

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION: FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2006 HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

A. INTRODUCTION

This paper describes follow-up activities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) regarding the implementation of recommendations of the 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The paper also presents key aspects of the international migration and development nexus in Africa, and highlights some emerging issues of critical importance for ECA member States.

B. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

ECA participated in several regional and global activities on international migration and development in preparation for the 2006 High-level Dialogue. This included an international symposium on international migration and development jointly organized by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Government of Italy in Turin in June 2006. During the symposium, ECA organized a session on international migration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa, in order to enhance understanding of the migration and development nexus.

The High-level Dialogue played a key role in the activities of ECA on international migration in the region. In 2006, the Regional Commission undertook a major reform of its programmes and resources and prepared its report *International Migration and Development: Implications for Africa* (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2006). The report, which was launched in New York at the occasion of the High-level Dialogue, shows the importance of international migration flows within Africa compared to migration flows of Africans to other parts of the world. It calls for better management of migration at all levels — country, regional and global. This requires formulation and implementation of migration policies based on effective and sound political and economic governance as advocated by the African Union (AU) and its New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme.

The 2006 reform process was guided by the following four major challenges:

1. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through strategies to promote sustainable and equitable growth and development;
2. Promoting regional integration to overcome the limitations of small and fragmented economies;
3. Harnessing the benefits of globalization by articulating viable policies and strategies;
4. Strengthening institutions and capacities for management and good governance.

In the context of these four challenges, international migration emerged as an important activity for the Commission. It has been included in the ECA business plan for 2007-2009, which

calls for monitoring social development, including the follow-up to the 2006 High-level Dialogue.¹

The reform resulted in placing greater emphasis on international migration as an important area for harnessing human and financial resources in support of the countries in the region. International migration has been included in the strategic framework and budget for sub-programme 10 on Social Development for 2008-2009 and 2010-2011. The Commission will continue to produce biennial reports, convene expert group meetings, establish data and information banks and conduct research on international migration and development in Africa.

As a follow-up to the High-level Dialogue, ECA and its subregional offices have partnered with various governments, the African Union Commission, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa (IGAD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa on the following activities in the region:

1. A four-day conference on Population and Development in Africa: Research and Policy Dialogue for Action in Mafikeng, South Africa, from 5 to 8 March 2007. This conference called for dialogue on research in migration, urbanization and development, with emphasis on the opportunities offered by migration, whilst recognizing the importance of the human rights of migrants. Also, it called for collection, analyses and sharing of migration data;
2. The Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Development-Fortieth Session of the Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 29 March to 1 April 2007. This Conference especially addressed the importance of remittances for development in Africa;
3. The first joint annual meeting of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 26 March to 2 April 2008. This meeting called for reducing the costs of transferring remittances so as to increase mobilization of financial resources for development;
4. The workshop on Migration and Economic Development in Africa, jointly organized by the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), IOM and TRUSTAFRICA, held in Dakar, Senegal, from 17 to 19 March 2008. The workshop focused on support for African countries in the formulation of their national migration policies with special emphasis on integrating migration into national development strategies. About 86 participants attended the workshop, primarily from Western and Middle Africa, including government representatives, representatives from various regional research institutions, United Nations organizations, universities, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and embassies². Discussions centred on: (a) incorporation of migration in poverty reduction strategy papers; (b) regional and interregional strategies; (c) national policies and strategies in the field of migration and economic development, and (d) population mobility and physical conditions in Africa. ECA delivered a presentation on the regional dimensions of international migration, and presented the activities so far undertaken in this field by the Commission;
5. ECA organized a workshop with the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and IOM in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 12 to 14 May 2008. The workshop was part of the cooperation activities of ECA on migration management in the

IGAD region. ECA made a presentation on International Migration and Development: Implications for Regional Cooperation and Integration;

6. The ECA Office for North Africa (SRO-NA) organized an Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in North Africa in Rabat, Morocco, from 19 to 20 March 2007. The meeting adopted recommendations on how to improve the integration of migration issues in the North African development process. Special attention was paid to migrants' financial transfers and competencies with the aim to strengthen the positive contribution of North African migrants. The plan of action was addressed to governments, private sector, universities, parliamentarians, financial system representatives, civil society organizations, particularly migrant organizations, as well as to international, regional and sub-regional development organizations;
7. The ECA Office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA) undertook a study on the role of population and migration in enhancing regional integration in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) regions in September-October 2008. The study focused on the growing realization that achieving regional integration in Africa would require sound population and migration policies that could facilitate free movement of persons and factors of production within and across borders. The findings of this study were presented at a regional workshop, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 1 to 3 December 2008.

C. ASPECTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT NEXUS IN AFRICA

International migration involves a wide range of voluntary and forced cross-border movements within Africa, as well as regular and irregular migration flows to destinations within and outside Africa. Usually, young and well-educated persons have the highest propensity to migrate. Recent research shows that the number of female migrants has increased. The different motivations to migrate arise from complex factors such as lack of employment opportunities, income inequality and unequal distribution of wealth, conflict and economic and political instabilities.

Africa is experiencing many challenges in the area of international migration. The outflow of skilled workers exacerbates the shortage of labour in nursing, engineering, information technology and mining. While dealing with problems related to financing for development, Africa struggles to address urgent issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and the achievement of the MDGs.

Moreover, Africa is witnessing rapid urbanization and experiencing regional integration through, *inter alia*, regional economic communities, the AU and NEPAD. Rapid urbanization will require greater investments in the social and physical infrastructure in urban areas, in particular for water, sanitation and affordable housing.

