



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Secretariat**

**Co-ordinator of OSCE
Economic and Environmental Activities**

**OSCE PA Winter Session
General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science,
Technology and Environment
Vienna, 25 February 2016**

Intervention

by Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitgüden

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Migration management:

Opportunities and challenges to the economy in the OSCE region

Dear Secretary General of the OSCE PA,

Dear delegates and participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all allow me to join the previous speakers in thanking the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for this invitation to speak.

As you all know an estimated 232 million international migrants – a number expected to grow to 400 million by 2040 – and another 740 million internal migrants who have moved from rural to urban areas within countries, represent today a sizable portion of the current global labour force. Building policies that allow unlocking the economic potential of this significant level of workers' mobility means to bring about prosperity and stability for

countries of destination, countries of origin and the migrants themselves. Indeed, a triple win situation.

If we think that migrants send back home \$583 billion each year, we can realize the scope of the economic potential of migration. This overall flow of cash represents two to three times the annual amount of global Overseas Development Assistance (ODA).

In the field of labour migration management my Office has a strong mandate to assist participating States in developing effective labour migration policies. Two Ministerial Council Decisions shape this mandate and in particular the Ljubljana Decision on *Migration* adopted in 2005, and the Athens Decision on *Migration Management* adopted in 2009. Both Decisions aim at promoting a comprehensive, pro-active and positive approach to migration management. Indeed, the OSCE commitments emphasize the positive role of labour migration for economic growth. Effective systems that facilitate labour mobility will help people migrate under safe conditions, thereby allowing them to contribute optimally to the development of the communities at destination and origin.

However, passing from theory to practice is not an easy task. In my intervention today I will touch upon some of the policy dilemmas that States are confronted with when developing effective migration policies in order to reap the opportunities and curb major challenges. I will do it with the help of some data which are drawn from some recent researches and the Migration Agenda of the last meeting of the World Economic Forum.

The global economy is approaching a demographic tremor. By 2050 the global population of those 60 years old and older will exceed the number of young people for the first time in history. According to the Munich-based Institute for Economic Research, Germany alone will need an estimated 32 million immigrants by 2035 to maintain an adequate balance between its working-age and non-working-age population. This does not mean that all borders must be opened to everyone. But it is true that migrant labour force could represent part of the solution to address the talent shortages and encourage innovation.

However, despite the great opportunity that migrant workers represent for labour markets, selection and recruitment of foreign workforce in countries of origin and its placement in countries of destination remains a main challenge. Almost everywhere in the world, and not only in the traditional global north-west destinations, States' approach towards labour mobility has become progressively more rigid. The paradox is that while goods and financial

assets move along rapid and safe channels, human beings have been increasingly prevented from accessing credible and feasible, legal migration routes.

According to the five-year research of the International Migration Institute at Oxford University, restrictions to human mobility often display side-effects which can even make them counter-productive. The strongest side effect is that they reduce return migration. In other words: they reduce circulation and push migrants into permanent settlement. In the case of irregular migration, this side effect is even stronger.

Therefore, contrary to conventional wisdom, greater labour mobility is part of the solution. Establishing accessible and realistic labour migration channels remains a priority in order to take the most out of migration. Moreover, accessible migration channels for young adults can be one of a possible set of actions that needs to be complemented by more structural interventions. Circular migration, that means temporary stay in the host country that can be repeated in time, can represent a suitable option. The topic was discussed last November on the occasion of an Expert meeting that my Office organized here in Vienna.

There are fears regarding migration, coming from the global economic downturn of 2008, from the loss of jobs, from the post 9/11 syndrome, from losing personal and national identities because of globalization. *These fears are real. They exist. But instead of denying them, we must deal with them.* Our need for collective stability and security should not be overshadowed by the challenges of the global financial crisis and the economic downturn. The Eurostat 2016 report reminds that from 2008 to 2014 the EU governments issued between 2 and 2.5 million new residence permits each year, at a time when the financial crises was at its peak.

We need to raise awareness through public discourse that migration has become an integral part of our global economic environment and that it generally contributes to economic growth and social development.

There is need for us to come together and to discuss common issues concerning migration management and to find solutions that are mutually beneficial, fair and equitable as well as sustainable.

For this we need political will and open dialogue. This includes stepping-up efforts to: improving policy cohesion between migration management, economic development and environmental policies; encouraging legal migration and combating illegal migration by

balancing facilitation and prevention measures; understanding the demand and supply of labour markets; creating conditions for improved economic development and co-operation; facilitating integration of migrants in host societies and their reintegration on return; and improving their protection.

Our attention should focus on the environmental impact of migration, particularly in the case of increasing flows from rural to urban areas, in particular in crisis situations, as well as how climate change can represent a possible contributing factor to further mobilization of people. All aspects of migration are better managed when governments, businesses, civil society and media work together creating so the basis for a peaceful society.

My office has a rich record of implementing various activities related to labour migration, such as projects, workshops, conferences and trainings. We are proud of a series of operational tools, developed in co-operation with IOM, ILO, and ODIHR which include a *Handbook on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies in Countries of Origin and Destination* among other guides and manuals. In particular my Office has pioneered the *Guide on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies* in which the needs, aspirations and vulnerabilities of men and women migrant workers are addressed with specific attention with the view to maximise the respective migration experiences.

Another area in which my Office has put much effort, in line with the OSCE commitments, is improving the collection of comparable data on migration. Indeed, ineffective policies are often based on poor data collection systems, on inaccurate information that often turn into misconceptions. Our effort as OCEEA is to raise awareness on good migration governance and promote evidence-based migration policies that can address socio-economic needs and fuel migration's development potential for all. Good migration governance means taking an approach towards human mobility that - by adhering to economic evidence and international human rights standards – results in increased productivity. This is not an easy task, without the necessary political support, it becomes a mission impossible.

Dear delegates and participants,

It is in our shared responsibility to pursue effective migration management; it is in our collective effort to make migration an asset for economic development and growth.

In addition, my Office will take a closer look on the possible impact of environmental degradation on migratory pressures and vice versa. The connection between migration and climate change has been already acknowledged within the 2009 Athens Ministerial Council Decision on Migration Management. In this respect, my office will intensify its work in the area of climate change as well as address the linkages between environment, migration and security, including within the framework of its work with the Partners for Co-operation.

Yet, almost inevitably, the topic of migration today is quickly associated with the Syrian crisis and with the Syrian refugees. Though there is high urgency in identifying best ways to deal with the current flows of persons, there is a need to elaborate longer-term strategies. That's why labour migration policies must complement humanitarian responses. Short- and long-term strategies are the two faces of the same coin.

I believe that the experiences of my Office can retain their high relevance also for today's current situation. The greatest challenge in building good migration governance systems is to establish common grounds of understanding, by replacing misconceptions with a positive narrative of migration as an opportunity on economies.

Allow me to conclude by saying that today's migration crisis is offering a great opportunity: the opportunity to apply and implement the many diverse tools that have been developed in the years to maximize the benefits of properly managed migration as well as the presence of refugees. Today we have the opportunity to reinforce our co-operation to this end. Indeed, co-operation is not only possible but it makes the difference. The OSCE is eager to continue playing its role as a platform for dialogue and a hub for ideas and activities, building bridges for a more peaceful and inclusive society for all.

Thank you.