapore. Some of these initiatives will be examined later in the paper.

Attitudes to the presence of migrant workers

Because of the size, age, education and skills of the native population, there is a demand for migrant workers in specific jobs and sectors. These are mostly low-skilled and labour intensive jobs – often classified as 3D: dirty, dangerous and demeaning. In the Asia region, this need has been met by temporary labour migration schemes, with memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between countries of origin and destination.

The ILO study showed that there is broad recognition among the public of the need for migrant workers to fill certain labour market niches: 88% of respondents in Singapore, 79% in Korea and 76% in Malaysia. A little over half (55%) of respondents in Thailand agreed with this premise, despite the country having a very low unemployment rate and labour shortages in key economic sectors (Thailand’s shrinking working age population and rising education levels also means that fewer people are available to carry out low-skilled and labour intensive work). However, at the same time, about 80% of respondents in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand felt that government policies to admit migrant workers should be more restrictive. Similarly, in Europe, a study in 2006 showed that an average of 40% of respondents in European Union (EU) countries agreed that immigrants contribute a lot to the economy (IOM, 2011).

In Asia, Europe and the USA, the public often make a distinction in their feelings towards skilled and low-skilled migrants and ‘illegal’ and ‘legal’ migrant workers. It is not always the case that skilled workers are more welcomed than low-skilled workers. In Singapore, during the 2011 general election, blogs and alternative news media revealed a high degree of public discontent over ‘foreign talent’: professionals who obtained well-paid jobs in Singapore that many believed should have gone to nationals. Notably, respondents were less likely to agree with reducing the number of skilled workers from ASEAN countries (17% in Singapore, 18% in Thailand and 29% in Malaysia).

In terms of irregular migrants, Thailand and Malaysia have large numbers of undocumented workers due in large part to the long borders with comparatively less-developed neighbouring economies. In the case of Thailand, few entered the county through legal channels, but many migrants entered Malaysia legally but lost their legal status. The sympathy that is sometimes expressed when a documented worker is unfairly treated is absent in the case of an undocumented worker experiencing similar treatment. They are sometimes viewed as having brought their hardships upon themselves. In the ILO study, approximately

80% of the respondents in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand felt that unauthorized migrants cannot expect to have any rights at work (see section below on Migrants' Rights).

Attitudes on migrant workers' impact on the economy and employment

The UNDP Human Development Report 2009 assessed the impact of labour migration upon both countries of origin and of destination, concluding that in both cases, the gains outweighed the losses. From the point of view of destination countries, the value of migrant workers is often viewed in terms of their capacity to fill jobs that would otherwise not be taken up by local workers, who have moved into employment that offers higher pay and better conditions.

In Singapore and Korea, the vast majority of the ILO survey respondents were of the view that migrants make a positive net contribution to the economy: 83% in Korea and 78% in Singapore. In Thailand and Malaysia, the figures were much lower than 40 and 37%, respectively. In recent years, the ILO, World Bank and the Thai Development Research Institute have all conducted research in Thailand that shows that migrants make an overall contribution to the economy.

Migrants fill relative labour shortages in key industries – such as manufacturing, seafood processing, agriculture, etc. Foreign labour account for 32% of all workers in manufacturing, construction and agriculture in Malaysia (Labour Force Survey 2010 as cited in ILO, 2011). The fisheries sector in Thailand – which is largely dependent on migrant workers – is valued at over USD 4 billion a year, and in 2008 was equal to about 1.2 and 9.9% of the national GDP and of the agricultural GDP, respectively (FAO, 2009).

Moreover, in many host societies in Asia, it is common for households to employ a migrant domestic worker or a care worker for the children, the elderly or disabled persons. Employing someone to carry out these duties often allows women to enter paid work, and by proxy migrants make a major contribution to society and the economy.

The workers brought into countries through temporary labour migration schemes are not usually accused of taking jobs from locals. This is a more common complaint of skilled migrants, for example, in Europe and Singapore, in the case of foreign talent. However, it is argued in some quarters in Malaysia and Thailand that migrants contribute to a depression in wages for locals in lower skilled jobs.

