



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
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International Dialogue on Migration 2011  
The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change

**Intersessional Workshop**  
**Economic Cycles, Demographic Change and Migration**  
**12 and 13 September 2012**

Laura Thompson  
Deputy Director General  
Introductory Remarks

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Officials,  
Members of the United Nations Family,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to this workshop, the second in this year's International Dialogue on Migration, on "Economic cycles, demographic change and migration".

This workshop has set itself an ambitious twin goal: to understand the relationship between migration and economic cycles, on the one hand, and between migration and demographic change, on the other hand, and to examine how we can reconcile these two forces in our migration policies.

The topic is timely: what started out as a financial crisis in 2008/09 and soon developed into a full-blown economic recession continues to send shockwaves to this day. The crisis brought global corporations to their knees, it ruined small businesses, and set unemployment soaring. But it did not affect all countries equally. The emerging markets escaped relatively unscathed and eventually spearheaded economic recovery.

The crisis sparked a range of fears concerning migrants and migration: fears of intensified irregular migration; fears of mass return; fears of a major slump in remittances. As IOM's 2010 World Migration Report found, however, the impacts we saw were rather more complex.

We could concentrate our analysis on pure economics: demand and supply, factors of production, revenues. However, this would mean missing the human impact of the crisis: migrants were some of the worst affected groups: the last to be hired, they were often the first to be fired. Unemployment rates among migrants were generally several times higher than those of native workers. Many slid into irregularity. In some parts of the world, migrants' families experienced a drop in remittance receipts. And – perhaps most damaging to social peace and stability – migrants were once again blamed for economic woes, further hardening public attitudes towards migrants.

While there were some protectionist knee-jerk reactions and “closed border” policies in response to the crisis, overall, governments refrained from attempts to “shut down” international migration flows. Since the beginning of the crisis IOM and others have stressed: just as migration has energized the global economy and national labour markets in the past, migrants are also part of the economic recovery process now.

As we celebrate IOM’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, it is fitting to look to the future – which is what the IDM 2011 intends to do, following the theme of the World Migration Report “The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change”: what can we learn from the past to manage future migration?

This is not the first large scale economic crisis nor will it be the last. Inevitably, periods of boom and bust will continue to mark the global economy. Should we orient our migration policies along these short- to medium term cycles? And if so, how?

This workshop proposes to look further than the cyclical behaviour of our economies. Global migration is also embedded in a context of longer-term demographic disparities: populations in some regions are very youthful and continue to grow rapidly, while other parts of the world are witnessing demographic ageing and decline.

Labour markets represent the interface between demographic change and economic cycles. Simply put, whether a population is predominantly young or predominantly “grey” also determines who works (or is looking for work) and who doesn’t.

Of course, migration is just one among many factors influencing population patterns, labour market structures and the availability of skills. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of ageing populations here and youthful societies there, skills shortages here and labour surplus there, drives migration already today. The mobility of skills, talent and labour is already a fact and a necessity, but as these trends continue, we will see more of it.

This workshop aims to contribute to the debate of how to govern this much-needed mobility in fair and equitable ways, respectful of the rights of migrants and of the labour market and development needs of countries of origin and destination.

The fundamental questions of this workshop are: What have we learned from the last crisis about our migration policy responses to economic downturn? Where does migration fit in the demographic question? How can we reconcile the demands that economic cycles place on labour markets with larger demographic parameters in migration policies? How can we best govern migration to enhance economic growth and human development?

I hope that the discussions during the next two days will allow you to respond some of these questions.

To conclude, let me reiterate a warm welcome to you all. It is a pleasure to see such an impressive line-up of delegations and speakers. Unfortunately my schedule does not allow me to stay for the discussions, but I will join you again tomorrow afternoon and, for now, wish you a successful workshop.