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UNION VIEW

ITUC International Trade Union Confederation
December 2008



→ N.D.



Costa Rica: Helping migrants organise

Migrant workers, mainly from Nicaragua, can be found in all low-paid jobs. In a country known for its aggressive anti-union culture, the trade unions are campaigning to promote their rights and help them organise. Within the framework of a bi-lateral trade union agreement between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, the ITUC supports the Migrant Workers' Trade Union Centre, the spearhead of the trade unions' migrant workers' policy. Read our report and witness accounts.

Continuing focus on the economy and security in management of migration flows

Migrants – most of them Nicaraguans – work in all the low-pay sectors. The bilateral cooperation between Costa Rica and Nicaragua is working to improve their situation. But the policy approach continues to be focused on business profit and security, rather than on defending migrant workers.



A Nicaraguan worker on the building site for a property development in Heredia. "We have no reliable data on the proportion of women in the migrant workforce, but we are seeing a perceptible increase", remarks Joaquin Melendez Gonzalez (CTRN).

Countering urban myths

"Costa Rica is the country with the most people expelled from Mexico (2,500 per year), which gives the lie to the misconception that Costa Rica is only a country importing workers. Moreover, a recent study shows that migrants are not a burden for the social security system. On average, they use 30% of what they contribute, so it's important that we counter that myth", says Salvador Gutierrez Gonzalez of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

There are a number of reasons why Costa Rica is a receiving country for migrants. First, the socio-economic status of the population and the level of social security in Costa Rica attract migrants from the region. Second, the various wars that have scarred this part of the world have also led to migration to Costa Rica. Finally, the demand from the Costa Rican agricultural sector, one of the country's economic pillars, is another factor that appeals to migrants. These migrants have come (in chronological order) from Cuba, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and – more recently and on a massive scale – Nicaragua.

There are Nicaraguans in every region of the country. Costa Rica's population of 5 million includes about 700,000 migrants, of whom about 76% come from Nicaragua. Of the whole migrant workforce, some 60% have no documents, and of these, 42% are Nicaraguan women. The choice of who emigrates from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is often family-based: the best educated and most enterprising family

members are sent, to ensure an optimum return on the collective efforts made to pay for the journey.

A wide range of sectors of activity

Migrants work in a very wide range of sectors. A large number of them are employed in agriculture (especially coffee, pineapple, banana, citrus fruit and cane sugar growing). Nicaraguans account for almost all workers in the security sector, which covers the whole country, both in tourist infrastructure and as security guard for private homes. The construction sector is widespread, with large building sites for tourist complexes on the Pacific coast. Everywhere you can also find plenty of drivers, with a particular concentration at the northern and southern borders and in the ports. Domestic workers are concentrated in the whole central region of the country and in the tourism sector on the west coast. A lot of migrants also work in the informal economy, especially in the centre of Costa Rica, as street peddlers, mechanics and car-washers. Maquilas (export factories) also

employ migrant women, although no data is available due to the closed nature of the sector.

Pressure for more flexibility in the law on immigration

"Initially, the legal and institutional framework was pretty good for defending and unionising migrants in the same way as others. But when migration gathered pace, especially due to the employers' desire to make increasing use of this workforce, we witnessed a major psychological/social reaction and the political parties started to promote xenophobic ideas. This led to a toughening up of migration law (law 8487 which came into force in August 2006) and 'rounding up' of migrants in the streets for 'deportation'", explains José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez coordinator of the Centro Sindical de Migrantes (CSM (Trade Union Centre for Migrants)). In response, a front was formed to defend migrants' rights. The main driving forces behind this were the Church and the trade unions, working together in the Red de la Sociedad Civil para Migrantes (Civil Society Network for Migrants). "The intervention of the trade union movement and the Church has reduced xenophobia in Costa Rica. Society is starting to change and to develop a desire to raise awareness of cultural differences and support integration. In the media industry for example, there are radio and television programmes dedicated to the two cultures", indicates José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez

"As a result of this incipient change in society and – in particular – international pressure, a proposal for reform of the law on immigration is on the table, but it has not yet been passed or applied. However – even if only informally – we are already witnessing a let-up in the repression of people without documents", says José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez.

Bilateral cooperation

Operating in Costa Rica where it is developing a project to combat human trafficking and a health project for indigenous migrants from Panama who are working in the coffee plantations in the south of the country, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is also involved in a bilateral co-development project between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The objectives are to boost the contribution of migration flows to the development process in these two countries and support economic growth and the process of improving social conditions in areas with a high level of migration. "With the support of Spanish development cooperation, we are playing a role bringing the two parties closer together so that the problems can be pinpointed and efforts made to resolve them in practice, for example by putting in place mechanisms to close legal loopholes. For example, you can now obtain a contract of employment in Costa Rica even if you have entered the country on a tourist visa. The technical staff are conscious that they have to find practical solutions, but the politicians are out of step. By developing towards integration practices, we hope to make the country develop towards a spirit of greater openness", explains Salvador Gutierrez Gonzalez, the IOM technical secretary for this three-year bi-national project.

Regulating private employment agencies

The bilateral approach between the two labour ministries has produced a first agreement on regularisation of migration flows, and a second on private agencies in the construction and agriculture sectors.

"The objective is to avoid the practices of employment agen-

cies which make wonderful promises which don't match up with the reality that migrants have to face on arriving in Nicaragua, especially if they aren't paid the minimum wage and they have to deal with substandard housing and health and safety conditions", explains Costa Rican Labour Minister Francisco Morales Hernandez. "These agreements have led us to draw up lists of companies and workers. When a Costa Rican employer needs a worker, the employer contacts the Costa Rican Ministry of Labour, which passes the request to its Nicaraguan counterpart. Companies have asked us for freedom to choose the workers on the lists. Our initial experience of this has been positive – although the system isn't yet completely up to scratch, we think it's the right way to go", continues Francisco Morales Hernandez. As part of IOM's bilateral project, the ministry is also organising a training programme for employers and HR managers to promote the legal recruitment of foreign workers in the agriculture and construction sectors. The Ministry of Labour has also opened a special office for Nicaraguan migrant workers and the proposal for amendment of the Labour Code contains a special chapter dedicated to improving the protection of migrant workers in their relations with employers.

Lacunae to defend workers without documents

But in the eyes of the unions, the application of the bilateral agreement leaves much to be desired and, what's more, only concerns those members of the workforce who have documents and a contract of employment. "A lot of employers go directly to the border to look for people without documents, who don't benefit at all from the improvements sought by this bilateral agreement. There isn't always control over 'informal' migration because employers make arrangements to ignore the conditions set by the Ministry for Labour, and also because there are not enough labour inspection staff to check the presence of workers without documents on the plantation and on other work sites. We're involved in a dialogue with the ministry to try to ensure that the most badly exploited workers without documents are also defended better", adds CTRN President Sergio Saborio Brenes.

