

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

The work of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in the field of international migration is designed to support global processes of dialogue and sharing of ideas and practices initiated at the General Assembly's 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and continued through the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The year 2009 has been marked by UNITAR's increased engagement in advancing interagency collaboration and coordination within the United Nations and with other stakeholders, including the Institute's assumption of the chairmanship of the Global Migration Group (GMG) in June 2009. UNITAR's ongoing training activities in the migration field fall within the Institute's broader mandate to strengthen the United Nations system through appropriate training focusing on social and economic development as well as peace and security issues of particular relevance to United Nations Member States.

A. UNITAR CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE GLOBAL MIGRATION GROUP

UNITAR assumed the chairmanship of the GMG on 1 June 2009 for a period of seven months. The Group's overall objective under UNITAR's tenure was to foster timely and coherent analysis and guidance by the United Nations and other GMG members, namely the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank, to the pressing challenges of migration governance at a time of global economic downturn.

In close collaboration with the next GMG chair, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNITAR proposed a first-ever annual workplan for the GMG with a view to guaranteeing consistency in strategic direction and thematic focus over the course of the two semi-annual chairmanships from June 2009 to July 2010. The workplan, proved to be a valuable roadmap, structuring the Group's work around clearly defined objectives and expected outcomes. The workplan rested on three main pillars: (a) fostering a strong sense of purpose within the Group; (b) establishing clear rules of engagement, and (c) enhancing GMG visibility. GMG members, as well as other stakeholders, including United Nations Member States, have recognized the contributions made by the GMG in a number of areas over the second half of 2009.

First, a high-level GMG retreat, convened by UNITAR on 9 October 2009 near Geneva, Switzerland, signalled a reinforced commitment and a sense of urgency among the Heads of agency, who called for active and "clever" leadership while holding strategic discussions on the impact of the economic crisis on international migration and on migrants' well-being.

Second, the GMG refined and in some instances, defined its rules of engagement and reprioritized its terms of reference. For the first time, clearly articulated working methods were developed on the basis of a study of other inter-agency coordination mechanisms and a GMG survey conducted by UNITAR. Furthermore, UNITAR's proposal to establish a troika of GMG chairs found broad support among principals and would henceforth serve to ensure continuity during transitions in the semi-annual chairmanships.

Finally, in order to strengthen GMG's visibility, UNITAR took the lead in coordinating the development of joint outputs that provided Governments with policy recommendations and timely data and analysis, enabling them to adequately respond to the challenges posed by the global economic crisis for migrants and their families.

A joint GMG statement delivered by the Executive Director of UNITAR, Mr. Carlos Lopes, at the opening session of the third meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, in Athens, Greece, on 4 November 2009, reaffirmed the commitment of GMG members to work together to ensure that (a) development gains of migration were recognized and leveraged; (b) migrants' rights were protected, and (c) more robust data were collected to provide a solid evidence base for policy-making. Furthermore, 14 fact-sheets on the impact of the crisis on migration, initiated by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and compiled by GMG members, were made available to participants of the Athens Global Forum. Available on the GMG website, the fact-sheets, together with other resources from GMG members, form an online inventory of data and analysis on international migration that is easily accessible for public use.¹

The joint statement of the GMG and a joint GMG press conference at the third Global Forum were examples of how a mobilized and united GMG can be an effective advocate for enhanced international migration governance and protection of migrants. The GMG technical symposium, proposed by UNITAR for early 2010, would be another step forward in raising public awareness about the development implications of international migration and for promoting the adoption and wider application of key instruments and norms relating to migration.

B. UNITAR "MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT" SEMINAR SERIES ORGANIZED IN COLLABORATION WITH IOM, UNFPA AND THE MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

Since 2005, UNITAR, as the main training arm of the United Nations system, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNFPA and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, has organized the "Migration and Development Seminar Series" at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The Series' role is to inform, educate and stimulate policy-thinking on migration-related topics among New York's diplomatic community. It brings together various stakeholders involved in migration and development issues — Governments, United Nations entities and other international organizations, the private sector and civil society, including migrant associations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics— and provides an informal platform for dialogue and networking.

