There is growing attention to the fact that private companies working in Iraq and elsewhere utilize international employees (occasionally called Third Country Nationals or TCNs) to support their operations in the field. Although this attention is in general negative, it is quite common for private companies to engage the services of a global workforce. In a globalized economy, all transnational companies – whether their focus is manufacturing, mining, transportation or even security – look for employees with the required skill sets from local, regional, and international sources.

This is true of universities, hospitals, construction companies, and television stations. Even national armies engage the services of internationals. The British army, for instance, has maintained at least one regiment of Nepalese Gurkhas in their army since the middle of the 19th century, while the Indian army also makes extensive use of Nepalese citizens. The French Foreign Legion is comprised almost entirely of foreign citizens, and virtually every military in the world – including the United States – counts numbers of non-citizens among its ranks. Moreover, United Nations peacekeeping missions as well as the operations of regional organizations (such as the African Union and NATO) are built around the very idea of employing people of diverse nationalities.

While there have been attempts to restrict the recruiting of international employees for work in dangerous conflict and post-conflict environments, such efforts are misguided and ultimately do little more than obstruct the basic human right of individuals to choose their employment. There are many risky jobs in the world, from coal mining to construction, from assembly line work to artic fishing. Each of these professions carries an associated risk which was must be factored into an individual’s decisions to pursue employment in that field. The same is equally true of reconstruction and security work in conflict and post-conflict environments, though it is difficult to imagine vocations where the appropriate skills could have a more beneficial impact.

Although people working in challenging environments generally earn higher salaries by way of hazard pay, many international employees are enticed by the higher wages as they often live in developing countries where options for employment are limited. While larger wages may be attractive for some people, each individual must weigh the benefits against the many other factors of employment, including the associated risks. It is the responsibility of the company to inform individuals of the rewards as well as the risks associated with their employment, and it is the right of the individual to decide where and from whom to seek employment.