



Human Dimension Implementation Meeting ODIHR activities

Wednesday, 4 October 2006

Working session 5: Humanitarian issues and other commitments

Including: Migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants; refugees and displaced persons; treatment of citizens of other participating States.

The number of migrant workers in the OSCE region is increasing. Citizens move to richer and more economically developed regions of their own countries and larger cities in search of jobs and better living conditions. Intolerance on the part of host societies or communities towards migrants can cause conflict and resentment. In many countries, the successful integration of migrant workers is further hampered by the absence of ways to regularize their situation.

Many migrant workers are unaware of their rights in countries of destination, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment. Furthermore, a lack of dialogue between countries of origin and destination means that governments are unaware of the extent of migration flows between their countries and, consequently, have inadequate migration policies in place. There is a need for co-operative mechanisms among OSCE participating States on the issue of labour migration to prevent discrimination, ill-treatment, and other violations of the rights of migrant workers, as well as developing migration policies.

At the same time, population registration systems that do not restrict freedom of movement and the right to free choice of place of residence are a necessary element in the development and improvement of integration policies that ensure the protection of human rights of migrants. Such policies should also ensure efficient and harmonious integration of migrants, if they are to benefit both the receiving society and migrants.

ODIHR activities relating to this Working Session/issue

The main component of the ODIHR migration programme is the promotion of human rights of migrants and facilitating their integration into host societies, focusing on inter-state co-operation on labour migration and migration related information.

ODIHR works closely with OSCE states as well as other international organizations and NGOs on promoting sustainable integration policies. A Human Dimension Seminar on migration and integration of migrants was organized by the ODIHR and the OSCE Chairmanship in 2005. Particular attention was paid to integration as a two-way process that affects both the newcomers and the host population. Participants indicated the responsibility of public institutions to take steps to open societies to newcomers, enabling them to participate fully in political, social, cultural, and economic life. Both sending and receiving countries can benefit from migration if they take positive steps to combat discrimination and acts of intolerance against

migrants and ensure that conditions are created for them to integrate without losing their identities.

Promoting interstate co-operation on labour migration, migration-related information, and human rights of migrants:

Over the last decade, ODIHR activities included programs aimed at supporting the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan which have become main destination countries in the OSCE region for migrant workers, mostly citizens of countries of the former Soviet Union. Due to regulations, many migrant workers end up living without registration and without rights to legal employment. The ODIHR's activities aim at assisting states in improving migration management systems and promoting effective co-operation between sending and receiving countries and relevant governmental institutions to the benefit of both migrant workers and host states.

In 2005 the Russian political leadership officially declared that a more comprehensive migration policy should be introduced in order to meet serious demographic and economic challenges. On the request of Russian government institutions, the ODIHR in close co-operation with International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched a project with the aim to provide decision-makers with information and suggestions to a planned regularization programme for foreign workers. An important part of this was to gauge attitudes of main stakeholders (irregular foreign workers, employers and experts) to the idea of such a programme.

In September-December 2005, the ODIHR in co-operation with IOM Moscow conducted a number of surveys targeting employers, migrants (Moscow and Sverdlovsk regions) as well as regional authorities in 20 regions of the Russian Federation. The results of those surveys were presented to government officials involved in the regularization programme, at a roundtable in March 2006. The participants also discussed the most suitable model of organizing migration regularization programmes in the Russian Federation with experts from countries with extensive experience in the field and which have in the past conducted similar programmes, such as Spain, Italy, Canada and the USA.

Another research project was launched earlier this year in order to improve understanding of the scope, the role and the characteristics of contemporary labour migration to Kazakhstan from the countries of the Central Asian region. This project was launched by the ODIHR in co-operation with UNESCO Cluster Office in Central Asia, the OSCE Centre in Almaty, and the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, at the request of the Kazakh authorities.

The project focuses amongst other issues on protection of migrants' rights, different forms of labour exploitation in order to draft recommendations for the development of migration policy. A draft research concept was elaborated and further discussed with relevant agencies and a group of international experts at working meetings in Astana and Almaty in June 2006. The first phase of the project, a review of the relevant legislation of Kazakhstan was conducted in June-July this year, by a team of Kazakh lawyers under the auspices of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law.