

ENHANCING THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND OF THOSE LEFT BEHIND:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MENA REGION

December 2013

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Background and Conceptual Framework

The freedom to leave any country to seek new life opportunities is a fundamental component of human freedom and a basic human right: ***“Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”*** -- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13*. Exercising this right is also perceived as a pathway for individuals and households to expand access to other basic rights in the areas of employment, social protection, improvement of living conditions, health and education (articles 6, 9, 11, 12 (1) and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights respectively) - and ultimately widen life opportunities for them and for their children (UNDP Human Development Report 2009). Migration is indeed one of the oldest and most tested forms of risk diversification for households and provides a secure tool of social protection through consumption smoothing for migrants and their families. It is finally a natural response to the lack of good

training and employment opportunities in certain developing economies.

In economic terms, gaps in productivity levels and training standards between poor and rich countries remain so high that more and more development experts are now referring to cross-border labor mobility as the most powerful development policy tool available for the poor to increase their income and learn new skills in view of expanding their life opportunities and those of their families: the economic literature indicates that even a small amount of international labor market integration would be far more potent than complete trade integration. But in presence of restrictive immigration policies in migrant-receiving countries, especially for the poor and the most vulnerable at the low-skilled end, the right to leave does not de facto translate into equal opportunities to access richer countries’ labor markets. This is one of the greatest sources of inequality worldwide.

Instead of focusing on the huge potential gains of expanding access to legal migration opportunities for the poor and removing the barriers to achieve these, so far the development community has mostly focused on zero-sum game arguments on the so-called “brain drain” and on migrants’ contributions to their home economies - mainly through remittances and knowledge transfer. Most programs that have tried to “leverage” these contributions for home development have either failed or remained small scale and highly contextual. The evidence of brain drain is scarce and not conclusive, and the existing policy options to counter it are often harming migrants’ rights and ineffective in enhancing welfare for them and their communities of origin. It is time to think of migration as development: “(...) departing one’s country of birth is today one of the most important sources of poverty reduction for a large portion of the developing world” (Clemens and Pritchett, 2008).

Background and Conceptual Framework, cont'd.

But the potential of international labor mobility to enhance access to health, education and social protection rights remains largely untapped because migrants incur large costs and bear great risks in order to move. The burden of these costs and risks is regressive with low and semi skilled workers being the most vulnerable even before they have left home and subject to the highest barriers to migrate for work. These gaps exist and persist because of pervasive restrictions at the receiving end by governments even in the face of widespread labor shortages, which create incentives for illegal and risky labor inflows. Widespread coordination failures within and between countries, and weak capacities to address the risks and leverage the development-enhancing potential of international migration in sending countries further exacerbate the situation.

What is needed now is attention to practical cooperative arrangements so that enough trust and commitment is created to result in more legal avenues opening up for the mobility of the poor and vulnerable right holders. For example, we need to understand how job search and matching are conducted internationally, how education and training can

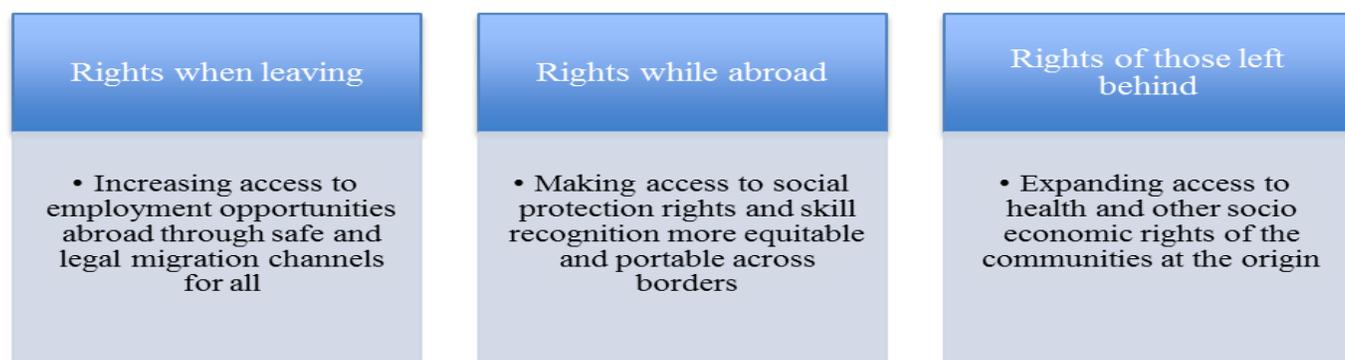
be harmonized and recognized transnationally and how pre-departure training can be designed to empower departing migrants so that their access to fair work conditions in the destination country is enhanced. We also need to know more about whether the poor can actually participate in international migration and how access to social protection rights can be ensured in origin or destination countries, including through bilateral arrangements for portability of health and pension rights.

