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ECOSOCC holds inaugural media sensitisation forum on the Free Movement Protocol and 3rd FMP Forum

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) with support from Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has held a host of Pan African series of CSO Sensitization Forums on the African Union's Free Movement Protocol (FMP), with its inaugural Media Sensitization Forum, for the North African region.

The North African CSO Sensitization Forum was held from 7-10 November 2022 and was the third and last edition of the series following forums held in Accra, Ghana for the West and Central Regions, in May 2022, and for the Southern and Eastern regions, in Maputo, Mozambique in September 2022.

Speaking during the third CSO Sensitization Forum, Ambassador Amr Aljowaily, Strategic Advisor to the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, reiterated the need for African CSOs to be the platform from which the voices of Africans should be heard the loudest. He also affirmed the media's critical role in communicating the content of these voices.

Similarly, Mr. Denise Kodhe, ECOSOCC's Presiding Officer, urged African CSOs to formulate solutions on issues that go beyond migration and free movement citing that African youth should be empowered towards the development of their communities. Being a career journalist, he addressed the media from his decades of experience in the media fraternity, saying that the media should ask critical questions, and accept the invitation extended to them on occasions such as the FMP Forum.

Head of ECOSOCC Secretariat, William Carew commended the partnership with GIZ which has made it possible for the sensitization of the FMP among CSOs across all 5 regions of the continent, and highlighted its value in Africa's development.

"I sit here proudly seeing the amount of work put in by our various member states, our partners the GIZ Addis Ababa office, the Federal Government of Germany, the African Union and all the CSOs across the continent who have put their energy and efforts behind making sure that the issues surrounding FMP, are addressed and given priority," he said.

Mr. Carew further assured the meeting that ECOSOCC and its partners would assist CSOs in building their capacity with skills and competencies for them to engage relevant stakeholders in advocating for ratification of the protocol.

Ms. Onike Shorunkeh-Sawyerr GIZ AU Advisor on Labour Migration and Free Movement, expressed appreciation on the quality of participation by the participants from all the Forums this year and thanked ECOSOCC for the partnership that would add great value in Africa's future development.

Media houses from the North Africa region participated in the forum during a special Media Sensitization Forum hosted at the International University of Rabat. Among other things, the media were given an insider's view of the Free Movement Protocol in Africa and its accompanying CSO engagement.

The CSO Sensitization Forums have been organized with the aim of introducing the Free Movement Protocol within African civil society and strengthening the capacity of participating CSOs in the popularization and implementation of the protocol across the continent.

Note to editors:

The Free Movement Protocol in context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

In January 2018, the African Union (AU) agreed to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to optimise intra-Africa trade. Simultaneously, the AU adopted a protocol supporting the free movement of persons between the countries of Africa. Both are considered necessary for the successful social and economic development of the countries of the African continent.

As of 8 October 2022, 54 countries had signed the AfCFTA and 44 of the 54 signatories (81.5%) had ratified, whereas 33 countries had signed the Free Movement of Persons (FMP) Protocol and only four countries had fully ratified.

The operational phase of the AfCFTA was launched during the 12th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union on the AfCFTA in Niamey, Niger on 7 July 2019. Start of trading under the AfCFTA Agreement began on 1 January 2021, however, no trade has as yet taken place under the AfCFTA regime.

Policymakers say that the free movement of labour will be a key contributor to the successful functioning of the free trade area, but not all African countries are committed to the concept, for various reasons. Movement across the continent is happening however, due to increasing forced migration trends, climate induced migration and the impact of COVID-19 on mobility – these remain key African migration issues to watch in 2022.

Free movement is one of the key goals for Africa's Agenda 2063.

The freedom of movement of people, capital, goods and services are the aspired four basic freedoms which make up the African continental and regional integration agendas. The protocol was the codification of the commitment to free movement made by African countries in declaring the establishment of the African Economic Community in Abuja in 1991.

Africa is currently in the 5th phase of the Abuja Treaty, which established by the African Economic Community, which was adopted by the Organization for African Unity in 1991, and envisioned the "free movement of people and the rights of residence and establishment.

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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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