

Panel debate on fundamental rights compliant sustainable growth

Abstract

With a diverse panel, the discussion highlighted the interconnections between business, and economic rights and social rights and how they need to pull together. People themselves should also be empowered to be drivers of change. And part of this involves education and equipping people with the right skills to act.

Speakers:

1. Michael Spindelegger, Director General, International Centre for Migration Policy Development
2. Wolfgang Greif, Vice-president, European Economic and Social Committee
3. Marie Ringler, Europe Co-Leader, Ashoka Foundation
4. Shalini Randeria, Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences

What is important to act upon?

What we would like to see are the hard facts behind sustainable growth. For example, there are an estimated 7 – 8 million labour migrants from Pakistan working abroad, many of them in the Gulf States. What they don't have is the right to be paid for what they are doing. It is a fact that the denial of rights reduces their incomes, the amounts they can remit and the development impact of their migration. Granting them fundamental and labour rights would boost this impact and would bring Pakistan a lot closer to the annual GDP growth envisaged by the 2030 Agenda.

At the moment it is more of a humanitarian discussion. There are economically hard facts which would help guide discussions on sustainable growth. Once we do that we can move a step forward.

Where do you think we should have the discussion on the most important acts on sustainability

At the heart of business is social responsibility. There are deep doubts that businesses in Europe follow fundamental rights. Sustainability needs to be seen much more than economically and ecologically. I suspect that in Europe, especially after the financial crisis, the whole concept of competitiveness is not fit to deal with fundamental rights.

The Troika regime following austerity did not fit with fundamental rights in my view. The other point is the responsibility of business in Europe and globally. A lot of companies need binding pillars to guarantee that business is being managed in line with fundamental rights.

There is a need to focus on the solutions and this drives change. How can we empower more people in the world to solve the issues we are discussing here? How can we be driving change not from the top-down but bottom-up?

The Good Lobby example is a good option that creates ecosystems that empower people to do well on what they want to do; people don't need to wait for their problems to be solved.

How do you build these ecosystems? There are always actors in countries and markets that are relevant to driving these changes. There is an added dimension and what does that mean for funding? Do we have mechanism that will allow people to take up change? The technology around crowd sourced funding is one thing but we need other actors to play a role. We need to help and support people by opening doors to those people who want to drive change.

What is the view on sustainable growth?

There are two aspects. Ecological sustainability and social sustainability. Both have different aspects and the question of business responsibility is important. We often forget the history of a lot of these concepts. We talk about right based development but we forget we already had a framework for the right to development.

We cannot talk about human rights without mentioning the structural inequality between North and South and inequality within countries.

Companies have long been involved in infrastructure projects displacing people. But how do you protect the losers of this particular model of growth? We need to think if it is socially viable.

The extraterritorial obligations of states also need to be taken seriously because the harm being caused is not only restricted to the territory of a given state.

We have international organisations who give loans that can be violators. All of these extraterritorial actors need a mechanism to protect the rights of actors on the ground. And we need to widen the social space of social and economic rights. We need global social policies and think of business as an actor in this.

What kind of things can we put in place to work on this? What are the tool and instruments?

The EU is supranational and we have regulations. There is a question of compliance. On the global level we missing a framework which is binding and which binds the social reasonability of multinational companies.

There are human rights guidelines for multinational institutions. The question is about implementation and responsibility of governments.

We have all the facts but we don't act on the facts. We need to use what is already there. One of the key principles is by empowering citizens to be the people who drive that change. One of the reasons that these changes are not achieved is because we forget the power of citizens and actors. We need them to become our allies.

We don't really have so much research work, especially from countries of origin. We need to have a better understanding why they are leaving the country. The main issue is to argue in a better way. No one really recognises that the migration to Europe is a benefit to our countries. We need migrants. Without their contribution we will not survive and we need to argue about that. Facts and figures are necessary.

Fear is the tool of global capitalism. Can fear be in a capitalist world or must the economic system be changed to ensure human rights?

We can't deal with this in business so is this the right framework for security? Over 50% of countries don't really have trade union freedom or the right to organise. Governments and politics and business who deal with this different kinds of securities, legal securities in the world. Let's create the pillars for security.

Do black market vendors have equal rights in their societies if they avoid tax and social security contributions to their host societies?

Avoidance of taxes is a huge problem and it is an issue at all levels. There is only a system of bribes and not taxes. The street vendors pay bribes and not taxes. The question is about legalisation and mainstreaming the black market into the system. We also need to think about multinational corporations that are not paying taxes and avoiding them.

One of the major problems is finding rules and procedures, mechanism for making states and other actors accountable. If you want growth and human rights you need compliance. The struggle for human rights has always been a political struggle.