This program of the WB Human Development Department for MENA is an attempt to lay the technical foundations for mutually beneficial cooperative arrangements on international labor mobility between sending and receiving countries around the Mediterranean. By doing so, it supports MENA sending countries in building up their own capacities to better manage labor outflows and take advantage of labor mobility arrangements with receiving countries in the most concrete ways to enhance access to employment, education, health and social protection rights for their own citizens. Ultimately, this program aims to promote economic and social rights of migrants and their families by facilitating safe and productive employ-

ment across and beyond the Mediterranean and mitigating the common risks associated with labor movements.

The human rights approach offers a fresh look at the issue as it brings us to focus on people rather than places only, which is the natural perspective of the Human Development network. From this common standpoint, there is a role for development practitioners and governments to help the less fortunate access their rights and expand their opportunities and those of their families by moving across borders in good conditions. Support from the Nordic Trust Fund has helped us accomplish a real shift in the way we think about the issues at stake but also in the way we work on these issues. The human rights-based framework we have subsequently adopted tries to capture migrants at different points of the mobility process as featured in the diagram below.

For all three stages, this booklet provides an innovative perspective on the issues at stake; an overview of the activities conducted with support from the Nordic Trust Fund and the related learning outcomes; and concrete ideas for the way forward.



Rights When Leaving: Getting the Legal Channels to Work

The issues at stake

Access to employment and learning opportunities is de facto highly unequal in the North Africa-Europe corridor, with very limited legal migration avenues available to the poor and lower skilled workers despite the existing demand for their work in destination countries. In a context of strong economic and demographic imbalances between neighboring countries, increasingly restrictive immigration rules thus lead to rising undocumented migration flows, often happening in dramatic conditions and through various informal intermediaries which generates repeated human rights abuses. The disconnect between private sector needs and public policy has therefore increased the human costs and risks of migrating to unprecedented levels. As a result about 1500 people die crossing the Mediterranean ever year. In this context, finding relevant and effective legal channels to facilitate labor migration for all can be considered as a pressing human rights challenge.

In the absence of any comprehensive multilateral instrument the governance of international labor mobility remains largely a unilateral or bilateral matter. This is especially so at the low to mid-skill levels where the perceived risks of allowing entry are higher. Bilateral labor arrangements (BLAs) are thus considered by a growing number of experts and policy makers as the most economically realistic and politically palatable way to build legal channels for international labor mobility. BLAs also offer the opportunity to devise sound public mechanisms to ensure that the

risks inherent to labor migration are adequately addressed, and to build trust and coordination in the system to improve access to legal migration opportunities. Such mechanisms relate for example to public labor intermediation, the regulation of private recruitment services, recognition of skills and qualifications, health and social protection arrangements, monitoring of contracts and work conditions, training provisions, etc.

