

Labour's Position on the 2026 International Migration Review Forum Progress Declaration



The global labour movement,¹ approaches the 2026 International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) at a critical juncture for workers worldwide. We are navigating a period defined by deepening economic inequality, climate-driven displacement, geopolitical fragmentation, and a sustained global assault on democracy, multilateralism, and fundamental trade union rights.



Across regions, migration is increasingly shaped by forces and dynamics beyond workers' control - armed conflicts, war, and instability, alongside climate breakdown and economic exclusion. For many, migration is not a free choice but a necessity for survival.



In this volatile context, migration governance cannot be treated merely as an exercise in border management, nor can it be reduced to a transactional system of “skills mobility” designed solely to fill labour shortages. Migration is fundamentally a matter of labour rights, human dignity, and global equity. Migrant workers sustain economies and essential sectors across borders, yet in times of crises, they are often the first to lose protection, income and security. The reality is that the global economy relies heavily on the toil and sweat of migrant workers, yet these same workers are routinely excluded from the protections of national labour laws, pushed into the informal economy, and subjected to highly exploitative working conditions and deceitful recruitment and sponsorship systems. They build and sustain economies, yet remain structurally excluded.



To address these systemic failures, **the global labour movement has consistently fought for social, economic and environmental justice – a framework that guarantees climate-friendly jobs, rights for all workers, universal social protection, equality, and inclusion. Coherent, rights-based migration governance is an essential pillar of this vision.** When migrant workers are denied fundamental rights or structurally silenced by precarious visa regimes, it does not just harm the migrant workers and their families; it degrades the democratic fabric of our societies, undermines collective bargaining, and puts downward pressure on working conditions for everyone. For the labour movement, defending migrant workers is inseparable from the broader *fight for democracy and shared prosperity*. True workplace democracy requires that every worker, regardless of their passport or visa status, has the power to organize, speak up, and demand their fair share of the wealth they create.



Assessing the 2026 Zero Draft

While the inaugural 2022 Progress Declaration made important strides by anchoring migration governance in decent work and fair recruitment, the 2026 Zero Draft presents a deeply concerning landscape. We acknowledge and welcome the areas of progress—particularly the expanded focus on integrating migrants into national social protection systems and the stronger language condemning recruitment fees and debt bondage.



However, we are profoundly alarmed by the structural regressions present in the draft. The text exhibits a dangerous shift in framing, moving away from a rights-based approach toward technocratic “labour market governance.” By diluting explicit references to the International Labour Organization (ILO) core conventions, removing robust calls for labour inspection, and largely omitting the enabling rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, the current draft risks treating migrant workers as disposable commodities rather than human beings and rights-holders.



¹ Represented by the ten Global Union Federations: Education International (EI), IndustriALL Global Union, UNI Global Union, International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), Building and Wood Workers International (BWI), International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), Public Services International (PSI), International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), International Arts and Entertainment Alliance (IAEA), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

We remind Member States that international labor standard protections apply to ALL workers regardless of their immigration or other status. The 2026 Progress Declaration must not regress. It must deliver on the promise of the *Global Compact for Migration (GCM)* by cementing international labour standards as the non-negotiable foundation of all migration policies. To that end, we present the following urgent demands.

Demand #1 – Collective Worker Voice and Participation

- **Right to Freedom of Association:** We remain alarmed that the 2026 Zero Draft largely omits freedom of association and the right to organise and collectively bargain (ILO Conventions 87 and 98). These are fundamental enabling rights that shift power dynamics, allowing workers - importantly also migrant workers - to protect their interests, negotiate fair wages, and defend themselves against exploitation through collective action.
- **Meaningful Social Dialogue:** Migration policies and programmes designed without trade unions will inevitably fail workers. States must heed the call to engage in authentic, institutionalised social dialogue with trade unions, migrant-workers-led organisations and independent workers' organisations at the local, national, and multilateral levels to develop safe and fair migration frameworks, including rights-based pathways.
- **Worker-informed BLAs:** The participation of unions and worker-led organisations in the design and negotiation of Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) is crucial. Currently, the exclusive involvement of governments, employers and industry lobbies creates a deep imbalance, resulting in the exclusion of worker voices and a lack of a rights-based approach.
- **Tripartite Mechanisms:** The Declaration must reaffirm the unique and critical importance of the ILO's tripartite structure (bringing together governments, employers', and workers' organisations) as the necessary and only legitimate foundation for building fair global labor migration governance.

