NINETY-NINTH SESSION

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INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION 2010

Migration and social change

Approaches and options for policymakers

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I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   Migration is a catalyst for social change and development at both macro and micro levels – it creates spaces for interaction between migrants, as individuals, and communities of origin, transit and destination, as a whole. As a result, societies experience changes in terms of social structures, identities, attitudes, norms and practices. In an era in which mobility patterns are becoming increasingly complex and with nearly all countries exposed to migration in some way, transnationalism – a process whereby people establish and maintain socio-cultural connections across geopolitical borders[1] – is a prevalent phenomenon that presents both opportunities and challenges. By focusing on the connections that migrants establish between countries, the transnational prism serves as an angle of analysis for the wider issues of migration and social change in both host and home societies. Notions of belonging and identity may need to be reassessed in the light of transnationalism and modern migration dynamics, which reveal that individual and collective identities are layered and evolving, rather than static and one-dimensional. Effective migration policies, informed by the transnational context, can help harness the benefits of migration while maintaining social cohesion.

2.   In 2010, the International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) was dedicated to addressing these challenges and identifying practical solutions with regard to migration and social change in the context of ever-denser communication, transport, trade and information networks. The following is a summary of the general conclusions that emerged from the discussions and exchanges between policymakers and practitioners at two intersessional workshops held as part of the IDM on the topics of "Migration and transnationalism: Opportunities and challenges" (9 and 10 March 2010)[2] and "Societies and identities: The multifaceted impact of migration" (19 and 20 July 2010).[3]

II.   LESSONS LEARNED

3.   First, **migration is only one of the many drivers of social change**. It does, however, have the potential to enrich not only the economies, but equally importantly the cultural, political and social life, of both countries of origin and destination.

4.   Second, **maintaining cohesive societies in the face of greater mobility or diversity is one of the fundamental objectives of migration management**. Socio-economic and political changes induced by migration can present challenges that require new answers in different domains of policymaking. National-level efforts to this end can be effectively complemented by initiatives at the level of local communities and municipalities, where

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[1]   *World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy*, IOM, Geneva, 2008, p. 500.
[2]   For further information on this workshop, including the agenda, background paper, list of participants and additional material, please visit www.iom.int/idmtransnationalism.
[3]   For further information on this workshop, including the agenda, background paper, list of participants and additional material, please visit www.iom.int/idmsocieties.

interactions between migrants and non-migrants, whether in countries of origin or destination, are most tangible and immediate.

5.   Third, **transnational dynamics are a key characteristic of contemporary migration realities**. By placing the spotlight on migrants' multiple connections with different societies, this approach challenges certain notions of rights and entitlements in so far as they are determined by citizenship. Migration policies created in a transnational context are likely to produce an impact outside the domestic sphere, and conversely their success is determined by realities beyond national borders.

6.   Fourth, **migrants are both agents and subjects of transnationalism**. On the one hand, migrants mobilize social and cultural exchanges between societies, while also influencing patterns of global migration through their social networks. On the other hand, their own lives, in emotional and practical terms, are often decisively shaped by their simultaneous connection to several places.

7.   Fifth, **migration also affects non-migrants, both in origin and destination countries**, whose needs and vulnerabilities must be taken into account in the policymaking process. Social implications of migration, such as changes in family structures and gender dynamics, are often felt most strongly by women and children who remain behind, although in some cases these structural changes can lead to female empowerment.

8.   Sixth, **managing perceptions and misperceptions of migration and migrants in public discourse is crucial for social cohesion**. The positive visibility of migrants is essential for increasing acceptance of migrants by societies and recognition of their contributions; the media is one of the main stakeholders in this regard. It is of equal importance to acknowledge and address the concerns expressed by communities of origin, transit and destination in order to reduce unfounded fears.

9.   Seventh, **integration is a dynamic concept that needs to be revisited in the light of changing migration realities and socio-economic and political parameters**. Every society will define its own concept of integration, depending on its social, cultural, historical and other circumstances. Furthermore, the kind of integration required to achieve a cohesive social climate may vary significantly depending on the type of migration at hand or the way a society defines migration.

