



Can vocational training and apprenticeships programs change migration intentions and behavior?

Irregular migration has harmful effects on millions of people around the world, who risk exploitation, physical harm, and death in their search for better living conditions. In response to this ongoing crisis, millions of dollars are invested globally each year to address the root causes of irregular migration.

One strategy to achieve this goal is to develop and improve people's skills to facilitate their entry and participation in labor markets. Resulting employment opportunities could potentially affect migration through two channels: by diminishing the financial appeal of migrating from the country of origin; and by improving economic opportunities through which they can get access to safer migration methods, after which newly acquired skills can increase their employability in the destination country. Regardless of the channel this process follows, however, its overarching goal is a reduction in irregular migration.

3ie conducted a mixed-methods systematic review of ten impact evaluations and seven qualitative studies on the effects of classroom-based and on-the-job skills training programs on migration-related outcomes.

Highlights

What are the effects of labor market skills development programs on migration?

- There is not enough evidence on skills-based active labor market policies (ALMPs) targeting migration. The small number of studies available show no evidence of an effect on intention to migrate or migration behavior.
- Only two studies specifically targeted irregular migration.

Considerations for future policy and programming

- Commission rigorous impact evaluations to fill evidence gaps.
- Design programs that explicitly target potential migrants.
- Collect primary data to establish intervention acceptability and confirm assumptions of the theory of change.
- Building skills and strengthening local workforce capability may address short-term “demand-side” issues; however, they will fail to achieve longer-term impacts on irregular migration if solutions for “supply-side” economic root causes (e.g., lack of local labor market and economic opportunities) are left unaddressed.
- Anticipate that migration decision-making is complex and that successful programs may not change an individual's desire to migrate but may in fact increase their capacity to do so. If few legal channels exist, individuals may choose irregular pathways. Ensure that programs do not unintentionally exacerbate these dynamics by anticipating and planning for this possibility during program design.

Overview

There is a need for systematic evidence on what works, for whom, and at what cost to address root causes of irregular migration. One such root cause is economic insecurity, and one approach to improving this is through ALMPs. Creating employment opportunities through the demand side of labor markets assumes that when workers are provided with a set of skills, they

will be able to find a job and improve their wealth.

Migration programming further assumes that this will deter irregular migration—either by making it less attractive or by providing the means by which people can use regular and safer migration channels. But what does the evidence say about this cause-and-effect relationship between

skills-based ALMPs and migration? Our primary objective for this review was to identify, assess, and synthesize evidence on the effect of skills-based ALMPs on intermediate outcomes that influence eventual migration and final migration behavior outcomes. We aim to facilitate the use of evidence in informing policy and practice decisions within the field of irregular migration programming.

Main findings

We found a small body of evidence indicating no effect of skills-based ALMPs on migration; however, most included studies have issues that may affect internal validity, and all but two studies do not specifically target potential migrants. New, high-quality evidence on irregular migration programming may produce different results.

The studies did not report the cost-effectiveness of interventions in relation to migration outcomes.

The qualitative evidence base, though also very limited, shed some light on potential program design components, contextual factors, and population characteristics that may hinder or encourage enrollment and uptake of the training interventions included in the review. With limited uptake, it is unlikely that the interventions will result in altered outcomes.

Program design and implementation elements that can encourage uptake include: providing targeted outreach and sensitizing target populations in the early stages of the program;

providing certificates that serve as credentials in a timely manner; providing sufficient incentives; and ensuring that programs are appropriately designed. Design considerations include language of delivery, program duration and intensity, and location accessibility and safety. Context and population characteristics—such as social norms around gender and equity, and participants' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, attitudes and interests—may also influence uptake and should be considered.



Table 1: Number of studies and findings by outcome

Outcome	# of IEs reporting on this outcome	Main findings
Migration behavior	6	No evidence of a significant effect (results did not differ by gender)
Attempted migration	4	No evidence of a significant effect
Intention to migrate	3	No evidence of a significant effect
Knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about migration	2	Not comparable enough for a quantitative synthesis

Overview of evidence

The review drew on evidence from ten randomized controlled trials and seven qualitative programmatic studies; these covered six programs implemented in Sub-Saharan African countries, two implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one each in South Asia and East Asia. Two of the programs specifically targeted

potential migrants, the rest targeted vulnerable youth. The average age of participants ranged from 16 to 31. Participants had little experience with the labor market and thus a high potential to benefit from training.