"In reality, Costa Rica hasn't yet set out an explicit migration policy. The overall approach is focused primarily on business profit and security, but not much attention has been given yet to the interests of migrant workers themselves", says Salvador Gutierrez Gonzalez of IOM.

Migrants account for some 14% of the population of Costa Rica. Of these, 76% are from Nicaragua. "Migrant workers are spread across the country and are involved in a wide range of activities", says José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez, coordinator of the Centro Sindical de Migrantes (CSM (Trade Union Centre for Migrants)) of CTRN (the Costa Rican Confederation of Workers).



Ratifications expected

Costa Rica has unfortunately not yet ratified the UN Convention on the protection of Migrant Workers and members of Their Families (1990) and the two ILO Conventions relating to migrants (97 & 143).

Overcoming the fear of joining a union

Since 2007, the Centro Sindical de Migrantes (CSM (Trade Union Centre for Migrants)) has been fighting to defend migrants' rights and to help them join a union – in spite of the ban on migrant workers holding trade union responsibilities.

There are two sides to the migrant issue: as well as the difficulty of achieving freedom of association – a problem which affects all Costa Rican workers – you have specific problems related to the extreme vulnerability of migrant workers. In cooperation with the country's other trade union centres, we have recently drafted a proposal on decent work in which migration is a top priority. That shows that nowadays the Costa Rican trade union movement as a whole acknowledges that migration is a priority union issue," declares CTRN President Sergio Saborio Brenes.

Involving the youth and women's committees

"It is crucial to develop aids for migrants, especially in the areas of housing, health and education. We must work as a team with the youth and women's committees to be able to cover as many areas of this issue as possible. For example, the education union works to promote educational supervision of children despite their parents' professional mobility (see article on page 15). There is a whole psychological/social and cultural aspect to take into account too," explains José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez (CTRN). This has led the CTRN Youth Committee to launch an awareness campaign for young Costa Ricans to counter xenophobic and racist attitudes. "The General Secretary makes visits to meet migrants on the ground, taking with him other young people from the committee to inform them and give them basic training. Accordingly, in June a group of young people visited banana-plantation workers at the border with Panama. Meetings of the same type were held on the ground with the construction sector and with drivers," explains CTRN Education Officer Tyrone Esna Montero.

Opened in July 2007 with the support of ITUC and the Swedish trade union organisation LO-TCO, CSM is devising an awareness campaign within the trade union movement and offers direct legal support to migrant workers. Together with other players in civil society – especially the Church, which is very active in this area, as well as IOM – it promotes migrants' rights among the general public and official institutions, in particular the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Security. As part of bilateral cooperation with the Nicaraguan trade union centres, it has also lobbied the Nicaraguan Embassy.

Three objectives

"CSM pursues three priority objectives: developing the organisation of migrant workers; promoting their capacity devel-



"The CTRN (Costa Rican Confederation of Workers) Youth Committee launched an awareness campaign for young Costa Ricans so as to counter xenophobic and racist attitudes, featuring meetings being organised on the ground. But there is not one young migrant among the 20 members of the Youth Committee because it is against the law for a migrant worker to hold trade union responsibilities, which is a big stumbling block," complains CTRN Education Officer Tyrone Esna Montero.

ment in all aspects of social protection; and coordinating migrant policy with union policies relating to women and youth," explains CSM Coordinator José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez. "Trade union policy involves not only helping migrants to have meetings with each other to discuss their problems, but also putting migrant workers in contact with the whole of the community of workers in Costa Rica to help foster a better knowledge of each other and an improved understanding of migration phenomena," continues José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez.

Support from sectorial unions

"At the centre, our work dealing with the ministries covers the interests of all workers, whatever their sector or region. But actually the distances are obviously a major obstacle for all those who are living a long way from the central region. To get around this problem, we got all of the unions playing a part. Nationwide, they have been given the task of recording the problems of Nicaraguan migrant workers, and of pooling all this information at national union meetings in every region."



In the streets of the centre of San José, Carlos Guerrero Varela (CMTC) has for many years been supporting and unionising self-employed workers, including many migrants (see article on page 6).



This leaflet introducing the Centro Sindical de Migrantes (CSM (Trade Union Centre for Migrants)) gives the centre's contact details and summarises the fundamental rights of migrant workers.

Besides the geographical constraints, trade union organising faces three major hurdles. "First, the migrants who come here do so to improve their financial situation and that of their family who have stayed behind in Nicaragua. In many cases they know absolutely nothing about social security and only a very small minority has an idea what the labour movement is. Their focus is on how much they're going to earn and how much they're going to be able to send to their family. Knowing their rights in terms of social security and union membership isn't a priority. Second, migrant workers are very afraid to approach a trade union. The general lack of respect for trade union rights is very discouraging. It's extremely difficult to set up a trade union in a private company. Employers don't allow us to have contact with workers during the working week, leaving us only with Sunday. Joining a union in the private sector puts you at risk of being fired overnight. You can make huge efforts to launch a union in a private company, only perhaps to see the whole thing destroyed from one day to the next. If you have a collective agreement, it's more likely that the union will survive. This general climate creates a lot of fear. In pineapple-growing and construction, everything's ready and the file could be sent to the Ministry for Labour but people find it very difficult to run the risk of the ministry passing the list of union members to the employer (see pages 10 & 11). Third, the law enables migrants to become a member of a union but it doesn't allow them to be part of union decision-making bodies. This ban on having migrant trade union officers

makes communication with migrant workers very difficult. It would be much easier if they could have dealings with union officers from their own community and it's a major obstacle to increasing unionisation of Nicaraguan workers in Costa Rica," complains José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez.

Union alliances

On the ground, after the initial stage of identifying local and sectoral migrant associations and unions, CSM is seeking to develop alliance-based work. "In the banana sector, we're in contact with COSIBA (coordinadora sindical bananera – Coordinating Organisation of Banana Growers' Trade Unions of Costa Rica) as well as the Chiriquiland union in the far south of the country. In terms of bus drivers, we have links with the SICOTRA union. In the construction industry, we're going to have a meeting with an independent construction trade union. As regards domestic workers, we're in touch with the ASTRADOMES union and we'd like to see them join CTRN to strengthen our structural links", says José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez. Coffee-growing seems to be the most difficult sector to unionise because the work there is seasonal in nature, running from October to December, during the harvest. For the rest of the year, workers look for a vacancy in other agricultural sectors or, for women, the domestic services sector. "The sectoral diversity and geographical spread has led CSM to initially choose to target two priority sectors: pineapple-growing and construction," declares José Joachim Melendez Gonzalez.

