

International Migrations and Human Rights



Elli Heikkilä

The 6th Informal ASEM (The Asia-Europe Meeting) Seminar on Human Rights was arranged in September 2004 in Suzhou, China. In this seminar, "International Migrations and Human Rights" there were three participants from Finland, representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Refugee Advice Centre and the Institute of Migration.

The seminar aimed to highlight the need to integrate the issue of protection of the human rights of migrants into all stages of migration management. Both Asia and Europe have to continue to seek joint, equitable and appropriate solutions, through regional and bilateral dialogue, to the problems posed by international migrations.

In the seminar preliminary report, it was discussed that immigration is usually thought in utilitarian terms: it is subject to economic as well as social cost-benefit analyses. Immigrants are thus instrumentalised; the issue becomes one of their relative worth or value to society. There has been much international effort to influence states to treat migrants as human beings, rather than as unwanted, outsiders or aliens.

Also the primary step to addressing the human rights of mi-

grants is the acceptance that economic, political and cultural globalization has made immigration and multiculturalism a more or less permanent condition that needs to be accommodated humanely. There is also increasing awareness that migration and migrants are transforming cultural and social landscapes within and between states, including the formation of trans-territorial and transnational networks and communities.

It is important to recognize the numerous positive benefits that migration can have for both sending and receiving countries. A significant positive impact of international immigration is in the area of remittances. Worldwide, remittances are approximately \$100 billion (US) per year, and roughly 60 percent of this sum goes to developing countries. In 2001, 8.9 % of the Philippines' GDP was generated through remittance. Other ASEM countries that receive high rates of remittances are Spain and Portugal.

In Asia, as in Europe, migration is subject to varying degrees of punitive control. The presumption is that migration is something that can be stopped and started, as economic conditions in the receiving countries require. This was clearly illus-

trated in several Southeast Asian host states following the regional financial and economic downturn in the late 1990s when hundreds of thousands of migrant workers were expelled or repatriated.

In Europe, migration trends involve two converging policy debates. The first concerns integration of migrant communities and the second is moves towards a common EU policy on immigration. The focus of common immigration policy is effective control of entrance and borders.

Source: Kumar Rajaram, Prem & Carl Grundy-Warr (2004). Protection or Control?: Global Migration Policies and Human Rights. The 6th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights, Preliminary Report.

