



PERC PAN-EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COUNCIL CRE CONSEIL REGIONAL EUROPEEN
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Agenda Item 8: Migration in Europe – trade union approach (FINAL)



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Migration in Europe – the trade union approach

1. Introduction

Following the “fall of the wall” in the beginning of the 1990s Europe has maintained a remarkably high dynamics of change across all economic, political, social and cultural domains of life. Mobility – of values and meanings, of people, of capital, of products is probably the new characteristic feature of the new level of freedom and new opportunities for societies and individuals to shape their own future while contributing to better understanding among diverse ways of life, tolerance to the “other” and a common feeling of belonging to Europe. The EU has played a pivotal role in the process of change with advancing its own internal integration and the overall success of the policy of enlargement towards the eastern part of the continent.

All the achievements however have come at a cost for individual citizens, for workers as well as for societies. The effects of the new chances for mobility quite often have been associated also with negative outcomes which can have long term implication – relocation of companies and migration of jobs to cheaper locations, social dumping within and across national borders, social exclusion and discrimination of a considerable part of the population, inter-cultural tensions, destabilizing of democratic structures and a notable rise of their political influence of populist and nationalist ideologies.

Anchored in the programme and policies of the ITUC and closely linked to the strategy and action plan of the ETUC on the issue of migration, PERC has its own dimension to add and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and the specific factors fueling the process. This document is a first step in shaping the PERC approach to the issues of migration in Europe, focusing on the key items for overall orientation as well as identifying practical actions that can be taken to help organizations cope with the problems. Obviously this is an area where PERC is embarking on a long-term engagement which will need to be developed and adapted in line with realities on the ground.

2. Shifting patterns of migration in Europe

The period of the 1990s has seen a massive exodus of people from Eastern Europe, in some cases close to 10 per cent of the population, mainly of working age. A significant part of these people ended in the Western part of Europe, first of all in the EU, facilitated by the unfolding of the enlargement process.

With the emerging of the current EU of 27 members and the evolving single labour market inside, a substantial part of the previous problems have become issues of internal EU policy and management. The respective

responses will have their impact also on the future attraction of migrants to the EU

At the same time, in the last several years there have been important and more complex changes in migration flows in Europe as a whole. While the EU is and will continue to be a key "pull factor" particularly for countries on its borders it is possible to detect "ripple" effects across the continent. Waves from Central Europe/new member states going west to "old members" are substituted by migrant groups from countries on the eastern EU borders and these in turn are being replaced by people from Central Asia and further south and east. In this new configuration Russia with its high growing economy and negative demographic trends similar to the rest of Europe is emerging as a new "pull factor" for emigrants from around its borders.

Pressed by tightening labour markets, certain eastern member states governments (e.g. Romania, Bulgaria) are considering or taking initiatives to easily fill the gaps on the labour market by importing cheap workers from China, Vietnam, etc. while the potential of the local labour force remains underutilized. There have already been critical cases affecting not only labour related issues but also community and political problems in immature democracies.

Migration patterns in Europe are clearly changing their nature, geography and dynamics over pretty short periods of time. From predominantly "sending" migrants the countries in Eastern Europe are increasingly under the dual pressure of losing people and talent on one side and challenge to accommodate and integrate newcomers in their place. The overall picture is getting more complicated and in general tends to open possibilities for easy advance of employer interests, including the use of "shadow" economy techniques of arranging employment relations.

Coping with a new set of challenges necessitates common efforts across the whole area to secure comprehensive and sustainable solutions. That is where PERC can really add value to the activities of trade unions at national and regional levels in support of ETUC policies in the EU.

3. Effects of migration and challenges for PERC approach:

Migration in Europe is a complex phenomenon fed by multiple factors and multifaceted effects that can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. With the exception of a handful of countries all European economies will have to resort external supply of labour in the future to maintain necessary growth rates and high social standards. Freedom to move also facilitates more efficient utilization of skills and resources to the advantage of individuals and societies where they work and live. Remittances from abroad are a major factor contributing to national income in a number of countries in Europe and can be crucial in helping poorer members of society with relatives abroad to be in minimum control of their lives. Returnees from countries with higher level of development particularly in the area of labour and social standards bring back home not only money. A new and more demanding vision of the world,

of community, of labour relations makes them a natural reserve for organized labour, for policies of social cohesion and stabilizing democratic institutions.

At the same time migration processes left largely to employer discretion open easy ways for overexploitation, undermining labour and social standards and depressing wage growth not only in high income countries but also in low income ones coupled with discrimination on different grounds. "Sending" countries in Europe have already faced the impact of "brain drain" and "youth drain" further burdening the process of catching up with the more developed countries while in the host countries immigrants with qualifications often face significant underutilization of their skills, de facto materialising a "brain waste".

Illegal migrants inevitably find themselves in a state of almost total powerlessness to control their work and life patterns under the constant risk of being persecuted even if trying to find some assistance. These groups of migrant workers pose a particularly serious challenge for trade union policy and activities as such people are left at the mercy of particular employer and have little choice outside the shadow economy operations if not pressed into. Along with the victims of networks of trafficking of people, illegal migrants can also find themselves in conditions of forced labour even in countries with established systems for labour and social protection, e.g. Italy, UK, etc.

The remittances can exert a dual impact also in less developed economies amidst transition reforms pushing up inflation, as some information from Albania is suggesting

4. The basis for PERC approach to migration in Europe

ITUC and ETUC work and policy development in this problem areas offer a sound base for PERC work aimed to:

- Develop a pro-active approach based on policies for sustainable growth and quality employment with full-time jobs;
- Orientate policy aims towards managing and regulating mobility processes, including early warning systems of cross border social dumping practices where possible rather than relying exclusively on restrictions and punishments;
- Promote freedom of association and the rights of migrant workers, through application of ILO, UN and Council of Europe conventions on the protection of migrant workers and their families, with special attention to immigrants without any or clear legal status in the country;
- Develop targeted policy on the gender dimension of migration, i.e. the feminization
- Demand policies to combat and eliminate precariousness in work in Europe and currently the dangers of private agency work particularly facing Russia and the NIS;
- Engage in combating labour exploitation and trafficking of people for work;

- Develop trade union policies and practical approaches for keeping contact with migrant workers from departure to settling in the host countries and for organizing them at their place of work;
- Review and strengthen health and safety regulations and secure effective monitoring, control and enforcement of standards by the authorized institutions;
- Develop trade union campaigns against racism and xenophobia fit for the specific forms and conditions in which they appear in different countries;
- Preserve and update public education and VET systems, as well as invest in maintaining and improving workers skills in response to changing working environment, involving life-long learning programmes and with special attention to workers in precarious type of employment in agency and part-time jobs
- Facilitate the recognition of skill levels and education certificates to secure better utilization of knowledge and skill resources across Europe

5. Action points

To start work in the field it is recommended for PERC to:

- Set up a specialized Task Force on Migration In Europe jointly with the ETUC to start expert work on the issue with the aim of organizing a European conference on the labour and trade union aspects of migration;
- Collect and provide access for all members to information on the website about exiting and developing bilateral or multilateral cooperation among trade unions the products of such work – best practices, guidelines, brochures, leaflets, etc.
- Follow the activities of specialised research and policy development centres linked to trade unions and other and disseminate important results among member organizations