

## *General Assembly Informal Thematic Debate on International Migration and Development*

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **Introduction**

The President of the General Assembly will host a one-day Informal Thematic Debate on International Migration and Development ('the debate') at UN Headquarters in New York on 19 May 2011, pursuant to A/RES/63/225. The debate is intended to build on the on-going dialogue on international migration and development, and to contribute to the process leading to the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development to be held by the UN General Assembly in 2013.

The first High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006 established that international migration can contribute to development if supported by the right policies. Since 2006, Governments and the international community have been pursuing a variety of policies and programmes to maximise the development impacts of international migration, and to reduce its negative effects.

As the first informal thematic debate on this issue in the GA, the interactive debate provides a unique opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to take stock of achievements to date, and to consider what has been learned about effective policies and practices that promote migration's positive contributions to development. It is also an opportunity to discuss the obstacles that reduce the benefits of migration and suggest ways to eliminate them, and to consider the way forward. The President of the General Assembly will distribute a Chair's Summary following the debate.

The Global Migration Group (GMG) intends to organise an experts symposium preceding the debate, which is expected to take place on 17-18 May in New York.

This concept note is intended to assist delegations and participants in preparing for the debate. In their interventions, Member States and civil society are invited to provide advice and share ideas and lessons learned from a pragmatic and action-oriented perspective. This note includes **key questions** on which Member States and participants are invited to focus their interventions, to help ensure that the one-day event will be practical, targeted and constructive. Member States who wish may also have their full statements posted on the President's website following the debate.

#### ***Morning session: The contribution of migrants to development***

With the increased recognition of the implications of migration on development and vice versa, this panel discussion focuses on sharing good practices that maximise the contribution of migrants to development.

Since the GA's 2006 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, much has been done to improve our understanding of the human development aspects of international migration. We know more, for example, about how migration helps to increase household incomes and improve access to education and health services. Migration can also be an empowering experience, particularly for women. There is growing recognition of the beneficial impacts of "social remittances" by migrants, including the transfer of information and know-how and the promotion of entrepreneurship at home. As countries seek to boost economic growth, the role of migrants as innovators and entrepreneurs has also received greater attention. Migrant networks play an important role in this respect.

Migrant workers also make important contributions to the economic growth of countries of destination. The recent economic and financial crisis has shown, once more, the resilience of migration and

remittances against such shocks. The crisis has dampened, but not reversed, increases in the global number of international migrants: between 2005 and 2010, their number increased by 11 million, down from a 13 million increase between 2000 and 2005 (Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/203). While rising unemployment in countries of destination has contributed to some increases in return flows, large-scale return migration has not occurred, because the majority of international migrants have settled in the countries of destination and have achieved a high level of local integration. Furthermore, the majority of international migrants remain employed and their labour continues to be necessary for key sectors of the economies of destination countries. Regarding remittances, in 2009 remittances to low- and middle-income countries amounted to \$316 billion, \$20 billion less than in 2008 (Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/203), indicating that remittances have been more resilient to the effects of the crisis than other types of financial flows. Remittances continue to contribute to the reduction of poverty and the improvement of health and education outcomes of migrants' families.

Nevertheless, when unemployment is high, the contributions of migrants are more likely to be disregarded, and xenophobia and racism may become more prevalent. It is all the more urgent, therefore, that Governments ensure full respect for the rights of migrants, including those in irregular situations, recognising that all migrants are entitled to respect for and protection of their human rights. Migrant workers who are especially at risk include those in the agricultural and informal sectors, including domestic care workers, many of whom are migrant women from developing countries.

Today, against the backdrop of the international financial crisis and increasingly better understandings of the contribution of migrants to development, some notable advances in migration policies and practices that harness the development potential of migrants are emerging. There are ongoing efforts to improve and harmonize the recognition of qualifications so that skilled migrants do not face recruitment barriers in countries of destination. Global competition for talent is rising. Many countries of origin have adopted strategies to attract back their expatriate skilled migrants. In addition, some destination countries are adopting measures to prevent shortages in their health workforce, such as increasing their domestic production of health personnel, thus reducing their reliance on health workers from countries with already fragile health systems.

In this panel, Member States and civil society are invited to share their experiences as well as practical and concrete advice on how to leverage the opportunities that international migration provides for countries of destination, countries of origin and migrants themselves, to reduce poverty, promote economic growth and human development, and boost overall development. As a guide, it is suggested that interventions address the following **key questions**:

1. How can Governments support their nationals working abroad as assets for their national economies and for social development in their countries and communities?
2. What social and other policies have proven effective or are needed to maximise the benefits of migration for development, for example measures to ensure the portability of social security benefits, facilitate the transfer of remittances, or ensure access to health, education and other critical social services for migrants?
3. What are successful examples of cooperation between Governments and key stakeholders such as trade unions and other members of civil society, employers, and private recruitment agencies, to safeguard the rights of migrants and ensure their full participation in the social and economic life of countries of destination?

#### ***Afternoon session: Improving international cooperation on migration and development***

International cooperation is crucial to ensuring that migration takes place in optimal conditions, with optimal results. Cooperation between States facilitates the migration process and can help ensure that

migration occurs through safe and regulated channels, and that it leverages the contributions that migrants make to development.

International cooperation has increased markedly over the past decade and now covers the full spectrum of activities, ranging from the global (e.g. the High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly in 2006 and the Global Forum on Migration and Development), to the regional (e.g. the various regional cooperative mechanisms, including consultative processes) to the bilateral (e.g. bilateral arrangements on facilitated labour migration). Both at the global and regional levels, informal, State-led processes are the most common forms of cooperation. By facilitating the exchange of information and lessons learned among officials working on migration, global and regional mechanisms have helped shape the global international migration and development agenda and, importantly, built confidence in the ability of governments from around the world with different experiences and perspectives to work together harmoniously to find shared and complementary policy approaches. Several regional cooperation mechanisms that seek to promote economic integration and allow for the free movement of labour have also developed. The UN supports Member States' cooperation, notably through the GMG and the work of its agencies.

At the bilateral level, the number of migration-related agreements has risen sharply over the past two decades. They have been instrumental in opening new migration channels, regulating conditions of recruitment and work, and ensuring predictability in the migration process.

In addition, there are more projects on international migration and development funded by the international development units of donor Governments. By considering the effects of international migration on development and vice versa, donor agencies are more likely to develop projects that leverage the benefits of migration. As just one example, concern about the increasing migration of health care workers from low-income countries with already fragile health systems has led to the development of recruitment codes of practice, which might not have received this attention if such emigration were not a barrier to attaining the health-related MDGs.

In this panel, Member States and civil society are invited to share updates on the current landscape of international cooperation and to discuss concrete best practices and outcomes that have emerged in recent years. As a guide, it is suggested that interventions address the following **key questions**:

1. What are concrete outcomes and best practices achieved by the regional and global cooperation mechanisms, including informal consultative processes, in which Member States discuss migration and development issues? How could these be multiplied or replicated in other world regions? How can the international community best support these efforts?
2. What are good models and lessons learned in the context of bilateral agreements aimed at facilitating migration and protecting migrants' rights? Have, for example, bilateral agreements and codes of practice had a positive influence on the ethical recruitment of migrant health personnel? Are other measures necessary?
3. What are good examples of how development cooperation has been effectively targeted to support national efforts to integrate migration into development planning and projects? How could such measures be stepped up?
4. Given the urgent need to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications and certifications between countries of origin and countries of destination in order harness the economic and social contribution of migrants to development, which good practices have emerged on the recognition of qualifications and how can these be replicated?