

ACTIVITIES OF ECA ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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International migration is a priority area for the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The ECA reform and repositioning exercise emphasized regional integration in which international migration is an important factor and resulted in tasking the Human and Social Development Section and the African Centre for Gender and Social Development to provide a programmatic focus on the subject within the Commission. This focus resulted in placing greater emphasis on international migration as an important area for harnessing human and financial resources in the support of the countries and the region.

ECA research defines international migration in the framework of regional integration, which calls for alleviation of the obstacles to trade liberalization, markets, and the free movement of people between countries. With international migration and labour mobility being highly constrained in Africa, the reports on “Assessing regional integration in Africa” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2004, 2006a) called for harmonization of labour laws and labour markets to encourage labour mobility across countries. The countries will need to relax visa requirements for people through adopting common travel documents and labour standards. Moreover, they will need to ratify and implement the relevant protocols of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

ECA prepared a regional report entitled “International migration and development: Implications for Africa” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2006b). Published on the occasion of the High-level Dialogue, this report shows that international migration flows within Africa are larger than the movements of people to destinations outside the continent. The report underlines the role of international migration in regional integration and development, which depends on the following factors: (a) the rights of international migrants and their families; (b) cohesion and tolerance; (c) contribution to development; (d) constructive engagement of Member States; (e) coherence and harmonization of policies, and (f) human and institutional capacity-building.

The countries in the ECA region need to constructively engage in a regional dialogue on international migration and development in order to integrate this issue closer in regional economic integration and international development cooperation. Constructive cooperation between countries and regions will lead to harmonization of national policies and regional frameworks. Also, the countries will need to initiate programmes on human capital development, especially 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, reduction of transfer costs of remittances can be done through the development of agreements and 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 New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) initiatives.

Development in Africa requires peace and stability, of which cohesion and tolerance are important ingredients. 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. Therefore, African countries are in need of: (a) new approaches for harnessing migration resources and potentials for

development; (b) developing migration policies and fostering partnerships on migration that are sensitive to the regional development needs; (c) building institutions and human capacity to manage migration through proper record-keeping, harnessing research activities and feeding research results into decision-making processes, and monitoring and upholding the rights of migrants and their families, and (d) developing mechanisms to build synergies between migration policies and national development planning.

Follow-up activities to the High-level Dialogue include a memorandum of understanding between the ECA and IOM. The memorandum lays out modalities for collaboration between the ECA and IOM in the area of international migration and development in Africa. The ECA has prepared a project proposal that aims to strengthen and promote understanding of the nexus between international migration and development in Africa. More specifically, the project will focus on three important and interrelated activity areas: (a) remittances' role in development; (b) capacity-building for better management of migration flows, and (c) migration and regional integration.

REFERENCES

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