



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Excerpts from the Foreword of: International Migration and Development — Report of the Secretary-General

Introduction

This September, the General Assembly will explore one of international migration's most promising aspects: its relationship to development. The potential for migrants to help transform their native countries is capturing the imaginations of national and local authorities, international institutions, and the private sector.

Throughout human history, migration has been a courageous expression of the individual's will to overcome adversity and to live a better life. Today, globalization, together with advances in communication and transport, has greatly increased the number of people who have both the desire and the capacity to move.

This new era has created challenges and opportunities for societies throughout the world. It also has served to underscore the clear link between migration and development. This Report seeks to explore these challenges and opportunities, and to offer evidence of the changes taking place. It is an early road map for this new era of mobility.

I am confident that September's High-Level Dialogue will be remembered as the moment when cooperation on this vital matter attained a new level. Sovereign States have the right to decide who is allowed to enter their territory, subject to the international treaty obligations they have assumed. But this right should not prevent us from working together to ensure that international migration helps us meet our development goals. The scale of migration's potential for good is huge. To take just the most tangible example, the funds that migrants send back to developing countries—at least \$167 billion in 2005 alone—now dwarf all forms of international aid combined.

The potential of migration & development

We have gained many new insights into migration and, especially, into its impact on development.

We now understand, better than ever before, that migration is not a zero-sum game. In the best cases, it benefits the receiving country, the country of origin, and migrants themselves. It should be no surprise that countries once associated exclusively with emigration—such as Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Spain, and many others—now boast thriving economies which themselves attract large numbers of migrants. Emigration has played a decisive role in reinvigorating their economies, as has the eventual return of many of their citizens.

International migration is changing as labour markets and society become more global. Those who emigrate no longer separate themselves as thoroughly as they once did from the families and communities they leave behind. No longer do the vast majority settle in just a small number of developed countries: about a third of the world's nearly 200 million migrants have moved from one developing country to another, while an equal proportion have gone from the developing to the developed world. Nor are migrants engaged only in menial activities. Nearly half the increase in the number of international migrants aged 25 or over in OECD countries during the 1990s was made up of highly skilled people.

Meanwhile, research continues to undermine old assumptions—it shows, for example, that women are somewhat more likely than men to migrate to the developed world, that migrants can maintain transnational lives, and that remittances can dramatically help local economies. At the same time, innovations in policymaking are allowing us to manage international migration in new ways—China and the Republic of Korea attract expatriate researchers back home with state-of-the-art science parks; Governments collaborate with migrant associations abroad to improve livelihoods at home; and development programmes help migrant entrepreneurs start small businesses in their countries of origin.

Owing to the communications and transport revolution, today's international migrants are, more than ever before, a dynamic human link between cultures, economies and societies. And the wealth of migrants is not measured only in the remittances they send home. Through the skills and know-how they accumulate, they also help to transfer technology and institutional knowledge. They inspire new ways of thinking, both socially and politically. India's software industry has emerged in large part from intensive networking among expatriates, returning migrants, and Indian entrepreneurs at home and abroad. After working in Greece, Albanians bring home new agricultural skills that enable them to increase production. By promoting the exchange of experience and helping build partnerships, the international community can do much to increase—and spread—these positive effects of migration on development.

Promising policy initiatives

In light of these changes, Governments everywhere have an opportunity, and a good reason, to re-examine their international migration and development policies.

This report suggests many ways in which Governments and others could shape the nature of international migration and the distribution of its costs and benefits, thereby making migration work better for everyone. From promoting entrepreneurship among migrants, to facilitating access to financial institutions, to establishing partnerships to train health and education personnel, there is no dearth of possibilities. But such a report cannot be exhaustive. I expect that Governments will bring yet more ideas to share with one another when they come to New York in September.

We are only beginning to learn how to make migration work more consistently for development. Each of us holds a piece of the migration puzzle, but none has the whole picture. It is time to start putting it together. We have a unique opportunity to do this by identifying, assessing, and sharing the many experiments in managing migration now being tried around the world. And since migration is a global phenomenon—which occurs not only between pairs of countries or within regions, but from almost every corner of the world to every other—it requires our collective attention.

Many promising policies are already in place. Some countries are experimenting with more fluid types of migration that afford greater freedom of movement through multiple-entry visas. Others are promoting the entrepreneurial spirit of migrants by easing access to loans and providing management training. Governments are also seeking ways to attract their expatriates home: directly, through professional and financial incentives, and indirectly by creating legal and institutional frameworks conducive to return—including dual citizenship and portable pensions. Local authorities, too, are using innovative measures to attract expatriate talent to their cities or regions.

Yet we find that while countries share people through migration, they often neglect to share knowledge about how to manage the movement of people. We all need to learn more systematically from each other.

A Global Forum: Improving international learning & cooperation

How do we start putting together all the pieces of the migration and development puzzle? This knowledge is scattered not just in the many United Nations offices, funds, and programmes, but also in the halls of Governments around the world, in the minds of experts, in the experiences of employers, in the activities of civil society organizations, and in the hearts of migrants. And where would it be best for Governments—in the spirit of investigation and as equals in a collegial environment—to discuss how international migration can be made to work for development? The United Nations is surely the obvious venue for this exchange of ideas, experience, and lessons learnt.

As we continue to explore how the United Nations can better serve its Member States, it is evident that we must be able to facilitate cooperation among Governments on international migration issues, especially those related to development.

A consultative Forum—led by, and open to, all the 191 Member States of the United Nations—would offer Governments a venue in which to discuss issues related to international migration and development in a systematic, comprehensive way. It would also stimulate Governments to look at the issues of migration and development in a holistic manner, not merely through the separate lenses of different government departments. Such a Forum would not produce negotiated outcomes. But it would give Governments timely exposure to promising policy ideas, as analysed by the most relevant, qualified bodies from both inside and outside the United Nations system. The Forum would thus complement, and add value to, the activities of regional consultative processes—especially since the latter do not usually address issues related to development, focusing instead on managing regional migration flows.

Such a Forum would allow Governments to establish a common understanding—based on the best evidence—about the areas of migration policymaking that have the greatest potential to contribute to development. In addition, a Forum could provide—just as the High-Level Dialogue is already doing—the impetus to increase coherence in migration policies and actions at the national and international levels. It would also offer an opportunity for Governments to engage, when they deem it desirable or necessary, with relevant stakeholders who have valuable knowledge and experience—including NGOs, experts, migrant organizations, and others. But most of all, a Forum would maintain our focus on international migration issues, while signalling that international migration is a normal but crucial element in the development process. □