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**UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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## **UNESCO's contribution to the work of the United Nations on international migration**

### *Promoting the Human Face of Migration*

**1** The United Nations Secretary General has proposed to create a global consultative forum within the UN on international migration<sup>1</sup>. This would be an open-ended body involving Government representatives active in international migration, which would enable the elaboration of constructive approaches towards international migration and ensure fruitful cooperation between Governments and the UN system, along with the International Organization for Migration, IOM. This major initiative indicates the growing awareness of the policy importance of international migration among States and within the international community. This document outlines UNESCO's proposed contribution to this process.

**2** UNESCO's mandate to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, culture and communication is highly relevant to the issue of international migration and development. Based on its mandate and within its areas of competence, the Organization could contribute to the consultative process on international migration and development by addressing:

- the migration-education nexus, for example by anticipating and defining the emerging problems concerning brain-drain in developing countries, or by serving as a central forum for coordinating the ethical, normative and intellectual issues of recognition of qualifications for mobility,
- the migration-development nexus, including the development of knowledge diasporas through the use of information and communication technologies - ICTs,
- the impact of environmental trends on international migration, including the growing importance of climate changes and natural disasters on the movement of people,
- the balance between, on the one hand, social cohesion and the integration of migrants in host societies and, on the other hand, the respect for cultural diversity in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies,
- the research-policy nexus, including ways in which social scientists and policy-makers can cooperate to improve policy development on crucial social transformations brought by migration.

**3** The main functions that UNESCO has to offer to the newly proposed Forum are:

As a **laboratory of ideas**, addressing migration issues linked to education, science, communication and culture and identifying appropriate strategies and policies to deal with them.

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<sup>1</sup> UNITED NATIONS (2006) *International Migration and Development* (Report of the Secretary General), New York: United Nations General Assembly (A/60/871).

As a **clearing house**, by gathering, transferring, disseminating and sharing available information, knowledge and best practices in international migration and development, and to identify innovative solutions and policies.

As a **standard-setter**, through its conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications and through its major normative instruments that provide standards in terms of respect of cultural diversity and in approaching cultural diversity from a human rights perspective.

As a **capacity builder** and initiator of **international cooperation** for researchers and policy-makers in the area of international migration and development.

## 4 Migration and education

Migration and education are deeply intertwined processes. Education is certainly a key factor among the complex forces that drive modern day migration. People may migrate because they have acquired skills that can be used in foreign labour markets, or because they wish to study and acquire training abroad to enhance their professional opportunities. Alternatively, underdeveloped training opportunities may undermine people's socio-economic perspectives, thereby encouraging them to seek opportunities abroad.

A central issue in the international mobility of workers regards the recognition of qualifications and of technical training. Migrants with unrecognised competencies may see their socio-economic perspectives jeopardised: this generates frustration among migrants as well as labour market tensions; it also reduces their integration perspectives while decreasing their positive impact on the economy. It is therefore in the interest of both Governments and migrants to ensure the recognition of skills acquired in different countries, especially in the contemporary context of internationalisation of higher education. Since the sixties, UNESCO has been functioning as a standard-setter to develop normative instruments in the field of academic mobility and the recognition of qualifications. Regional conventions exist in all regions (Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Arab World, the Asia Pacific); in addition, a Mediterranean Convention represents a unique instrument of interregional cooperation. These treaties constitute a base for further developments in the field of international cooperation in training recognition, which is an important component in the fostering of smoother migration processes.

A central feature of contemporary migration flows is skilled migration. While this corresponds to the current context of economic globalisation, it also raises major concerns for sending countries in terms of brain drain. States that invest in education resent their citizens' departure to developed countries and the loss of skills this generates. Migration policies need to fully incorporate this element in order to maximise the impact of migration on development and to avoid tensions between sending and receiving regions. In addition, migration policies should be related to economic policies, especially those that entail the privatisation of public services such as education, as they may lead to the deterioration of people's access to education and to out-migration.

