

POLICY AND PROGRAMME WORK ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

*United Nations Population Fund*

A. INTRODUCTION

International migration is an integral part of the global development process. The complexity of the phenomenon is such that international migration can no longer be considered peripheral to the mainstream of population and development policy. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held in New York in 2006, affirmed that international migration could be a positive force for development if well channeled and supported by appropriate policies. Indeed, formulation of sound migration policies as well as building national capacities to meet the challenges of international migration could significantly increase the benefits and minimize the risks for countries of origin and destination as well as for the migrants themselves.

B. FOLLOW-UP TO THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: ACTIVITIES ADDRESSING KEY  
ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

International migration has important implications for population dynamics and thus for the core mandate of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The approach of UNFPA towards policy and programmatic interventions in this area is rights-based and culture- and gender-sensitive. UNFPA provides directed policy, advocacy and technical support to ensure that international migration is recognized as an important factor in development. With its network of country offices worldwide, UNFPA is positioned to make a significant contribution to enhancing awareness and increasing national capacity to address the challenges of international migration and to support countries in their efforts to integrate migration issues into national development plans, including poverty reduction strategies.

As Chair of the Global Migration Group (GMG) for the period January to June 2008, UNFPA initiated a collaborative effort analysing the challenges of protecting the human rights of international migrants which resulted in the publication *International Migration and Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities on the Threshold of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Global Migration Group, 2008). Each of the 14 member agencies of the GMG contributed to this publication by providing inputs based on their respective mandates and expertise. The report points out that migrants are human beings with rights which States, exercising their sovereign right to determine who enters and remains in their territory, have an obligation to protect. It underscores the fact that fundamental human rights are non-negotiable and that an individual's immigration status is irrelevant in this respect. International migration, development and human rights are inextricably linked. Respect for the fundamental rights of migrants is essential to reap the full benefits of migration. Cooperation between governments in countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as non-governmental organizations, civil society and migrants themselves is essential to ensure that international human rights' instruments are implemented and that migrants are aware of their rights and obligations. Groups with special needs, including migrant children, female labour migrants in the informal sector, trafficking victims, irregular migrants, as well as refugees and asylum seekers are in particular need of effective protection.

UNFPA is supplementing its Policy Guidance Note on International Migration, which outlines the Fund's strategic direction in addressing international migration and suggests a number of future activities of UNFPA in this area. Concept notes are being prepared to address the linkages between international migration and gender, human rights, population ageing, HIV/AIDS and climate change.

Globally, UNFPA supports initiatives towards increased availability, dissemination and utilization of disaggregated data on migration for evidence-based policy dialogue, development planning and programme formulation. At the country level, UNFPA encourages its country offices to support activities that promote the establishment and maintenance of reliable databases on international migration and development. It also supports the enhancement of national capacity to integrate migration policy issues into national and sectoral development policies, strategies and programmes, including poverty reduction strategies.

UNFPA encourages its country offices to support operational research that fosters understanding of migration processes, including female migration, and addresses the needs of migrants, especially sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as well as studies that focus on: (a) the relationship between migration and development; (b) the root causes of migration; (c) the impact of migration on gender equality and women's empowerment; (d) measures to prevent human trafficking, especially of women and girls; (e) the human rights of migrants; (f) the challenges of irregular migration, and (g) the impact of migration on the environment.

UNFPA continues its collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and offers seminars on key migration issues for government delegates at the permanent missions to the United Nations in New York. These seminars are intended to provide government officials with a better understanding of the relationship between migration and development and a forum for discussion of important topics of concern to countries of origin, transit and destination.

The Fund is participating in the new European Commission–United Nations Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI)<sup>1</sup>, which supports small-scale actors to contribute more fully to linking migration and development in line with international policy frameworks. The Joint Initiative seeks to help these groups, including local authorities, non-governmental organizations and transnational community organizations, to become more active and effective and to ensure that key stakeholders are fully informed of best practices in this area. It will provide an open forum to share news and information, collate information about existing migration and development initiatives, develop skills and provide mutual support.

### C. EMERGING ISSUES IN THE AREA OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Among the issues of concern to UNFPA are the following:

- (a) Migration as a force for development. Migration is increasingly seen as a development force, not a development failure. Remittances sent by migrants to their families often exceed official development assistance (ODA) and constitute the single largest source of financial flows to developing countries, exceeding foreign direct investment (FDI) flows in many countries. Migrants are also important “vehicles” for transmitting social remittances including new ideas, products, information and technology. However, while migration can aid development and reduce poverty, it can also broaden social inequity, particularly in sending countries. Discussions of the benefits and costs of migration typically focus on economic aspects. However, there are significant social costs of migration that are not always obvious: children without mothers,

husbands without spouses, elderly relatives without anyone who will care for them. The migration of mothers often results in children dropping out of school or finding themselves in situations of neglect or abuse. The separation of spouses, parents and children has implications for family stability that are felt in both countries of origin and destination;

