

Concept Note

Panel Discussion on Migration and Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges

(UN Headquarters in New York, Wednesday, 24 April 2013)

Introduction

The Panel Discussion on Migration and Sustainable Development-Opportunities and Challenges will be co-organized by the Division for Sustainable Development and the Population Division, DESA in the margin of the forty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development, to be held in New York on 22-26 April 2013.

Background

In the discussions of the Rio+20 process, migration has been recognized for its increasing importance and relevance to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, as well as for its influence on all regions of the world.

Currently, human mobility between and within countries is at its highest levels in history. In recent years, international and internal migration has increasingly been recognized as a positive force for development. Migrants transfer knowledge and skills to both receiving and origin locations, channel investments and remittances, and foster economic linkages and business opportunities between countries and regions. Carefully managed migration can promote economic growth and innovation in destination locations and reduce poverty in origin locations. At the same time, while migration can to a certain extent offset labour surpluses in sending countries, receiving countries are taking on associated challenges, including managing labour markets, and migrants may risk unfair exploitation and human rights violations. Additional facets of international migration patterns include “brain waste” and “brain drain”.

The relationship between environment and migration is complex and interwoven with the other socio-economic factors that drive people to move, either voluntarily or by necessity. Some estimates indicate, however, that extreme weather events (e.g., tropical storms, floods, droughts, heat waves, etc.) and environmental degradation (e.g., desertification, soil and coastal erosion, etc.) – both of which will be exacerbated by climate change – will move or permanently displace, up to 200 million people by 2050. Migration is a nexus for many issues of sustainable development, such as agriculture, food security, water, and energy.

Harnessing the opportunities that migration provides while addressing its challenges will require countries to create policy and legal frameworks that recognize the patterns and drivers of migration, as well as the characteristics of migrants themselves.

Several international agreements recognize the importance of migration to sustainable development. Agenda 21 (in Chapter 5) focuses on expanding knowledge on linkages between migration and the environment, and the development of policies and programmes to address environmental migrants. The 1994 International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) included an entire chapter on International Migration, focusing on issues related to international migration and development, documented migrants, undocumented migrants, and refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons. Other agreements, such as the United Nations Conference on Least Development Countries, the Monterrey Consensus, and COP-16 of UNFCCC also highlight additional aspects of migration and development. The Secretary-General's report on climate change and its possible security implications¹ also has a section on population displacement and involuntary migration which could further add to the number of urban dwellers and additional pressure on arable land and water.

In the outcome document of Rio+20 "The Future We Want", paragraph 144 focuses on systematically considering population trends and projections in national, rural and urban development strategies and policies, and through forward-looking planning, seizing the opportunities and address the challenges associated with demographic change, including migration. Paragraph 157 focuses on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants and related international, regional and bilateral cooperation and dialogue.

The forty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), to be held in New York on 22-26 April 2013, will focus on the theme "New trends in migration: demographic aspects". The General Assembly will hold a High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development during its sixty-eighth session in 2013.

Objective of the Panel Discussion

The Panel Discussion on Migration and Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges aims to:

- Deepen the understanding on relations between migration and sustainable development, including trends, patterns, opportunities and emerging challenges;
- Strengthen follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of Rio+20 regarding migration and sustainable development;
- Promote effective national policies as well as international and regional cooperation and dialogues on migration and sustainable development and share successful experience and lessons learned; and
- Contribute to the preparation of the High-Level Dialogue of the GA on International Migration and Development.

¹ A/64/350

Structure and topics

The Panel Discussion will be organized as a side event with duration of 75 minutes. It will be moderated by the Director of the Population Division of DESA. Three panelists, the Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a high-level representative of Member State and a senior representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will make presentations with focus on following topics:

- Trends, challenges and opportunities on migration and sustainable development;
- Follow-up to the outcome of Rio+20 and positioning of migration in the post-2015 development agenda;
- International cooperation on migration and sustainable development;
- Strengthen national policies and regional cooperation on implementation of commitments on migration; and
- Legal perspective of protection of people displaced by natural disasters

Background document

The OxAID, an academic organization of UK, has prepared an analytical paper with focus on patterns and trends on migration and sustainable development. It is available on line at the websites of Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform and Commission on Population and Development.

Participation

The Panel Discussion will target the senior officials to the forty-sixth session of the CPD, senior representatives of the Permanent Missions of Member States in New York as well as representatives of UN system organizations and civil society.

Expected outcome

A summary of the Panel Discussion will be prepared by DSD and the Population Division. It will be an input to the High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly on International Migration and Development, in the format of official document of the General Assembly.