

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE ARAB REGION

League of Arab States (LAS)

A. BACKGROUND

The Arab Observatory for International Migration was launched by the Population Policies and Migration Department of the League of Arab States (PPMD/LAS) a few years ago with the goal to execute the Arab Declaration for International Migration, adopted by the Arab Social and Economic Council in 2006, with the objectives to:

1. Filling the gap in migration data in the Arab region by continuously compiling and updating such data;
2. Capacity-building and sustaining the technical capabilities of the bodies dealing with migration in Arab countries;
3. Contributing in knowledge transfer in the international migration field;
4. Finding mechanisms to enhance the benefits of migration of highly-skilled migrants to promote the development in Arab countries and the Arab regional integration.

B. ACTIVITIES 2007-2008

1. Advocacy and regional coordination activities

PPMD, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), organized a Coordination Meeting on Fostering More Opportunities for Legal Migration in Cairo, Egypt, from 8 to 9 October 2008. The meeting was opened by Ms. Aisha Abdel Hadi, the Egyptian Minister of Manpower and Migration and attended by governmental representatives from 15 Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), ambassadors from Asian and European countries and representatives from international and regional organizations¹, in addition to a number of Arab experts interested in the field of international migration. The meeting's goal was to exchange information and experience and coordinate and unify the Arab position in preparation for the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) held in Manila, the Philippines, in October 2008.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- (a) Evaluate the achievements and follow-up of the first meeting of the GFMD, held in Brussels, Belgium, in 2007, and highlight the different and successful experiences in the field of migration at the regional level;
- (b) Exchange information and discuss the most significant developments in the field of migration at the global level as well as in the Arab region;
- (c) Summarize common views, suggestions and perceptions on regional issues in preparation for the second meeting of the GFMD, held in Manila, the Philippines, in 2008;

- (d) Make suggestions to support the roles and activities of the Arab Observatory for International Migration implemented by PPMD/LAS.

The main outcome from this meeting was the adoption of a text, which was presented in Manila, the Philippines. The paper called for:

- (a) Inviting PPMD/LAS to convene an annual Arab Regional Governmental Experts Meeting on International Migration in order to discuss the GFMD's themes, coordinate the Arab vision for the Global Forum and identify best practices, policies and projects related to migration;
- (b) Enhancing flexible forms of migration and labour mobility, including creating opportunities for regular migration tailored to the needs and specific demands of economies and labour markets in receiving countries;
- (c) Implementing bilateral agreements and collective agreements for mobility of workers, as well as signing new agreements suitable to the needs and objectives of both sending and receiving countries, including new countries of destination;
- (d) Supporting partnership with organizations working in the field of migration in countries of origin in the Arab region, including collecting reliable data and assisting in their dissemination. Raising awareness through the media to inform about opportunities for regular migration and the dangers of irregular migration, and strengthening the capacity of institutions which benefit from the revenues of migration and to combat adverse effects of migration;
- (e) Encouraging the participation of migrants in development projects and programmes in their countries of origin through facilitating financial remittances, investment opportunities and making use of the skills acquired in the countries of destination.

The LAS organized the Arab Ministerial Meeting for Migration and Expatriates in Cairo, Egypt, from 17 to 18 February 2008. The meeting was opened by Mr. Amre Mousa, Secretary-General of the LAS and Ms. Aish Abdel Hadi, Egyptian Minister of Manpower and Migration. The meeting was attended by migration and labour ministers, parliamentarians and other officials in charge of migration in the Arab countries.

The meeting aimed at:

- (a) Informing participants about recent research in the field of migration and development as observed at the global and regional level;
- (b) Gaining support of decision-makers for more effective policies to magnify the benefits of migration, especially the migration of experts, and to confront its negative repercussions;
- (c) Presenting experiences in the field of migration in Arab countries and supporting coordination, cooperation and exchange in this regard;
- (d) Approving strategic and common charters and resolutions to remedy migration issues in the Arab region.

The meeting adopted the following recommendations and decisions:

- (a) Request PPMD/LAS to prepare a study on the regional aspects of migration of highly-skilled workers;
- (b) Establish an Arabic network for the labour market, which will be implemented by the Arab Labor Organization (ALO), to collect data and statistics on employment of Arab migrants;
- (c) Invite the ALO to establish an Arab training center or centers for potential Arab migrant workers in order to increase their technical, professional, cultural and linguistic skills in conformity with international labour standards and in response to labour market demands;
- (d) Call on Arab States national committees or national councils to coordinate migration policies at the national level to establish such councils to ensure coordination between the various policies and inputs on migration in order to increase the effectiveness and coordination at the regional and international levels.

