

ACTIVITIES OF UNITAR ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

The work of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in the field of international migration is designed to support global processes of dialogue and sharing of ideas and practices initiated with the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and now continued through the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The Institute's migration-related training is an example of inter-agency cooperation on matters of critical relevance to Member States. It falls within the broader mandate of UNITAR to strengthen the United Nations system through appropriate training on social and economic development, and peace and security issues.

THE "MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT" SEMINAR SERIES OF UNITAR ORGANIZED IN COLLABORATION WITH IOM, UNFPA AND THE MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

In 2007, UNITAR, as the main training arm of the United Nations system, supported by IOM, UNFPA and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched the "Migration and development" seminar series for the biennium 2007-2008. The series continues the work of the "Key migration issues" series which was organized in collaboration with IOM and UNFPA in 2005-2006.

The series' role is to inform, educate and stimulate critical thinking on migration-related topics among New York's diplomatic community. It brings together various stakeholders involved in migration and development issues—Governments, the United Nations and other international organizations, the private sector and civil society, including migrant associations and other NGOs, academics, etc.—and provides them with an informal platform for dialogue and networking. Prior to the first GFMD meeting, delegates were regularly updated on the preparations by the Government of Belgium. They were also briefed on the work of the Global Migration Group (GMG).

Since March 2007, the series hosted four seminars on the following topics: building partnerships between migration and development actors; facilitating migrants' participation in society; migration and ageing, and transnational communities and development in conflict-affected countries. A course on international migration law, facilitated by IOM, complemented the series, examining all international and regional legislation pertaining to international migration, while providing an interactive, skills-based learning experience for delegates.

Along with its partner agencies, UNITAR is currently coordinating with the Government of the Philippines, GFMD host in 2008, to identify migration-related priorities on which to train the international community in 2008. These are likely to include: international migration and urbanization, migration and sustainable development (climate change), labour migration (with focus on female migrants), and its annual international migration law course (with a 2008 focus on human rights).

The main reflections and observations from the "Migration and development" series in 2007 can be summarized as follows:

Migration and development experts continue to view the so-called "migration-development nexus" through the different lenses of their respective mandates and policy agendas. For the development community, a "balance sheet approach" captures the positive, the ambiguous and the negative linkages

between international migration and development. A solid evidence base is required for advising Governments on the effects and implications of their policy choices. Issues to be considered under the umbrella of international migration and development include: the internal-international migration nexus; skills management; facilitation of remittances; the role of transnational communities, and the mainstreaming of migration into other policy areas.

Both donors and developing countries are starting to see migration as an integral part of development planning. Co-development policies and the mainstreaming of migration into national poverty reduction strategies are evidence of this trend. In many industrialized countries, migration is being discussed as a “remedy” to population ageing and resulting labour shortages. However, it has been stipulated time and again that immigration alone cannot reverse this trend.

The ability of migrants and transnational communities to contribute to the development of their countries of origin is largely a function of their situation and opportunities in the host country. New immigrants need assistance, including through investments in their skills and the recognition of foreign credentials. Civil society, especially migrant associations have a crucial role to play in this regard, as newcomers tend to turn to friends and family first. Local governments are important facilitators of migrant integration and often a reservoir of good practices, e.g. in the area of public private partnerships. They should be consulted in a systematic manner in the process of national policy formulation in order to allow for greater overall policy coherence.

International events, discourses and frameworks have an important impact on the integration of migrants and respective policies at the national and local levels, e.g. by framing perceptions of and responses to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. It is widely recognized that integration is a two-way and long-term process of mutual adaptation between immigrants and the host society, which spans the whole range of societal spheres including the social, political, economic and cultural realms. There is, increasingly, a transnational dimension to the integration of migrants, including aspects such as the transferability of pensions and social security benefits, as well as outreach to expatriates by countries of origin, who invest in the maintenance of ties with the country of origin.

Home and host countries capitalize on the transnational affiliations of transnational communities, in particular regarding contributions to development in their countries of origin. Initiatives by donor countries and the international community to convene and engage people in transnational communities have been hampered, however, by a lack of follow-up and long-term commitment. Institutional mechanisms are needed to provide an entry point for transnational communities, including within the United Nations system. Countries of origin face challenges regarding their absorption capacity of investments and returnees, especially in the post-conflict situations. In this context, the potential of transnational communities in terms of social capital can be as important as material assistance.