

Remarks by Sandra Polaski, Deputy Director General for Policy, ILO
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This meeting of the GFMD takes place at a very challenging time for the global community, when current levels of **human mobility**, particularly of refugees, but also other migrants, are the largest since the Second World War.

ILO believes that what happens in the **labour markets** of these countries is critical to both the immediate and long-term recovery and resilience in countries affected by these flows.

As refugees and migrants arrive, the lack of access to decent jobs can drive them into the informal economy (or “gray economy”) in countries of destination or first asylum. In such jobs they are typically paid less, denied benefits and may be vulnerable to various kinds of abuse. At the same time, legitimate businesses then face competition from the expanding informal sectors, and that puts downward pressure on wages more generally. This can be a source of tension between migrants and host communities.

Yesterday’s roundtables raised the challenging issues of how to protect the refugees and migrants in transit and how to create the needed employment and livelihood opportunities when they arrive at destination countries.

The Syrian refugee crisis, and other current refugee and migrant flows, have put images on TV screens, front pages and social media that have made the entire world aware that our governance systems for refugees and migration remain fragmented and inadequate.

This is a crisis that calls upon the global community to take shared responsibility to respond appropriately. It can’t be handled successfully by any country alone. This is a crisis of solidarity and of values.

The ILO has intensified its efforts to make our necessary contributions, given our mandate. For example, we organized the first regional policy dialogue in July on the impact of the crisis on labour markets in five regional refugee-hosting countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. Bringing together Ministries of Labour, Interior and Foreign Affairs, as well as employers’ and workers’ organizations, the dialogue explored means for creating an environment that could generate decent work and incomes for Syrian refugees, and at the same time assist host communities in their longer-term development.

We know that if host communities are to continue to accept and try to integrate refugees and large migrant flows we have to address their existing employment deficits as well as providing opportunities to the newly arriving workers.

The ILO is also working closely with the African Union Commission, IOM and the UNECA, to provide technical expertise for a region-wide “Joint Labour Migration Programme ” in Africa that will support fair migration schemes within the Regional Integration Processes and at national levels.

The November EU-AU Summit on Migration in Valletta also presents an important opportunity to design a collaborative response between the two regions, and the ILO is supporting this joint response. The demographic transitions in aging European countries and the emerging labour shortages that will result provide strong impetus to develop strategies for better utilizing the skills and talents of refugees and to consider more regular paths for labour migration.

The crisis has also highlighted the imperative to address the shortfalls in jobs and livelihoods in origin countries, the need to stimulate job growth in those countries if we hope to ease the pressures that lead to distress migration.

Yesterday's roundtables also discussed the pressing need to reduce labour migration costs, costs that are often exploitative. These start with direct recruitment costs and transport fees, as well as high-interest loans that are often taken to finance these fees. But they also include underpayment, late payment or non-payment of wages, lack of compensation for work-related sickness or injuries, lack of social protection and employment-based benefits, and failure to recognize and pay for migrants' skills.

Recruitment costs are spiralling. ILO and World Bank research shows that every year, migrants pay between USD 5 and 10 billion in illegal recruitment fees. The money made in this unregulated environment opens the way to some horrendous abuses. In the Asia - Arab States migration corridor, where the number of migrant workers has increased ten times in volume over the past decade, 80 per cent of migrant workers use recruiters and many pay exorbitant fees.

In addition to the financial burden on migrants, ILO research has also found that payment of recruitment fees to labour recruiters and other intermediaries significantly increases the risk that migrant workers will fall victim to serious human rights violations, such as trafficking and forced labour.

Tremendous development benefits can be realized from eliminating these costs. The savings could be even larger than savings from reducing remittance transaction costs. ILO and the World Bank estimate these savings to amount to up to USD 20 billion each year. Bringing down these costs would benefit the migrants and their families and could double the benefits if remittance costs were also brought down. The need to lower the costs of recruitment for migrants and to combat unscrupulous recruiters is also recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Plan on Financing for Development, adopted in July.

Last year, ILO's tripartite constituents adopted a new legally binding Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, which calls for specific measures to improve the regulation of the recruitment of migrant workers as one way of preventing forced labour.

ILO has also launched a *Fair Recruitment Initiative*, which involves collaboration of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society, and the partner agencies of the Global Migration Group.

This Initiative aims first to better understand recruitment practices and the impact of different regulatory approaches on fairness in the labour recruitment process. Second, to improve laws, policies and enforcement relating to recruitment across major migration corridors, including through exchange of promising practices that meet international standards and demonstrate the business case for fair recruitment. And third, to develop tools that can protect and empower workers, including through access to effective remedies.

We have a challenging agenda ahead if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including the goals and targets on migration. The litmus test of how well we achieve our goals will be whether member States are prepared to take the necessary policy decisions, to negotiate and cooperate with each other and to implement adequate measures.

This is also a good time for the GFMD to expand its stakeholders, as it did yesterday with the business community. It is also essential to bring in the other key actors in the labour market, namely worker representatives and trade unions, and other civil society stakeholders.

Together, we can create a bold new vision for fair migration and development.