



Conferencia Regional sobre Migración
Regional Conference on Migration

Conferencia Regional sobre Migración
COSTA RICA 2020
Presidencia Pro-Témpore



Virtual Conference Cycle:

Labor Migration and Economic Recovery: Contributions from Businesses and Governments

CONCEPT NOTE

August – September 2020

The Regional Conference on Migration (RCM or the Puebla Process) is a consultative process on migration, made up of eleven countries in the region: Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Dominican Republic. The countries share and exchange experiences on migration that involve situations of origin, transit and destination, from three fundamental pillars: Migration Governance; Integration, migration and its link with development and Preparation, protection, assistance and irregular migration.

The RCM was created in 1996 and since then it serves as a forum for open discussion of regional migration issues and the exchange of information and experiences to achieve greater coordination and cooperation in the region, and contribute to protecting the human rights of migrants. These topics were discussed by the Vice Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the Member Countries of the RCM at its XXIV Regional Conference, held in Guatemala City, in November 2019. As a result, the Member Countries of the RCM agreed to carry out various activities within the framework of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022, during the Pro-Témpore Presidency of Costa Rica (2020), one of those activities being the holding of a regional workshop on the challenges and benefits of labor migration with the private sector.

CONTEXT

1. The challenge of economic recovery

Globally, businesses and employers from all production sectors are being confronted by one of the most complex challenges of our century: starting a path towards economic recovery in a context of uncertainty and sanitary emergency. According to recent estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the pandemic will destroy between 5.3 and 25 million jobs worldwide, similar to global unemployment records



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suffered during the 2008-2009¹ world financial crisis. Although it is difficult to foresee how long this crisis will last, or how a recovery process would look like, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recommends that the adverse effects suffered by this crisis will be decisively lower if we manage to react quickly and resoundingly.² While the pandemic affects the economy as a whole, it is presumably disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable groups, such as informal workers, domestic workers, migrant workers, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and women-owned enterprises, increasing unemployment and intensifying the economic inequalities and vulnerabilities that already existed before this health emergency. The crisis and its aftermaths will also affect significantly both the level of labor migration flows worldwide, as well as traditional migration schemes.

In addition to attending the direct effects of this pandemic, the efforts of recovery must respond to a global economic landscape that already showed signs of weakness, even prior to this sanitary emergency. At the beginning of this pandemic crisis, world economic growth rates were predicted to bottom out at least at 1% or lower.³ Recently, growth projections were actually lower than expected. As of March 2020, Goldman Sachs indicated an annual GDP drop of 3.8% for the USA, 9% for the Euro zone, and 2.1% for Japan; and an economic deceleration for China that would creep growth to barely 3% (Goldman Sachs, 24 March 2020).⁴ For Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC projected a maximum growth rate for the region of 13% for 2020; however, the devastating effects of this crisis has changed this projection, and now predicts that GDP will cap out between 3% to 4%, or more.

The panorama described above has become even more complex, given that the pandemic has generated a serious economic contraction of multiple dimensions. The closure or regulation of economic activities has increased unemployment or reduced working hours and income, both in countries of origin and in countries of destination. Recently, the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA) reported that a loss of more than 8 million full-time jobs is estimated among its member countries for the second quarter of 2020 due to the health emergency.⁵

The effects have been similar in destination countries; in the United States, for example, the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that total nonfarm payroll employment fell to 20.5 million in April, and the unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent as a result of the pandemic. According to the Department of Labor report, employment fell sharply in all major industrial sectors, with particularly high job losses in the leisure and hospitality sectors.⁶ But the pandemic has also led to a contraction in consumption, a major reorientation of public spending due to fiscal measures adopted by most countries, and loss of investor confidence in key areas. The effects are not equitable. Response costs (for example, self-isolation, social distancing measures, school closings, business closings, etc.) are not equally distributed, and private sector responses should account for

¹ Source: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf

² Source: <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45337-america-latina-caribe-la-pandemia-covid-19-efectos-economicos-sociales>

³ Ditto.