There is some evidence to back up this claim. For example, in Thailand, a number of studies (Pholphirul, 2011) have shown that migrants make a net positive contribution to the economy, but also slightly depress wages of nationals in certain jobs. When the labour market is tight in the destination country (as it is the countries in the study), the economy gains from new labour inflows, but the effects could be uneven on different groups of population. As most immigrants in these countries are low-skilled workers, employers of low-wage labour would benefit. In addition, all consumers benefit from cheaper goods and services as a result of the migrant workforce. But the flows could depress wages and other benefits at the lower end of the host country's workforce. Having wages for all rise with productivity, and promoting freedom of association and collective bargaining, can establish wage levels that are fair and do not perpetuate structural dependence of certain sectors on low-wage migrant labour.

Attitudes to the effect of migrants on society

Around the world, there are various concerns about the impact migrants have on the host society.

One of the more commonly held fears about migrants is their criminality. This may be the cause or the effect of migration being handled as a national security issue, rather than a labour or economic issue. The ILO study found that approximately 80% of respondents in Thailand and Malaysia felt that migrants commit a high number of crimes, compared to 52% in Singapore and 57% in South Korea. Unless irregular status is seen as a criminal offence – which for many people it is – there is little evidence to back up the claim that migrants are more likely to commit crimes than the rest of the population. For example, police statistics released in Singapore in 2008 show that the arrest rate for work permit holders in 2007 was reportedly 227 per 100,000 people, compared to 435 per 100,000 for Singapore residents (Othman, 2008). In Thailand's Tak province, an analysis of the incidence of different crimes between 1998 and 2001 showed that migrants were less likely to commit crimes than nationals (study by Sirikarnjana as cited in Paitoonpong, 2012).

Another widespread concern in host societies around the world is the impact of migrants on the culture and heritage. Although Malaysia and Singapore have multicultural populations, 75 and 58% of the respondents in the ILO survey felt that migrants were threatening the culture and heritage of the country. Nearly, half of the respondents in Thailand and a quarter of respondents in Korea felt the same way, but there, migrants make up a much smaller proportion of the population.

These worries may contribute to the development of policies that house migrants away from the local population centres. Their mobility is also hampered by explicit policies to restrict their movement (e.g. migrants' inability to obtain a driver's licence), or harassment by the authorities should they leave their workplaces, dormitories or communities.

Attitudes to the rights of migrant workers

Influenced or in line with international labour standards, host countries in the survey have generally enacted laws that aim to provide equal treatment of national and foreign workers in employment and working conditions.² This protects workers from discrimination and also protects nationals from being 'undercut' by migrant workers or their employers in hiring. Yet, according to the ILO survey, just over half of the respondents in Korea, Malaysia and Thailand were aware of such legislation, compared to 81% of respondents in Singapore.

However, the public are not necessarily in agreement with this law or principle. Most respondents were of the view that authorized migrant workers cannot expect the same pay and working conditions as nationals for carrying out the same job. This varied from 51% of respondents in Korea, to 58% in Singapore, to 64% in Thailand and 73% in Malaysia. For unauthorized migrants, approximately 80% of respondents in three of the countries felt that unauthorized migrants cannot expect to have any rights at work; while in Korea, 40% felt this way.

Despite the vulnerability and scope for abuse of migrant workers, the proportion of respondents who agreed that migrant workers are often exploited was 37% in Singapore, 43% in Malaysia, 59% in Thailand and 91% in South Korea. These figures corresponded with the positive responses to the question on whether the authorities do enough to protect migrants from being exploited: 68% in Singapore, 63% in Malaysia, 57% in Thailand and 17% in Korea.

An attitude often encountered is that migrants have no basis to complain because 'they're better off than they were at home'. This underestimates the value of what migrants leave behind (family support, friendships and relaxed working conditions with shorter hours, in many instances) and gives no consideration to a more valid comparison, between the conditions for migrant and non-migrant workers in the country of destination.