Demand #2 – Commitment to Decent Work, International Labour Standards and Human Rights

- **Restore Normative Anchors:** The 2026 Zero Draft dangerously dilutes explicit references to international labour standards. We call for the final Declaration to explicitly centre ILO core conventions and the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* as the absolute bedrock of migration policy.
- **Strengthen Inspection and Enforcement:** We note a clear regression in the 2026 draft regarding labour inspection capacities. Rights on paper are meaningless without enforcement. States must recommit to robust, fully funded labour inspection mechanisms to monitor workplace conditions—including in the informal economy and domestic work sector—and establish firewall protections so migrants can report abuse without fear of detention and deportation.
- **Climate and Social Justice for All:** Migration must be a choice, not an act of desperate survival. We call for investment in quality, equitable public services – including inclusive and adequately funded public education as a pillar of social justice - economic diversification that broadens access to decent work, and jointly-developed green industrial and just transition policies that build resilience for workers and their communities in origin countries. This is essential to ensure that all people can live, thrive and work with dignity, without being pushed into migration by intersecting climate and social injustice.
- **The Right to Stay:** States should commit to sustainable development goals that include the creation of decent work and living wages in origin communities/countries so that workers, their families and communities have a right to stay and are not pushed to migrate due to economic coercion or lack of viable options at home.

Demand #3 – Non-Discrimination and Universal Social Protection

- **Equality of Treatment:** We acknowledge the 2026 draft's recognition of the acute vulnerability of workers in the informal, domestic, and care sectors, where many women, racialized and youth migrant workers are concentrated in low-wage work. States must translate this recognition into policy by enforcing pay equity and by ensuring these workers have equal legal protection, minimum wage guarantees, and occupational health and safety standards.
- **Social Protection Portability:** We welcome the 2026 draft's expanded focus on social protection inclusion. However, it is crucial that this inclusion ensures that all migrant workers, regardless of their migration status or the sector in which they work, are included in the scope of social protection portability. States must urgently operationalize the portability of benefits (including pensions and healthcare) through bilateral and multilateral agreements, strictly aligned with ILO Convention No. 102.

- **Portable Justice:** The Declaration must go further in calling for robust “portable justice” mechanisms for effective access to justice. Migrant workers must be able to pursue grievances, access legal representation, and obtain remedies in countries of origin, transit, destination and even after they have returned to their origin country for wage theft, workplace violations as well as any kind of violence and harassment suffered along their migration journey. As noted by the ILO, wage theft is the number one indicator of forced labor, and migrant workers are three times more likely to be in forced labor than other workers.

Demand #4 – Rights-Based Pathways and Regularisation

- **Priority for Regularisation:** A sustainable migration system cannot rely on keeping millions of people in undocumented, hyper-exploitable limbo. Implementation of the GCM must prioritise broad, accessible regularisation schemes, family unification, and humanitarian resettlement over the expansion of restrictive, employer-tied temporary or circular work programmes that structurally breed abuse. It should also guarantee that migrants and their families can safely access education and essential public services without fear of being deported, upholding these as safe, trusted spaces free from immigration enforcement.
- **Humanitarian Pathways:** As the climate emergency accelerates, we demand expanded regular pathways for climate-displaced persons. These pathways must guarantee full worker rights, social cohesion, and clear options for permanent residence and civic participation. And states must re-commit to humanitarian pathways for those displaced by conflict, war and other forms of violence, which are increasingly driving migration globally, while ensuring equality of opportunities and outcomes for migrant women and men, unequally impacted by crisis, and that these workers and their families are not excluded from quality public services, labour rights and protections while sustaining economies in destination countries. Temporary labour migration schemes are not a viable solution to long-term displacement.

Demand #5 – Just Models for Labour Migration and Fair Recruitment

- **Beyond Skills Recognition:** The 2026 focus on “skills recognition” must not overshadow worker rights and agency. Pathways must end the commodification of migrant labour. We reject models that treat migrants purely as economic inputs; regular pathways must allow for job mobility and full freedom of association. And the progress declaration must recognize that ALL work has dignity - regardless of whether in the informal or formal economy; whether low wage or higher paid - and skill.
- **Binding Fair Recruitment Regulation:** While we welcome the 2026 draft’s stronger language on ending recruitment fees and debt bondage, voluntary guidelines have proven insufficient. This commitment must be backed by binding, cross-border regulations on the recruitment industry, strictly guided by the *ILO’s General Principles and Operational Guidelines on Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees* and a zero tolerance policy on fees charged to workers.
- **ILO Leadership:** As the only UN agency with a rights-based, constitutional mandate to protect workers and establish labour standards, the ILO must lead on the governance of labour migration within the UN Network on Migration and any other UN agency addressing issues of labour migration.

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