

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/WG.5/7
9 September 2011
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

REPORT

**WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE BETWEEN ESCWA AND ESCAP
COUNTRIES ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
BEIRUT, 28-30 JUNE 2011**

Summary

The Population and Social Development Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Social Policy Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) jointly organized the Workshop on Strengthening Dialogue Between ESCWA and ESCAP Countries on International Migration and Development in Beirut from 28-30 June 2011. The Workshop, which brought together policymakers and independent experts, was part of a two-year Development Account project entitled “Strengthening National Capacities to Deal with International Migration: Maximizing Development Benefits and Minimizing Negative Impacts”. This report provides a summary of the papers presented and discussed during the Workshop, a summary of the panel discussion on national experience, and the findings and recommendations of the Workshop.

The Workshop was organized around four components: (a) understanding the key trends of migration between countries of the ESCWA and ESCAP regions; (b) managing migration between the countries of the regions while protecting migrants; (c) assessing migration between ESCAP and ESCWA member countries from a gender perspective; and (d) sharing national experience and good practice related to the management of international migration and the protection of migrants.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-4	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	5-19	3
A. Conclusions.....	6-15	3
B. Recommendations	16-19	4
II. ISSUES CONSIDERED	20-62	5
A. Key trends and challenges related to international migration and development.....	21-30	5
B. Managing international migration while protecting migrants.....	31-41	7
C. Assessing migration from a gender perspective	42-49	9
D. Sharing national experience and good practice related to the management of international migration and the protection of migrants	50-61	10
E. Working groups: preparing the agenda for future interregional dialogue.....	62	13
III. ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP	63-70	13
A. Venue and date.....	63	13
B. Opening.....	64-69	13
C. Participants.....	70	14
<i>Annex.</i> List of participants.....		15

Introduction

1. The Population and Social Development Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Social Policy Section of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) jointly organized a Workshop on Strengthening Dialogue Between ESCWA and ESCAP Countries on International Migration and Development in Beirut from 28-30 June 2011.
2. The Workshop was held as part of the two-year Development Account (DA) project entitled “Strengthening National Capacities to Deal with International Migration: Maximizing Development Benefits and Minimizing Negative Impacts”. In line with the objectives of the project, the Workshop aimed to: (a) enhance national-level skills and capacity to design and implement policies and programmes which maximise the gains and minimize the challenges of international migration for development, manage labour migration from the perspective of countries of origin and destination, and increase understanding of the policy options that could be taken to manage international migration to maximize its positive impact on development while benefiting migrant workers; and (b) develop recommendations to feed into future international consultative processes on migration, and contribute to increasing the availability of data and information on international migration.
3. The Workshop therefore addressed issues of migration and protection, migration and gender, and interregional cooperation. It provided participants with the opportunity to understand the current situation in relation to migration between countries of the ESCAP and ESCWA regions, discuss activities within the framework of global best practice, and consider how cooperation on migration issues could be maximized for the benefit of all concerned.
4. In particular, the Workshop focused on national experience and discussed ways forward in terms of (a) identifying areas of concern for countries of origin and destination relating to the protection of migrants, and discussing good practice in that area; and (b) cooperation on migration management issues between countries of origin and destination.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The working papers, presentations and discussions of the Workshop highlighted a number of concerns relating to the management of migration for both ESCWA and ESCAP member countries. There was a consensus among participants on the following conclusions and recommendations.

A. CONCLUSIONS

6. Migration from the ESCAP to the ESCWA region is significant: of the 26 million migrants in the ESCWA region, between two thirds and three quarters are from ESCAP countries. This migration is generally perceived as temporary, with no expectations from Governments that migrants will remain in the country of destination permanently. Migration within and between the ESCWA and ESCAP regions reflects the importance of South-South migration in international migration.
7. Migration has the potential to bring mutual benefits to countries of destination, countries of origin and migrants themselves, yet it is not a substitute for development. Countries of destination receive workers who contribute to filling skill and labour shortages, and to economic growth and development, while the economies of countries of origin can benefit from financial remittances, transfer of skills and reduced pressure on labour markets. A successful migration experience can enable migrants themselves to increase their physical and social capital, and achieve better standards of living for themselves and their families.
8. The economic, social and cultural vulnerability of migrants remains high, due to gaps in social protection measures.