Aggressive anti-union culture

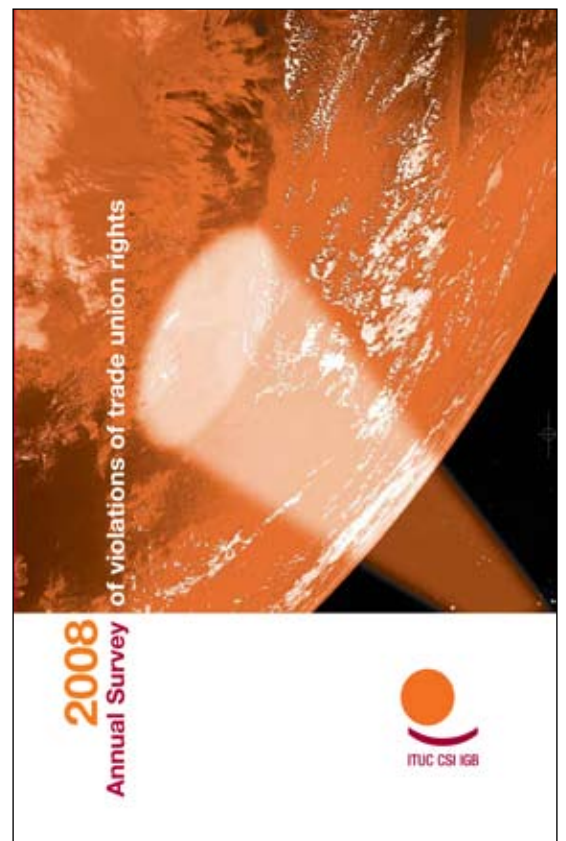
There is a stark contrast between the freedom of association provided by law and its non-application in practice.*

Costa Rica has a unionisation density of 8.72%, with 60% of this unionisation being in the public sector and some 30% in the private sector of the informal economy. Agriculture accounts for 19.16% of the unionised workforce, with the mainspring being the many farmers' associations. But only about 4% of workers in the formal private sector are union members. In the maquilas (export factories), unionisation is in effect impossible. «Those figures offer an impression of the scale of the problem of freedom of association in the private sector, which wallows in an anti-union culture that is deeply rooted among authorities, employers and politicians,» complains CTRN President Sergio Saborio Brenes.

Joining a union in the private sector puts you at risk of being fired overnight. "You can make huge efforts to launch a union in a private company, only perhaps to see the whole thing destroyed from one day to the next." The unions have denounced the existence of blacklists, particularly in the expanding pineapple industry, which is mirroring the anti-union practices of the banana plantations. The unions also deplore the large number of so-called 'solidarist' associations, which undermine the foundations of freedom of association.

Despite repeated questioning and denunciations, the government continues to be deaf to the ILO's recommendations. "That's why this December we're launching a cross-union campaign for freedom of association, with the support of the Coordinadora Sindical de América Central y el Caribe (Central American and Caribbean Trade Union Coordinating Organisation), TUCA and ILO.»

* You will find more details in the chapter on Costa Rica in ITUC's annual survey of violations of trade union rights in the world, at the following address: <http://survey08.ituc-csi.org/survey.php?IDContinent=2&IDCountry=CR&Lang=EN>



The informal economy gets organised

Health insurance, child care, cooperatives, administrative and legal assistance, housing... the CMTC has developed an attractive range of services to support the trade union organising of informal economy workers, many of whom are migrants.



The San José city authorities no longer issue licences for independent workers. More and more of them are having to hawk their wares on the streets illegally. Like the young Nicaraguan who, when he sees the police coming, quickly gathers up his goods and runs off to sell his vegetables elsewhere.



"The CMTC national executive has approved an action plan to help migrant workers. We have worked, notably, with the Church to defend the rights of migrant workers in the informal economy," explains Carlos Guerrero Varela of the CMTC, in front of a banner promising free legal and social assistance for migrant workers.

We've been in contact with informal economy workers for 30 years, in terms of individual assistance. In 1997 the independent workers' confederation FECOTRA* was created. It is affiliated to the CMTC and has 15 member organisations. It is concentrated in the San José region but we plan to extend it to other provinces. The workers are mainly street vendors, newspaper and lottery ticket sellers, women making handicrafts and fisherwomen. There are 5,000 informal economy workers affiliated to FECOTRA. That is only a tiny proportion of the total of about 800,000. But we are determined to take our organising strategy further and many groups are approaching us to ask us to help them structure their associations. We have a potentially very strong political force at stake here," explains the CMTC organiser for the informal economy, Carlos Guerrero Varela, with conviction. This conviction is strengthened by the growing share of the informal economy in the Costa Rican economy overall. "Informal activity makes up more than half the economy already. It has been steadily growing as a proportion of the economy for the last few years because of neo-liberal economic policies."

Access to social security

The great diversity and very scattered nature of informal activity makes trade union organising extremely difficult, which is why the CMTC has developed a strategy of providing attractive services. "First we signed an agreement with the social security fund to provide informal workers with health, maternity and disability insurance. They pay into the social security system via the federation, which acts as the intermediary, to manage the process. This is a real advantage, because having an income to survive on if you fall ill is something very concrete. This agreement with the social security fund is the result of a lot of awareness-raising work with the public authorities. Contrary to an assistance-based approach, we call for worker participation, giving them full access to their rights. Their contributions include a small percentage that goes into a solidarity fund to compensate for possible non-payment by workers in a difficult situation, notably if they fall ill and cannot pay," explains Carlos Guerrero Varela.

The CMTC has also introduced a child care service for infor-

mal economy women workers who often work from 5:00 in the morning till 7:00 at night. "We have also developed an accommodation programme, with 150 homes around San José for single, low-income women, close to the child care centre. The women bring a small contribution, and the national centre finances the rest. It is very difficult because the authorities' contribution is very low. We also have another project, building homes on the Golfo Nicoya beach for the fisherwomen. They go fishing from 5:00 a.m. in their little pirogues and after 5:00 p.m. they come to the beach to sell their catch to the middlemen who then sell it in the San José market for much higher prices. They live in very difficult conditions and are at constant risk of expulsion.

"We also have a capacity-building programme with INA (the national learning institute). It provides basic primary/secondary education and vocational training in management, client services, and English. About 100 workers are being trained, including 65 women. Another form of support that helps them improve their income is the development of microcredit and micro-enterprises. We are also putting strong pressure on the municipal authorities to build three new markets (fruit and vegetables, handicrafts and miscellaneous goods)."

