**BRIEFING PAPER**

**Enhancing Development through International Cooperation on Migration**

IOM, Regional Economic Commissions

**Policy Recommendations**

- Migration considerations need to become a more integral component of development policies and planning. Successfully addressing migration issues requires a comprehensive and evidence-based approach that takes account of its linkages not only with development, but also with other critical policy areas such as the environment, health, education, protection and human rights.

- There is need to ensure that public perceptions of migrants are fair and balanced if migrants are to fulfil their potential for their own benefit, as well as for the benefit of their host societies and countries of origin.

- Dialogue is crucial to promoting international cooperation on migration between states. Collaboration and partnership at national, regional, inter-regional and international levels plays a strong complementary role.

- Multilateral cooperation on migration at an inter-agency level, as well as with civil society, could further be reinforced with a view to enhancing development outcomes that can be derived from migration.

- Institutional capacities need to be strengthened at all levels so as to foster dialogue amongst stakeholders, including with migrants. Priority should be given to joint efforts to plan, coordinate, and implement migration policies that promote humane movements.

**Introduction**

The need for a coherent process on attending to migration issues at the global level has been recently highlighted by the emergence of regional consultation mechanisms on migration. The Swiss Government-led Berne Initiative and the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) played important roles in creating the impetus and growing inter-state confidence in dialogue and cooperation on migration that made possible the 2006 UN General Assembly High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD) and the state-led Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) that resulted from it. However, governance mechanisms on international migration remain deficient, despite efforts by all parties to improve its management and coordination.

Despite developments in recent years that have brought about greater inter-state cooperation at the regional and increasingly, international level, achieving migration policy coherence at the global level is still some way off when compared with the global mechanisms in place to address issues like trade and finance. The GFMD is informal and non-binding in nature, and as yet insufficiently mature to have had
concrete impact; there is no mechanism as yet that comes close to being a global system for dealing with migration in its entire breadth. Despite this absence of a global migration regime, some advances as relates to human mobility in the areas of labour migration, migrants’ rights and refugee issues have been made. The 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families represents a bold effort to ensure minimum standards globally on the important question of migrant worker’s rights and to foster greater cooperation, but this has not yet received widespread ratification, especially among receiving countries. Further, developments in recent years in the field of international migration law have resulted in a body of work that provides a reference for states on a range of migration issues including migrant rights, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, consular protection and other matters regulating the treatment of migrants and migration.

Consequently, and in the absence of a binding mechanism for global cooperation on migration -- and this seems unlikely to come into being any time soon given the association often made between sovereignty issues and migration -- various mechanisms to respond to the need for international cooperation in this sphere are emerging.

Regional Consultative Processes on migration (RCPs), which have emerged in most regions across the world in the past 20 years, may constitute the building blocks towards a global migration regime. They underpin current bottom-up efforts aimed at enhanced inter-state cooperation on migration, and by so doing, play a complementary role to global mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. Their work is paramount in fostering cooperation at the regional level and therefore it may be worthwhile to strengthen RCPs where a lack of capacity is an impediment to meaningful interaction and partnership with RCPs in other regions.

Modelled on the state-led, informal and non-binding nature of RCPs, international fora for dialogue such as the GFMD are playing a critical role in bringing together countries of origin, transit and destination to deliberate on a wide range of migration and development issues. In the absence of a global regime for migration, it will be critical that the role of the GFMD and the 2013 second HLD, both of which are key pieces in the mosaic of international cooperation on migration, are reinforced if they are to continue to fulfil the role they have to date, and indeed the enhanced role they have the potential to fulfil. Yet, it is important also to acknowledge that as currently structured, they remain insufficiently agile to fully meet the need for international cooperation on migration.

There is growing consensus that ever greater policy coherence in favour of a comprehensive and balanced approach to migration at national, regional, inter-regional and global levels is necessary if the positive role that migration can play to the benefit of origin and host countries alike is to be more fully realised.

Well-managed migration at all levels can positively impact host and origin countries, and most importantly, the migrants themselves. By the same token, poorly managed migration can push migrants into irregularity, thereby undermining the potential contributions they could make as well as the integrity of the migration process. For migrants, having irregular status increases their vulnerability to human rights abuses and also has the effect of curtailing the potential contributions they could make for the benefit of origin and host countries, as well as for themselves. The key therefore is strengthened cooperation within and between countries across all regions so as to promote a better understanding of migration and foster policies that more accurately reflect the realities of today's mobile and interconnected world.
**Evidence**

Migration was not an issue of deep inter-state discussion and cooperation until the past decade which has witnessed tremendous progress in inter-state cooperation and dialogue on migration at regional and global levels. Today, most governments realize the importance of improved cooperation on migration, as reflected in certain key developments during this period.

At the **international level**, the 2006 United Nations General Assembly High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD) was a groundbreaking event. The international community had been aware for some time that migration was a matter deserving close and continuing attention. Absent, however, was a strong and unifying theme to provide coherence of thought and action. Migration and development has emerged as the tie that could bind the many different stakeholders: countries of origin, transit and destination, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, trade unions and, most importantly, migrants themselves. The HLD demonstrated that States from around the world can come together for constructive discussions even if their perspectives on and experiences of migration differ. The resulting **GFMD** that has been held on an annual basis since 2007 has provided an important platform for states to come together and discuss migration and development issues.

