

**ESCWA's Contribution to the Thirteenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration
(New York, 12-13 February 2015)**

A) Main achievements of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in 2014 with regards to the implementation of the Secretary-General's eight-point agenda for action

Following up on its active engagement in the preparation for the 2013 second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, particularly through regional consensus building and support to its member states in reaching a common understanding of the migration-development nexus, ESCWA's work in 2014 focused on the implementation of the recommendations which emanated from this important global event. Through established partnerships with the League of Arab States, IOM and twelve UN agencies working in the Arab States region, ESCWA's work over 2014 focused on the Secretary-General's eight-point agenda for action, especially with regard to enhancing migration partnerships and cooperation to improve policy coherence and coordinated responses to international migration challenges (Point 8), and integrating migration into the development agenda (Point 6), including in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

Point 8 on "Enhance[ing] Migration Partnerships and Cooperation"

International migration is and will remain a phenomenon of central importance for the social and economic development of the countries of the Arab region, providing opportunities for development, but also posing challenges with the escalation of conflicts and the resulting massive displacements of several hundred thousand people over the past few years. In an effort to enhance partnership and coordination between countries, but also between international organizations and major stakeholders, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) continues to support the work of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, and has played a central role in elaborating its work-plan and implementing its 2014 activities.

As agencies in the United Nations system have begun to create structures to enhance global and regional coordination on migration-related work and ensure that their efforts are complementary and mutually-reinforcing, the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region was launched in 2013 and is co-chaired by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the International Organization for Migration. It brings together 15 agencies¹ with a shared objective of coordinating the complementary efforts of actors in the region and promoting joint research and interventions on migration. The Working Group aims to examine the links between migration and development; ensure the systematic production and access to quality migration data; support the development and implementation of Government policies and programmes that maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse impacts of migration in a more coherent way; and promote dialogue between countries of the region to find mutually-beneficial solutions to migration challenges.

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), the League of Arab States (LAS), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Entity for Gender Empowerment (UN-Women), and the World Health Organization (WHO)

The member agencies of the working group have agreed that one of the main functions of this working group should be the production of a **regular report on international migration in the Arab region**, as a joint effort to address the absence of an overarching and regular update on the situation in relation to international migration in the Arab region. The report aims to address the knowledge deficit on international migration in the Arab region by providing detailed information on current migration trends and their economic and social consequences for policy makers, researchers and practitioners as well as thematic and timely discussions of important migration-related topics. The report will also address the migration governance with a view to understanding the overall national policy and legislative framework and the most important developments in migration governance in the Arab region over the past few years.

First of a series of biennial reports, the 2015 Migration Situation Report in the Arab Region² will address the issue of displacement and development in a changing Arab region, given the importance and urgency of this issue to the region in light of the waves of armed conflict that have swept across several Arab countries in the past few years and have led to mass displacement and refugee movements, and the challenges that this situation poses for the internally displaced, refugees and host communities.

Point 6 on “Integrat[ing] Migration into the Development Agenda”

As part of the work of the Thematic Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, ESCWA, IOM and LAS carried out a four-day Training Workshop on International Migration and Development (Cairo, 15-18 September 2014) for ten Arab countries of origin³.

The workshop aimed at building the capacities of participating officials to better assess the impact of migration on development, undertake a migration mainstreaming exercise and thereby aimed at strengthening their skills to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate policies that maximize the positive impacts of migration for development and minimize its negative effects in line with global best practice. The training was designed around the IOM-produced *International Migration and Development Training Modules* and supplemented by the Arabic translation of the GMG’s manual *Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Practitioners*, produced by the Global Migration Group and translated by ESCWA and focused on the migration-development nexus; engaging expatriate communities in development; the sociocultural dimensions of migration and development; migration and development policy and planning; and programme experiences on migration and development. It placed particular emphasis on a south-south peer learning process by integrating the lessons learned from initiatives undertaken by the countries represented at the workshop. The training was developed in collaboration with several members⁴ of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region to draw on their complementary expertise in the different dimensions of migration and development.

ESCWA’ work in the area of international migration in 2014 also focused on enhancing the development benefits of remittances through a regional project aiming strengthening the capacity of government officials to formulate and adopt strategies, policies and programs to enhance remittances impact on development in selected Arab countries. The first stage of the project has focused on preparing a comprehensive assessment of the current situation, with country studies completed on Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen among others. The next stage will involve capacity development activities

² The report is expected to come out in the autumn of 2015

³ The countries are the following: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, The Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen.