⁴ Source: <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45337-america-latina-caribe-la-pandemia-covid-19-efectos-economicos-sociales>

⁵ Source: <https://www.sica.int/consulta/noticia.aspx?idn=121966&idm=1&ident=1>

⁶ Source: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_05082020.htm



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these differences in effects for specific groups of the population. The economic consequences will be far-reaching and will deepen existing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

The mid- to long-term economic impact will depend on the measures implemented at the national, regional and global levels. In this regard, there is consensus on the idea that economic recovery will not depend solely on traditional market mechanisms, but rather, requires an articulated effort among governments, employer organizations, unions and the support of the international cooperation. The set of strategies, policies and measures adopted must consider the management of labor migration as a priority so that some sectors of the economy continue to operate, such as, for example, the hiring of temporary migrant workers from Mexico, Guatemala and Jamaica in Canada's agricultural sector.⁷ For companies and private sector organizations, it is essential to understand the role of labor migration in their daily work and the impact that this process has on the economic performance of countries, given the contribution of migrant workers as a qualified and not qualified workforce for the productive matrix of the countries, as support of the care and enablers of the inclusion and the labor permanence at the community level; as key segments of the value and supply chains of the countries, acting as suppliers, manufacturers, distributors and marketers; and even as key market players.

2. The contribution of labor migration towards economic recovery

Migrant workers are undoubtedly one of the groups most severely affected by the global economic contraction. In the United States, for example, there is significant participation of migrant workers in the industries that have been greatly affected, such hotels and restaurants, office building cleaning services, and personal services, such as home childcare and beauty salons.⁸ The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates that about 6 million foreign workers are employed in vital services or frontline industries, and another 6 million work in other industries that have also been affected by the sanitary emergency.⁹

However, an adequate labor migration management can also be part of the policy measures that facilitate a quick and sustained economic recovery. The last five years has registered a spike in international migration, both in the number of people who migrate, as well as the public discussion about this matter in global, regional and national agendas. In 2019, the number of international migrants was estimated at nearly 272 million worldwide¹⁰, and almost two thirds of these, are migrant workers.¹¹

⁷ Source: <https://business.financialpost.com/commodities/agriculture/migrant-friendly-canada-struggles-to-attract-migrant-farm-staff>

⁸ Source: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-workers-us-covid-19-response>

⁹ Ditto.

¹⁰ Source: IOM (2019), 2020 World Migration Report, available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/informe-sobre-las-migraciones-en-el-mundo-2020>.

¹¹ Source: ILO (2017) ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers. Results and Methodology. Second Revision (2017 reference year), available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652030.pdf



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Estimates indicate that there were approximately 164 million migrant workers around the world in 2017.¹² Between 2013 and 2017, high-income countries experienced a slight drop in migrant workers (from 112.3 million down to 111.2 million). On the contrary, mid- to high- income countries observed an increase in this indicator (from 17.5 million to 30.5 million). In 2019, Mexico was the largest origin country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with approximately 12 million Mexicans living abroad.¹³

The majority of Mexican migrants live in the United States, forming the largest country-to-country migration corridor in the world. Nevertheless, it is also turning into a very alluring destination country for international migrants. The main destination for Central American migrants is the United States (78% of the total), followed by Costa Rica (5.35%), Spain (4.18%), Canada (1.8%) and Mexico (1.6%).¹⁴

JUSTIFICATION

Although attending the current sanitary emergency is a top priority, it is crucial to visualize joint actions that contribute towards an economic recovery which might contribute to attend the challenges and strengthens the benefits of labor migration. According to the International Organization of Employers (IOE), labor migration will play a critical role for the regional economies, due to the need of additional workforce, which enables sustained growth and ensures greater levels of long-term prosperity.¹⁵ With this scenario in mind, it is essential to deepen actions that support safe, orderly and regular labor migration with the engagement of businesses and employers, as recommended by the Global Forum on Migration and Development Business Mechanism.¹⁶

In this context, the United Nations agencies (IOM, ILO and UNDP) and the IOE have proposed a cycle of high-level Virtual Conferences, responding to a request made by RCM Member States, in order to advance on this issue and identify –first hand- the needs and expectations from the employment sector, and articulate efforts with government institutions and employers organizations in such a way that RCM Member States can mitigate the impact caused by this crisis in their economies and in migrant workers. This cycle of virtual conferences will analyze the following topics:

(a) Talent mobility to address workforce deficits

¹² Source: ILO (2017) ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers. Results and Methodology. Second Revision (2017 reference year), available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652030.pdf

¹³ Furthermore, a significant number of South American migrants live in other parts of the region. Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had the second and third highest number of immigrants in the region in 2019 (2.9 million and 3.8 million, respectively)

¹⁴ Other relevant intra-regional migration corridors include the migration corridor of Nicaragua, Panama and other Central American countries towards Costa Rica seeking temporary or permanent work, and migrants from Central American countries (mainly Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) towards Belize. In the Caribbean, the most relevant intra-regional corridor is Haiti towards Dominican Republic. Source: UNDESA, cited in Source: IOM, UNHCR, SICA (2019), Baseline Study Findings on Migration and Displacement in the SICA Region, available at: <https://rosanjose.iom.int/SITE/es/biblioteca/hallazgos-del-estudio-de-linea-base-sobre-migracion-y-desplazamiento-en-la-region-del>

