# The Migrant Pay Gap

## by Lauren Harrell

**According to the International Labor Organization's mission statement: "*The main aims of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues*".** In December of 2020, the ILO published a report in which they shared the findings of their research examining the migrant pay gap across 49 countries. This report, The Migrant Pay Gap: Understanding Wage Differences Between Migrants and Nationals written by Silas Amo-Agyei, analyzes the existing factors that lead to the prevalence and continual widening of this gap, with migrants earning less income than non-migrant nationals. While factors such as education level, gender, and age are able to be accounted for within the analysis, the majority of the various migrant pay gaps throughout the 49 countries surveyed, exist due to factors that are unaccounted for. The ILO asserts that these factors upholding the prevalence of the gap center around discrimination toward the migrant worker. It could have been beneficial to include within this report some examples of the instances of discrimination, in order to provide a stronger support this assertion. The report states: "*Measures to eliminate the unexplained part of the migrant pay gap can help to reduce overall wage inequalities across countries. In countries where the unexplained part of the migrant pay gap is significantly high, eliminating this gap would help enhance skills and jobs matching for men and women migrant workers, and promote equality as well as economic productivity and development across countries*." While there is no doubt that discrimination is a key factor in the migrant pay gap, further analysis should be devoted toward answering the question of why this factor is such a driving force of these pay gaps.



▶ Figure E-5: Working poverty among migrant workers before and after eliminating the unexplained part of the migrant pay gap

Source: S. Amo-Agyei (2020), *The Migrant Pay Gap: Understanding Wage Differences Between Migrants and Nationals*, *International Labor Organization (Labour Migration Branch)*

**The ILO's migrant pay gap report differentiates the 49 surveyed countries into two categories: High-Income Countries (HICs) and Low- and Medium-Income Countries (LMICs). The migrant pay gaps are found to be prevalent in both types of countries; however, the HICs were found to have gaps in which the migrants earned on average 12.6 % less per hour than the nationals, while the LMICs were found to have gaps in which the migrants earned on average 17.3% more per hour than the nationals**. The report states: "*A possible reason migrant workers tend to earn more on average than non-migrant workers in some LMICs, among others, is the likelihood of a relatively high proportion of temporary high-skilled 'expatriate' workers among the total migrant population in those countries*". Out of the 49 countries surveyed, 33 were HICs and 16 were LMICs. This conclusion drawn by the ILO could have had a stronger support if there were an even number of HICs to LMICs surveyed, in order to have more information to analyze in comparing the migrant pay gaps of the two. Equality among the number of countries within each category could have also provided a stronger support for the assertion that, on average, migrants working in LMICs earn a higher percentage of wages per hour than nationals, since the introduction of new data has the ability to change the overall percentages.

**With the current reality of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbating existing inequalities**, **it is important to shine a light on the many unjust disparities, including the migrant pay gap.** While acknowledging the issue is a necessary initial step toward rectifying the inequality, establishing policies to assist in future prevention and implementing combative structures is also needed, alongside training and education in order to break down the root causes of the discriminatory inequality.

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