

GFMD 2016 Second Thematic Workshop – Migration for Harmonious Societies

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Keynote Presentation

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Foreign Secretary Ambassador Shahidul Haque, Acting Secretary Begum Shamsun Nahar, distinguished Co-conveners Ambassador Encyla Tina Chishiba Sinjela and Ms. Romany Nanayakkara, IOM Director General Ambassador William Lacy Swing, distinguished fellow panelists, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman.

First of all, I would like to thank the Bangladesh GFMD Chair for inviting ILO to make one of the keynote presentations at this second GFMD thematic meeting on “Migration for Harmonious Societies”.

This meeting comes at a particularly important moment in time when many governments and societies around the world face the challenge of how best to address large movements of refugees and migrants, the theme of the United Nations General Assembly high-level meeting on 19 September.

Last December, the ILO released global and regional estimates of migrant workers, demonstrating that 150 million, or the majority of today’s 244 million international migrants, are migrant workers accounting for 72.7 per cent of the migrant population of working age (15 years and over) of 206.6 million.¹ **This means that labour markets and the world of work play a vital role in the topic we are discussing today.**

I would like to provide three insights from this labour perspective: (1) social justice as a common core value which binds all societies; (2) harmonious workplaces contribute to more cohesive societies and the role of the principal world of work actors, employers and workers, in fostering this; and (3) our institutional role in shaping a more balanced discourse and narrative around migration for employment at all levels.

¹ *ILO Global estimates on migrant workers, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2015, available at http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_436343/lang--en/index.htm.*

As many of you know, the ILO is the oldest UN organization, created in the aftermath of the First World War. The first line in the Preamble of its 1919 Constitution proclaims that “*universal lasting peace can be established only if is based on social justice*”. It then cautions that unjust conditions of labour creating hardship and deprivation for large numbers of people can lead to unrest and so imperil “*the peace and harmony of the world*”. An improvement of these conditions is therefore essential. The Constitution’s Preamble then goes on to list some of the key conditions such as regulation of the hours of work, prevention of unemployment, provision of an adequate living wage, protection of workers against employment-related injuries and illnesses, protection of children, young persons and women, provision for old age, recognition of the principles of equal remuneration for work of equal value and freedom of association, and “protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own”.²

The point here is that the quest for social justice continues to be a common core value that binds societies everywhere. This is articulated today in the concept of decent work for all, now firmly entrenched in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 8). Since 1919, ILO has adopted 189 legally binding Conventions and 204 Recommendations. These aim to create a global level-playing field in respect of the protection of fundamental rights of all workers,³ regulation of their working conditions, provision for their social protection, and establishment of effective labour market institutions, and also give particular attention to workers at greater risk of abuses such as those in specific sectors (e.g. agriculture, domestic work) and migrant workers.

As the ILO Constitution acknowledged in 1919, special attention needs to be paid to the protection of migrant workers, which is also recognized in the principle subsequently inserted into ILO’s amended Constitution in 1944 that “labour is not a commodity”. This is ever more important in our globalized world today especially when we see some governments (and other key actors in the migration process) transferring the costs of migration to workers, setting lower minimum wages for them and negotiating bilateral agreements that take advantage of the “weaker bargaining power” of migrant countries of origin.

Recently, the ILO Committee of Experts published its General Survey on the ILO migrant worker instruments,⁴ entitled “Promoting Fair Migration”, which will be discussed at the ILO

² ILO Constitution, 1919 (as amended), Preamble.

³ Abolition of forced labour, elimination of child labour, trade union rights and equality of treatment and non-discrimination in employment and occupation, as found in the eight ILO fundamental conventions.

⁴ International Labour Conference, 105th Session, *Promoting fair migration*, General Survey concerning the migrant worker instruments (Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) and Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) and Recommendations Nos 86 and 151), Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016. The General Survey had a very good response rate demonstrating the continuing high level of interest in this topic on political agendas at the national and regional level. 122 governments reported on the

International Labour Conference in two weeks' time. The Committee underscored the continued relevance of the core values embraced by these instruments, such as diversity, equality and non-discrimination, access to justice, fair recruitment, and the role of social dialogue in the formulation and implementation of rights-based and effective policies relating to migration for employment at all skill levels. In the General Survey, the question of migrant integration is very closely tied to adoption of national policies on equality of opportunity and treatment. I invite you to take a look at the Survey, as it also contains a useful listing of good practices reported by governments and social partners.⁵

Harmonious workplaces contribute to more cohesive societies. But this cannot occur when migrant workers experience unequal treatment, where some jobs are perceived to be only “migrant jobs”, and when local workers feel, rightly or wrongly, that their own jobs, wages and working conditions are being undercut by the arrival of migrants. Adequate protection of new workers, whether these are young people entering the labour market for the first time, migrants or refugees, is a sure way to protect all workers. It is also in the interests of business counteracting unequal competition and a “race to the bottom”. In this regard, **representative worker and employer organizations play an important role**, particularly at the local community level, such as when trade unions seek to ensure decent wages and working conditions for all workers through collective bargaining processes, thus alleviating the concerns of local workers. Businesses and employers also benefit from more diverse workforces.