However in practice, few of these agreements have been effective in achieving their intended objectives. This creates an impetus for individuals to explore illegal ways of crossing borders, often at the cost of human rights violations. Where BLAs have succeeded, both labor sending and receiving countries have demonstrated joint responsibility in managing migration flows. Where they have failed, capacity gaps (e.g. in training or worker selection) in labor sending countries or the lack of effective coordination mechanisms (e.g. job matching or cost sharing) with host countries have led to suboptimal outcomes. The ILM program is therefore looking at the conditions for BLAs to work as expected in terms of facilitating labor mobility while offering migrants adequate right protection.

What we have done and learned

The ILM team has conducted a detailed diagnostic of the design and implementation of the French-Tunisian BLA in comparison with other prominent schemes for temporary labor mobility around the world, and then held consultations between

various public and private stakeholders in North Africa and Europe on the basis of this policy diagnostics to discuss solutions to bring confidence back into existing BLAs or to create new programs in closer coordination with private actors.

“The disconnect between private sector needs and public policy has increased the human costs and risks of migration to unprecedented levels.”

Based on the results of these diagnostics and consultations, the conditions of success to jointly manage temporary labor migration through bilateral agreements can be derived at three levels: (i) at the design level where sending and receiving countries should strive to build a coherent set of measures, incentives and division of labor that serve their stated objectives; (ii) at the implementation level where strong multi-stakeholder coordination, information sharing and administrative efficiency is required along the migration cycle: from recruitment to return; and (iii) at the level of institutional capacity building, where needs can be diagnosed jointly and capacity constraints addressed as long as government ownership and adequate tools allow for monitoring progress, identifying bottlenecks and mobilizing resources to make the necessary adjustments.

The first difficulty in the design phase is to choose the sector carefully, figuring out whether the labor

Rights When Leaving, cont'd.

needs are temporary or permanent, if the skills requested are available in sending countries or require additional training before and upon arrival, etc. The next and subsequent challenge is to ensure the commercial viability of the scheme through relevant design features on the following: finding mutually beneficial cost-sharing mechanisms between the different stakeholders to ensure fairness and avoid overstaying; setting a relevant duration for workers' stay and allowing for repeated stays for temporary migrants who comply with the terms of their contract; selecting workers with the relevant skill profile to avoid over qualification for the positions offered; meeting private sector needs and adjusting temporary schemes to labor market conditions as these evolve.

“Piloting bilateral labor mobility programs in select sectors and corridors ... can help gather the conditions of success for bilateral labor agreements to work as expected and therefore create safe channels for migrants to seek employment abroad.”

The main challenge in the implementation phase is to organize and moderate regular collaboration spaces between all the key stakeholders for in-depth and operational discussions aiming at building trust and ensuring a progressive improvement in the functioning of the agreement. Em-

ployers, workers, private recruiters and diaspora members should all participate in such discussions. Involving local and sectorial federations of employers on a regular basis also allows for better identifying their needs, prospect job offers and organize recruitment in safe and effective ways. Improving the screening, pre-selection and preparation of job candidates in close coordination with employers can also be challenging but necessary given the training gaps encountered in most cases and the asymmetries of information between the different stakeholders across borders. Adequate information for migration candidates before departure is also essential to raise awareness about their rights at destination and limit potential abuses.

At the capacity level, labor sending countries governments often lack the resources, networks and know how to prospect job offers and maintain a presence abroad in order to build sustainable relationships with employers in destination markets. This requires adequate financial and human resources but also close coordination between the public employment agencies in charge and foreign representations. The main challenge for receiving countries is to develop adequate methodologies to identify the domestic labor market shortages that can be addressed effectively through temporary migration schemes and make sure that such schemes remain responsive to demand as it evolves over time. Streamlining hiring and admission procedures is another important challenge to tackle to avoid adding to the costs

of international recruitment both for domestic firms and foreign workers.

