



International
Labour
Organization

Fair
Recruitment
Initiative

► Reporting on Forced Labour, Fair Recruitment, and Labour Migration

An ILO toolkit for journalists
ECOWAS contextualized edition



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This toolkit has been developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations which, since 1919, brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. The ILO's Fair Migration Agenda, which was launched in 2014, emphasizes the significance of labour migration narratives and perceptions in influencing public opinion.

In the framework of the [Fair Recruitment Initiative](#), the toolkit aims to foster contributions to the United Nations TOGETHER campaign, promoting respect, safety and dignity for migrants and refugees. It also aims to further contributions to Alliance 8.7, the global partnership committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals on eradicating forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour around the world. Furthermore, it operates within the framework of the Global Compact on Migration & Development, focusing on objective 16 (Empowering migrants and societies to achieve full inclusion and social cohesion) and objective 17 (Eliminating all forms of discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration).

Many organizations and actors have contributed to this toolkit, including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the United Nations Alliance for Civilizations (UNAOC), ILO staff in various country offices and journalists from many countries around the world. The original ILO Media Toolkit was developed by Charles Autheman, Kevin Burden, Cassandre Guibord Cyr, Nicolás

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The authors of the toolkit and the authors of the various examples of reporting provided in this toolkit are respectively and solely responsible for the content and any opinions expressed within this publication, which does not reflect any official position of the ILO.

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► Introduction

Why use this guide?

Globally, migrants are still too often victims of discriminatory and xenophobic attacks while their contribution to the socio-economic development of countries of origin, countries of destination and countries of transit often go unrecognized. The media often inadvertently promotes a toxic public narrative on migration and reinforces stigmatization of migrants that can contribute to hate speech. Indeed, migrants are often perceived in a negative light and as creating scarcity of jobs for nationals, not taking into consideration their contributions in addressing skills and labour shortages in host countries.

It is essential to change negative perceptions and attitudes around migration through evidence-based or fact-based journalism and broadcasting that contribute to eliminating public misconceptions. Indeed, a fair and balanced reportage that recognizes migrants' contribution to the economic growth and development of countries of origin, transit and destination is urgently needed.

International migration today is largely linked to the search for a job and better wages. Even when employment is not the primary driver, it usually occurs at some point in the migration process. Labour migration is also one of the key foundations of Africa's socio-economic development and regional integration.

Labour migration is a global phenomenon involving several actors in the World of Work (representatives of Ministries in charge of Labour, Employment and Social Protection, Employers' and Workers' Organizations) and other different stakeholders such as

Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs, Ministries of Health, Ministries of Education, Ministries of Interior, Ministries of Gender, Public Employment Service (PES), Private Recruitment Agencies (PREAs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Understanding the specific responsibilities of these different actors is critical in order to produce accurate reports. Thus, specific measures to counter labour exploitation, abuse and discrimination in the labour market and at the workplace need to be ensured. While labour migration remains a key priority in several socio-economic strategies in Africa at the levels of the African Union, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the [Economic Community of West African States \(ECOWAS\)](#) as well as Member States, the real question remains: **how to ensure that labour migration is leveraged for the national and continental economic and social development?**

Expert studies and data show that migration, particularly labour migration, is an **important enabler and beneficiary of regional integration and economic development in Africa**. For example, the key findings of a 2018 **ILO/OECD study on the impacts of immigration on developing countries' economies**,¹ showed the following:

- **Migrants can have a positive impact on economic growth.** The study's conclusions state that overall immigration is unlikely to depress gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, on the contrary. In some countries, the estimated contribution of immigrants to GDP represents up to 19 per cent, such as in **Côte d'Ivoire**.²
- **Immigrants may also generate additional employment opportunities for native-**

1 ILO-OECD, 2018, *How Immigrants Contribute to Developing Countries' Economies*. <http://www.oecd.org/migration/how-immigrants-contribute-to-developing-countries-economies-9789264288737-en.htm>

2 ILO-OECD, 2018, *How Immigrants Contribute to Ivory Coast's Economy*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/how-immigrants-contribute-cote-divoires-economy>

born workers. Overall, in **South Africa**³ the study shows that recently arrived migrants have a positive impact on native-born employment rates and monthly wages, as well as a decrease in unemployment rates.

- At the same time, **when migrant workers are employed in the formal economy, their employment can have a positive effect on public finance.** In **Ghana**,⁴ the contribution of immigrants to the government's fiscal balance exceeds the contribution of the native-born population (on a per capita basis). In addition, in **South Africa**, immigrants have a positive net impact on the government's fiscal balance.

However, migrant workers' contribution to the economy depends on their **jobs and working conditions as well as migration status**. Good governance of labour migration is therefore critical in order to harness the full potential of the benefits of labour migration for both origin and destination countries, as well as migrant workers themselves. Thus, specific measures to counter exploitation, abuse and discrimination in the labour market and at the workplace should be put in place, as well as legislation, policy and practical measures to strengthen labour and social protection frameworks and to support migration as a driver of stability, decent work, and shared opportunity.

This toolkit was developed to help media professionals and communicators report and communicate on fair recruitment, forced labour and labour migration in the ECOWAS region. Other stakeholders can benefit from the guidance included in this tool, notably social partners, policymakers at national and regional levels, such as governments, ministries, and agencies responsible for migration policies, multilateral organizations and international institutions, as well as ECOWAS, UEMOA,⁵ and other regional institutions. National and international media will play a crucial role in amplifying key messages, while migrants, potential migrants, and their communities will be central beneficiaries, ensuring informed decision-making and awareness. This will contribute to strengthening free movement, enhancing migration governance, while ensuring the well-functioning of the labour market.

You do not need any prior knowledge to browse through the guide's content. You can work your way through the material in your own time and at your own pace.

We recommend that you follow the course in logical order, but it is not strictly necessary. If time is short, you can dip in to find the information you need most at the moment and return later to expand your knowledge.

Notes

3 ILO-OECD, 2018, *How Immigrants Contribute to South Africa's Economy*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/how-immigrants-contribute-south-africas-economy-1>

4 ILO-OECD, 2018, *How Immigrants Contribute to Ghana's Economy*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/how-immigrants-contribute-ghanas-economy>

5 The West African Economic and Monetary Union (Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine, UEMOA, in French).

Notes

The role of the media

Harrowing tales of survivors trapped in the web of trafficking

Through the haunting narratives of victims ensnared in the merciless web of child trafficking, Babatunde Titilola writes about the heartbreaking reality of how innocent lives are lured into a world of sexual exploitation and suffering under the guise of promising opportunities abroad.

It took three days before 28-year-old Joy finally agreed to share her trafficking story with this reporter. She had reservations about the interview's intentions, having faced exploitation from similar requests in the past. However, after seeking clarification on the potential impact of her narrative, she eventually decided to open up.

Joy's life has been fraught with challenges, especially since her trafficking experience from her hometown in Benin, Edo State, to Libya a few years ago.

Raised by a single mother after her parents' divorce at the age of eight, Joy had been making do with life's meagre offerings. However, her world was shattered when her mother passed away, leaving her to navigate life's obstacles alone at the age of 21.

Read the full article, which was a winner of the 2024 edition of the ILO Global Media Competition on Labour Migration: <https://punchng.com/harrowing-tales-of-survivors-trapped-in-the-web-of-trafficking/>

This story highlights the importance of forced labour, fair recruitment and labour migration in the ECOWAS region, as well as how several important interconnected policies are at stake.

On such issues, journalists have a voice that many do not have. They have the ability to highlight abusive practices and denial of fundamental human rights as well as to alert readers or viewers to the abuses. Journalists have the opportunity to influence public opinion and policy, thereby impacting the lives of workers. In addition, they have a clear ethical duty not to make matters worse, which can happen when reporters and editors use derogatory language about workers and sensationalist headlines.

Writing stories on labour migration is not like writing a routine news story. In many circumstances, it takes more time because of the effort required to investigate: speak to various sources, weigh the information and verify it carefully in the process.

Many stories of forced labour and fair recruitment are "glocal": they have a local impact and produce repercussions globally. For instance, workers trapped in the garment industry may be producing clothing that some of your readers wear. Therefore, understanding contemporary economic interactions and global production mechanisms is also important for reporting.

In the following pages, information and advice is provided to help report more accurately and effectively on forced labour, fair recruitment and labour migration. Many

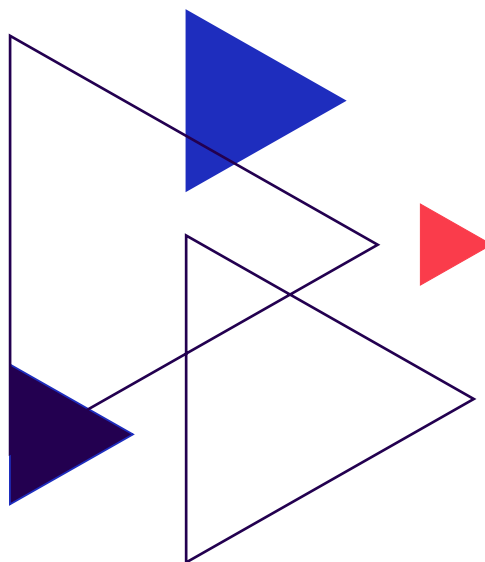
examples of good reporting are included as well as tips from journalists experienced in covering these often-challenging subjects.

Notes

Bringing ECOWAS media professionals together for a validation roundtable in Abuja

On 24-25 June 2025, media professionals from across the different ECOWAS Member States gathered in the federal capital of Nigeria alongside technical officers of the ILO, representatives from the ECOWAS Commission, representatives of regional employers' and workers' organizations (FOPAO and OTUWA), as well as other relevant stakeholders. Over the two days, they reviewed the toolkit and provided numerous insights and suggestions, which are featured in the document. They shared some critical recommendations for practitioners in the region, emphasizing the need to:

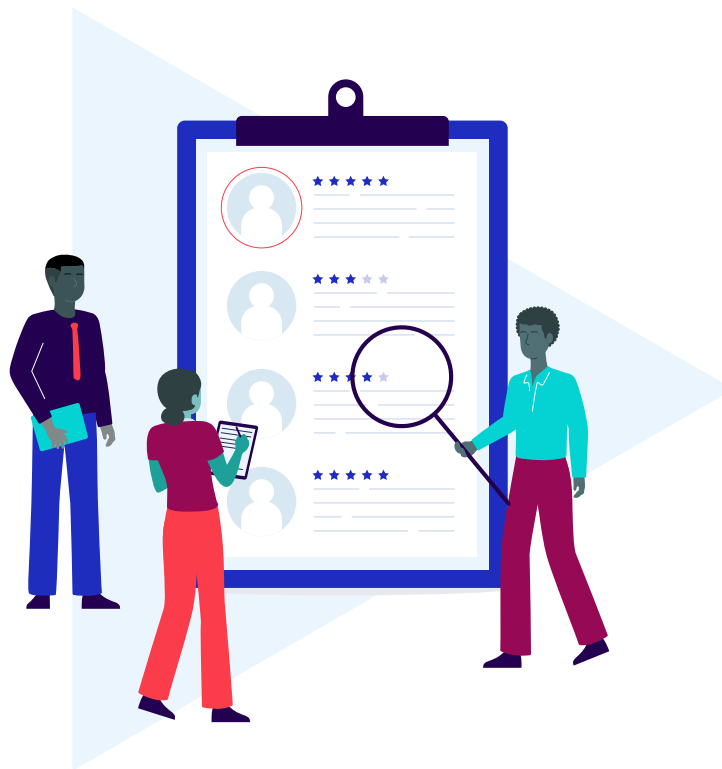
- ▶ go beyond event-based journalism and strive to unpack root causes of labour migration patterns in the region;
- ▶ exercise their right to access information, notably to inform their audience on matters of public interest;
- ▶ include migrants as direct sources of information and, when possible, work collaboratively across borders and within their countries; and
- ▶ avoid sensationalism and cover the full story, including stories of returnees, casual workers, seasonal workers, frontier workers or informal workers.



Module 1.

Notes

Understanding the story



► Unit 1.1 – Looking for a common terminology

While telling stories on forced labour, fair recruitment and labour migration, it is important to know that some words are legally defined while others aren't. Understanding the definitions and interpretations is part of the preparatory work that should be done before any reporting. If you do not have a clear understanding of the meaning(s) of the words you use, your capacity to report accurately, identify relevant statistics and challenge the discourse of your sources of information is weakened.

Dictionaries, glossaries and media stylebooks are key resources to gain expertise and improve the quality of media productions. The ILO has developed Media-Friendly Glossaries on labour migration in different languages as well as contextualized editions.⁶

⁶ Different versions of the *Media-Friendly Glossary* can be accessed on the following link, including an "Ending Violence Against Women" (EVAW) edition. <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/fair-recruitment/media-engagement-forced-labour-and-fair-recruitment>

► Unit 1.2 – Forced labour

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Forced labour can take many different forms. Victims are often tricked into jobs where they are paid little or nothing at all and then cannot leave because they have been manipulated into debt or had their identity documents confiscated. Poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and migration are some of the factors that make workers more vulnerable to forced labour.

A. What is forced labour?

The term forced labour covers a wide variety of coercive labour practices where work is compelled from individuals. People who are in forced labour did not give their free and informed consent to start working and/or are not free to leave their work.⁷ Human trafficking, debt bondage, bonded labour, slave labour and modern-day slavery are terms that are used by news and media to describe labour exploitation. There are an estimated 27.6 million victims of forced labour around the world.⁸ Forced labour can be found almost anywhere, whether in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Central Asia, Africa, the Arab States or the Americas.

Ten-Year Action Plan to Eradicate Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (2020-2030)

The Ten-Year Regional Action Plan, adopted by the African heads of state during the African Union Summit in February 2020 and by Ministers of Labour and Social Development in December 2019, is a comprehensive action plan for achieving SDG Target 8.7, which calls on all to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labour as an essential step to achieving decent work for all, full and productive employment and inclusive and sustained economic growth. Through the Action Plan, African leaders recognise the magnitude of the challenge they face and set the ground for positive policy experiences in a number of African countries that will help guide efforts in the region moving forward. The AU is committed to accelerating the achievement of SDG 8.7 in line with its policy frameworks and legal instruments, and to using its political and convening capacities to drive greater coordination of implementation efforts across the continent.

Read the action plan: https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/40112-wd-child_labour_action_plan-final-english.pdf

⁷ ILO, 2012, *ILO Indicators of Forced Labour*. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_203832/lang--en/index.htm

⁸ ILO, Walk Free, and IOM, 2022, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage>

Notes

B. How do people get trapped?

Some workers are more vulnerable to the risk of forced labour because they face discrimination (for example, minorities) or because they are isolated (for example, migrant workers). The risk of abuse is higher when the work is performed out of sight, behind closed doors, such as in the case of domestic workers.

C. What type of work or which sector?

Forced labour can happen in any type of activity inside the labour market, in the formal or informal sector, even though some low-wage jobs are more prone to abusive practices and exploitation.

D. Recruitment practices

The use of coercion is often very subtle and hard to detect. Recruitment through deception, including making false promises, is very common when it comes to forced labour. Private recruiters and informal intermediaries may be the only source of employment information available to migrants. This makes it easy for them to lie about the nature of jobs and work conditions.

E. Impunity and profits

Unscrupulous recruiters and employers reap huge illegal profits facilitated by an environment of impunity where abuses are not always effectively investigated or prosecuted. Victims and their families lose income and, as a result, cannot escape poverty. It also creates unfair competition for ethical companies and risks tarnishing the reputation of entire industries. Therefore, such an environment must be tackled with the contribution of all relevant parties, including recruiters, employers, and regulators, to ensure they take their responsibilities seriously and stick to the law.

F. Labour migration and the risk of forced labour

Migrant workers are one of the groups most vulnerable to forced labour. Around 15 per cent of forced labour victims are international migrant workers. Once workers have left their country of origin for a country of destination, they can find themselves more vulnerable to exploitation, especially when they don't speak the language.

