



Informal interactive hearings
with NGOs, civil society and the private sector

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Migration and the World of Work: Continuity and Change

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Opening panel: Looking back and beyond the HLD 2013

In the past seven years since the last high level dialogue, we have all been witnesses to both change and continuity in migration and the world of work. The Global Unions believe that in crafting the future of our engagement with the GFMD, we need to take these changes and continuities into serious account.

Much of migration continues to be about the search for decent work. Majority of migrants are still workers who leave home and country in search of better employment opportunities abroad. One recent changes in this regard, workers *from* developed countries migrating to developing countries in search of decent work. With the 2008 global financial recession and the Euro crisis, migratory patterns have been radically changed in a way that has highlighted the vulnerability not just of developing countries but of developed ones as well.

Austerity measures have led to loss of jobs and reduction of essential public services, which are critical safety nets in times of crisis. Joblessness and poverty are spreading rapidly, leaving people with no choice but to seek jobs elsewhere. A new phenomenon of a “public sector working poor” is, in fact, now spreading across Europe. Public sector workers who have lost their jobs are moving to other countries, with increasing waves of emigration among doctors, nurses, and teachers, as can be seen in Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland (ILO, 2013).

In this connection, we need to talk about development strategies not just about migration management strategies. What development strategy will create jobs within the framework of sustainable economies? In the developing world, this means the emergence of a strong national domestic economies. In the developed world, this development strategy must allow for economic recovery that puts primacy on curbing high unemployment rates.

These domestic economies need not be totally divorced from a global economy -- we are not saying that we want isolated economies -- but we believe that domestic economies have to exist and thrive if we want to genuinely address the issue of forced migration. The rhetoric on the right to work must include the right to find decent work at home and not just abroad.

Migrants continue to suffer victimization. We all know the global facts and figures on xenophobia-related discrimination, human trafficking, sexual abuse of migrant women workers,

etc. What has happened in the past decade – is more informality, more precarity of migrant worker leading to even lesser social protection. Decent work has been elusive also for young workers most of whom have been forced to accept any kind of job for any kind of compensation, in any location. Very high unemployment rates now plague the youth population.

At GFMD, we have repeatedly raised and discussed ways to protect the migrant workers. GFMD must take very strong position/ against migration-related bilateral agreements that violate or undermine existing international labor standards. Unfortunately, the GFMD has oftentimes been made the venue to negotiate such bilateral agreements but it has not been keen on assessing whether or not existing agreements are violative of migrants' rights.

GFMD may have bolstered the discourse on migrant workers' rights but these rights cannot be promoted through 'informal networks, with no monitoring systems, no genuine participation of civil society and no reference to the normative framework agreed upon at the international level'.¹ Such gaps have 'led to decisions and programs that overlook States' obligations to protect the human rights of migrant workers and their families'. Perhaps, this is because to a very large degree, access to justice and addressing violations is not the role of GFMD.

Promoting and defending the rights of migrant workers and the right for decent work is the mandate of the UN. The global unions assert that the United Nations especially the ILO and the UN Agencies in the GMG should take the leadership role in these matters. ILO already has the mandate to protect migrant workers' rights. Thus, what the HLD needs to do is to 'reaffirm the leadership of the ILO and the Global Migration Group and ensure that it is 'involved in global, regional and bilateral cooperation related to labour migration'.

Moreover, we in the trade union movement also utilize and expand existing spaces while we continue to strengthen our own ranks in collaboration with the broader civil society. Global forum are important mobilizing platforms but they should not be viewed as the end-all and be-all of the global struggle for migrant workers' rights. There is much work to be done on the ground. We have to work on 'the people' so to speak. To convince governments and societies that migrant workers are not commodities and have to be treated with dignity befitting any worker.

For sure, this movement is not totally absent as evidenced by the recent success of the global movement in mobilizing various social and political forces for the ILO Convention on the Rights of Domestic Workers. This is the kind of example that we must follow. The kind of movement that we must build. One that generates ideas acceptable to both its immediate constituencies - the workers -- as well the larger public. One that is relentless in persuading policymakers in all the parts of the globe that the gender and rights-based approach to migration policy should not remain in the realm of rhetoric. One that see workers as actors and not just as victims of societal change.

¹ "The UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development must deliver on a rights based approach to migration"

Much has remained the same but much has also changed. In the past seven years, we have seen a global environment increasingly becoming volatile for all workers but most especially migrant workers: global financial crisis, political instability in societies where pro-democratic movements are asserting themselves vis-à-vis longstanding authoritarian powers and displacement due to the crisis of climate change.

With crisis after crisis happening in practically all regions of the world, we need to act fast and in a manner that will redound to substantial and not just superficial change. Substantial change requires more than once-a-year discussions. More importantly, it requires actions not just discussions. The GFMD may be useful but it is very insufficient for reasons stated above. For us trade unionists, the GFMD can never be as effective as a self-organized, self-directed global movement that mobilizes around the urgent needs of workers, for migrants and all types of workers. Our aim is to bring back the dignity of the worker -- wherever he or she is working.

Thank you.