



**Research Track Seminar:
“The Future of Work, Labour *after Laudato si*”
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Points on jobs, demography and migration

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Migrant workers = “international migrant individuals of working age and older who are either employed or unemployed in their current country of residence” (ILO). Out of 277 million international migrants, 234 million are of working age, and 164 million are effectively migrant workers, 4.7% of the global workforce – a rise of 9 per cent since 2013, when they numbered 150 million. The majority (58%) of migrant workers are male, 86% are adults (24-65 years old), and 67% are concentrated in high-income countries where more desirable work opportunities exist than in the countries of origin.¹

Anthropological focus. *Work and labour are directly related to the meaning of life, the sense we give to our actions and activities as human beings. Integration of these various dimensions/transitions will probably require a new perspective on the relationships between the economy, labour, care for our societies and for our common home, and each individual human vocation.*

- There are five categories of “people on the move” for consideration here:
 - (1) voluntary or intentional migrants seeking better quality of life, including work;
 - (2) voluntary or intentional migrants seeking family reunification or with other socio-cultural (non-economic) objectives;
 - (3) forced migrants leaving areas of environmental decline, social or political stress in order to live and work in better conditions etc.
 - (4) Forced migrants who qualify as refugees;
 - (5) Victims of human trafficking who are ‘put to work’ in the most dire of conditions. In all of these, perhaps in different ways and to a different degree, labour / work is very relevant if not the key consideration.

¹ ILO *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers* re 2013-2017.
https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_652001/lang--en/index.htm.

- Thus labour is generally the main driver of contemporary migration flows: the lack of job opportunities, insufficient remuneration of labour, insecurity (“I cannot live without the rule of law”), decline of work opportunities due to environmental change, and so on.
- The culture of waste and the commodification of human beings drive and justify slave labour, whose increase in the past year is notable. In 2017, across the globe, convictions for labour trafficking numbered only 332.
- Temporary migration schemes, aiming at increasing circular migration, often mask the attempt to deprive migrant workers from benefits they should be entitled to (retirement pensions, social securities, health insurance).
- In some countries (Gulf States? USA?), restriction or complete denial of family reunification for migrant workers jeopardizes their life with their family, their own integral human development, and the upbringing of their children. So while the workers strive for a better family future by sending home their remittances, the interruption of normal parenting can cause problems that negate any gains.

Economic focus. *The economy should not be reduced to business, and economic outcomes should not be reduced to profit and loss. Rather, the economy must be seen in a more encompassing and integral manner as in Laudato si’. The economy must facilitate the pursuit of the common good. Accordingly, we need to address the profound economic challenges of sustainability and solidarity across continents (now!) and across generations (future!). Only on this basis will a truly new/renewed and indeed sustainable economic model emerge.*

- Present economic models are exacerbating world imbalances and depleting developing countries of their important resources. Another facet is changing the local economy to serve export interests, e.g. the replacement of local market farming in Africa to provide corn-ethanol to Europe. These injustices only help to boost emigration.
- The quest for cheaper products often determines the ‘need’ of companies to cut labour costs, which frequently leads to underpayment, exploitation and abuse in their supply chains -- which is where precarious employment of migrant (“irregular”) workers prevails.
- The official discourse in the Global North is to eradicate irregular migration. But the same Global North depends on irregular migration to staff the informal economy which supports the formal one. This clear contradiction amounts to hypocrisy, because leaders choose to turn a blind eye to these obvious facts while seeking political power with anti-immigrant rhetoric.

A social focus for work. *From Rerum Novarum (1891) to today, the Church's Social Teaching has always addressed how societies and labour are organized and interact. New forms of capitalism, of value chains, of modalities of production are disrupting the links between extraction, production, distribution, consumption and societies in new ways. How are the Unions responding?*

New challenges, especially in the care for our common home, confront organizations of entrepreneurs, of workers and of various stakeholders. New forms of dialogue are required to maintain the quest for human dignity, respect and protection of the natural environment, and the exercise of new forms of solidarity in the advancement of the common good (all this is more/less equivalent to the Sustainable Development Goals).

- There is little consideration of the demographic winter of many societies in the Global North, and a total disconnect with long-term migration policies.
- With increasing life expectancy and declining fertility in much of the world, the care of family members, sick people and elderly is increasingly delegated to non-family-members, with the consequence that the proportion of migrant workers in the care sector is rising quickly. (This should not be a driver of trafficking and slave labour!)
- There is an evident risk of relegating migrants to a few restricted labour sectors (normally unskilled sectors), without any possibility of social mobility, as well as a risk of ethnic stigmatization. The Pope's comprehensive understanding of people on the move – the need to welcome, protect, promote and integrate them – is a pertinent framework. Even professionals, let alone semi-skilled and unskilled workers, can find themselves exploited and degraded in a new country's labour market (i.e. promotion). And even if they manage to make a decent living, they may not be fully accepted into the local society (i.e. integration).

Governance. *Strongly linked to the transformation of the social fabric, Laudato si' has highlighted the need for new, integrated forms of governance, bringing together voices (interests) from local communities and popular movements together with more traditional actors of the economy: entrepreneurs, workers, investors, national and local governments.*

- For LDC's, the strategy of labour export is not serving the countries of origin as a path to sustainable development, but only increases their economic and political dependency and instability. Some countries of origin are losing the most productive segment of their workforce.
- As an international phenomenon, migration involves pairs of States – the country of origin and the country of destination. The fact of national sovereignty is not contested, but some states adopt exaggerated language regarding their sovereignty and resist attempts at dialogue and cooperation that would be mutually beneficial. (Witness the critical reactions addressed by some states to

the recently adopted GCM.) But international labour migration can only be governed effectively through bilateral and multilateral dialogues and agreements.

- Countries of origin rarely have any power to bargain for better labour standards for their migrant citizens working abroad, for the power lies exclusively with the countries of destination.
- In their relationship with their employers and finally with the States from or through which they move or in which they work, migrant workers seldom have a voice. But is this not similar to the situation of the peasants who, in the 19th century, abandoned their rural way of life to take up the new jobs of the Industrial Revolution? If the unions were key to regularizing and finally improving the situation, by organizing and collective bargaining, ought not the union movement - in the 100th anniversary of the ILO - take up the analogous challenge today?