



## Governing Body

326th Session, Geneva, 10–24 March 2016

GB.326/WP/SDG/1

### High-Level Section

*Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization*

HL

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### FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA

## Addressing the labour market impacts of refugees and other forcibly displaced people

#### Purpose of the document

This paper examines: (i) trends in the movement of refugees and other forcibly displaced people in need of international protection; (ii) opportunities to reinforce the link between humanitarian action and development cooperation, particularly inter-agency coordination; and (iii) possible key elements of a comprehensive ILO response to labour market impacts.

**Relevant strategic objective:** The four strategic objectives.

**Policy implications:** None.

**Legal implications:** None.

**Financial implications:** None.

**Follow-up action required:** The paper is submitted for debate and guidance.

**Author unit:** Conditions of work and equality department (WORKQUALITY).

**Related documents:** Programme and Budget for 2016–17; GB.325/INS/17; GB.326/POL/1; GB.326/POL/2.



## I. Introduction

1. The global refugee crisis has grown at an unprecedented rate in recent years, with tragic consequences and unacceptable loss of life. In addition to the immense human suffering involved, the crisis has had major impacts on member States hosting those driven from their homes, including on national labour markets. The scale and scope of the crisis have challenged the ability of members and the international community to respond swiftly and adequately, and posed fundamental questions about the relationship between the humanitarian, labour market and developmental dimensions of their actions.
2. At its 325th Session (November 2015), the Governing Body held a first discussion on the global refugee crisis and its labour market implications.<sup>1</sup> Members expressed concern at the unfolding human tragedy and called for increased protection for people affected by the crisis. They underlined the need to draw a distinction between the needs of refugees and those of migrants, while acknowledging that the humanitarian and development spheres are interconnected.
3. Members highlighted the challenge of promoting employment opportunities for refugees in States where unemployment is already high and the presence of large numbers of refugees has been protracted. As a starting point, they called for closer, more systematic and effective coordination and collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, particularly to strengthen the ILO's cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Some Members further referred to increased cooperation with the International Organization for Migration. Moreover, they highlighted the key role of both the ILO report on revision of the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71)<sup>2</sup> and the ILO flagship programme on Jobs for Peace and Resilience in addressing decent work deficits in countries of origin, in addition to other root causes of the crisis, including in fragile and post-conflict settings.
4. In considering governance challenges more broadly, the Governing Body decided to hold a follow-up discussion at this 326th Session (March 2016). The Screening Group subsequently decided that heads of relevant international organizations would be invited to share their views on the impacts of refugees and other forcibly displaced people on host societies and their labour markets, and to explore ways of enhancing the ILO's role and inter-agency cooperation. The Screening Group also decided to hold a separate discussion, at the same Governing Body session, on outcome 9, "Promoting fair and effective labour migration policies", in the Employment and Social Protection segment of the agenda.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GB.325/INS/17.

<sup>2</sup> ILO: *Employment and decent work for peace and resilience Revision of the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71)*, Report V(1), International Labour Conference, 105th Session, Geneva 2016.

<sup>3</sup> GB.326/POL/2.

## II. Increase in global forced displacement

5. Globally, the number of forcibly displaced persons has grown exponentially in recent years, reaching its highest recorded level in 2014 with nearly 60 million people displaced as a result of persecution, conflict and generalized violence.<sup>4</sup> This figure includes over 19 million refugees and almost 2 million asylum seekers, with over 4 million forced across borders from the Syrian conflict. In addition, reports from relevant monitoring programmes show that increasing numbers of people are being forced to flee their homes due to climate-related or other natural disasters.
6. Furthermore, these figures have continued to rise with UNHCR reporting at least 5 million individuals newly displaced in the first half of 2015. Early indications are that the number of forcibly displaced persons will far surpass 60 million in 2015.<sup>5</sup> While future trends depend heavily on political developments and other factors beyond the scope of this paper, there are prospects for continued and possibly substantially increased flows of displaced persons.
7. The increasing scale, scope and complexity of mass movements of people worldwide has increased pressure on existing migration and asylum governance systems and structures, as well as on the economies of affected countries. The impact of these flows on national and local labour markets is being felt more acutely and rapidly than in the past and is generating more competition for low-skilled labour, driving many refugees into the informal economy or to accept unpaid labour. During the Governing Body discussions in November 2015, members called for the decent work objectives to be more effectively incorporated into the global response to the refugee crisis in order to address its informal employment and exploitation dimensions.

