



International Labour Office

The Role of Migration in the Development of Post-Revolution Tunisia

**CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT & SECURITY ISSUES
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Panel Address

Working Group on Labour Migration:

Mobility, Development and Governance: What's needed to regulate labour mobility

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To set the context for the work of this group, we best start by taking into account the challenges that shape migration and its results globally; the causes, conditions, importance and results of migration define what it means to Tunisia and to its partners.

Migration is today one of the most challenging realities for national, regional and local governance on both sides of the Mediterranean. And it is so especially here where Tunisia is in the process of redefining government and renewing its social order.

I Role and importance of migration

Migration today is essentially *international labour and skills mobility*. For more than 100 countries, this mobility has become the key factor to sustaining development: namely production of goods, services and knowledge; provision of food, infrastructure, healthcare, housing, education and transportation.

214 million people are today living outside their country of birth or citizenship. That would make for the world's 6th most populous country. ILO calculates that 105 million of them are economically active; that is to say, employed, self-employed or otherwise engaged in remunerative activity. That is about half of the total and most among those of working age. Given an estimate of 1 accompanying dependent for each active adult, over

90 per cent of migration today is bound up in the world of work.

These numbers undercount migrant labour since they do not account for short-term temporary or seasonal migrants.

Foreign born workers now comprise about 10% of labour forces in Western European countries and 15% to 20% in immigration countries of Australia, Canada and the USA. Similar proportions apply in other countries worldwide, from Argentina to Cote d'Ivoire to Malaysia to South Africa. Migrants comprise 50% or more of work forces in several MENA countries, over 90% in Qatar and the UAE.

Taking account of the offspring of immigrants since the 1960s gives figures of 20% or more of work forces "issue de l'immigration" in numerous Western industrialized countries. Take traditional Austria, where now 48% of the population of the capital, Vienna, is foreign born or has at least one foreign born parent. Or Switzerland, where 30% of the workforce is foreign origin.

Migration serves as an instrument to adjust the skills, age and sectoral composition of national and regional labour markets. Migration provides responses to fast-changing needs for skills and personnel resulting from technological advances, changes in market conditions and industrial transformations. In countries of aging populations, migration is replenishing declining work forces and injecting younger workers, in turn contributing to increased dynamism, innovation and mobility in those work forces.

But more is still to come. New evidence based on more accurate forecasting suggests that the world is on the eve of even greater international mobility. Recent application of a new ILO forecasting methodology shows that China alone will face a deficit of 124 million workers in its labour force within 20 years. This is more than the total of economically active migrants worldwide today. The Russian Federation is losing 1 million members of its work force each year now. A recent study suggests that Switzerland will need 400,000 additional workers by 2030. And Tunisia itself reached the fertility rate of zero population growth five years ago.

Migration is not the only solution. But it is the response able to provide a big portion of workers and skills required for sustainable economic activity in many places.

That is, admittedly, difficult to see at this moment with many countries still reeling from high unemployment resulting from the global economic crisis...and widespread political discourse blaming all evils on immigrants.

II. Challenges for governance, for regulation, for administration

The features of migration today present three overarching challenges related to the theme of this conference. One is the juxtaposition of high unemployment here and pressures to obtain relatively less protected migrants who can provide cheap, docile and flexible labour in migrant destination countries. Another is the very fact of migration diversifies and changes the composition, identity and self-perception of entire States as well as local communities and neighbourhoods. The third major issue, the focus of this discussion, is how to regulate migration so that it benefits home and host country development, employment and well-being.

1. Bottom line need for protection

In the highly competitive globalized environment, employment of migrants is often characterized by absence of decent working conditions, low pay, job insecurity, sexual harassment for women, and so on. Where data exists, for example, it shows foreign workers suffer occupational injury and death rates twice as high as for “native” workers.

Migration is taking place in a context of generalized deregulation of work and of labour markets. Salient characteristics of work today include increased precariousness of employment, informalisation of economic activity, and deteriorating conditions at work. These changes affect large numbers of workers in industrialised countries as well as in developing countries.

Efforts to acquire economic competitiveness at low cost produce a continuous demand for cheap and low-skilled migrant labour in numerous sectors of national economies – even in periods of recession. Small and medium-size companies and labour-intensive economic sectors usually do not have the option of relocating operations abroad. Migrant labour is a low-cost means to sustain enterprises and, sometimes, entire sectors of economic activity that are only marginally competitive.

