



Euromf EZA Seminar – Short Report

Protection gap for migrant workers in the EU

Focus on working and living conditions for migrant workers and their families

Bucharest, 19 and 20 October 2017

Organisation: Euromf vzw

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Two years ago, during our seminar on 1 and 2 October 2015, we looked into the migration flow and its consequences for host countries and countries of origin. The lectures and discussions quickly made apparent that we had to expand on working and living conditions of labourers migrating within Europe and the effects on their families, and especially the children, who stayed behind. Consequently, we organised this seminar to deepen and broaden our knowledge.

Marianne Thyssen (European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility) spoke to those present by way of a video message. She went into the EU proposals that should be a first step to improvement and wished the participants a productive seminar.

Maria Mihaela Darle (Head of Social Department CARTEL ALFA) opened the seminar with a first challenge. She alerted us to the necessity to give foreign employees a voice too in the social dialogue via the labour unions, but she also raised the question how these employees can be motivated to join.

Dirk Coninckx (ACV Union of Construction and Industry, Belgium) demonstrated in his lecture the ingenuity of the complex systems that are set up to exploit Eastern European employees in Western European construction and transport companies by underpaying them and excluding them from social security. As a result, migrant employees who have an accident are often literally dumped into the street. Real video testimonies of lorry drivers added to the authenticity of his presentation.

The Belgian province of Limburg has a long history of labour migration, at the start mainly miners. Erwin De Bruyn (Stebo) pointed out how the government at first took on a constructive role in providing social security and housing and how this led to a rapid improvement of the fate of the immigrants. The last decades however, the authorities stay completely at the side-line and the consequences of this attitude are detrimental, as becomes clear in -among other things- the lamentable housing of these new migrating employees.

The academic input was provided by Johan Wets, who, as a researcher connected to HIVA-KU Leuven, already studied this topic very thoroughly. Presenting a lot of numbers and data, he gave an insight in the constantly

increasing migration flow and showed that, when looking at various countries, one notices both rising and falling inclinations among them. He also went into the difficult question for a clear definition of who is a labour migrant. Or, on the other hand, are they often just European employees? The motives were analysed and the lack of policy was exposed.

The first day lectures were concluded with an insight in the Romanian everyday reality by Cristina Chert (Coordinator of the Open Network in Romania –an NGO supporting community development), who collaborates in the European RE-InVEST research programme. She explained the reasons for migrating, the exodus of villages and its consequences, and the observation that in the meantime a large return current has originated. This speaker, by means of a number of examples, made us contemplate on how to look at these people. Are they parasites, victims or survivors?

In a final workshop a lot of time was spent at digesting the contents of the lectures in a participative and interactive manner and a goal-driven search for specific proposals to further expand a European social policy. A red thread in this matter surely is the necessity to also provide the necessary means for a permanent exchange of information about migration and the associated working and living conditions across country borders.

On Friday 20 October all attention was focused on families and especially children who remain behind. This part of the seminar was launched by a presentation by Ilze Trapenciere (researcher of The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia). She expanded upon the consequences for the children left behind and the influence on their upbringing and education. She also mentioned some positive initiatives. Her presentation was supplemented by the Ukrainian delegation who gave a draft of the problem in their country, but also stated they experienced that when parents are able to return to their family on a regular basis, far less problems can be identified. The Slovakian delegation contributed to the topic too, by explaining migration from their country.

Dr. Annik Lampo (Head of Department Child and Youth Psychiatry) described, based on her daily work and research, the consequences for children of being left behind by their parents working abroad. The importance of bonding and being together was expertly underlined and clarified from a psychiatric perspective. This speaker as well stressed the importance of creating possibilities to create regularly returning close contact opportunities. Having video talks is not a fully-fledged solution.

Arktos vzw is a Belgian NGO that has a considerable experience in dealing with youths and children who are somewhat abandoned by school, parents, the system. Dirk De Rijdt explains, based on practical experience, how he and his colleagues, step by step, and dealing with the most difficult youths, nevertheless travel a positive trajectory. This is a trial and error process that implies giving a whole lot of trust. The most effective way to keep on going is clearly to get the youths to start from what motivates them.

The second day as well was closed with a plenary workshop in which, based on the content of the lectures, a number of constructive proposals were drafted. The red thread surely was acknowledging the importance of addressing the problem of left behind children and make proposals to the EU to certainly start a policy on this issue. Among other things, this could be done by greater efforts in the host countries to keep the families of migrant employees together.

You can comprehensively re-read all the lectures on our website. Moreover, you can find accompanying documentation, videos, reports and specific proposals of the workshops.

www.euromf.be