

**President of the General Assembly**  
**Panel discussion on international migration and development**  
**New York, 25 June 2013**

*Summary*

In preparation for the 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the President of the General Assembly convened a panel discussion on international migration and development in New York on 25 June 2013. The one-day panel discussion focused on the overall theme of the 2013 High-level Dialogue, namely to identify “concrete measures to strengthen coherence and cooperation at all levels, with a view to enhancing the benefits of international migration for migrants and countries alike and its important links to development, while reducing its negative implications”. The panel discussion consisted of three thematic panel segments, featuring presentations by migration experts, key institutional stakeholders as well as migrants themselves.

**Migration and development: drivers and impacts**

Panellists noted that since the first High-level Dialogue in 2006, the discourse on migration and development had shifted from emphasising mainly economic factors to also considering broader social and cultural aspects. Moreover, the multiple contributions of migrants to societies of origin and destination were receiving greater recognition. The experts cautioned that migration was not a panacea for poverty reduction, but that it should be part of broader national development strategy.

Given the increased interdependence of economies around the world, it was important to pursue policies that facilitated safe, orderly and legal migration. Measures to strengthen border security were leading to an increase in the number of undocumented migrants by hindering voluntary return and circulation of migrants. Because many people migrated out of necessity, pushed out by the lack of opportunities and good governance, it was important to prioritise the development of communities of origin so that migration could occur out of choice. The challenge was for countries to form partnerships that harnessed the contributions of diaspora groups, facilitated the repatriation of migrant earnings, and promoted circulation and return migration.

In countries of destination, migration had a positive, albeit modest, effect on employment and wages as well as a neutral fiscal impact. Migrants also played an important role as entrepreneurs and job creators. In some cases, migrants became entrepreneurs because they had difficulty accessing formal employment. Evidence also suggested that, in general, migrants did not compete for jobs with the native-born population, but filled gaps in occupations left vacant.

Remittances were found to increase access to education and health services at the household level and spur social and economic development. Yet, the productive use of remittances needed to be enhanced. As the potential contributions of migrants to development extended much beyond the realm of remittances, countries were encouraged to develop innovative strategies to empower migrants, promote migrant entrepreneurship, and leverage the contributions of

transnational communities. Thus, countries could enhance the positive contribution of migration and facilitate the return of migrants by creating conducive environments at home as well as by identifying strategies to better utilize the skills of their transnational communities. Concrete measures, such as granting dual citizenship, voting rights and the portability of social benefits, including pensions, could leverage diaspora contributions and promote circulation and return of migrants.

Panellists concurred that the costs of migration remained high and continued to be disproportionately born by the migrants themselves, especially those with limited skills. It was observed that foreign-born persons were more likely than the native-born population to be unemployed and to be overqualified for the tasks they were performing. One participant called for addressing the mismatch between local labour market demands and the availability of migrants with appropriate training and qualifications. Countries of origin needed to devise better policies to promote the return and circulation of migrants, especially those with needed skills. Countries were also encouraged to explore more effective approaches to recognise and put to use the skills of migrants acquired abroad, including vocational skills, through the mutual recognition of skills and diplomas.

### **Facilitating labour mobility - protecting migrant rights**

Panellists recognized that in an increasingly globalized world, where barriers to the free movement of goods and capital were falling fast, it was economically sound also to maximise the allocation of labour. Regional integration processes were one of the innovative solutions that allowed people to move more freely. Given that migration was mostly an expression of individual choices and freedoms, the upcoming High-level Dialogue offered an important opportunity to develop a common agenda based on the rule of law and with the rights of migrants at its centre.

Migration often resulted from a combination of job opportunities and labour shortages. Since the onset of the global financial crisis with rising unemployment among the native-born population, migration had become a politically sensitive issue. Many migrants were the object of xenophobia, hate crimes and other human rights violations. Countering the xenophobic discourse on international migration was considered a priority. Host countries, in particular, needed to be more proactive in acknowledging the positive contributions made by migrants.

Since the High-level Dialogue in 2006, the international community had learned that a comprehensive and right-based approach to migration and development was necessary. All migrants by virtue of their human dignity had rights that transcended their migration status. The international legal framework offered an important foundation for protecting migrants. More concerted efforts were needed to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children.

There was consensus that migration could not be addressed unilaterally. Instead it needed to be approached in an inclusive manner, involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions. Several participants called for strengthening policy and

institutional coherence between the various entities within national governments working on migration as well as enhancing capacities at the country level.

### **The 2013 High-level Dialogue and beyond**

The panellists drew attention to the progress made since the 2006 High-level Dialogue in fostering a climate of trust, where Member States and other stakeholders, including international organizations and civil society, could engage in an open dialogue. In particular, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), one of the main outcomes of the first High-level Dialogue, had provided a conducive platform for the exchange of ideas and best practices related to international migration and development.

There was widespread support for the need to fully integrate migration into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. Participants also underscored the urgency of better protecting the human rights of all migrants as well as ratifying and implementing relevant international instruments, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of migrants, particularly women, children and persons with an irregular migration status, was identified as a priority. Various participants called for establishing a framework to assist migrants caught in crisis situations, including “stranded migrants”.

Panellists also highlighted the need to change public perceptions of migration, which were often based on negative stereotypes, as well as to combat xenophobia and racism against migrants. Improving the public’s awareness of the contributions of migrants to societies of origin and destination was identified as a possible outcome of the High-level Dialogue in 2013.

Participants suggested expanding the number of stakeholders at the GMFD, and making the forum more action-oriented. They also recommended a closer cooperation between the Global Forum and the Global Migration Group (GMG). While the GFMD provided a welcome platform for informal dialogue and cooperation, some participants observed that the United Nations had a key role to play in improving global migration governance.

The panel also called for strengthening the evidence base on migration and development with a view to enhancing the formulation and monitoring of evidence-based migration policies and programmes. The 2013 High-level Dialogue could promote concrete plans to increase the availability of data disaggregated by relevant characteristics and to expand research on migration and development.

### **Conclusions**

The panel discussion concluded that while much progress had been achieved since the first High-level Dialogue, a number of key challenges remained. Based on the significant body of evidence about the multiple contributions of migration to global development, migration should not only be recognized as an intrinsic part of the post-2015 United Nations development framework, but also included in any future sustainable development goals. The negative narrative surrounding migration in some countries needed to be countered and information about the positive impacts

of migration should be distributed more widely. Greater efforts were also needed to protect the rights of migrants, especially the most vulnerable, recognizing also that migrants themselves were at the core of the debate on migration and development. There was a need to strengthen partnerships and cooperation at all levels, including among Member States, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia. Improving the evidence base on migration and development was also considered a priority. The 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, therefore, was an important opportunity for the international community to make concrete progress in improving the wellbeing of migrants around the world.

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