



# Euromf

European midfield

## BRIEF REPORT

**Euromf EZA Seminar, Bucharest, 1 and 2 October 2015**

**Supported financially by the European Union**

**The Commitment of social partners to tackle social exclusion within the labour market -  
Focus on tackling problems of migrant workers from inside and outside the EU**

In this short report we will try to outline the most important headlines of the discussion and the presentations. It is impossible to be complete.

We would like to start by repeating two comments made at the seminar.

- “It is ok to make a list of all the problems, but we already made too many lists. Now it is time to act and react. Yes, we can.”
- “Referring to Bernard Shaw: When everyone would come to the seminar with one apple and exchanged it with his neighbour, we would all go home with still but one apple. On the other hand, when everyone shares an idea we all go home with a lot of ideas.”

It is also clear that we don't believe in the liberal view on building a society, a view that these days dictates the EU politicians and policies. We believe in a socially corrected economy and a society driven by justice and solidarity.

When we chose this seminar's subject a year ago, we couldn't know that it would become such a hot topic as a result of the refugee crisis and the current political statements in a divided Europe.

When we listen to the language used by the liberal and rather right-wing and nationalistic political leaders, it is clear that they hope to use the fear for the unknown -more specifically: refugees and migrants- to find leverage and basis for their political decisions. They always say that they want to protect our welfare and good social system.

Migration is a very old phenomenon. After the Second World War an increasing number of migrants and refugees came looking for a better life in Europe. And Fortress Europe made increasingly more restrictions for migrants and refugees. Research found that this way of



reacting only increases the number of dead among refugees. Analysis also determined that more rules only lead to an ever more restricted and difficult flow of migration. Once a system has been established, it is very difficult to abandon it. It becomes a kind of prison. This is disadvantageous to the economic development.

Apart from this, there was another urgent request to political Europe. Politicians think in terms of votes, not in terms of leadership. We now need the sort of leadership that creates a balance between all the positive and negative elements of migration. This concerns both migrants and refugees. In fact, their problems are similar.

It is clear that empowering the fear for the unknown, in this case migration, kills good policies. We need to oppose this and expose the real facts and figures on a day to day basis.

Attention was drawn to yet another contradiction:

Today “we are ... told ... it is reasonable and acceptable to discriminate for our own good ... in the interests of national security ... [alongside] ... better policies of ‘integration’”

BUT “... it is important to ask what it means to demand that immigrants and minorities integrate into societies that consider them a potential threat to their people’s security”.

The things we need to defend for migrants and refugees are:

- a secure livelihood, a decent job and family life, citizenship, welfare, dignity and respect,
- the basic rights which trade unions struggle to protect,
- to come and go in freedom,
- to persecute and punish the traffickers.

The migrants’ problems are not only related to work and economy. Migration has many faces and should be approached from different angles. It is important to look at the situation from within their world and to listen to their stories with an open mind, and not being biased by our potentially one-sided framework. We should avoid an idealistic approach and look at the problem with realism and common sense.

It is also clear that the internal European migration is grounded in the fact that life is very hard in the less developed countries of the EU. Even the aftermath of crisis could be endured better in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe or the Baltic States.

The problems are not only related to job opportunities, work conditions, etc., but also to leaving family and friends behind. Children too are staying behind. What about their education and their need for affection? Who is dealing with that aspect of migration from East and Baltic to West?



Migration always produces a positive and a negative aspect, both for migrants themselves as for the receiving country and the country of origin. The most visible effect is the return of money to the country of origin, which is invested in more and better housing. At this moment savings are not used to create and develop new economic activities. To solve this could be a challenge for the EU.

It is also important to take into account the fact that work related migration is not always a success story. This issue often remains in the shade.

Several speakers pointed out the necessity of a clear and just regulation of rights and obligations of migrants and refugees in the receiving countries. Only a proper legislation will encourage, assure and facilitate the free movement of employees between countries. This matter is urgent and should be dealt with without delay by the EU policy makers, since there will be a constant influx of employees, for several reasons. A proper set of rules and laws will also facilitate things for the administrations, because it will be easier to explain, implement and control.

A defensive approach of the flow of migrants and refugees will only end in more restrictions, resulting in more dead people on the path of migration.

It is important to create a social security system that can function worldwide. Social security should be a system that 'accompanies' the employees wherever they go. To achieve this we need to address these issues:

- Access to social security in host and native countries affects the level of vulnerability.
- Portability between host and native countries is important to avoid loss of accrued entitlements.
- Labour market conditions for migrants in host countries and the recruitment process for migrants in the country of origin must both balance between employers' needs and workers' protection.
- Access to informal networks can act as an informal social safety net to support migrants and their family members.
- Mobility of labour and mobility of entitlement.

We are challenged heavily by the large differences between collective agreements about minimum wages, work conditions and social security.

Not only regulations and laws are important, there is also the matter of the reception of migrants in society.

For that to work, we need midfield organisations that take care of this reception, f.i. the [Internationaal Comité](#) in Belgium. We need self-organisations of migrants, side by side to trade unions and organisations of independent entrepreneurs. Trade unions must open their doors to the task of defending migrants and refugees and employ migrants who are familiar with the genuine problems and the different cultures.

Trade unions and midfield organisations have to co-operate, across the EU. And they have to



find ways to reach and inform the migrant employees, even when it has to be with the help of wives or partners.

The main problems for migrant workers are:

- obstacles to information access,
- inadequate knowledge of the legislation,
- inadequate knowledge of the language,
- dependency on labour mediators,
- being unfamiliar with the role of trade unions,
- cultural differences.

A big challenge for the trade unions is to include both migrant workers and members as engaged volunteers in the organisation. To be familiar with the problems, trade union representatives have to be in close contact and listen well. Leaflets with information about legislation, in several languages, are a good help.

Local authorities, authorities as such, need to know what is happening in the workspace and what is the actual situation of migrant employees. Migrant workers and refugees also dream about being an independent entrepreneur. Authorities need to use mediators and midfield organisations who can help to detect the real obstacles for a fair and performant policy. From experiences in Italy we learn that it is very important to create projects and initiatives that provide an active role for migrants and refugees. They must have the opportunity to get involved, to establish their own project. In this life project they are given a coach and they can develop their competences. The problem is that for this kind of initiatives there is no structural financial support available.

It was also made clear that to attract migrant workers when there is a shortage on the internal labour market can't be an end in itself. The right approach is a dual policy: Take good care of the migrant workers who enter your social system (diploma, wages, licenses) and at the same time start a campaign to attract the unemployed in the internal workforce or employees looking for a new challenge.

The problems for domestic workers are EU-wide, even worldwide and need a global approach. We need to establish a combined action. Trade unions must force all the EU countries to sign the recommendations of the ILO.

An important group of migrant workers and refugees are workers without papers. We are not just talking about domestic workers. Undocumented migrants are employed in all kinds of jobs, mostly in the construction sector. We must insist on the necessity to inform, activate, mediate, advocate active enforcement of rights, define obstacles and improve economic bargaining powers of workers.

Next to trade unions the self-organisations of migrant workers and their families are important: they create a network. Apart from the importance of the network itself, it is also



an important mediator in the process of finding a job. Establishing self-organisations of migrants is beneficial to their self-confidence, language acquisition, etc. An important side-effect is that their engagement as volunteer is a skill-building process on its own.

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