The business argument

Around the world, employers and industry associations are entering the debate and calling for migrants to fill gaps in the labour market.

- A 2011 study in the UK shows that demand for migrant workers has increased despite rising levels of unemployment. Almost two-thirds (63%) of UK employers report that non-EU workers have allowed them to increase productivity. Over 4 in 10 (43%) of the 759 employers surveyed report that they are struggling to fill vacancies from within the UK/EU, with 23% saying they are recruiting non-EU workers for engineering vacancies, 15% for IT positions and 7% for both nursing and accountancy/finance positions (Clarke, 2011).
- “Malaysia, the world’s number two palm oil producer, faces prospects of lower output growth in the commodity as strict entry rules and better job opportunities in top supplier Indonesia lead to a shortage of plantation workers” (Koswanage, 2011).
- According to a report by the Center for American Progress, the H.B.87 anti-immigration law enacted in the US state of Georgia could result in \$300 million in estimated losses in harvested crop state-wide, have a total economic impact of \$1 billion on Georgia’s economy, and cause untold millions in losses to the economies of small towns and farmers dependent on migrant labour (Baxter, 2011).
- “Immigration is simply essential for the development of [Russia’s] entrepreneurial business and the economy on the whole. To fulfill our declared strategic development plans the country cannot avoid doubling the number of working migrants it recruits” (Yevgey Yakubovsky as cited in Toohey, 2011).
- “Migrants have been founders of firms like Google, Intel, PayPal, eBay, and Yahoo. More than a quarter of all global patent applications from the United States are filed by migrants, although they are only about 12% of the population” (Goldin, Cameron, & Balarajan, 2011).

While employers see migrants as essential to the economy, most people are not themselves employers of migrants and in some countries have little interaction with migrant workers. The perception that they do not benefit from the presence of migrants can mean that many of the general public do not feel that they have personal stakes in sustaining policies that they regard as being mainly to the advantage of employers and migrant workers.

In the ILO survey, the vast majority of respondents in all four countries felt that the authorities should crack down on the employers of irregular migrant workers, rather than the irregular migrant workers themselves: 89% in Singapore, 83% in Thailand, 74% in Korea and 73% in Malaysia. This finding is important and indicates that there is support for better implementation of employer sanctions to curtail irregular migration.

Bringing about change

The ILO’s Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration calls for governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations to promote social inclusion and prevent discrimination against migrant workers. There is also an obligation in the ASEAN Declaration on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers to work towards the achievement of harmony and tolerance between receiving states and migrant workers.

The improved governance of labour migration is fundamental to improving public attitudes towards migrants. 'Public perception of immigrants is improved indirectly through policy measures that lead to managed migration, better control of external borders, credible asylum regimes, anti-discrimination measures and effective integration'. (Niessen & Huddleston, 2009)

There is evidence that public perceptions towards migrants are not static and do change over time. In the USA, a study on attitudes towards immigrants from Latin America was conducted twice over the space of nine years (Table 1). Although the findings from 2006 still reveal negative attitudes, it is a considerable improvement from the previous study.

Presenting the facts

Attitudes are largely shaped by the media, personal experience and anecdotal information from friends and family. Some or much of this information is inaccurate or misleading and feeds into anxiety about job opportunities and the stagnation in living standards for the least well-off.

The public should have a voice in migration policy – in the same way that the public should have a say in economic, national security and environmental policy. But in order to ensure that migration can work for all, public discourse must be more informed with facts about the impact that migrants make on the economy and society, and migrants' right to equal and fair treatment.

It may be necessary to combat myths and commonly held beliefs about the number or types of migrant workers in the country, their impact on wages, their contribution to social security programmes, etc. Key change agents in addressing their misconceptions could include the media, government officials, trade unionists, teachers, police and doctors. They have the potential to reach out and influence other members of the community.

Affirming the positive contribution migrant workers make to the countries where they live and work can be an effective counter to negative public attitudes. How effectively migrant workers themselves are able to play a part in promoting a positive view of themselves depends in part upon their status.