Countries in Africa have responded to international migration issues in different ways. Often, African countries fail to coordinate or lack policies to respond to these problems altogether. Existing policies are often not enforced, and some policies are so strict that undocumented migration is often the only possibility for those seeking employment abroad. International migration is hardly recognized in national development plans and strategies. A major obstacle to furthering the understanding of the international migration development nexus is the lack of adequate data. In addition, there is a research vacuum on the linkages between

international migration and development. Analyses of the social and economic impacts of emigration require accurate and detailed data and information, which is currently not available in the majority of African countries.

International migration is increasingly gaining attention among African leaders. The free movement of people and skilled labour and the right of residence and establishments are central to the Abuja Treaty, the Pan-African international agreement signed in Abuja, Nigeria, on 3 June 1991 and the treaties of the regional economic communities. Also, the constitution of the AU recognizes the role of migrants and considers them an integral part of national human resources. The NEPAD illustrates the ability of governments in Africa to put forth an innovative regional development framework. The framework document acknowledges the link between international migration and development in Africa and calls for improvements in health and education services, as well as for harnessing financial resources, including remittances, for Africa's development.

ECA focuses on the role of international migration in regional integration and development cooperation between countries. Research undertaken by the Commission defines international migration as part of regional integration, which calls for alleviation of the obstacles to trade liberalization, markets and the free movement of people between countries (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2004). Regional integration through the regional economic communities is an integral part of the AU Charter.

Some measures to promote labour mobility and free movement of people between countries have been undertaken by some of the Regional Economic Communities. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) —all have protocols and treaties on free movement of people and the right of residence in any of the member countries. ECOWAS has ratified its protocol on the free movement of persons, residence and establishment³ and SADC countries allow their citizens visa-free entry for 90 days. However, the implementation of these protocols requires political will, which is largely lacking. Moreover, cooperation between countries and economic communities on free mobility of labour has been hindered by security considerations, lack of employment opportunities and competition for limited job opportunities.

The thinking of ECA on international migration and development is conditioned by the need to uphold the following key elements:

1. The human rights of international migrants and their families. Bilateral and multilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries must promote respect for human rights, including the right to affordable and accessible health services and healthy working and living conditions;
2. Cohesion and tolerance nurtured through highlighting the importance of integration and respect for diversity and multiculturalism;
3. Contribution to development, which extends beyond economic gains to include social welfare, cultural enrichment, health promotion and political stability;
4. Constructive engagement of member States. International migration should be brought to the arena of international development cooperation;

5. Coherence and harmonization of policies. There is need to improve the governance of international migration through harmonization of the policies and procedures of government ministries and departments;
6. Capacity-building is needed for maximizing the potential human and financial gains of international migration for development.

D. EMERGING ISSUES

As a result of the High-level Dialogue, human rights and regional integration have emerged as important topics directly related to migration. The High-level Dialogue has triggered demand for constructive engagement in dialogue on the links between international migration and development, to bring this nexus closer to the area of national development, regional economic and development integration and international development cooperation. Constructive engagement between countries and regions will lead to harmonization of national policies and regional frameworks. Also, the countries need to initiate programmes on human capital development, especially in the areas of health and education, in addition to partnerships in the areas of trade and financial systems.

Such initiatives can enhance the development impact of migration. For instance, transfer costs of remittances can be reduced by enacting agreements between the different parties involved and by establishing an integrated payment infrastructure. Developments of human and institutional capacities are essential for regional integration and development in Africa. Building such capacities requires long-term investment and the implementation of regional mechanisms and frameworks embodied in the NEPAD initiatives.

Development in Africa requires peace and stability, for which cohesion and tolerance are important. International migration involves people of different cultures. Therefore, the countries will need to formulate programmes to nurture respect for human rights, including the rights of international migrants and their families, multiculturalism, tolerance and social integration. This is important for achieving social harmony, peace and stability at the sub-regional and regional levels.

E. CONCLUSION

International migration and development in Africa is increasingly gaining attention in ECA sub-programmes and activities. Since the 2006 High-level Dialogue, ECA has continued to work closely with regional and other partners, such as the AU, IOM and IGAD, to assist African countries in harnessing the development potentials of international migration. The Commission is seeking to strengthen and promote the understanding of the international migration-development nexus and the resource potentials of international migration for development in Africa. More specifically, the following are three activity areas on which the Commission will focus in the future:

1. Role of remittances for development;
2. Capacity-building for better management of migration flows;
3. Migration and regional integration.

The 2006 High-level Dialogue revealed the need for African countries to:

1. Explore new approaches for harnessing migration resources and potentials for development;
2. Develop migration policies and foster partnerships on migration that are sensitive to the regional development needs;

3. Build institutions and human capacity to manage migration through development of migration data and statistics, proper keeping of migration records, harnessing research activities and feeding research results into decision-making processes, and monitoring and upholding the rights of migrants and their families;
4. Develop mechanisms to build synergies between migration policies and national development planning.

NOTES

¹ See United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ECA Business Plan 2007-2009.

² Among the organizations represented at the meeting were: the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD), the Centre de Recherches pour le Développement International (CRDI), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), the Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire (IFAN), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

³ See Protocol A/P.1/5/79 relating to the free movement of persons, residence and establishment available at <http://www.ecowas.int> (accessed 13 January 2009).

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