

RC44 Activist Session

Third ISA Forum of Sociology, 10 July, 2015, Vienna, Austria

Title: Migrant Workers in Austria and Germany

Organisers: Ercüment Çelik, Ankara University, Turkey; Faisal Garba, University of Cape Town, South Africa and University of Jena, Germany

Venue: ÖGB Haus Catamaran, 14.00-16.00

The century-long history of migrant labour in Europe reached a new phase from 2007 onwards in the wake of the European financial and debt crisis that is ravaging labour markets across Europe. As at 2012, Arbeitsklima-Index reports that every fifth working person in Austria has a migration background (amounting to 690.000 people). Aside migrants from EU member-states, the majority of the migrant workers are from the former Yugoslavia (214.000), and from Turkey (91.000). As with elsewhere in Europe, migrant workers in Austria are heavily affected by the ongoing crises: They are the first targets for retrenchment and/or skill devaluation (forced to take employment below their qualifications). In the course of the last decade it is estimated that every year around 500.000 migrant workers predominantly from East and Southern Europe end up in Germany and work in agricultural, construction, meat, logistics, and in the home care sector. Predominantly employed by subcontracting firms and labour brokers, migrant workers in Germany face inhuman working and living condition, a situation that has sparked a debate on “human trafficking” and “new slavery” in Europe in the 21st century. Significant numbers of these precarious workers are African migrants uprooted by the direct and vicarious impacts of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), and resource conflicts deeply intertwined with a global neoliberal accumulation regime. In keeping with the long held view of migrant workers as transient sources of labour expected to leave when their labour can be dispensed with, African migrants in Germany have assumed a state of ubiquitous absence. They are a common feature of almost every major work place in Germany, yet remain marginal to both popular imaginary of what constitutes Germany’s demography. Most of them have had to take deep pay cuts due to their extra-legal working arrangements.

This session aims to bring together labour scholars, activists, trade unionists and workers from Austria and Germany in order to discuss the above mentioned issues in their contemporary manifestations with a deep historical background of migrant labour in Europe. The following speakers will shed light on these matters:

- 1) Ljubomir Bratić, activist, author and social worker, who has been involved in various organisations working on the former Yugoslavian migrants in Austria.
- 2) Handan Özbaş, Austrian Branch of DIDF-The Federation of Democratic Workers Associations, an organization of Turkish and Kurdish workers in Germany, Austria, Holland, England and Switzerland.
- 3) Dominique John, DGB-The German Trade Unions Confederation, “Fair Mobility” Project.
- 4) Weldeyes Weldeamanuel, Deputy Chairperson of the Works Council at LSG, a service provider for Lufthansa; and member of NGG, The Food, Beverages and Catering Union, Germany.