It is easy to see the negatives, but it is much more difficult to appreciate the positives ... which ultimately overshadow the negatives. (United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UN General Assembly thematic debate on international migration and development, 19 May 2011)

Promoting interaction and integration

A key indicator in influencing attitudes towards migrants is interaction. Proximity to migrants in the workplace or in the community usually leads to more knowledge and more positive perceptions of migrant workers.

Table 1. Public perceptions in the USA of immigrants from Latin America in 1997 and 2006.

Immigrants from Latin America ...	April 1997 (%)	March 2006 (%)
Work very hard	63	80
Have strong family values	75	80
Often go on welfare	55	37
Significantly increase crime	43	33

Source: Pew Research Center (2006).

Studies in Europe show that people who live in areas that are more ethnically diverse and have a longer history of migration are generally more tolerant than those living in less diverse areas (Crawley, 2009). Personal experience acts as a counter to other information sources which would otherwise be the basis of perceptions (Crawley, 2009).

As stated in the EU’s Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy (EU, 2004):

Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, intercultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.

The ILO study in host societies in Asia shows similar findings. The red lines in Figure 1 indicate the level of ‘support’ for migrants (knowledge plus non-discriminatory attitudes) across different segments of the population according to their interaction with migrants, including employers of migrants, friends or colleagues, acquaintances or having no interaction.

Even within the confines of a temporary labour migration regime, as the case is largely in Asia, a strong case can be made for an approach that stresses the benefits of interaction between migrants and nationals. ‘Bridging social capital’ may enrich the lives of both by finding common ground and constructive engagement in local initiatives – social and cultural, not simply economic.

Recommendations and good practices

The following are recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners in Asia to consider in promoting a better image of migrant workers and improved understanding between nationals and migrants.

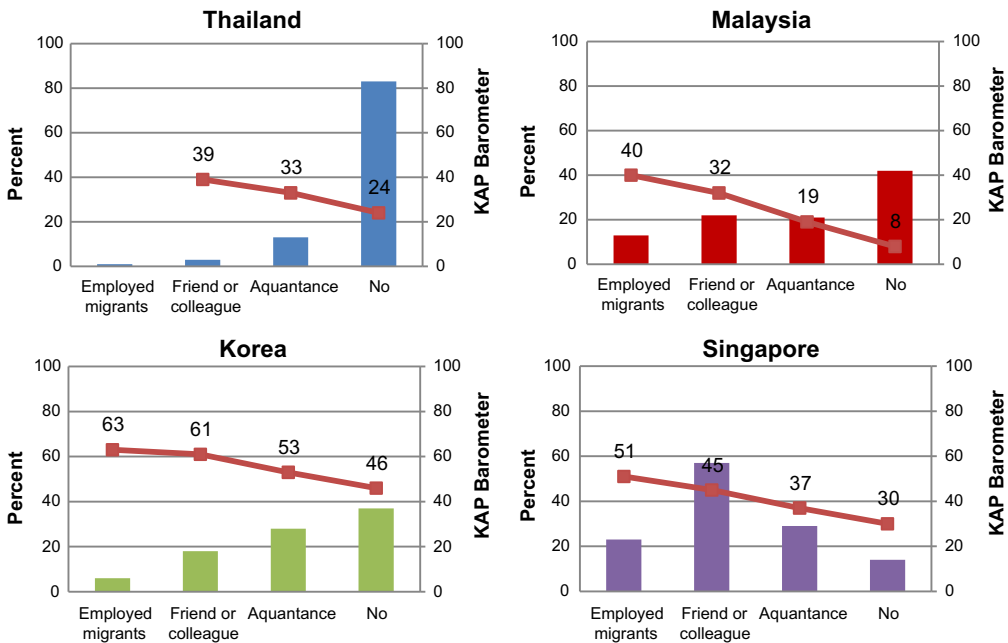


Figure 1. ‘Support’ for migrants according to the level of interaction of respondents with migrants. Source: ILO-ROAP (2011).