On the supply side, a large and continuous availability of labour is assured by what may be the biggest failing of globalization: its inability to create decent employment in countries with growing and youthful populations. Generally high unemployment rates, lack of formal jobs and absence of decent working conditions in many less development countries assure a high supply of labour and skills compelled to go elsewhere for sustenance and employment.

This is especially the case today in Tunisia, where some estimates show as many as 800,000 persons, especially youth, without jobs. These ranks were swelled by some 300,000 jobs lost in the country’s major tourist industry in the last six months and the return of some 60,000 Tunisians expelled from Libya where they had been employed.

2. Change, Diversity and destabilization

Secondly, migration is visibly and rapidly changing the ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and religious composition of societies and communities worldwide. It is turning upside down traditional markers of belonging, of participation, of composition in many places.

The definitions of identity, of belonging to, and of the State itself in most countries were built around mono-ethnic, mono-racial, mono-lingual, mono-religious markers. But these just don't apply to growing numbers of people today present in our cities, in our workplaces, in our neighbourhoods, and in voter rosters.

But change and diversity don't often 'come naturally,' all the more so when established populations find public services disappearing, jobs becoming less stable, affordable housing more scarce, cost of living rising, and so on. It is not hard to perceive newcomers in association with these problems and easy to believe political leaders and news coverage making the amalgam between foreigners and unemployment, crime, scarce housing, inflation, traffic congestion, etc.

3. Government

A third fundamental challenge is the basic one of how to regulate mobility and address the real needs for services and support for departing and arriving migrants. And in destination countries, how to assure integration of newcomer populations.

In Tunisia, at present primarily a country of origin, a large agenda faces government administration in schooling, child and family welfare, skills training, healthcare, community governance, and so on. For example, many migrant origin communities face crucial issues of providing for education as well as social support and child welfare services where parent or often parents have migrated. Assessing and addressing local and national skills and labour needs resulting from departure of the best and the brightest is a widespread challenge.

On the other side of this international equation, immigrants whether short or long term need services: access to housing, transportation to work, healthcare, schooling or training, police protection, social security, maternity support, to note the most salient. Given that most come to work or they enter the labour market once they grow up or obtain refugee status, assistance in recognition of credentials and qualifications, skills retraining or adaptation, job matching support, are needed to facilitate employment.

As noted earlier, Tunisia will reach in maybe just ten or so years the demographics of greater numbers of its workforce reaching retirement age and declining numbers of native youths reaching working age.

III. The Antidotes

IV.

Nine points on what needs to be done here and elsewhere:

1) A full and adequate set of international standards exists to provide the foundation for national legislation, policy and practice on regulated labour migration in all countries. Ratification by Tunisia of these framework instruments should be on the agenda.

In fact, the extension of the rule of law to treatment of foreign workers and to regulating international labour migration spans nearly a century. The first treaty references to protection of persons working outside their country of citizenship are found in the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I in 1919. The first international conference on migration took place not in the 60s or 50s but in 1923. It was convened by the Government of Italy under ILO auspices to encourage destination countries in Northern Europe and North America to improve treatment of migrant workers from Italy and other origin countries! The first international Convention on migrant workers was drawn up in the 1930s.

Three main instruments provide a broad normative framework for regulating migration and protecting migrants: ILO Convention 97 on migration for employment of 1949, ILO Convention 143 on migrant workers of 1975, and the 1990 International Convention on rights of migrant workers.

These three instruments supplement core human rights conventions and International Labour Standards in reinforcing three basic principles in international law:

- Equality of treatment and non-discrimination between regular migrant/immigrant workers and nationals in the realm of employment and work.
- Universal human rights apply to all migrants, regardless of status.
- The broad array of International Labour Standards providing protection in treatment and conditions at work –safety, health, maximum hours, minimum remuneration, non-discrimination, freedom of association, maternity, etc.—apply to all workers.

84 countries have ratified at least one of these three instruments, two-thirds of the 130 or so countries for which migration is an important concern. That includes all the North African countries except Tunisia, and 11 member States of the European Union.

2) Strengthening anti-discrimination and integration measures and practice certainly needs to be a priority for the destination countries concerned. Employment --work in decent conditions—is central to everyone’s participation in society, to their independence, to individual self-support, to identity and to dignity. As the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) put it, “Employment is a key part of the integration process, because decent jobs are vital to immigrants' self-sufficiency, and they enhance social relations and mutual understanding with the host society.”

