SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

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Existing policy frameworks and ongoing public discussions largely focus on a few aspects of international migration such as the orderly management of international flows of migrants, the curtailment of undocumented migration or the various forms of discrimination against migrants. Against the current background of contention that revolves around international migration, the human dimension has often been missing from the debate. Three key components of the complex dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion that define the relationships between migrants and host societies are discussed: the public perception of migration; the well-being of migrants and the effect of migration on the social fabric of societies. Specific issues related to migrants who are part of indigenous and tribal peoples are also discussed**.**

A. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND INFORMATION

1. Public perceptions relative to migrants

Whether in labour-importing countries or countries that have traditionally attracted immigrants and, increasingly, in both developed and developing countries where migration is a recent phenomenon, migration and migrants have a negative image. Media attention routinely focuses on uncontrolled "flows" of people seeking work or asylum, on undocumented migration, on the criminal activities of traffickers and smugglers, and on problems of integration of migrants with the local population.

In developed countries, this negative image is associated to a significant extent with the common belief that international migration has almost exclusively a South to North direction, whereas the latest estimates by the Population Division of the United Nations indicate that of the 175 million international migrants in 2000, 40 per cent were living in developing countries. In developing regions, the general perception is that affluent countries are increasingly closing their doors to migration from poor countries, while reducing their assistance and resisting the opening of their markets to the products of these same countries. An "asymmetry" is seen in a world order where capital, goods and services circulate more freely than labour. In all regions, sex tourism, sex trade, the sexual exploitation of migrant women and migrant children—a significant proportion of whom come from indigenous communities—in addition to refugees add to the impression that the movement of people across borders is an unruly, risky and often tragic feature of the contemporary world.

Public perceptions may reflect real issues and problems, but they also reflect ignorance, prejudice and fear. Moreover, public opinion fluctuates with events and is subject to a variety of influences. The majority tends to change its views with the ups and downs of the economy, but is also sensitive and responsive to the information and political messages coming from public authorities. Similarly, public authorities are watchful of trends in perceptions and public opinion, especially when seeking to gain or retain electoral support.

Extreme politicization of migration in many countries bears further testimony to this fact, so does the rise in violence against migrants. Migrants and foreigners have always been used as scapegoats, being unfairly blamed for existing or perceived social and economic problems ranging from unemployment to criminality. The events of 11 September 2001 showed that the threat of terrorism was global and have fostered the perception that migrants, particularly those of Muslim or Arab origin, are a threat. In a study on the situation of Muslim and Arab populations after 11 September 2001, the Special Rapporteur on

contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance found that in most non-Muslim countries, but primarily in Northern America and Europe, violence and discrimination against people originating in the Near East, the Middle East and South-East Asia became more frequent. Although some of the fears raised by Muslim and Arab peoples have receded in many non-Muslim countries, persons with those backgrounds still face discrimination and hostility because of their religious beliefs and ethnic origin.

2. The information-policy nexus

Despite the growing salience of international migration and the concerns it raises, the statistics needed to characterize migration flows, to monitor changes over time and to provide Governments with a solid basis for the formulation and implementation of policies are very often lacking and difficult to compare. In many countries this information is neither available nor produced on a regular basis. Few countries have accurate data both on entries and departures of migrants. Also, the magnitude of undocumented migration, by its very nature, remains difficult to quantify.

In the absence of reliable statistics, the reality of migration is frequently distorted and half-truths or stereotypes guide most the perceptions that most citizens have of migrants. The lack of readily available and reliable information also tends to reinforce the perception that current migration trends are beyond the control of authorities and undermines the credibility of official statements. Moreover, in many countries, the political discourse on international migration is not perceived as being the reflection of a clear, coherent and committed policy, a fact that further undermines its credibility. The formulation of such a policy, while difficult due to the changing nature of migration flows as well as to the fact that many countries are at the same time countries of emigration, immigration and transit, has the potential to steer public opinion away from simplistic and erroneous views.

Undoubtedly the media shapes public views migration. Although the media's propensity to concentrate on worrying trends tends to reinforce prejudice against migrants, it also exposes problems that need to be addressed, such as the poor living conditions of many migrants or the violence and discrimination they face. While the importance of promoting mutual awareness of cultures, civilizations and religions has long been recognized, the need to take action aimed at promoting respect for diversity and cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism has become critical in a globalizing world where international mobility is increasing.