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Campaigns

Specific campaigns and activities should be organized to raise awareness among the public or a specific audience about the actual impact migrant workers make on society and the economy, and advocate for a more accurate and fair portrayal of migrant workers in the media, in the community and in public discourse. This should include opportunities for interaction between migrant workers and nationals, as this is the key to improved perceptions, relations and understanding. Migrant workers should be involved and enabled to speak up as advocates for their rights and as an effective means to contest prejudices. Some examples of these types of activities in the Asia region include:

Singapore

The Migrant Workers' Centre, an initiative of the Singapore National Employers Federation and the National Trade Union Congress, organized a series of road shows with the theme 'Embracing Differences'. The road shows featured a number of recreational activities for migrant workers' entertainment, as well as an exhibition on Singapore's history, customs and social norms.

Korea

In Korea, the Migrant Worker Film Festival is now in its sixth year. The festival aims to promote understanding and harmony by showcasing films that highlight Korea's multicultural society and raise public awareness of migration policies and social issues.

Thailand

The *Saphan Siang* ('Bridge of Voices') campaign, initiated by the ILO, aims to promote understanding between Thais and migrants. The campaign aired a public service announcement on Thai television, and hosts a website, www.saphansiang.com where migrants and Thais share videos talking about their views and experiences, including the positive contribution that migrants make to Thailand. A photo competition and exhibition was held in mid-2012 with the theme: 'A Positive Image'.

Media engagement

The media are often accused of sensationalizing migrant worker issues and presenting negative stories about migrant workers that feed public distrust and preconceptions about them. On the other hand, many of those concerned with migrant worker issues recognize that accurate, well-researched and non-prejudicial reports are broadcast or published and that the media are a key change agent and can be influential in shaping attitudes towards migrant workers.

Governments and organizations working on migration issues should provide the media with up to date information and human interest stories to showcase the positive aspects of migration. It is important, whether in the media or elsewhere, that the public is invited to be supportive of migrant workers not just through pity at the plight of those who have been treated most wrongfully; this may promote protective action, but does not encourage respect, which, in the long term, may better assure migrants of their rights.

Pre-departure orientation and training in destination

Integration into host societies is a two-way process that requires mutual respect. Prior to departure and upon arrival, migrant workers should be informed about the culture, social norms and work practices in the host country. Malaysia's National Vocational Training Council (Ministry of Human Resources) has produced pre-departure training modules on Malaysian customs and social practices, workplace culture, relevant labour laws and dispute settlement procedures, etc.

Many suggest that basic language skills are essential to overcoming differences and building stronger social capital. Passing a Korean language test is a requirement for migrants working in Korea, and in Singapore there are a range of educational opportunities for migrant workers, including learning English. Policies that tend to favour longer placements and integration rather than short placements and social isolation best facilitate workers learning local languages and 'acclimatizing' to social norms in the host society.

Research

To promote more informed discussion and policy-making, a better knowledge base and reliable data should be generated concerning migrant workers, in the absence of which rumour and prejudice are more likely to exert their influence. This should reflect their contribution to the economy; their contribution to and use of social security and welfare programmes and accurate figures on criminal behaviour.

In addition, research should be conducted into public attitudes towards migrants and related issues, and also what motivates these attitudes. In order to explain public opinion, surveys must be supplemented with qualitative information gleaned from discussions with a broad range of stakeholders. This information should be used in the shaping of campaigns. Moreover, as challenging as it may be to measure the impact of initiatives aimed at public education and informing public attitudes, the effort needs to be made.

Legislative review

Negative attitudes cannot be resolved nor positive attitudes be generated only by regulation. Nevertheless, measures that affirm the rights of migrant workers can serve to increase respect for them. Therefore, countries should bring national legislation in line with international labour standards and consider ratification of the ILO migration conventions and the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990). Moreover, by ratifying the ILO Domestic Workers Convention (2011) would send a signal that domestic work is recognized and valued as work.

