

Dear colleagues and friends,

Please find below the overall summary of the migration report. 37 participants from 26 different countries participated in the four week long debate on the migration report which was submitted by the International Labour Office in preparation of the 92nd International Labour Conference in June 2004.

1. Economic effects of migration

The debate circled around the question whether it is possible to create a win-win situation for migrants, receiving and sending countries. Migrants who choose to migrate on their own will do so because of a previously desperate situation or because they hope to improve their situation and/or that of their families. The receiving countries could alleviate their demographic problems by allowing more migrants in. However as migrants become old too and if they choose to stay in the new country the demographic problem is only delayed. Furthermore, sending countries are predicted to face demographic problems in the future as well which would be worsened by outward migration. The socioeconomic impact on the communities of the sending countries should not be underestimated.

There are two opposing arguments as to the economic impact of migration on the receiving country. On the one hand migrants might increase the internal market of the receiving country and thereby creating new jobs. On the other hand it is argued that migrants might be willing to undercut existing wages and labour conditions in their new country due to their desperate situation and thereby deteriorating existing labour conditions.

2. Rights and conditions of migrants

Trade unions should fight against injustice and for the promotion of solidarity through organizing regardless of the economic effects of migration. Organizing documented and undocumented migrants is utmost important to improve their situation. The workplace is the first point of contact of the migrants with their new country and that is why this is particularly important. Unions should actively fight against racism and xenophobia. Employers should be blamed for employing migrants under sometimes appalling conditions rather than blaming migrants for working in such conditions out of desperation. The UN convention

on migrant workers of 1990 and the ILO Conventions 97 and 143 on migrant workers are seen as important tools to improve the situation of migrant workers. The latter two however lack some important migrant groups such as posted workers.

3. Managing Migration

There was a consensus amongst the participants that some form of governance of migration is needed in order to alleviate potentially negative effects of migration such as the deterioration of working conditions and wages, even though the migration report shows that the impact of migration on these are minimal. Migration could best be governed by means of the establishment of tripartite commissions on migration. The term “managing migration” assumes that migrants can be “managed” which is clearly not the case and therefore the term should be avoided. It will only be possible to govern migration in a sustainable manner if we manage to create more equal opportunities between the North and South and particularly if we create jobs where they are needed. An international framework on migration as suggested in the World Commission Report on Globalization should take account of that and should also be based on existing ILO and UN instruments. The current GATS mode IV was criticized in that it would give employers relatively free hands in moving about their workers while workers would have relatively little control over their mobility.

4. ILO Activities with Governments and Social Partners

The discussion on ILO activities with Governments and Social Partners focussed on strategies and efforts to organize workers and activities to strengthen their rights as well as awareness raising to reduce the hostile debate about migrants. A number of examples on organizing migrant workers were put forward and development of documentation on good practices seems useful. Political campaigns to ensure migrants rights and public dissemination of information on national and international labour standards are important, as well as bilateral agreements between source and receiving countries. Awareness raising campaigns and use of special events/days to inform about migrants are essential to reduce the hostile debate about migrant workers. Tripartite structures to deal with the issues would ensure broad participation and commitment of everybody.