All these services are accessible to migrant workers. "The housing project involves about 40% of migrant workers. In the child care centres there is also a high percentage of migrant children, mainly from Nicaragua, but also from Peru, Colombia and the Dominican Republic," says Carlos Guerrero Varela.

Inter-union cooperation

"We are working with the CTRN on a proposal for a comprehensive employment policy that covers informal economy workers, notably by including them in the labour code. We have submitted a joint request to the ILO to help us with this," explains Carlos Guerrero Varela. Furthermore, the youth committees of the two ITUC affiliates are working on a joint project for the informal economy which could also be helpful for young migrant workers.

(*) Federación costarricense de trabajadores autónomos- FECOTRA.

Angie: "I was roughly handled and bathed in cold water"

"I began to work when I was five with my grandmother, selling vegetables. I have been working for myself for 12 years. My biggest problem is that I do not have a licence from the authorities, so they take my goods away from me. After the demonstration on 6 August 2008, I was locked up in a police cell while waiting to go to court. When I was stopped in the street by the police, I was beaten and insulted, then when I got to the police station they hit me again. I was handled roughly and bathed in cold water.

"I had known Carlos for several years, from meeting him in the street. I came to the union to find help, to put an end to the physical attacks on me and other women like me.

"I am a member of an association of independent vendors without a licence. I want to get authorisation, but the city authorities are getting rid of vendors like us by not granting any more licences. The last 20 licences were given to elderly people, four years ago. There have been none since.

"I have three children. Two days after giving birth I went back to work on the street, each time. I am raising them on my own. I pay into the social security system, for health care and medicines for myself and my children.

"I would like a more stable job, decent accommodation and fewer difficulties with the authorities. I am also interested in training, to get a better job."



There have been regular confrontations between street vendors and the San José police in recent months. The CMTC has published posters denouncing police repression, such as this one showing Angie, an independent worker without a licence, who is being beaten up by police officers.

Maria Cecilia: "We don't have the right to work to eat"

Fifty-six year-old Maria Cecilia has been working in the markets of San José for 40 years. She lives on the outskirts of the city, an hour away from the markets in the city centre, with her children, her mother and her dependent sister. She began working in the markets with her mother when she was very young, but today she suffers severe pain in her back and legs which prevents her from going to work more and more often. "They are cleaning up the pedestrianised areas for the benefit of the big stores and the tourists. But we don't have the right to work to feed ourselves! We aren't drug addicts or delinquents, we are only asking to work. I have known the CMTC, via Carlos, for years. It gives me much needed moral and practical support. It helped me a lot for example with one of my daughters who was very ill, and has since died."



Building works along the main pedestrian walkways in San José. "There is a trend in the cities, as there is throughout Latin America, to renovate the urban areas, to 'clean' the city centres of independent workers and send them further away. For electoral reasons, the city's political authorities are targeting informal economy workers. The big shops are also putting the pressure on. Yet they all pay the same 13% rate of VAT!", says Carlos Gerrero Varela (CMTC).

"They pay us as little as possible"

The construction sector relies on a workforce that is 70% Nicaraguan migrant workers, particularly on the big tourist sites on the Pacific coast.

"When I came here I wanted to get a residence permit. I got a lawyer, whom I paid, but the lawyer wasn't very honest. Every time I telephoned, he told me there was no progress. I went directly to the 'Dirección Nacional de Migración y Extranjería' (immigration ministry) where I was told I had been living in the country illegally for the last year, as there was an expulsion order against me. The lawyer had taken my money but hadn't told me about my situation! I was taken into detention on 30 April, and I had five days to appeal, but because of the May Day bank holiday, there wasn't enough time to go through the whole process. So then I was kept in the Hatillo prison in San José (a migrants' detention centre notorious for its unhealthy and inhuman conditions)," reports Rónald Fuentes, a migrant workers' union leader in the construction industry, with Nicaraguan nationality.

Trade union solidarity campaign

The ITUC, in association with the Migrants' Trade Union Centre (affiliated to the CTRN) of Costa Rica and the Sandinista Workers' Centre (CST) of Nicaragua, protested at his arrest and in a letter to President Oscar Arias called for the immediate release of Rónald Fuentes, noting he had a record of good conduct.

"I was lucky because the government came under pressure from the solidarity campaign the trade unions launched with the ITUC and the ILO. After 11 days in detention, I was released. I still do not understand why I was arrested, because the notification procedure was not applied," says Rónald Fuentes.

"People think that the migrant workers have nothing to fall back on, no-one to help them. The authorities were surprised at this huge display of solidarity from all over the world for a simple Nicaraguan migrant like me. After my experience, the CSM was better known, more migrant workers came to find out about it and realised there were things they could do. I was the guinea pig, and I'm very pleased about that because it highlighted the work of the CSM and the existence of international trade union solidarity.



"I was the guinea pig, and I'm very pleased about that because it highlighted the work of the CSM and the existence of international trade union solidarity," says Rónald Fuentes, the first migrant worker to become a trade union leader despite the legal ban, imprisoned for 11 days in May 2008.

This experience also illustrates the need for migrant workers to take charge of their own situation, and to realise their strengths as well."

Originally from Managua, Rónald Fuentes has been working in Costa Rica's construction industry for eight years. He lives there with his wife but his 18-year-old son stayed in his home country. "But I cannot go home to see my son and the family. Because I've been to prison, if I go back to Nicaragua, I risk being banned from Costa Rica for ten years."

Despite the risks he faces because of the legal ban on migrants holding trade union office, Rónald Fuentes continues



"The authorities were surprised at this huge display of solidarity from all over the world for a simple Nicaraguan migrant like me



Rónald Fuentes.





“I grew up on the streets, with my mother. But I put my children in the trade union day care centre. That helped me enormously and the children learnt a lot.”



Wendy, 27 years old, street vendor in San José, affiliated to the CMTC.

his trade union organising work. “It is so useful to be able to join a trade union. And it is also important to work with the trade unions back in Nicaragua, to keep potential migrants informed. When workers take the first step, applying to the embassy for a visa, they have no idea of the harsh conditions they are going to find in Costa Rica.”

“Employers treat us badly. They often humiliate us, treat us with contempt and bully us. The minimum wage is not respected, we are paid very little. But as 70% of the workforce in the construction industry is Nicaraguan, we are very useful! But they don’t care, they pay as little as possible,” complains Rónald Fuentes .

“There is a lot of pressure. They tell migrant workers that if they join a union they will lose their rights. For example, their residence permit won’t be renewed. When they come here with their passport and need medical assistance, there are so many formalities, one thing is conditional upon another, and they end up in an administrative vicious circle,” he explains.

