



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

International Organization for Migration

International Dialogue on Migration 2011

INTERSESSIONAL WORKSHOP ON ECONOMIC CYCLES, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND MIGRATION

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

On 12 and 13 September 2011, IOM held a workshop on “Economic Cycles, Demographic Change and Migration” in Geneva, Switzerland as part of its annual International Dialogue on Migration (IDM).¹ The IOM membership had selected this workshop topic as part of the 2011 IDM theme, *The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change*. The workshop was attended by government representatives from around the world, non-governmental and international organizations, academics and other experts.

A guiding theme of the workshop was the notion that migration is inevitable and essential for economic growth and competitiveness given the global and regional labour market and demographic trends. Effective governance of migration in this context must not only reconcile short- and long-term priorities, but also balance the interests, needs and rights of migrants, countries of origin, and countries of destination. The workshop identified some of the main areas where governments and institutions may need to reinforce their capacities to manage the interfaces between economic cycles, demographic changes and human mobility to maximize benefits for economies and societies. IOM and other relevant international organizations will play their role in accompanying this process.

Based on the discussions that took place during the event, this document provides a summary of the dialogue organized in two main sections, first, main messages and second, recommendations for action and priority areas for capacity building.

¹ The workshop background paper and other conference material can be obtained from www.iom.int/idmeconomiccycles

MAIN MESSAGES

1. Migration is a structural force for global economic growth and development and it is linked to economic cycles and demographic change, but it is not the only factor in the equation.

- Migration flows are closely tied to economic conditions, and thus also subject to cycles of economic boom and bust. Yet, the workshop participants observed, economic fluctuations do not generally change fundamental conditions relating to labour market trends, labour force size and composition, and general demographic parameters, such as ageing.
- Likewise, migration should not be considered the sole cause of or solution to skill shortages. Participants discussed this issue in relation to the health care sector, where deficits in the countries of origin of migrant health workers are the result of a complex set of factors that goes well beyond migration.
- A recurrent theme of the workshop was that migration is not “a cure-all solution”, but one element in a comprehensive policy mix.

2. Economic cycles and demographic trends are subject to different time scales, drivers, and degrees of certainty and predictability; complicating the harmonization of these parameters with migration policy.

- Much of the discussion revolved around the labour market, where the interactions between economic fluctuations and demographic trends are most evident. Understanding of labour market dynamics in the context of economic cycles and demographic change will most likely always remain imperfect. Nevertheless, more systematic efforts are needed to analyse short-term and long-term labour market needs and better integrate the conclusions with labour migration policies.

3. The recent global economic crisis affected migrants and societies, but overall migration and remittances flows proved resilient.

- While the economic crisis acted as a “stress test” for migration policy, it also demonstrated the resilience of migration to crisis, as many participants reported, for example, that their countries did not see a significant drop in migration flows during the crisis.
- The 2008-2009 global economic crisis also showed that migrants tend to be more vulnerable than native workers to the effects of economic recession. This vulnerability should be considered in social protection policies, in particular since unemployment can often translate into an irregular legal status for migrants.

4. A paradigm shift is underway in migration policy priorities, as more and more countries are exploring ways to attract skilled labour and many are simultaneously becoming places of origin, transit and destination for migration flows.

- It emerged from the debates that human capital is highly valued in the global economy, marked by growing competition for talents among developed countries and emerging markets. However, there was also a strong realization that unilateral attempts at managing a globalized labour market are likely to have their limitations.

- At the same time, many countries are seeing a change in their migration patterns: for instance, they are shifting from being origin countries to being destination countries or realizing that, while still sending migrant labour, they also need to attract skills and workers.
 - While much discussion was devoted to mobility of the highly qualified, there was also acknowledgement that labour markets need skills at all levels and that the demand for high and less skilled labour is linked.
- 5. The notion of governance of international migration remains debated, but the past decade has witnessed significant, if incremental steps towards more coherent and collaborative approaches to migration and greater recognition of common interests.**
- Different conceptualizations of governance were put forward: some focused on results, such as making migration more orderly, fair and beneficial; while other proposals focused on the process, such as creating trust and networks. Migration governance may be seen as a set of collaborative practices to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative repercussions of migration. In general, participants were in favour of pragmatic approaches, achievable goals, more dialogue and partnership.
 - Participants highlighted different partnership models, including regional and bilateral approaches, while also contemplating new ways of connecting government, civil society and private sector stakeholders.
 - During the discussions, migrants and migrant networks, the private sector and youth were identified as some of the most important actors and “change agents” whose views must be taken into account.
- 6. Circular and temporary migration bears significant potential both for migrants, countries and labour markets, but structural issues cannot be solved by temporary means.**
- Participants raised the issue of definitions, costs and benefits of circular, temporary and seasonal migration. The link between circulation and the (regional) free movement of people received particular attention.
 - The discussions underlined that temporary and circular migration, and migration of the highly skilled, requires a broader policy framework which takes into account issues such as the migrant’s family situation, taxation, social security and portability of benefits.
- 7. Migration brings many economic benefits, but the human and social dimension of migration is paramount.**
- Interventions emphasized the positive roles of migrants and migration, in particular in the recovery process following economic recession. Migrants also possess specific skills and attributes which are prized in modern labour markets, for instance international work experience, language skills and adaptability.
 - However, migrants are not just workers, but human beings with rights and aspirations. In addition, migration also has social, cultural and political dimensions and consequences. Public perceptions of migrants and migration need to receive focused policy attention, especially as hostility and rejection of migrants tend to be on the rise during times of economic strain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance capacities in collecting labour market information and conducting evidence-based labour market assessments and forecasts, as well as in assessing recruitment systems;
2. Support the human capital development of migrant labour, in origin and destination countries, including through investments in training and education, employment creation and skills matching;
3. Reduce brain waste by promoting the equivalence of degrees, the recognition of credentials, and licensing;
4. Strengthening the capacities in countries of origin to monitor the employment situation and potential labour market opportunities for their nationals abroad, as well as developing measures to cope with their return during times of crisis;
5. Build strategies to engage with the private sector and employers, for example in identifying labour market opportunities and skills needs, recognizing foreign qualifications, and designing and running recruitment processes;
6. Support migration solutions for countries with youthful population and high levels of skills;
7. Foster potential for circulation and skill exchange, including through appropriate visa, admission and permit schemes that facilitate circulation, through temporary return of qualified nationals in specific sectors, and through partnerships between countries or institutions;
8. Monitor and evaluate the labour market outcomes for migrants and different migrant groups in a systematic fashion, and identify barriers to effective labour market integration;
9. Devote special attention to the labour market integration of “non-economic migrants”, such as accompanying family members and humanitarian entrants, and migrants already present in the country;
10. Pay attention to gender specificities relating to labour migration, employment, family policies and differentiated vulnerabilities during economic downturn;
11. Embed migration as one element in a broader population policy, including gender-specific policies and provisions for families and children;
12. Promote the sharing of best practices and interstate cooperation at bilateral, regional and global levels and continue the conversation with all actors, working towards humane, collaborative and effective governance of international mobility.

These recommendations emerged from the discussion and represent areas in which governments may need to enhance their capacities – including by building knowledge and appropriate data; by tightening institutional coherence between different governmental bodies; by improving coherence between different but overlapping policy domains; by investing human and financial resources; and by creating structures for consultation and cooperation with others.

Geneva, 13 September 2011