A good example of collaboration between employers and workers in this area is the recent joint statement on the refugee crisis of the European economic and social partners, involving Business Europe and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).⁶ The statement views integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in the labour market as “essential”, and that it should also be seen as an opportunity in light of aging and shrinking workforces and growing skills shortages in Europe. The statement goes on to say that such integration needs to be based on a range of measures, the cornerstone of which is the assessment, testing and screening of the skills and competencies of refugees and asylum-seekers. Moreover, fostering “*a better integration and fair participation in the labour market is the only way to build solidarity and social cohesion and prevent further social unrest and rejection of refugees and migrant populations*”. The importance being given by governments and social partners to this question led to the decision of the ILO's Governing Body in March of this year to convene a

position of national law and practice regarding matters dealt with by the ILO migrant worker instruments, and 43 workers' and 18 employers' organizations provided information and observations.

⁵ 2016 General Survey on the ILO migrant worker instruments, op cit., at p. 116, listing good practices in equality and integration policies in Cabo Verde, Mexico, Morocco and Portugal.

⁶ Statement of the European Economic and Social Partners on the Refugee Crisis, Tripartite Social Summit, Brussels, 16 March 2015, available at https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/press-release/files/14.03.16_final_eco_soc_partners_message_refugee_crisis.pdf.

tripartite technical meeting of experts on 5-7 July to discuss and adopt guiding principles on access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market.

Integration of refugees and migrants into the labour market continues to be a challenge. In 2014, ILO and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) conducted a study on the labour market progression of newly arrived immigrants, including mobile EU citizens, in six European Union Member States.⁷ The study found that upward mobility in the labour market for this group of workers continues to be limited. Necessary remedial measures include the speeding up of labour market integration, i.e. through improved vocational and language training; strengthening the capacity of relevant labour market institutions, such as public employment services and training institutions, to deal with the specific needs of this group; and enhancing policy coherence.

My third point concerns the need to shape at all levels a more balanced discourse and narrative around migration and particularly around labour migration and mobility given the important role played by labour markets in societal inclusion and integration. As UN organizations, we have a responsibility to contribute to countering many of the false, inaccurate and negative narratives currently in circulation. On a more political level, last September, the ILO, together with the OECD and the World Bank, was requested by the Turkish G20 Chair to prepare a joint paper for the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting on the "Contribution of labour mobility to economic growth".⁸ This theme was then taken up in the Declaration of the G20 Ministers, which recognized that "*when managed carefully, effectively and in a fair manner, [international labour mobility] has the potential to make an important contribution to economic growth*".⁹ On a more practical level, just over one year ago, you heard from my colleague in our Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific describe our advocacy work on migrant workers in four major destination countries in Southeast and East

⁷ M. Benton et al., *Aiming Higher: Policies to Get Immigrants into Middle-Skilled Work in Europe*, MPI and International Labour Office, Washington, D.C., November 2014.

⁸ ILO, OECD, World Bank, "Contribution of labour mobility to economic growth", paper prepared for G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting, Ankara, 3-4 September 2015, available at http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/multilateral-system/g20/reports/WCMS_398078/lang--en/index.htm.

⁹ G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration: Creating quality jobs for all, investing in skills and reducing inequalities to promote inclusive and robust growth, Ankara, 3-4 September, available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_398847.pdf: "International labour mobility brings both challenges and opportunities. When managed carefully, effectively and in a fair manner, it has the potential to make an important contribution to economic growth. It may also help address current and future labour force imbalances and skills needs. Further work is needed to explore the complexity of these issues, including through sharing good practices" (para. 9).

Asia.¹⁰ This involved using evidence to challenge prejudicial public attitudes towards migrant workers as well as fostering interaction between migrant workers and local communities.

In the second half of last year, in collaboration with the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ILO held a global media competition for journalists entitled “Reporting fairly on labour migration”. The aim, in the words of the ILO Director-General, was “to recognize exemplary media reporting on labour migration, which provides balanced narratives and gives voice to migrant workers”.¹¹ We received many excellent submissions reminding us that there are powerful human stories to be told of the migration experience, which enrich both host societies and communities of origin, and can also contribute to improving and strengthening coherent policy responses.

¹⁰ “Changing Public Attitudes: Using Evidence to Drive Campaign and Advocacy Work”, Presentation by Anna Olsen, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Second GFMD Thematic Meeting, The role of communications in promoting widespread recognition of the benefits of migration, improving public perceptions of migrants, combating discrimination, and promoting integration, Geneva, 29 April 2015, available at <http://www.gfmd.org/meetings/turkey2014-2015/thematic-meetings>.

¹¹ See “Awarding Excellence in Reporting Fairly on Labour Migration”, <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/guidance-for-journalists/awarding-excellence/lang--en/index.htm>.