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.ioe-emp.org/es/>

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.ioe-emp.org/es/redes-empresariales/mecanismo-empresarial-del-foro-mundial-sobre-migracion-y-desarrollo/>



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Demographic fluctuations have created a deficit in capacities worldwide, but it also represents an opportunity for employers and labor unions, and government and civil society organizations to work collectively in creating practical solutions that respond to the needs of the labor markets. Linking talent banks to global labor opportunities would simply benefit the growth of the private sector, the economic insertion of migrants and global economic development in a moment where key sectors, such as tourism, transportation and commerce have been severely affected. As indicated by the Global Forum on Migration and Development Business Mechanism¹⁷, businesses and organizations from the private sector will have the opportunity to exploit the benefits of migration, complemented with the offer from local workers, including the creation of new employment and providing relevant data on labor market information systems (LMIS) in order to facilitate labor migration policy building.¹⁸

(b) Fair and Ethical Recruitment

Currently, one of the effects generated by this sanitary emergency is that many migrant workers have lost their jobs and have returned to their countries of origin. As the attention of the crisis advances, migrants will eventually have to return or new immigrants will undoubtedly take their place in receiving countries. Consequently, migrants with existing contractual obligations may be able to return relatively easier, but employers looking to quickly recruit a larger group of workers, may find themselves shortcutting adequate recruitment and hiring processes, and potentially enticing illegal recruiters on planning how to offer their services to mobilize vulnerable migrant workers. This means that the possibilities of exploitation and abuse in the workplace and through inadequate recruitment practices may increase exponentially. Responsible agencies and businesses that maintain fair recruitment practices possess clearer business benefits and a competitive advantage compared to those that do not. To achieve this, there need to be regulatory frameworks that promote fair and ethical recruitment and ensure that they are properly implemented.

(c) New technology, entrepreneurship and migration

Businesses and employers may contribute directly to the promotion of entrepreneurship in migrant workers through proper training or funding, and thus ensuring the establishment of support networks and synergies regarding the economic activities that are being developed. The increase of business ventures led by migrants is presented as an opportunity for new commercial partnerships or clients from the private sector, while concurrently supporting the economic integration of migrants.¹⁹ It is also critical - in a post-emergency sanitary context – that employers analyze and foresee the effects of using technology in the future of work.²⁰ The mobile and remote nature of virtual work makes it possible for people to be available during their displacement process, or even, as an alternative to the needs of migrating due to employment purposes. In the case when someone may initiate or continue working remotely from their country of origin, it allows them to continue

¹⁷ Source: <https://gfmdbusinessmechanism.org/>

¹⁸ Ditto.

¹⁹ Source: UNHCR, IOM (2018) Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees.

²⁰ Source: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/future-of-work/lang-es/index.htm>



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using existing local contacts and improve their skills.²¹ However, these new work schemes represent a review of regulatory frameworks regarding labor migration. Additionally, new technology companies play an increasingly relevant role in identifying solutions to better manage migration (through online immigration processes, skills search platforms, among others).

In order to identify the perspectives of businesses and employers faced with these opportunities and challenges, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization of Employers (IOE) submits for consideration to the RCM Member States and employment organizations, a series of virtual conferences oriented in strengthening the contributions made by labor migration in a post-emergency sanitary economic recovery.

OBJECTIVES

Virtual Conference General Objective

Facilitate a dialogue that contributes to exchanging ideas, reflections and joint solutions between business organizations, employers and the governments of the RCM Member Countries to meet the challenges and enhance the benefits of labor migration, including in the post- pandemic economic recovery process.

Specific Objectives

1. Identify the expectations and priorities of employers' organizations and companies to potentiate the incorporation of migrant workers into the workforce, as well as regarding migration policies and how these policies respond to employer's needs, both in terms of the workplace, the value chain, as market agents and as part of the care structures.
2. Exchange best practices and lessons learned from public-private alliances in RCM countries that promote labor migration and migrant social inclusion.
3. Analyze potential labor migration markets and labor trend changes against current challenges and future work in RCM Member States, focusing on innovative technologies and promoting the employment of migrants (including entrepreneurship).
4. Promote the use of guiding frameworks and tools developed by international cooperation (IOM, UNDP, ILO) for ethical and fair recruitment, entrepreneurship and development of sustainable livelihoods of migrants.

²¹ UNDP (2019) The Migrant Union: Digital Livelihoods for People on the Move.





