

**FIFTH COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations Secretariat
New York, 20-21 November 2006

**UN-HABITAT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF THE
UNITED NATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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United Nations Human Settlements Programme

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UN-HABITAT has been working on migration and urbanization for a very long time. It is important to understand that the growth of cities is not just a phenomenon of migration from rural to urban areas. It also entails international migration - people seeking a better life in other countries both in the north and in the south. Whether they are fleeing conflict, disasters or simply seeking a better life somewhere else, the number of people on the move today is greater than ever before.

During the preparatory process for the High Level Dialogue on Migration, UN-HABITAT has worked on the following:

- In one of UN-HABITAT's flagship reports – *The State of World's Cities 2004/2005 on Globalization and Urban Culture*, Chapter 4 is on “International Migration: Socio-economic and Cultural Implications.”
- UN-HABITAT in cooperation with the Italian Technical Cooperation and the University of Venice has published a book on “*International Migrants and the City*” (June 2005) – Bangkok, Berlin, Dakar, Karachi, Johannesburg, Naples, Sao Paulo, Tijuana, Vancouver and Vladivostok.
- UN-HABITAT in cooperation with IOM organized a Ministerial Roundtable breakfast on “*the Millennium Development Goals and Migration*” during the High Level Segment of ECOSOC on 1 July 2005;
- In preparatory meeting for the 2006 ECOSOC High Level Segment, UN-HABITAT in cooperation with ILO, IOM, World Bank, UNCTAD, UNFPA and others has organized a Roundtable on “*the Challenge of globalization – labour migration , brain drain and brain circulation*” on 5 April 2006.
- During the High Level Dialogue of ECOSOC 2006, UN-HABITAT in cooperation with ILO, UNCTAD, IOM and others, UN-HABITAT has organized the High Level Dialogue on “Globalization and Labour Migration.”
- Every year on the first Monday in October, UN-HABITAT uses the World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of the world's growing cities and the rapid and irreversible urbanization. The theme this year was “Cities – magnets of hope.” UN-HABITAT has published its Habitat Debate on “Cities – magnets of hope, A look at Global Migration Problems” as a special issue after the High Level Dialogue.

The destination of international migrants is increasingly towards cities, particularly large cities, where they have more chances of finding income-earning opportunities. Often times, in such conurbations, migrants strive to gain access to the large and expanding informal sector and to provide for the demand for low-paid service workers. A significant number of them, particularly those in developing countries, end up living in informal settlements that are generally devoid of adequate housing and basic services. It is also common for those who end up in developed countries to settle in neighbourhoods with sub-standard levels of facilities.

The spatial distribution of immigrant populations results from choice as well as lack of choice. The cultural, social and religious traditions of migrants often differ from those of the host country or city. This makes their integration in the host society a difficult process. While many

newly arrived migrants might prefer settling among their own community to begin with, most do not have little choice.

While we are debating the issues of protecting immigrant rights and looking for options to stem the tide of migration, we must realise that the weakest link in the chain of any solution is at the local government level. In many instances local authorities have very little say, if any, over national migration policies. Similarly, they also have very little capacity to control transnational migration flows to their cities. However, local government is faced with the impact of transnational flows. This impact is of primary concern to three major spheres of public policy.

The first sphere of concern is the challenge of ensuring the protection of human rights for migrants. The most evident manifestation of this challenge lies in the area of adequate housing and access to basic services. Indeed, *Housing and basic services* are probably the single most important problem that international migrants have to deal with when they first arrive in their city of destination. The formal housing markets tend to be out of bounds as far as migrants are concerned. This situation results in the formation of inner city slums or “ethnic” ghettos. Recent events serve as a stark reminder that such ghettos can become the hotbeds of social unrest and civil strife. As we seek ways and means of protecting the basic rights of immigrants, let us not forget that these rights can be rendered most meaningfully through the right to adequate housing and basic services. Translating these rights into reality requires an explicit chapter on socially inclusive housing and urban policies at the local level.

A second sphere of concern is the challenge of *decent employment and working conditions*. Here again, local governments have a critical role to play in obviating the consequences of exploitative labour practices and human trafficking. Local-level decisions can help make informal activities part of a robust formal sector and provide more job and income opportunities, and protection.

It is well recognised that the presence of international migrants also makes cities more cosmopolitan, and therefore more attractive to the forces of globalisation. However, the increasing ethnic diversity of present-day cities all over the world, including in many countries with little or no multicultural tradition, often evoke anxiety and fear among local residents. If cities are to be a polis, the Greek word for a place where different people come together, cities must be considered as front-line actors in tackling social exclusion. Local authorities certainly need policies that raise urban productivity and foster economic growth; but they also need policies that manage diversity and promote integration. A cornerstone of any such strategy must be the participation of migrants’ representatives in municipal councils and local decision making.

Much of the current debate on migration reminds me of the three decades of debate we have had since the creation of UN-HABITAT on the issue of urbanisation. There are indeed several parallels and important lessons learned.

International migration, just like urbanisation, cannot be controlled in any sustainable or humane manner. It has to be managed. Experience shows that proactive immigration policies can prevent negative impacts and maximize positive ones at the international, national and local levels.

International immigrants must be considered as development agents for the bridges they build between their home countries and their adoptive communities.

In many countries, international migrants constitute a growing group of urban residents that are victims of exclusion. They are often denied access to housing and urban services and have no voice in decision-making. If we want to build inclusive societies, we have to pay much more attention to building inclusive cities. Including migrant populations in governance structures at the local level are essential to this task.

International migration can no longer be considered a question of national security alone. Its implications at the urban level must be assessed and governed. While UN-HABITAT, within its mandate, assists local authorities to adopt more inclusive governance and management, there is an urgent need for a coordinated approach across all spheres of government to overcome inconsistencies in policies and practices.

Finally, we need to devote more attention to research on the urban dimension of international migration, to better understand what works, why, and in which circumstances. Such an evidence-based approach will enable all of us to develop the right policy options, to implement more effective strategies, and to learn from each other in our common quest to uphold human rights, contribute to peace and security, and to be able celebrate the true sense of our humanity - our cultural diversity.

Thank you for your attention.