## 5 Knowledge diasporas and the use of ICTs

A possible answer to brain drain challenges lies in what is usually referred to as brain gain or brain circulation, i.e. the advantages for sending countries represented by the existence of skilled citizens abroad. States may indeed benefit from a diaspora network of expatriates with international work experience, either to provide know-how and human capital to workers in the country of origin or to invest in private sector initiatives. By reducing the obstacles stemming from distance and communication, ICTs constitute an enabling factor that should be strengthened, notably through the use of on-line interactive media (internet radio, internet television and media organizations' interactive websites).

UNESCO's expertise in forging scientific cooperation and partnerships and in promoting the use of ICTs represents a base to address the challenges raised by skilled migration and their impact on development. In this respect, UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the main source of internationally comparable data on issues such as students' mobility (including doctorate holders), thus providing data to support adequate policy development. In addition, in the 2006 *Abuja Declaration on the Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures and Peoples*, UNESCO and other participants called for the adoption of immigration and visa regulations to facilitate the exchange and free movement of scientists, a crucial aspect of brain circulation. Higher education could thus be a key platform for the conversion of brain drain to brain gain, regulated by conventions and using networks for joint activities, student and faculty exchanges, and e-training by expatriate scholars.

## **6 Migration and environmental issues**

A largely unrecognised but growingly important category of migrants include so-called 'environmental refugees', i.e. people who left their homes following natural and man-made disasters. Key environmental factors include desertification, cyclones, floods, landslides, droughts and extremes of temperature. Such natural disasters are partly the product of human behaviours incompatible with sustainable development and generate major social problems, including hunger and poverty. People living in areas threatened by such phenomena are forced to move to find means of livelihood. It is for example estimated that, by 2020, some 60 million people will migrate from the desertified areas in Sub-Saharan Africa towards Northern Africa and Europe. The 2004 Asian tsunami provides a recent illustration of environmental migration, as it forced ten of thousands of people to leave their region of origin.

Some of these environmental refugees remain internally displaced people and usually migrate towards urban areas, thus fuelling urbanisation processes and raising challenges in urban governance. Others go abroad, becoming international migrants. Given that environmental reasons are not considered within the asylum regime, their status is likely to be problematic, which may raise issues surrounding their access to rights. UNESCO has substantial experience in water-related issues, as well as in natural disaster reduction and warning systems (including the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System). It is thus in an appropriate position to foster research and policy developments in the emerging environment-migration nexus.

## **7 Migration and cultural diversity**

Migration is a major source of cultural diversity. Throughout the world, migrants have brought with them parts of their culture of origin, leading to increasingly multicultural environments, especially in urban settings. Cultural diversity is widely recognised as an asset in a globalising world and as a stimulating source of socio cultural change. It is also a challenge, however, as the coexistence of people of different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds may threaten social cohesion and lead to fragmented societies. In most receiving societies, the integration of migrants is now understood as an urgent policy issue.

UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) are major normative instruments that provide standards in terms of respect of cultural diversity and in approaching cultural diversity from a human rights perspective. Given the contested nature of migrants' cultural recognition, the 2001 Declaration is of particular importance. In addition, the recognition of migrants' cultural diversity within a human rights framework is a useful complement to the dominantly economic dimension of labour migration: migrants are not only workers, they are also human beings endowed with rights, identities and cultural belongings.

UNESCO will therefore work on improving the necessary balance between social cohesion and cultural diversity, through the development of best practices and successful policies conducive to pluralism. In addition, the development of indicators to measure cultural development, along with the strengthening of migration community media in the respect of independence and pluralism, may contribute to assess how migrants both integrate in the host society and contribute to the diversity of cultural expressions by engaging in intercultural dialogues.

## **8 The research-policy nexus**

Migration is a complex and fast-moving process that is currently attracting a high level of scholarly analysis. In the mean time, it is a pressing policy issue that calls for the elaboration of appropriate policies. The challenge is therefore to bridge the gap between social science research and policy-making. Policy-makers should be able to benefit from the findings of social scientists while researchers should make their findings better available and more accessible to policy-makers. Issues include linkages with gender and the empowerment of women, HIV/AIDS, poverty, human trafficking and contemporary forms of slavery, conflict and human security, democracy, xenophobia, racism and discrimination, the role of remittances in development, urban cohesion and governance, transnational social spaces, tolerance and intercultural exchanges within a globalizing world.

