UNESCO'S ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF MIGRATION IN 2009-2011

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

A. THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS
ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Within the framework of the Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has worked with institutions, experts and researchers concerned with the social impact of the economic and financial crisis to closely monitor and document the ways in which the crisis affects social transformations, and the implications this has for social policymaking. Along with other topics, migration will represent one of the fields of research and activities for this network.

The economic and financial crisis might impact discrimination and xenophobia directed at migrants. History shows that in times of economic depression problems regarding social cohesion emerge and lead to increasing exclusion and persecution against outsiders and foreigners. All previous crises, such as the Great Depression, the oil crisis and the Asian, Russian and Latin American financial crisis, have affected the situation of migrants in many ways and spurred resentment of foreign workers and xenophobic actions. Yet there is little hard evidence supporting xenophobic actions directed at immigrants, which makes it difficult to provide in-depth assessments of the phenomenon. Part of the problem is the complexity of xenophobia and discrimination processes, which operate at different levels in a mutually reinforcing manner. These processes are simultaneously rooted in individual, social, media, political and Government dynamics.

Given the multiple origins and occurrences of discrimination and xenophobia, the challenge is to develop strategies that are specifically relevant to the categories of actors and levels at stake. This also calls for more systematic gathering of data, through the elaboration of indicators and through independent monitoring bodies.

B. RECENT INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN THE EVIDENCE BASE
ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Free movement within regional organizations

UNESCO has launched a research project on attitudes and policies toward free movement within regional organizations. While free movement may be difficult to achieve at the world level, it may be a much more realistic and desirable policy option at the level of regional organizations. This research follows the 2007 UNESCO publication *Migration without borders*, which explored the scenario in which borders did not inhibit migration flows. In the end, the book promoted the idea of migration in a world without borders in which the freedom of movement would constitute a fundamental right.

By now, several African regional organizations —including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Southern Africa— have committed themselves to facilitating the

movement of people among their member States; the African Union, too, has regularly embraced free movement among its members as an objective to be pursued. These actions show the potential for regional migration governance, while also stressing the challenges raised by this endeavour.

A partnership has been set up with the United Nations University-Comparative Regional Integration Studies Programme (UNU-CRIS) at Bruges, Belgium, on the role of free movement of people as part of integration processes, and a worldwide study on attitudes and policies toward free movement among regional organizations has been launched. Some thirty regional organizations have been contacted and researched in order to understand their approach toward free movement, the measures taken so far, their successes and achievements, the obstacles encountered and the steps ahead. In addition, a network of experts is being constituted to shed light on the implications and challenges of free movement for regional organizations. The purpose of the project is to promote policy development on migration arrangements to be considered and discussed by stakeholders within the regional organizations. The initial research project will be concluded in 2010 and the results will be published in 2011.

2. *Recognition of qualifications*

The recognition of migrants' diplomas and academic qualifications has become a key component of the proper management of human mobility. Under the auspices of the UNESCO solely or jointly with other organizations, regional and interregional conventions have been developed to promote the recognition of academic qualifications for academic purposes. The conventions, overseen by a secretariat, recognize a "de facto" and "de jure" role of a diploma for professional purposes, such as obtaining employment.

In order to update and review the issues raised by these conventions, an international conference was organised in Paris, France, in September 2008. Contributors from all over the world provided detailed accounts of the trends and difficulties faced by the international recognition of qualifications, as well as policy options to address these challenges. Best practices and policies will be further collected and developed in the coming years to achieve more transparent and realistic overall policies on the recognition of academic qualifications of migrants worldwide.

3. *Global education database on international student mobility*
at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) maintains a database on student mobility covering tertiary level students.

The database is unique in the following ways:

(a) Complete geographical coverage. The UIS has the most complete coverage of student mobility data in the world, achieved through a survey of global education statistics from more than 200 countries and territories. The survey is carried out on an annual basis in collaboration with Eurostat and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Countries and territories provide data on the mobile students they host by country of origin, which can be used to construct a complete global picture of both emigration and immigration trends of students for each country;

(b) Cross-national comparability. The UIS strives to achieve cross-national comparability of the indicators and statistics that it publishes by applying a common framework of statistical concepts and definitions as well as procedures for data collection and processing. The definition of an internationally mobile student is a person who leaves her or his country or territory of origin and moves to another country or territory with the purpose of study. In practice, three criteria are used to classify internationally mobile students: country/territory of permanent residence, country/territory of prior education, and citizenship. In addition, the current statistics exclude students in exchange programmes of one school year or less;

(c) Time series. Detailed country-level statistics are available since 1999. In addition, regional estimates are available from 1975 onwards. The UIS is currently revising country historical data, to be released in the near future;

(d) Free public access. As with other UIS data, the data on international student mobility are available to the public to download at the UIS online data centre.[1]

C. CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA OF
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Migration and climate change

Climate change is one of the major concerns for the international community and its impact on migration is the object of increasing attention from both policymakers and researchers. Yet, despite the interest in the link between climate change and migration, there is little research in this area. There are uncertainties surrounding the actual mechanisms at stake, the number of persons affected and the geographical areas concerned. There are debates between those who stress the direct impact of the environment on population flows and those who rather insist on the social, economic and political contexts in which such flows occur. The available information is heterogeneous, as it includes policy reports, advocacy publications by intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), empirical case studies and more normative and legal considerations on the protection of "environmental migrants."

The purpose of this project is to provide a comprehensive overview of the climate change-migration nexus. It will provide empirical evidence on the links between climate and migration by bringing together both case studies and research, from different disciplines —including history, sociology, geography and climatology. It will also investigate the key issues raised by the climate change-migration nexus which includes the social and political context in which the topic has emerged; states' policy responses and the views of different institutional actors; critical perspectives on the actual relationship between the environment and forced migration; the concepts and notions most adequate to address this relationship; gender and human rights implications; as well as international law and responsibilities.

