

Summary of the Panel discussion on Migration and Sustainable Development

(24 April 2013, New York, NLB Conference Room 4)

1. The Panel Discussion on Migration and Sustainable Development was jointly organized by the Division for Sustainable Development and the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It was held on 24 April 2013 during the 46th session of the Commission on Population and Development. Mr. John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division chaired the meeting and made opening remarks. Three panellists, H.E. Mr. A.K. Abdul Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Mr. Udo Janz, Director of UNHCR Liaison Office in New York made presentations, respectively, on “Strengthening national policies and regional cooperation on migration and sustainable development”, “International cooperation on migration and sustainable development”, and “Protection of people displaced by natural disasters”. The panel was moderated by Mr. John Wilmoth and Ms. Marion Barthelemy, Chief of the Intergovernmental Support and Interagency Branch of the Division for Sustainable Development. Representatives of Member States, UN system organizations and other international organizations, Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders participated in the meeting.

2. Participants exchanged views on the trends, patterns, opportunities and challenges on migration and sustainable development, related national policies and regional and international cooperation in the context of follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference. They referred to the on-going discussions on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The key messages from the panel’s presentation and ensuing discussion include:

Linkage of migration and three dimensions of sustainable development

3. Human mobility- be it international or internal-is closely tied to the three dimensions of sustainable development. Migration has the potential to improve human development outcomes for migrants and their families by raising incomes and improving education and health outcomes. Migration also greatly contributes to the development of countries of origin and countries of destination. The share of remittances in some countries’ national income has grown rather fast. These countries experienced significant qualitative changes in the livelihoods of people in terms of empowerment, entrepreneurship, and networking. The relationship between environment and migration is complex and interwoven with the other socio-economic factors. Environmental changes such as sea level rise could have a significant impact on migration. It needs to be studied in greater depth.

4. For the positive impacts of migration to be fully realized, appropriate policies and programmes need to be in place at all levels. Policy interventions may include: incorporating migration into national development planning, strengthening policy coherence between relevant Ministries, lowering the costs of migration, ensuring better working conditions for migrants, securing the portability of social benefits, promoting mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications, strengthening preparedness and awareness of migrant workers in terms of technical and vocational training and job-oriented education, encouraging productive investment of

remittances, combating racism and xenophobia against migrants and their families, and considering migration as one of the possible adaptation strategies in the context of addressing climate change, particularly in the most affected countries.

Migration and follow-up to Rio+20, post-2015 development agenda and SDGs

5. Migration is an important component of sustainable development. Migration has been absent from much of the discussion on internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference has underlined the importance of integration of three dimensions of sustainable development. It emphasized the need for a systematic consideration of population trends and projections in national, rural and urban development strategies and policies through forward-looking planning. It called for addressing the challenges associated with demographic change, including migration, and protection of human rights of all migrants. The on-going discussion on the post-2015 UN development agenda and the SDGs provides an important opportunity to put migration “on the map”. Migration should be seriously considered in these on-going processes, even though it may be difficult to specify measurable targets and goals for migration stocks and flows.

Migration and science and technology development

6. There is a strong linkage between migration and science and technology development. Migration helps “brain circulation” which has two-way impacts. While migrants with skills help dissemination of knowledge and expertise in countries of destination, countries of destination also help migrants to gain better education and new ideas. Some of these migrants have become entrepreneurs after coming back to their home countries. The wide use of new communication tools, such as Skype and broad band internet, in the migrants’ community also contribute to the promotion and development of these new tools and technology. Cooperation should be enhanced in order to tackle the challenge of “brain drain” and to promote “brain circulation”.

Protection of refugees displaced by natural disasters

7. Climate change and natural disasters can be a driver of migration. Some studies suggest that more people have been displaced by natural disasters in recent years than previously. Most people who are displaced in response to extreme weather conditions remain within their country. Persons who flee across international borders in response to natural disasters are not covered by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Nansen Initiative, launched in October 2012 by Norway and Switzerland, with the support of UNHCR, aims to address this legal and protection gap for people displaced across borders owing to environmental change and extreme weather events.

Cooperation on migration at all levels

8. Ensuring a safe and orderly channel for population movement and mobility is still a challenge. What is needed is putting in place policies, ensuring participation of all relevant actors as well as forming partnerships that can benefit the country of origin as well as the country of destination.

9. Some regions, such South Asia, have started regional consultative processes and cooperation on migration. It is important to learn how other regional and sub-regional groups are working on mobility.

10. Issues related to regional cooperation on migration would be: how the countries from the same region and outside partners complement national efforts in tapping benefits from migration, particularly given that some countries in the region are least developed countries and vulnerable to extreme weather events. It might be interesting for countries in the same region to consider promoting circular migration through some institutional arrangements. Dialogues, cooperation and coordination should be strengthened between countries of origin and countries of destination.

11. Cooperation on migration should be inclusive. Civil society, academia, the private sector and all other stakeholders should be part of the efforts. Partnerships should be strengthened in order to ensure broad participation and effective and improved migration policy.
