

## **Decent Work: A Rights-based Approach to Labour Migration and Development**

### **High-level Meeting on Migration and Human Rights**

**(September 4, 2013)**

**Greg Vines, Deputy Director General, ILO**

Madame High Commissioner, excellencies, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to attend this high-level meeting on migration and human rights, an important event towards the 2013 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the ILO's decent work and rights-based approach to labour migration and development.

Despite some economic recovery in the developed countries today, employment prospects worldwide remain weak. Over 200 million people will be unemployed this year, and this is expected to rise by another 3 million in 2014. The world labour force is currently increasing by 40 million per year. The rate of increase is gradually declining but to keep up with the growth of world's labour force, some 470 million new jobs will have to be created over the 15 year period from 2016 to 2030. If there are higher participation rates, especially for women, the figure will be higher. Beyond the number of new jobs needed, there are around 900 million working poor who are unable to lift themselves and their family above the \$2 a day poverty line.

The search for decent work that can support decent lives for workers and their families is a primary driving force of international migration. Differentiated demographic and income trends are adding to migratory pressures. Environmental factors such as climate change are already a strong driver for migration within and across borders, including sea-level rise,

extreme floods and more persistent droughts, which could reverse many of the achievements in poverty reduction.<sup>1</sup>

The ILO estimates that over 50 per cent of the 214 million international migrants today are economically active: together with their families, migrant workers comprise over 90 per cent of this total, and migration is growing. UNDESA will release a report in the next few weeks estimating that the total number of migrants has increased by 9% to 232 million. Almost half of international migrants are women and one in eight is between the ages of 15 and 24. This highlights the labour dimensions of international migration.

Moreover, South-South migration is as large as South-North migration, each representing about one-third of the global total of international migrants.<sup>2</sup> About 50% of emigrants from developing countries move to another developing country, and largely within their region. Intra-regional mobility accounts for two thirds of global migration—within the regions 80% occurs between countries with a common border.

Migrant workers play important roles in labour markets and contribute to the economies and societies of home and destination countries. They spur development through the creation of new enterprises, strengthen ties between countries of origin and destination via the transfer of technology and skills, and their remittances improve migrant children's health and education.

Remittances by migrant workers sent back to their families now totals over \$500 billion dollars a year, \$400 billion of which goes to developing countries. This reflects 3 times the total amount of overseas development assistance and foreign direct investment combined. Much goes directly to families in rural areas and helps sustain living standards and provide some investment finance for small businesses, housing, children's' education and health care. As the Secretary General pointed out in his report to the High-level Dialogue, while immigration has negligible impacts on wages and employment for local workers in destination countries, it can serve to reduce wages and employment opportunities for low skilled workers if policies use immigration to promote structural labour shortages rather than growth in decent jobs.

---

<sup>1</sup> ILO: *Towards the ILO centenary: Realities, renewal and tripartite commitment*, Report of the Director-General, Report 1(A), International Labour Conference, 102nd Session, Geneva, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Migrants by origin and destination: The role of South-South migration", Population Facts No. 2012/3, UNDESA, Population Division, June 2012.

This can also lead to exploitation of migrant workers. Migrant workers, including women and youth, the low and middle-skilled and those in irregular situations are particularly susceptible to exploitation, including deceptive recruitment, dangerous working conditions and poor wages, discrimination, denial of social protection, exclusion from or only partially covered by labour laws. In worst cases, they may become victims of forced labour, human trafficking and smuggling. Their children are especially vulnerable to abuse as child labourers. Lack of fundamental rights at work such as rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, non-discrimination and equal treatment is often a human rights concern for migrant workers. Moreover, poor labour governance reduces the contributions of migrant workers to development, including the lack of effective labour market needs assessment, jobs matching, skills upscaling, portability of pensions, and reintegration to employment on return home.

The 2013 High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development and the consultation process for the design of the post 2015 development agenda presents the opportunity to address the gaps in international migration, including its labour market dimensions.

Many of the above protection gaps can be addressed by ratification and implementation of international labour conventions on migrant workers, the 8 ILO core conventions on fundamental principles and rights at work, as well as the UN Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers. Together these provide the legal framework for the governance of international labour migration.

In addition, the ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration provides a rights-based approach and good practices to ensure migrant worker protection.

As international migration grows, labour migration governance that focuses on the rights and protection needs of men and women migrant workers will become increasingly important to achieving equitable, sustainable, and inclusive development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Jobs are at the centre of development and economic growth, and decent work is at the centre of most migration. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda calls for a commitment to jobs with inclusive and equitable growth, “not growth at any cost or just short-term spurts in growth, but sustained, long-term, inclusive growth that can overcome the challenges of unemployment. The first priority must be to create opportunities for good and decent jobs and secure livelihoods... and ensure that it reduces poverty and inequality.”

There is growing consensus that the way forward is through job-centred development underpinned by respect for human rights, including labour rights, supported by a social protection floor and participatory process through social dialogue. This is central to themes of the High-level Dialogue. Facilitating labour migration and protecting the rights of the migrant workers to ensure them decent work will require that development strategies focus on decent work, equal treatment of migrant workers, and meeting the social and family needs of migrant workers. Effective actions for improved labour migration governance include:

- Harmonizing labour migration and employment policies, taking into account labour market needs and demographic trends;
- Promoting cooperation for well-governed and equitable processes of labour migration between origin and destination countries through all stages of migration;
- Encouraging the development and effective implementation of national laws to protect migrant workers, in particular the low and middle skilled workers, guided by international labour standards;
- Facilitating tripartite consultation and social dialogue; and
- Enhancing knowledge development and information sharing on migration and development.

As the Secretary-General has said in his report to the General Assembly last month: “One of the key elements of the emerging vision for the development agenda beyond 2015 is inclusive economic transformations ensuring decent jobs, backed by sustainable technologies...” Given its critical role in development, the ILO is seeking to ensure that productive employment and decent work for all is an explicit objective of the post-2015 development agenda.

In charting a more strategic course for labour migration and development activities, the ILO will convene a tripartite technical meeting this coming November that will assess the outcomes of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and consider possible areas for follow-up, particularly in light of the post-2015 development agenda. In its leadership as chair of the Global Migration Group in 2014, the ILO will continue to advise on the labour aspects of migration and development. Together with members of the GMG, the ILO will work for a productive process towards the post-2015 development agenda.

Thank you for your attention.