This project is intended to develop a problematic and non-deterministic understanding of the phenomenon that recognizes the multi-causality of the migration process, as well as the agency displayed by migrants when taking the decision to leave their home. Consequently, it views "environmental migration" not only as forced and not merely as the last resort solution, but as a strategy among others to cope with socio-economic, political and environmental change —hence the necessary conceptual caution in using notions such as "climate refugees" or

"environmental migrants". Lastly, the project aims at disentangling the relationship between climate change and migration, notably in terms of geography, such as internal versus international and short versus long distance migration and time, such as temporary versus permanent migration, sudden climate hazards versus long-term environmental degradation. Results from this project will be published in a book in 2010, to be followed by case study reports for different regions.

2. *Skilled migration*

Even if skilled migration has been on the agenda of researchers and policymakers for several decades, the topic is now receiving renewed attention, notably because of the increase in the number of international migrants, of persistent under-development in some regions, and of the development of knowledge-based economies. Following the publication of the book *Migration without Borders*, UNESCO aims to bring a new perspective to this topic and will explore five major issues in a project dedicated to the "brain drain".

First, UNESCO will focus on the ethics of "brain drain". "Brain drain" is not only an economic issue, but raises ethical, legal and philosophical questions. For example, under which ethical framework can the outflow of skilled individuals from a developing country be understood as a problem? How does individual freedom —and in particular the recognized human right to leave one's country— relate to this negative conceptualization of migration? On what principles can people be expected to contribute to the development of their country of origin and, conversely, what are the responsibilities of Governments when addressing "brain drain"? How can one bring together the right to leave and the right to development, education or health? Should certain sectors of the economy, such as health and education be approached differently? Overall, is there "fair" skilled migration policy and how can it be implemented.

Second, the organization will engage in a discussion of "brain drain" between countries, markets and people. "Brain drain" is driven by at least three dynamics: (*a*) powerful market forces create a world labour market that incites some people to take jobs abroad, thereby challenging countries' ability to "manage" migration; (*b*) Governments proactively design policies to recruit the best and brightest, while others have schemes to export their workers, and (*c*) people themselves are endowed with agency and develop strategies to migrate. What are the relations, and possible conflicts, between these three forces? How different are their outcomes? For example, if one assumes that only motivated and entrepreneurial people emigrate, are not all forms of migration a loss for sending countries? In other words, where and when does "brain drain" start? And what can Governments realistically do to manage it? To what extent can Governments influence market forces and migrants' agency? In other words, in whose interests are skilled migration policies designed? Should they aim at improving the functioning of labour markets, at maximizing countries' benefits, or at ensuring people's well-being and access to rights?

Third, UNESCO will look at "brain drain" and education politics. In fact, a major assumption within "brain drain" debates is that skilled migrants are trained at their Government's expenses, but fail to pay back because they leave and enable other countries to benefit from their skills. How does this relate to the politics of education, and especially to the privatization of higher education? Is such a privatization, if and when it occurs, a consequence of "brain drain" or rather the product of a new economic model for universities? What would be the relevance of "brain drain" in a hypothetical world in which training and skills' acquisitions would be entirely private? Education policies raise further questions with respect to "brain drain": how can the widely acknowledged benefit of international mobility for students, as shown by exchange

programmes such as Erasmus-Socrates in Europe, be related to "brain drain"? How can one rethink the connection between students and their Governments in an era in which mobility is not only valued but also sometimes required for some careers?

Fourth, UNESCO will look at the evolution of the concept of "brain drain." While a matter of current discussions, the term has a long conceptual history, having been defined, constructed and addressed in different ways during the last decades. The goal is not simply to trace the history of a concept and its different definitions, but also to understand who has promoted it, in which economic, political and intellectual context, and on the basis of which interests. How has "brain drain" been linked to development? How has it entered the agenda of different Governments, and of the international community? In addition, other notions, such as brain gain, brain waste, brain circulation, care drain and youth drain, are increasingly widespread, but have different meanings. Are these terms connected to changing skilled migration patterns, or are they the rhetorical product of the involvement of new actors and stakeholders in this field? In other words, what are the dynamics at work in the construction of "brain drain" as a political and policy issue?

Fifth, UNESCO will study the future of "brain drain" and skilled migration. In particular, the project will look at the future prospects for "brain drain" and skilled migration policies. For example, can this topic be part of inter-country agreements, whether at the bilateral, regional or multilateral level, in order to ensure more efficient, and perhaps fairer, approaches to this topic? While some, often non-binding, international initiatives have been taken, in particular in the health sector, what is their impact and how can they evolve? Is there a role for international organizations to address "brain drain"? How realistic are the options based on circulation, the role of transnational communities or information and communication technologies, especially in a world in which the management of migration is a major concern for most Governments? Is the underlying assumption that individuals are to contribute to the development of their nation-state still relevant in an inter-connected world that calls for "cosmopolitan" solutions? Can one hope to achieve triple-win solutions for countries of origin, destination and migrants themselves? In a context in which migration is often perceived to be the reason for many societal problems, affecting, for example, security, welfare and social cohesion, under what conditions and assumptions can one develop a positive understanding of the impact of migration on development and of migration as an asset?

Since Africa is a priority area for UNESCO's work, particular attention will be devoted to "brain drain" and skilled migration from Africa where the emigration of skilled professionals, especially in the health and education sectors, can significantly affect the development potential of specific countries. Findings from this project will be published in a book in 2011.

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[1] For the website of the Data Center, see http://stats.uis.unesco.org (accessed 22 July 2010).

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REFERENCE

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2007). *Migration without borders: Essays on the free movement of people*. Paris, New York, Oxford: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Berghahn Books.