

Meeting Skill Needs for the Global Green Transition

A Role for Labour Migration

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This factsheet summarises a new policy paper from the Center for Global Development, which reviews labour demand and supply for the green transition in five countries of migrant origin and five countries of destination. It concludes that labour migration is likely to have an important role to play in supporting the green transition.

Over the coming decades, countries must reduce their emissions at an unprecedented pace. This requires the rapid development of low-carbon — ‘green’ — technologies, and the workers to operate them.

This ‘green transition’ must occur everywhere, simultaneously. Net zero carbon-equivalent emissions must be achieved globally between 2050 and 2060, with stringent benchmarks in the intervening decades. This transformative shift is already underway, but it will require many more workers if it is to occur at the scale and pace needed.

The jobs needed for the green transition are often not high-skill, but low attractiveness and other factors could make them hard to fill with domestic workers in the Global North. While it is important to provide workers in high carbon sectors with the opportunity to transition to green jobs, neither the transitioning workforce nor other domestic channels appear sufficient to meet workforce needs in the timeframes required.

It is likely that high-emitting countries in the Global North will need to use migration to supplement their domestic workforce supply. This could be undertaken through long-term temporary migration of workers already holding skills needed for the green transition. Given, however, that the shortage of

skills needed for the green transition is global, conventional loosening of visa policy will do little to increase the total number of green-skilled workers.

Countries in need of workers for their green transition will need to support workers’ training as well as facilitate their migration.

In doing so, they could follow the Global Skill Partnership model, which has been successfully tested in multiple sectors and countries. In this model, enough workers are trained in the country of origin for both migration and contribution at home. This prevents the mere reallocation of skilled workers, which would have a limited effect on emissions reductions and could restrict the green transition in the country of origin.

Because of the constrained timeframes necessary for the green transition, new Global Skill Partnerships in green transition-related sectors would need to be scaled at unusual pace.

Partner countries would need to be selected carefully, considering their capacity to provide workers without losing the ability to undertake their own green transitions, and the development – and decarbonisation – benefits that could accrue. India stands out as a possible partner, with a large young population, well-developed training system, and eagerness to agree migration partnerships.

Countries of origin can benefit significantly from green-skilled training and migration programmes. So long as training is integrated so that migration programmes do not merely relocate migrants to the Global North, the skill stock in countries of origin can be increased, and experience and remittances gained.

Policy Recommendations

For countries of origin and destination:

- **Survey skill needs.**
- **Prioritise domestic training and reskilling.** Migration should complement domestic workforces, not displace them.
- **Harmonise training requirements with partner countries.** Governments should seek to harmonise or align curricula with partner countries, making efficient mobility feasible.
- **Support the training of existing immigrant and refugee populations.**

For countries of destination:

- **Develop skill partnerships.** The global shortage of workers means that conventional migration pathways will not provide the green-skilled workers needed globally, and risks stripping countries of destination of the workers they need for their own green transitions. Countries of destination should therefore support training in countries of origin, increasing the total global stock of green-skilled workers rather than merely reallocating them.

- **Integrate development impacts in migration partnerships.**
- **Expand mid-skill visas (long-term temporary and permanent).** While skill partnerships are necessary over the mid-term, increased immigration is likely to be needed by countries of destination in the short term.

For countries of origin:

- **Invest in low-cost, high-volume apprenticeship schemes.** These schemes should be connected to international labour markets, training to the levels needed by countries of destination and supported by these partner countries.
- **Actively harness emigration.** Countries of origin should position themselves to benefit from increasing international demand for green-skilled workers, partnering with countries of destination in exchange for substantial investment in training infrastructure.

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