- **Debt bondage.** Debt bondage is the most common form of coercion used to entrap workers. It affects 20.9 per cent of all victims of forced labour in the private sector. Accepting credit for expenses such as travel costs immediately places a worker in debt to their employer. This debt can then be manipulated through sudden "rises" in interest rates or hidden charges.
- **Retention of passports.** The retention of passports and other identity documents is one of the most common forms of coercion, restricting a migrant worker's freedom of movement, preventing them from seeking help and trapping them in forced labour. It is one of eleven indicators of forced labour. In many countries, this is even a common practice for certain kinds of workers, for example, for domestic workers who live in their employer's household.
- **Wage withholding.** Wages may be withheld in order to cover the costs of housing or tools and equipment. This creates a situation where the worker becomes dependent on the employer for food and shelter.

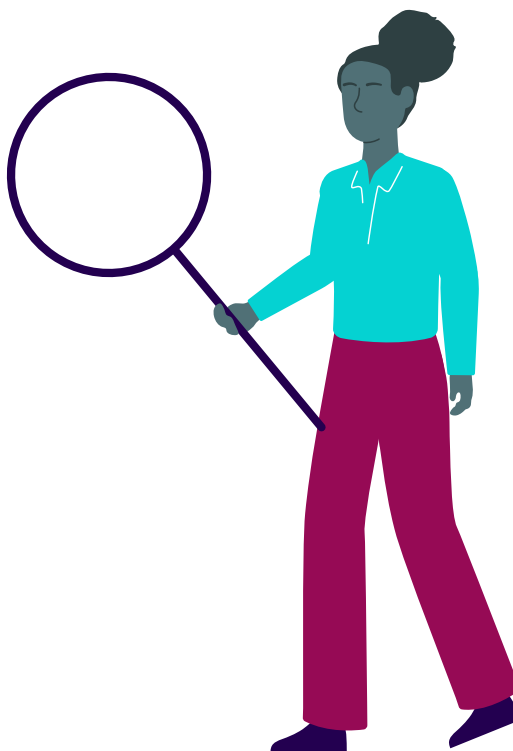
G. Ending forced labour

Forced labour is a severe violation of human rights and is considered a crime under international law. It should be punishable through penalties reflecting the gravity of the offence and which deter perpetrators. Although most countries outlaw forced labour, human trafficking and/or slavery-like practices in their national legislation, successful prosecutions of offenders sadly remain few.

H. The importance of regulation

When labour markets fail, and workers are left unprotected, the most vulnerable among them are at risk of exploitation. In its effort to promote decent work, the ILO has developed several international labour standards that tackle forced labour. Some address forced labour in general, while others focus on specific issues such as child labour or domestic work.

Combating forced labour requires the effective regulation of labour markets, at both international and national levels, and proper enforcement of labour laws.



► Unit 1.3 – Decent work opportunities through fair recruitment

In today's globalized economy, millions of people are looking for job opportunities beyond their community or country of origin and the recruitment and employment of workers along global supply chains are becoming ever more common. Migration today is more and more about the world of work. In addition, millions of workers migrate within their own country in search of decent work. Making sure that the recruitment process is fair is a key aspect in securing decent work opportunities for all.

A. What is fair recruitment?

Fair recruitment is a concept that is not defined in international law but that has become central to international debates and ILO work. The Fair Recruitment Initiative is an ILO global initiative looking to improve recruitment practices. It is based on a four-pronged approach:

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1. **Enhancing Global Knowledge:** This involves enhancing, exchanging, and disseminating global knowledge on national and international recruitment practices. The goal is to advance understanding and share best practices in recruitment processes.
2. **Improving Laws, Policies and Enforcement:** The initiative focuses on strengthening laws, policies, and enforcement mechanisms to promote fair recruitment practices. This includes aligning national laws with international labour standards and ensuring effective oversight and enforcement.
3. **Promoting Fair Business Practices:** This pillar aims to encourage businesses to adopt fair recruitment practices. It involves working with employers to ensure that their recruitment processes are ethical and compliant with international standards.
4. **Empowering and Protecting Workers:** The final pillar focuses on empowering workers by providing them with the necessary tools and support to protect themselves against abusive recruitment practices. This includes ensuring access to remedies for workers who have suffered abuse during the recruitment process.

The concept of fair recruitment is embedded in the *ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment*,⁹ which look at various aspects of the recruitment process, and in particular the following:

- **Information on job opportunities.** Fair recruitment starts at the beginning of the recruitment process when information on the existence of a job opportunity is shared. Unfair practices such as deception can happen at that moment, for example through the publication of false promises in the classifieds section of a newspaper. Governments can issue press releases or can publish advertisements to reject such lies.

► **Direct recruitment or agents?**

Recruitment processes can be complex and involve different private or public actors. The more intermediaries there are between the employer and the worker, the more risks there are of unethical practices. One of the common problems workers face is the payment, directly or indirectly, of recruitment fees or costs.

The *ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment* state that workers should not pay recruitment fees or related costs, and yet in many countries, recruitment fees are still legally charged to the workers whether in part or whole. In addition, it is important to understand the full range of costs that workers end up paying. These can include “recruitment fees”, usually charged by a recruitment agency for the services of connecting a worker with an employer, but can also include related costs, such as costs for identity documents, travel documents, medical checks and pre-departure training.

- **Appropriate job matching.** The recruitment process should ensure that efficient job matching is carried out so that workers are offered a placement with job opportunities that are best suited for their qualifications, abilities and aspirations.

9 ILO, 2019, *ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/general-principles-and-operational-guidelines-fair-recruitment-and-0>

AU Strategy on Fair and Ethical Recruitment for Africa (2024)

The AU Fair and Ethical Recruitment Strategy for Africa was adopted by the Fifth Ordinary Session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment (STC-SDLE-5) in July-August 2024. The Fair and Ethical Recruitment Strategy for Africa, which comprises four strategic objectives in line with the ILO [Fair Recruitment Initiative Strategy \(2026-2030\)](#), is expected to serve as a tool to support such collective effort, with a view to strengthening a rights-based approach to labour migration governance and piloting innovative practices to promote fair and ethical recruitment from, to, and within the continent. The strategy is structured around the following 4 strategic objectives, with accompanying targets and a 6-year implementation plan (2024-2030):

1. Knowledge, guidance and tools on continental, regional, national, and international recruitment processes are enhanced, exchanged, and disseminated within Africa and along migration corridors.
2. Laws, policies, enforcement and monitoring mechanisms to advance fair and ethical recruitment are reviewed and improved.
3. Fair and ethical business practices are strengthened and promoted.
4. African migrant workers are protected from recruitment-related abuses and empowered to actively contribute to policy design and implementation in this area.

B. Eliminating worker-paid recruitment fees and related costs

The recruitment process often involves third-party intermediaries charging high fees, which frequently burdens migrants in the lowest-paying jobs. ILO-World Bank surveys¹⁰ show that low-income migrants — disproportionately the least skilled or educated — are paying the highest costs relative to their earnings. This has made migrant workers vulnerable to debt bondage and abuses that amount in different criminal justice frameworks to human trafficking or forced labour. The *ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs*, clearly call for recruitment fees and related costs to be borne by employers, notworkers.

C. Who else has a role to play in this story?

Many different actors have a role to play in promoting fair recruitment and ensuring its effective implementation. Governments bear the ultimate responsibility for advancing fair recruitment and should adopt and enforce laws and policies meeting international standards.

Enterprises — including labour recruiters, public employment services, private and public employers, as well as trade unions and civil society organizations — are all essential to promote fair recruitment. Finally, the media can also play a role, by making sure that workers are informed and by exposing malpractices publicly.

¹⁰ The World Bank, 2017, *KNOMAD-ILO Migration Costs Surveys*.

Notes

D. Ethical recruiters

Some private recruitment companies/agencies have made the choice to be “ethical recruiters”. The terms and conditions they offer to employers and workers are

transparent and respect fair recruitment guidelines. Their experience is important in demonstrating that compliance with the law and ethical behaviour in recruitment works.

► Unit 1.4 – Policy frameworks

A. Labour migration policies

Labour migration policies can consider including the formulation and implementation of temporary¹¹ and seasonal¹² migrant workers schemes; the carrying out of regularization¹³ programmes (if necessary) to regularize the situation of migrant workers in an irregular situation¹⁴ who are usually present in the informal economy; to determine whether refugees have access to the labour market, etc.

Evidence-based labour migration policies require producing and compiling labour migration statistics to ensure consideration of labour market needs at all skill levels (low-skilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled) and based on periodic and objective labour market analysis and the identification of sectoral, occupational and regional labour shortages.

Evidence-based or fact-based labour migration policies should ensure a positive impact of labour migration on economic growth and development in order to avoid a “social dumping”¹⁵ effect or a “race-to-the-bottom”¹⁶ approach in national labour markets through

11 **Temporary international migrants** are defined as international migrants entering the country of labour attachment or country of destination with the intention of stay for a limited period of time which may be less or more than 12 months.

Definitions are extracted from the *ILO 2018 Guidelines concerning statistics of international labour migration*. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/ilo-2018-guidelines-concerning-statistics-international-labour-migration>

12 **Seasonal migrant workers** are defined as not usual residents of the country of employment, whose work by its character is dependent on seasonal conditions and is performed during part of the year.

13 Migration **Regularisation or Amnesty Programmes** are administrative schemes to allow migrants in an irregular or undocumented situation to apply for legal residence and work permits. They take place for economic and humanitarian reasons, and they have the long-term goal of curbing irregular immigration. Arguments against state that such programmes reward lawbreakers and encourage further unauthorized immigration; arguments for point to their importance in increasing tax revenues, integrating migrants and reducing their vulnerability to exploitation, formalizing the informal economy, and “wiping the slate clean” for future immigration enforcement. There are usually two categories of regularization programmes: *de facto* or “one-shot”. *De facto* regularization programmes automatically grant permanent residency to migrants after they have lived in a country for a certain number of years and are implemented on a rolling basis. The “one-shot” regularizations target a limited number of migrants who have specific residency and work requirements; such programmes also have deadlines for applications.

14 Migrants are considered to be in an irregular situation or non-documented situation if they are unauthorised “to enter, to stay and to engage in a remunerated activity in the State of employment pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreement to which that State is a party.”

15 **“Social dumping”** is a practice to use cheaper labour than is usually available at the site of production or provision of services.

16 **The “Race to the bottom”** approach refers to a competitive situation where employers, companies, or the state/nation attempt to undercut the competition’s prices by reducing labour costs, sacrificing quality standards or worker safety (often defying regulation).

the effective utilization of policy tools such as labour market/vacancy tests,¹⁷ and skills/occupations shortage lists or critical skills lists¹⁸ as well as fair and flexible immigration quota¹⁹ systems (among other practical tools) to ensure non-discrimination between national and migrant workers.

Indeed, if discrimination in terms of working conditions (remuneration, working hours, leave entitlements, occupational safety and health, social security protection, etc.) is not detected on time and fully addressed, it can create a sentiment of unfairness among national workers.

The latter is highly relevant particularly in terms of low-skilled migrant workers in order to safeguard the respect for the “equal pay for work of equal value” principle to protect migrant workers themselves and make sure that migrant workers do not displace national workers in certain economic sectors and occupations.

As such, evidence-based labour migration policies should ensure policy coherence with employment and education/training policies related to existing unemployment, underemployment, jobs and skills mismatches, as well as labour surplus or skills shortages in certain economic sectors and occupations, and consider the presence of migrant workers in an irregular situation in the informal economy.

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17 A **labour market or vacancy test** takes place to establish that no national worker can be found to fill a job or position available. It involves the procedure of acquiring information about the actual labour market demand and supply situation. Such procedure should confirm the lack of eligible nationals who could be employed in that given job or position. It implies that a foreign worker may be granted a work permit for a specific employer under the condition that among the national unemployed or job seekers there are none who would meet the job requirements or show interest in taking the job. The procedure usually involves the following:

1. An employer submits a notification of a vacancy to the National Employment Agency or Service (e.g. Public Employment Service, the Private Employment Agency or the Labour Office);
2. The employer and/or the National Employment Agencies or Services publicly place and announce the vacancy (e.g. public employment networks, national and/or local newspapers) for at least 4 weeks;
3. The vacancy notice must include the following information: a description of the employment; the name of the employer; the minimum monthly and/or annual remuneration; the location/s of employment; and the hours of work;
4. The Employment Agencies or Services analyze and compare the vacancy with unemployed and job-seekers' records (qualifications, job experience, etc.);
5. If the analysis reveals an adequate number of persons meeting the requirements arising from the job description, the Employment Agencies or Services offer the job and organize the recruitment among the unemployed and job-seekers;
6. The Employment Agencies or Services compare the amount of remuneration proposed by the employer with the remuneration that can be obtained in the same, or similar occupation or for performance of similar type of work;
7. If no unemployed or job seeker accepts the job offer within a determined fair period of time, the national authority issues a relevant decision;
8. Once the labour market or vacancy test is completed, the decision issued is passed to the employer who attaches it to an application for a foreign worker work permit.

18 “**Critical skills/Occupations lists**” are also called “Occupation in-demand lists”, “Skill shortage lists” or “Catalogues of occupations difficult to cover”. They consist of a list of skills or occupations for which demand cannot be met locally in countries of destination. Aspiring migrant workers with skills/occupations on these lists are often given preferential treatment during visa or work permit applications to help fill this demand. Labour market information systems, including regular needs assessments, coupled with labour migration statistics and trends, provide the most up-to-date and accurate information on the occupations and skills to be included in such lists. It is important to not only include highly-skilled occupations, but to also allow for semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations (e.g. jobs in the agricultural sector, construction, domestic sector, etc.). If these are not included in shortage lists, demand for these jobs could attract migrants in an irregular situation to the informal economy.

19 An **immigration quota** is established by countries of destination for the purposes of limiting the entry of immigrants. It represents a quantitative restriction on the number of migrants to be admitted by the State. Immigration quotas can determine the number of migrant workers to be accepted per economic sector, industry and occupational level per an established period of time.

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Finally, they should prevent the “deskilling”²⁰ and “brain waste”²¹ of the workforce (national and foreign) while promoting the recognition of their qualifications, certificates and diplomas.

Evidence-based labour migration policies should also factor in the significant involvement of labour market institutions in their implementation:

1. Labour Inspection Service
2. Labour Market Observatory
3. Social Security Institute
4. Public Employment Service
5. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres
6. Occupational Safety and Health Service
7. Working Conditions Service
8. Skills Recognition/Recognition of Prior Learning Agencies
9. Anti-discrimination and Labour Market Integration Agencies

B. Relevant continental frameworks on labour migration

The African Union has designed a comprehensive continental framework, integrated within its long-term socio-economic development strategy, Agenda 2063, to strengthen labour migration governance in Africa, including but not limited to:

- The African Union Commission (AUC) First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014-2023) of Agenda 2063²²
- African Union (AU) Revised Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030)²³
- AU Protocol to the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community relating to the Free Movement of Persons in Africa (2018)²⁴
- AUC's Ouagadougou +10 Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development in Africa (2014)²⁵
- AU Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2022)²⁶

20 **Deskilling:** Labour market-related term that describes the phenomenon experienced by skilled or highly-skilled workers who enter the labour market and obtain a job below their skills or qualification level (compared to their acquired qualifications) and are considered to be “overqualified” for the job they occupy. This practice results in situations where workers perform lower-skilled jobs, and are often badly paid. If they stay (which is often the case) in that same job, they rarely climb the occupational ladder. The longer they stay in that lower-skilled job, the harder it is for those foreign workers to obtain a job in accordance with their qualifications, since unused skills might be lost or lose value after time — and workers suffer deskilling. The end result is an unfair loss of the time and money that the worker spent in obtaining (eventually unused) qualifications and the waste of funds that his/her family and country spent on human resources.

21 **Brain waste:** A term commonly used in migration terminology in relation to other terms such as brain drain and brain gain. It determines the lack or bad utilization of potential foreign human resources available in the labour market. It relates to migrant workers' skills, qualifications and job experience acquired in the country of origin that are not properly utilised in the labour market of the country of destination. The main causes include the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications and hence underutilization of workers' skills, and/or difficulties to obtain work permits, also driving migrant workers to work in the informal economy and often in jobs below their skills level. This results in a loss-loss situation for workers, countries of origin and countries of destination.