- (b) Female migrants. Migration is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Men and women who migrate face different opportunities, risks and challenges, including vulnerability to human rights abuses, exploitation and discrimination. Gender sensitivity must figure prominently in all aspects of migration policy formulation, planning, programme delivery and monitoring. Protection of human rights and access to legal and health services, including reproductive health services, are especially important when it comes to addressing the challenges faced by migrant women;
- (c) Human rights. Migrants are human beings with rights which States, exercising their sovereign right to determine who enters and remains within their territory, have an obligation to protect. Respecting and protecting the human rights of migrants enables them to contribute more fully to development. Women are especially vulnerable to exploitation and human rights abuses and need special protection. Among the main challenges in the protection of the human rights of migrants are the ratification, implementation and enforcement of existing human rights instruments. A particular challenge is to address the lack of adequate policies, mechanisms, monitoring and standards pertaining to female migration to ensure that discrimination and gender inequality is not perpetuated;
- (d) Human trafficking. Widespread discrimination and violence against women and restrictive immigration policies that limit opportunities to migrate safely and legally fuel the trafficking trade. Trafficking is very closely tied to sexual exploitation and abuse, and many victims are forced into sex work against their will. Although awareness and action against trafficking is growing, there is an urgent need to do more to end this crime. Greater cooperation between and within countries is essential in order to bring traffickers to justice and to provide services and human rights protection for victims. In order to be effective, a comprehensive policy response should be multi-pronged and should include prevention, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators;
- (e) “Brain drain”. The emigration of highly educated and highly skilled people drains developing countries of much needed talent and hinders development efforts. The demand for skilled migrants in receiving countries, together with push factors in countries of origin, have driven increasing numbers of highly skilled workers abroad. A number of developing countries are experiencing deficits in the health care system, which are exacerbated by the emigration of doctors, nurses and other health personnel. A significant challenge is to provide decent work and decent working conditions in countries of origin to help stem the “brain drain”. Another opportunity for development in countries of origin is to encourage the return of skilled migrants;
- (f) Global financial crisis. The recent economic downturn has important implications for future migration flows. As more countries are affected by a recession and as unemployment rises, migration policies may become more restrictive and public perception of migrants may become more negative. In the hardest-hit sectors of the economy, migration flows have already shown signs of reversing themselves and this, in turn, has affected the flow of remittances in a number of countries;
- (g) Climate change. Due to the inevitable effects of climate change, the number of migrants is expected to rise over the next decades. Both gradual deterioration of the environment and sudden environmental events such as tsunamis, trigger migration flows. While it is difficult to project the exact number of people who would be forced or would choose to migrate as a result of

environmental factors, the large number of migrants expected in the future calls for appropriate policies and programmes to address the challenges of such movements. Women are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Climate change magnifies existing inequalities. More women than men suffer injury or die in natural disasters because they are not warned, cannot swim or cannot leave the house;

- (h) Migration data. Good-quality and timely age and sex disaggregated migration data are essential for evidence-based policy dialogue, development planning and programme formulation. More emphasis should be placed on capacity-building for collecting and disseminating data, including census and survey data that provide an accurate picture of the magnitude of migration flows and research that enhances understanding of the root causes and impacts of migration.

UNFPA will continue to focus its activities on data collection, research and capacity-building at the country level. The Fund will also continue to provide policy, advocacy and technical support at critical policy, programming and monitoring levels to ensure that international migration is recognized as an important factor in development.

#### D. CONCLUSION

International migration cannot be a substitute for development. However, it must be an integral part of the development agenda. Making migration work for development requires cooperation and collaboration between sending and receiving countries. The Global Forum on Migration and Development is an important “vehicle” for such cooperation. By engaging in non-binding consultations and sharing experiences and good practices in an informal and voluntary setting, governments and civil society will be in a better position to ensure a triple-win situation in which countries of origin and destination and migrants themselves benefit from migration.

The inter-agency Global Migration Group (GMG) continues to play an important role in ensuring effective follow-up to the High-level Dialogue and in facilitating the work of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. A more active GMG with clear rules of operation and a results-oriented focus will be in a better position to provide direction and leadership in a system-wide context; identify critical issues, challenges, gaps and best practices, and promote interest and dialogue on migration-related issues.

UNFPA looks forward to continue working with its GMG partners, United Nations Member States, United Nations agencies and other international organizations to address the increasing challenges of international migration.

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> For further information on the Joint Initiative, see <http://www.migration4development.org> (accessed 9 January 2009).

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#### REFERENCE

Global Migration Group (2008). *International Migration and Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities on the Threshold of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: United Nations Population Fund.