

International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) New York, 26 March 2018

Talking Points for Peter Robinson

- I wear three hats in speaking with you today: as President of the USCIB, which represents American business in the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), as a Regional Vice president of the IOE and member of its Management Board, and most specific to my remarks this afternoon, a representative of the Business Mechanism to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).
- The Business Mechanism was created in 2015 to bring the voice of business to the table in intergovernmental discussions on migration. Led by the IOE and the WEF Future Council on Migration, the Business Mechanism comprises a large network of employer organizations and companies of all sizes across the world. The Business Mechanism has contributed advice and input to the GFMD, and we are currently engaged in offering advice, based on the unparalleled experience of our members on the ground, to the governments negotiating the Global Compact on Migration (GCM).
- Our message is based on the critical importance to our businesses and to our economies of well-regulated national migration systems. Let me take a moment to explain why.
- Global skills mobility is integral to business and economic growth. In 2015, it is estimated that labour migration increased global GDP by about 4 percent, or up to 3.2 trillion USD.¹ Companies know the value of skills mobility in their workplaces: In a recent survey by the Council for Global Immigration, 74 percent of corporate respondents reported that access to global skills is critical to their business objectives.² Migrants bring skills that mitigate gaps in native workforces. They introduce energy, new ideas and new perspectives. They help business compete, innovate, and expand.
- These benefits devolve to both receiving countries and sending countries. Developed economies are facing the labour impact of aging populations and falling birth rates. The shrinking domestic labour pool means that receiving countries must look abroad to fill worker shortages at all skill levels. By 2020, there is

¹ McKinsey Global Institute, *Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity* (November 2016), available at <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/global-migrations-impact-and-opportunity>

² Council for Global Immigration, *Employer Immigration Metrics: 2016 Survey Results*, available at https://www.cfgi.org/us-immigration/our-advocacy/Documents/16-0559%20CFGI_EmpMetricsReport_FullFNL.pdf

expected to be a worldwide shortage of 38 to 40 million skilled workers.³ Sending countries rely on remittances from their citizens working abroad and on circular migration for the skills and experience brought by returning citizens.

- And the benefits devolve to both migrants and to native workforces. Migration is a complement to the native workforce, not a substitute for it. Around the world, businesses are working with governments to invest in education and training, bring women, youth, and underrepresented groups into the labour market, and develop domestic policies to ensure that all citizens are equipped to participate in a 21st century economy. When migration is part of a broader skills strategy, ALL workers can be better equipped to take new jobs created by business expansion.
- Migration systems must also address the growing need for unskilled and semi-skilled labour in shortage occupations and for seasonal needs. Systems often inadequately consider these labour needs because there is a perception that local workers are available. In reality, low-skill labour needs are often met by foreign workers who lack proper status; this is one of the key drivers of irregular migration.
- The absence of sound low-skill mechanisms has serious consequences – as I know I have no need to remind the IOM. Creation of more legal avenues for low-skilled migration tends to reduce the incidence of trafficking, irregular migration, informal employment activities, unethical recruitment practices and forced labour. The latter of course is the target of the IRIS system which IOM is developing with the strong support of the international business community.
- Indeed, companies are participating in an array of initiatives aimed at fair and ethical recruitment. They can also lend their expertise to the development of advanced technology for immigration processing, programs to match employment opportunities with available workers, and educational and competency assessments, as well as in the efficient and cost effective transfer of remittances.
- In sum, we have a strong expertise and interest, and have already been actively engaged, in a number of the issues that are being addressed in the GCM. Our hope for the GCM is that it will help change the conversation and the reality on the ground. Instead of fearing migrants as competition for jobs, we hope that more of society can appreciate their contributions and the value of skills mobility. And when appropriate legal and regulatory mechanisms are in place to meet low and semi-skilled needs, we hope that an important driver of exploitation can be eliminated.

³ McKinsey Global Institute, “The world at work: Jobs, pay, and skills for 3.5 billion people,” June 2012, available at <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/the-world-at-work>.

- How to accomplish these goals? Last year the Business Mechanism participated in the consultations process of the GCM and submitted recommendations⁴ that we were pleased to see reflected in the zero draft. We are now closely following the monthly rounds of negotiation in New York based on that draft and using the channels available to us to submit our comments, suggestions, and views on those issues of concern to the business community.
- Let me give you a sense of the nature of our submissions. I've already talked about our work related to ethical recruitment. Here are the recommendations we have made related to skills mobility:
- **Firstly**, Migration policies should be timely and flexible to accommodate new and long-standing business models, but also predictable and transparent so that employers can effectively manage compliance.
- --A range of migration options should be available to facilitate mobility in all skill levels, including dedicated programs for short-term assignments, as well as client-site placements and other forms of remote work. Policies must also be flexible enough to adapt to changing skills needs, and specifically to accommodate the need for lower-skilled workers.
- --We suggested a number of practical solutions in this area, including trusted employer programs to facilitate processing for organizations with a record of compliance, and work authorization mobility to allow foreign workers to change employers with fewer formalities. These programs conserve resources for government and business and protect migrants.
- **Secondly**, Employers can be a valuable partner in identifying skills needs and establishing frameworks for assessing foreign qualifications. Policies should avoid rigid qualification requirements and skills definitions, trusting employers to identify the most-qualified candidate.
- -- Employers should be able to set requirements and identify the most qualified job candidates. Rigid skills assessment frameworks and occupational qualifications are often in conflict with labour market realities and with the business judgments of employers. Moreover, government should work closely with the private sector in identifying skill shortages and long-term measures to address those shortages.
- **Thirdly**, Migration policies should foster family unity by creating accessible pathways for accompanying family to obtain work authorization.

⁴ GFMD Business Mechanism, *Toward a Global Compact on Migration: Perspectives on Labour Migration* (June 2017) and *Targeted Action for the Global Compact for migration* (September 2017), both available at <http://gfmdbusinessmechanism.org/polar/>

- -- Because foreign workers seldom migrate alone, family considerations are an important factor for global assignees and their employers. The inability to obtain work authorization for spouses separates and places financial burdens on migrant families, and can be a deterrent to sought-after migrants at all skill levels.
- **Fourthly and finally**, we need to elevate the discourse around migration by highlighting how skills mobility promotes opportunity and publicly committing to fair, responsible, and compliant migration.
- --Business has a role here too. We need to be more effective in demonstrating how migrants apply their skills to enrich the local economy and community. Sharing compelling migration success stories can help to humanize an issue that is too often distorted. Sharing, too, examples of fair, responsible and legally compliant skills migration can help to build public trust. This includes publicly supporting voluntary compliance programs and participating in training and educational programs to promote the development of the domestic labour force.
- In conclusion, I am here to assure you of the interest and intention of the international business community to find strategies for businesses and governments alike to partner to both advance skills mobility and protect the human rights of migrants. Our job is to craft an honest and compelling business narrative that resonates with governments and sceptical publics. The job of our governments is to implement it!