22 <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/ftyip>

23 <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35956-doc-au-mpfa-executive-summary-eng.pdf>

24 <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-treaty-establishing-african-economic-community-relating-free-movement-persons>

25 <https://www.ilo.org/resource/2014-aucs-ouagadougou-10-declaration-and-plan-action-employment-poverty>

26 https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/41106-wd-DRAFT_DECLARATION_-ENGLISH.pdf

- ▶ AU/ILO/IOM/UNECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa (JLMP) Strategic Framework 2020-2030²⁷
- ▶ Assessment of Legal Labour Migration Frameworks in Africa²⁸

C. Selected relevant regional frameworks on labour migration

Regional legal and policy frameworks govern migration at the sub-continental level and are crucial for understanding regional migration dynamics. Journalists and communicators should explore these different strategies to understand how they impact countries of origin and destination. In this effort, they may wish to highlight success stories, scrutinizing how these frameworks have positively impacted migrant workers on issues such as labour mobility, labour rights enforcement, or effective coordination on irregular migration. Conversely, media practitioners have a critical role to play in following up on the implementation of these different strategies and holding governments and regional authorities accountable for their implementation.

▶ ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol (1979)

In May 1979, ECOWAS Member States adopted their first protocol relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment.²⁹ It stipulated the right of ECOWAS citizens to enter, reside and establish economic activities in the territory of other Member States and provided for a three-step roadmap of five years each to achieve freedom of movement of persons

after fifteen years. The first phase regards the right of visa-free entry, phase two deals with the right of residency, and phase three concerns the right of establishment in another Member State. The first phase has been fully implemented. The second phase, the right of residency, has also been implemented, given that citizens have obtained an ECOWAS residence card or permit in a fellow Member State. The third phase, the right of establishment, is still under implementation in most Member States.

To facilitate the free movement of people in the ECOWAS region, Member States established a common passport, formally known as the ECOWAS travel certificate. The ECOWAS passport was introduced in December 2000 to exempt holders from intra-regional visa requirements and to function as an international travel document. The Member States are currently in the process of implementing a joint visa for non-ECOWAS citizens that covers the whole region, the Eco-Visa.

▶ ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration (2008)

The ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration³⁰ establishes a link between migration and development and sets out action plans on different migration-related issues, notably to encourage policy harmonization.

▶ ECOWAS Vision 2050 (2021)

The ECOWAS Vision 2050³¹ was adopted in December 2021, replacing the previous Vision 2020 strategy. It is based on five pillars with related objectives and orientations:

- ▶ peace, security and stability;
- ▶ governance and rule of law;

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27 <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/auiloiomuneca-joint-programme-labour-migration-governance-development-and>

28 https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40africa/%40ro-abidjan/%40sro-cairo/documents/publication/wcms_853283.pdf

29 <https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/PROTOCOL-RELATING-TO-FREE-MOVEMENT-OF-PERSONS.pdf>

30 <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/49e47c8f11.pdf>

31 https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Vision2050_EN_Web.pdf

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- economic integration;
- transformation, inclusive and sustainable development; and
- social inclusion.

► **ECOWAS Labour and Employment Policy (2009)**

In June 2009, the ECOWAS Council of Ministers adopted the Labour and Employment Policy (LEP) and its Strategic Action Plan. The overall objective was to develop, harmonize, coordinate and implement common policies to promote growth and development through decent work. The policy covers five areas of intervention: labour standards, employment, social protection, social dialogue and subregional integration.

► **ECOWAS Labour Migration Strategy (2025)**

The ECOWAS Labour Migration Strategy³² embodies a forward-looking governance model rooted in accountability, inter-ministerial coordination, and regional solidarity. It calls on Member States to translate policy into action through integrated national plans, sustained political will, and inclusive dialogue with civil society and social partners. With this Strategy, ECOWAS positions itself not only as a facilitator of free movement but as a catalyst for human development, decent work, and regional prosperity.

► Unit 1.5 – Key regional challenges

A. Child labour

Child labour refers to children working below their country's minimum age for admission to employment (excluding children engaged in light work) and to children in the worst forms of child labour, namely hazardous work, or in commercial sexual exploitation, forced labour or illicit activities.

In 2024, according to the Global Estimates of Child Labour, 138 million children were engaged in child labour worldwide. A sizeable portion of this figure (21.5 per cent) were located in Sub-Saharan Africa.³³

What is the minimum age to work?

It varies from country to country, but international labour standards set the limit at no younger than 15 years old. Some countries may exceptionally have a minimum working age of 14 years old.

What is hazardous work?

Any activity or occupation that has adverse effects on the child's safety, physical or mental health, or moral development. Hazards can come from excessive workloads, the physical conditions of work, and/or the duration or hours of work even where the activity is known to be "safe". Hazardous work is considered to be one of the worst forms of child labour.

³² https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44767-doc-ECOWAS_Draft_Labour_Migration_Strategy.pdf

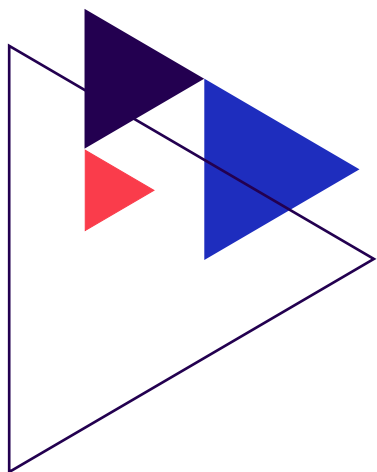
³³ *Child Labour: Global estimates 2024, trends and the road forward*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2024-trends-and-road-forward>

When is child work not considered child labour?

Children are allowed to work in some circumstances, even if they are under the minimum working age. Light work is encouraged in many cultures and very often seen as something that can help children develop important skills for their future.

What is light work?

Children may engage in light work two years before reaching the minimum age to work, but only for a limited number of hours and as long as it is not likely to harm their health and development or affect their attendance at school.



What is youth employment?

Children who have reached the minimum age to work and who are participating in decent work which does not affect their health, personal development or education are considered to be in youth employment.

The ILO has carried out substantial work on child labour in different ECOWAS countries, notably under the ACCEL Africa project (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana).³⁴

Jointly with the International Training Centre of the ILO, the ACCEL Africa programme designed a self-guided course to help journalists better understand child labour and learn how to report more effectively on this complex issue.³⁵

B. Climate change

Climate change and migration have always been interconnected. With the impacts of climate change on countries of the ECOWAS region, migration patterns will be directly affected. Journalists covering labour migration need to understand how climate and migration interact, and how their stories can best capture this complex relationship. A critical resource hub is the Covering Climate Now portal, co-founded by the *Columbia Journalism Review* and *The Nation* magazine in association with *The Guardian* and WNYC. It includes specific guidance on climate and migration.³⁶

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³⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/accelerating-action-elimination-child-labour-supply-chains-africa-accel>

³⁵ <https://www.itcilo.org/fr/courses/self-guided-course-reporting-child-labour-media>

³⁶ <https://coveringclimatenow.org> and <https://coveringclimatenow.org/from-us-story/covering-climate-migration/>

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It is equally important to consider the complex linkages between human mobility, climate change, environmental degradation, and how disasters continue to have an unprecedented impact on human security.

Journalists and communicators have a key role to play in unpacking the drivers of human mobility and informing the general public on policy opportunities, notably regional integration and economic development.

ECOWAS Climate Strategy (RCS) and Action Plan

The climate strategy includes specific provisions related to disaster- and climate change-induced migration in the ECOWAS region. The strategy covers issues such as national and regional adaptation mechanisms, disaster risk management, and stronger regional cooperation.

See: <https://climatestrategy.ecowas.int/en/>

C. Crises

West Africa has not been exempted from crises in recent years, the most notable example being the joint withdrawal in 2024 of

Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS. Such events have direct implications for regional mobility and can, in practice, lead to the erosion of free movement in West Africa.

Free movement at risk as Niger leaves ECOWAS

In this article, Nigerien journalist and fact checker Youssouf Abdoulaye Haidara analyzes the possible implications of Niger's withdrawal from ECOWAS on free movement within West Africa.

Read the full article: <https://dialoguemigration.com/en/discovery/free-movement-at-risk-as-niger-leaves-ecowas/>

D. Returnees

There is no universally accepted definition of return migration or returnees. Depending on the context — irregular migration, regular migration, forced displacement or internal displacement — return migration can refer to different types of situations and returnees can benefit from various forms of support, notably via assisted voluntary return or reintegration programmes.

In 2022, the ILO conducted research on the media representation of returning Nigerian migrant workers. The analysis was conducted over ten years and included media samples from eight newspapers and two media outlets, leading to the following key findings:

- Low number of media reports on returning migrant workers.
- Returning migrant workers were largely “silent” and “voiceless” in the newspapers’ reporting.

- ▶ The reasons for returning were not always clear from the newspaper reports.
- ▶ Lack of depth and contextualization of reports on returning migrants.
- ▶ The return of migrants was predominantly portrayed through a humanitarian lens.
- ▶ Significant level of inconsistencies in the reports.
- ▶ Lack of prominence on issues around returning migrants across the newspapers' reports.
- ▶ Limited follow-up on the reintegration of returning migrants.

The information brief included a series of recommendations centered on the reporting of returning Nigerian migrant workers. These recommendations are also relevant to journalists reporting on returning migrant workers in the broader ECOWAS region.³⁷

E. Social networks and social representations

Social networks can play an important role in shaping the way migration is perceived within society. With the rise of misinformation and disinformation, online users run increased risks of being misled by images or content that are inaccurate or intentionally misleading. Testimonials from the region highlight the role played by social networks in shaping dreams of prospective migrants and fostering an idealized vision of the migration experience.

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Social networks, migration dream: between illusions and pursuit of a better future

In today's digital age, social networks are shaping the dreams, ambitions and perceptions of an entire generation. In Togo and many other West African countries, thousands of young people log on to platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube each day to follow the lives of those who have crossed borders. They are presented with alluring images of life in Europe, North America or Canada: snowy selfies, sleek modern apartments and glamorous parties. These curated virtual narratives fuel a powerful migratory dream — often idealized and sometimes far removed from reality. But what lies behind these carefully crafted posts? How do these platforms influence decisions, shape hopes and sometimes lead to deep disillusionment? Through the voices and experiences of young Togolese, this report explores the complex relationship between social media and migration, between the fantasy of elsewhere and the sometimes harsh reality of life abroad.

Read the full article: <https://dialoguemigration.com/en/testimony/social-networks-migration-dream-between-illusions-and-pursuit-of-a-better-future/>

³⁷ ILO, 2022, *Promoting better media reporting relating to returning Nigerian migrant workers*. <https://www.fairrecruitmenthub.org/resources/promoting-better-media-reporting-relating-returning-nigerian-migrant-workers-0>

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F. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals or groups who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, but who have not crossed an international border. Involuntary departure and the fact that the individual remains within their country are the two defining elements of an IDP. The second element distinguishes IDPs from refugees, as by definition, refugees are outside their country of origin.

Data and analysis on IDPs are produced by the Norwegian Refugee Council via the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).³⁸ Journalists can access global reports as well as regional reports, country profiles or expert analysis. As of 2024, the IDMC estimated 83.4 million internally displaced persons globally — 73.5 million displaced by conflict and violence, and 9.8 million by disasters. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region with 38.8 million IDPs, around 46 per cent of the global total.³⁹

► Unit 1.6 – Gender sensitive policies and strategies

A. Gender and labour migration

While women are equally represented in the overall population, they only represent 38.7 per cent of international migrant workers globally,⁴⁰ a proportion which has been stable over the past years. This situation can be explained by the under-representation of women among international migrants of working age and their lower labour force participation. Several additional factors have been suggested as well: women are more likely to migrate as an accompanying family member and face additional economic or non-economic obstacles in their access to the labour market.

Data at the regional level suggest strong differences between regions. In Northern, Southern and Western Europe, there are slightly more women international migrant workers than men. On the other hand, in the Arab States and in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are more men international migrant workers than women.

38 IDMC. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/internal-displacement-updates/>

39 2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2025/>

40 ILO, 2024, *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrants in the Labour Force*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/ilo-global-estimates-international-migrants-labour-force>

The Youth and Women Employment Pact for Africa (2013)

The pact provides some key figures on youth and women's employment in Africa and suggests specific guidelines organized around seven strategic directions: (i) Pursuing sustainable and inclusive growth, (ii) Enhanced, Stronger Political Leadership, (iii) Promote well-functioning Labour Market: Labour Market Governance, (iv) Preparation of the youth and women to enter the job market, (v) Public-Private Partnerships, (vi) Promotion of regional and sub-regional labour mobility, (vii) Communication, Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation.

Read the Pact: https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/28065-wd-youth_employment_pact_for_africa-english.pdf

See also the ECOWAS Gender and Migration Framework and Plan of Action 2015-2020: https://ccdg.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/Plan-of-Action_Gender-and-Migration.pdf

Whereas contemporary economic migration in Africa has traditionally been largely male dominated, women's migration is rising in importance. A growing number of women migrate for work and education and to pursue other economic opportunities in the region. This phenomenon has been termed the feminization of migration.

Over the past two decades, the number of women migrating for employment has increased drastically in the region. African women migrant workers are an invaluable, yet undervalued workforce that works mostly in sectors characterised by significant decent work deficits. Labour migration can be a tool for women's economic empowerment, including through labour market integration and gendered remittances, yet women and men face different risks, experiences and vulnerabilities. Relative to men migrant workers, women migrant workers are less likely to be in formal employment and economic activities.

This calls for an intersectional approach in the analysis of the trends and gaps in decent work outcomes for migrant workers, taking intersecting forms of discrimination such as gender, migration status, race and age into consideration. Sex-disaggregated data of high quality are another cornerstone for developing and implementing gender-responsive policies and measures.

Gender considerations are crucial, and they affect both the reasons for and the experiences of migration. Socially constructed roles, expectations and power relations affect the whole migration process and translate into inequalities of opportunity and treatment for women and men migrant workers. Women migrant workers face a dual challenge: they are at the intersection of two groups — women and migrants — that are often undervalued and face various labour market barriers.

UN DESA data suggest that the feminization of migration has reached significant levels in the Eastern African region with 50.6 per cent of all migrants being female. Data about ECOWAS countries are indicated in Table 1.

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► Table 1. Breakdown by sex of migrant stock in ECOWAS countries, 2024

	Percentage of females among international migrants (Total stock of international migrants)
Benin	52.9% (418.000)
Burkina Faso	52.4% (740.000)
Cabo Verde	49.4% (17.000)
Côte d'Ivoire	40.0% (2.881.000)
The Gambia	47.2% (236.000)
Ghana	46.6% (532.000)
Guinea	41.2% (117.000)
Guinea-Bissau	50.6% (15.000)
Liberia	42.4% (72.000)
Mali	49.3% (545.000)
Niger	53.5% (449.000)
Nigeria	45.5% (1.403.000)
Senegal	47.0% (282.000)
Sierra Leone	43.4% (50.000)
Togo	49.3% (282.000)
Total West Africa (including Mauritania, non-ECOWAS country)	45.4% (8.237.000)

Source: UN DESA, International Migrant Stock 2024.

Since nearly half of all migrant workers in the region are women, labour migration policies should be gender-responsive and evidence-based. As such, labour migration policies should ensure coherence with employment, social protection and skills policies, and should be factored into development policies with a significant involvement of labour market institutions in their implementation.

For many women, as for men, migration can represent a positive experience and have important emancipating and empowering impacts. However, migration remains a gendered process, i.e. gender often determines whether someone

has the option or resources to migrate, how to migrate, where to migrate, which sector to work in, terms and conditions of employment, and how a migrant worker returns and reintegrates. Often women migrants are confronted with gender-specific disadvantages and vulnerabilities in the migration process and in their employment. Women workers, especially young female migrants, often end up in situations of double or even triple discrimination, disadvantage, marginalization and vulnerability (including violence and harassment as well as forced labour). The multiple layers of discrimination and vulnerability can come in the form of:

► **Being a woman compared to men:**

During every stage of their migration experience, women migrant workers tend to be more exposed to human rights violations compared to their male counterparts because they lack access to and control over resources and decision-making. For example, women are more likely than men to lack access to realistic and accurate information concerning recruitment, the migration process, and economic, social costs and benefits of employment abroad and are, therefore, much more at risk of being deceived by unscrupulous recruitment agents and traffickers. Stereotyped labour roles for men and women lead to the concentration of female and male migrants in different sectors or occupations that bring specific and different risks and vulnerabilities. Women are typically concentrated in low-paid jobs which are not, or are only partially, covered by labour laws and social protection provisions, e.g. domestic work. Domestic and care work are performed within the private sphere of the home where abuse and poor labour practices are less visible, and support of peers is largely unavailable. Men are often concentrated in highly hazardous occupations such as construction or fishing, where their vulnerabilities are often unrecognized and unaddressed.

