

**Transcript Panel Discussion First Strategic Roundtable
“Labor Market and Migration” on Curaçao.**



Dear Reader,

It is with great honor that we hereby present you with the summary of our First Strategic Roundtable “Labor Market and Migration”. In the first section you will find the conclusions of this roundtable. In the second section you can find a transcript of the panel discussion between the panellists.

We thank you for your ongoing support for our mission and we hope that you will be able attend our Second Strategic Roundtable “Developing a framework for a more inclusive labor market”.

Sincerely,

Ieteke Witteveen
Director Human Rights Defense Curaçao.

Section One: Conclusions

1. We have to change the paradigm on how to deal with migrants. Reason: Our laws are based on a way of thinking that does not correspond with our reality. We must have a coherent policy that exceeds the Ministries. “It should not only be SOAW or Ministry of Justice. It is a matter of policy that exceeds the Ministries [sec. intergovernmental]. If not It will be difficult to come up with a coherent policy. For instance, we must not only change LTU, but also Labor, MEO an all arrangements that deal with migration. If not everything will stay the same.”
2. Acknowledge the Governmental incapacity and taking of decisions and the implementation deficit, being an obstacle for the execution of the reports. That is why stakeholders must be involved, as at the Round Table of 30 August 2022.
3. The Round Table commission will present the report of the Round Table to the Government and Parliament.
4. There will be more Round Table meetings concerning this topic. There will be a second Round Table in February 2023.

Members of the panel:

- **Raul Henriques** (Social Economic Council; SER),
- **Priyancka Royera** (Human Rights Defense Curaçao; HRDC)
- **Dois Gijsbertha** (Ministry of Social Development and Labor; SOAW),
- **Edward St. Jacobs** (Umbrella Organization of Trade Union Curaçao; SSK),
- **Sharesca Nicolaas** (Admission Organization; UO Toelating)
- **Raymond Jamanika** (Contractors Union; AAV/VBC)

Section two: Transcript of the panel discussion

Moderator Jo Anne da Costa Gomez: We have listened to many reasons why it takes so much time for a person to get a legal status, to leave the informal sector and enter the legal sector. Keeping in mind that there already are three projects for a more inclusive labor market, we have noticed that legal requirements hinder effectiveness to take a person out of the illegal circuit into the legal one. The question is whether we have to adapt the law and admission requirements that are on the table now?

S. Nicolaas/UO: Before we reach that point, the Government has to decide what it wants. A system based on the philosophy that the person must meet the requirements. Our laws are based on that philosophy, but on the other hand, there is a reality. A group of people has come without knowing the existing philosophy. They came on their own. As a Government you can do two things. The Government has come with a project to give the person the opportunity to enter the legal system and every time it becomes clear that in the practical situation this does not work. In other words, before deciding to change our legislation to include groups that do not understand the country's philosophy you have to come to the point whether we have to change this philosophy, and that is the case here, what has to change and how to bring this about.

Migration management does not stand on its own. It is not only in the hands of SOAW or the Ministry of Justice. It is part of the management area that surpasses the Ministry. If we don't look at it from a [intergovernmental] perspective, it will be difficult to come up with a coherent management. The new paradigm, for instance, would not only change the National Ordinance Admission and Expulsion (LTU), but also Labor, MEO and all regulations that deal with migration. If not, nothing will change.

From the public R. Sling/SER. The country must have management (policy) in various fields. Situations like we have now, whereby many people are leaving Curaçao. Why? What makes people leave? People go where they get jobs. When we look at our history, there were many of similar moments. People do not go where they cannot get a job. Why do people leave Curaçao? The idea to replace those who leave by another person hinders us in finding out what is happening with the local labor market. Investing in education without profiting from this, as persons are leaving without coming back, is the first question the Government should ask itself.

When people want to enter the country we have to deal with them correctly. But in the policy dealing with refugees we have to see to it that there is a good flow. Curaçao for example cannot handle such a number of persons alone. We have to find out how to handle adequately with refugees. They have to be treated as humans, but we should take into account the economic capacity. Those who are already here must be treated in a correct way.

Moderator: What are we going to do with the persons who are now in Curaçao and who have found work in the informal sector?

Henriquez/ SER: Today there was a public debate in Parliament about the Government program of the current cabinet. Before we come up with a policy, we must identify the factors in our community on an institutional level that hinder a coherent policy. We can talk specifically on the concept how to deal with refugees. However, there have been changes during decades

and we see there is a collective incapacity in our community that does not know to deal effectively with these issues.