III.   APPROACHES AND OPTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Taking action to minimize misperceptions of migrants and migration in public discourse

10.   The image of migrants and migration lies at the heart of any relationship between migrants and societies. Biased framing of migration in public discourse, inaccurate accounts and sensationalized reporting can lead to misperceptions of migrants and migration, and consequently result in the exclusion of migrant communities and the disruption of social cohesion. Without downplaying the real and complex challenges that migration brings to societies, it is necessary to address distorted images of migrants and "migration myths" by calling upon the media to strive for objectivity and accuracy in their reporting and by engaging societies in identifying and combating racist, xenophobic, extremist and other hostile messages. Given its capacity to reach a wide public and influence discourse, the media has important societal functions and responsibilities to fulfil in promoting social inclusion.

Effective practices include increasing migrant involvement in news production, targeting migrants as part of the viewership or readership, and working towards a public debate on migration-related issues that is realistic and fact-based, rather than sensationalized. Not only is the presence of different voices in the media an important reflection of the diversity that characterizes a society, but it is also a key to empowering migrants and enhancing their positive visibility as it allows them to represent themselves, rather than merely be represented. By supporting media by and for migrant or minority ethnic communities, societies of destination potentially benefit from the viewpoint of migrants regarding the social change in which they partake, as well as from their contribution in social and cultural domains.

Mobilizing initiatives to increase migrants' social participation and to facilitate interactions between migrants and communities, particularly at the local level

11.   While opening up opportunities for personal development and learning, for some individuals the transnational experience may also result in the loss of a sense of identity and of belonging to a particular society, especially when family members do not migrate together. Measures taken to increase social participation of migrants can help prevent further alienation and enable them to harness their full potential. At the same time, host societies sometimes perceive "newcomers" as a threat, and coming to terms with the change that they are experiencing may require time and serious public debate. Focus groups and other forms of community dialogue can provide a means of identifying and mediating the challenges that may arise during the integration process. Actions by local governmental and non-governmental actors can be particularly useful in increasing dialogue and bridging the gap between migrants and their communities as they target the scale of social interaction which tends to be the most relevant in most people's lives. As there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer, creative and community-specific solutions have proven very effective, as illustrated by initiatives undertaken in large cities with significant migrant populations. As regards the interaction between migrants and their communities of origin, misunderstandings of mutual needs and expectations can be reduced through communication via migrant associations and improved technology. While difficult to measure and manage, social remittances – the ideas, practices, skills and values transferred by migrants to their home communities – can contribute to change and development, especially at the individual and household level. For example, they can influence gender dynamics and health-seeking behaviour and help to improve educational outcomes for the children of migrants in countries of origin.

Institutionalizing mechanisms to enhance political participation of migrants and diasporas

12.   Migrants' multiple allegiances are often viewed with suspicion by both home and host countries and interpreted as "split loyalties". As a result, and despite its significance for successful integration and social cohesion, the participation of migrants in the policymaking process, including elections, in both countries of destination and origin is frequently found to be limited. Creating institutional structures and avenues for migrants to engage in political processes and social life will ultimately result in more responsive policies and more inclusive societies. While relating to questions of nationality, political participation can also be enhanced without the fully fledged naturalization of migrants, for instance, through the granting of certain political rights at the local level or via consultative bodies through which migrant communities can have a say in matters and decisions that concern them. Seeking advice and feedback on policies and programmes from migrant and minority communities or ensuring their representation at the local authority level in particular can significantly increase migrants' visibility, participation and stake in community life, thereby contributing to more inclusive societies. Likewise, countries of origin may consider strengthening political ties to

migrant populations, for instance through out-of-country voting, regular consultations with the diaspora through a country's consular network, or representation of the diaspora voice in the national legislature, for instance through dedicated bodies or within parliament.