B. IMPROVING THE WELL-BEING OF MIGRANTS

The well-being of international migrants largely depends on the availability of work generating a decent income, on a clear and secure legal status, on access to social services and to social and health protection, and on their participation in society.

1. Decent work and sufficient income

The hope for income producing work is the overwhelming motivation for migration. Evidence that most migrants who want to manage to obtain remunerated work is provided by the magnitude of the sums of money sent home by migrants: remittances are currently estimated at some $US 80 billion a year. Their magnitude, however, should not obscure the problems faced by people seeking to make a living in a foreign country. While recently, policy attention has been mostly devoted to the migration of highly-skilled workers to meet specific labour needs in the country of destination, the large majority of migrants are concentrated in the lower part of the occupational hierarchy of countries of destination and are often poorly paid and subject to harsh working conditions. Migrants belonging to indigenous and tribal peoples are generally unskilled and work in poorly paid occupations due to exclusion and marginalization in their

countries of origin that do not permit them to integrate their traditional knowledge within the mainstream perception of a "skilled" workforce.

Discrimination, exploitation, deception and sometimes abuse are employment-related situations commonly and increasingly faced by poorly skilled migrant workers. Although the current xenophobic climate in some of the host societies is partly responsible for this situation, it is also due to the vulnerable position of migrants in the labour market and the lack of enforcement of labour standards in countries of destination.

2. Clear and secure legal status

Together with a decent job and decent income, a clear and secure legal status is a critical component of the social condition and well-being of international migrants. A temporary residence permit or work contract is normally sufficient to provide legal security to short-term migrants. Many countries of destination have taken measures to clarify and simplify the rules, procedures and conditions for legal residence and employment of migrants. Streamlining of procedures has also occurred regarding asylum-seekers so as to ensure that the asylum system is not used as a channel for labour migration. However, migration policy remains generally restrictive and in many countries conditions to obtain permits for legal residence are often unclear and applied inconsistently or arbitrarily. In some cases, the fundamental human rights of migrant are violated.

As countries, especially developed countries, have tightened controls over the entry of foreigners into their territories and as an increasing number of people have felt the need or have been forced to migrate, the flow of undocumented migrants has probably increased. Some undocumented migrants have fallen pray of traffickers, who use deception to lure them. Victims of trafficking are often deprived of their passports or other papers establishing their identity and nationality. Trafficked women, in particular, are forced into a situation of complete vulnerability and dependence, and are generally subject to exploitation. Providing them protection and a temporary legal status while their exploiters are tried is one of the measures to combat trafficking and its effects.

3. Access to social services and social protection

Access to social protection has become a major issue for both migrants and receiving countries. The social protection of migrants is a question that often lies at the core of the migration debate. Extending the existing social protection regime to migrants is viewed by many as undermining the economic benefits of migration for the receiving countries. In developing countries where only very elementary social services and welfare systems are offered to nationals, the issue is even more contentious. These basic services are offered in ways that are not sensitive to gender and cultural need and may not be available to indigenous populations, giving them a further reason to migrated. However, in countries where social services are available to the population at large, the social protection of migrants and their access to social programmes often remain fragmented, partial and inadequate.

Among the various issues of equity that have been raised in relation to the social protection of migrants one is increasingly attracting attention: the non-portability of pension benefits. Few countries allow this portability for all migrants. Although, many bilateral agreements have been signed, a large number of migrants, in particular those from developing countries, fall outside those agreements and cannot receive pension benefits if they decide to leave the host country. The issue of the non-portability of pension benefits has gained relevance in the wake of increasing flows of skilled workers.

4. Health of migrants

The health risks faced by migrants are compounded by discrimination and restricted access to health information, health promotion, health services and health insurance. Health authorities in the country of destination focus on pre-existing infectious and communicable diseases among potential migrants. Considerable public and media attention has been devoted to the association between migrants and HIV/AIDS, but research shows that whereas international mobility may play a role in transmitting the disease internationally, migration per se is not a conduit, especially because authorized migrants are checked before being admitted. There continues to be concern, however, about disease transmission and undocumented migrants. Yet, migrants are sometimes more vulnerable than the national population to the risk of contagion. That is the case of male migrant workers working in mines or other areas where they remain isolated from their families and of migrants, particularly female migrants, involved in prostitution.