► **Being a foreigner compared to nationals:**

A key source of vulnerability of women migrant workers is that their jobs often lack labour and social protection. Additionally, women, because of gender discrimination in access to information, education and support networks, are less likely than male nationals to be aware of the laws and regulations of the destination country and do not have effective means to seek legal redress in case of violation of their rights. Like their male counterparts, women migrants frequently have to deal with difficult living and working conditions, increased health risks, lack of access to social services and various forms of abuse, but their situation of relative disadvantage in societies of origin and destination exacerbates their exposure to abuse. With xenophobia and discrimination against

migrant workers on the rise, especially in unstable and poor economic times, female migrants tend to be more vulnerable than women and men national workers overall.

► **Being a dependent migrant compared to autonomous migrants:**

Strong dependency on a specific employer is one source of vulnerability for migrants, especially for **women** migrants, as their dependent status can be used by the employer or by co-workers, not only for general mistreatment, but also for sexual harassment. Migrant workers are sometimes not allowed to change employers or are required to have their visas sponsored by a national. The “one employer rule” and the visa sponsorship system tend to put migrants almost totally under the control of the employer/sponsor, which can prove to be particularly challenging for women due to their relatively weaker power positions. The specific situation of domestic workers brings this dependency situation to its extreme as the workers share with the employer the work and living space, households typically fall outside the mandate of labour inspection and the lines between personal and employment relationships tend to become very blurred. Some employers foster dependency of a worker by isolating her, confiscating her passport, work or residency papers, limiting her contact to the outside world or evoking fear in her that any complaint will result in job loss and/or deportation. Finally, women might face specific barriers when their migration status is linked to consent of a male family member who “signs off” on their migration (and hence restricts their decision power) or when they migrate as accompanying family members and depend on their spouse/father for the renewal of their residence/work permits.

► **Being an irregular migrant compared to regular migrants:**

Migrants can enter a country irregularly or they can fall into irregularity because they fail to comply with relevant requirements at destination, for example if they lose their regular job. In some cases, restrictive policies introduced by countries of origin on their mobility (e.g. age bars, consent from spouses, or even

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pregnancy tests before departure), leave few or no legal migration channels open to women and can push many of them into irregular paths, with higher risk of abuse. On some occasions, national legislation at destination criminalizes migrants who leave their job, arguably forcing them to stay in exploitative workplaces. Women can be more vulnerable than men to be undocumented or irregular migrants. Those who are in irregular situations in the destination country have no recourse to the law in case of violation of their rights. They are also too scared to complain or even to approach the authorities for any kind of official assistance.

The main elements of gender-responsive labour migration policies are that rights should be enjoyed by men and women migrant workers in line with the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination. They do not necessarily mean equal treatment in all instances. Promoting gender equality in labour migration policies may include special gender-specific provisions (e.g. preferential treatment or affirmative action to compensate for long-term discrimination, particularly that suffered by women migrant workers not only vis-à-vis men migrant workers, but also between them and women and men national workers).

Gender-responsive labour migration policies should include specific measures to counter exploitation, abuse and discrimination of women and men migrant workers in the labour market and at the workplace. They should take into account the differences in socio-cultural roles, needs, opportunities, constraints and vulnerabilities of women and men and guarantee that human rights, including labour rights, are enjoyed equally by women and men migrant workers, and that migration legislation, policies and programmes promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation with a view to eliminating any discrimination based on sex.

B. The importance of journalism and communication

Public debates around labour migration do not always capture these gender-related disparities. Stories about “migrants” tend to be gender-neutral and the specific challenges that women or men may face in their labour migration experiences are seldom detailed. To help journalists and communicators introduce a gender-sensitive approach in their work, the ILO has developed specific guidance on the matter.⁴¹

41 ILO, 2022, *Gender-sensitive reporting and communication on labour migration*. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/fair-recruitment/publications/WCMS_858566/lang-en/index.htm

Gender-sensitive reporting on migration guideline

A gender-sensitive story is stronger and more nuanced. It has depth and reflects different viewpoints and voices. It assesses relations, representations, social hierarchies, structures and power dynamics between men, women, and other gender identities, and their different experiences in society.

- ▶ Aim to use words that remove sexist biases and frameworks. Avoid references to a person's race, class, sexual orientation, nationality or marital status when irrelevant to the story.
- ▶ Consider gender-aware alternatives to terms such as "manpower" (labour force or workforce); "girl", when speaking about an adult (female, woman); "cleaning lady" (domestic worker); "prostitute" (sex worker), etc. Gender-aware language seeks to avoid assumptions about the nature and roles of women and men in society, and hence, to challenge discriminatory representations of men and women.
- ▶ When reporting, consider the migration and labour issues most saliently faced by women, including gender-based violence, marriage migration, pay inequity, discrimination, and maternal healthcare and rights.
- ▶ Avoid considering family, children, contraception and maternity the sole responsibility of the mother.
- ▶ Be aware of gender-based discrimination in migration policies, such as migration bans based on age, marital or maternal status, and how the jobs available abroad perpetuate gender roles.
- ▶ Although not always available, strive to include gender-disaggregated data in all reporting.
- ▶ Recognize the significant amount of unpaid care work that women perform, and how this affects their lives as workers and as migrants.
- ▶ Recognize that domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, and human trafficking can be experienced by men and boys too.
- ▶ When conducting interviews, try to gather diverse perspectives from both men and women to ensure balanced representation.
- ▶ Gender concerns should also apply to the use of images and pictures, which can reinforce social constructions of femininity and masculinity and gender roles.
- ▶ When quoting from sources using demeaning or sexist language, put their sexist words or phrases between quotes to draw attention to their offending usage.

Notes

► Unit 1.7 – Bilateral labour migration and circular migration agreements

Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) are arrangements between two countries or agencies that outline the responsibilities and actions of each party in governing labour migration. BLMAs include legally binding agreements (BLAs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), as well as bilateral agreements between ministries or agencies on various aspects of labour migration. These agreements may also cover broader topics like irregular migration, readmission, and migration and development.⁴²

A. Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs)

Bilateral labour migration agreements⁴³ can be useful migration governance tools to facilitate safe, regular, and orderly labour migration between countries, while addressing both labour market needs and the protection of migrant workers, and can be more beneficial if they are based on social dialogue. The advantages of such agreements are that they can be adapted to the particularities of specific groups of migrants, and that both the sending and the receiving States can share the burden of ensuring adequate living and working conditions as well as monitoring and more actively managing, the pre- and post-migration processes.

AU Guidelines on Developing Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (2022)

The AU Guidelines aim to achieve three interconnected objectives:

1. Provide a model template and guidelines for policymakers and practitioners to develop BLAs and MoUs based on international (including African) instruments on human and labour rights, global frameworks (SDGs and GCM), existing African protocols/legal instruments on free movement, and migration policy frameworks, as well as relevant tools and good practices.
2. Address gaps in existing BLAs regarding migrant protection and labour migration governance and propose steps to enhance the promotion and protection of migrant workers' rights.
3. Propose an African template and guidelines that complement, where needed, and promote implementation of the AU Protocol on Free Movement and the respective REC free movement and labour mobility systems and are aligned with regional integration objectives and considerations.

Read the AU Guidelines: https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/41106-wd-GUIDELINES_ON_DEVELOPING_BILATERAL_LABOUR_AGREEMENTS_BLAS-ENGLISH_0.pdf

⁴² UN Global Guidance on BLMAs 2022.

⁴³ The ILO has mapped, categorized and analyzed BLAs which can be searched on an online repository. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/measuring-impact/agreements/lang--en/index.htm>

B. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are less formal than BLAs and most countries of destination prefer them, probably because as non-binding agreements they are easier to negotiate and implement — and to modify according to changing economic and labour market conditions. Countries may sign such agreements for political reasons, to reflect friendly relations or to reinforce cooperation in managing irregular migration.

C. BLMAs in the region

ECOWAS countries such as Cabo Verde, The Gambia or Nigeria have signed different agreements with countries within and outside the region as shown in Table 2.

Notes

► **Table 2. Examples of existing BLMAs in selected ECOWAS countries**

Cabo Verde	France, Spain, Portugal
The Gambia	Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Spain, United Arab Emirates
Nigeria	Qatar, United Arab Emirates

Reporting BLAs in the region

Journalists have a key role to play in covering the design, signing and implementation of BLAs as illustrated in the following articles:

Trade Ministry commences 6-day sensitisation on Bilateral Labour Agreements (The Gambia)

Read the article: <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/trade-ministry-commences-6-day-sensitisation-on-bilateral-labour-agreements>

Nigeria signs bilateral agreements with UAE, Qatar to protect 7,000 workers

Read the article: <https://businessday.ng/news/article/nigeria-signs-bilateral-agreements-with-uae-qatar-to-protect-7000-workers/>

Germany, Ghana in talks for labour mobility agreement to benefit youth

Read the article: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Germany-Ghana-in-talks-for-labour-mobility-agreement-to-benefit-youth-Ablakwa-1984052>

Notes

D. Circular migration agreements

Circular migration refers to temporary movements of a repetitive character, undertaken either formally or informally, by persons across borders. Managed or regulated circular migration programmes have emerged as a migration policy tool to mitigate the effects of brain drain and promote development in origin countries through a steady flow of remittances, return of skilled workers, and support for enterprise development.

E. Regional agreements

In addition to various bilateral arrangements, there are also a number of regional and sub-regional agreements on various aspects of migration. Regional agreements on migration typically involve a series of meetings that allow participants to share experiences and develop relationships and a common understanding of mutual problems.

► Unit 1.8 – Social security protection of migrant workers

A. Social protection needs

Social protection is defined by the ILO as the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence of, or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of health care; and the provision of benefits for families with children.

By definition, social protection is broader and more inclusive than social security since it incorporates non-statutory or private measures for providing social security, but still encompasses traditional social security measures such as social assistance and social insurance. For the purpose of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), social protection floors are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. As social security systems remain

less developed in East and Horn of Africa States, with coverage being extended to mostly formal sector workers, the situation of migrant workers remains precarious when it comes to access to social protection and particularly to the portability of accrued social security benefits. This is especially the case with migrant workers in an irregular situation who have been able to contribute to the social security systems of countries of destination. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of ensuring adequate social protection coverage for all, including migrant workers. They have been among the most affected categories of workers in terms of both health and economic impact of the pandemic — as they often work in high-risk sectors such as health care, caregiving, agriculture, agro-food processing, transportation, etc.

ILO standards that address the issue of social security for migrant workers globally comprise the **Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118)**, and the **Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157)**. Conventions Nos. 118 and 157 establish a system based on several basic principles: equality of

treatment, the maintenance of acquired rights and the maintenance of rights in the course of acquisition.

1. **Equality of treatment:** By the principle of equality of treatment, non-national workers must benefit in the host country from the same conditions as nationals in terms of coverage and entitlement to social security benefits.
2. **Maintenance of acquired rights and the provision of benefits abroad:** The maintenance of acquired rights permits migrant workers to receive benefits due to them from a State, even when they cease to be resident on its territory. This principle, which is essential for the social protection of migrant workers, is intended to ensure them real equality of treatment and not just legal equality. In the case of long-term benefits (particularly invalidity, old age and survivors' benefits, and annuities paid as a result of an employment accident or an occupational disease), there is a direct obligation to maintain acquired rights, in the sense that it is not dependent on the conclusion of an agreement between the States concerned. With regard to short-term benefits, the obligation to maintain acquired rights is indirect. States have to endeavour to participate in schemes for the maintenance of these rights.
3. **Maintenance of rights in course of acquisition:** The maintenance of rights in the course of acquisition makes it possible to add together periods of coverage of migrant workers under the social security legislation of the various countries in which they have lived.
4. **Applicable legislation:** The States concerned have to determine by common agreement the applicable legislation, in accordance with certain principles set out in the Convention itself. The applicable legislation is normally that of the State in which the persons concerned carry out their occupational activities or, in the case of persons who are not active, in which they are resident.

5. **Administrative assistance and assistance to persons:** Convention No. 118 provides that States parties shall afford each other administrative assistance free of charge with a view to facilitating the application of the Convention and the implementation of their respective social security legislation. The matters covered by Conventions Nos. 118 and 157 are very complex. With a view to facilitating the conclusion of agreements between the States concerned and their coordination at the international level, the Maintenance of Social Security Rights Recommendation, 1983 (No. 167) contains model provisions in the annex for the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral social security instruments.

Social security is a set of interventions and benefits aimed at reducing and preventing poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle through nine main benefits:

1. Retirement benefits
2. Unemployment benefits
3. Survivors' benefits
4. Occupational injury and disease benefits
5. Health insurance benefits
6. Maternity benefits
7. Invalidity benefits
8. Sickness benefits
9. Family benefits

Portability is defined as the maintenance of the right to social security benefits that are acquired, or in the course of acquisition, in two or more different countries. Portability enables a migrant worker to preserve, maintain, and transfer those social security benefits. It requires cooperation between the country of origin and destination.

Notes

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Universal health coverage in Côte d'Ivoire

The Ivorian government established the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through Law No. 2014-131 of March 24, 2014. As of 2025, an estimated 60 per cent of the population is enrolled in the programme.⁴⁴ The scheme covers both Ivorian nationals and foreigners.

Barriers in accessing social protection

Migrant workers may face many challenges and barriers in accessing social protection. These may be territorial — related to their country of origin or the destination country where they work — or attached to their nationality. The ILO has also identified numerous legal and practical barriers which may be related to certain categories of workers, migration status, informality or lack of information.⁴⁵

B. Social protection for migrant workers and their families in ECOWAS States

The *ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security*, drafted in 1993 and adopted in 2013 is the key framework governing social security portability in the region. The Convention is based on the principles of equal treatment between migrant workers and nationals and inspired by key ILO conventions on the matter.⁴⁶

► Unit 1.9 – Skills mobility and recognition of migrant workers skills**A. Migrant workers face skill recognition challenges**

Migrant workers are over-represented in jobs and tasks that require fewer and lower-level skills, are lower paid and offer restricted career prospects.

Migrant workers, especially women migrant workers, are often subjected to “deskilling” and “brain waste” during their migration experience. In order to gain access to employment, migrant workers not only need to possess relevant and verifiable skills, but also need to be able to signal and validate these skills to potential employers in order to gain access to job opportunities and to adjust to changing

⁴⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/cote-divoire/cote-divoire-advances-toward-universal-health-coverage-leaving-no-one-behind>

⁴⁵ A comprehensive list of challenges and barriers is listed in the publication *Extending Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees, and their Families: Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners* (Chapter 1.3). <https://www.ilo.org/publications/extending-social-protection-migrant-workers-refugees-and-their-families>

⁴⁶ See the *Social Protection for Migrant Workers and their Families in ECOWAS States* brochure. <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowRessource.action?id=57692>

labour markets. This means that skills need to be transferable between jobs and easily recognized by employers — i.e. portable.

The low capacity of national recognition bodies and processes in both countries of origin and destination has been one of the major barriers to skills portability and recognition of migrant workers' skills, but is not the only one. Skills recognition at country level and between countries can be promoted by instruments available at international level or negotiated at bilateral, regional, or multilateral levels.

B. The African Continental Qualifications Framework

The African Union is working on the development of an African Continental Qualifications Framework⁴⁷ (ACQF). The

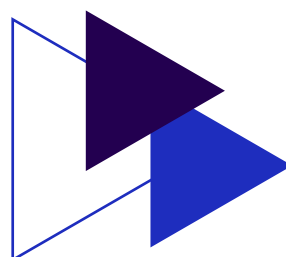
ACQF is a policy instrument that will contribute to enhancing comparability and transparency of qualifications; facilitate mutual recognition of certificates; improve mobility of learners and workers across the continent; and promote cooperation and alignment between different qualifications frameworks (national, sub-regional) in Africa, and eventually with other frameworks globally.

