

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Labour migration on the agenda of Africa-Europe dialogue (4-6 April)

Brussels, 3 April 2006 (ICFTU OnLine) Senior Government officials, executives of employers' organizations and trade union leaders from Africa and Europe will examine ways of making labour migration contribute to integration and development at a Africa-Europe Inter-regional dialogue to take place in Brussels on 4-6 April 2006.

The conference is organized by the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) and constitutes the culminating point of a 3-year programme aimed at building interregional partnership and cooperation over key issues such as protection of migrant workers, labour markets needs, management of labour migration and anticipating on future migration movements. A comprehensive set of national and regional research reports will be presented covering statistical data, legislation and migration-development synergies.

While the Europe Union generally estimates (in a Green Paper released last year), that between 2010 and 2030, at current immigration flows, the EU-25's working-age population will fall by 20 million, the ILO notes that twenty million African workers leave and work outside of their countries of origin and by 2015, one out of ten African workers will be living and working outside his or her country.

"Clearly, labour migration has become a central challenge for development, economic progress and social welfare in both Europe and Africa" says ILO expert Patrick Taran. "ILO's mission is to help make labour migration a win-win situation for origin and host countries and for national and migrant workers", he added.

The ILO/EU programme has already led to adoption of new legislation in a number of African countries and to the establishment of tripartite migration mechanisms in twelve countries across the continent.

In Brussels, officials from governments, employers' organisations and trade unions in Europe and Africa will review progress, examine new research and discuss policy options on how to best manage labour migration for integration and development.

Last week, the ILO Governing Body authorised the publication of a non-binding multilateral framework for labour migration that is being supported by the European Union and a large number of developing countries as a unique tool to deal with migration as part of a right-based approach that take account of labour markets needs.

ILO Conventions on migrant workers provide for equal treatment for migrant workers and for improving legal migration avenues as a means of reducing abuses often linked to irregular migration.

"A significant number of migrants face undue hardships and abuse in the form of low wages, poor working conditions, virtual absence of social protection, denial of freedom of association and workers' rights, discrimination and xenophobia, as well as social exclusion" says the ILO.

According to ICFTU Equality Director P Kamalam, the adoption of a Special Action Programme on migrant workers by the ICFTU in 2005 reflects growing activity and visibility by the trade union movement worldwide on labour migration. "Migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable to exploitation and denial of fundamental workers' rights", she said, adding "Besides campaigning for the ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions on migrant workers, national labour legislation in many countries needs to be revised to conform with international standards. Recognising the particularly vulnerable situation of women migrants, the Global Unions Organising Campaign launched on 8 March this year pays particular attention to their organisation into trade unions".

The ICFTU Programme builds on trade union work already being done at the national level, for example the involvement of unions in tripartite migration processes in 12 African countries, and focuses on building practical cooperation between trade unions in "sending" and "receiving" countries

In addition to representatives from Africa regional and national trade union centres, the Brussels meeting will be attended by representatives from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the European Trade Union Confederation, the World Confederation of Labour and several national trade union centres in European Union member countries.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. www.icftu.org

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