

CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

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A. BACKGROUND

The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) established a new consensus on placing people at the centre of development efforts. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, a key outcome of the Summit, pledged to make the eradication of poverty, promoting full employment and fostering social integration as overriding objectives of development. The Declaration contains a specific commitment to advance social integration to create “a society for all” through fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant and that respect diversity, equality of opportunity, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

The work of the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) focuses on:

1. Addressing the needs and concerns of socially marginalized groups, including youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.
2. Advocating the needs for promoting social inclusion goals.
3. Investigating through research and analysis issues related to the social perspectives of development, especially those related to poverty and employment.
4. Providing advisory services and engaging in capacity-building activities to assist Governments and other stakeholders in the implementation of the goals contained in the Copenhagen Programme of Action, in particular, poverty eradication, full employment and social integration.

In all these areas of work, international migration is of great significance. The increase in international migration flows in recent years has contributed globally to challenges in meeting the goals of the World Summit for Social Development. Although the Division does not have a specific sub-programme that focuses on migrants, it is clear that migration presents added challenges to the mandates of the Division, and has been addressed as a cross-cutting issue.

This note addresses the manner in which international migration has shaped selected aspects of the Division’s work and highlights a few directions for future work on migration that can contribute to a better understanding of the increasing social development challenges that are undoubtedly associated with international migration. The note focuses on two areas of the Division’s work—Social Integration and the Programme on Youth.

B. SOCIAL INCLUSION AS AN OVERALL GOAL

How to integrate diverse social groups into society is at the heart of the work of the Division for Social Policy and Development. In order for migrants to function effectively in destination societies, their gradual but smooth integration into host societies is critical. They need to be integrated into all aspects of the recipient societies in the same ways as the other members of the societies.

When they are well integrated into destination societies, migrants are likely to increase their contribution to the development of their communities. However, when they are left alone without any interventions, migrants do not automatically integrate into host societies, but often form their own sub-societies, where they retain their own social norms, ethics, languages, cultures and identities. This will further alienate them from the rest of the society, as they are perceived as not willing to participate in or contribute to local communities. Misunderstanding or confrontations stemming from cultural, ethnic, religious and other differences sometimes give rise to irrational fears, prejudices, and encourage the development of ideologies such as racism and practices of discrimination geared at excluding “others”, in this case, migrants. This situation will eventually create social tensions not only between sub-societies and the mainstream society, but also, potentially among different sub-societies.

Those living in, or recovering from situations of violent conflict are often forced to migrate temporarily or permanently to escape death and torture. In addition, it is most likely that people feel forced to move when they cannot find any other choices, when they face structural and continuous lack of economic opportunities, lack of freedom, persecution, insecurity, violence, human rights violation, destruction of economic and social infrastructure due to conflict. In these cases, people migrate, not because of their choice but because of their survival. This category of involuntary migration is increasing in volume and importance.

The Social Integration Branch of the Division has had to respond to new challenges in a world that has seen the highest rates of international migration in recent years. Risks of social exclusion are magnified when various social groups are part of migrant streams. In order to promote understanding of the challenges of social integration, DSPD, in collaboration with UNESCO and UN-Habitat, organized an Expert Group Meeting on “Creating an inclusive society: Practical strategies to promote social integration” at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France, from 10 to 13 September 2007.

Within the broad objective of developing practical strategies to promote social integration through an inclusive and participatory process, the meeting explored essential elements necessary to create an inclusive society, clarifying methodology of analysis of social inclusion, and exploring possible approaches to measure the cohesiveness of societies. Case studies, existing methodologies and indicators to assess the impact of interventions to promote social inclusion at the local and community level, were discussed. Ways to address urban violence and insecurity, marginalization of certain groups and conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts were also reviewed. DSPD is working on a publication, which will contain a chapter on “A concept and methodologies for measuring social inclusion”, to be published in 2008.

C. THE PROGRAMME ON YOUTH

The World Programme of Action for Youth which provides the mandate for the work of the United Nations Programme on Youth has identified 15 priority areas of action¹—none of which is

migration, but all of which have major implications for the propensity of youth to migrate. By and large, success or failure in achieving the goals in the 15 priority areas determines whether youth migrate or not in search of better opportunities.

Youth are more likely to migrate than others. The World Bank estimates, for example, that the proportion of youth from developing countries who cross borders is about a third of the overall migration flow and about a quarter of the total number of immigrants worldwide (World Bank, 2007). Many move without adequate papers and they may pay smugglers to reach their destination. The journey is sometimes difficult and risky especially crossing oceans and seas. Youth migration is often voluntary, but can be forced. Youth, especially females, are frequently trafficked and exploited. In their new destinations, youth may have little knowledge of how to obtain legal and social protection. While on the move, young migrants become vulnerable to different types of abuses including sexual abuse, slavery, and forced recruitment to become child soldiers.

The migration of young people has far reaching impacts. It reduces the labour force in sending countries. For young people, migration also means losing the networks of family and friends that are important in giving young people support and a sense of belonging, identity and direction.

In a recently adopted resolution of a Supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth², the General Assembly recognized the special challenges of youth migrants and urged Governments to foster the conditions that provide opportunities, jobs and social services for youth in their home countries. It recommended that where youth migrate, “efforts should be made to guarantee that young migrants enjoy full respect for their human rights, including fair and equal treatment with others and the protection of law against, inter alia, violence, exploitation and discrimination such as racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and cultural intolerance, and access to economic opportunities and social services, as appropriate”.

The World Youth Report 2007 (United Nations, 2007) has drawn attention to the challenges associated with youth migration for both sending and receiving countries. The report suggested that migrant youth faced a particular predicament; they were at the bottom of the scale when it came to social and economic inequalities in the developed countries to which most young migrants were migrating. Youth, the report argued, migrated as a response to economic and social difficulties in their own communities.

A major obstacle relating to understanding youth migration and ameliorating its negative impacts on youth and society at large is the severe lack of age-specific data on migration. Youth have the greatest propensity to migrate. Unfortunately, however, many policy recommendations to address the consequences of migration are often age-blind. This weakness reflects the fact that although demography has made considerable progress in refining its approaches to analyzing the other two components of population change—fertility and mortality—progress in age-disaggregating data on migration has been more limited.

D. FURTHER RESEARCH AND DATA NEEDS

Data on flows, stocks and distribution of migrants are essential in enhancing these and other areas of work of the Division and in working towards promoting social inclusion and building social cohesion in the context of increasing international migration.

With regard to youth, it is clear that there is no blanket, age-blind solution to the challenges that migration presents. An effective global response to the challenges of migration requires that the dominance of this age group in migration streams is acknowledged and addressed.

NOTES

¹ Priority areas are: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, youth participation in decision-making, globalization, information and communication technology, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, and intergenerational relations.

² See A/RES/62/126, February 5, 2008.

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