

ILO and Cà Foscari University of Venice

Symposium on the Social and Labour Policy Dimensions of Regional Integration

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In 2004 the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation released a report claiming that regional integration offered a potential stepping stone to a more equitable pattern of globalisation, but only if it had a strong social dimension.

Today regional communities can be found in every part of the globe. And while the historical and political circumstances behind the creation of each community may differ, they often share similar objectives to improve political stability/cohesion as well as accelerate economic development. They tend not, however, at their origins to be projects for regional social policies or for guaranteeing minimum labour protections.

Over time, some communities remain rather loose associations of member States for addressing common interests (shallow integration), whereas others establish more elaborate governance institutions and regulatory frameworks, including at the political level (deep integration). Deeper forms of regional integration are often also characterized by the development of regional social policies.

In thinking about these deeper forms of integration that address social and labour policies, it is helpful to ask two related questions:

First, what are the social and labour consequences of regional integration? That is, what impact do regional trade agreements and labour migration policies have on workers at the national level?

Second, what sorts of social or labour policies are developed at the regional level and what has been the results of these policies in practice? The nature and extent of these policies depend on the mandate of the regional community, but they may include:

- Human rights charters (EU, AU)
- Frameworks on labour standards (NAFTA)
- Social Dialogue mechanisms (EU, SADC)
- Regional consultative processes for migration
- Structural funds (EU)
- Etc.

The purpose of this symposium will be to reflect on this second question. That is, what has been the experience of different regional communities in the development and implementation of social and labour policies? And what future contributions can regional integration make to the cause of social justice?