The way forward

Piloting bilateral labor mobility programs in select sectors and corridors where acute labor shortages are recorded in labor receiving countries and supply side synergies can be found in labor sending countries (e.g. Health and Hospitality) can help gather the conditions of success for bilateral labor arrangements to work as expected and therefore create safe channels for migrants to seek employment abroad. The small scale of pilot programs allow for close supervision to mitigate and manage the risks related to labor mobility, build trust and effective coordination mechanisms between the different stakeholders, and create a demonstration effect for employers to recognize the value added of hiring foreign workers and policy makers to adjust public policy frameworks accordingly. If the appropriate learning mechanisms are in place, source and host countries in the Euromed region and beyond could use these pilots as a laboratory for broader policy reforms, with the aim of creating sustainable systems for legal labor mobility. Bilateral pilots would also provide concrete opportunities for sending countries to test out and strengthen their intermediation systems for international employment, with the aim of providing adequate mechanisms to prepare and recruit workers for job opportunities abroad.

Rights While Abroad: Ensuring Worker Protection and Skill Recognition

The issues at stake

Mobile workers face specific risks and vulnerabilities throughout the migration cycle, from recruitment to employment abroad and potential return before or after retirement. Preventing and mitigating such risks warrants adequate policy interventions to protect migrants' rights at these different stages. Since information asymmetries create room for exploitation during the recruitment process, it is important that regulations and oversight guard against them. Institutional mechanisms that facilitate recognition of migrants' skills abroad will maximize the economic gains to mobility while discouraging abuses that would threaten this human capital. Information geared towards migrants is also very important to reduce abuses. While abroad, proactive support services delivered by sending country representations can significantly reduce migrant vulnerability. These should complement low-threshold and easy-access social services offered by receiving countries. Once labor is mobile, social security rights such as pensions and health insurance need a relevant legal and institutional basis to become practically portable. In what follows we review the worker protection issues at stake in MENA countries at these three different stages:

i. During recruitment: Sending country governments in North Africa have recently liberalized private recruitment services for international employment but compliance remains

low and the levels of formal placements are not increasing. Introducing safeguard mechanisms to prevent worker abuse and exploitation is necessary in an environment of information asymmetries. These can include eligibility requirements for private recruitment agencies to obtain a license such as registration fees or financial capacity and deposit requirements restrictions, and rules for recruitment such as limitations on the fees perceived from workers or the use of compulsory standard contracts. However, if too stringent, such regulatory constraints can undermine the commercial viability of certain recruiters and drive the industry underground to only result in less workers' rights protection. It is therefore important to adjust the regulatory parameters to ensure commercial viability for private recruiters, which then allows for monitoring and protecting workers' rights as they use formal recruitment services. Informing migrants about their rights at destination before departure is an essential complementary measure for worker right protection.

In addition to adequate worker protection measures, increasing the transferability of migrants' qualifications during the recruitment process can empower migrants by enhancing their competitiveness and mobility within receiving country labor markets. Efforts to support "full and productive employment" (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 6.2) are necessary to prevent the underutilization of workers' skills, a

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phenomenon that disproportionately affects low- and mid-skilled migrants. To discourage devaluation of migrants' qualifications in receiving country labor markets, employers, government actors, and training organizations must develop skill recognition mechanisms that optimize human resource allocation while allowing migrants to leverage their skills for their own well-being.

ii. While abroad: Sending countries in MENA seldom have any effective mechanism to ensure the protection of their worker's rights abroad: such protection almost exclusively depends on the receiving countries governments' rules and provisions, which are sometimes insufficient. Some categories of low-skilled vulnerable workers, especially in GCC countries, may not receive any legal protection of their rights as workers – and often end up dealing with abuse at the hand of recruiters or employers (e.g. overcharging by recruiter, change of contract terms, other breach of contract, confiscation of passport, non-payment or late payment of wages, wrongful termination, forced work beyond legal work

Rights While Abroad, cont'd.

hours, physical abuse, sexual abuse, etc.). With a foreign status, and low-income and capacity to deal with the legal system, workers are most often left helpless. There is a strong gender dimension in migrants' rights protection while abroad as female domestic workers, especially in the GCC, face specific risks and abuses at the workplace. To better protect their migrant workers against such right abuses, some major sending countries in Asia have set up Migrant Welfare Funds (MWFs) that offer a range of services such as assistance in case of emergency or repatriation, coverage for legal assistance, shelter in case of termination or abuse, social assistance for the families left behind, etc. There is still a lack of credible information on their implementation. Any attempt to develop similar schemes in other sending countries in MENA would therefore require a proper evaluation of these existing arrangements.

