

United Nations Economic and Social Council

Informal Preparatory Meeting on the Theme of the 2006 High-Level Segment of ECOSOC

4-5 April 2006-03-29 United Nations Headquarters
New York

Roundtable 6: The challenge of globalization – labour migration

“International migration to the cities of the South”

Marcello Balbo, Department of Planning
Università luav di Venezia

As a consequence of globalization, international migration is no longer a predominantly South to North flow but has acquired a significant intra-developing country dimension. In particular, international migrants are heading more and more towards cities, where they find greater job opportunities as a consequence of the new demand for low-paid jobs, particularly in the service sector. In addition, cities provide the networks migrants need to rely in order to have access to the labour market and to find a place where to stay.

Current migration flows are increasingly of a temporary nature, since migrants tend less and less to settle permanently in the city of destination. Moreover, migrants make up very different groups of people: they are no longer only male unskilled workers, but also qualified professionals, students and, increasingly, women migrants.

International migration raises the essential issue of social inclusion and “the right to the city”, based on the principles of solidarity, freedom, equity, dignity and social justice, irrespective of nationality, race, gender or religion. The temporary nature of most migration movements makes it increasingly challenging to establish forms of migrant representation, and how best to promote migrant inclusion in the local decision-making process.

As a result of decentralization policies, local governments are increasingly entrusted with the responsibility of coping with urban growth issues, including international migration. Though it is largely acknowledged that also in the cities of the South international migrants contribute significantly to the economic dynamism of cities by filling sectors of the labor market eschewed by the local population, most local governments have little capacity to deal with international migration, least so to delineate any explicit policy.

Urban policies must meet migrants’ diverse needs, capacities and potentialities differentiating between territory-based policies, i.e. programmes targeted at the low-income population to which most international migrants add, and population-based policies, i.e. those aimed directly at international migrants and their different needs and demands.

Multicultural cities are not only a predictable consequence of current economic and social changes, in an era of globalization they are also beneficial to the hosting as well as the sending society, including in the cities of the South. Hence, cities must promote the inclusion of all its residents including international migrants, whose differences are likely to require *multiple inclusions*: which type, for which migrant community, and over what period of time.