



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA)

between the International Organization for Migration (IOM)
and
the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Background

In **December 2000**, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) inaugurated a Regional Consultative Process (RCP) with the major aim of accelerating the regional integration process and addressing problematic migration issues in a regional forum.

The Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA) process was specifically designed to encourage ECOWAS Member States to discuss common migration issues and concerns in a regional context, for which immediate solutions may not be forthcoming on a national level.

MIDWA addresses five key areas:

1. Promotion of peace and stability in West Africa and protection of migrants' rights;
2. Contribution of migrants to the development of their country of origin;
3. Poverty alleviation in emigration areas;
4. Information, sensitization and research on the different aspects of international migration in West Africa;
5. Intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation.

History of activities

A set of symposia, seminars, conferences and working groups have emerged from the MIDWA process in order to meet the objectives of RCP in West Africa.

Migration management

The MIDWA mechanism was launched by the *International Seminar on Migration Policies in West Africa* (**December 2001**) and the *Workshop on International Migration in West Africa: concepts, data collection and legislation* (**October 2002**), which followed the adoption of the RCP.

From 14 to 16 **November 2005**, IOM organized a workshop in Abuja (Nigeria) in an effort to strengthen capacity to manage migration within the region and to revitalize the MIDWA process as a RCP.

Building on the recommendations of participating States, IOM, in partnership with ECOWAS, organized an expert level meeting in **May/June 2006** with technical representatives from various ministries concerned with migration on the following topics:

- a) irregular migration within and outside West Africa;
- b) return, readmission and reintegration of migrants.

In **February 2007**, IOM organized another MIDWA workshop, focusing on irregular and return migration, with the objective of strengthening the migration management capacities of West African States through continued dialogue and capacity building on migration among ECOWAS Member States. On this occasion, particular attention was dedicated to including the importance of raising public awareness on these issues, and obtaining a commitment to elaborating (common) consistent regional and national information tools/campaigns.

In **April and May 2007**, Experts meetings were organized in order to define a Common Approach on Migration, to be later presented to the ECOWAS Head of States in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in January 2008. Main migratory trends and issues were discussed, in order to provide recommendations on the promotion of free movement within the ECOWAS zone; policy harmonization; the protection of the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; the management of regular migration, as well as the gender dimension of migration.

Trafficking in persons

IOM seeks to support and strengthen ECOWAS initiatives against trafficking in persons, which take place in the framework of regional political and legal declarations launched by the December 2001 ECOWAS Political Declaration and Regional Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons. In July 2006, ECOWAS joined forces with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to develop greater interregional cooperation and provide governments with tools to further address the issue of trafficking in persons. A joint plan of action and a multilateral agreement on cooperation were signed.

Within the MIDWA framework, IOM participates in the formulation of regional policies on counter trafficking through technical contributions to ECOWAS processes and initiatives, such as presentations at conferences and seminars. Specific support is extended to the TIP Unit **since 2008** for the preparation of an ECOWAS handbook on cooperation and networking in counter trafficking.

Migration and development

In **August 2006**, a workshop on migration, development and poverty reduction was organized in Dakar for West and Central African countries, in response to capacity building needs in human resource development, while taking into consideration the importance of the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development.

In **March 2008**, IOM organized a *Regional Workshop on Migration and Economic Development in Africa*, in close cooperation with the Trust Africa Foundation and IDEP, in order to continue the efforts undertaken in coordination with other regional processes in Africa.

New challenges: mixed migration flows

In **November 2008**, an International Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration was held in cooperation with UNHCR and the OHCHR. The Conference gathered high-level representatives of ECOWAS and its Member States, civil society and international experts, and aimed to contribute to the debate on the realities of migration in West Africa. The meeting, which was held in Dakar (Senegal), identified a series of eight thematic areas of discussion.

Future developments

International Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration will be followed by several workshops during **2009**, focusing on various issues related to the protection of migrants in view of developing improved migration management schemes, focusing mainly on counter trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, labour migration and youth employment, as well as the link between migration and development.

Regular consultations between ECOWAS, its Member States and IOM confirm their interest and commitment to introduce the Common Approach on Migration as a new framework for further implementation of the MIDWA process. IOM suggests the following steps for implementation:

- Integrate MIDWA into an Action Plan that would operationalize the Ouagadougou Common Declaration (2008);
- In accordance with the timeline set in action plans, and in close coordination with ECOWAS ,organize a regional meeting to review the MIDWA in the framework of the Common Approach, and define the MIDWA agenda in a way consistent with the new migration policy and the institutional framework for implementation established by ECOWAS and its Member States.

The objective of this approach is to map MIDWA activities for an initial period of five years (2009-2014).

Technical assistance from IOM through the establishment of a MIDWA Secretariat within the ECOWAS Department of the Free Movement of Persons would promote and support the development, coordination, implementation and monitoring of regional and national projects.