Half of the studies evaluated classroom-based training programs,

such as vocational training, as a standalone treatment. One study facilitated access to vocational training through vouchers. The rest focused on apprenticeship approaches, either as standalone interventions or combined with classroom-based training.





Table 2: Characteristics of programs evaluated by included studies

Program	Country	Skills-building training modality	Other components	Intervention duration (months)
CTIP ^a	Cambodia	Classroom	Job-search platform	N/A
Information campaigns and vocational training ^a	The Gambia	Classroom	Information campaign	6
Vocational training and job assistance	Uganda	Classroom	Worker referrals	6
TEVETA program	Malawi	On-the-job	N/A	3
STAR	Bangladesh	Classroom and on-the-job	N/A	6
A Ganar	Honduras	Classroom and on-the-job	Employment referrals	7–9
A Ganar	Guatemala	Classroom and on-the-job	Employment referrals	7–9
National Apprenticeships Program	Ghana	On-the-job	N/A	18–48
Vocational training vouchers	Kenya	Vouchers for classroom training	Information campaign	20
Youth Startup Business Grant Program	South Sudan	Classroom	Unconditional cash grant	12

Note: ^a These interventions focused on irregular migration and targeted potential migrants.

Implications for policy and programming

Consider collecting primary data to establish the acceptability and appropriateness of interventions, and to confirm that assumptions within any program's theory of change reflect the concerns and needs of participants and are context-appropriate. Migration decision-making is often driven by a combination of factors in addition to economic insecurity. A program that fails to account for all primary drivers may lead to low uptake and diminish the rigor of impact evaluations.

Because migration decision-making is complex, successful programs may not change an individual's desire to migrate but may in fact increase their capacity to do so. If few legal channels exist, individuals may still choose irregular pathways. Ensure that programs do not unintentionally exacerbate these dynamics by anticipating and planning for this possibility during program design.

Building skills and strengthening local workforce capability may address short-term "demand-side" issues; however, they will fail to achieve longer-term impacts on irregular migration if solutions for "supply-side" economic root causes (e.g., lack of local labor market and economic opportunities) are left unaddressed.

If evidence generation is appropriate and a priority for the investment, ensure there are adequate resources for evaluation. This means that evaluated programs are of an adequate scale to ensure that impact evaluations are sufficiently powered for minimum detectable effect sizes. Additionally, ensure that there is adequate funding for impact evaluations within the larger investments.

Implications for future research

We found a dearth of rigorous impact evaluation evidence on the effect of skills-based ALMPs on migration, which covered programs in only 10 countries. We need more high-quality mixed-methods evaluations that cover a broader range of geographies in order to draw robust conclusions and identify interventions that will work across a broad range of contexts.

Future studies should also examine effects on population subgroups, including by sex, age, or disability. In this review, we were only able to examine sex differences, and this was only for a small subset of included studies.

Studies should also collect and report data on costs in order to examine cost-effectiveness. Without cost data it is difficult to use study findings to inform future investment decisions.



What is a systematic review?

3ie systematic reviews use rigorous and transparent methods to identify all of the studies that qualify for analysis and synthesis to address a

specific research question. Reviewers identify published and unpublished studies and use theory-based, mixed methods to analyze and synthesize

the evidence from the included studies. The result is an unbiased assessment of what works, for whom, why and at what cost.

About the review

This brief is based on the Systematic Review on the Effect of Skills-Based Active Labor Market Interventions on Migration Outcomes, 3ie Systematic Review 48 by María Daniela Anda León, Carolyn Huang, Miriam Berretta, Promise Nduku, Andile Madonsela, and Shannon Shisler.

The review analyzed the effectiveness of skills-based active labor market interventions on migration outcomes from impact evaluations identified in the 3ie evidence gap map Addressing root causes and drivers of irregular migration by Miriam Berretta, María Daniela Anda León, Carolyn Huang, and Shannon Shisler. This evidence gap map used a systematic search to

identify and map the evidence base of impact evaluations and systematic reviews of interventions that aim to address the root causes of irregular migration in low- and middle-income countries.

The evidence gap map report and the full technical review are open access and available on the 3ie website.

About this brief

This brief was authored by María Daniela Anda León and Shannon Shisler. The review was developed by 3ie with funding from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Guatemala through the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID) funded project, Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration in Guatemala. The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not represent the opinions of IOM, USAID, the U.S. government, 3ie, its

donors or its Board of Commissioners. Any errors or omissions are also the sole responsibility of the authors. This brief was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta, Mallika Rao, Tanvi Lal, and Durgadas Menon.



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December 2023