



International
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Understanding patterns of structural discrimination against migrant and other workers in some countries of South and West Asia



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► **Understanding patterns of structural discrimination against migrant and other workers in some countries of South and West Asia**

Background paper

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► Foreword

Discrimination in the world is commonly included in labour related reports. However, quite often, public discourse focuses on specific cases of discrimination rather than analysing systemic discrimination. Trade unions and other labour activists regularly publish global and national reports on discriminatory labour practices. While the documentation of specific cases of labour discrimination is, no doubt, very important, when this discrimination is framed in such a way, the issue appears to be linked to the practices of a few employers and poor law enforcement.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) reports related to equality of opportunity and discrimination, by the Committee of Experts for the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, highlight the specific laws and policies that underpin some forms of labour discrimination at a national level. This background paper reviews those many annual reports and analyses some of the processes that shape laws and policies.

Freedom from discrimination in the world of work is one of the four pillar of fundamental principles and rights at work. While many ILO publications on fundamental principles and rights at work deal with child labour, forced labour, and freedom of association and collective bargaining, fewer explore labour discrimination and equality. Even fewer publications explore the structural nature of discrimination in the world of work, including its genesis, and the link between all categories of fundamental rights. This paper is an attempt to start filling that gap – it sheds light on how all fundamental principles and rights at work are closely connected. This paper is not exhaustive, but it lays out some of

the key parameters that should be considered by anyone reviewing discriminatory work practices in connection with migration.

The recent 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has brought to light how certain people were more indispensable, or protected, than others. This paper illustrates examples of how the pandemic and the resultant multilayered crises that impacted countries in South and West Asia have unequally affected the world of work. More broadly, increasingly some media promotes without any evidence, a public and nationalist discourse linking immigration, the unemployment rate of nationals, and poor national economic performance.

This paper problematizes such narratives and explores the processes and political dynamics that shape job markets and opinions about migrant and other vulnerable workers. The analysis is helpful in deepening the general understanding of the web of policies and political processes that underpin discrimination in the world of work and people's labour mobility. This paper was prepared within the framework of Work in Freedom programme, a development cooperation programme of the ILO. The programme's central goal has been to reduce vulnerability to forced labour, and yet one of the main lessons it has learned over the past seven years is that discrimination in the world of work is a root factor underpinning forced labour practices. To prevent forced labour, one has to first tackle labour discrimination. We hope this paper will contribute to a better understanding of discrimination patterns for policymakers, social partners, UN organizations as well as other analysts and practitioners.

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