

Language is powerful. It shapes the way we view things, the context in which we place things, and the way in which we frame things. Often, language implicitly informs our listeners of the way we view something and attaches a connotation to a word, subject, or idea; these suggestions may be positive or negative. Language used in the context of migration has the ability to empower, bestow agency, or attach skill to individuals. Conversely, language also has the power to disempower, remove agency, de-skill, as well as criminalize individuals. As such, it is important to consider how language is used to frame migration and what it is we that we actually mean to say.

Certain vocabulary is used when we view migration through a rights-based lens. In an effort to influence public discourse and the framing of migration and migrant workers, the following four terms are a sample of language commonly used when viewing migration through a rights-based lens.

- **Domestic Worker // Household Service Worker *versus* Domestic Helper // Household Helper // Maid**

Reproductive work, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, is considered to be women's work; more often than not this work is unpaid and is not even recognized as work. In many countries in Asia and the Middle East, domestic work is not included under labor laws and domestic workers are not afforded the same rights as other workers. Many individuals refer to these workers as maids, nannies, domestic helpers, household helpers etc. "Helper" fails to emphasize that actual work is being done and instead reinforces the idea that domestic work is not actually considered work. For myself, the use of terms such as maid or nanny de-skill the work that is required and often fulfill a stereotype.

Instead of using the terms listed above, migrants' rights advocates refer to this type of work as domestic work and the workers in these roles as domestic workers. In the Philippines, the government terms this as household service work and household service workers. Regardless of which term is used, the terminology here stresses that those hired for the domestic realm are engaging in actual **work**. There is a significant push from rights advocates for the media and the government to use this terminology. These terms reinforce what advocates are advocating for; for destination countries to recognize domestic work as work and to include domestic workers in their labor laws.

- **Country of Destination *versus* Receiving Country // Host Country**

The destination country is the country the migrant worker is going to for work. In my opinion, the term "country of destination" attributes agency to the migrant worker. In this, the migrant worker made a choice in which country they would like to find employment in.

The term "receiving" has a negative connotation. In the dictionary "receiving" refers to the receipt of goods in exchange for money. Not only does this term commodify the worker, it additionally removes agency from the migrant worker and insinuates that either the government of the migrant worker, or the country the migrant worker is bound for, has more authority in the outcome of the decision than the migrant workers themselves. Furthermore, the term host country stresses the temporary status of the worker and suggests that they are there at the munificence of the country of destination.

- **Country of Origin versus Sending Country**

The country of origin is where the migrant worker has come from; where the migration process began for the migrant worker.

The term sending country represents the commodification of the migrant worker, and is used in the same regard when referring to the trade exports of a country. This term suggests that the migrant worker is seen as a measurable good, or as an item with the potential for economic gain. Again, from my perspective this removes agency from the migrant worker and suggests that the government of the migrant worker has more voice in the migration outcome.

- **Undocumented Migrant // Irregular Status versus Illegal Migrant // Illegal Status or Irregular Migrants**

An undocumented migrant is a migrant without verified documents. This may include a work visa, residence visa, or identification document, such as a passport. An undocumented migrant may also be referred to as a migrant with an irregular status.

The use of the term “illegal” implies that a migrant worker has committed a crime solely because they are undocumented. Referring to a migrant worker in this context criminalizes the work and residence status of the migrant worker. It is important to note that a number of elements that lead to an undocumented status are not taken into consideration; a significant proportion of which would largely be out of control of the migrant worker.

The use of undocumented or irregular communicates that the circumstances in which these definitions arise can be diverse, varying, and context-dependent. Moreover, I believe these two terms highlight the true nature of migration in its current state of globalization.

Concluding Thoughts

For more information regarding a migration glossary through a rights-based perspective please visit: <http://recruitmentreform.org/campaign-glossary/>