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## Go West, Young Folk

### India should work to ease barriers to labour mobility

The ministry of overseas Indian affairs has signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), an independent intergovernmental organisation, which has signed up 120 countries as its members to facilitate migration of Indian workers to EU countries. If that means it will be easier for Indians to migrate to continental Europe in future, it is a win-win proposition on all sides.

The world may be globalised with respect to the flow of capital, goods and services, but labour flows are still heavily restricted by national governments. Between 2000 and 2010 several industrial nations, including Germany, Austria, Spain, Sweden, Greece, Italy and Japan, will see their working populations shrink. Rapid ageing of populations is creating, for the first time, barriers to further economic expansion in Europe and Japan. With fewer and fewer tax-paying workers being asked to support huge populations of pensioned-off seniors, something is bound to give. The way out for these countries is to import workers.

EU countries need workers in areas as diverse as IT, health care, tourism, manufacturing and agriculture. India gains by sending its workers abroad. Migration relieves excess population pressures in India and the country can tap its migrant population for remittances, investments, skills and know-how. New Delhi ought to keep tabs on the international labour market and disseminate widely information about available job opportunities. It can work with other nations to facilitate the mutually beneficial process of migration, hammering out visa and taxation issues and making sure that Indian workers are fairly treated abroad. It can run training and certification courses so that labour shortages in a specific area can rapidly be filled with workers from India. It should also keep a watch on racketeers who aim to defraud people by promising them jobs abroad. That should work well with having official channels through which workers can migrate in checking fraud and human trafficking.

It's a shame that India is not yet one of IOM's 120 member states. New Delhi, which has such a large stake in migration and labour mobility issues, should be seeking to play a far more proactive role within the organisation. IOM should be invited to set up permanent offices in New Delhi, if not other Indian cities as well.