⁴ ILO, WHO, UNAIDS, UNODC and UN-Habitat.

designed to assist countries in providing a more attractive finance and investment environment for their expatriate communities and ensuring that resources are channeled towards development.

B) ESCWA's review on the proposed targets for the post-2015 development agenda as they relate to international migrants, migration and mobility

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) proposed by the OWG take into account migrants and international migration issues given their importance to the achievement of sustainable development. Direct reference is made in the proposed SDGs to the protection of labour rights and the promotion of safe working environments; promoting inclusion on the social, economic and political levels regardless of origin; increasing well-managed, regular and protected migration and mobility of people, including through the reduction of the transaction costs of remittances; eliminating trafficking of women and children; increasing the retention of health workforce in developing countries; and enhancing capacities to produce and make available good quality accurate disaggregated data, including by migratory status⁵. In fact, integrating migration and migrants' issues in the SDGs is likely to strengthen current efforts of Arab countries to improve migration governance in line with global and regional norms and conventions towards maximizing the development benefits of international migration and reducing its negative impacts.

As intergovernmental negotiations on the SDGs progressed over the course of 2014, focus on migration issues and migrants was largely maintained. However, displaced persons and refugees, who represent two significant groups in the Arab region⁶, were eventually moved from the list of targets to the introduction section. Issues pertaining to migration and migrants were streamlined in the sense that targets more or less addressing similar issues were either integrated into one target that is usually set at a higher level, or merged together with a view to avoid redundancy. For instance, the target on "facilitat[ing] orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies"⁷ provides a good example of a target set at a high level that requires several actions and measures to be taken in order for it to materialize. An example on reducing redundancy is the consolidation of the different statements on remittances as a financial resource and the different mentions of the same statement on lowering the transaction costs of migrants' remittances into one means of implementation⁸ when we compare the working documents of the tenth to thirteenth session meetings of the OWG to the Outcome Document.

Moreover, targets were moved to means of implementation and vice versa. The former case could represent a risk should the means of implementation as detailed in the current version of the outcome document be reduced or removed from the final document as negotiations proceed through 2015. Thus efforts should be exerted at the negotiation stage to avoid such an occurrence. Underlining the gender aspect was also noted in some instances, but in other instances, reference to the migrants' socio-demographic group was replaced by a reference to a more general group, the vulnerable; and only was such reference diluted in one instance by changing the focus to the overall population. Overall, reference to the migrants' socio-demographic group was maintained.

⁵ United Nations (2014) Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, A/68/970, pages 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22 and 24.

⁶ Reference to the internally displaced persons and refugees made in the working document of the tenth OWG session meeting was dropped from subsequent versions.

⁷ A/68/970, page 17.

⁸ A/68/970, Means of implementation 10.c, page 18.

Accordingly, it is clear that the efforts of various stakeholders to maintain specific reference to migrants and international migration have been fruitful. Reading the OWG Outcome Document from a migration/migrants lens shows the importance accorded to these issues by governments, and highlights the proposed SDGs and the future development agenda as a framework to address key issues, most importantly the protection of migrants.

Therefore, as progress towards agreeing on the final content of the SDGs is made, it is important to:

- Maintain focus on issues of migration and migrants as this will provide Governments with a global framework to address these issues, noting that most of the development funding will be channelled through this framework.
- Maintain focus on ‘the vulnerable’, thereby reaffirming the UN Secretary General people-centred approach to sustainable development and supporting the intensification of development efforts to bridge existing gaps between ‘the vulnerable’ and the mainstream population.⁹ The vulnerable’ as a broader category could encompass socio-demographic groups “at high risk of discrimination”¹⁰ including migrants, a group that has “traditionally [been] marginalized and socially excluded ... in the Arab region”¹¹.
- Ensure that means of implementation dealing with migration issues remain part and parcel of the SDGs.
- Push to reintegrate in the SDGs a specific reference to displaced persons and refugees at the level of relevant targets and means of implementation.
- Formulate indicators that take into consideration migrants and migration issues and dynamics as this is important to facilitate the monitoring of and reporting on progress in the implementation of development goals and targets and to help move the migration agenda forward.

⁹ United Nations (2014) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, A/69/302.

¹⁰ United Nations (2014) Framework of Actions for the Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014, A/69/62, page 22.

¹¹ ESCWA (2014) Social Justice in the Policies of Arab States: Discussion Paper (E/ESCWA/28/8).