C. ECOWAS Qualification Frameworks

ECOWAS is working on the development of a regional qualifications framework. Within the African Continental Qualifications Framework, a mapping study has been conducted, identifying the possible scope and implementation of such a framework.⁴⁸

General Convention A/C.1/1/03 on the Recognition and Equivalence of Degrees, Diplomas, Certificates and Other Qualifications in ECOWAS Member States

The Convention aims to promote regional cooperation in assessing and recognizing qualifications, to facilitate the use of manpower, and to reduce brain drain. Member States commit to recognizing the validity and comparability of qualifications, promoting information exchange, and ensuring the implementation of the Convention through national agencies. The Convention was signed in Dakar on January 31, 2003, and entered into force upon ratification by at least nine signatory States.



⁴⁷ See African Continental Qualifications Framework – ACQF. <https://acqf.africa>

⁴⁸ https://acqf.africa/resources/mapping-study/ecowas-report/@@display-file/file/ECOWAS%20EN_ACQF%20Mapping%20Report_WEB.pdf

Notes

► Unit 1.10 – Labour migration statistics

Labour migration data

The collection, analysis and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data are the basis for evidence-based policies. Migration is a very sensitive political area that requires comprehensive, up-to-date and high-quality data to guide policy makers in taking the right policy decisions. Access to reliable data on labour migration is necessary to understand migration flows and their implications for labour markets. Accurate sex-disaggregated data and in-depth gender analysis of international labour migration and its gender dimensions and gaps are more important than ever to help with the design of effective, evidence-based and gender-responsive policies that address the

specific needs of women and men migrant workers and enable them to access decent work, equal pay, equal opportunities and fair treatment in their countries of destination.

Such data and analysis can inform policy solutions to address those gaps so that the enormous potential of labour migration to contribute to sustainable development in the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) and its Member States is fully harnessed. The ILOSTAT website includes a section⁴⁹ dedicated to labour migration with access to data sets, edited content, tutorials, and publications. It serves as the go-to website for anyone interested in accessing the latest reliable data on migrant workers.

Working with migration statistics is a complicated exercise not just for rookies

Because migrants are relatively small percentages of the population (3-5 per cent on average, globally), it can be difficult to find enough migrants to respond to national household surveys, which themselves only look for about 5 per cent of a country's population. Moreover, in many places migrants are housed in collective or institutional housing arrangements, which are usually not covered by these surveys. Informal workers or irregular migrants are also often reluctant to talk to survey enumerators, for fear of being found out, fired, or deported, despite assurances that any information provided to the survey is anonymous. All of these factors make it challenging to produce reliable and valid migration statistics.

Countries also use different definitions to identify who is a "migrant" in official statistics. A distinction can be made between migration statistics based on "country of birth" and those based on "citizenship". Depending on the policy being developed, it might be more relevant to look at one or the other. For this reason, the ILO collects and produces statistics using both definitions.

Finally, in many places migration is a politically sensitive topic. Being on the unpopular side of the migration debate has made or broken careers, institutions, even entire governments. Just like any other statistics, interpreting migration statistics can serve a range of purposes or ideologies. While there are often very few statistics to base analytical conclusions or policy recommendations on, it is essential to use a broad range of information, which all points to a reasonable interpretation from different angles, to substantiate an evidence-based conclusion.

For additional guidance, see: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/avoid-these-5-rookie-mistakes-when-using-ilo-databases/>

49 <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/>

► Unit 1.11 – Legal frameworks

Notes

A. A rights-based approach to labour migration

Labour migration is a global phenomenon involving a number of different parties. Understanding the specific responsibilities of these different actors is critical in order to produce accurate information. In 2020, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights produced a toolbox⁵⁰ with seven key elements to building human rights-based narratives on migrants and migration.

Using a rights-based approach, journalists and communicators should consider the heightened vulnerability of migrant workers to human rights and labour rights violations. These instances of abuse and exploitation can happen throughout the migration cycle, prior to departure, in the country of destination, or upon return to the country of origin.

The legal framework governing labour migration and addressing forced labour and fair recruitment is both international and national. At the international level, several instruments have been adopted over time.

Some of these instruments are legally binding for the countries that have ratified them (conventions and protocols) and some provide non-binding guidance to strengthen national frameworks (recommendations). In addition, the elimination of all forms of forced labour is one of the ILO's four fundamental principles and rights at work. As a consequence, the instruments related to forced labour must be respected, enforced and promoted by all ILO Member States, whether they have ratified them or not.

B. International labour standards

While not an exhaustive list of international legal standards relevant to labour migration, trafficking, forced labour and related offences, the following timeline presents selected relevant international law instruments:

50 OHCHR, 2020. <https://www.standup4humanrights.org/migration/en/toolbox.html>

Notes

1930

Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)

Convention No. 29 defines forced labour as: "...all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily". The Convention requires ratifying States to suppress all forms of forced or compulsory labour (Article 1(1)). As the first convention on the subject, it provides the definition of "forced or compulsory labour" (Article 2(1)) and lists five exceptions. It also requires ratifying States to ensure that the use of forced labour is punishable as a penal offence and that penalties are "really adequate and strictly enforced" (Article 25).

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312174

1948

Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88)

Convention No. 88 outlines the responsibilities of a public employment service. It requires ratifying States to ensure a free public employment service to workers (Article 1). Ratifying States are also required to form advisory committees including representatives of employers' and workers' organizations to advise on the organization and operation of the public employment service and in the development of employment service policy (Article 4(1)). The public employment service should assess workers' vocational capacity and assist them to obtain training, and match employers' vacancies with workers who have suitable skills (Article 6(a)).

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312233

1949

Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)

The Convention requires ratifying States to facilitate international migration for employment by establishing and maintaining a free assistance and information service for migrant workers and taking measures against misleading propaganda relating to emigration and immigration. It includes provisions on appropriate medical services for migrant workers and the transfer of earnings and savings. States have to apply treatment no less favourable than that which applies to their own nationals in respect to a number of matters, including conditions of employment, freedom of association and social security.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312242

1957

Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

Convention No. 105 prohibits explicitly five situations where forced labour is imposed by state authorities, namely forced labour as punishment for the expression of political views, for the purposes of economic development, for participation in strikes, as a means of racial or other discrimination or as labour discipline.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312250

1958

Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

The ILO adopted this Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, which is part of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (Declaration on FPRW adopted in 1998 and revised in 2010). The Convention requires States to enact legislation that prohibits all discrimination and exclusion on any basis including race or colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national or social origin in employment and repeal legislation that is not based on equal opportunities.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312256

1975

Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)

The Convention provides for measures to combat clandestine and illegal migration⁵¹ while at the same time setting forth the general obligation to respect the basic human rights of all migrant workers. It also extends the scope of equality between legally resident migrant workers and national workers beyond the provisions of the 1949 Convention to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, social security, trade union and cultural rights, and individual and collective freedoms for persons who as migrant workers or as members of their families are lawfully within a ratifying state's territory. The Convention calls upon ratifying States to facilitate the reunification of families of migrant workers legally residing in their territory.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312288

51 Term used in the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143).

Notes

1990

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990

Entering into force in 2003, this Convention obligates States to protect the human rights of migrant workers and members of their families without distinction of any kind such as sex, race, colour, language, religion or conviction, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, nationality, age, economic position, property, marital status, birth or other status, and regardless of their stage of migration. Under Article 11, no migrant worker or member of their family shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour or be held in slavery or servitude.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention using the OHCHR dashboard:

<https://indicators.ohchr.org>

1997

Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)

Adopted in 1997, this Convention recognises the “role private employment agencies may play in a well-functioning labour market”. The purpose of the Convention is to allow the operation of private employment agencies as well as to protect the workers using their services. According to Article 7 of the Convention, private employment agencies shall not charge directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, any fees or costs to workers.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312326

1998

Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998

Adopted by all ILO Member States in 1998, the Declaration defines the four core labour standards that all Member States must “respect, promote and realize”, whether or not they have ratified the relevant conventions. The four principles are freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, as well as the elimination of forced labour, child labour, and discrimination. In 2022, a fifth principle was added to the declaration: occupational safety and health.

1999

Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182)

Adopted in 1999, this Convention calls for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency. The worst forms of child labour include all types of slavery, including the sale and trafficking of children; forced labour to pay off a debt; and any other type of forced labour, including using children in war and armed conflict. Other worst forms of child labour include the sexual exploitation of children, the involvement of children in illicit activities, and work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Since 2020, this Convention has been universally ratified:

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-child-labour-convention-achieves-universal-ratification>

2000

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000

The Palermo Protocol is one of three protocols that were adopted by the United Nations to supplement the 2000 Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Article 3 of the Protocol defines trafficking in persons as requiring three components: the act, the means, and the purpose. The Palermo Protocol establishes children as a special case for whom only two components are required for a definition of trafficking in persons — act and purpose.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Protocol using the OHCHR dashboard:

<https://indicators.ohchr.org>

2008

General recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers, 2008

This General Recommendation, under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, aims to elaborate the circumstances that contribute to the specific vulnerability of many women migrant workers and their experiences of sex- and gender-based discrimination as a cause and consequence of the violations of their human rights.

Notes

2011

Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)

Adopted in 2011, this Convention focuses on decent work specifically for domestic workers. Articles 8 and 15 focus on the recruitment side of domestic work with notable provisions on the role of private recruitment agencies, on fees and on repatriation. According to Article 9, domestic workers:

- a) are free to reach agreement with their employer or potential employer on whether to reside in the household;
- b) who reside in the household are not obliged to remain in the household or with household members during periods of daily and weekly rest or annual leave; and
- c) are entitled to keep in their possession their travel and identity documents.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460

2014

Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (P029)

The Protocol is a legally-binding instrument that requires States to take effective measures to prevent forced labour and provide victims with protection and access to remedies, including compensation. It supplements Convention No. 29, so ILO Member States must have ratified the Convention first to be able to ratify the Protocol.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Protocol on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:3174672

Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)

Recommendation No. 203, which supplements both the Protocol and Convention No. 29, provides non-binding practical guidance concerning measures to strengthen national law and policy on forced labour in the areas of prevention, protection of victims and ensuring their access to justice and remedies, enforcement and international cooperation. It builds on the provisions of the Protocol and should be read in conjunction with it.

2019

Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

Adopted in June 2019, this Convention is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

You can verify if your country has ratified this Convention on the ILO NORMLEX website:

https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:3999810

► Table 3. Ratification of ILO Migrant Workers Conventions (No. 97 and No. 143) as well as the Private Employment Agencies Convention (No. 181), the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189), the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention (P029), and the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) in ECOWAS countries* as of 2025

	Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)	Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)	Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)	Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)	Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (P029)	Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)
Benin		1980				
Burkina Faso	1961	1977				
Cabo Verde						
Côte d'Ivoire				2025 (in force on 3 April 2026)	2019	
The Gambia						
Ghana						
Guinea		1978		2017		
Guinea-Bissau						
Liberia						
Mali			2016		2016	
Niger			2015		2015	
Nigeria	1960	2023	2023			2022
Senegal						
Sierra Leone	2021	2021	2021	2021	2021	
Togo		1983				
Total	3 ratifications	6 ratifications	4 ratifications	3 ratifications	4 ratifications	1 ratification

Notes

ILO supervisory system/mechanism*

International labour standards are backed by a supervisory system that is unique at the international level and that helps to ensure that countries implement the conventions they ratify. The ILO regularly examines the application of standards in Member States and points out areas where they could be better applied. If there are any problems in the application of standards, the ILO seeks to assist countries through social dialogue and technical assistance.

The ILO has developed various means of supervising the application of Conventions and Recommendations in law and practice following their adoption by the International Labour Conference and their ratification by States.

There are two kinds of supervisory mechanisms:

Regular system of supervision

Examination by two ILO bodies of reports on the application in law and practice sent by Member States and on observations in this regard sent by employers' organizations and workers' organizations.

1. The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.
2. The International Labour Conference's Tripartite Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.

Special procedures

Unlike the regular system of supervision, the three special procedures listed are based on the submission of a representation or a complaint.

1. Procedure for representations on the application of ratified Conventions.
2. Procedure for complaints over the application of ratified Conventions
3. Special procedure for complaints regarding freedom of association (Freedom of Association Committee).

Observations and requests made by the supervisory bodies can be a useful resource for journalists. They can help them identify shortcomings or improvements in the implementation of specific international labour standards. Recent requests from the ILO related to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) can be found on the NORMLEX platform.**

* Detailed information can be found on the ILO official website: <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/ilo-supervisory-system-mechanism/lang-en/index.htm>

** https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID:4021990

C. Good practices in national legislation

- ▶ **Armenia.** The 2011 Criminal Code (Amendments) allowed for the confiscation of property from offenders. Additionally, victims of trafficking have been included in the list of vulnerable persons eligible for extra employment assistance by the government.
- ▶ **Ethiopia.** Ethiopia has ratified key international conventions related to forced labour, including ILO Conventions No. 29 (Forced Labour) and No. 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour). The country has also incorporated these principles into its national legislation, including the revised Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019.⁵² This proclamation prohibits forced labour and outlines penalties for offenders. The Ethiopian government has also developed a National Action Plan (NAP) to combat human trafficking, which includes elements related to forced labour, and adopted a proclamation on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Persons, Proclamation No. 1178/2020.⁵³
- ▶ **Nigeria.** Section 62 of Nigeria's Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, as amended in 2015, provides that where "the circumstances so justify, trafficked persons shall not be detained or prosecuted for offences related to being a victim of trafficking, including non-possession of valid travel documents, use of a false travel or other document."

- ▶ **United Kingdom.** The United Kingdom's 2015 Modern Slavery Act criminalizes human trafficking, including forced or compulsory labour.
- ▶ **United States.** The United States government emphasized the importance of due diligence in preventing human trafficking with Executive Order No. 13627 in 2012, and title XVII of the National Defence Authorization Act for FY 2013. Subsequently, the U.S. government incorporated these policies into the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) clause 'Combating Trafficking in Persons,' which sets out strict requirements for contractors and subcontractors who receive federal contracts.

D. National legislation related to forced labour and fair recruitment

The ILO NATLEX platform allows users to search for national labour, social security and related human rights legislation. It is possible to browse the platform either:

- ▶ By country: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.byCountry?p_lang=en
- ▶ By subject: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.bySubject?p_lang=en

Notes

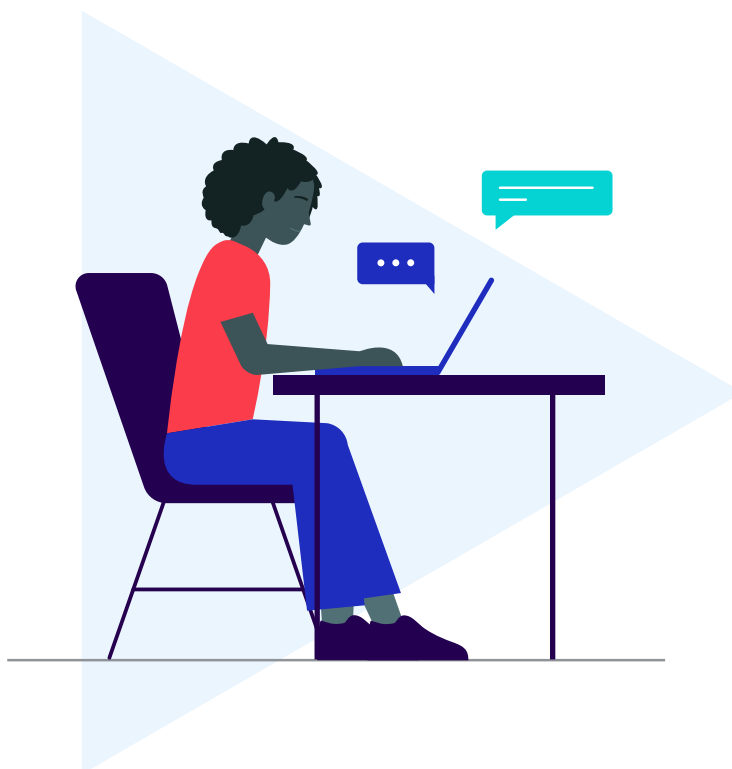
⁵² Proclamation No. 1156/2019. https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=109825

⁵³ Proclamation No. 1178/2020. https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=113354

Module 2.