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iii. Upon return: Despite existing agreements on the portability of social protection and health rights between North African countries on

one side and EU and GCC countries on the other side, important gaps remain in the design and implementation of Bilateral Social Security Agreements (BSSAs) with North African countries. Some BSSAs can still be completed to include exportability of health rights, which is in the interest of all the parties involved: cost-efficiency for receiving countries, health sector development for sending countries, greater access to health care for migrant retirees willing to return to their home communities. Beyond design gaps, some BSSAs are not fully implemented when it comes to informing the right holders and ensuring fruitful collaboration between the duty bearers in receiving and sending countries' administrations.

What we have done and learned

i. During recruitment: The ILM program has assessed regulations for international private recruitment in Tunisia and Morocco in comparison with existing practices in other major sending countries worldwide. The main result is that regulatory constraints imposed on private recruiters in North Africa are too stringent and remote from the realities of the market to ensure compliance and ultimately end up being ineffective in protecting migrants' rights. The key challenge here is to acquire a detailed understanding of these realities in order to adjust critical regulatory parameters such as limitations on fees charged to workers or financial requirements accordingly. A more balanced mix of negative and positive incentives could help improve compliance and ultimately ensure higher

worker protection: major labor sending countries seek a dual approach of applying penalties on recruiters who resort to illegal practices and rewarding those who comply with the rules. Positive incentives can include: the extension of licenses or waiver of renewal requirements; tax benefits; return of some of the deposit after an initial block of time; invitation to participate in marketing missions in destination countries; labeling or creating a public list of trustworthy agencies; etc.

The ILM program has also conducted research on migration and skill development programs to identify the requisite features of transnational skill certification systems. On-site investigations of programs in the Philippines, the Pacific Islands (administered by the Australian government), and the United States (administered by the Mexican government) revealed how programs can facilitate overseas valuation and utilization of migrants' skills. Through engaging international employers in the definition of skill competencies and training procedures, sending country training institutions can ensure the value of their graduates' qualifications on foreign labor markets. By aligning training, migration, and employment frameworks, sending and receiving country institutions can leverage migrants' skills to increase migrant welfare and receiving country productivity, as well. Increasing the explicit value of migrants' labor market participation may also encourage receiving country policies that inhibit abusive employer practices and incentivize more migrant-friendly recruitment processes.

Rights While Abroad, cont'd.

ii. While abroad: The ILM team has conducted a first analysis of the design features and operational effectiveness of MWFs in South Asia in view of assessing elements of good practice that could be adopted by North African countries sending migrants to the GCC. There are no consistent assessments of the design or performance of these schemes, however some problems reported include: inadequate sum of benefit; lack of public information and awareness among workers and families; long and complex claim process; poor governance and underutilization. Performance is better where there is higher involvement of civil society and broader worker representation in the administration of the schemes. Since lack of information and capacities among migrant workers and their families seem to constrain access to their rights, performance is also higher where there is active involvement of civil society and diaspora organizations in bridging the gap between the government and right holders, or where public authorities make a special effort to reach out to right holders. Effectiveness is also higher where the private sector is involved in the execution of the insurance and loans. Finally, the gender dimension must be taken into account to devise relevant protection schemes for domestic female workers, especially in the GCC countries.