Tailoring policies to provide effective support to different migrant groups

13.   Different factors – which may be related to age, gender, language, culture or migratory status – can create barriers for certain groups of migrants, intervening in their effective participation in society and giving rise to potential vulnerabilities. Effective measures to decrease vulnerability, such as pre-departure orientation sessions, counselling, language training and the implementation of programmes to raise migrants' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, can already take place in countries of origin. In host societies, certain key services or institutions may need to be made available or accessible for migrants who do not yet fully master the local language (or languages) or who are unfamiliar with local culture and customs, in order to allow them to communicate their needs effectively and understand what is required of them. Public services, especially the health sector, may find it necessary to adapt in response to cultural diversity. For instance, countries with a long history of immigration may have ageing migrant communities and thus a demand for culturally appropriate care for the elderly.

Reinforcing policy effectiveness by ensuring relevance and coherence and by expanding cooperation

14.   To effectively address the transboundary challenges of migration, policymakers need to think and act transnationally by focusing on collaboration at the bilateral, multilateral and local levels. Cooperation needs to be further consolidated across the board, both horizontally between different government ministries and vertically between local and national levels of government. Investing in research and comprehensive data collection on the social impacts of migration can play a pivotal role in informing public debate and policies. Regular monitoring of migration patterns, flows and projections can assist policymakers in formulating policies that better reflect transnational realities, facilitate greater social and political participation of migrants and provide more appropriate and timely support. Greater coherence in migration policy formulation and subsequent implementation can be achieved through strengthening partnerships and sharing of best practices between multiple stakeholders, including non-governmental actors such as civil society groups, the private sector and transnational corporations. Their insight and expertise may prove useful in increasing policy effectiveness in service provision. For example, with respect to social welfare policies, one important consideration is access to and transferability of social security schemes such as health and unemployment insurance and pensions for migrants and returnees. Bilateral or regional schemes are fundamental tools in this regard and can help provide fair access to such benefits, ensuring for instance that individuals do not lose benefits that they have accumulated when crossing borders. To increase policy effectiveness, cooperation may be extended to involve private sector partners such as insurance firms or transnational corporations.

Implementing measures to lessen the negative impacts of migration on families

15.   Often regarded the most fundamental unit of society, families are affected by migration in a multitude of ways and merit the dedicated attention of policymakers. In countries of origin, the psychosocial challenges and social consequences of migration are mostly felt by spouses and children who remain behind. Possible initiatives include psychosocial support mechanisms in schools, and assistance for spouses in the form of skills

training, access to credit facilities, and employment and business opportunities. A gender-sensitive approach should cut across all such measures, recognizing that family separation due to migration affects men and women differently and that the challenges arising from separation tend to place a particular burden on women. In societies of destination, it is important that support mechanisms be put in place not only for newly arrived migrant families, but also for "1.5th", second and third generation in order to build cohesive and functional communities. Enfranchising young people is not only essential; it is also a long-term investment in the well-being and cohesion of a society. Furthermore, social and housing policies at the local level, especially in large urban areas, should aim to prevent social segregation. Lastly, a focus on language training in educational institutions, non-discrimination measures in access to higher education and employment, and recognition of foreign qualifications through, inter alia, inter-university partnerships are among the first steps necessary to maximize the potential of different groups in contributing to and participating in society.

IV. CONCLUSION

16.   In conclusion, the changes and challenges brought about by migration call upon policymakers to rethink migration policy formulation, coordination and implementation to incorporate new transnational realities that shape social interactions in societies of origin and destination. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders – governments, host and home societies and migrants themselves – to adapt to change and work towards cohesive and functioning societies. Policymakers may wish to take into account the following salient elements: the representation of migrants and migration in public and political discourse and in the media; the opportunities for migrants to participate in the social, political and cultural life of societies of origin and destination, giving them a stake in the well-being of the communities they interact with; the needs and concerns of home and host communities, which are best addressed through open dialogue in order to help communities adjust to the changes brought about by migration; issues arising in migrant families and families separated by migration, including a longitudinal perspective which takes account of migrant youth, second and third generations, and ageing migrants; the removal of structural and practical barriers that prevent migrants from fully integrating into their new surroundings; and the importance of concrete initiatives at the local level to complement national policies. Lastly, policymakers need to think beyond the national sphere and reach out across borders to governmental and non-governmental partners to respond effectively to the new social dynamics brought about by migration.