



Interactive Dialogue 18 July – Panel 1 – Sandra Vermuyten, Public Services International

How can we combat xenophobia and discrimination and build a strong narrative that recognizes the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development?

Migrants and refugees make positive contributions to society, both in their countries of origin and destination. However - we caution against the use of migration as a tool for development, as it can undermine the vital need to provide decent work in home countries. These positive contributions are realised when migrant workers are able to exercise their human and labour rights – and are not trapped in precarious and exploitative employment conditions.

Trade unions organise and represent migrant workers. We promote inclusion and non-discrimination and are working with communities in receiving migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, promoting inclusion and fighting racism, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance.

In terms of re-framing the narrative on migration and refugees within the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the key words are: root causes. Addressing the root causes of large movements of migrants and refugees means making mobility a choice, not a necessity – this is the key to how we all work together to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

While we commit to protecting the human rights of migrants and refugees, we must also commit to building the conditions for the right not to migrate. Fighting poverty, reducing inequality, ending hunger, ensuring right to health, education, gender equality, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development, protecting the environment, promoting democracy and the human right to peace – these are all essential elements to address the root causes of migration and displacement and combat discrimination and xenophobia.

b. How can we encourage national and global leaders (political, social, economic and religious) and the media to promote a more positive narrative on migration and refugees?

The migration and refugee crisis is leading to critical situations due to a lack of investment in public services that have already been underfunded and privatized for the last decades.

This underfunding is also a critical issue in relation to hosting refugees - women and children are the first victims of violence in conflict zones but they also often remain in peril once they end up in camps where there is often no protection or rule of law and exploitation is rife. Migrant women are exposed to trafficking, often do not have access to decent work and social protection and are heavily discriminated against, leading to physical and psychological scars that can have an impact for generations to come.

Around the world, populist politicians are raising the flag of racism and xenophobia to hide the fact that they represent the interests of the few, not the many. Austerity policies, secret tax deals, corruption and deregulation of the labour market support an economic model in pursuit of ever more profit for a very small minority.

Fighting racism means challenging governments and supporting organizations that are the voice of those who are marginalized. Investing in education and inclusive policies are the key to fight prejudice and racism. The trade union movement calls for proactive pay and employment equity legislation, including through collective bargaining, which eliminates the systemic discrimination in employment



faced by indigenous peoples, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTi, young, migrant workers and refugees.

In terms of the follow-up to the high-level panel, we call for the ILO to be involved which will provide the competence and tripartite structure comprised of governments, employers and workers to comprehensively deal with labour migration, as well as in providing guidelines to promote access of refugees and forcibly displaced persons to decent work and social protection.

In our own unions, fighting racism means adopting an antiracism action plan which includes changes in representation, inclusiveness and integration of issues and ideas. By doing so, trade unions create and contribute to a society that will truly eliminate racism.

c. How could NGOs and civil society, including the private sector and academia, contribute to a global campaign to counter xenophobia, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report for the 19 September Summit?

In the first place by continuing to insist on human rights based migration policies and oppose deals such as the EU-Turkey deal. We think that EU leaders and governments are feeding a political process that is unacceptable, shameful and contributes to division, growing racism and discrimination between large groups of the population.

In the second place – by ensuring that decent work, social protection, the human right to education, training and the recognition of skills for migrant workers and refugees are made a priority.

Along with the right to education, the right to health is a basic human right that must be guaranteed to all migrants and refugees in large movements. Towards this, there needs to be collective effort and investment to strengthen public health services delivery in frontline communities, such as in cities and municipalities, which receive the large flows of migrants and refugees.

Within the work of the UN High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth, PSI is supporting the development of global strategies for the deployment, protection and decent working conditions for health workers dealing with humanitarian situations and public emergencies, in both acute and protracted situations of large movements.

Finally, we continue to call for involving representatives of labour whenever business is represented - representation of trade unions AT PAR level with business, both inside and outside the UN to ensure that policies are inclusive and not fuelled by corporate interests. Refugees are not commercial goods.

Let's Work together for peace and inclusive societies.