EIGHTY-FOURTH SESSION

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TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

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1.   Patterns of migratory movement have changed considerably over time. Already complex migration dynamics are further compounded by two main trends: increasing economic, political and cultural globalization, and transnationalism in the migration process.

2.   With globalization – especially in relation to trade liberalization, global economic integration and electronic communication – has come a much heightened awareness of life and work opportunities in other parts of the world. This awareness, coupled with significant advances in international transport, has led to greater population mobility. Although progress in liberalizing the movement of persons has not proceeded at the same pace as the liberalization of trade in goods and capital, regular and irregular labour migration plays an important role in the international economy.

3.   The improved transportation and communications networks have also amplified the phenomenon of transnational migration, whereby migrants maintain and promote ties between their country of residence and their country of origin by travelling back and forth, maintaining family and/or business in both, or by sending remittances on a regular basis, developing networks or sharing skills.

4.   Globalization and transnational migration have contributed not only to the volume but also to the patterns and forms of migration movement. Migration, which historically has been relatively unidirectional and permanent in nature, is now increasingly temporary and circular. Nationals of more countries are on the move and more countries are affected by migration than ever before. Countries that were once countries of origin of large emigrant groups are now countries of destination or simultaneously countries of origin, transit and destination. Reports of projected dramatic changes in the demographic make-up of the world's population, and the implications of those changes for migration, have been widely reported. So, too, has the growing feminization of migration, with estimates that at present 47.5 per cent of all migrants are female,[1] although the implications of this for policy makers have not yet been fully developed.

5.   It must be taken into account that the locus of control over migratory movements is now the subject of a struggle between governments, which wish to retain their sovereign right to determine who may or may not enter their territory, and a sophisticated migrant smuggling and trafficking industry bent on circumventing established migration procedures for commercial profit. Even without the distorting and often dangerous interventions of traffickers and smugglers, much migration occurs spontaneously, outside the realm of government programmes.

6.   It is therefore also commonly accepted among policy makers that their priority task is to adjust their migration policies to respond to these changing patterns. Adjustment in this instance is not simply a matter of doing a little more or a little less of what has been done before, but

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[1]   World Migration Report, 2000.

rather of redefining in fundamental ways what has to be done. The purpose of this paper is to prompt discussion in that direction by signposting some issues that call for fresh thinking and innovative solutions.[2]

I.   LABOUR MIGRATION

7.   Labour migration poses one of the principal challenges to migration policy makers in the twenty-first century. People are moving to seek work on a scale beyond the scope of current regulatory mechanisms; at present there is no effective international mechanism to match labour supply to demand, with the result that clandestine flows elude the capacities of national and international enforcement authorities. Not only does the future hold increased mobility, but apparently there is more supply of labour globally than there is demand.

8.   A number of trends in labour migration are emerging:

- greater attention is being given to the movement of highly-skilled professionals. This is particularly evident in Germany, but also in other European countries;

- a larger number of women are migrating as heads of family, which is tending to increase the exploitation of women (and children) by traffickers or unscrupulous employers;

- labour migration is being privatized, which means that labour-migration policy is increasingly employer-driven;

- the clandestine movement and employment of unskilled or semi-skilled labour migrants continue to rise.

II.   IRREGULAR MIGRATION[3]

9.   Traditionally, destination countries have dealt with irregular migration by seeking to strengthen control or enforcement procedures at points of embarkation and disembarkation. The challenge at present is to develop a more systemic approach. To address the issue of irregular migration effectively, one must make the linkages between the economic, social, political, trade, labour, health, cultural, security and foreign and development policy spheres, and the movement of people. These linkages are essential so that realistic goals can be set and actions implemented which address the different aspects without creating improvement in one sphere to the detriment of another.

10.   What must be avoided is the coexistence of two modes of migration: one that is managed by governments, and another parallel irregular approach that feeds on policy inconsistencies (e.g. between migration and employment). One of the big challenges for governments in this area is to establish credibility, best achieved by clearly signposting and providing legitimate channels of entry, while deterring irregular movement.

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[2]   For a fuller discussion of these and other significant migration management trends and analyses, see the forthcoming edition of the World Migration Report.

[3]   See also Council document MC/INF/257, Workshops for policy makers – background document.

III.   MIGRATION AND SECURITY

11.   The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have had a significant effect on migration issues. There has been a natural reaction of concern about national security and how migration impacts on social and economic security and stability. Does unlimited geographic mobility accelerated by globalization represent a security threat to States and societies and play into the hands of international terrorism? The effects of 11 September have brought a new clarity of focus on the importance of managing migration effectively, and a growing realization that *ad hoc* approaches are no longer sufficient.

12.   Various measures are being undertaken by States to tighten their migration systems and combat terrorism. Cooperation and making connections between security considerations and migration is of growing importance.