As in previous years, UNITAR and its partner agencies collaborated with the 2009 GFMD chair, Greece, to identify migration-related priorities on which to train the international community in 2009. Since February 2009, the Series hosted four seminars on the topics of: (a) migration, "brain drain" and caregiving; (b) aligning migration with development goals: the challenges of policy coherence; (c) peacebuilding: the role of transnational communities, and (d) migration and the economic crisis.

In addition, a course on international migration law, facilitated by IOM, complemented the Series. The course examined the many conventions, which, spread across different branches of law at the universal and regional levels, apply to those involved in migration processes. Topics covered included: (a) migration terminology; (b) authority and responsibility of States; (c) rights

and obligations of migrants; (d) migrant smuggling and human trafficking; (e) labour migration; (f) migration and security; (g) forced migration, and (h) developments in international cooperation on migration. The Series also featured a panel discussion on the occasion of International Migrants' Day on 18 December, which focused on the experiences and challenges of migrant youth.

Since 2005, the Migration and Development Series has been producing an increasing body of knowledge, which is available to the public on UNITAR's website.²

1. Findings of the 2009 Migration and Development Series

The 2009 Series pointed to the following three inter-connected objectives that guided policy-making and international cooperation on migration: (a) recognize and enhance the contributions of migrants to prosperity in both countries of origin and destination; (b) ensure that migration contributes to advancing the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and (c) increase human development gains of migrants and their families as reflected in enhanced choices and capabilities.

a. Migration and global prosperity

Migration is a factor stimulating and maintaining economic and social progress and prosperity in countries around the world, including developed countries. Limiting the scope of the international dialogue on migration and development to focus on the interlinkages of migration and development in developing countries would obscure the contributions that migrants have made and continue to make to industrialized countries. Indeed, migration governance cannot be the sole domain of development policy and assistance. While it is true that migration policies that regulate questions such as visa issuance, employment, access to services and skills recognition need to take development considerations into account, it is equally important to recognize that the compatibility of migration policies and development objectives requires that other policy areas such as health and trade be part of the analysis.

A key question throughout 2009 was whether and how the global economic crisis would affect international migration and migration policies. Preliminary observations suggested that the crisis' effects varied across world regions, with the United States of America and the European Union (EU) being, at least initially, more affected than Asia and Africa. Where Governments were faced with rising unemployment, they adopted measures to restrict new immigration, encourage returns and give preference to native workers in the labour market. In the United States and EU, unemployment was reported to be much higher among foreigners and the foreign-born than among natives. However, migrant return rates remained low, even when Governments adopted measures to provide migrants with incentives to leave. Three main factors were identified as influencing migrants' propensity to return: (a) the right to come back to the country of destination; (b) the conditions and prospects in the country of origin, and (c) migrants' opportunities for asset accumulation in the country of destination and thus their ability to sell these assets, that is, a house or other property, to afford return.

Experts were cautious about prospects for labour migration to recover soon, warning of the scenario of a "jobless recovery" in industrialized countries, with the financial sector rebounding much faster than the rest of the economy and labour market. However, dramatic shifts in global migration trends were also deemed unlikely, given that the underlying factors of

contemporary migration patterns, in particular global inequalities and demographic imbalances, would remain.

With declining birth rates, many developed countries rely on migrant workers from abroad to support their ageing populations. For these countries, low labour mobility can inhibit economic growth, create fiscal imbalance and undermine the welfare of the elderly. Accelerated mobility, on the other hand, can lead to emigration of highly-skilled people and related labour shortages in migrant origin countries. The World Bank has suggested inter-regional cooperation on human resource development as a solution to this problem, including reforms and investments in the education sectors of countries of origin, better integration of migrants at destination and improved portability of pensions and benefits among countries. Such a regime would ultimately be global in order to avoid competition among regions and to ensure that all beneficiaries contribute to the development of the human resources they require.

Indeed, the necessity of establishing a multilateral framework to enable and regulate labour migration was a recurrent theme throughout the Series. Experiences from Asia, for example, showed that bilateral labour migration agreements often left countries of origin in a relatively weak bargaining position because of the intense competition among them. A common regulatory framework would improve this situation and thereby the protection and working conditions of migrant workers. Bilateral agreements were deemed insufficient to address the problem of the emigration of health workers, because regulating emigration from one particular country of origin often created emigration pressures in neighbouring countries.

