

REPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION POLICY PROGRAMME

*United Nations Institute for Training and Research
International Migration Policy Programme*

Since 1998, the International Migration Policy Programme (IMP) has sought to strengthen the capacity of Governments to manage migration and to foster regional and international co-operation towards orderly migration and the protection of migrants. By early 2004, IMP had organised 16 regional meetings in Central and Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Pacific, the Caribbean, Western Africa, and Eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region, for migration capacity-building, practice-oriented training and co-operation, involving some 900 senior to middle-level Government officials from over 125 developing and transition countries.

Commended for its work in United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on International Migration and Development, the most recent resolution adopted in December 2003 notes again the work undertaken by IMP and collaborating United Nations and non-United Nations agencies to strengthen the capacity of Governments to manage migration flows at national and regional levels and thus to foster greater cooperation among States towards beneficial and orderly migration. In carrying out its activities, IMP relies on the broad support and inter-agency cooperation among global and regional bodies dealing with migration, population, displacement and refugee issues.

Following the establishment of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) on 1 January 2004, IMP's core activities have been put on hold during the 18 months work of the Commission. The Director of IMP has been appointed as Executive Director of the Secretariat of the GCIM.

A. ASPECTS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE MEETING

Based on IMP's vast experience in promoting regional dialogue as the basis for cooperation amongst States, suggestions for topics of discussion for the United Nations High-Level Dialogue planned for 2006 are the following:

1. How and to what extent regional consultative processes on migration can be used as building blocs towards greater international cooperation

Both the fruits of IMP's activities and of the plethora of regional consultative processes on migration (RCPMs) confirm the utility of bringing Governments together at the regional level to discuss and develop strategies to tackle their migration challenges. Indeed, due to their informal non-binding nature and their relatively low overhead costs, RCPMs have been hailed as a positive tool for successively developing migration management nationally and regionally. Groupings that incorporate "like-minded" Governments such as the IGC represent efforts that have gone "one step further" beyond assuming regional affinities to bringing together countries facing similar migration challenges due to their particular "push/pull" characteristics.

Internationally, through activities such as the ones fostered in the context of the Berne Initiative Process, there is an effort today to identify what countries may share in terms of common priorities or perhaps more accurately what could be categorized as mutual benefits, i.e. trade offs or the asymmetrical interests of States. The Global Commission on International Migration has also sought to capture regional affinities through its five regional hearings, each inviting different stakeholder groups to share its regional priorities.

The United Nations High-Level Dialogue may wish to consider whether regional cooperation constitutes a building bloc towards international governance in this field. Can different approaches to migration apply cross-regionally? What are the motivations underpinning regional and international cooperation in this field? Regional discussions tend to focus on similar priorities; international cooperation on finding compromises or trade-offs which are equitable for different regions. If this is the logic behind international cooperation, is it not more useful to begin from the starting point that different regions have different priorities rather than common priorities that apply across regions?

2. How to measure progress of qualitative activities such as RCPMs

Regional Consultative Processes on Migration (RCPMs) and their spin off effects, including technical capacity building, assist countries and regions in strengthening their migration management systems. Like other qualitative exercises, however, it is often difficult to measure the extent to which progress in developing sound policy and practice is a direct result of such consultations. IMP, with the financial assistance of UNFPA, is currently undertaking an evaluation of two regional dialogues, namely that for the Issyk-Kul Dialogue region (Central Asia, Caucasus and neighbouring countries) and the AU/IMP Dialogue. The evaluation, based on questionnaires with participants, interviews and targeted field inquiry, will seek to track the developments which have occurred in countries in relation to the recommendations that were endorsed at previous IMP meetings. It will attempt to isolate a number of external factors and to identify how and to what extent the consultations resulted in specific progress.

The United Nations High-Level Dialogue may want to consider how, through empirical analysis, to quantify the value added of regional consultations, and more precisely how to calculate the correlation between consultations and progress.

3. How to move beyond discussion to concrete implementation of existing obligations (e.g. respect for human rights)

Following from above, a natural complement is to consider areas where limited progress has been made and to seek to address these failings. Indeed, at IMP events and in other contexts, Governments speak more frequently about the need to move beyond dialogue to concrete action in areas where such action is urgently needed. Inaction is often a direct result of lack of resources and/or political will. Sometimes, however, inaction results from misunderstandings, misinformation or lack of information on what course of action should be taken.

The United Nations High-Level Dialogue may want to consider areas where Governments have called for going beyond discussion to concrete action. It may want to consider why inaction has resulted and whether something can be done about it. One area that is frequently cited in this regard is the lack of implementation of existing legal obligations in the area of human rights and more precisely the protection of migrants' rights. Is this based on a lack of resources and political will or are there, at least for some countries, other factors that account for this failing?

4. How to incorporate civil society more effectively in consultative fora

While migration policy can be considered a relatively new concept insofar as most States began to develop immigration policies in the post World War II period, and some have only begun just over a decade ago, it is not surprising that civil society's influence on migration policy *per se* is just now beginning to play an important role. To be sure, civil society has always had a role in operational assistance, and on policy, it has had a longer history in the field of human rights for instance than strict migration policy. This has changed over the last few years, and large international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, for instance, have clearly stated their interest in gaining access and a platform within

migration policy fora. Though RCPMs include NGOs, civil society's influence in policy making is still fairly limited.

The United Nations High-Level Dialogue may want to consider how NGOs on the front line of migration's effects, namely those providing assistance, engaged in reintegration and return, often in close contact with migrants and indeed representing migrant groups, should be incorporated as full fledged actors in migration policy development both regionally and internationally.