

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)

Press Release No: 050/2023
Venue: Nairobi, Kenya

Date: September 18th, 2023

ECOSOCC wraps up national dialogue series on the African Union's Free Movement Protocol

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) convened the third and final multi-stakeholder national dialogue series of the year on the Free Movement Protocol (FMP), from 12-13 September 2023.

The third edition hosted with the support of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Government follows successful national dialogue series convened in March 2023 in Lusaka, Zambia and May 2023 in Port Louis, Mauritius. In 2022, ECOSOCC held regional Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) sensitization forums on the FMP in Ghana, Mozambique, and Morocco.

Increased mass migration and displacement within the African continent has spurred several policy frameworks to address and manage it. The African Union in particular has established two key policy frameworks to address, manage, and promote migration and mobility within the continent: the FMP and the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA).

The FMP aims to curb and eventually eliminate barriers to regional border migration (to work, visit, trade, live, etc.) within the continent. Eliminating these barriers translates to economic growth on the continent as well as improved migration procedures for African citizens.

Unfortunately, despite the existence of migration policy frameworks, policy uptake among AU member states and their popularization within African civil society remains low and has not achieved the desired impact. ECOSOCC has taken up the mantle to popularise the frameworks.

William Carew, ECOSOCC's Head of Secretariat emphasized the need for all stakeholders to take an active role in ensuring that the AU Free Movement Protocol is popularized, domesticated and implemented across the continent.

"I implore all of you to use your voices as non-state actors to help popularize, ratify and adopt the Free Movement Protocol. I call on you to push member states to take action whenever they drag their feet. Everyone in this meeting is to be an ambassador of change around the FMP conversation. Let us go beyond just talking but push the messages to the right stakeholders so that we properly influence change." He said.

Officially opening the dialogue, Mr. Joseah Rotich, Head of Regional Investment within the State Department for Trade of the Republic of Kenya noted that African countries trade less with their neighbours and more with countries outside Africa saying, "Free

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movement of people across our own borders helps to fix that anomaly. As long as we have AfCFTA in motion, we cannot disregard the free movement of people."

Mr. Rotich urged participants to take an active role in ensuring that the Free Movement Protocol is adopted and implemented.

"I challenge all of you to come with solutions on how best to send the message towards ratifying and implementation of the Free Movement Protocol. We value the role of non-state actors in making things work, let us continue working together," he said.

Mr. Christian Friedemann, Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to Kenya highlighted that free movement on the continent was central to development of Africa.

"The discussions held here are to ensure movement in Africa is easier and to popularize the Free Movement Protocol. At the core of the continent's and the world's development, people have to work together. Free movement enhances that working together," he said.

Mr. Denis Kodhe, Presiding Officer Emeritus of ECOSOCC reiterated that the Free Movement Protocol was a transformative instrument that demands collaboration and inclusive dialogue from all relevant stakeholders.

Apart from the CSOs and policymakers that participated during the National Dialogue Series, a side-event drew participation from the Editors Forum. The editors were taken through a discussion on the Free Movement Protocol, the AfCFTA and the Agenda 2063.

The dialogue concluded with a roadmap/advocacy plan on the Free Movement Protocol. The plan will be consolidated with other Action Plans from other allotments of the National Dialogue Series to be convened on the continent so that it feeds into policy drafts from ECOSOCC.

The National Dialogue Series sets the stage for a proposed inaugural Parliamentarian Forum on the FMP scheduled for 2024.

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About ECOSOCC

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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