In countries with advanced health care systems, there have been claims that some migrants move in order to take advantage of that health care because advanced treatment is not available or affordable in the country of origin. It is argued that the provision of health care to migrants puts additional financial stress on already overstretched and under-performing public health systems.

Migrant health poses a triple challenge by raising fundamental questions of social equity, public health and human rights. Work carried out by the World Health Organization and the World Bank on mental health has found that migrants and refugees are among the groups that are disproportionately affected. Although knowledge of the mental health of migrant populations remains fairly limited, there is enough evidence to suggest that severe psychological stress due to uprooting, disruption of family life and a hostile social environment is common. Unfortunately, a large number of migrants have no or little access to mental health care, either because they are excluded from existing service arrangements or because there is no provision for mental health care, a situation that prevails in more than 40 per cent of all receiving countries.

5. Participation of migrants in civil and political life

Besides a few non-governmental and religious organizations, migrants do not have natural defenders of their interests. However, the idea that long-term migrants should have certain political rights, such as the right to participate in local elections, albeit still controversial, has gained ground in several developed countries. This development reflects the growing awareness that long-term residence of large numbers of foreign citizens on national territory is a feature of many societies.

The participation of migrants in civil and political life builds upon several existing rights including the right to belong to trade unions and the right to vote, as well as on the existence of institutions such as migrant associations and consultative bodies. While the right of migrants to belong or form a trade union is quite limited in developing countries, migrants enjoy those rights in some developed countries. In a number of developed countries, labour unions, concerned about the threats posed to the enforcement of labour standards by deregulation and plummeting membership, have adopted a more welcoming stance towards migrants and support measures to ensure their equality with nationals in the realm of work.

Forums where migrants could dialogue with both public and private sector representatives on policy issues that have a direct bearing on their life and well being would be useful. In countries where certain aspects of the rights and duties of active citizenship are being dissociated from the possession of nationality of the country of residence, such developments provide a critical test of the ability of societies to accommodate people with several layers of identity and citizenship. At the current juncture, however, preoccupations with security do not facilitate the emergence of flexible rules for the participation of migrants in public affairs.

C. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The pursuit of a better life is a common feature of human nature. Migrants who leave their homes seeking a better life often do so to improve their livelihoods. Many migrants, particularly from indigenous communities, do not have a choice and are forced to migrate due to discriminatory environmental and socio-economic policies. Some migrate from one vulnerable situation to another, prolonging or aggravating their poverty because of social exclusion, discrimination or worse. The integration of migrants into host societies takes many forms and paths. In some countries, migrants may be legally included but socially excluded mainly because they do not speak the local language well or because their limited knowledge of local customs limits their employability. Alternatively, undocumented migrants may be legally excluded but may feel integrated in ethnic communities and in the labour market through the informal sector. In labour-importing countries, where migrants have temporary status, their integration may not be considered important. In situations where temporary migrants can easily become illegal because of constraint on length of stay, their exclusion may be exacerbated.

Family reunification has become a major source of migrants in several countries but not all Governments permit the admission of the close family members of migrants, particularly if the latter are admitted specifically as temporary migrant workers. The expectation of long-term residence is generally a necessary condition for family reunification to be allowed and admissions are increasingly being restricted to spouses and children under the age of 18 or lower.

D. SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATED TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Given the large number of indigenous migrants within national borders and internationally and the particular vulnerability of indigenous migrant women, the lack of adequate data and attention to their problems is serious. As urbanization increases, indigenous women often leave their homes as young girls and travel to cities in search of work in assembly plants or as domestic workers, living in impoverished settlements on the edges of cities. Some travel to cities in countries other than their own, also to work mainly as domestic workers. They are thus stuck at the bottom rungs of the occupational hierarchy and are thus vulnerable to exploitation. They can also fall prey of traffickers and end up forced into prostitution. Indigenous populations have become more mobile as land rights, once held by the community, are increasingly conferred upon families and individuals, who are free to sell. When indigenous families become landless, women are more likely to suffer because of lack of resources. Indigenous communities are also adversely affected by large infrastructure projects and disproportionately affected by discriminatory environmental policies that favour extractive industries.

An additional challenge is posed by the existing trade regime and its effects on social groups and social development in general. The further the world of transnational corporations advances economically and into different realms of social life, the more state intervention is needed to guarantee the functional, institutional, legal and policy related requisites for their free operation. But as coffee production illustrates, the increasing impoverishment of indigenous farmers engaged in coffee production is directly related to the drop in the worldwide price of coffee. Similarly, indigenous farmers in developing countries remain poor in part because world prices for food are kept low by the subsidies on food exports provided by the Governments of developed countries.