The proposed World Health Organization (WHO) Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel was welcomed as a first step in the right direction. Non-binding in nature, the code aimed to encourage the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as national policies, for the ethical recruitment of health workers. One way of strengthening the code would be to include the private sector in ethical recruitment agreements, which to date are mostly limited to the public health care system, as for example in the United Kingdom.

b. Migration and the MDGs

The discussions of the Migration and Development Series in 2009 illustrated how migration intersects with the development challenges included in the MDGs. Particular attention was given to the effects of health care worker migration on the achievement of MDG 6, which committed the international community to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases and would also be the focus of the Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2010.

The global imbalance of health professionals was seen as one of the main obstacles for achieving MDG 6, as a low density of health care workers was observed to correlate with high mortality rates. Both the number of professional caregivers and the amount of public spending on health care systems were lowest in those areas that have the highest prevalence rates of HIV. Thus, sub-Saharan Africa, where in certain countries over 20 per cent of the population was HIV positive, received less than one per cent of the world's total health care spending, and only accounted for three per cent of the global health care workforce.

Emigration of health workers posed a major challenge for developing countries, a challenge that was all the more difficult to address as it involved some conflicting rights. Given the scarcity of health workers in many countries around the world, and the increased need for care

by ageing populations in the industrialized societies, the right to health in developed countries and the right to health in developing countries were bound to be opposing at times. Similarly, the individual health worker's right to search for a better life abroad and countries' desire to provide functioning health care systems bore potential conflicts of interest. There were also gender-specific implications since care-giving professions were dominated by female workers and HIV infection rates in Southern Africa were markedly higher among women than men.

Governments were called upon to invest in the health sector and to increase job satisfaction and performance among caregivers through a strategy of "treat, train and retain." This approach, advocated by the Global Health Workforce Alliance (GHWA), aimed to (a) improve access to HIV services for health care workers ("treat"), who were often exposed to a higher risk of infection; (b) recruit more health care workers and provide specialized, HIV/AIDS relevant care training ("train"), and (c) improve the work environment, offer professional development opportunities and financial incentives to reduce the push factors of migration ("retain"). In addition, the more effective use of existing capacities could enhance access to health care in countries facing high emigration rates. Task-shifting from one health care profession to another, such as from doctors to nurses and from nurses or midwives to community health workers, had been relatively successful. Ministries of health could formulate and implement policies to facilitate the return of health care workers who had gone abroad. Governments of destination countries could complement such efforts through measures to promote circular migration, for example by limiting visas provided to people attending temporary training programmes. However, the decision to return would be more sustainable, if it would be voluntary rather than the result of legal enforcement.

Violent conflict proved to be an obstacle to realizing the MDGs, with countries in conflict and post-conflict situations often ranking at the bottom of development indices. In order to address this challenge in a comprehensive manner, United Nations Member States established the new United Nations peacebuilding architecture following the 2005 World Summit. Reaching out to the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and its support office, PBSO, the Series discussed the role that transnational communities, including refugees and displaced persons, could play as contributors to peacebuilding and development processes in war-torn home countries.

As the example of Sierra Leone illustrated, some Governments started to recognize the potential and resources of transnational communities and to build dedicated institutional capacities to reach out to overseas communities. It was recommended that an office, solely concerned with transnational communities be centrally placed within the Government, above inter-departmental rivalries. It would also be part of national development planning processes and operate in close coordination with other ministries. Countries emerging from conflict could capitalize on others' experiences and share good practices, as was currently happening between Liberia and Sierra Leone.

International organizations could play an important facilitator role between countries of origin, destination and transnational communities, as in the case of the IOM's and UNDP's temporary return programmes for expatriate experts and professionals. They could help build trust between Governments and expatriate communities, and work towards the creation of enabling conditions for the engagement of transnational communities in both their country of origin and destination. Expatriate communities could contribute to international assistance in post-conflict situations in many ways. Asset inventories could be used early on, during the humanitarian phase of peacebuilding efforts to identify the resources and potential contributions of transnational communities. They should also be included in discussions on expert rosters and

rapidly deployable capacity. In addition, the PBSO could consider to engage systematically with expatriate communities when mapping resources and capacity gaps in countries under the consideration of the PBC.