We must admit the limitations of the public apparatus. the structural problems, irrespective of the political philosophy of the sitting government, ideology, current political ideology, we will have to face them. Take for instance the structural problem of the implementation deficit. Problems of legislation. CBS presented the challenge on collecting data. We are a SIDS (Small Developing Island State), with vulnerabilities that are inherent with our small scale. We lack the effective institutional capacity for these type of issues. Before talking about the necessity to facilitate admission and expulsion we must look at the fundamental problem we are facing.

From the public: Mr. Willems, CGTC: Mr. Gijsbertha explained how the market profits from the people applying for a permit. Nicolaas explained that the system fails in reaching the appropriate level, as a great many things were not taken into account. Instead of going through these procedures, let us register all these people who have entered and give them a kind of residence permit on our island paying an amount of money, allowing them to be on the island for a couple of years and in case of good conduct the residence permit can be extended. What do you think about this?

Gijsbertha SOAW: This is difficult as we have to introduce changes in our Law and this is a policy that takes time. The problem is urgent now. On the one hand you have to realize that this makes your country more attractive and we could find many people rushing to Curaçao. The problem is we may not know who these people are who rush to enter your country. This might end up affecting the credibility of the country. It would be ideal if we knew what we want for our country. How do we have to prepare our own people for the labor market? Will doing this prevent our own people from emigrating? This is a circle. Government policy is crucial. Which direction is the economic sector looking for? Nowadays we develop the sector and fill it up with people from other countries.

Henriquez SER: To formulate what we want we should not only ask the Government. It is a shared responsibility. All groups are important. The consultative aspect is important. That is why it is important today to lay bare the challenges. It is quite easy to put everything on the shoulders of the Government, especially when you know that the Government alone cannot do it.

Jamanika/AAV/VBC: Agreed. This is a shared responsibility. What do we all wish for our country? We must accept the different types of refugees. Moreover, they can help our economy. We must respect the foreigner who comes here. Just look at the construction sector in the Caribbean, Guyana is looking for between 50 and 100 thousand workers. They have discovered crude and the country is booming. We should not be surprised that the Curaçao citizen will go to Guyana. This also counts for Suriname in the near future.

Contractors should also take their responsibility. However, it is a reality that not all of them are members of the contractors' association. Nowadays there are 32. Which means that there those from whom you can get information of their construction agenda. *Come up with a commission looking into a sustainable future.*

Moderator: The construction sector is the one where undocumented migrants are employed. How do you deal with this problem? It is said that there are not sufficient local workers and that is the reason they employ people from abroad.

Jamanika/AAV/VBC: In the informal sector we also have people who are not part from the contractor's association. We cannot speak for them. Where is the problem? Why are they not part of the association? We do not know. We ourselves are formulating our own problems. If we believe in a legal economy, we cannot accept illegal matters. To be a member of the association means you having to pay taxes etc. The association does not accept this.

St. Jacobs/SSK: I am happy with this meeting. The government explained that they should deal with this problem. *All stakeholders must give their support.* Data and information are important, previously we would stipulate what to focus on without data and information. Now we have to determine what type of persons we want for our country and how do we form people to help the country's economy. Those are issues we have to deal with first before reaching the part dealing with the problem of the migrants. If our people are leaving but other come to live here this means that we have sufficient work on Curaçao. But whom do we want? Our people do not want to do that type of work? And those who come from abroad, can we form them in a way that they become part of our country. For our economy to grow our population must grow. But with whom? With those who commit robberies or with those who pay their share of taxes to the Government? On the other hand, employers of immigrants must be conscious that you cannot just start employing illegals and abuse of them. There are so many aspects.

Question from the public: Who is of the opinion that we still have to define what we want and where we are going? Who is of the opinion that we talk, talk, talk and do not stop talking?

I.Copra/SER: Curaçao has already shown in different ways where it wants to go. Many reports explain what the economy should look like and its preconditions. It is NOT that we do not know where we have to go. The points have simply not been implemented in conformity with the recommendations.

The point is not the determination of the sectors, but the type of persons that have to guide the development in the sectors. Now we are confronting an urgent problem that needs to be addressed.

Jamanika/AAV/VBC: It has been mentioned in the press that it is critical to find a job that meets the requirements demanded by Curaçao. This has been discussed with the Minister of VVRP. Because of the free market, you cannot keep people out of the market. We are not the only one going through this process. In all of the Caribbean there is a scarcity of trained workers. Moreover, nowadays there are very limited workers skilled with a particular vocation. We are looking for solutions. The economy of Curaçao is fluctuating so much that people choose to go abroad to make some money.

Moderator: How do you come up then with a solution? Apply for a permit for foreigners? Yes. From the beginning we sit with SOAW to indicate who we need and for which position. For instance, we can agree on two Curaçao citizens work as counterparts of a foreigner whom we employ. **Will you do his? Do we want to do this? What is your**

objection? Among other things the five to six weeks to get a permit?