9. Consultation with and participation of civil society in the issues governing the migration process and in areas of policy dialogue is relatively weak.
10. The financial costs of migration remain relatively high compared with the average income of migrants.
11. The regulation and oversight of recruitment processes, including recruitment agencies in both countries of origin and destination, is insufficient. This leads to hardship and problems for migrants.
12. The *kafeel* system still suffers from a number of shortcomings.
13. The level of compliance with regulations and legislation governing migration has been relatively low in most countries of origin and destination. The adoption and enforcement of bilateral and multilateral agreements has also been insufficient.
14. Due to the nature of their employment, migrant domestic workers, particularly women, are vulnerable to exploitation. Domestic workers are rarely covered by national labour laws and a low value is accorded to their work. This situation is often exacerbated by the exploitation of migrant domestic workers by private recruitment agencies in both countries of origin and destination.
15. Available, accessible, timely, comparable and accurate data remain crucial for evidence-based policymaking on migration and development.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Recommendations relating to migration and development:
 - (a) Greater attention should be given to the integration of migration into development plans at all levels of government;
 - (b) Governments of countries of origin, with the active participation of migrants, should provide an enabling environment for enhanced skill acquisition, technology transfer and more productive use of remittances for development;
 - (c) Reintegration of migrants and their families should be included in the national and local development plans of countries of origin;
 - (d) There remains a need for more available, accessible, timely, comparable and accurate qualitative and quantitative data, and shared information on migrant inflows and outflows, migrant stocks and the experiences of migrants through the migration cycle.
17. Recommendations relating to the governance of labour migration:
 - (a) Governments should continue to review and assess current systems of governance and regulation of labour migration. Evidence is required on the need for reform, and which alternative systems may work better;
 - (b) The excessive cost of migration, for both migrants and their employers, requires greater attention and scrutiny. Recruitment and placement costs should be reduced in order to maximise the benefits of international migration;
 - (c) There is a need to promote transparent and effective bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding on better migration governance with an effective monitoring process.

18. Recommendations relating to the protection of migrant workers, especially female migrant workers, and the rights and obligations of migrant workers and employers:

(a) Enabling mechanisms should be put in place to enable migrants and employers to exercise their rights and obligations more easily;

(b) Employment contracts and obligations, including salaries, must be fully respected by workers and employers;

(c) Social protection mechanisms, including health care, should be extended to migrant workers to reduce their vulnerability and exclusion. Efforts should be made to enhance the portability of such protection schemes;

(d) More explicit attention needs to be given to the particular needs of female migrants and the impact of female migration on both countries of origin and destination. This is particularly relevant to the experiences of domestic workers.

19. Recommendations relating to multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation and dialogue:

(a) International and regional organizations should continue to promote mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation, ensuring the participation of countries of origin and destination;

(b) Both ESCWA and ESCAP should continue to promote dialogue and collaboration on migration in the two regions. Interregional dialogue is essential for the exchange of ideas and experiences, and ultimately for enhancing the benefits of international migration. This should be inclusive of the voices of migrants themselves, as well as civil society.

II. ISSUES CONSIDERED

20. The agenda of the Workshop comprised seven sessions. Background papers were presented which covered the international migration experience of ESCWA and ESCAP member countries.

A. KEY TRENDS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

21. The session was chaired by Mr. Ronald Skeldon, Professional Fellow, School of African and Asian Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

22. Ms. Sabine Henning, Population Affairs Officer, Migration Section, United Nations Population Division, presented a paper entitled “International Migration and Development in Asia and the Pacific: Key Issues and Recommendations for Action”. The presentation provided an overview of key trends related to migration between ESCAP and ESCWA member countries. Ms. Henning showed that there had been an overall growth in the number of migrants in Asia since 1990, with the number of migrants in ESCAP countries reaching 107 million in 2010, and with the ESCWA region hosting over 25 million. ESCWA countries were among the most important migrant-hosting countries in the world by the proportion of foreign-born in the population. Ms. Henning noted that migration in general is intraregional, and that South-South migration is an important phenomenon. Asian migrant stocks are particular, however, in that they are heavily male-dominated, with a high representation of working-age men in particular.

23. Ms. Henning highlighted the importance of remittances to both ESCWA and ESCAP member countries, as they represented a high proportion of the gross domestic product in many Asian countries. She showed that these remittances have been recovering from the decrease suffered during the global economic crisis and in many cases already exceeded pre-crisis levels.