Moreover, military encroachment on the lands and territories of indigenous peoples, the many cases of assassination and arbitrary arrest or detention of indigenous activists, leaders and their supporters, as well as the criminalization of resistance, all have significantly increased. These developments undermine the self-sufficient economies of indigenous peoples, causing food insecurity, worsening poverty and loss of land, culture and identity. In response to these concerns, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has issued specific recommendations relating to migration which are outlined in the Annex to this paper.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, powerful forces are at work that make the presence of migrants a likely permanent and increasingly significant characteristic of population all over the world. While migrants make largely positive contributions to their host societies, these often seem eclipsed by negative perceptions of migrants based on notions of fear, racism and xenophobia. To a large extent, the lives of migrants illustrate in a magnified way the impact of major social, political and economic trends.

Information on international migration is inadequate to assess the full social impact of migration. In particular, the data available do not permit to quantify the extent to which indigenous people participate in international migration. There is also a dearth of information on South to South migration. Where such data exist, systematic documentation and analysis are essential to facilitate informed discussion of the issues at the policy level. Lack of information notwithstanding, a shift in approach is needed to overcome the attitudinal and cultural obstacles to recognizing that the human and social dimensions of migration warrant greater attention.

Annex

**Recommendations of the United Nations Permanent Forum on
Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) relating to Migration**

Mandate:

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. According to its mandate, the Permanent Forum would:

- provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the Council, as well as to programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations, through the Council;
- raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; and
- prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues

Recommendations:

The UNPFII noted at its Third Session the lack of data and studies on the issue of migration in recommendations 12 and 65:

12. Given the large number of indigenous migrants within and beyond national borders and the particular vulnerability of indigenous women migrants, as well as the lack of adequate data and attention to their problems, the Forum recommends launching a new initiative involving various stakeholders, including the Inter-Agency Support Group, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in order to face this urgency. The Forum recommends, as a first step, the convening of a workshop on the theme "Migration of indigenous women" in order to highlight the urgency and scale of the issue, including the alarming trend of trafficking indigenous women within and across national borders, and the development of recommendations and guidelines for addressing the problems faced by indigenous migrant women. Participants to the workshop should be a selected number of members of the Forum, relevant United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programs, and experts from indigenous organizations, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, Governments and academia. The objectives of the workshop should be:

(a) To underscore the urgency and scale of the issue;

(b) To highlight and address the lack of reliable data on the issue and to promote the systematic collection of data (of both quantitative and qualitative nature) by relevant United Nations and other intergovernmental entities, Governments, NGOs, indigenous organizations, and academia;

(c) To review and analyze existing data;

(d) To provide a report, including recommendations, to the Forum.

65. The Forum recommends that United Nations agencies, funds and programs strengthen their work on migration and its effects on indigenous peoples, and develop policies and outreach programs for indigenous migrant and urban peoples.

The PFII reported to ECOSOC about the issue of migration, through recommendations 13 and 89:

13. Violent conflicts and militarization fundamentally affect the lives of indigenous women and their families and communities, causing violations of their human rights and displacement from their ancestral lands. Yet indigenous women do not see themselves as passive victims but have taken up the roles of mediators and peace builders. Recognizing the profound concerns of the impact of conflict situations on indigenous women, the Forum recommends:

(a) That IOM and other relevant United Nations entities incorporate the needs and priorities of women and girls as ex-combatants in the design and implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, and ensure their full access to all resources and benefits provided in reintegration programs, including income-generation and skill-development programs;

(b) That UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme, and other field-based agencies collect data on the situation of indigenous women living in conflict areas. Such data would be invaluable for analysis and programme development;

(e) That UNHCR give priority to indigenous women and their families who are displaced internally and externally by force due to armed conflict in their territories.

89. The Forum, reaffirming its recommendations on health made at its first and   second reports, in the spirit of the theme of its third session (Indigenous women), recommends that all relevant United Nations entities, especially WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA, as well as regional health organizations and Governments:

(h) Provide appropriate health services and protection services, including safe houses, to displaced refugee and migrant women and women and girl children victimized by trafficking for prostitution;