

**TALKING POINTS FOR PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON
THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS ON LABOUR MIGRATION AND HIV
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Migration for employment has increased rapidly during the past decade and it will continue to expand in number and type of employment in the coming decades. This is due primarily to the inability of the global economy to create enough jobs where people live. It will be further increased as the quests for greater business flexibility intensify in relations to the competitive pressure arising out of the increasingly interdependent economy and the fast pace of technological innovations. The terms and working conditions of many migrants are exploitative and expected to worsen.

Although currently the majority of contemporary migrant workers consist of low-skilled workers, the potential for the movement of professional and technical migrant workers, cannot be underestimated, even if they are often better positioned when compared to their lower skilled counterparts.

ASEAN for example, has become a major area of increasing international migration in recent years. As outlined in the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS), the movement of business peoples, professional i.e. (PMS) is deemed as one of the key strategies for the region to achieve a single market by 2015. Unlike less skilled migrant workers, almost 80% of the PMS migrant workers came from outside the ASEAN region. They tended to accompany FDI or were targeted by the destination country as an area of national need.

Under the current context of the financial crisis, joblessness, precarious employment and unprotected forms of unprotected work are on the rise everywhere in the region especially in the export oriented economies. In times of economic boom, migrant workers are welcomed and needed but during an economic crisis, migrant workers are targeted. Migrant workers are the first to be terminated forcing them to either return to their home countries, where there is little economy development and hence fewer job opportunities, or become part of the irregular work force facing further discrimination and exploitation.

The present global economic crisis has no gender prejudice; however, the reality is that because of the existing gender dynamics within our society, the economic crisis impacts women workers more severely than men. During period of economic depression, women are particularly vulnerable to poverty and unemployment due to the marginalized political, economic, and social status. Many of the women migrant workers are main breadwinners, thus their families are badly hit by falling remittances as it is in the case of Philippines where remittances account for 12 per cent of gross domestic products. The situation is equally bleak in Indonesia, where 80% of the overseas migrant workers are women. In the extreme situation in various countries, women being pushed into greater poverty become more probable to or are forced into sex work as well as become victims of trafficking.

Obviously, migrant workers, documented or undocumented become the intense target for discrimination and subject to more intense exploitation. It is with these harsh economic realities that migrant workers and their families are confronted with growing misery aggravated by the fact that most countries in the region do not yet have a sustainable system of job unemployment insurance, health care and HIV services and effective social protection/security.

Governments must take these realities into consideration in their strategic response to the global economic crisis especially in relations to the plight of the migrant workers. Regardless of their legal status, migrant workers must be protected against discrimination in their terms and conditions of employment.

Our organization believes that abundant and remunerative employment opportunities for men and women are the most effective means to raise general living standards and to secure a more equitable distribution of income.

Towards this end, especially in developing countries, all socio-economic policies should be consistent with the goal of the **ILO decent work agenda**. Such a policy requires not only economic growth but also direct measures to improve the living conditions of the poor and upgrade the skills for workers to improve their employability and earning capacity. In agricultural based economy, rural development must continue to be a central component of the strategy.

The decent work agenda must be based, foremost, on the promotion of remunerative employment and mechanisms to spread the benefits of growth to the least advantaged. Therefore, social protection and social services are needed to ensure that all members of society have security in terms of income, and access to education and health services.

The idea of social solidarity stretching over national boundaries may need time to take root, but it must certainly be considered as an essential and inevitable evolution of the social security for workers. And it will become more essential as migration for employment intensified between the countries in an increasingly interdependent global economy.

We commend the various Governments for their effort to promote and protect the rights of interests of migrant workers and are particularly impressed by the program initiated by the Philippines and Indonesia Governments to protect migrant workers' rights and secure their interests. However, there is a need for more bilateral and multilateral dialogue between countries of origin and destination, including joint measures to promote decent employment in the countries of origin. Such dialogue on migrant worker issues must be conducted in a multi-lateral framework and includes stakeholders, such as Trade Unions and NGOs propagating and representing the rights and interests of migrants workers, labour, women, peasants, environment and health.

We urge the Governments to take immediate action to prevent the abuses of migrant workers by recruitment agencies and implement all measures to make all licensed agencies accountable for any instances of malpractice.

However, we believe that more can be done for the vulnerable migrant workers to cope with impact of the financial crisis. We call upon the Governments to:

- ✓ Utilise the various type of overseas workers funds created by employment levies on migrants to assist migrant workers and their families affected by the financial crisis.
- ✓ Include migrant workers and their families as recipients of financial and technical assistance under the governments' stimulus packages and monitor the different impact of the recovery packages on migrant workers and make necessary adaptations.
- ✓ Ensure that all migrant workers, documented or undocumented and their families are not deprived of health services including access to HIV services by host and destination countries.

We, the Global Union Movement including our organisation, UNI are fully committed to the struggle for respect for migrant workers' rights and we will work together to support the migrant workers in five broad areas, namely:

- Serve as an organizing centre where migrant workers can be recruited into the unions as members thereby enabling them to participate and/or lead in union action such as collective bargaining and to help service other migrant workers
- Serve as a resource centre for the purpose of accessing important data and analysis on migration issues and trends
- Serve as a help centre for migrant workers especially for legal and counselling needs
- Serve as an advocacy centre so that migrant workers can be represented effectively in public policy making – at national, regional and international levels.
- Promote fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages and adequate access to decent working and living conditions and health services for all workers including migrant workers.

We will collaborate closely with various NGOs and support the initiatives of various UN agencies including UNDP and ILO in developing strategic policy response to the challenges confronting migrant workers and the implementing of activities aimed at protecting the rights and interests of migrant workers.