

John Manzongo in Turin, Italy

Governments must craft and sign multilateral agreements that ensure migrant workers' social protection rights are safeguarded, the International Labour Organisation has said.

Addressing more than 50 international participants to the Labour Migration Academy underway here at International Training Centre of International Labour Organisation yesterday, programme manager Ms Miriam Boudraa said many countries were losing out on their workforce living and working in other countries.

"Many migrant workers do not have basic rights, they are losing many benefits when they finally decide to return to their home countries where many will eventually sink into poverty.

"There is a strong need for governments to enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements at regional or international level on how to deal with labour migrants.

"The agreements would then enable countries to transfer workers' social benefits which they would have contributed while working in foreign lands. This would also benefit the origin country of the migrant worker," she said.

Ms Boudraa said there were policy options and instruments which countries can use in tackling labour migration such as regional integration, state agreements on social protection and regularisation of migrant workers whether regular or irregular migrants.

She said some countries are benefiting economically from migrant workers' benefits that they usually confiscate after the workers return to their countries after deportation or sickness.

"A worker is like a tightrope walker who is at risk from falling off when there is no safety net to receive him or her. Social protection thus becomes very critical as it acts as the safety net and fallback plan whenever an unexpected job loss occurs.

"Migrant workers in all the continents face serious challenges such as poor remuneration, forced labour, harassment, rape, torture, diseases due to lack of protective clothing and unethical working hours.

"When a migrant worker falls sick, they lose their job and if lucky are repatriated back home where his or her government starts taking care of them indirectly through social services contributed to by other workers," she added.

She said the ILO created various conventions that protect social rights of workers and ratified by different countries yet they are not being utilised to protect the workers. The course runs from July 2-13, 2012.