24. Ms. Henning also discussed the level of ratification of international instruments relating to migration, noting that progress in this area had been uneven, and that many ESCWA and ESCAP member countries had not ratified key conventions. She also outlined the increase in international meetings on the subject of migration and development since 2006, including the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the Global Forums on Migration and Development. She also explored the importance of data, showing that Asian countries could do more to cover migrants in their censuses, suggesting methods to improve the coverage of migration in these processes and presenting the Global Migration Database of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as a tool for research. She concluded by arguing for the need for greater evidence, engagement, cooperation and capacity-building in the field of migration.

25. Mr. Paulo Saad, Chief, Population and Development Area, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) gave a presentation entitled “International Migration: An Overview of the Main Findings from the Latin American and Caribbean Region”. He outlined the objectives of the DA project entitled “Strengthening National Capacities to Deal with International Migration: Maximizing Development Benefits and Minimizing Negative Impact”, and discussed the findings of the ECLAC regional workshop “Looking Towards the Future: New Trends, Issues and Approaches” and the publication *International Migration in Latin American and the Caribbean: New Trends and Approaches*, produced by ECLAC within the framework of the project. Mr Saad noted that their research and discussion had found that Latin American migrants in Spain and the United States of America faced specific challenges, but they also contributed to demographic, social and economic reproduction, to the benefit of their countries of destination. Mr. Saad also outlined future work within the framework of the project, including an interregional workshop covering the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe and ECLAC; the consolidation of regional information systems developed under the project; the final workshop to be held under the project; and the dissemination of the project outcomes.

26. Mr. Paul Tacon, Associate Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, ESCWA, presented the United Nations DA project “International Migration: An Overview of the Main Findings from the ESCWA Region”. He discussed the activities carried out by ESCWA on international migration and development, and presented a regional study entitled *International Migration Challenges in the Arab Mashreq and the GCC Countries*, and the regional workshop “International Migration in the Arab Region: Integrating International Migration into Development Strategies”. He noted that the project had found that there was significant potential for migration to contribute to development in the region, although challenges remained. He also discussed the positive recommendations that had come from those activities, as well as the implications for dialogue with ESCAP member countries. In particular, he noted the importance given to dialogue by ESCWA member countries, their understanding of the importance of migration for development, their concern for the rights of migrants and their desire to achieve the best possible outcomes for all concerned by the process.

27. Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, ESCAP, discussed the United Nations DA project “International Migration: Main Findings from the ESCAP Region”. She noted the achievements of the project to date in the ESCAP region, such as the research and enhanced data collection, as well as the findings of the *project, which include the need for policy coherence, and attention to the migration of women, recruitment costs and protection*. She identified a number of areas for potential interregional cooperation and dialogue, such as discussing the *Kafala* system, the rights of domestic workers and the social protection of migrants.

28. The discussant, Mr. Ibrahim Awad, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo, opened up a general discussion on the session papers. He proceeded by clarifying that international migration is not only a movement from South to North, from developing to industrialized countries, but also happens to a significant extent between and among developing countries. Indeed, levels of interregional and intraregional migration within Asia are greater than migration out of Asia, and the same applies to international migration within Africa. South-South migration has thus become one of the most important migration streams globally. He added that some 50 per cent of international migrants

are migrant workers and almost 40 per cent are families of those migrant workers, such that their migration makes a social, economic and demographic contribution to development in both countries of origin and destination.

29. Mr. Awad emphasized that trans-border issues can only be addressed if there is international cooperation. Furthermore, migration and development issues cannot be addressed in isolation of protection and rights issues, as underlined by the DA project on international migration. The protection of the rights of international migrants is necessary to ensure the contribution of migration to development in both countries of origin and destination. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the Global Forum on Migration and Development should address the issue of protecting the rights of international migrants. Where the nation State is the primary actor, there is a need to look at what is happening within it in order to protect migrants and benefit from these new international citizens. The economic activities of the world have become increasingly globalized. The migrant workers are the beginning of “global citizens” and their needs should be addressed through a “global system”.

30. In the discussions that followed, participants raised issues relating to demographic trends and the future of interregional migration, as well as the impact of climate change on migration. It was noted that data in key areas were lacking, not only in relation to the number of people leaving their countries of origin, but also relating to those returning. The question of reform was also raised, with the example of the reform of the temporary work permit system of the Republic of Korea being highlighted in particular.

B. MANAGING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION WHILE PROTECTING MIGRANTS

31. The Session was chaired by Mr. Irudaya Rajan, Professor, Research Unit on International Migration, Center for Development Studies, Kerala, India.

