

## Concept Note 5

# The Opportunities of Circular Migration

### GOAL

This session will explore how well-governed circular migration can benefit both sending and receiving regions. It will analyze the role of local and regional governments in promoting legal, fair, and sustainable migration pathways that support skill development, territorial resilience, and regional cooperation.

### CONCEPTUALISATION

Circular migration refers to the temporary, recurrent movement of individuals between countries, typically driven by employment, education, or seasonal labor opportunities. Unlike permanent migration, it holds the potential for mutual benefit: countries and regions of origin may gain through remittances, skills transfer, and return investment, while host regions address labor market shortages and benefit from diverse and flexible workforces.

When effectively governed, circular migration can contribute to sustainable development, knowledge exchange, and improved livelihoods in both origin and destination regions. However, in the absence of robust policy frameworks, it can lead to adverse outcomes, including labor exploitation, precarious working conditions, social disintegration, and the loss of human capital. Informal recruitment channels, lack of social protection, and inadequate reintegration pathways further diminish its developmental impact.

To fully harness the benefits of circular migration, it is imperative to establish comprehensive governance systems that uphold migrants' rights at all stages of the migration cycle. This includes transparent recruitment practices, recognition of qualifications and skills acquired abroad, access to social protection, and reintegration support on return. Gender-sensitive policies are also essential, given that women migrants often face disproportionate barriers and vulnerabilities.

Local and regional governments play a strategic and increasingly recognized role in

shaping and managing circular migration processes. Their close proximity to both migrant communities and local labor markets equips them to assess sectoral workforce needs, identify outbound migration opportunities, and coordinate targeted pre-departure services such as vocational training, language preparation, and legal counseling. Upon return, these governments can support reintegration through tailored programs—ranging from entrepreneurship and business incubation schemes to psychosocial counseling and financial literacy training.

Furthermore, by aligning circular migration with territorial development strategies, local governments can mitigate the negative consequences of outmigration—such as rural depopulation and youth disengagement—while fostering innovation, investment, and knowledge circulation. Migrants often serve as translocal connectors, bringing back new ideas, skills, and networks that can revitalize local economies and strengthen community resilience.

Effective circular migration schemes typically rely on multilevel and multi-stakeholder partnerships involving local authorities, national governments, international organizations, private sector actors, and diaspora networks. Such collaboration ensures that migration policies are integrated with broader development objectives and that migrants' contributions are fully recognized and maximized.

This session will present concrete examples, institutional frameworks, and policy instruments that have successfully leveraged circular migration to enhance skills development, promote inclusive labor mobility, and strengthen territorial cohesion.

## **QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

- How can national policies ensure that circular migration protects migrants' rights while supporting development in both sending and receiving regions?
- What practical steps can local governments take to link circular migration with local labor needs and reintegration support?
- How can international partners and diaspora networks help strengthen skills transfer and investment through circular migration?
- What safeguards are needed to make recruitment fair, recognize overseas skills, and ensure social protection for migrants?
- How can circular migration policies better address the specific needs and challenges faced by women migrants?