José Joaquín Meléndez González, coordinator of the CTRN’s migrants’ trade union centre, believes “his experience has enabled him to overcome a series of psychological obstacles that prevent many Nicaraguan migrants from integrating into Costa Rican society. He is effectively working as a trade union leader, even though the law doesn’t allow him to. Even if though he doesn’t officially have the rank of a union officer, he has won over the esteem of the workers, and that is crucial in our work with the migrants”.



If I deduct all my expenses, I find that I earn a little bit more than Nicaragua, but that little bit more is vital to survive

José Noël (on the left in the photo) is from Managua and has been in Costa Rica for three years now. “I’m working in the security sector, in a supermarket. It’s a sector in which wages are very low and it’s even worse for migrants, with employers paying what they want. I earn 40,000 colons a week (77 US\$). With my wife and four children, I need 100,000 colons a week to pay for our house, water and electricity and essential goods. My wife doesn’t work. She has no residence permit so she would only be able to obtain small jobs paying pitiful wages. As for me, I have no residence permit either, but I do have a work permit. I have a contract, but it doesn’t indicate a term, which means that I could be thrown out at any time. My contract of employment entitles me to health insurance, but I need permission from the boss to go to hospital. Initially, I was a bus driver here in Costa Rica, but I had a gout problem so I was fired,” says José Noël in front of the small wooden shack where he lives amidst the noise and pollution of the side of a motorway. José Joaquín Meléndez González (on the right) talks to him about the bus drivers’ union which he could join and promises that Ronald Fuentes, a Nicaraguan migrant union activist, will come to meet him very soon.

“My children are in Managua with my relatives and I send money so that they can go to school. Adapting to the reality is very painful. The rent is US\$ 100 a month. If

I deduct all my expenses, I find that I earn a little bit more than Nicaragua, but that little bit more is vital to survive, even though I would prefer to stay in my country,” concludes José.



The high social price of exported pineapples

Migrants account for 60% of export plantation workers. We discuss unionisation efforts in the field in Guacimo.



→ Reuters

Chemical contamination

"Pineapple-growing causes a lot of pollution. Chemical fertiliser is used on a massive scale so that the pineapples can be sold for export. This causes severe contamination of the soil. Sometimes, rivers become completely yellow and ground water is also affected. The effects on flora can already be seen – some trees are dying; it's a major environmental problem here. For workers, the chemical products cause headaches, skin, eye and lung irritations and fertility problems," complains Jorge Morales Corella, an officer at the Guacimo trade union association for small-scale agricultural producers (ASCG) and also treasurer and former general secretary of the national farmers' federation.

It's payday today. It's difficult to get workers to come to the meeting in this school. Many are really afraid to come as they always fear that we are hand in glove with the Ministry of Immigration and that they will be sent back over the border. The atmosphere is tense as we have fought hard recently, sometimes making major sacrifices because it is no secret for anyone here that when you try to defend rights, you risk losing your job," warned Lionel Lopez Martinez, an officer at the Guacimo-Limon pineapple workers' association.

Despite this, sitting at the desks in a small school in Guacimo were some fifteen workers, mainly women whose husbands work on the plantations, who had responded to the association's call to come to its meeting. Most of them were Nicaraguans who had stories to tell about the difficult working conditions on the plantations.

"Migrants account for at least 60% of the people working for the region's mainly export-focused plantations, such as Dole and Chiquita. On the Dole plantation, to which we were denied access, 500 workers have the right papers, but many others have no documents. I know that from my work at the health centre, where I see many workers who don't have any papers with them. That's why they don't let us go onto the plantation," complained Jorge Morales Corella, one of the officers of the Guacimo trade union association for small-scale agricultural producers (ASCG) and also treasurer and former general secretary of the national farmers' federation.

«It's a great boon for employers that up to 90% of their workforce can be made up of immigrants. On some fincas (farms), only the senior management are Costa Ricans – all the others are Nicaraguans,» continued Lionel Lopez Martinez.

Staff turnover is very high. "Managers are paid on the basis of productivity, which encourages them to be tough. Since workers receive no induction training, they often go elsewhere after three months," explained Jorge Morales Corella. Wages range from 30,000 to 35,000 colons per week (between 57 & 77 US\$). In general, work stops at 1 p.m. However, in high season, it goes on until later, with packaging staff even sometimes working at night.

Formerly, homes were provided on the banana plantations. But wanting to regain this land, employers demolished them and the agricultural workers' homes are now very spread out. In some cases, as at Dole, the employer lays on buses. If this is not the case, workers have to walk or cycle to the plantations.

In very hot weather, workers collapse from dehydration because they have no drinking water on site. Working on the plantations also frequently leads to back and shoulder problems. "The work-related medical insurance covers work accidents and provides basic medical cover for the whole family. That works for a while, but when the company doctor tells you have to go back to work, it's finished and if the



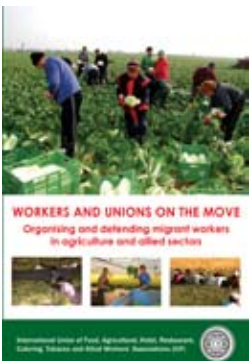
No dialogue possible

«We can't unionise without some minimal cooperation from the boss. For the moment, the only response you get is to be fired – as a matter of course, the boss appoints worker representatives he considers servile to him. If that judgement turns out to be wrong and the person starts to make demands, the boss does everything he can to destroy the credibility of that representative,» says Lionel Lopez Martinez, an officer at the Guacimo-Limon pineapple workers' association.



During the World Forum on Migration and Development, the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) published a new handbook, based on numerous case studies, to encourage and assist trade unions to organise migrant workers in agriculture.

<http://www.iufdocuments.org/www/documents/IUFmigrantworkersmanual-e.pdf>



health problem is still there, you have to look for another job," added Jorge Morales Corella.

Employment agencies

"Workers who come to work here via recruitment agencies have no residence permit and are particularly badly exploited," complained Daniel Jiménez González, chairman of the Guacimo farmers' association (ASCAG). "I worked 15 years ago through a recruitment agency which paid me below the legal minimum," said Lionel Lopez Martinez. "Normally, the contract signed with a company stipulates that the working hours are eight hours per day and defines the basic pay. But employment agencies have direct dealings with workers and pay them slightly less than the wage paid by the employer, pocketing the difference, without giving them any social security or holiday entitlement. Certain agencies recruit in Nicaragua itself, while others work here in Costa Rica," he continued.

There are almost as many women as men working both in the field and in packaging. "In theory, men and women earn the same wage, but only if their productivity is the same. For women who, for example, work in packaging for 12 hours at a time and have to carry heavy loads, it is very hard and very difficult to achieve the same level of productivity as men," indicated Lionel Lopez Martinez.

