

18 December 2020 – International Migrants' Day

Public Services International (PSI) and European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

### **The Rights-Based Approach to Migration in 3 Phrases: Solidarity, Human Rights and Root Causes**

*"No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land"<sup>1</sup>*

This year, we mark International Migrants' Day by amplifying the call for a rights-based approach to migration, contained in 3 phrases: solidarity, human rights and root causes.

First and above all, we pay tribute to the many migrant workers across the world who have continued working hard, and very often unprotected, in front line services during the pandemic. They provide an essential contribution to the fight against the covid-19 pandemic and deserve respect and much better pay and working conditions.

Compounded with the challenges of the pandemic, climate disasters and on-going violence and conflicts, forced displacement, either internally or across borders, has already surpassed 80 million even before the year is over. This is a disturbing finding from the UN Refugee Agency.

Across the world, we witness various forms of suffering: boatloads of desperate migrants drowning in their attempt to reach Europe, and for those who have reached European shores, they are often stranded in squalid camps or in shanty towns with very limited or even no access to clean water, food and basic amenities and public services.

In the Middle East and North Africa, lockdowns, border closures and restriction of movement left many migrants without recourse to livelihood, no access to health care or any form of social protection.

In the Gulf countries, thousands of migrants are forcibly repatriated without having paid their wages or any form of compensation. In many host countries, homeless migrants are rounded up and placed in overcrowded accommodation or in detention centres that pose high risk of contamination due to lack of facilities, poor services and inhumane living conditions. Migrants are treated with violence in militarised border crossings.

In the US-Mexico border, children are being separated from their parents and with no hope of reuniting with them.

The list goes on.

Despite the dangers and exploitation that they face, migrants embark on such dangerous journeys because they believe that the prospects are less worse than the persecution, violence or extreme poverty they face at home. And until there are legal routes to safer places, people will continue to travel through dangerous means.

Unfortunately, States' responses only exacerbate the negative consequences of migration and ignore the root causes of forced displacement.

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<sup>1</sup> From Home by Warsan Shire (The new odyssey, Patrick Kingsley)

We reject migration policies whose aims perpetuate inequality and human suffering. We reject policies oriented towards militarisation of borders, migrant detention, externalisation of asylum, border pushbacks, forced returns and striking of unfair deals with third countries or with neighbouring countries.

The European Commission's proposal for a new Asylum and Migration Pact continues these injustices. On asylum policy, the pact goes further as it legitimises breaches of international migration and asylum conventions such as pushbacks of asylum-seekers, and is a missed opportunity to revise the Dublin rules that place a disproportionate responsibility on EU border Member States. We add our full support to the [ETUC's condemnation of the pact](#) and call upon the European Parliament to reject it in its current form.

It is time to end these injustices and human suffering. We demand for a *rights-based approach to migration*, summarised in three phrases:

*Solidarity.* There should be responsibility-sharing in the reception of refugees and migrants based on a culture of hospitality and supported with adequately funded and staffed quality public services that are accessible for all newcomers.

Rich countries must take their fair share and not leave poor countries with the responsibility of hosting 85% of the world's refugees. In health care, rich countries must refrain from draining the skills from poor countries by investing in their own human resources for health and supporting poorer countries develop and sustain their human resource needs.

Forged in 2018, the UN Global Compact on Migration and the UN Global on Refugees provide a comprehensive framework and guidance in promoting migrant and refugee rights. However, a stronger push for solidarity and international cooperation is needed to fully implement them on the ground.

*Human rights.* Migrants, regardless of status, are entitled to the full respect and protection of their human and labour rights, including their right to decent work, fair and ethical recruitment, social protection, access to public services and to justice. All migrants, regardless of status, must be guaranteed the right to organize and to join trade unions.

*Addressing root causes.* Doing away from the problematic view of using migration as a source of development and treating migrants and asylum seekers as a commodity. Rather, it is through investing in sustainable democratic development in every country that we can address the root causes of forced migration. In the face of pandemics, climate crisis and other disasters, international cooperation is needed so we can all build sustainable and democratic societies. We have learned that neoliberal pro-market policies do not work but only exacerbate poverty and human suffering, while extracting profits on the back of exploited migrants. A radical reset is possible. And we can begin with a collective push for fair trade and economic policies, progressive and just taxation, climate justice, adequate funding for quality public services, and the commitment to human rights, including trade union rights, good governance, democracy and peacebuilding.