Notes

Finding the story





► Unit 2.1 – Getting prepared

Being fair to the story is a challenging task. It requires good preparation, understanding of the subject matter, hard work as well as long-term dedication. According to photojournalist and documentary filmmaker Mimi Chakarova, the biggest preparation is

mental. Beyond the mental preparation, she also suggests that quality reporting comes from extensive research. In doing so, you should bear in mind the following dos and don'ts:

► **Table 4. Dos and don'ts**

 Do	 Don't
<p>Read what is currently being reported by the media and look for stories that are poorly covered: decent work deficits or even abuses in some sectors, gaps in legislation, victim protection, and discrimination in services provided to victims.</p>	<p>Look for stories that are sensational or try to fit into an existing narrative by distorting the reality.</p>

**Do**

Reach out to relevant expertise: civil society organizations, academia, professionals working on labour migration and forced labour.

**Don't**

Overlook that you are dealing with vulnerable persons. Rushing, even if you are working on tight deadlines, can have dramatic consequences.

**Do**

Assess the feasibility of possible stories (time, format, legal and personal risk, resources) and potential consequences for you and your sources of information.

**Don't**

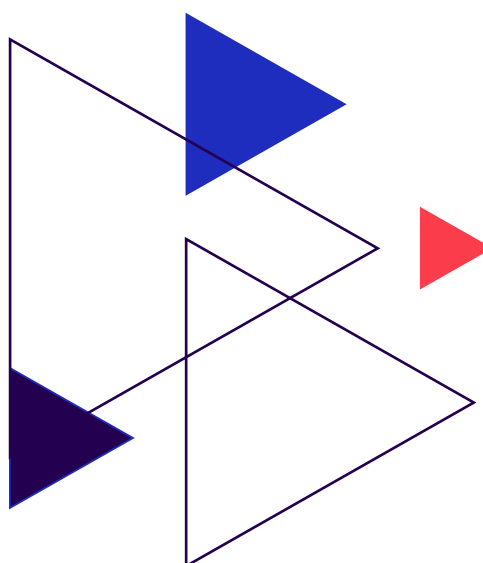
Forget that your responsibility is to inform your audience and not to advocate.

► Unit 2.2 – Finding a story

There are examples of reporting on situations of labour migration and forced labour in this section, but the focus of this module is not on revealing a story of abuse. Positive stories can be powerful and provide information that can both prevent situations of abuse and improve public perception about the benefits of labour migration, which, if it takes place under fair recruitment and decent working conditions, can contribute to development, to the wellbeing of countries of origin and destination and to migrants themselves.

Journalists can also tell stories of positive changes in policies, laws, business practices, and how these changes might affect the lives of thousands of people.

This section is organized by theme and provides a brief introduction, examples of reporting and, when relevant, a list of questions that can be the starting point of a story.



Notes

A. Human stories

The most compelling stories are those where people tell their own stories. There is no need to sensationalize these accounts: you can just let the facts and the personal testimonies speak for themselves, adding any required factual information that is missing. Support groups may be able to put you in touch with someone, for example, who has escaped. You must protect their identity if they request it. Human interest stories are often widely shared and can raise awareness about the issues and create social pressure for change.

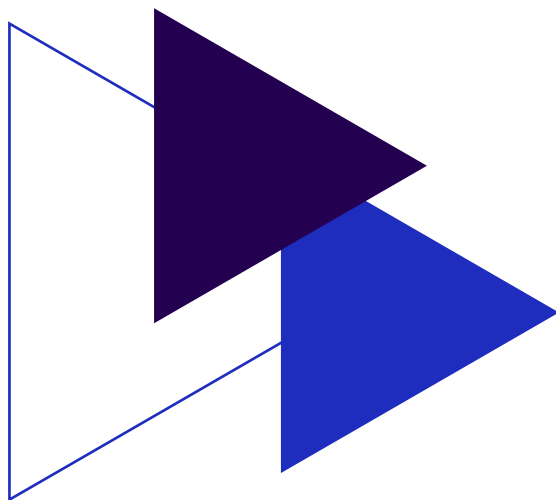
Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- How were they recruited?
- What work are they doing?
- What journey did they make?
- What are the living conditions outside work?
- If they had been trapped into forced labour, how did they get their freedom?
- What was the reaction of the community around them?

Example of a story about people**No country for young men**

Senegal's villages deserted for dreams of Europe, reporting by Kieran Guilbert, published on Thomson Reuters News. This multimedia series received the 2016 ILO Award for Excellence in reporting on "Breaking Stereotypes on Labour Migration".

Published on *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*: <https://news.trust.org/shorthand/no-country-for-young-men/>



B. Labour and the workplace

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. The four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda include: employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue. The recruitment conditions of workers may affect the realization of each of these pillars and fair recruitment should apply to all workers. Yet abuses can occur in many industries that can lead to forced labour. It can happen out of sight, for example in domestic work; or in remote areas, such as agriculture, mining and fishing; as well as in sectors closer to our everyday lives, such as catering and hospitality.

Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- ▶ What are the main sectors of activity and employment in your region?
- ▶ What are the steps workers need to take to get a job? Do they have to pay recruitment fees? How can advance payments force workers into “debt bondage”?
- ▶ Do employers and workers know about their rights at work?
- ▶ What are the working conditions?
- ▶ What information is provided about safety and health on the job?

Notes

Example of a story about work

I left Ghana to farm in Italy. I was exploited in both places

Kojo Afreh was a farmer and artisanal miner popularly known as *galamsey* in Ghana before he decided to travel to Italy. He hoped that by finding work abroad, he could support his family and eventually marry the mother of his child. This led him to join others in a perilous journey through Burkina Faso and Niger, crossing the Sahara Desert, Libya and eventually reaching the Italian city of Sicily via a boat. Kojo spent two years in Italy working on farms, facing exploitation and harsh conditions. He was eventually deceived by labour inspectors and deported back to Ghana. Despite promises of support, Kojo finds himself back in the dangerous *galamsey* mines, struggling financially.

Published on *openDemocracy*: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/i-left-ghana-to-farm-in-italy-i-was-exploited-in-both-places-migration/>

Notes

C. Business and economics

Forced labour and unfair recruitment generate huge illegal profits. An ILO study found that modern slavery generates annual profits of over US\$236 billion.⁵⁴ News reports can unveil the economics behind these issues and encourage employers and businesses to address the risk of forced labour and promote fair recruitment and decent working conditions in their own operations as well as in their supply chains.

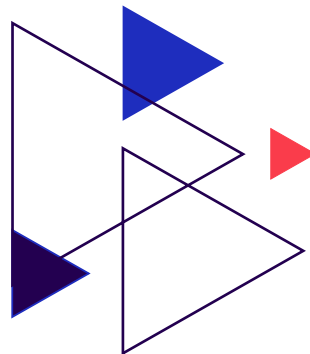
Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- What are the economic incentives behind unfair recruitment practices, exploitative working conditions and forced labour?
- How can these be reversed or overcome?
- What are businesses doing to promote decent working conditions in their operations?
- How do public and private employers ensure due diligence in their supply chains?
- How are corporate promises integrated into actual business practices?
- Has consumer pressure resulted in improvements for workers?

Example of a story about money**A proposed U.S. remittance tax could hit Liberian families hard**

This story looks at the possible impact of a United States bill on financial flows from Liberian migrant workers living in the U.S. to their country of origin.

Published on *Front Page Africa*: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/a-proposed-u-s-remittance-tax-could-hit-liberian-families-hard/>



⁵⁴ ILO, 2024, *Profits and poverty: the economics of forced labour*. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/annual-profits-forced-labour-amount-us-236-billion-ilo-report-finds>

D. Migration

The ILO estimates that there are 167.7 million migrant workers in the world today.⁵⁵ Stories about migration can highlight the difficult choices individuals and their families face in searching for better opportunities. Stories about migration can also help show the positive contribution migrant workers make to countries' economies, helping to overcome common negative stereotypes and xenophobia.

Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- ▶ Why do people look for work opportunities away from home?
- ▶ What are the legal opportunities to migrate?
- ▶ How do people travel?
- ▶ Who facilitates migration?
- ▶ How are intraregional migration flows impacted by the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocols?
- ▶ What happens when legal or established migration routes are suddenly shut?
- ▶ How are migrant workers welcomed in countries of destination? Are they treated fairly?

Notes

Example of a story about mobility

EU tests idea in Gambia: Would more opportunity at home mean fewer migrants?

Job opportunities, safety — those kinds of factors guide decisions about whether to leave your country. But the pull of stories that say a better future is waiting somewhere else may be even stronger. This story is part of a global series called “On the Move: The faces, places, and politics of migration.”

Published on *Christian Science Monitor*: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/1126/EU-tests-idea-in-Gambia-Would-more-opportunity-at-home-mean-fewer-migrants>



⁵⁵ ILO, 2025, *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/ilo-global-estimates-international-migrants-labour-force>

Notes

E. Discrimination

Discrimination can be based on gender, race, ethnicity, indigenous identity, migration status and disability. All these types of discrimination can influence recruitment and working conditions. In some cases, workers can be in forced labour because they belong to a certain ethnic group or caste, or even for holding some form of political opinion. In other cases, women migrant workers can experience discriminatory labour practices at home and abroad. It is important to take discrimination into account when you look at issues of recruitment and forced labour. Stories about overcoming discrimination in the workplace and promoting equality of treatment on the job can raise awareness and change mind-sets.

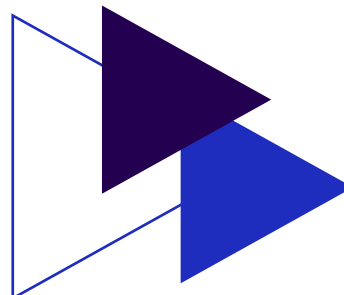
Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- Are some people facing discrimination in terms of job opportunities, recruitment, working conditions? In which sectors?
- Are efforts being made to ensure equality in the workplace?
- Does internal and international migration affect some groups of people differently?
- Are some people more vulnerable to forced labour than others? Children? Women? Men? Indigenous people?
- Do women and men have equal rights at work? Are they equally aware of their rights?

Example of a story about differences**How weavers in Burkina Faso are now on Europe's migration front line**

The EU is pumping millions of euros of development aid into the Sahelian country to keep migrants at bay. This story won the 4th ILO global media competition on labour migration (2018).

Published on *The New Humanitarian*: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/02/06/how-weavers-burkina-faso-are-now-europe-s-migration-front-line>



F. Law, enforcement and crimes

The justice system in most countries shines light into some of humanity's most unsavoury practices — such as the violation of labour rights. If your country takes action against labour abuses, make contact with the organizations and people who are responsible for this, whether they are in the mainstream police or a specialist agency. If there are laws, but they are not enforced, ask: "Why not?"

Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- ▶ What relevant laws are in place in your country?
- ▶ Who is in charge of enforcing the laws?
- ▶ How do they go about doing it?
- ▶ How well are laws enforced?
- ▶ What are the consequences for those who abuse workers' rights?

Notes

Example of a story about justice

NAPTIP rescues victim of forced labour in Egypt

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), said it has rescued a victim of forced labour in Egypt. The latest development follows the call by the Director General of NAPTIP, Dame Julie Okah-Donli, on leadership of the various regulatory bodies in the country to warn their members against aiding the trafficking of Nigerians for illicit purposes.

Published on *The Guardian*: <https://guardian.ng/appointments/naptip-rescues-victim-of-forced-labour-in-egypt/>

Notes

G. Information, education and advocacy

Stories can be inspired by people who are making a difference to tackle labour abuses and to promote decent work and social justice for all.

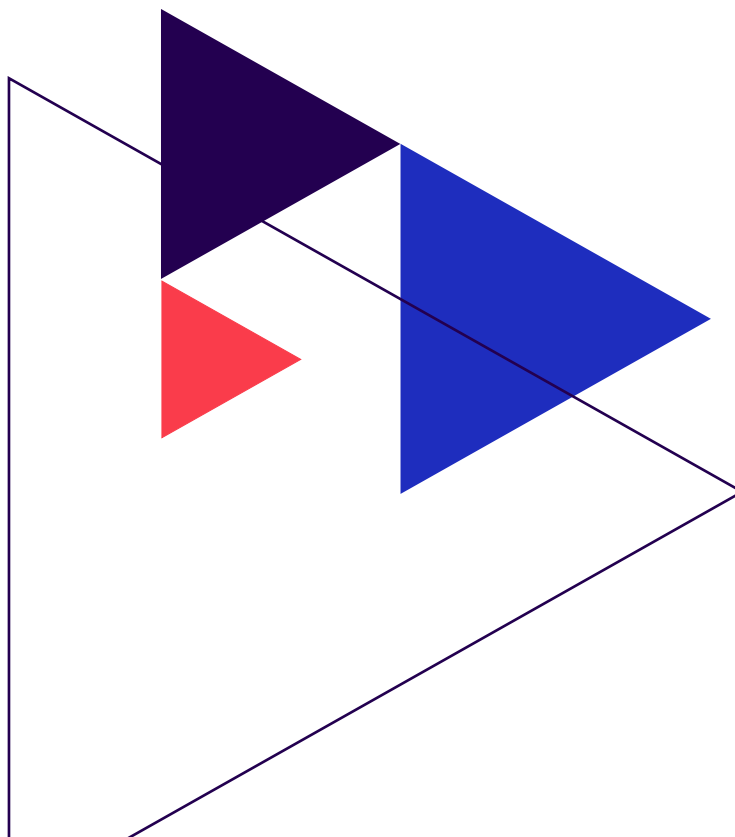
Key questions you may wish to consider include:

- What is being done to inform people about their rights?
- Who is acting for the abused?
- What expressions of public support or hostility are there for people in forced labour and for people who migrate?
- Are there adverse effects to the policies promoted by advocacy groups?
- What role do celebrities or other figures play in raising awareness?

Example of a story about awareness**Battered not beaten, Sierra Leonean women pick up the cudgels**

This story on the activism of Sierra Leonean trafficking survivors is part of “Stories of Origin”, a series that comprises articles and interviews that explores the lived experiences of both returning and potential migrants and their families.

Published on *migrant-rights.org*: <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2023/09/battered-not-beaten-sierra-leonean-women-pick-up-the-cudgels/>



► Unit 2.3 – Getting support

Notes

A. Gaining support

If you are a reporter aiming to do a story which will take time and resources and which may attract hostile attention, you will probably face a tough task in convincing your editors to let you do so.

The only option is persuading editors that the work is important and adds value to the news organization. You might remind your superiors that:

- Investigations are at the heart of journalism.
- Strong investigative reports will raise the profile of the news organization, improve its standing and potentially increase its revenue.
- The report or reports will be of a uniquely high quality and will bring attention and kudos.
- Your organization can “own” the subject — that is to say, become the natural home of coverage of the subject. Other people will come forward with related stories.
- There may be the chance to enter the report(s) for awards.

B. Funding

In investigations, when you are looking for extra time and resources, it helps if you can set out all the likely costs, including staff time, travel and accommodation costs, and other costs. Look for external funding for a story: an international non-governmental organization might agree to pay the costs of a reporter travelling to another country to produce a series of reports on migration. Sometimes grants are made to the winners of a competition.

Be aware of the risks that the report becomes one-sided and only reports what the funder wants. It is important that the news organization retains its editorial control and remains in charge of what is ultimately published.

C. Collaborating with other media outlets

Collaborating with another news organization can help to reduce costs and increase impact. Even global news organizations like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* have done it, to great effect. There are also opportunities for smaller news organizations to collaborate across borders.

Notes

Collaborative efforts are also valuable when it comes to publication. The simultaneous launch of stories across different media outlets — and possibly in different countries — can generate greater impact and reach a wider audience.

The Global Investigative Journalism Network, in its Human Trafficking Resources,⁵⁶ lists several interesting collaborations.