IV.   PROTECTION OF RIGHTS

13.   The protection needs of refugees and the responsibilities of States towards them are well-known and addressed in other fora. The phenomenon of mixed flows of refugees/asylum seekers with other voluntary migrants using asylum procedures to gain access to the country of destination, and of asylum-seekers travelling through multiple transit countries, often by means of smugglers or traffickers, to reach their desired country of asylum, poses particular challenges for policy makers.

14.   Beyond these challenges, however, are growing challenges to protect the rights of migrants in general, including in particular a dramatic increase in the number of migrants subjected to abuse and exploitation by traffickers in this new "slave trade." Moreover, migrants in an irregular situation are entitled to protection of their fundamental human rights, but are nonetheless vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, and do not enjoy access to a range of social services and other forms of protection of the host society. In addition, in some countries lawful migrants continue to be subjected to widespread xenophobic and racist tendencies.

15.   The issue of how to manage and integrate the rights and obligations of all migrants and the imperative need for States to manage migration effectively is an issue of growing concern.

V.   HEALTH AND MIGRATION

16.   Patterns of migration are constantly changing and travel time is faster, often shorter than the incubation period of an infectious agent. Mobile people - whether tourists, business travellers or migrants - can thus trigger health issues, for example by introducing new or re-emerging diseases to countries of transit or destination, or by being vulnerable to conditions acquired from their new host communities and by taking back diseases unknown to their regions of origin. There is a critical relationship between population mobility and emerging or re-emerging infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis.

17.   Health issues can also trigger, delay or prevent migration and can modify how it is conducted, in a way which renders individuals and fragmented or displaced families or groups vulnerable to situations which threaten their health or life.

18.   The link between health and migration is not limited to negative consequences. Some forms of migration have a positive impact on health, both of migrants and host communities. For example, there are a growing number of bilateral and multilateral migration arrangements which facilitate the exchange of health workers, either separately or as part of protocols for qualified labour.

19.   It is becoming increasingly clear that there is an urgent need to expand existing knowledge and information related to the impact and consequences of migration health.

VI.   MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT[4]

20.   Development and migration are inextricably linked. Many States owe their wealth - whether human or economic - to population movements over the centuries. In the particular case of developing countries or countries in transition, the need to build a bridge between national development needs and the human and economic capital represented by their diasporas is becoming more and more apparent as a means to contribute to growth.

21.   Several issues are being dealt with in an increasing number of fora, including:

- the significance of migrants' resources as financial potential for development (globally an estimated USD 100 billion are remitted to developing countries which substantially exceeds Official Development Assistance);

- the impact on sustainable development of other non-financial forms of diaspora support such as capacity-building, information exchange, technology transfer, business investment and other grass-roots transnational practices that have a potential role in the development of the country of origin; and

- "brain drain" or "brain circulation" which can result in the loss of skills, frequently without any immediate returns.

CONCLUSION

22.   While migration remains largely within the sovereign domain of States, one of the most notable trends in international migration is the growing recognition of the need to develop comprehensive and cooperative approaches to migration management at the regional and international levels. More and more States are seeing that international cooperation is needed to effectively address migration which is, by its very nature, international in scope. Equally, they recognize that it is not sufficient to address aspects of international migration in isolation: they must be brought together within a comprehensive framework.

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[4]   See also Council document MC/INF/257, Workshops for policy makers - background document.

23.   Cooperation is needed to fully appreciate and develop the benefits of migration and reduce potential divergences of interest on the part of countries of origin, transit and destination. Governments are increasingly negotiating strategies which support the sustainable development of countries of origin and the labour needs of countries of destination, while giving due regard to the rights of migrants.

24.   At the regional level this is seen, *inter alia*, in the proliferation of Regional Consultative Processes on migration.[5]   At the international level, a growing number of international conferences and fora of the United Nations' organizations and others are addressing aspects of migration, such as migrants' rights at the Durban World Conference against Racism, irregular migration and smuggling and trafficking at the Bali Ministerial meeting and the recent European Union meeting on Counter-Trafficking, and migration and development at the Johannesburg World Summit on Social Development.

25.   Beyond these regional and issue-specific international efforts, two major policy initiatives on migration at the international level warrant particular note. The IOM Council's International Migration Policy Dialogue, and the Berne Initiative launched by the Government of Switzerland, are both direct responses to the need for a fuller exploration of migration dynamics and trends. The IOM policy dialogue is designed to enhance understanding of migration issues, through international dialogue, with a view to finding common understandings and approaches and facilitating inter-State cooperation in this area. The Berne Initiative is oriented towards similar objectives, through the pursuit of the development of an international framework of principles to guide inter-State cooperation and effective migration management. These and other initiatives can pave the way for a more global agenda on migration.

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[5]   For a fuller description of these Processes, see A. Klekowski von Kopenfels, "The Role of Regional Consultative Processes in Managing International Migration", IOM Migration Research Series No. 3 and "Managing Migration at the Regional Level: Strategies for Regional Consultation", from IOM's Round Table on Managing Migration at the Regional Level, 5 June 2002.