## III. The humanitarian and development nexus

8. The dynamics of increased flows of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons has placed a series of interconnected challenges at the top of the national policy agenda in different parts of the world, and at the top of the international policy agenda as well. While there may be wide agreement on the need to tackle the problem at source, for example through the restoration and consolidation of peace and the rule of law in situations of conflict, there is less common vision over how to respond to the large numbers of people seeking to cross national borders and on their treatment, including access to labour markets, once they are present on national territory.
9. While a fair sharing of the effort required to meet the challenges of the refugee crisis and the need for greatly increased international cooperation to define a global response and respective responsibilities within it are widely discussed, the reality on the ground is that national responses differ considerably, either as a result of conscious decisions by the governments concerned or fortuitously, as a result of circumstances. A number of ILO member States have deployed exceptional measures to receive very large numbers of refugees in proportion to their local populations and have permitted them conditional access to their labour markets, or are considering doing so.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR: *World at War, Global Trends 2014*.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR: *Mid-Year Trends 2015*.

10. In this context, the international community has increasingly acknowledged the need to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian assistance and the development dimensions of the overall response to the refugee crisis. That is reflected in the international activities, listed in the appendix, which have taken place since July 2015 and in which the ILO has been involved. Jobs are strategically placed at the intersection of these two dimensions and are a priority for refugees themselves. Thus, the Syria Donors' Conference held in London on 4 February 2016 included a thematic panel on jobs and economic development, in addition to a session on humanitarian protection and one on education. The Director-General participated in that panel and underlined the key role of labour market participation in policies for the integration of refugees and forcibly displaced persons. He also drew attention to the portfolio of project proposals in respect of these issues drawn up by the ILO for activities in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, which remain unfunded to the tune of over \$50 million.

#### **IV. Towards a comprehensive multilateral response and the definition of the ILO's role in it**

11. The scale, gravity, complexity and protracted nature of the current refugee crisis demand the international community to renew its efforts to overcome the difficulties exposed by the crisis, by forging a unified, coherent and adequate response to the tasks of protecting, resettling and integrating the millions of persons affected. Immediate and concerted attention needs to be given to helping countries receiving large numbers of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons and to prevent them from being overwhelmed by the economic and political impact of doing so. That need is all the greater given the often difficult employment conditions already prevailing in host countries.
12. As regards the multilateral system, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly will convene a high-level plenary meeting on 19 September 2016 on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. The meeting will build on consultations which took place at the Syria Donors' Conference, on the outcome of a Conference being convened by UNHCR on 30 March 2016 to gather pledges to resettle people displaced by the Syrian crisis, and on the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May 2016. The UN Secretary-General will prepare a report and recommendations on how to strengthen international cooperation on the issue by May 2016, to which the ILO, with other organizations, is contributing input.
13. The processes now under way in preparation for the General Assembly meeting in September will be underpinned by continuing work in the UN Global Migration Group, which was chaired by the ILO in 2014 and is actively engaged in identifying ways to strengthen inter-agency cooperation on the refugee crisis. That includes formulating guidance in the context of the UN Development Assistance Framework to governments to address refugee issues in their national development planning processes. In a similar vein, the ILO and UNHCR are now reviewing their 1983 Memorandum of Understanding and 2004 Joint Statement with a view to enhancing coordination in expanding and strengthening labour market and livelihoods interventions for refugees. Against this backdrop of urgency and institutional initiatives, the ILO is challenged to define and implement its contribution, both to the overall multinational effort and through its own distinctive expertise and services to member States. It is already active in both respects, and is ready to do more if and when funding becomes available.

