

Asia-Europe Labour Forum

Policy Proposals to the 5th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference,

Sofia, Bulgaria, 3 - 4 December 2015

“We reiterated the need to adopt and implement policies to foster employment and to create decent jobs, in particular for youth and other vulnerable groups, in consultations with social partners and other stakeholders and to make employment accessible to all.”

4th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference, Ha Noi, 2012

1. Macro-economic policies to stimulate decent work creation

The ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers have the political authority to call for macro-economic policies that can attain employment-led growth and the creation of millions of new decent jobs. Such outcomes can be achieved with robust measures to raise labour demand, including public investment in social and physical infrastructure, and the care-economy; raising low and middle-incomes to reverse the decline in the labour income share; introducing and strengthening social protection floors; guaranteeing universal access to basic public services; and actively supporting the transition from the informal to the formal economy. The ASEM partners should be promoting the effective implementation of the ILO Conventions on Fundamental Rights at Work as a means to halt and reverse the decreasing labour share of income.

2. Guaranteeing decent work for all and promoting social dialogue in supply chains

Social dialogue is an indispensable element of good governance on both national and international levels. Policies formulated and implemented in cooperation with the social partners promote social stability and cohesion and have the potential to boost economic and social progress, and therefore such policies need to be put in place. Developing work on increasing workers' protection, recognising the responsibility of business to apply due diligence across the supply chains, promoting the ratification and effective implementation of the ILO Conventions on Fundamental Rights at Work and taking action to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights would greatly benefit working people in Asia and Europe. In particular,

- the AELF has high expectations for ASEM projects to be agreed on Fundamental Rights in supply chains and the continuation of the “Social Dialogue for Working Conditions” project;
- in view of the discussion on supply chains in the International Labour Conference in 2016, the AELF asks the Ministers to recognise the responsibility of business to apply due diligence across the supply chains and the need to strengthen the use of UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

3. Social protection floors for sustainable and inclusive growth

The Asia-Europe labour Forum encourages ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers to establish broad social protection systems and improve the financial sustainability and the quality of existing ones. The ratification of ILO Convention No. 102 on social protection and the implementation of ILO Recommendation No. 202 on social protection floors would considerably help ASEM partners in enhancing social protection.

- The ASEM partners that start putting social protection systems in place would benefit from the continuation of the relevant projects and the provision of technical assistance from partners with long experience in social protection systems.

4. Advancing the global discourse on OSH

The ASEM Ministers of Labour and Employment have contributions to make on the work that is currently being developed in other global governance processes, like the G20 and the G7, in particular,

- with the continuation of the project on occupational safety and health (OSH) and measures to monitor the observance of such regulations, with a special focus on supply chains, and as means to follow up the G7 Action for Fair Production.

5. Addressing youth unemployment and long-term unemployment

The Asia-Europe Labour Forum supports employment targets for youth employment, youth guarantees, and accessibility of vocational training as needed in order to help create new opportunities for youth currently out of employment.

- Activating dialogue on labour market policies for long-term unemployed is another area where ASEM could develop a better understanding.

6. Responsibility toward refugees and migrants

Being faced with multiple challenges in dealing with the entry of refugees in the EU and the increase of migratory flows, the ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers have a long agenda to discuss. Workers in Asia and Europe expect commitments to resettle refugees and asylum seekers and to afford all migrants the right to decent work. In particular, migrant workers are more vulnerable when they lack language skills and remain unaware of their rights. Granting equal protection to migrant workers is the best way to protect the jobs and wages of workers in the host country.

- The ASEM LEMC5 could take up this agenda by launching a new project on migrant labour.

7. Taking immediate action on climate change

The ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers need to address climate change in their talks in Sofia. With a view to a Paris Climate agreement, governments should take concrete steps to reduce emissions and agree on a robust mechanism of periodical review for raising ambition over time. There is an urgent need for developed countries to mobilise USD 100bn by 2020 for adaptation. Including a commitment to “Just Transition” measures in Paris would enable industrial transformation in all sectors, in particular jobs and livelihoods for workers in emission-intensive industries.

8. Granting the Asia-Europe Labour Forum the status of “ASEM Forum”

“In this context, we took note of proposals to enhance consultations with social partners in ASEM on employment and labour issues.”

4th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers’ Conference, Ha Noi, 2012

Trade unions have been engaged in the ASEM process since its very beginning in 1996. Admitting the Asia-Europe Labour Forum as an “ASEM Forum” not only would make dialogue more inclusive but would also increase relevant experience, especially on issues of employment and social affairs, and ownership of ASEM’s work. The trade unions in ASEM partners look forward to deepening engagement in the ASEM process by being included in ASEM meetings and by being directly involved in Leaders’ Summits together with the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP) and the Asia-Europe Peoples’ Forum (AEPF).