

ACTIVITIES OF ESCWA ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

*Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
United Nations*

The interest of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in international migration has kept pace with the growing importance of this issue at both the regional and international levels. A number of activities have taken place prior to and after the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in an effort to mainstream the development aspects of international migration in the regular programme of work of ESCWA. In these activities, the nexus between international migration and development was acknowledged by demonstrating the intrinsic relation between population mobility and the overall process of socio-economic development.

Against this background, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Population Division of DESA, organized an Expert Group Meeting on “International migration and development in the Arab region: Challenges and opportunities” in Beirut, Lebanon, from 15 to 17 May 2006. The meeting provided a forum for substantive examinations of key issues faced by Governments, international organizations and civil society in addressing the challenges and opportunities of international migration and development in the Arab region. In addition, ESCWA organized a round table on labour migration in the Arab countries at the International Symposium on International Migration and Development, which was held in Turin, Italy from 28 to 30 June 2006. At this meeting, the development impact of international migration in the region was discussed and the role of remittances and transnational communities in fostering development in sending countries was examined. ESCWA also participated in the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and delivered a presentation on the regional dimensions of international migration and development during side events on 13 and 15 September 2006.

As part of the documentation for the sixth session of the Committee on Social Development, which was held in Amman, Jordan, from 5 to 6 March 2007, ESCWA prepared a fact sheet on international migration in Arab countries together with a situation analysis report on labour migration in the Arab region. The report aimed at constructing a regional profile of international labour migration in the Arab region within the context of globalization and the evolving demographic and socio-economic situation.

ESCWA recently published a wall chart on international migration and development in the Arab region to reiterate the importance of understanding the linkages between migration and development in order to capture more effectively its economic, social and cultural benefits and better manage its negative costs. The wall chart presents a situation analysis of international migration in the Arab countries, and addresses key issues relating to the potential benefits and challenges of migration experienced by both sending and receiving countries. Among those issues are remittances, female migration, labour migration and youth unemployment, the potential trade-off between the demographic bonus and the pressure to emigrate, and the emigration of skilled workers.

ESCWA is completing the third issue of the Population and Development Report on “International migration and development in the Arab region: Challenges and opportunities”. The report is a recurrent publication that was recently prepared in the context of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The report is a policy-oriented output, which analyses the nexus between international migration and development, in relation to the socio-economic and socio-demographic changes in the Arab region.

International migration features in the 2008-2009 work programme of ESCWA. A number of activities have been planned in order to increase the capacity of member countries to develop and operationalize intersectoral social development plans and programmes with a focus on vulnerable groups, including migrants. These activities will include a policy brief on international migrants and a joint project with ECLAC on “International migration in the Middle East: Comparative analyses and proposals for the creation of a network for exchanging common strategies.”