



**Developing information for migrant workers through international  
trade union cooperation**

**VS/2013/0204**

**Budapest workshop**

**20-21 March 2014.**

**Summary**

On the 20-21st March 2014 LIGA Trade Unions held an international workshop in Budapest and launched the series of events taking place in the frame of a migration project coordinated in partnership with the Romanian Cartel-Alfa and the British TUC. The project is entitled “Developing information network for migrant workers through international trade union cooperation” and it is partly financed by the European Commission. The project lasts for 12 months from November 2013 to October 2014. During the project’s lifetime the coordinators planned two other workshops to be held in London and Bucharest, which will provide as many opportunities for debates and exchange of ideas in the domain of migration. The website developed for the duration of the project had been already launched; it was designed to work also as a forum that serves migrant workers and provides updated information through the permanently updated structure of the platform. Besides, partners have committed to prepare studies based on complex research on migration in these three countries. Moreover, partners will prepare and disseminate information materials in three languages that will serve as useful reference for migrant workers. An important conference will bring the Project to an end in September 2014 in Budapest.

Melinda Kelemen, the project coordinator, gave the opening speech of the conference. The first professional presentation of the conference was held by Judit Tóth, Professor of the University of Szeged in Hungary, and writer of the Hungarian Country Report. Professor Judit Tóth gave a detailed and in-depth presentation of her 30-pages study, which aimed to contextualize the Hungarian situation regarding migrants, as well as to compare it with the British and the Romanian situations. From her presentation we could learn that the rate of foreigners who live and work in Hungary is only 1,4%. However, the increase of out-migration of labour force in recent years generated a so-called war on numbers based on data provided by KSH (Hungarian Institute of Statistics) and by host countries, respectively. Statistics compiled by the World Bank could qualify as reliable sources of data. According to these data there are approximately 500.000 Hungarians working abroad. Push factors in Hungary are the following: increasing unemployment rate, which has already reached 11%, high taxes, low salaries, household credit, and low level of social transfers. Hungarian trade unions support the elimination of restrictive measures taken by the Government.

According to Judit Tóth, Great Britain’s attraction increases constantly, a process encouraged by language, differences in salaries, and the continuous expansion of diaspora networks. Expansion of diaspora-networks means that several firms and organizations support workers while they work abroad.

The biggest difference between the British and the Hungarian system lies probably in the jurisdiction; while the Hungarian Labour Code defines labour rights relatively uniformly and allows little diversifications, the British regulations are quite fragmented.

British law is not clear about Temporary Alternative Work., which has negative effects on Hungarian workers too. Lack of regulation allows for many abuses, while state control remains weak. The number of self-employed workers increases mostly among Romanians and Bulgarians working in Britain. Legislation in Hungary is not as explicit as the British is regarding self-employment. Self-employment is more widespread in certain domains, such as constructions and catering, sectors benefiting from weaker social protection. Both countries know high rates of unemployment among young people. In Hungary unemployment is high in general, while in Britain there is great difference between the rate of unemployment among the young people compared to the average rate of unemployment. Public sector employment is very high in both countries; every fifth worker is employed in the public sector. Britain intends to gradually and systematically decrease employment in public sector, while Hungary has not yet designed such a plan.

In both countries law stipulates minimum salary. Hungarian regulations differentiate between public employees, graduates and non-graduates. In the British system the criteria for differentiation is age, and whether the worker needs accommodation and subsistence.

In her presentation Prof. Judit Tóth also detailed the sources of information available for migrant workers, as well as how to improve them on the web-page, the flyers and information-brochures designed within the framework of the Project.

Georgiev Tsanko, representing Podkrepa trade union, opened the afternoon session. He presented the structure of Bulgarian labour force market from the perspective of migration. Then the Croatian and Polish participant presented the situation in their own countries.

Rosa Crawford, representing the British partner TUC spoke about how migrant workers in England become union members.

Florina Panaite, representing the Romania partner CARTEL-ALFA told us that Romania is a sending country, exactly as Hungary is. According to certain estimations there are 3 million Romanians working abroad. However part of them are irregular migrant workers.

For the remaining time of the afternoon, participants formed three workgroups and they discussed about their common problems. They also made proposals and recommendations regarding further cooperation, leaflets, brochures and the website of the project.

In the opening presentation of the second day, ETUC councillor Marco Cilento presented the migration policies and projects of ETUC. According to one of ETUC's decision, migration is one of the most important issues, in which equal treatment and access forms the basic and most important principle. Europe has to open legal channels for assuring free movement to make migration safer. He also talked about the need for developing a clearer European regulation, which does not rely exclusively on limitations. The situation of irregular migrant workers has to be addressed too. Moreover, trade unions should include migration policies in their list of priorities. The European Commission's Stockholm Programme 2009 set out five priorities. ETUC has already implemented major part of directives regarding sanctions against employers, temporary migration, and intra-corporate cooperation and transfers.

Selection and circularity are two important phenomena in migration. The first one refers to issuing temporary work permits, while the second articulates the fact that a given country accepts only highly-skilled labour force. These two phenomena cannot provide for the needs of European societies. ETUC recommended to the Commission to support stable migration instead of the two migration phenomena mentioned above. ETUC is highly concerned with the issue of irregular labour force. However, in reacting to demographic processes the Commission should support not only measures that limit labour migration but also measures that regularise labour, enhance access to services, consolidate rights and support family members. Access to rights and training is another very important issue that needs further work. A new regulation is needed that consolidates integration in and access to labour market, and migrant's rights. Existing directives such as the directives on family reunification or migrants' residence should be further developed. New trends in labour force should be analysed and migration process articulated accordingly. All these require close involvement of social partners who should prepare analysis for making migration movements more predictable. Regarding illegal migration, the Commission supported consolidation of borders and aided return.

The intra-corporate transfer directive allows multinational companies to transfer employees from one country to another. It is mainly the labour force coming from third countries that arrives in Europe following this route. They receive work permit and benefit from simplified procedure in obtaining work permit. ETUC holds to the principle of equal treatment in this respect too; work to be done should be real, and workers should be highly skilled. The European Parliament did not agree to accept these recommendations, which became administrative requirements and not legal provisions. Therefore, the aim of equal treatment is hardly met. In the present, ETUC fights for changing this situation. It considers that it is unfair to open up legal channels for

migrants, a measure that supports the in-flow of cheap labour force in Europe or does not provide them the same rights European employees have.

In the final stage of the conference the three workgroups presented the results of their discussions, and the participants gave feedback about how to engage successfully in future work.