The European Commission established a useful and appropriate definition of integration:

[I]ntegration should be understood as a two-way process based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of legally resident third country nationals [foreigners] and the host society which provides for full participation of the immigrant. This implies on the one hand that it is the responsibility of the host society to ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place in such a way that the individual has the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural and civil life and on the other, that immigrants respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and

participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their own identity (EU, 2003).

3) The concerns of migrant populations are those of the whole community; the responsibility of virtually every administrative branch or department of government must be engaged.

4) The universalist concern across government or local administration begs existence of a coherent legal and policy framework, nationally as well as in the respective level. Several countries have established comprehensive national migration policy frameworks, such as Cambodia, Kyrghystan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, among others.

The International Labour Organization developed –through 90 years experience of its tripartite constituents-- guidance for developing, strengthening, implementing and evaluating labour migration policies and practices. This guidance is contained in the *ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration*: Copies are available here.

5) Universality of impacts along with the imperative for policy coherency require deliberate, organized consultation, coordination and downright cooperation. In many countries, interagency task forces or working groups on migration bring together representatives of ministries across the board, often together with key partners/stakeholders outside government, namely employers, trade unions and social service entities, sometimes also representatives of concerned migrant communities. Regional and local authorities have also replicated this approach.

6) Data is an essential starting point. That means data on labour migration, its characteristics, skills profiles, economic impact, etc. Not just movement data, which shifts perceptions away from the essential and large economic and social contributions migrants make, to gross numbers that imply costs instead of benefits and threats instead of developments. Some labour migration data is obtained here in Tunisia; ILO conducted a thorough collection and application assessment a few years back with recommendations for new and improved measures that remain valid today.

7) Vocational and skills training is another key element on the agenda. Something like another 80,000 Tunisian youth will graduate this year from higher skilled and academic training. Will they have skills needed and employable here in Tunisia. Will they have skills and qualifications needed elsewhere today and tomorrow?

8) The opportunities and costs of maintaining a viable albeit diverse work force must be reflected in the costs of government. Representative personnel, trained staff, focused programmes, targeted outreach, specialized administrative departments all require resources. Meeting the needs of any population requires resources, the budget challenge is ensuring that the additional needs of additional population –or changed population— are quantified and taken into account. This is true for all countries represented here.

9) Finally, media work is key to changing constituent and public attitudes. There are plenty of stories to be told of how migration is creating jobs, saving neighbourhoods, enhancing economies, providing affordable healthcare, reducing crime, rejuvenating culture, and assuring the future economic well being of all countries concerned. A plan of action needs to include a deliberate media strategy on migration and migrants –one that feeds favourable speech, stories and sound bites.

IV. Lines for an effective National Policy on labour migration:

Key foundations for a viable and effect policy agenda on labour migration are:

1. Obtaining *collection and analysis of relevant labour migration and labour market data* to guide policy formulation.
2. *Engaging with social partners* –employers and worker organizations—in migration policy and administration.
3. Setting the *standards-based approach to migration*, in national law and practice, to establish equality of treatment in law, protect migrant –and national—workers, and to have common and accountable means for international cooperation.

These are the inescapably essential foundations for:

4. Formulating a comprehensive national *labour migration policy for governance, regulation and administration*, involving the concerned government ministries and social partner economic actors.
5. Putting in place *informed and transparent labour migration systems* to meet measured, legitimate internal and external labour needs –in context of a vision for integration and development
6. Enhancing the contribution of labour and skills mobility to the *employment agenda and decent work*.
7. Providing adequate and current *vocational education and training* to meet both national needs and international demand.
8. *Enforcing minimum decent work standards in all sectors of activity*, to suppress abuse of workers and reduce incentives for recruitment of unauthorized migrants.
9. Extending social protection, specifically *social security coverage and portability*, to migrant workers
10. *Enacting and implementing a plan of action against discrimination and xenophobia*.

A Challenge and offer

I conclude with a challenge in form of an offer. An authoritative national policy, improved collection and application of labour data, enhanced employment and engagement of key economic actors --social partners-- are key elements that ILO is uniquely placed to assist with. The ILO stands ready to enhance cooperation with Tunisian government authorities, their constituents and international partners in moving

this labour migration agenda forward. We can help ‘get it right’ in meeting challenges of migration today and tomorrow.

Meeting these challenges and opportunities requires proper data and knowledge, application of the rule of law, engaging the best principles of public administration and conducting effective practices already demonstrated around the world.

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Several pertinent resources:

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