



US-bound refugees attending a cultural orientation class in Mae La Camp, Thailand (Photo: © Pindie Stephen/IOM, 2008)

# Migrant Training

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an inter-governmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

## Introduction

Migration is a recognized phenomenon occurring on a global scale, involving refugees, labour migrants, immigrants and students alike. IOM offers a variety of migration services and assistance to governments and individuals, which in turn facilitates the migration process and enhances migrants' chances of succeeding in his or her new environment. One of these services is Migrant Training, in which the teaching of life skills and attitudes both prepares and empowers the migrant for his or her new life abroad. This training is generally delivered before the migrant's departure, and is designed based on the specific needs of the target population.

IOM has been providing migrant training since the early 1950s. At the request of governments, IOM delivers migrant training for various categories of migrants including refugees and humanitarian entrants resettling in a third country, labour migrants taking up employment on short or long term contracts, and immigrants. IOM's training activities have taken place in over 50 countries worldwide. Currently, IOM's migrant training has a combined programme value of approximately USD 7.5 million, serving some 46,000 participants annually.

Traditionally, participants in IOM's migrant training programmes have been refugees accepted for resettlement in a third country. During the last two decades, however, IOM has widened its scope by also offering training to migrant workers, including skilled and non-skilled labour migrants, and immigrants and their family members.

## Rationale

Anyone moving to a country where cultures, traditions and practices are different from one's own can be expected to undergo an adjustment period of variable duration and difficulty. Refugees, for example, accepted for resettlement to third countries, often come straight out of refugee camps and have little, if any, knowledge of the societal and economic realities of the destination countries. Migrants, whether they are refugees, immigrants or workers, or simply individuals joining their family members for a new life abroad, frequently have unrealistic and, consequently, inaccurate expectations of their future life in the destination country. These expectations not only cause stress to the newcomers upon their arrival, but may also cause undue pressure on the social service providers of the host community who work hard to help the newcomers adjust. Unrealistic expectations can cause further strain on the relationship with the general public, thus weakening prospects for integration.

The provision of migrant training, which covers aspects such as pre-employment orientation, cultural orientation, language training, and/or technical/vocational training, reduces anxiety on the part of refugees and migrants by painting a more realistic picture of what awaits them. Training also provides them with the coping skills to deal with the unfamiliar, while at the same time helps shape positive attitudes towards life in their new society. Migrant training also provides an opportunity to establish links between the country of origin and the country of destination, as well as an opportunity for the receiving community to learn more about the culture and profile of new arrivals.

## Objectives

Although the training methodology and curricula content vary depending on the migrant's needs and abilities, as well as the realities of the destination country and requirements of the donor, there are broad themes that are shared and applicable throughout. The general objectives of these training programmes can be summarized as follows: (a) to provide participants with up-to-date factual information about the country of destination; (b) to assist participants in developing the skills needed to succeed in their new environment or workplace; and (c) to explore attitudes necessary for successful adaptation and integration. Migrant training empowers participants to adapt more rapidly and successfully to the day-to-day demands of



IOM International Organization for Migration

17 route des Morillons, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

Tel: +41.22.717 91 11 | Fax: +41.22.798 61 5

E-mail: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int) | Internet: <http://www.iom.int>

their new environment and to express their competencies not just at an economic level but also at a social and cultural level.

### Curriculum Content and Variations

IOM recognizes that curricula are “living” documents that are constantly being adapted and updated to meet the specific needs and abilities of each new group. General topics covered for all participants typically include practical information about the country of destination while at the same time address issues such as cultural adjustment and integration.

Migrant training curricula take into account the core facts regarding the country of destination, including geography, climate, housing, laws, employment, education, health and social services, and transportation. Topics such as social norms and values, cultural adaptation and coping with culture shock are spiraled throughout the curricula. As IOM often facilitates and arranges the logistics and travel for migrants, the training also focuses on the journey itself, taking into consideration the departure and arrival protocol, airline regulations and safety, as well as information on customs, security, and immigration formalities.

Content will vary, depending upon the target group. While refugees will need to understand and learn about the resettlement realities which await them, including health and social services, migrant workers, on the other hand, will be presented with employment-specific information such as contracts, benefits, rights and responsibilities, remittances, banking systems, investment opportunities and accreditation. They will also be given the chance to gain a better understanding of the expectations of their prospective employers, including the skill levels required, and the cultural and psychosocial factors that may affect the migration process. All migrants, whether they are temporary or permanent, will benefit from understanding the cultural norms and values they will encounter as they navigate from the known to the unknown, and make connections between that which they have experienced and that which is still new.

### Training Methodology

Training sessions are “learner-centred”. Skilled trainers directly involve the participants and ensure that they take ownership of the classes. The training methodology is hands-on, meaning that participants are not simply told about life in their new country, but are given the opportunity to experience it through role-plays, case studies, problem-solving activities, games, debates, and other activities that require their full involvement. Often power point presentations are used to highlight the topics and student handbooks provided with the aim of ensuring that whatever knowledge is presented is actively assimilated by the participants. Questions are encouraged, and opportunities for evaluation and follow-up are often built into the training models. Effective training requires the trainers to know the background of their participants. Trainers draw parallels and connections between a participant’s point of reference and their own understanding of the societal expectations and behavioral norms of the destination country. Trainers must be sensitive to the cross-cultural issues that may challenge the participants’



Labour migrants in Mauritius undergoing a pre-employment training (Photo: © Michael Newson/IOM, 2008)

own cultural values and traditions, and create opportunities for open discussions on a range of topics. Sensitive topics are raised in a manner which is both respectful and non-judgmental, in which participants can explore their own attitudes and concerns.

The training courses can last anywhere from one to ten days (5 to 50 contact hours), or in cases where language training is also provided, for a month or longer. The length of a course often depends on a variety of factors; the training setting (i.e. urban or camp), level of need, and practical considerations and requirements of the donor. Delivery of sessions is flexible and training may even be scheduled on weekends or in the evenings to meet the needs of the participants. Class sizes vary, as well as the age range of the participants. Through its many years of experience, IOM has come to understand that certain categories of migrants, namely refugees, have distinct needs, especially the pre-literate, children, the physically challenged, and youth. Often child care is provided and transportation costs reimbursed to ensure participation levels are high.

### New Directions

In coordination with governments, IOM is expanding its services into other non-traditional areas, including post-arrival information dissemination. Through providing post-arrival information on new groups, the capacities of the receiving agencies are strengthened. IOM is also in a position to conduct needs assessments of prospective groups (including refugees and migrants) and to compile cultural profiles that address the newcomers’ background, their history of persecution (if applicable), and any cultural and traditional practices that may clash with those of the receiving country. IOM will continue to work closely with relevant government agencies to identify further needs, which may benefit the host communities.

### Conclusion

By taking advantage of IOM’s training programmes migrants, host communities, and governments all stand to benefit. Migrants gain from having a better understanding of the migration process, which contributes towards reduced levels of anxiety while increasing the overall chances of successful integration. Host communities gain through a decreased need to support the newcomers, while fostering an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect among all community members. And, finally, governments gain through decreased costs as newcomers become self-sufficient, productive and integrated members of the receiving society more quickly.