At the **regional level**, RCPs and inter-regional fora (IRF) -- informal regional dialogue and cooperation mechanisms -- have come into being or been strengthened where they already existed. RCPs and similarly structured inter-state/inter-regional cooperation mechanisms play a key role in fostering mutual understanding and action on migration. RCPs have flourished over the past two decades and now span virtually the entire globe. Some of these RCPs give priority to migration and development considerations while others take a more ad hoc approach. Significant inter-regional dialogues now address the migration and development nexus and provide important venues for cooperation, including South-South cooperation, on inter-regional migration flows. An additional opportunity for dialogue on migration issues has come about through regional and sub-regional organizations and economic integration processes that have in recent years added migration to their agendas.

At the **national level**, states today more fully appreciate the need to ensure a whole-of-government approach that ensures all aspects of the multi-dimensional issue that migration is taken into account in planning and action.

Equally important are the various **outcomes from this enhanced global cooperation and multi-stakeholder involvement in migration issues**. Cooperation in remittance management between host and origin countries, and involving private sector entities, is a case in point, leading to reduced transfer costs for migrants. Another area in which such cooperation can be witnessed is that of **diaspora engagement**, in collaboration with civil society actors that work with diaspora. The Global Migration Group (GMG) Handbook on Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning seeks to equip interested governments with the knowledge and tools they need to more fully factor migration into their development policies and subsequently their actions. Furthermore, states across the migration spectrum today agree on the need for protection of migrants’ welfare and rights, and on the need to work collaboratively towards limiting the incidence of migrant trafficking and smuggling in human beings, and to punish the perpetrators rather than their victims.

Perhaps the best indication of the impact thus far of inter-state dialogue on migration is the **evolution from focusing almost exclusively on the economic aspects** of migration, and remittances in particular, to now recognizing and discussing migration as a social phenomenon as well, with implications for health, gender, children, family relations and for the rights of migrants, regardless of their migration status.
**Gaps and Challenges**

With RCPs playing a role that is increasingly important, particularly in the absence of a binding global framework for cooperation on migration, the need for ever stronger interaction between them is understood and widely acknowledged. It is critical that fledgling RCPs get the capacity building support they need to be credible partners for engagement with RCPs in other regions. For RCPs and similarly-structured dialogue fora to play the role they have the potential to and are increasingly called upon to do, it will be critical to ensure that they have the capacity to meet regularly and in a more predictable manner than has been possible for many of them.

As inter-state cooperation grows from strength to strength, partnerships between agencies are equally fundamental. While IOM is the inter-governmental organization mandated to address migration in all its complexities, each of the 15 other members of the Global Migration Group (GMG) have important mandates and valuable expertise on various aspects of migration. Fostering the meaningful interaction between these agencies and promoting the sharing of valuable information cannot and should not be overlooked. When this expertise and collective voice can be brought together the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. One example is the joint declaration presented by the GMG at the Global Forum on Migration in Puerto Vallarta. Therefore, the involvement of all relevant actors within the UN system through the work of the GMG, the coordination mechanism for 14 UN agencies plus IOM and the World Bank needs to be strengthened, so that the GMG can play as strong and effective a supporting role as possible to states. The GMG can play a key role in magnifying the benefits and minimizing the negative effects of migration. Institutional capacities at all levels should also be strengthened with a view to fostering dialogue and cooperation to planning and implementing policies that promote human and orderly migration that benefits migrants and societies.

**Conclusions**

The enhanced opportunities that are today available for international exchange and dialogue on migration issues are in large part responsible for the shift that is today observable in migration discourse. There has been a significant shift away from whether or not to have migration, to how to more effectively manage it in its various and ever-evolving forms, along with the challenges it occasions, to increase its positive effects and minimize negative ones.

The positive outcomes from enhanced international cooperation on migration notwithstanding, it is important to note that little progress has yet been achieved, in particular in the facilitation of the movement of people in response to opportunities for legal entry. This is particularly needed with a view to fostering on a macro level, the reduction of asymmetries and inequalities, and on a micro level, the fight against discrimination through more effective protection to all migrants.

And yet, increasing global and regional economic integration is having a direct impact on prospects for the movement of people. The majority of people migrating today do so not because they are fleeing persecution but because they are looking for a better life – education, training, employment and temporary or permanent opportunities in a different place.

Clearly, it is one thing to acknowledge that the movement of people now has a firmly established place in national and international consciousness, and quite another to address migration with the purpose, determination and coherence that have been achieved in other economic and social development fields.
Sources/Acknowledgements:


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About the GMG The Global Migration Group (GMG) is an inter-agency group bringing together 16 agencies including ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UN/DESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICG, UNITAR, UNODC, UN Regional Commissions, UN Women, World Bank, and WHO to promote the wider application of all relevant international and regional instruments and norms relating to international migration, and to encourage the adoption of more coherent, comprehensive and better coordinated approaches to the issue of international migration. The GMG is particularly concerned with improving the overall effectiveness of its members and other stakeholders in capitalizing upon the opportunities and responding to the challenges presented by international migration. For further information: www.globalmigrationgroup.org