"In many cases, if a woman gets pregnant, she's dismissed: sometimes on the spot, in other cases on the pretext that the plantation is cutting down on staff. At Dole, if a woman is pregnant but her partner is a manager, she will be protected. If not, she will be fired. They pay special attention to that issue in the recruitment procedure. If you apply for a job while you're pregnant, you won't be hired. If the boss finds out you hid your pregnancy since you started your job, you will be dismissed. In the past, they used to almost systematically demand proof that you aren't pregnant when you start work, but now that's very rare," explained Manuela, a worker attending the union meeting.

In the field, internal or external auditors are supposed to find out the actual situation, but "as happened recently when a European Union audit mission came here, workers don't

speak out because they risk losing their job. Managers decide in advance who is going to represent the workers", said Antonio, a Nicaraguan farm worker at Dole. "A television crew also came from Deutsche Welle, but a watch was kept on the workers to prevent them from speaking out and telling their stories, so as to present only a good image," continues Antonio.

Union help for regularisation

The three main demands concern wages, working conditions and regularisation of papers. "My primary concern is to obtain documents. My husband's wage isn't enough – I need a residence permit to work as well," said Maria. "But it's expensive. You pay a lot of money to a lawyer – money for which you have to work very hard – and then he just disappears," she continued. José Joaquín Meléndez González, from the Centro Sindical de Migrantes (Trade Union Centre for Migrants) of CTRN (the Costa Rican Confederation of Workers), promised to come back one Sunday with an official from the Ministry of Migration to explain that the standard procedure costs no more than US\$ 25, which is the cost of obtaining a certified document from a consulate – there was no need for a lawyer to be involved.

Providing information of this type to migrant agricultural workers is one of the ways that the union movement can make a big difference on the ground. Of course, the primary aim remains to establish unions in due form. "The trade union here is ready to be launched. But people are still hesitant about registering it at the Ministry of Labour because they're afraid that the union members mentioned will be fired immediately, and that is a heavy burden to bear which can't be taken lightly," explained José Joaquín Meléndez González. In the meantime, the association is pursuing its work to raise awareness. "Take the varying hours for instance. When the association calls a meeting, it's very difficult to set a time because you never know at what time you'll finish your work on the plantation. There are worker blacklists, which make people afraid. There's also a lot of job insecurity, and workers have problems with taking the risk of speaking to a visitor, especially a union activist. It's a long haul," concluded Lionel Lopez Martinez.

"My husband was poisoned and I lost two babies"

"I have a Nicaraguan brother-in-law who, having worked for six years for a plantation employer, was fired overnight without any entitlements or compensation. The only reason was that he'd asked to be moved to a slightly better-paid job. He's now found another job which means he can't come and tell his story himself," says Lisa, at her husband's side, in front of their little wooden houses.

"My husband used to work in the plantation fumigation team. I have a document from the hospital that certifies that I lost two babies with massive deformities because my husband was in contact with toxic products. My husband was never told of the risks when he started but he was poisoned through the pores of his skin. What can we do? The answer is nothing. Now my husband is unemployed. To survive, I sell second-hand clothes and I'm also the secretary of the farmers' association."

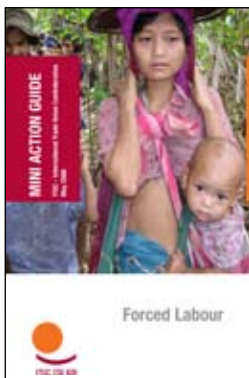


Eliminating forced labour and human trafficking

At least 12.3 million people are in forced labour as defined by the International Labour Organisation's Convention 29. The victims are subjected to various forms of psychological and/or physical coercion and over 2.4 million of them are also victims of human trafficking. Migrants are targeted more than most by these extreme forms of exploitation, because of their vulnerable situation.

An international trade union conference on forced labour and human trafficking organised by the ITUC, its Pan-European Regional Council (PERC), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) was held in Athens from 21 to 23 November. The ITUC also published a trade union guide to action on forced labour to coincide with this conference, organised within the framework of the Global Trade Union Alliance Against Forced Labour and Trafficking.

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/guide_forced_labour_EN.pdf

**"I have no residence permit and so no access to healthcare"**

Veronica came from Nicaragua 11 years ago and has been working for a year on a farm growing flowers. "I'm paid 720 Colons per hour (1,4 US\$), and 1,029 colons an hour for overtime (1,9 US\$). I live 10 kilometres from the farm but no transport is organised, so I walk or cycle to work."

Previously, Veronica worked on a pineapple plantation where she was in charge of distributing chemical products. But she was fired without any entitlement whatsoever when a new director suddenly decided that she didn't have the skills required for the job. "I have three children, aged 13, 12 and 7. The youngest was even born here in Costa Rica. The children can, thank goodness, go to school here even if I don't have a residence permit. For the moment, I don't have plans to go back to Nicaragua because the children are used to it here. But my former job in which I came into contact with chemical products makes me fear for my future health because initially we didn't get any protective equipment. And since I have no residence permit, I have no access to healthcare."



Combatting child labour: the trade unions target agriculture and the informal sector

Awareness-raising and a monitoring network.

Over 113,000 boys and girls aged between 9 and 14 work in agriculture, domestic service and small informal commerce. The figure dates back to 2002 and the unions believe it has increased over the years.

The two national trade union centres affiliated to the ITUC have developed a policy to combat child labour with the ILO's IPEC. It involves large-scale awareness-raising as well as work on the ground to identify the child victims of this scourge. The two national centres also work within the framework of the National Childhood Council which, in collaboration with ILO/IPEC, brings together all the institutions, social partners and other members of civil society concerned.

Tyronne Esna Montero, the CTRN's education officer, is responsible for the special commission created as part of the national centre's policy to combat child labour that it has been developing since 2005. "In agriculture, they are usually children whose parents work in the sector. In small informal commerce, such as the street vendors selling sweets or flowers, they are usually the children of migrants." The farm workers' unions affiliated to the CTRN run a programme of awareness-raising activities, with ILO/IPEC, aimed at parents and all their members, in several regions around the country. Small local monitoring groups have been formed to report on any child labour they discover in their area.

The CMTC is also involved in large-scale awareness raising and the monitoring and reporting network. "To raise awareness we go to schools, for example, with material, particularly videos, to talk about this problem. In the informal sector, where we have a strong presence (see page...), we have trained 200 people. They are the core of the monitoring and reporting network which alerts the federation to the problems. The federation then calls on the public authorities to take action and follows the process through to the end," explains Carlos Guerrero Varela, the CMTC's organiser for the informal economy. The child care centres set up by the CMTC for women workers in the



→Reuters.

informal economy also participate in the fight against child labour. "It allows the women workers in the informal sector to have an alternative option to taking their baby out on the street with them all day, in a cardboard box. We wanted to make a clear separation between the workplace and where the children are kept, so that they get to know something other than the street, and can imagine a future that does not necessarily involve the street. We also help the children get to school," says Carlos Guerrero Varela.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children: "The trade unions have a key role to play"

Combating the myths and social intolerance, and bringing those responsible to justice.