iii. Upon return: The ILM team has started exploring this issue by taking stock of existing portability agreements around the world and in the EU-MENA context and identifying design gaps. The next step has been to gather leading experts to develop a

methodology to identify bottlenecks in the implementation of BSSAs in different bilateral corridors. A first comparative study on the actual access to portability of social security rights is underway in four migration corridors: Morocco-France/Belgium and Turkey-Germany/Austria. Early evidence suggests that rights holders are often not sufficiently informed about the portability of their rights, which ultimately prevents them to fully access their right to move back and forth between their host and home countries, especially for migrant retirees with their specific vulnerabilities. There are also important coordination gaps to bridge between social security administrations at the bilateral level, notably when it comes to sharing data on right holders.

The way forward

i. During recruitment: Benchmarking recruitment regulations and practices in MENA countries and other labor sending countries in the world will help us create a guide for good practices aimed at enhancing protection of migrants' rights throughout the recruitment process. We would then organize discussions with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and sending country practitioners on how best to protect migrants' rights while facilitating labor mobility through adequate regulation of private intermediation services for jobs abroad. Identifying the current state of skill assessment and certification mechanisms in MENA countries will allow for intermediation between receiving and sending country employers, recruitment firms, training institutions, and migration

agencies. Increasing the value of skill certifications in receiving country labor markets will elevate recognition of migrants' labor market value and may support stronger policies to protect this important human capital.

ii. While abroad: Adapting relevant financial and non-financial instruments to protect the rights of low-skilled workers in the North Africa-GCC context must be based on in-depth understanding of the specific conditions existing in sending and receiving countries and for migrants. A systematic assessment of existing instruments in Asia – design and performance – would therefore be very useful as a guide to other labor sending countries in MENA and elsewhere. Building a network of practitioners between Asian and Arab sending countries to improve the protection vulnerable workers in the GCC would help raise their voice and influence on receiving countries.

iii. Upon return: The logical next step will be to assess practical ways to ensure access to portable social security rights in EU-Maghreb corridors and discuss these with relevant country officials and the European Union based on the results of the comparative corridor study under implementation. At the administrative level, formal bilateral discussions on implementation constraints could be completed by a parallel process of informal technical dialogue using the neutral platform of CMI. Information campaigns among right-holders would finally help address information gaps on the existing schemes for long-term social security rights.

Rights of Those Left Behind: The Example of Health Care

The issues at stake

Examining international migration policies and programs through the human rights lens also means understanding and mitigating the potential adverse impacts of emigration on the basic socio-economic rights of families and communities left behind. In particular the outflow of health workers raises concerns about rendering poor regions of the world underserved in terms of access to health care services, as well as fiscal concerns about the unrecovered costs borne by resource-constrained governments to finance public medical education. These concerns around the migration of health workers have currently led to four kinds of responses:

- i. Seeking ex-post compensation for sending country governments that have invested in public education: such schemes have proved highly impractical;
- ii. Mandating the return of (or else imposing monetary penalties on) workers who have been trained with public funds: such schemes restrict workers' rights to seek employment opportunities in the country of their choice and have been difficult to enforce;
- iii. Restricting (interpreted as a ban sometimes) recruitment from countries which suffer from health worker shortages in the name of 'ethical recruitment': such measures have succeeded in preventing hiring from certain countries but at the cost of restricting access to the right to

move and missing the central point of global labor shortages; and

iv. More recently, some policy experiments are moving in the direction of recruiting untrained workers and training them at the receiving end – such pilots are underway in a few countries, including Germany but remain expensive and hence limited in scope.

Most importantly, none of these solutions has succeeded in expanding access to health care for the communities of origin. The challenge now is to find more relevant and effective solutions to incentivize cooperation between sending and receiving countries in a way that access to the right to leave for health workers does not restrict, but rather expands access to health rights for the populations left behind.

