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Abstract: Researchers and international institutions have tried to solve a fundamental paradox in the politics of migration. While introducing stricter migration policy stands high on the agenda of many countries, demographic facts suggest that they will need to introduce more extensive labour immigration to avoid labour shortages. Meanwhile, attempts to introduce a legally binding international regime on labour mobility, most ambitiously through Mode 4 of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and as requested by developing countries, have had limited success. This article explores one of the political options for resolving this: regulating the movement of natural persons through free trade agreements. It examines three recently concluded free trade agreements (FTAs), the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), in an attempt to answer two questions. First, do the signatories commit to more expansive possibilities for labour mobility than through the GATS? Second, what has the political reception of such measures been? While most of the signatories are willing to schedule more far-reaching commitments through FTAs than through the GATS, these commitments typically fall within the realm of existing work permit systems in domestic law. In addition, we find examples of political backlash in countries that have included somewhat more ambitious mobility provisions in FTAs, particularly in Australia. These FTAs may still play a role by improving mutual recognition of skills, and limiting the impact of national reforms to restrict labour migration. However, we conclude that FTAs appear to be neither a manifestly successful instrument for significantly liberalizing labour mobility, nor an evidently desirable one. We call for a more holistic approach that refrains from temporary labour mobility programmes to meet permanent demand for labour, with respect to migrant workers' rights at its core.