"We began our work by tackling a lot of the myths and society's intolerance. A lot of people think it is the little girls who are making money out of this, that they are the wrongdoers. Information is a crucial first step," explains Victoria Cruz Lopez, the coordinator of the ILO/IPEC sub-regional project on combating commercial sexual exploitation.

"There has been an increase in our region in the number of children left alone in their home country when their parents migrate. At the same time, more and more children migrate themselves, either to look for their parents, if they are little, or to find jobs if they are bigger. But when they migrate they are in a very vulnerable situation, and come across sexual exploitation traffickers on the way. Like Mexico, Guatemala is very affected by this because of its geo-political situation. A survey carried out in Guatemala led to the identification of 100 child victims. Half of them came from other countries, from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. Some were children who had fallen victim to sex trade traffickers at the outset. Others were migrant children who had fallen into the hands of the traffickers and their networks on their travels. This occurs in all the countries in the region because of Central America's pivotal role between the north and south of the continent. As the third largest receiving country for migrant labour on the continent, after Canada and the USA, Costa Rica is obviously badly affected, often to the detriment of Dominican teenagers," comments Victoria Cruz Lopez.

"Joint responsibility"

"Given the transnational nature of the problem, we are trying to promote horizontal cooperation between the region's countries. We are supporting institutional strengthening

with a dual objective: prevention and social mobilisation on one hand, and penal sanctions against the authors of the crimes on the other," she continued.

When it comes to prevention, ILO/IPEC works with the trade union movement at the national and sub-regional level (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Salvador, Honduras and Panama). "We are working on the basis of 'joint responsibility' with the trade unions which, like employers, can play a key role in combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Based on our discussions with the region's trade unions, we published a brochure which includes a description of the phenomenon and the main areas for trade union action (see opposite)."

"Commercial sexual exploitation is closely linked to poverty, to the shortage of decent jobs, to the inability of some adults to protect their children...all topics the trade unions are well informed about. This is where we can collaborate with the trade unions. They represent an important sector of the population and they have links with key institutional players (such as the education, police and health unions)," adds Victoria Cruz Lopez.



No hay excusas

El comercio sexual
con personas menores de 18 años
es un CRIMEN



Trade union action

With the support of ILO/IPEC, the CSA has published a brochure which provides a trade union training module on the sexual exploitation of children (available in Spanish and English). The CSA also took part in the preparation of the Third World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, held in Rio de Janeiro from 25 to 28 November 2008.

http://www.iiicongresso-mundial.net/index.php?id_sistema=2&inicial=2&id_idioma=2



Taxis on the front line

Taxi drivers are on the front line as the link between arriving tourists and the children. They are directly requested by their clients to show them where the children are, or even to make direct contact with the children and adolescents.

"In our campaign, we have been able to build fruitful collaboration with the taxi drivers' union (SICOTA) which has signed a code of conduct to combat sexual tourism, a code promoted at the international level by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a tripartite organisation. The companies that have signed the code provide training for their workers during working hours, to teach them how to say no and to report abusive clients to the police," explains Victoria Cruz Lopez.

"For the last three months we have been focusing on the tourist areas. Our role as a trade union is to concentrate on informing our members and raising their awareness. We are negotiating with employers in the tourist industry to develop this awareness raising, notably through the distribution of posters and flyers in the hotels and tourist establishments," explains Tyrone Esna Montero, the CTRN's education officer and the trade union representative on the national committee in charge of tackling this problem.

In addition to the taxis, the campaign is visible in as many tourist areas as possible in order to give Costa Rica the image of a country that rejects this kind of tourism. The campaign seeks to involve all the sub-contractors in the tourist industry, to initiate a process of self-regulation. The tourist industry's chambers of commerce have made a commitment to preventing sexual tourism by signing the code of conduct, in coordination with the NGO Paniamoor. This WTO code of conduct is a step towards a global approach to responsible and sustainable tourism.





ILO/IPEC together with the CTRN's education union has published a manual for educators, both because there is work to be done in terms of prevention among adolescents, and because there are young girl victims of sexual exploitation who are at school. "It is a complex task, because young people can have a very ambiguous view of the situation, when they are being offered presents by adults for example, such as mobile phones or clothing, in exchange for nude photographs or sexual relations," points out Victoria Cruz Lopez.

Collaboration with the health sector is also crucial. "A lot of the young girl victims of sexual exploitation end up pregnant and the health centres become a key place for detecting cases of exploitation and protecting these young people. With each sector we have tried to identify everyone's role and responsibilities. We have published brochures with clear, concise information, aimed at doctors, teachers, police officers and immigration officials, including contact information so that they can report the abusers and protect the children."

It concerns men too!

"One of the biggest challenges for the trade union movement is to fight against the idea that because this is about children, it is an issue to be dealt with only by women. We have to explain that men are also concerned, as it is mostly men who pay to have sexual relations with children. We have to develop greater awareness, and make them understand that it is a crime," explains Victoria Cruz Lopez.

As part of this fight, the trade unions also challenge the politicians, and take part in various inter-sectoral forums, such as the Migrants Forum, or the Council for the protection of childhood and adolescence. In the tourism industry, where union membership is low, ILO/IPEC considers that "this campaign work can help bring the different parties together in a general way, and will hopefully also help to promote social dialogue, freedom of association and decent work. Families often get the blame, but families are often unable to protect their children when there is widespread poverty".

"If the workers and employers of the tourist industry all say NO, that can help pull the ground from under the feet of these mafias," concludes Victoria Cruz Lopez.

"Improving the self-esteem of women migrant workers"

"As a first approach, we are concentrating on information and training, aimed primarily at women domestic workers," explains Glenda Munoz Geuvara, organising secretary for the education union (SEC) and the officer responsible for gender issues at the CTRN.

The CTRN already works with the women domestic workers' union, ASTRADOMES. The CTRN wishes to build on this cooperation by encouraging stronger structural links between ASTRADOMES and the national centre. The next stage, as far as the CTRN's gender committee is concerned, will be to identify and respond to the priority needs of migrant women domestic workers. "Time is a big problem for all of them, because domestic workers usually only have a 45-minute break, which is the only opportunity for contacting them. Then we also have to go to the regions to see as many women workers and as many situations as possible," explains Glenda Munoz Guevara.

