

Commission for Social Development
45th session, 7-16 February, 2007

Panel Discussion, Thursday, 8 February 3–6 pm:

Labour mobility, Youth and Families

Labour mobility consists of changes in the location of workers both across physical space (geographic mobility) and across a set of jobs (occupational mobility). At the aggregate level, labour mobility conveys important economic benefits.

The reallocation of workers across regions permits the exploitation of complementary resources in new places, while reallocation across sectors makes possible the use of new technologies and the growth of new industries. At the individual level, mobility allows for improvements in the economic circumstances of those whose skills or aspirations are a poor match for the job or location in which they find themselves. In both developed and developing countries, people often move from rural to urban areas to avail themselves of better employment opportunities.

Countries can also benefit from labour mobility because it allows them to respond to changing demographic patterns. But, the impact of labour mobility extends well beyond these economic considerations. Labour mobility is increasingly seen as important means to find decent work. Yet, in many countries, large scale labour mobility has led to increasing urbanization and depopulation of rural towns which have brought on new social and economic problems.

- What can governments do to promote the economic and social benefits of labour mobility for workers while minimizing the drawbacks to individuals, families and communities?
- To what extent does increased labour mobility, particularly across national borders, contribute to the expansion of productive employment (in receiving countries) and the reduction of unemployment (in sending countries), and how can this process be best managed?
- At the family level, how does labour mobility affect the structure, stability and traditional role of the family?
- In all countries, young people are the most mobile and are most likely to experience labour mobility. How are the employment opportunities of young people affected by their labour mobility?
- What impact does the labour mobility of young people have upon their families and communities?
- How should governments respond to these challenges?