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METHODOLOGY

This activity will be implemented in three virtual conferences, which will include presentations from subject matter experts, spaces for dialogue and presentations from Member State representatives.

- a) The First Virtual Conference is dedicated to developing Specific Objective 1; centered on analyzing the role of employers as a source of support and advice to the authorities responsible for managing labor migration, given their ability to identify skills gaps or technical challenges when hiring migrant workers.
- b) The Second Virtual Conference is dedicated to developing Specific Objective 2; centered on exchanging best practices and lessons learned in RCM countries regarding initiatives that promote labor migration and migrant social inclusion with the engagement of government agencies and employment organizations.
- c) Lastly, a Third Virtual Conference is dedicated to Specific Objectives 3 and 4; centered on ethical and fair recruitment, analysis of potential changes in labor migration markets due to the current sanitary emergency, and the role of innovative technologies and the promotion of entrepreneurship in the economic recovery process.

The co-organizing organizations of the virtual conferences will facilitate the spaces for dialogue and will systematize the recommendations of the various participants in a short final document, which will serve as an input to strengthen an agenda for discussion and common regional follow-up action within the framework of the Labor Migration Group of the RCM.

PARTICIPANTS

The workshop is intended for 7 representatives per country (possibly at a Department Director's level for the public sector, and President or CEO for business organizations and business chambers), distributed as follows:

- 1 to 2 representatives from the Ministry of Labor (labor migration department, national employment service and/or departments responsible for the regulation of recruitment agencies),
- 1 to 2 representatives from the Institute or Directorate on Migration linked to the theme of labor migration,
- 5 representatives from Employment Organizations (National Business Chambers or Associations)

RCM Observing Bodies and the Regional Network of Civil Organizations for Migration (RNCOM) are welcomed to participate, as well as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, who serve as RCM focal points.



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PRELIMINARY AGENDA

August 19, 2020

Virtual Conference 1: Employers Organization Priorities and Expectations		
Time (Central America)	Activity	Facilitation
09:00-09:20	<p>Opening Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative of the RCM Presidency Pro-Témpore • Maria Paz Anzorreguy, Director of the International Organization of Employers (IOE). • Marcelo Pisani, Director of the Regional Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for Central America, North America and the Caribbean. • Leonardo Ferreira, Deputy Director of the Office of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for Central America, Haiti, Panama and the Dominican Republic. • Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 	RCM Executive Secretariat
09:20-10:30	<p>Panel with employers' representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the theme: Ronnie Goldberg, President of the OIE Policy Working Group on Migration, United States Council for International Business (USCIB) • Fabio Masís, Executive Director, Costa Rican Union of Chambers and Associations of the Business Sector (UCCAEP) • Fernando Yllanes, Mexican Confederation of Industrial Chambers (CONCAMIN) • Guido Ricci, Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations of Guatemala (CACIF). 	IOE
10:30- 11:00	Q&A from the participants	IOE
11:00- 11:05	Virtual Conference 1 Closing Remarks	RCM Executive Secretariat



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August 26, 2020

Virtual Conference 2: Public-Private coordination mechanisms for ethical recruitment and labor inclusion of migration workers		
Time (Central America)	Activity	Facilitation
09:00-09:05	Virtual Conference 2 Opening Remarks	RCM Executive Secretariat
09:05-10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the theme (IOM): Good practices and lessons learned from public-private initiatives to promote ethical recruitment and migrants labor inclusion. <p>Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 panelists representing Member Countries: coordination / communication mechanisms between governments and companies to integrate labor migration into labor market management (Countries to be confirmed) • 1 representative of recruiting agencies 	IOM
10:30- 11:00	Q&A from the participants	IOM
11:00- 11:05	Virtual Conference 1 Closing Remarks	RCM Executive Secretariat



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September 02, 2020

Virtual Conference 3: International Cooperation for the Management of Labor Migration and Economic Recovery		
Time (Central America)	Activity	Facilitation
09:00-09:05	Virtual conference 3 Opening Remarks	RCM Executive Secretariat
09:05-10:30	<p>Core Topic: Guiding frameworks and tools developed by international cooperation to support governments and business organizations.</p> <p>ILO: General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs.</p> <p>IOM: International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) and the Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking (CREST).</p> <p>UNDP: Fair Business</p> <p>Presentation of the PPT 2020 on the Migration Portal as an action of the Labor Migration Group.</p>	PPT 2020
10:30- 11:00	Q&A from the participants	IOM
11:00- 11:05	Virtual Conference 3 Closing Remarks	RCM Executive Secretariat



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