Vulnerable to violence

"There is a lot of work to do on self-esteem because women migrant workers often have very low self-esteem and know nothing at all about their rights. They are very vulnerable to all kinds of violence, which can go as far as femicide. There is a very strong need for them to gain a sense of their own worth and learn about their rights so that they can defend themselves." The migrant workers' centre works with women's associations that fight against violence against women. "There are very different situations where violence can flare up, exacerbated by husbands and wives having to live far apart, their very difficult living and working conditions, and cramped housing conditions. Alcoholism is a problem, particularly among men, who tend to internalise their problems. There is a whole psycho-cultural dimension to be tackled when approaching them." To develop the psycho-cultural dimension, women trade unionists have a



"There is a lot of work to do on self-esteem because women migrant workers often have very low self-esteem and know nothing at all about their rights," Glenda Munoz Guevara, CTRN gender committee.

key role to play. "Migrant women are not very communicative, they are even more reserved than the men. But among themselves women can open up more easily, which is why it is important for trade union women to take steps to get closer to them. There is a lot more to be done but it is a first step and the CTRN gender committee is determined to take this further," concludes Glenda Munoz Guevara.

Promoting continuity in school for the children of migrant workers

The education union is working to ensure the continued education of children despite their parents' occupational mobility.

"**S**s an education union we are particularly concerned about the migration of young people and children who come to Costa Rica with their families. The children follow their parents, who move between one sector and another, usually according to the seasonal work available on the coffee or pineapple plantations. This instability means there is no continuity in their school career and often leads to children being excluded from the education system," says Glenda Munoz Guevara, organising secretary for Costa Rica's Education Union (SEC) and gender officer at the CTRN.



Fighting against the loss of cultural roots

"We are organising a sub-regional activity for all the education unions of Central America. The aim is to work together to find a response to this problem of migrant children being excluded from education, and to make this issue an integral part of the official education system in Costa Rica. We want to guarantee continuity and coherence, both when

children have to move from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and from one region of Costa Rica to another. That will require coordination between the Education and Culture ministries, in order to fight against the loss of these migrant children's cultural roots and references. We work with people who are specialised in guiding the school career of children who often live in very traumatic circumstances," adds Glenda Munoz Guevara .

"No I.D., no diplomas"

"I arrived here in Costa Rica when I was seven years old, with no documents, no passport. An uncle took care of me because I'd been abandoned by my parents. I have tried several times to go through all the administrative procedures as if I've just arrived, but to no avail. Now I'm 20, and I've got two kids. Because I don't have any documentation, I was caught by the migration department, but they didn't expel me because my two children were born here. They've given me a provisional passport for nine months, but even with the help of a lawyer, I still have not been able to get any proper documentation. I managed to go to school, but because I didn't have any I.D. it wasn't possible for me to get the certificates to show I had completed both my primary and secondary education."



Protecting migrants from the impact of the financial crisis

International trade union strategy for migrants.



Mody Guiro (CNTS-Senegal) and Katia Parredes (ITUC- Equality Department) talk to migrant workers on the Guacimo plantations (Costa Rica). Both were taking part in an ITUC mission that went to Costa Rica last November as part of the follow-up to bi-lateral trade union partnership agreements, to look at the work carried out in the field by the Costa Rican CTRN's national migrant workers' union.

Mody Guiro, general secretary of the CNTS-Senegal, who has signed the same kind of partnership agreement on migration with the CGTM-Mauritania, took part in this exchange of experiences. Further to its round of meetings, the ITUC mission secured the commitment of the Costa Rican Labour Minister to organise a tripartite national seminar on migration, with the full participation of the trade unions, in 2009.

Combating racism

As part of its policy to combat racism and xenophobia, the ITUC is supporting the launch of several pilot projects in Brazil (CUT), Nepal (NTUC), DR Congo (UNTC) and South Africa (CONSAWU). The ITUC is also preparing a conference to take place in Geneva in April 2009 to examine the follow-up to the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Racism and Xenophobia in Durban in 2001.



In seeking to overcome the world financial crisis, governments should provide guarantees for the mobility of the world's people, not restrict it," warns Sharan Burrow, president of the ITUC, at the opening of the Civil Society Days organised within the framework of the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

At a time of major job losses migrant workers, often confined to the most precarious and least protected jobs, are in the front line of the economic and financial crisis. Their families in their countries of origin could also be badly affected, as they often depend heavily for their survival on money sent home by the migrant workers. Recalling the dramatic impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis on migrant workers, which resulted in the sudden expulsion of many migrants, the international trade union movement is anxious to ensure that the same errors that had such painful consequences for migrants are not repeated and that on the contrary migrants are considered as full participants in long-term development strategies and socio-economic policies.

Linking Migration to Development

"As part of the global trade union campaign for fairer globalisation with a more human face, linking migration to sustainable development is a fundamental priority in promoting decent work for all workers, migrant workers included," says Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC.

The ITUC's founding Congress in Vienna in November 2006 made combating discrimination one of its top priorities for action. Particular emphasis is placed on the gender dimension of the action to be taken, as women migrant workers make up a significant, growing and heavily discriminated

part of the migrant workforce.

In December 2006, the ITUC set up a trade union "action plan" to organise migrants more effectively, defend and promote their rights and improve their working conditions, with a particular focus on collective bargaining and on partnerships with NGOs and other civil society stakeholders.

Bilateral partnership agreements

As part of its strategy to strengthen South/South solidarity, the ITUC has launched three partnership agreements between affiliates in the different regions. With the support of the LO/TCO Sweden, these three pilot projects involve Indonesia (SPSI) and Malaysia (MTUC), Senegal (CNTS) and Mauritania (CGTM), Nicaragua (CST, CUS, CUSa) and Costa Rica (CTRN). Information and support centres for migrant workers have been set up in Malaysia by the MTUC, in Mauritania by the CGTM and in Costa Rica by the CTRN. Other affiliates have taken similar initiatives, such as the CGT Colombia which has just opened an information centre for migrant workers based in Bogota.

Global union federations such as the Building and Wood Workers' International and Public Services International have similar partnership agreements. In many trade unions, particularly in Europe and North America, there are long-established projects and mobilisation campaigns aimed at ensuring the full integration of migrant workers and their families. In Hong Kong, migrants have set up their own trade union, which is affiliated to the HKCTU (Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions).

-For further reading see the "Union View" edition on migrant workers in the Middle East, in particular in Jordan: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/VS_Jordanie_EN.pdf and the accompanying video documentary: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1678>

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Report: **Natacha David & Reuters**
Photos: **Natacha David & Reuters**
Editor in Chief: **Natacha David**
Layout: **Vicente Cepedal**