Lessons learned from the return of refugees suggested that, when engaging transnational communities, e.g. for the purpose of temporary return, a careful balance needed to be struck between assistance provided to returnees and assistance provided to the community as a whole. Indeed, Governments and international actors should be careful not to privilege expatriate communities over local populations. Especially for fragile transitional Governments with limited resources this could be a difficult trade-off.

c. Human development implications of migration

There are costs and opportunities associated with migration. When looking at migration through a human development lens, Governments in countries of origin, transit and destination should ask themselves what they are doing to enhance the opportunities and lower the costs. Concrete policy measures that were recommended included the creation of multiple entry visas, provisions for allowing dual citizenship, and improved consular support for natives abroad. Furthermore, creating an enabling environment for migrants would mean that every migrant who returned to the country of origin did so with additional skills and resources. Currently, too many migrants worked below their level of education and skills, and many countries prevented asylum seekers from working at all.

Permanent migration was deemed more beneficial in terms of human development than temporary migration programmes, which kept migrants in a position of dependency and did not allow them to develop professionally, or reunite with their families. Experiences from development and capacity-building programmes involving transnational communities also suggested that integration in the country of residence and contributions to the country of origin were not contradictory, but rather mutually reinforcing. Migrants who contributed to their home countries should have greater confidence and enjoyed greater respect in both their countries of origin and residence.

Many experts and commentators expressed concern regarding the erosion of migrants' rights during the global economic crisis, in particular of the fundamental right to non-discrimination vis-à-vis national workers. They also saw the risk of seeing an increase in human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, due to greater economic instability and lack of employment in countries of origin. Migrants need to be educated about these risks, as well as their rights and benefits in countries of destination. Some of the observable impacts of the recession on migrants were identified as: (a) risk of job loss; (b) wage reduction, delay, or non-payment; (c) more restrictive migration policies and expulsion of migrant workers, especially of those who were undocumented and low-skilled; (d) exploitative and opportunistic behaviour by employers and recruiters, and (e) rising xenophobia in destination countries.

The fact that lower skilled migrant workers were more affected by the crisis than the highly-skilled could further exacerbate inequalities in countries of origin. Indeed, evidence from Ghana suggested that lower-skilled migrant households witnessed a comparatively greater decline in remittances. The implications of lower remittance flows, including additional inequality effects, were likely to be felt in the long term, as reductions in receiving households' spending on education and health care had ramifications for the next generation and for future economic growth.

However, the crisis was also seen as an opportunity to change course and to review a development model that was built on the export of manpower and the inflow of remittances. Criticizing such an approach as unsustainable, a representative from civil society called for a “fundamental change in development model and the migration and development paradigm” in a “rights-based, people-centred, sustainable, social justice-oriented, gender-fair” manner.

C. UNITAR’S MIGRATION PROGRAMME IN COLLABORATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN AND THE IOM

In 2009, with the support of the Government of Spain, UNITAR and the IOM started to implement a multi-year joint project on the strengthening of capacities in the field of international migration and development.

The project involved different capacity development activities, such as: (a) expanding the migration policy series to other United Nations locations and the regional commissions; (b) following-up to the recommendations and actionable outcomes of the GFMD; (c) facilitating dialogue among regional and international migration policy processes, including regional consultative processes; (d) strengthening the development dimension in these discussions, and (e) providing capacity-building at country-level for both national and local stakeholders.

In 2009, a policy seminar away from United Nations Headquarters entitled “Africa-EU 7th Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment: Moving Forward involving Non-State Actors,” was held in Brussels, Belgium, on 7 June 2009, which discussed the status of the partnership and conditions for migration and mobility in the context thereof.³ Particular emphasis was placed on ways of securing greater and more meaningful involvement of African and EU civil society representatives in the context of the partnership. A follow-up seminar would be organized in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2010.

NOTES

¹ For the fact-sheets on the GMG website, see http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/migration_and_economic_crisis.htm (accessed 12 March 2010).

² For UNITAR’s website, see www.unitar.org/ny (accessed 11 March 2010).

³ For the report of the meeting, see <http://europafrika.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/report-africa-eu-7th-partnership-iom-unitar.pdf> (accessed 12 March 2010).