14. By way of example, the ILO is implementing a project in Turkey to help monitor the impact of a new regulation granting work permits to Syrians registered with the Government and others under temporary protection. This involves identifying employment opportunities both for Syrians and for host communities and the participation of employers, trade unions, the public authorities and training service providers.
15. This project helps to highlight the areas in which the ILO can bring added value and specialized knowledge to the challenges that host countries can be called upon to meet. These challenges include: defining the terms of access of refugees to host country labour markets which also meet the needs of host communities and the local workforce; skills recognition, matching and development; enterprise development; occupational health and safety; combating informality; protecting fundamental principles and rights at work; and employment-intensive investment programmes.
16. As always, international labour standards provide the indispensable normative framework for interventions; more than ever, the active involvement of the ILO's tripartite constituents acquires crucial importance. If access to labour markets is perhaps the single most important vector of integration of refugees into the societies in which they find shelter then it is employers and trade unions who are the vital human agents of that integration. Historically, they have demonstrated their capacity to meet that responsibility and there is every advantage to be gained by placing them in the best position to do so once more.

## **V. Final comments**

17. Through this High-Level Section discussion, the Governing Body has the opportunity to build on its discussion of November 2015 and to set out its expectations of ILO action on a crucial global policy issue. In so doing, it will bear in mind that it has on its agenda a separate discussion on "Promoting fair and effective labour migration policies". In particular, with the benefit of the panel of representatives of key actors of the multilateral system it will be well placed to frame its views in the context of the broader international response to the global refugee crisis.
18. The views expressed by the Governing Body will serve to shape the ILO's future activities, within the terms of its mandate and the limits of the resources available to it.

## Appendix

### International activities relating to the global refugee crisis, 2015–16

Organizations	Dates	Geographic scope	Activity
ILO	July 2015	Middle East and Turkey	Regional Dialogue on Labour Market Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, held in Istanbul, Turkey, 28–29 July 2015, addressed the complex issue of labour market integration and underscored the critical importance of “whole-of-government” and social partners approach.
UN	Sep. 2015	Global	High-level side event on “Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new development agenda”, held in New York on 30 September 2015.
Nansen Initiative	Oct. 2015	Global	Global Consultation on the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, held in Geneva on 14 October 2015, focused attention on disaster displacement, including associated cross-border migration and labour market implications.
Global Forum on Migration and Development	Oct. 2015	Global	Eighth Summit of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, held in Istanbul, Turkey, 14–16 October 2015, took up the issue of forced migration for the first time.
Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC)	Nov. 2015	Global	Workshop on the “Integration of Refugees and other Humanitarian Cohorts”, held in Geneva, 3–4 November 2015, considered the policy implications of such integration processes. <sup>6</sup>
Africa–EU Partnership	Nov. 2015	Africa/EU	Summit on Migration, held in Valletta, 11–12 November 2015, issued a Declaration and Action Plan which underscored the importance of reinforcing the development benefits of migration and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, in particular by creating jobs for young people.
ILO/European Parliament	Nov. 2015	EU	Workshop on “Refugees’ integration in the EU labour markets: Seizing the opportunities – tackling the challenges”, held in Brussels on 18 November 2015, concluded that labour market integration was among the most effective ways of facilitating the economic and social integration of refugees in host countries.
UN	Nov. 2015	Global	Informal meeting on ways to a comprehensive approach to the humanitarian response to the global refugee crisis, held in New York on 19 November 2015 during the General Assembly.
UN	Nov. 2015	Global	Plenary meeting on global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers, held in New York on 20 November 2015

<sup>6</sup> A full list of IGC members can be found at: <https://igc.ch>.

Organizations	Dates	Geographic scope	Activity
UN	Dec. 2015	Global	<p>during the General Assembly, considered the Syrian crisis and its structural impact on host countries and underscored the need for a much closer link between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.</p> <p>The General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare and submit a report setting out recommendations on ways to address large movements of refugees and migrants by May 2016 and decided to convene a high-level plenary meeting on that topic on 19 September 2016.<sup>7</sup> In this connection, the Secretary-General appointed a Special Adviser on the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants.</p>
World Economic Forum	Jan. 2016	Global	World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, held in Davos, Switzerland, 20–23 January 2016, underlined the importance of labour integration in addressing the global refugee and migration crisis.
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/UNHCR	Jan. 2016	Global	High-Level Conference on Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection, held in Paris on 28 January 2016, focused on the challenge of improving integration systems and structures for asylum seekers, including their integration into labour markets, while addressing growing protection needs.
UN	Feb. 2016	Global	Syria Donors' Conference, held in London on 4 February 2016, hosted by the UN and the governments of the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and Kuwait. A key theme was economic development, with a focus on policy challenges posed by the integration of refugees into host country labour markets.

<sup>7</sup> A/70/L.34.