32. Mr. Federico Neto, Director, Social Development Division, ESCWA, gave a presentation entitled “The Relationship Between Migration, Development and Social Protection”, which outlined the opportunities and challenges for development through international migration. These include the transfer of workforce, knowledge and funds. Mr. Neto highlighted the “triple-win-approach”, through which both countries of origin and destination, as well as migrants themselves, can benefit from international migration. He identified vulnerabilities faced by migrants and proposed various types of social protection measures that could be introduced to address them. He outlined some of the existing social protection measures extended to migrants in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) before concluding his presentation with a set of recommendations on ways in which social protection for migrant workers could be strengthened.

33. Ms. Nicola Piper, Research Fellow, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute for Socio-cultural Research, Freiburg, Germany, gave a presentation entitled “Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers from South Asia: Key Issues”, in which she provided an overview of the human rights framework underlying international migration. She identified the specific features of international migration within South Asia, as well as from South Asia to the GCC countries, and considered the specific vulnerabilities and human rights issues arising from the migration process. The employer-tied work permit system, the low skill profile of migrants, the involvement of private recruitment agencies and the high share of female migrants from certain countries of origin were highlighted as some of the key issues. Ms. Piper concluded her presentation by setting out some of the existing approaches of rights-based migration governance.

34. A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion, in particular pertaining to the lack of regulation of private recruitment agencies and the need to extend social protection to migrant workers and to families left behind in the country of origin. The low educational level of many migrant workers, especially domestic workers, often results in distorted expectations and increases their vulnerability. The instrumental role of civil society in protecting the rights of migrant workers was emphasized and the need for adequate pre-departure training and ensuring that future employers receive accurate information about workers was raised. The importance of bilateral memoranda of understanding or adequate regulation to oversee the

migration process was also highlighted, and the potential role of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was discussed.

35. Ms. Hélène Harroff-Tavel, Associate Expert, International Labour Organization, gave a presentation entitled “The Implications of the Recent Reform of the Sponsorship System: Challenges and Opportunities”. After providing an overview of the *Kafala* system (the system which requires migrant workers to have a local sponsor, binding them to their employers and preventing them from changing jobs or leaving the country), Ms. Harroff-Tavel outlined a number of key challenges facing the system. She also provided an overview of the reforms undertaken to date, noting that the likelihood of comprehensive reforms being undertaken was low, although she highlighted a number of encouraging changes in certain ESCWA member countries. She concluded her presentation by proposing an alternative to the *Kafala* system.

36. Ms. Tasneem Siddiqui, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, gave a presentation entitled “Recruitment Costs in Bangladesh: Challenges of Governing International Migration in Countries of Origin”. She provided an outline of recent trends in international migration from Bangladesh to Western Asia and highlighted the significance of remittances to the Bangladeshi economy. She argued that the recruitment of migrant workers should be managed by the Government, yet noted that over time the role of private recruitment agencies had increased and that approximately half the cost of recruitment is now generated by fees in the country of origin. She explained that the cost of migration was different for each country of destination and was dependent on a number of factors, including the level of skill of migrants. She outlined the average length of time that migrants have to work to recover the cost of migration and explained that they often had to take loans from a number of different sources to cover the cost. She also noted that the practice of visa trading in countries of destination also posed a challenge in governing international migration.

37. Mr. William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum Asia, gave a presentation entitled “The Role of Civil Society in the Protection of Migrant Workers”. He explained that Migrant Forum Asia is a regional network of non-governmental organizations committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers. He emphasized the role that civil society can play in providing support to protect the rights of migrant workers, such as providing shelter for undocumented migrant workers. Having explained that civil society is playing an increasing role in the Global Forum on Migration and Development, he did, however, question the level of commitment shown to the concerns raised by civil society organizations. Furthermore, he noted that while there was agreement on the involvement of civil society in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, to date no mechanism to ensure such involvement had been established. He identified the following key areas for the involvement of civil society at the regional level: (a) issues related to the *Kafala* system; (b) access to justice systems; (c) unemployment of undocumented migrant workers; and (d) access to detention centres and prisons for Embassy and Consular officials.

38. The discussant, Mr. Ahmed Ghoneim, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Cairo, responded to the presentation by highlighting additional issues related to the reform of the *Kafala* system, such as the unofficial income streams generated by the system through visa trading, as well as the need for information on alternatives to the system. He also questioned whether the essence of the problem does in

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