

**Address by Her Excellency Aleksandra Pivec
Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia
at the 41st Session of FAO Conference (22-29 June 2019)
Rome, 24 June 2019**

Migrations, agriculture and rural development

Dear Minister Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished colleagues,

I would first like to commend the selection of the theme for this year's ministerial discussion, which highlights a very topical issue, which is the linkages between migration, agriculture and rural development.

We are witnessing ever-increasing social, demographic, environmental, technological and economic changes. Migrations are a significant part of our quickly changing world, and without change, development would not be possible. But change, especially when caused by poverty, natural disasters, long-lasting crises and conflicts, also results in danger, great suffering and uncertainty. Many are forced to leave their homes and risk their lives when seeking a better future for themselves and their families.

Depending on the context, countries encounter various challenges linked with migrations. These may differ, for example, for countries experiencing long-lasting crises, or those with a high youth unemployment rate, countries in economic and demographic transition or developed countries where migrant workers are headed.

Except in the case of forced migrations, which are the result of conflicts and intolerable crisis situations, it is important that we do not consider migrations only as a problem requiring a solution, but as an integral part of economic, social and human development. Regardless of the challenges and costs for migrants and countries, migrations may also be an opportunity for progress.

I would like to point out that due to climate change we can expect increased migrant flows in the future as well. And this is where the transition to sustainable agriculture focusing on mitigating and preventing climate change will play a crucial role.

By harmonising policies in the fields of migration, agriculture and rural development, countries can promote positive and eliminate negative effects of migrations. Our joint objective should be aimed at making efforts by means of measures so that migrations become a choice and not a necessity.

Investing and attempting to eliminate obstacles for prospective migrants are a possible route to this objective. Other activities would also include the creation of better living conditions in rural areas, education and training of young people, and the promotion of employing and including young people in agri-food supply chains. A different approach would be required in countries where migrations are the result of conflicts, or the countries where migrants and refugees are headed in their desire for a better future. By protecting their rights and promoting their social and economic integration, their contribution to the development of the country can also improve.

In Slovenia, we are mostly faced with the challenge of how to maintain and prevent migration from rural to urban areas. Investing into vital countryside is thus our important priority. We strive to create conditions and opportunities to encourage citizens to seek their opportunities while living in the countryside by promoting and developing rural areas and agriculture. Special attention is dedicated to

young people, whereby measures are intended to generate jobs for them in rural areas with simultaneous generational renewal in agriculture. Generational renewal is vital for further development of agriculture, which is becoming a more interesting and business-oriented branch with young farm owners, and this is also recognised in the set development guidelines of Slovenian agriculture. However, we must certainly not neglect the significance of international cooperation and the existence of vulnerable groups detected in rural areas.

It is necessary for vulnerable groups and a vital countryside that a country also implements measures within other policies (e.g. tax and social legislation, and access to land), which ensure rural infrastructure and other public services (like: jobs, shops, schools, kindergartens, health care, etc.).

Finally, I would like to highlight the importance of beekeeping for preserving the vitality of the countryside. Slovenia is a country with a long beekeeping tradition. We dedicate special care and funds to bees within the framework of agricultural measures and programmes relating to beekeeping. With sustainable development of this sector, we see numerous positive effects for agriculture and the environment, including great potential for promoting employment and life in rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Continuous growing of international migration and the number of refugees must remain at the centre of the international community's attention not as a threat, but as a special challenge presenting great development potential. To exploit it successfully, it is necessary to understand migrations, their dimensions, characteristics, the factors affecting them and their effects. I thus commend today's discussion and the exchange of opinions which I am certain will contribute to our better understanding of migrations and improved formation of development policies, also, for the future.

Thank you for your attention.