P04 / Temporary labour migration regimes post-pandemic

Topic : OTHER SECTORIAL POLICY

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The pandemic disrupted the world of work, the lives of workers, and the ability to move across borders. Migrant workers, in particular, were detrimentally impacted by unilateral policies taken by governments. Many regular migration pathways consist of schemes that provide temporary contracts for low-skilled and semi-skilled jobs wherein workers have limited pathways to permanency and barriers to integration. Prior to the pandemic, it was well-documented that many of these workers faced discrimination and exploitation (Castles and Delgado, 2008, Silvey and Parreñas 2020, Spitzer and Piper 2014), but COVID-19, and the responses implemented by various countries, have amplified the difficulties that migrants face (Withers, Henderson and Shivakoti, 2021). This panel examines how COVID-19 impacted the working conditions, living conditions, and lives of temporary migrant workers and whether the pandemic resulted in a rethinking of policies related to temporary migration and its sustainability.

As mobility increases worldwide, global, regional and bilateral migration governance regimes become important (Martin, Martin and Weil, 2006). Temporary labour migration has been linked to the migration and development debate (de Haas 2010) and how it contributes to the economic development of labour-sending countries through remittances (Ratha 2021). A more skeptical account, meanwhile, contends that low-wage labour migration of this kind reproduces existing global inequalities while exposing migrant workers to extreme financial, physical and psychological risk in return for modest wages (Wickramasekara, 2016, Wise and Covarrubias 2009). Though this debate is longstanding and multifaceted; the circumstances brought about by COVID-19 do afford a unique opportunity to appraise the more contentious aspects of temporary labour migration and the relative stability and sustainability of remittances as a source of developmental capital for labour-sending countries (Deshingkar 2019, Grugel and Piper 2007, Triandafyllidou, 2022, Yeoh 2020, Yeoh, 2022).

The objective of this panel is to provide new research on the impact of COVID-19 on current labour migration schemes and its future. It examines what the pandemic-related policy responses mean for temporary migrant workers; unpacks the concepts of ‘essential’ mobility and ‘essential’ work; analyses the difficulties of return and reintegration; and discusses issues related to the sustainability of temporary mobility schemes that rely on exploitation and precarity of workers.

Key research questions include (but are not limited to):

1. How did the pandemic impact temporary labour migration regimes?
2. How can we rethink and redesign temporary labour migration regimes to provide better protection for migrant workers (in general and during future crises)?

The scientific relevance of this panel is analysing the systemic failures in protecting migrant workers in temporary status globally during and after the pandemic. The panel will critique the current temporary labour migration schemes and discuss innovative policy thinking on sustainably managed migration schemes that builds on migrant experiences under the pandemic.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The pandemic was particularly difficult for temporary migrant workers around the world as many lost their jobs, had to live in difficult conditions in dormitories, face problems related to health and safety and had to return home without pay or savings. For this panel, we look forward to receiving papers that explore the effect of the pandemic on the temporary labour migration regimes and policies surrounding them. We would like the panel to explore the different policies and practices related to such regimes and to question and critique its sustainability. Some key research questions include but are not limited to the following: how did the pandemic impact temporary labour migration regimes? And how can we rethink and redesign temporary labour migration regimes to provide better protection for migrant workers (in general and during future crises)?

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