Terminology

Political leaders and government institutions could be encouraged to set a good example by not using demeaning terms for migrant workers – for example, they should speak of 'domestic workers', rather than 'maids' or 'servants'. They should review their own regulations and official documents in current use in order to remove any terms or references that are pejorative or that may reinforce prejudice.

Regional and international cooperation

Addressing negative public attitudes is essential to promoting the positive role of managed labour migration in advancing and deepening regional integration. Unilateral actions are effec-

tive up to a point and inter-state and international cooperation is essential in promoting well-managed labour migration. Cooperation is required within countries among government and social partners (trade unions, employers and CSOs-civil society organizations), and between countries of origin and destination.

European Union

The type of regional integration actively pursued in European countries is not entirely applicable to Asian countries, where temporary labour migration programmes are the norm. However, there are some good practices that can be drawn upon. The *European Commission Handbook on Integration for Policy-makers and Practitioners* was drafted by governments and social partners to influence interventions by public authorities, civil society and the private sector to become more 'proactive in addressing the changing needs, social dynamics and well-being of their increasingly diverse population' (Niessen & Huddleston, 2009). The Handbook covers the role of the media; awareness raising and migrant empowerment; establishing dialogue platforms; acquisition of nationality and the practice of active citizenship and immigrant youth, education and the labour market. The first three apply directly to the Asian context. In addition to the Handbook, there is also an EU Integration Fund to support these types of initiatives, which feed into the larger integration policy process in the EU.

ASEAN

The 4th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour in October 2011 in Bali, Indonesia convened representatives of the governments, employers' and workers' organisations and civil society organisations of ASEAN Member States. The Forum provided a platform for information sharing and the exchange of views on enduring challenges identified in the ASEAN Declaration of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, including promoting understanding, rights and dignity of migrant workers in the receiving countries. The participants of the Forum agreed on the following recommendations and committed to reporting progress against these at the 5th Forum in 2012.

ASEAN Recommendations on the promotion of a positive image, the rights and dignity of migrant workers

- (1) Deliver comprehensive pre-departure education in sending countries, not only about culture and social norms, but also working and living conditions, reality of migration including financial implication, laws and procedures, rights of migrant workers, among others.
- (2) Conduct post-arrival orientation programmes in receiving countries performed by the government, employers, trade unions, civil society, that adopts a rights-based approach in orientating both migrant workers, employers and government – to understand what their rights and responsibilities are.
- (3) Raise awareness and build capacity of public and private recruitment agencies, local authorities and all stakeholders in sending and receiving countries in the delivery and monitoring of recruitment and placement services, and different forms of direct hiring of migrant workers to ensure greater protection of migrant workers' rights.
- (4) Collect and disseminate factual information through the media and other channels on the contributions of migrant workers to the economy and society in host countries (e.g. individual stories, economic and employment data, statistics on social impact) with the long-term objective of promoting a positive image of migrant workers.

- (5) Carry out joint efforts in ASEAN Member States to present a positive image of migrant workers with various stakeholders, e.g. migrant workers and their associations, academia, youth and student groups, tripartite parties, by using various means such as TV, commercials, exhibitions, radio talk shows, cultural performances and the commemoration of International Migrants Day.

Notes

1. AP-MAGNET is an ILO-sponsored online community of practice for experts and practitioners working on migration and human trafficking issues in Asia and in the Pacific. AP-MAGNET was launched in November 2010. Its aims and activities were decided through consultations with stakeholders from governments, workers' and employers' organizations, civil society, academia, UN agencies and international organizations. *Public Attitudes towards Migrant Workers* was the theme of AP-MAGNET's second discussion forum, held from 20 July to 10 August 2011. The discussion was moderated by John Gee from the Singaporean NGO, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2). Most of the contributors to the forum were senior representatives from NGOs and recognized migration experts, offering perspectives from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. As might be anticipated, the focus was on public opinion in countries and territories of destination, rather than on migrant workers' homelands.
2. There is no wage differential, for example, but equal access to some benefits, particularly social security coverage, is restricted in some countries.

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