UNESCO has experience in the research-policy nexus, which includes the organisation of the International Forum on the Social Science - Policy Nexus in Argentina and Uruguay (2006), within which one of the five themes was 'Population and Migration'. It will continue to promote social science research to contribute to innovative migration policies. In the past the Organization has established a number of regional research networks on migration, bringing together experts from countries of origin and countries of destination.

Through these networks, and through cooperation with its Member States and other partners, the Organization has the possibility to play an important role in gathering, transferring, disseminating and sharing available information, knowledge and best practices in international migration and development, and to identify innovative solutions and policies.

## Examples of UNESCO's activities in the field of international migration

- ❖ **Promotion of the human rights of migrants.** UNESCO has been engaged in the promotion of migrants' human rights, notably through the production of policy-relevant research on the obstacles to the UN Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights. Research was commissioned to understand the low rate of ratification of this treaty in Western and Southern Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, North Africa, the Asia Pacific, Canada, etc. As a result, governments, NGOs and other stake-holders are able to ground their actions and decisions in accurate and up-to-date knowledge on the situation of migrants' human rights in different regions of the world and on the possibilities to ratify and implement the Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights.
- ❖ **Creation and support of regional research networks on migration.** UNESCO has created and supported regional networks putting together policy-makers and researchers to foster the research-policy nexus in the elaboration of national and regional migration policies. A major example includes the Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN), comprising 15 countries.
- ❖ **Counter-trafficking projects.** UNESCO is running projects to fight human trafficking. In Western and Southern Africa, this includes carrying out policy-relevant research, collecting best practices in fighting trafficking at its roots, and organizing training workshops for policymakers, NGOs, community leaders and the media.
- ❖ **Promoting migrants' integration through museums on the history of migration.** UNESCO is engaged, jointly with IOM, in a project to foster the exchange of information and experiences on migration history museums, which are becoming increasingly popular in many receiving countries. By acknowledging the role of migration in shaping the societies and cultures of receiving states, such institutions play a key role in promoting the integration of today's migrants. A special emphasis is placed on the role of schools, as education is essential in raising awareness on the role of migration in the past and present.
- ❖ **Elaboration of policy-relevant research projects.** UNESCO has exercised a thought-leadership activity in launching research projects investigating the challenges of migration policies, especially in a perspective that focuses on the trends ahead and the place of migration in tomorrow's world. One project examines in detail the potential for regional or international agreements on free human movement such as within the EU.
- ❖ **Addressing the challenges of African migration.** At its 175<sup>th</sup> session (September 2006), UNESCO's Executive Board requested UNESCO to define a strategy to address the challenges posed by contemporary forms of African migration and development, in line with international human rights law and within the framework of the follow-up of the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development and the creation of the Global Forum. Practical proposals in the Organization's fields of competences will be made by Spring 2007.
- ❖ **Publication of an on-line journal on multicultural societies.** UNESCO founded in 1999 the *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, which constitutes a platform for international, interdisciplinary and policy-related social science research in the fields of migration, multiculturalism, and minority rights. As an open-access and peer-reviewed electronic journal, it deals with key issues in the field of migration and multiculturalism, including the governance of religious diversity, the rights of linguistic minorities, the protection of endangered languages, territorially based ethnic movements, multicultural policies in industrial and post-colonial countries, as well as multilingualism and integration.
- ❖ **Recognition of higher education studies and qualifications.** UNESCO initiated conventions on the recognition of higher education studies and qualifications in the late seventies and early eighties. Conventions now exist in all regions of the world. The European Convention was recently revised to respond to new trends in higher education in Europe, leading to the 1997 joint Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention). This unique standard-setting activity is of great importance to ensure the mobility of students and workers across international boundaries.