Supporting Cross-Border Journalism on Labour Migration in the ECOWAS Region

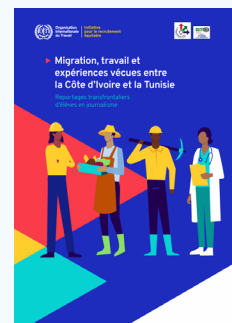
To promote balanced, evidence-based reporting on labour migration, the ILO supported cross-border journalism initiatives involving both professional journalists and journalism students, enabling them to report from **both countries of origin and destination** along selected migration corridors. This approach aimed to strengthen contextual understanding of migration dynamics, labour conditions, and migrant experiences across borders.

In West Africa, the ILO facilitated cross-border reporting partnerships between two pairs of journalism institutions: **ISTC in Côte d'Ivoire and PSI in Tunisia** along the Côte d'Ivoire-Tunisia corridor, and **UNIMAC in Ghana and PANOS University in Nigeria** along the Ghana-Nigeria corridor. Students from these institutions jointly produced in-depth stories documenting migration realities across the corridors. The resulting work was compiled and published in **two media anthologies**, showcasing student-led reporting from the Côte d'Ivoire-Tunisia and Ghana-Nigeria migration corridors.

Media anthology in the Ghana-Nigeria labour migration corridor



Migration, travail et expériences vécues entre la Côte d'Ivoire et la Tunisie: Reportages transfrontaliers d'élèves en journalisme



56 <https://gijn.org/topic/human-trafficking/>

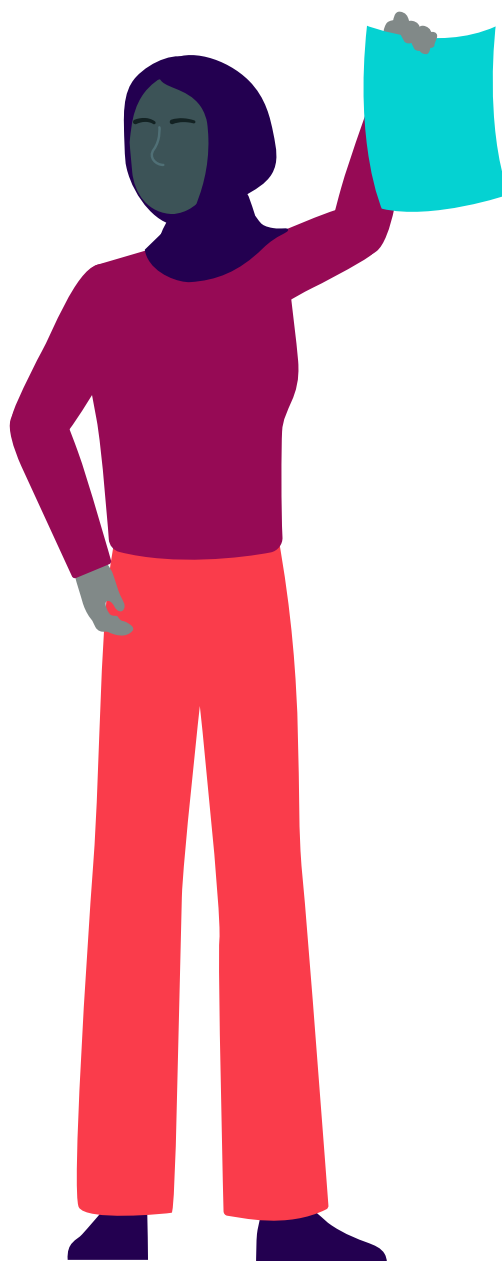
D. External support

Ensure that your reporting has strong support both outside and inside your mediahouse.

Possible candidates include:

- ▶ Elected politicians
- ▶ Business leaders, unions and employers' organizations
- ▶ Law enforcement officials
- ▶ Leaders of NGOs and campaign groups
- ▶ Experts such as academics
- ▶ Celebrities
- ▶ Traditional and religious leaders
- ▶ Traditional communicators

Explain your story and ask for their support. Publish a few words of support alongside their picture. This will demonstrate to those who would wish you ill that you have support in the community.



Notes

Module 3.

Getting the story



► Unit 3.1 – Resources

A. Facts and figures

Facts are the basis for all investigative journalism. Mostly, facts are nothing more than dry numbers on a page but with a proper understanding and interpretation they can reveal stories of real interest.

Learn to love documents. Look for official or highly respected documents such as official statistics, legal and regulatory frameworks, court documents, company publications and newspapers.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Relevant data sources include the Migration Data Portal (<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/labour-migration-statistics>) as well as statistics specific to the ECOWAS region (<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/western-africa>).

Exercising the right to access to information

Access to information was recognized as a fundamental right in 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19, on freedom of expression, states that this right includes the freedom “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

UNESCO offers guidance and resources to support the effective access to information and has a dedicated portal on this matter: <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-information>

In the ECOWAS region, UNESCO is working with the Court of Justice to reinforce the effective access to information, within a broader effort to support freedom of expression: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-ecowas-court-justice-reinforce-freedom-expression-west-africa>

The Africa Freedom of Information Centre also provides valuable resources and curates a repository of access to information laws in Africa: <https://www.africafoicentre.org/foi-laws/>

B. Photographs and videos

Photographs, and increasingly videos, are a vital part of modern storytelling. But forced labour and unfair recruitment usually take place in the shadows, and both perpetrators and victims may not be willing to be identified.

If someone agrees to be photographed (or filmed), but asks not to be identified, it is far, far better to protect their identity during the filming — for example, by only photographing them in silhouette or by filming only the interviewee's hands, rather than relying on postproduction techniques such as pixelating or hiding the person's face during the edit or production process.

What can you do if you can't get original images?

- ▶ You could use stock images from a picture library but the image may not match your story. Do not use sensationalized images, such as people bound in chains.
- ▶ You can illustrate your story with visual arts such as drawings, cartoons and paintings.
- ▶ You might even leave the story without illustration and explain to your reader why that is your choice.

Images play an important role but lack of professionalism or resources often leads to sloppy photo editing and, in the end, to a major disservice to the audience.

Notes

► Unit 3.2 – Safety

A. The principles of ethical journalism

Here are some top tips for staying safe in your reporting:

- **Be accurate.** Only report those facts which you have checked and double checked and know to be true. Everything else is a claim and should be attributed. Take care to report claims accurately. Do not draw conclusions. Report according to the limits of your ability. If you are covering a sensitive issue, report on what you can see, or at least what you are told by those around you. Leave the analysis, interpretation and speculation to others who have other sources and can see the bigger picture.
- **Be sceptical.** Analyse all information you are given on a situation. Consider recording the conversations you have with anyone involved in a sensitive story you are covering. Later, they may be pressured to deny your reports, and you may need to present your recordings and transcripts to a court.
- **Be balanced.** Actively seek out the views of all parties. If they won't speak to you, or you can't reach them, look for an authoritative source of their position, such as their official website or news agency. If you fail, explain why: "For such and such reason, it has not been possible to reach the following source of information."

Don't act as a judge, advocate or human rights activist. Leave this to the experts who can brief you and give you analyses.

- **Be impartial.** Don't promote the views of one of the parties to the conflict.

Don't use language (usually adjectives) to describe how good (strong, heroic, determined, rightful) one side is, or how terrible (evil, weak, cowardly) the other side is.

Recognise that words used widely and without intended prejudice in one community can cause offence among another. Would you like to be described as a "tribal" or "aboriginal"? Show respect to other people. Find out how they themselves prefer to be described.

Recognise when your own bias appears in your reporting and remove it.⁵⁸

B. Personal safety

Journalists who are reporting on issues such as unfair recruitment or forced labour are particularly at risk — even if they do so in a balanced and objective way. You are likely to be exposing criminal organizations or powerful individuals, or even government abuses. Reprisals may range from intimidation and harassment to actual violence, illegal arrest and arbitrary detention. You need to be aware and prepared.

58 Ethical Journalism Network, 2018, *Five-point guide for migration reporting*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aongjvQ-QCE>

Notes

Resources

Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012, *Journalist security guide*.

<https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/guide.pdf>

Council of Europe, n.d., *Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists*.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/media-freedom>

Digital Platform for Safety of Journalists in Africa.

<https://safetyofjournalistsinafrica.africa/resources/>

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), n.d., *IFJ Safety mission*.

<https://www.ifj.org/what/safety.html>

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), n.d., *Gender equality*.

<https://www.ifj.org/what/gender-equality.html>

International News Safety Institute (INSI), n.d., *INSI Safety Code*.

<https://newssafety.org/insi-safety-code/>

Media Foundation for West Africa, n.d., *Portal on Safety of Journalists*.

<https://mfwa.org/category/safety-of-journalists/>

UNESCO, n.d., *Basic texts related to the safety of journalists*.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/basic-texts>

UNESCO, 2015, *Safety guide for journalists: A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments*.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243986>

UNESCO, n.d., *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

<https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists>

C. Physical and mental health

- ▶ Be mentally prepared for a traumatic assignment. Share stories and experiences with your fellow journalists. Debrief your bosses and colleagues.
- ▶ Be aware of any potential risks to your physical health.

D. Digital security

- ▶ Don't keep contact details of sensitive sources in your handwritten notes, books, in your mobile phone or in computer files.
- ▶ Give your sensitive contacts a code name and use this in your notes.
- ▶ Protect your mobile phone with a strong PIN code.
- ▶ Store the contact details of sensitive sources under an assumed name.

Notes

- Delete records of sensitive calls.
- Delete text messages.
- Disguise sensitive numbers in another format.
- Learn how to use higher security for your web browsing.
- Learn how to send encrypted emails.
- Take care with what you post on social media.

E. Going undercover

It is a general rule of journalism that reporters should be open and honest about who they are. They should not disguise their identity or activity in order to gain access to information that would not be shared with a reporter. However, it can be very hard to gather convincing evidence of crime and anti-social behavior while being fully transparent.

This is why when — and only when — there is genuinely strong public interest reason to suggest crime or serious antisocial

behavior, some investigative reporters will take on an assumed identity, for example, by pretending to be an unskilled worker to take a job where workers are abused. This is known as “going undercover”.

If the reporter makes covert sound or video recordings, a court may decide that they are an invasion of privacy and illegal. Reporters who are uncovered may be subjected to threats and even physical violence.

Consider:

- How will you join the organization you are about to expose?
- Will you work alone?
- How will you make sure that you are safe?
- What is your undercover identity and story?
- How will you avoid asking too many questions and arousing suspicion?
- How will you get the information out?
- How will you get yourself out if/when things go wrong?

Resources

New Vision Podcast, 2021, *Undercover in Saudi Arabia*.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/fr/podcast/undercover-in-saudi-arabia-episode-1/id1537095765?i=1000581248870> (episode No. 1)

R.AGE, n.d., *Student/Trafficked*.

<https://www.rage.com.my/trafficked/>

The Sydney Morning Herald, 2016, *Fruit picking investigation*.

<https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2016/fruit-picking-investigation/>

Fair Planet, 2018, *The undercover Ghanaian journalist who names, shames and jails*.

<https://www.fairplanet.org/story/the-undercover-ghanaian-journalist-who-names-shames-and-jails/>

► Unit 3.3 – Sources

Notes

You can get information from a diversity of sources, including workers and their families, employers or agents and intermediaries that orchestrate recruitment as well as academics.

However unhappy they are about the situation they find themselves in, speaking out may only exacerbate the problem and possibly put them in danger. You will need to be sensitive and respectful, while at the same time encouraging them to provide you with information.

Stories about recruitment may address good or bad practices leading to very different outcomes for the workers concerned, affecting both their professional and personal life.

Journalists reporting on these stories need to work carefully and methodically to build up a body of evidence, ensuring accurate, fair and balanced reporting.

A diversity of sources must be considered. In the following section you will find tips on addressing particular types of sources.

A. Survivors

You must not pressure them, but it is fair to tell victims that speaking out will inform the public about the scale and nature of the problem. It may give others the confidence to speak. And it may warn others of the dangers they may face in travelling across borders.

If you want people to open up to you about traumatic experiences, you need to win their trust. Victims must know that they will not be denigrated or re-victimized by your reporting. The stories that you write about survivors of abuse and atrocities will also determine whether your interviewees will want to talk to you again for follow-up stories.

You should always treat victims/survivors and their families with compassion, care, respect and dignity. This does not mean you should stop being a skeptical journalist working to find the truth.

Depending on the situation, it is advisable to let the interviewee choose the interview venue. You want them to be in a place where they feel comfortable talking.

Victims and survivors may request that you do not publish any information which could lead to them being identified. News organizations are often reluctant to use anonymous sources because it has the effect of weakening the impact of the testimony.

There may also be the danger that those accused attempt to punish those who speak out. It is vital that reporters do not allow this to happen.

If you promise to protect their anonymity, you must ensure that you do so. Take care that their identity is not revealed, even inadvertently by publishing so much information about the person that someone close to them could work out who you are talking about.

In some very sensitive cases, it goes beyond not mentioning their name or identity in pieces that you publish. You must also keep their identity secret in your own notes, in case these fall into hostile hands.

B. Support groups, advocacy organizations, academics

Whereas much of the power and emotional impact of a story will come from testimonies of those directly impacted, it will gain strength when bringing a wider perspective, placing the story of one or more individuals into context.

Notes

To do this, get information from experts working in the field, such as:

- Support groups for victims and survivors
- Academics
- Associations
- Politicians with a specialist interest in the issue
- Trade unions
- Lawyers
- Law enforcement agencies
- Global organizations, such as the ILO

About accessing quality information in the ECOWAS region:

Trade Information: ECOWAS has established the [ECOWAS Trade Information System \(ECOTIS\)](#), which provides online market analysis tools to facilitate trade and decision-making. This includes access to various trade statistics databases, market price information, and export/import opportunities.

Migration Data: There is a significant lack of reliable and harmonized migration data within the ECOWAS region. This hinders meaningful analysis and effective policy implementation. ECOWAS is working on improving data collection and dissemination, including efforts to track and understand migration trends and their impact on various sectors.

Free Movement of People: ECOWAS has a protocol on the free movement of people, but challenges remain in ensuring its effective implementation, including issues related to visa reciprocity and the potential impact of political and security uncertainties on border crossings.

Data Protection: ECOWAS has a supplementary act on personal data protection, aiming to harmonize data protection frameworks across Member States. However, challenges remain in enforcement and the establishment of a regional data protection regulator.

Early Warning Systems: ECOWAS, through its Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), tracks information on conflicts and natural disasters and assesses their potential impact on migrants, including providing early warning systems adapted to reach migrants in multiple languages.

Access to Justice: ECOWAS has developed a handbook on access to justice and transitional justice, aiming to promote the rule of law and enhance access to justice for citizens.

ECOWAS Digital Observatory (ECODOB): Management and Information System for Telecommunications/ICT, used to track the development, trends, and performance of the telecommunications sector in West Africa to support the establishment of a single digital market in the region.

When you meet them, ask them to suggest someone else you should speak to. Build up your network of contacts. Follow them on social media; read their published articles. When researching your story, take detailed notes of what each person tells you. If, when

writing the story, you are unsure about your understanding, you will be able to go back and check with the right person. This will also allow you to attribute opinions accurately. You will quickly lose the trust of anyone you misquote or attribute the wrong opinion to.

Organizations and experts working on forced labour and fair recruitment can be found on the *Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Expert Directory*: <https://humantraffickingexperts.com/>

C. Actors suspected of abuse

People accused of crimes or anti-social behaviour should be the last people you contact in your investigation, when you have gathered all the evidence and built a strong case against them.

If you contact them too early, they will have the chance to put pressure on witnesses, destroy evidence — and scupper your investigation.

However, in the interest of fairness, you do need to give them a chance to respond properly to any allegations of wrongdoing made against them.

Many news organizations would consider one or two days sufficient time for the accused to give a considered response — but not enough for them to take action, whether legal or illegal, to prevent publication.

If they agree to meet, consider your own safety:

- ▶ Take a colleague along with you.
- ▶ Inform your editor where you are going.
- ▶ Have someone check up on you.
- ▶ Take detailed notes or make a recording.
- ▶ Conduct the discussion professionally and politely.
- ▶ Do not permit yourself to become angry or indignant.

If they refuse to meet, you could ask them to answer your questions by phone or email.

