

Fact-Sheet on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Discrimination and Xenophobia

A. Introduction

The world appears headed into the worst recession since the 1930s, marked by shrinking economies and rising joblessness in many countries. Migrants are among the workers most concerned: their labour market participation is often characterised by precariousness; and reduced demand for labour increases (perceived or real) competition between workers which, in turn, can fuel xenophobic and discriminatory reactions of nationals against migrant workers. Policy responses must be pro-active in addressing this risk.

Xenophobia and discrimination are broad notions, associated with a variety of meanings.

Xenophobia may be defined as the intense dislike or fear of strangers or people from other countries and refers to behaviors that are specifically inspired by people's foreignness.

Racial discrimination is defined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

In a broader sense, discrimination refers to situations in which migrants or people of foreign origin are deprived of access to fundamental rights, including in fields such as housing or the labour market.

Irrespective of the current economic situation, migrants often lack access to fundamental rights and protection, and are exposed to xenophobia and discrimination. The crisis tends to reinforce the risks and deprivations that characterize many migration processes.

B. Evidence

History shows that times of economic depression have a negative impact on social cohesion. All previous crises of the 1900s, including the Great Depression, the Oil Crisis, the Asian financial crisis, the Russian financial crisis and the Latin American financial crisis,

affected migration in distinct ways and spurred resentment of foreigners and xenophobic actions.

Processes of xenophobia and discrimination operate at different levels in a mutually reinforcing manner. They are simultaneously rooted in individual, social, media, political and government dynamics:

- *Population level.* Manifestations include the scapegoating of migrants for various problems such as poor housing, unemployment and crime, as well as generalized expressions of anti-foreigner sentiments, sometimes even violent attacks on migrants resulting in deaths.
- *Workplace level.* Many countries have adopted labour market policies that encourage employers not to hire foreigners and to lay off migrant workers first if necessary. There have also been reports of reductions of wages or non-payment of wages for foreign workers.
- *Trade union level.* Fears of competition over jobs between local and migrant workers have motivated some trade unions to ask for restrictions on the entry of foreign workers. Unions have also called for the cancellation of migrant workers' visas.
- *Government level.* While States have the sovereign right to determine admission policies, the long-term consequences of some recent measures should be carefully considered, including financial return incentives offered to unemployed migrants; the reduction of admissions and quotas, also for skilled migrants, in major destination countries; and the accelerated deportation of irregular migrants.
- *The media level.* Media often contribute to building an atmosphere of mistrust and misinformation surrounding migration by portraying refugees and migrants in negative terms, using racial and national stereotypes. As the main support for the dissemination of facts and analysis regarding the migration process, media have a key role to play in shaping mentalities and in providing sound and balanced representations of the implications of migration.

C. Challenges, Gaps and Further Areas of Research

Given the multiple origins and occurrences of discrimination and xenophobia, the challenge is to develop strategies that effectively address the issue of migrants' rights and protection and are tailored to the different categories of actors and levels at stake.

Fact-Sheet on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Discrimination and Xenophobia

More systematic gathering of data, the elaboration of indicators and the establishment of independent monitoring bodies should complement and inform policy measures.

D. Policy Implications

Governments could:

- Elaborate comprehensive national anti-discrimination legislation, draft provisions to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination on grounds, and set-up structures for monitoring their implementation;
- Make racist and xenophobic discrimination, behaviour and action, including against non-nationals and state-less persons unacceptable and, where appropriate, illegal;
- Explicitly repress racist violence and xenophobia against foreigners and prosecute initiators of violent acts;
- Keep open the channels for regular migration with the intention of preventing irregular migration and trafficking in human beings;
- Advocate a coordinated global response to the issue involving receiving, origin and transit countries.

Social partners and civil society actors could:

- Stimulate political, community and cultural leaders to speak out to promote respect for diversity and multicultural interaction, and to condemn manifestations of racism and xenophobia, to discourage discrimination measures and discourse at all levels and to support equality of opportunity;

Media could:

- Raise awareness, particularly about the valuable economic and social contributions made by migrants;
- Promote the principle of non-discrimination, emphasize positive images of diversity and of migration to eliminate negative stereotyping.

E. Good Practices

Examples include:

- The Parliament in Côte d'Ivoire adopted a new Anti-Xenophobia Law in August 2008.
- In South Africa, the NGO "Sonke Gender Justice Network" organized a **One Man Can Street Soccer Festival against Xenophobia** in July 2008 with the message that one person can stop xenophobia and violence, sustain reintegration, celebrate diversity, demand justice. Public schools launched the **Adopt a**

Country Initiative in Alexandria in September 2008 with the help of the African Diaspora Forum (ADF).

- **Speak out against Discrimination** is a new program established by the Council of Europe in 2008 that promotes the role of the media in combating all forms of discrimination, including Islamophobia and intolerance towards Roma.

- In Ukraine, a new campaign, **Diversity Initiative (DIN)**, was instituted in April 2007 by the UNHCR, IOM, Amnesty International and other NGOs after various xenophobic attacks on African migrants. Over forty organizations, including business, civil society, international, and government bodies have joined. DIN has provided input into a new government White Paper on Ukrainian and European anti-discrimination legislation.

Bibliography

Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation & Poverty (February 2009), Briefing No. 17 Migration and the Financial Crisis: How will the Economic Downturn affect Migrants?

ILO, IOM, OHCHR (2009), International Migration, Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia

ILO tripartite conference on the labour migration for the Russian Federation and CIS countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus (June 2009), The impact of the financial crisis on migrant workers

International Labour Office (2009), The global economic crisis and migrant workers: Impact and response / Ibrahim Awad

IOM Policy Brief (January 2009), The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Migration

Khalid Koser (2009), The Global Financial Crisis and International Migration: Policy Implications for Australia, Lowy Institute for International Policy

Migration Policy Institute (2009), Immigrants and the Current Economic Crisis: Research Evidence, Policy Challenges, and Implications / Papademetriou & Terrazas

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (2009), Migration and Development Series 2009, Seminar on Migration and the Economic Crisis

United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Research Paper 2009/47 (September 2009), Xenophobia, International Migration and Human Development / Jonathan Crush & Sujata Ramachandran

Prepared by UNESCO

For further information, please contact:

Mr. Paul de Guchteneire, p.deguchteneire@unesco.org

Mr. Antoine Pecoud, a.pecoud@unesco.org