Public area: Mrs. Jesus Leito [Minister SOAW]: Mrs. Copra mentioned many reports. I also agree with the points brought up by Mrs. Copra. We have analyzed. What we miss is the implementation and the decision which direction we want to take. We had *booming* sectors with many experts, but we lost the financial and refining sectors. Now we speak about tourism, but we are not prepared. Now we should stop talking and make decisions. Many participants of the Round Table have been here for years and we should adapt our ways of operating. We are busy with the recurring issues. Everything that we have discussed today has been discussed before. We are a country of migration and it is open to all people. Our policy is not: for certain people yes and for certain people no. We cannot simply continue talking. As a minister I have experienced how things work out in the houses of the migrants, becoming ill and going to hospital costs quite some money. We cannot afford things to continue as they are.

Moderator: There are person with quite some experience in positions to take decisions and lobby. Why is this decision not taken? In here, everyone agrees. In reality outside of this room, you hear different expressions, there is a community that does not understand that the migrant has to integrate into our society. You hear people saying; aren't we in need ourselves?

Rene Eisden (Admission Organization/UO). We have remained stuck in time. The modern world is way ahead of us. We do not have people who are capable to make the transition for us so that we can progress.

De Camps/Labor union: The question is why do we experience the brain drain? The migrant enters the country and gets lost in illegality. Youngster do not have the perception that they are being listened to. Just check the salaries of those people who have a Secondary Vocational Education (HBO) who do not even earn 2500 guilders and in The Netherlands they are well paid. The migrant, however, who sees our minimum salary rushes to come here. But this does not necessarily mean that the migrant can do this very specific job a higher vocational education. Nevertheless he finds his way around and his way of life does influence his children afterwards.

De Boer/CBS: Let us repeat what Mrs. Leito said. A vision we have to go for. What is the problem that hinders decision-making? Is it pride? Culture? This must be a matter of politics.

Public area. Mr. Cova: Those who are responsible are those in power. There is no policy. What is it that we want? Where are we going? What is it that we take into consideration? That plays a role here. Now there are companies that get a job and have to work with 30 to 40 workers for 600 thousand. But they do not have employees. We are still talking about appropriate management. The one in management control is the Government. No one feels responsible! Government reads the report and that is it. The stakeholders are to be blamed for not putting pressure.

Question of the moderator: Which pressure has to be applied?

Henriquez/SER: The problems have been discussed. Why don't we take collective steps and do something together? Put pressure on the Government and make the public aware so that we do not have to discuss the same things again.

St. Jacobs/SSK: My proposal. Publish a document with today's minutes. Inviting the complete cabinet to meet with us and show which direction with a solution on short term. *Everyone has his wishes but it is the Government that decides.* Asks the Government to meet and show them the headaches.

Public area Mr. Sille. Education is the strong weapon for change. If we want the workers in the construction field, we will have to prepare them. And where are we going? There is a country package-plan (landepakket) including flexibilization plan concerning migration, which we do not oppose. We are requesting the Government to come and listen to us. We must request the Government to change the policy. Our silence is punishable. We are aware of this. We are just talking to Venezuela. The Venezuelan migrants will also go back. What will we do then? There are also other nationalities. With regard to position requiring a Secondary Vocational Education, the Dutch workers will occupy them. The power of the labor unions will play a role.

Moderator: Do we have those workers on our island? What do you propose? Expel them?

No, we should not mistreat them, but look after our own issues. When they are here they never contribute to the social funds, but when they turn 65 they are entitled to the social benefits.

Mr. Gijbertha/SOAW: The reports are outdated. The world has changed with the pandemics. We should look for other ways. Meanwhile the school boards decide about the curriculum. We are not making any progress. We have a great many reports made by consultants, but those who have written them, they themselves do not know how to execute what they wrote. Decisions have to be taken. I agree with regard to the country package plan. Flexibilization is not something bad. You need it in times of crisis to promote mobility of workers. If you do this in a correct way, it is something good. It is done that way all over the world. We are the ones who demonize it. Our labor market is already filled with flexibilization.

Henriquez/SER: We have reached the stage for the platform to agree on certain issues. I recommend that we leave with some agreements.

- Re-affirm the need for meetings like this
- Acknowledge the Governmental incapacity and taking of decisions and the implementation deficit, being an obstacle for the execution of these reports.
- The conclusion is that we have to change the narrative, in order to reach getting rid of the patterns, We all know why. Protect our own people. However, if there is no labor demand we must deal with reality

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