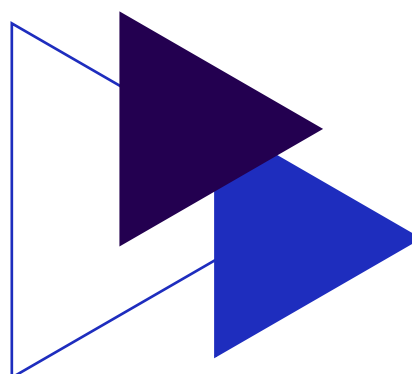
A third option is for them to prepare a written (or recorded) statement for you to use as their response to the allegations against them.

You should be persistent in seeking a response, repeating that you want to hear their view of events in the interests of accuracy and fairness.

If you receive no reply after repeated contact, you should seek to represent their position as best you can, using publicly available sources. You would then write in your report words to the effect of:

"We have contacted YYYY several times, without receiving a response. However, it presents itself on its website as an ethical employer, a member of the Decent Work Coalition. In an interview given to ZZZ TV three years ago, the CEO stated that his company had always been law-abiding and always applied international standards to the extent possible."

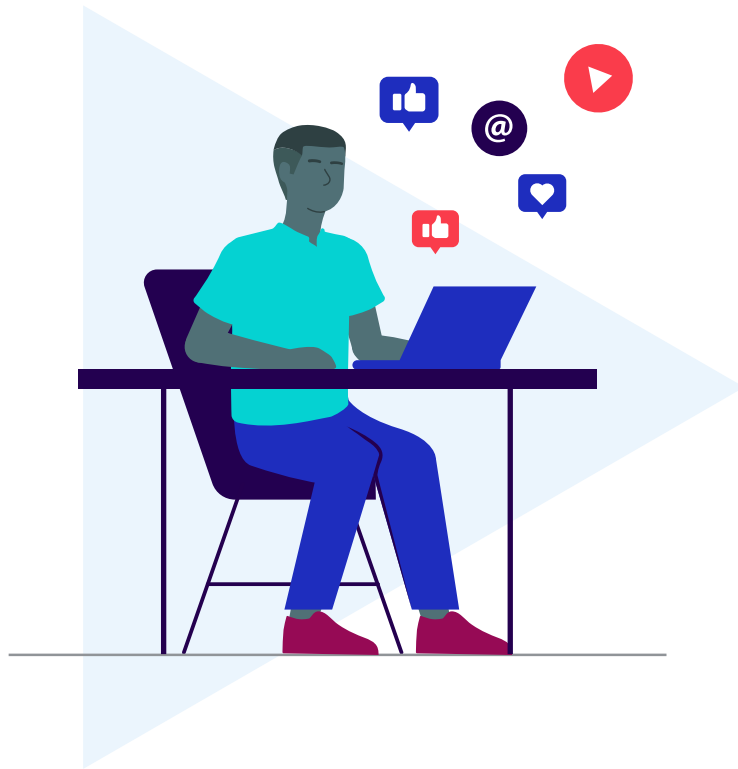
Always be polite. As a journalist, your role is not to determine guilt, but to set out the facts as far as they can be established so that the public can reach their own conclusions.



Module 4.

Notes

Telling the story



► Unit 4.1 – Which medium?

Journalists have a number of platforms on which they might publish their story. It is worth considering at an early stage how you might make best use of the material you have to reach the largest number of people and make the most impact.

You don't have to select just one. You can publish your material in different forms on different platforms such as newspaper, web, television, or others.

A. Web

Almost all news outlets have a website and some of them exist only as a website. However, these websites can as easily carry video or audio reports as they can words and pictures. During the process of building a story, consider taking photos, audio or video recordings that can be published in or alongside an article.

A "long read" is a new type of web article, which incorporates pictorial elements such as pictures, infographics, maps and even audio and video clips into a long text article. The combination makes the format very engaging. It is especially suited to features and investigations.

B. Social media

Many news organizations make extensive use of social media such as Facebook, X, TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram. Often, social media are seen as a way of attracting and serving audiences for their mainstream output, but they can equally be used for storytelling in their own right.

Some reporters have become very clever at telling complicated stories on X in a series of posts — short messages of no more than two or three sentences, often accompanied by a picture or even a short piece of video.

Instagram is especially good for sharing pictures and short videos. It allows for the publication of a series of images of the people who have provided testimonies — with their permission, of course.

The instantaneity of social media is also quite powerful, notably when looking to produce a concrete reaction from a person or an organization involved in your story. Recent examples have shown how the use of X has helped to report on exploitative conditions of human trafficking and to shed light on their situation, with authorities quickly reacting.

However, social media should also be considered as a medium where ethical and unethical recruiters operate, leading to forced labour or fair recruitment opportunities. The fact that social media is a space where a growing number of people search for jobs reinforces the idea that quality reporting should also appear on these platforms.

C. Radio programmes

Radio programmes can exist as part of a regular schedule, or exist entirely on their own as a podcast, downloadable and playable at any time. When they are held close to the source of the sound or used with

a plug-in microphone, smartphones make good recording devices.

Editing can be performed on a smartphone or a computer.

D. Video

Lightweight video production techniques such as filming and even editing on a smartphone make it possible for those with even modest resources to make their own video films, which can be shared online, broadcast on TV, shown in cinema or played to audiences in cinemas and community halls.

E. Animation

Animation is a great way to tell a story where there is a need to protect the identity of those involved.

F. Apps

Many people will be familiar with apps which are offered by news organisations as a way of accessing their content. But there have also been early experiments with using apps to tell stories in new ways. The BBC, for instance, created an immersive video to simulate the experience of a migrant risking their life to seek work and a future in another country.

G. Telling the story in pictures

As mentioned in the previous chapter, journalists must consider carefully how they portray their subject when reporting about labour issues. Particular attention needs to be paid when preserving the anonymity of sources and protecting victims of labour abuses is indicated.

Notes

Notes

► **Unit 4.2 – Consider a series**

If you've been working hard on a difficult subject such as fair recruitment or forced labour, it is likely that you have more material than you need for a single news report. In this case you could consider a series of reports on the same theme and host it on the web.

You might also consider taking the next step and turning your series into a campaign. This is when a news organization goes beyond its usual role of reporting neutrally on an issue and actually takes sides to support a policy change. News media that aim to be impartial and objective will normally only do this when they are fighting criminal activity and promoting human rights such as liberty, health and free labour.

The stories of the campaign may be focused on a single individual and unfold over time, or may feature different individuals who face similar problems. Alternatively, a single issue from a number of different angles can be considered: the trafficked or abused worker, the employer, the agent, the law enforcement officer, and so on.

The stories can run over consecutive days, or as an occasional series. Signposting forthcoming stories helps to keep viewers or readers engaged:

- "Tomorrow, in our continuing series, we'll meet the broker who sent Abdul on his perilous journey."
- "We'll hear more from Marie and find out how she's getting on with life as a free woman."

Six steps to a successful campaign

Step 1: Set out your goal

Campaigns can start off big or start small and grow. They will always benefit from good advance planning. However, your objective must be clear from the outset. Are you calling for a change in the law? Or some other action? For example:

- "We will keep campaigning until we see an end to the permit system."
- "All trafficked women must be freed and taken care of by the state."

Step 2: Manage your campaign

One person needs to manage the campaign on a daily basis to ensure that it keeps momentum and stays on track. This will usually be the reporter who is writing most of the stories.

The campaign also needs a champion who is senior in the editorial team such as a deputy editor, head of newsgathering, or somebody similar.

The champion will ensure that resources, including time, are allocated. Campaigns need many resources and junior staff may be reluctant to commit them. The champion will also protect the writing team by dealing with any external pressures from parties related to the inquiry.

Step 3: Seek to make a strong initial impact

Try to start the campaign with impact and choose a day when the campaign will not be competing against another planned newsevent.

Make the first campaign story prominent on the front page of a newspaper, or first in a television or radio news bulletin. Support it with side stories, backgrounders, images, and infographics.

Step 4: Make it easy for readers to join in

People are increasingly used to having their say on controversial issues on social media. Make the most of this and get them involved. Open up comments on your website and publish the most interesting and supportive. However, be aware that comments can also be negative, racist, sexist or otherwise inappropriate. It is important to set a clear and firm code of conduct for commenting online.

Set up a dedicated email account for members of the public to send you their comments and even stories or storyideas.

There is a platform for e-petitions where citizens can sign up to support demands for a certain action such as a change in the law. If this is the case, set up a petition or ask a sympathetic politician to do it. Then encourage readers to sign the petition. You can publish the number of signatories as it rises, as an indication that the campaign has growing support.

Step 5: Do something readers can't do

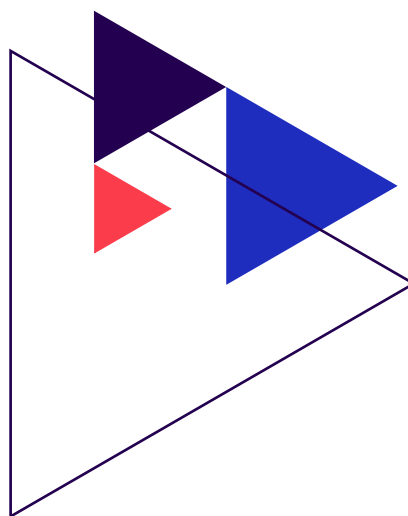
Remember the power and the limitations of your news organization. It can amplify the voice of the readers, ask uncomfortable questions and demand answers from those in the highest authority.

Follow up this kind of action with calls to confirm whether the material has been received and read, and to ask if there are any comments on your dossier. Keep that pressure up. If they have nothing to say, try a week later and a week after that. Record your efforts to get an answer and publish it in the paper.

Step 6: Keep at it

There is an old newspaper adage that says that when you are getting tired of a campaign, the readers are only just beginning to notice it. Unless you have opted for a very short, sharp campaign, you are in it for the long run. Keeping campaigns lively, active and interesting is the job of the whole newsroom, not just the handful of people who are directly responsible for it.

Notes



Notes

► **Unit 4.3 – Are you ready?****A. The editing process**

Like any other type of reporting, reporting on fair recruitment and forced labour requires the use of good editing guidelines and practices. A wide body of resources on editing is available and largely contextualized, which is why the present toolkit cannot mention them all as good editing practices go far beyond our scope.

B. Are you ready?

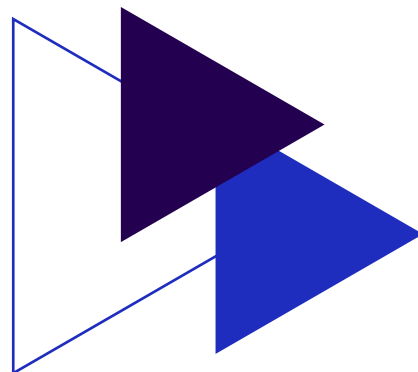
Before you publish your story or series of stories, bring everyone involved in the story together to ensure you have all the information at hand.

You must have clear answers to the following questions:

- What are you trying to say or allege?
- Do you have enough information and evidence to say it?

- What are the implications of your allegations?
- Do you have full confidence in your sources and in your analysis of documents?
- Have you made an extra effort to verify and check all your information?
- Has everyone under criticism been given the opportunity to respond?
- How is the story structured? Work out the beginning, the middle and the end.
- Can you break the story up into manageable parts?
- How will you illustrate the reports? Can you explain the story with pictures, illustrations, tables, or graphics?
- Has a lawyer or experienced editor checked the entire story (including the headlines)?

If you can't answer all these questions fully, you are not ready to publish.



Module 5.

Following up

Notes



► Unit 5.1 – Impact, awards and specializing

A. Impact

Good journalism makes a difference to people's lives.

The practices you report on might not end, but reports you publish might:

- Lead to an individual or individuals being freed from forced labour;
- Encourage an employer to modify their practices and/or their business partners to do the same;
- Give workers who had their rights infringed the confidence and contacts to set up a support group for others;
- Motivate authorities to strengthen the laws and enforce the existing laws;
- Prompt policy-makers to address forced labour and unfair recruitment practices and their root causes;
- Raise awareness on the situation of specific categories of workers and change possible public misperceptions.

Notes

It is important to think about the desirable outcomes for workers. When reporting on a situation of forced labour, the solution of freeing the workers is a desired outcome. In other instances, when reporting on situations that are not necessarily fair to the workers, such as, for example, decent work deficits in terms of working conditions, the desired outcome may be subtler and involve improving working conditions through changes that require the participation of multiple actors, hence more difficult to achieve and monitor.

B. Awards

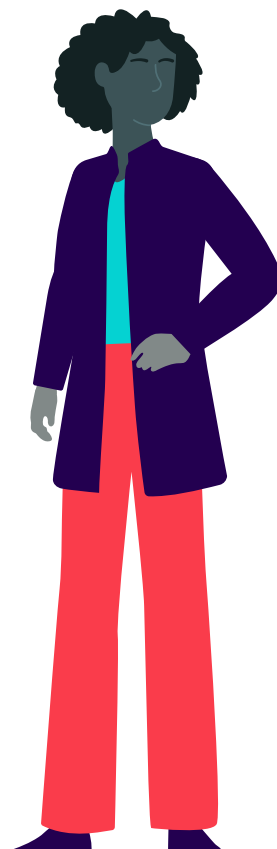
Awards, prizes and fellowships⁵⁹ exist for almost all types of reporting. Labour migration issues and notably forced labour regularly feature in generic media awards, especially when they involve intensive investigation. In recent years, some of the most prestigious prizes in different countries have gone to these types of stories:

- Pulitzer Prize (USA): Seafood from Slaves (2016)⁶⁰
- National Magazine Awards (Canada): The Cage (2016)
- Albert Londres Prize (France): Voyage en barbarie (2015)⁶¹

These distinctions help increase the initial impact of a story as they bring the attention of other media professionals to the issues and, at times, the attention of the general public as well.

Several other award schemes also focus on labour and migration issues, including:

- Global Media Competition on Labour Migration and Fair Recruitment⁶²
- Migration Media Award⁶³
- Anti-Slavery Day Awards⁶⁴
- ILCA Labour Media Awards⁶⁵
- International Women's Media Foundation Awards⁶⁶



59 See notably the *African Union Media Fellowship*. <https://www.nepad.org/aumf>

60 Associated Press, 2016, *Seafood from Slaves. An AP investigation helps free slaves in the 21st century*. <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/seafood-from-slaves/>

61 *Voyage en Barbarie*, 2018. <https://voyageenbarbarie.wordpress.com/>

62 *ILO Global Media Competition on Labour Migration*. <https://www.ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/events-and-training/labour-migration/global-media-competition-labour-migration>

63 *Migration Journalism Award*. <https://www.europeanpressprize.com/introducing-the-new-migration-journalism-award/>

64 Human Trafficking Foundation, *Anti-Slavery Day Awards*. <https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/antislavery-day-awards>

65 International Labour Communications Association. <https://laborcommunicators.org/>

66 International Women's Media Foundation. <https://www.iwmf.org/our-awards/>

► Unit 5.2 – Final tips

Notes

A. Read up

You need to know much more than you will ever regurgitate on the page or on air.

Read all you can about the subject. Read the specialist magazines. Follow the relevant blogs. Government bodies and NGOs often publish newsletters about their activities. You will need to understand how recruitment

mechanisms work, what labour migration is about and how national and international legal instruments come into effect.

When an opportunity such as workshops to learn more formally about your adopted subject area presents itself, take it. Every opportunity helps build up knowledge and develop a network.

Resources

ILO topic portal on fair recruitment.

www.ilo.org/fairrecruitment

ILO topic portal on forced labour.

www.ilo.org/forcedlabour

Thomson Reuters Foundation, Ending modern slavery.

<https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en/reports/modern-slavery>

B. Don't get lost in the subject

Your job is to explain specialist issues to an audience of ordinary, non-specialist people. Your job is to explain it clearly. That means:

- Translating jargon into everyday language;
- Cutting out irrelevant detail;
- Explaining things which are not clear;
- Making your stories relevant to readers, listeners or viewers.

C. Don't be alone

Get in touch with others who are covering the same beat. They can provide assistance with information, contacts, story ideas and advice. Consider joining or forming your own local group, or at least having an occasional informal get-together.



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