What we have done and learned

Current thinking on this issue has been framed along the lines of "ethical" recruitment, which ends up impinging on the right to leave for some while leaving unaddressed the lack of access to the right to health care for others. To depart from the zero-sum game options already on the table, the ILM team has organized in depth consultations with public and private stakeholders in Europe and North Africa (mainly Germany and Morocco), and reviewed the international experience to study ways to shift the policy debate around the mobility of health professionals towards a new definition of win-win by forging partner-

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ships so that the North and South come together to build global supply of these scarce assets in healthcare. In particular we would like to try out training at origin to meet standards in the North so that not only does the receiving country save on costs, but the sending country inherits an upgraded training system and an infrastructure that supports superior services at home and abroad. In short, if part of the training and worker preparation could be shifted to the origin this would be cost effective as well as development friendly and ultimately expand access to health care for the communities of origin. Relevant funding and cost-sharing mechanisms could be devised given the lower training costs at the origin, the relative wage gaps between sending and receiving countries, and the current recruitment difficulties that employers face in ageing industrialized countries.

This could happen in three ways:

Rights of Those Left Behind, cont'd.

- i. A public subsidy through aid is given from the North to the South to increase training quantity and quality;
- ii. A transfer is made from employers in the North to training institutes in the South to increase training standards and quantity – i.e. public private partnerships; or
- iii. A system of private financing is put in place where the wage arbitrage between the North and the South allows a self-financing feedback loop to be established.

The experience of other countries with similar experiments shows that several pitfalls must be avoided by putting in place appropriate visa systems and facilitating policy measures as well as coordination mechanisms with key public and private stakeholders. Inter-ministerial cooperation on both sides is necessary as such arrangement can require action respectively from the ministries of health, development cooperation, labor, immigration, education and

Conclusion

The human rights-based approach to international labor mobility has helped us take a fresh look at the issue by focusing on people rather than places only. We are shifting our attention to expanding access to human development opportunities through international migration. This shift is fully reflected in our thinking on the interplay between international labor mobility and human development and also in our work program with client countries in the South and

foreign affairs. Bilateral agreements can help address issues related to job matching and skill recognition while ensuring long term commitment to training partnerships. Employers need to be closely involved in the design and implementation phases to ensure that effective recruitment channels are in place and relevant training standards are reached. Since an important protection for workers' rights is their ability to leave a job, it is important to include options for workers to change employers. It is also essential to involve labor unions in destination countries to ensure that work conditions remain at par with native workers.

The way forward

Devising training partnerships to increase the supply of health workers on both sides of the Mediterranean as suggested above would allow for using labor mobility across the Euromed region as an opportunity to test out a new type of health worker training designed to address the

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growing labor shortages that some European countries face in the healthcare sector while strengthening North African health systems and offering good job opportunities for North African youth both in Europe and at home. A small pilot experiment would provide the opportunity to understand the practical implications of such an idea and learn the lessons for broader initiatives in this region and beyond.

mobility for enhanced human development programs in our client countries and across regions.

partner countries in the North. We now need to engage with our own colleagues working on Human Development issues within the Bank and show that such a new perspective on international migration can enhance the way we support developing countries in expanding life opportunities for their citizens. We will therefore use the findings summarized above to launch a discussion within the HD network on how concretely to leverage international labor

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About This Note:

This note was produced by the ILM team to draw lessons from a human rights-based approach to labor migration. It is intended for use by World Bank teams working on issues of migration and labor mobility across regions. The note, and the work of the ILM team, is supported by the Nordic Trust Fund on Human Rights (NTF).

About the ILM Program:

The International Labor Mobility (ILM) program is dedicated to building the policy and institutional infrastructure needed to take full advantage of the human development possibilities available through migration—for migrants, their destinations, and their countries of origin.

The program team works on international mobility issues across all skill levels, and focuses on policy issues that connect labor mobility with social protection, health and education. It is led by The World Bank's Human Development Department for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), working out of the Marseille-based Center for Mediterranean Integration. The program engages extensively with several public and private players involved in labor mobility issues across the region.

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