Surveillance to Solidarity: Peacebuilding for Migrant Worker Protection Through Mobile Platforms

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Phenomenon: The direct and indirect forms of violence that emerge from migration systems, particularly as they impact migrant workers.

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as the "movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new location," which can be international or internal, with rural-urban migration being a form of internal migration (IOM 2024, paragraph 1).
- According to the UN OHCHR, the term "migrant worker" is defined by the Convention on Migrant Workers in article 2, paragraph 1, as: "a person who is to be engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national".

Challenges for Migrant Workers

- Structural Vulnerability and Legal Exclusion (ILO 2011)

- Mistrust by locals in host country (Kalleberg and Hewison 2013)

- Barriers to Reporting and Support Services (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Chok 2013)

Technology: Digital Platforms

- Focus: Mobile Platforms such as LabourLink and WorkerConnect

Definition:

- Digital platforms are online infrastructures that facilitate information exchange, aggregate supply and demand, and build trust between users (Asadullah, Malo, and Ribeiro 2018, 20).

- A specific subset of these are mobile platforms, which are digital platforms designed to operate on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets (National University of Singapore 2017).

- LabourLink and WorkerConnect are examples of mobile platforms designed to collect feedback and deliver information directly to workers via mobile phones.

Advantages of Mobile Platforms

- Provide Access to Legal Rights and Protective Information (U.S. Department of Labor)

- Create Two-Way Communication Between Workers and Employers

  - LabourLink's mobile surveys and WorkerConnect's feedback tools create opportunity for workers to safely share concerns with employers, helping resolve issues early and prevent abuse

- Reduce Isolation and Empower Workers (Alexander and Otiende 2015).

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Potential Negative Effects of Mobile Platforms

- Inequitable Access and Digital Divide (Amnesty International 2024)

- Digital and Physical Security Risks (Border Report 2025)

- Bias in Perception (Hamilton et al. 2011, 36)

Recommendations

- Expand Access to Mobile Technology
  - Collaboration with NGOs and telecom providers to provide migrant workers with affordable and compatible devices
  - Expand free or subsidized internet access in high-risk migrant communities

- Strengthen Hybrid and Offline Support Channels for Mobile Platforms
  - To ensure migrant workers can still access vital resources despite potential digital barriers:
  - Increase Inspections at worksites and dormitories
  - Maintain hybrid support system
  - Confiscation of phones by employers limits workers' access to digital platforms, so offering offline alternatives helps ensure continued support and protection (Matlin et al. 2011)

- Integrate Mobile Platforms with Legal and Labour Support Networks
  - Link mobile tools like WorkerConnect with verified legal aid organisations and hotlines
  - Encourage employers and labour unions to formally adopt platforms like LabourLink

- Strengthen Anonymity and Data Protection