



Evaluation Summaries

Regulating Labour Migration as an Instrument of Development and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia

Quick Facts

Countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan

Final Evaluation: November–December 2011

Mode of Evaluation: independent

Technical Area: Labour Migration

Evaluation Management: ILO International Migration Programme in collaboration with EUROPE

Evaluation Team: Anna Lucia Colleo (Team Leader), Blanka Hancilova

Project Start: March 2008

Project End: May 2011

Project Code: RER/06/14/EEC

Donor: European Commission (USD 1,748,657)

Keywords: Labour Migration

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The region of Central Asia is an area of intensive flows of labour migration, both legal and undocumented. Organised labour migration is however a relatively new policy area; migration flows mainly take place along informal networks, thanks also to the existence of visa free regimes between most countries in the region.

Over the last decades, the national governments and international institutions have engaged in addressing the need for better policies and systems in order to better regulate labour migration and protect migrant workers.

Between March 2008 and May 2011, the project *Regulating Labour Migration as an Instrument of Development and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia* has aimed at promoting the development of more comprehensive labour migration strategies and initiatives in Central Asia, with a view to support the efforts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in addressing national and regional labour migration challenges more effectively.

The project concept sponsored a participatory approach, in which key stakeholders in the management of labour migration are engaged and mobilised: the employers who need and hire migrant labour and skills, the trade unions that represent workers, and the government bodies responsible for regulating labour markets, employment and decent work. Its logic was to strengthen institutional structures within target countries; build the knowledge base and the capacity of key stakeholders to effectively participate in labour migration policy and administration; and reinforce regional dialogue and cooperative mechanisms for regulating labour migration in Central Asia. The project's design capitalized the achievements of previous ILO initiatives in the region. Moreover, it took into account the mid-term goals and implementation strategies of the current Decent Work Country Programs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Present situation of the project

The project resulted in the formulation of recommendations adopted by the four regional

conferences and meetings conducted in the “Issyk-Kul Process of International Migration Policy Dialogue for Central Asia, Caucasus and Neighbouring States.” They have emphasized a quest for regional approaches and inter-State cooperation on migration, which the project has addressed. Seven pillars were identified to develop a comprehensive approach to labour migration, including 1) establishing a standards-based approach to migration; 2) professionalizing collection and analysis of relevant migration and labour market data; 3) putting in place an informed and transparent labour migration system; 4) enforcing minimum national employment condition standards; 5) consolidation of institutional mechanisms for policy formulation and administration of labour migration; 6) enacting and implementing strategies to counter discrimination and xenophobia; and 7) engaging social partners – employers and worker organisations – in migration policy and administration.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation exercise has been carried out in the course of November and December 2011 and covered the project as a whole from 2008 through 2011.

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the extent to which the outcomes of the project have been achieved, what kind of changes produced, what are the intended or unintended effects of the project; obtain feedback from the national partners: what is working, what is not and why; provide suggestions, recommendations to better target the next steps, future strategies and new areas of technical cooperation.

The clients of the evaluation are ILO specialists and managers in ILO MIGRANT and ILO DWT/CO Moscow; the ILO Evaluation Unit; ILO tripartite constituents and project implementing partners in the three beneficiary countries; staff involved in the project; and the project donor.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation is based on the review of relevant project documents, and on the

outcomes of individual phone interviews with: national stakeholders and external experts involved in the project; the Task Manager at the EC Delegation to Kazakhstan; the latest project’s Chief Technical Advisor; current ILO country staff, and ILO staff responsible for the project at ILO Headquarters in Geneva. The draft evaluation report was circulated by the ILO to colleagues serving at Headquarters, in Moscow and in the project’s beneficiary countries, who have provided feedback and in some cases, additional information to finalise the report.

In general terms, the collection of direct information for the evaluation has proved challenging. The turnover of staff at the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in the agencies dealing with migration issues in Tajikistan, in addition to the changes in project staff that have occurred over the project’s period, have limited the possibility to collect information in beneficiary countries.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The project’s success was hampered by serious external impediments, i.e. political turmoil in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and the reorganization of competences on labour migration in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In addition to these, interviewees agree that the project was under-performing over the initial two years, as the resulting combination of a number of factors: the limited managerial and technical capacity of the first CTA who was selected for coordinating the project in Central Asia, in charge until May 2010; conflicting discrepancies between ILO financial regulations and EC requirements for the management of grants; a complex administrative set up, with activities coordinated in Central Asia, administrative back-up based in Moscow and payment authorisations coming from Geneva; finally, limitations in the effectiveness of the project monitoring system to detect and report openly on project constraints, and address them with timely corrective measures.

On the positive side, the appointment of new executive staff in the summer of 2010 soon resulted in improved relationships with project stakeholders and in an accelerated progress of activities. The increased sense of project ownership by country stakeholders prompted formal requests for technical support, with the ILO providing quality advice to governments on legislative matters. By developing the results of previous EU projects coordinated by the ILO, regional cooperation among trade unions was reinforced, leading to a formal multi-country agreement concerning the protection of migrant workers. In more general terms, over the last eight months of operations, the project attained most of the project outputs that were foreseen in the initial project plan. Constituents have also mentioned that appreciation for the latest project activeness has ensured continuity to previous esteemed ILO work in the region, despite the fact that the latest project period could not fully compensate for achieving goals that had been deemed realistic for a 36 months period. Local stakeholders have also repeatedly affirmed the outstanding need in Central Asia for external technical support, especially as it concerns the promotion and impetus to regional dialogue and cooperation, and the important role of the ILO in its delivery, while also pointing out the importance of improving inter-agencies coordination to avoid duplication of efforts and outputs.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Recommendations for the future include:

1. Ensuring appointment of project staff with adequate managerial competences and technical qualifications, especially when this concerns project executive positions;
2. Establishing effective provisions at project level for monitoring progress, detecting criticalities, and taking timely corrective measures as needed;
3. Securing familiarity of project staff with the PCM concept and requirements;
4. A review of the pros and cons of centralising coordination of technical assistance projects at Headquarters or decentralising it to regional offices;
5. Addressing the issue of conflicting provisions on financial management between the ILO and the EU to ensure a smoother implementation of EU co-financed actions in the future;
6. Continuing support to key institutional and social stakeholders in Central Asia with a view to improving their national and regional efforts for an effective and rights-based management of labour migration flows.

Important lessons learned

Despite external and internal difficulties that hampered the implementation of this particular project, available information allows for the identification of a number of features concerning the project's logic and design, which can be regarded as positive features for similar initiatives in the future:

1. the alignment of its objectives with the broader goals of the DWCPs;
2. its latest participatory approach, based on the active involvement of key national counterparts, allows for structured cooperation among entities with a stake in labour migration;
3. improvement of coordination among stakeholders at national level, among government structures, and at regional level, between key institutional and social stakeholders operating in countries that are connected by transnational migration routes;
4. structured plan of meetings at national and regional level to exchange views and fine-tune evolving needs, approaches, methodologies and ways of operation;
5. focus on building or strengthening the internal set-up and capacity of institutional structures dealing with labour migration;
6. investment in a solid knowledge-base to support appropriate policy-making;
7. attention to the wide circulation of project outputs, so that they become common references and allow for future capitalisation of project work.