The PPMD, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), organized a workshop entitled The International and Regional Laws of Refugees and Migration Issues, held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 21 to 22 October 2008. This project aimed to improve the skills, knowledge and abilities of Arab parliamentarians to manage international migration, magnify its benefits and confront its negative repercussions, through the adoption of appropriate laws and legislations.

The workshop participants made the following recommendations:

- (a) The LAS, in cooperation with UNHCR, should convene a meeting of governmental and international experts dealing with issues of migration and refugees to update the 1994 draft Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries, guided by relevant international conventions in this area. The experts should also draft a model law in the field of asylum at the national level;
- (b) All Arab parliaments should establish parliamentary committees dealing with issues of refugees, forced migration, internal displacement and overall migration. The Interim Arab Transitional Parliament should address topics related to refugees and migrants in the activities of its specialized agencies.

The workshop participants also expressed appreciation for initiatives by Arab States that had resulted in the enactment of national legislation concerning refugees and migrants.

2. Data collection and databases

In 2008, the PPMD prepared the Arab regional report for international migration, which focused on Arab skilled migrants and development. This report addressed the following topics and questions:

- (a) Profile of Arab skilled migrant characteristics and what are the levels of Arab skilled migration flows. Which countries attract them? What are their fields of specialization? Are there any specific needs for Arab scientific or professional skills?

- (b) Causes of skilled emigration. How are skilled persons encouraged to migrate to another country? Are they directly attracted through job offers or through other channels? Did this migration result from Arabs studying abroad?
- (c) Current situation of transnational communities and their involvement in the development of countries of origin. In which ways do transnational communities participate in the development of their countries of origin? What relationships do skilled labour migrants maintain abroad with local communities and home countries? What role do the following factors play in linking countries of origin and destination: remittances, investments, joint ventures, promotion of exports, outsourcing, return for short periods to serve in academic institutions or research centers, participation in think tanks, political participation, etc.
- (d) What is needed so that Arab skilled migrants remain involved in the national development and regional integration of their countries of origin? What are the learned lessons from the successful international experiments?
- (e) Strategies and policies to mobilize transnational communities. How can a country of origin benefit from its transnational communities abroad and how can it integrate these communities into global development initiatives? What role do civil society institutions, especially Arab professional associations, play abroad? What is the role of professional and scientific organizations and Arab expatriate researchers in technology and knowledge transfer, in national development and regional integration and in bringing transnational communities and countries of origin together? How can one enhance their roles in order to serve local communities?
- (f) What are the strategies at the Arab regional level aiming at strengthening Arab scientific transnational communities and regional development? What is the role of destination countries in helping to establish and strengthen transnational communities?
- (g) How can one improve the knowledge and information base of scientific transnational communities?

3. Arab Labor Organization (ALO)

The ALO, in its thirty-fifth General Assembly of the Arab Labor Conference, which took place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 23 February to 1 March 2008, recommended the following:

- (a) To support Arab temporary migration to Europe and to protect Arab migrants through: (i) the Barcelona process², the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, which started in 1995 to strengthen relations between the European Union and the Mashriq³ and Maghreb⁴ regions; (ii) Arab migrant associations in countries of destination, and (iii) non-governmental organizations and other institutions which support migrants;
- (b) To organize a forum for those involved in labour mobility in both Arab receiving countries and countries of origin in order to discuss and implement temporary bilateral or multilateral mobility projects;
- (c) To adopt the Abu Dhabi Declaration⁵ of 2008 on overseas employment and contractual labour for countries of origin and destination in Asia, including countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Further, to implement partnerships between sending and

- receiving countries to ensure labour rights and interests of receiving countries as well as a multilateral framework for circular labour mobility;
- (d) To draw attention to the issue of irregular migration flows in Arab countries, and support the international effort to combat human trafficking;
 - (e) To implement the free movement of service provided, as called for by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Mode 4).

NOTES

¹ The organizations present were: the Arab Labour Organization (ALO), the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, the European Commission (EC), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the National Council for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

² For more information on the Barcelona process, see http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/barcelona_process_en.htm (accessed 19 January 2009).

³ The Mashriq or Mashreq is, generally speaking, the region of Arabic-speaking countries to the east of Egypt and north of the Arabian Peninsula.

⁴ The Maghreb, also rendered Maghrib (or rarely Moghreb), meaning “place of sunset” or “western” in Arabic, is a region in North Africa. The term is generally applied to all of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

⁵ For the Abu Dhabi Declaration, see http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/brochures_and_info_sheets/abu_dhabi_declaration_eng.pdf (accessed 5 January 2009).