IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND MIXED FLOWS: IOM’S APPROACH
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper builds on the discussion of the “Challenges of Irregular Migration: Addressing Mixed Migration Flows” at the Ninety-sixth Session of the IOM Council in December 2008.1 While the 2008 Discussion Note focused on conceptual issues relating to mixed migratory movements, this paper articulates IOM’s approach in terms of the direct assistance it provides, in collaboration with a range of partners, to particularly vulnerable groups of migrants involved in such movements, and its support and services for government counterparts and other stakeholders.

2. As underscored in 2008, responses to irregular migration and mixed flows must be delivered in the context of a comprehensive approach to migration management, simultaneously taking account of the legitimate sovereign authority of States and the fundamental human rights of migrants. It is also essential to consider the whole “migratory life-cycle” from pre-departure, to transit, arrival, post-arrival and return. Indeed, proactive measures initiated at the pre-departure phase can help minimize many of the abusive elements of mixed migratory movements.

II. UNDERSTANDING MIXED FLOWS

3. Mixed flows are defined by IOM as “complex population movements including refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants”.2 In essence, mixed flows concern irregular movements, frequently involving transit migration, where persons move without the requisite documentation, crossing borders and arriving at their destination in an unauthorized manner. Such movements occur in all parts of the world and also attract considerable public attention, especially when tragedies occur, because of the dangerous conditions migrants face while in transit, at sea or in border areas. Irregular mixed migration flows present particular challenges to States not only because they infringe on their sovereign prerogative to determine which non-nationals may enter their territory and under what conditions, but also because the persons involved in these movements are more likely to be subject to hardship, human rights violations and discrimination, and thus require special and individualized assistance.

4. Considerable attention is devoted to asylum-seekers and refugees in mixed flows due to the established international legal principles of non-refoulement and refugee protection, but mixed flows also comprise diverse groups of other migrants who may be particularly vulnerable: victims of trafficking, smuggled migrants, stranded migrants, unaccompanied (and separated) minors, those subject to violence (including gender-based violence) and psychological distress and trauma during the migration process, vulnerable individuals such as pregnant women, children and the elderly, and migrants detained in transit or upon arrival. In addition, mixed flows may include migrant workers, cross-border traders and migrants moving for environmental reasons. While this Note addresses irregular migration and mixed flows, irregularity is not necessarily the defining feature of all of the above categories of vulnerable migrants. For example, many victims of trafficking enter a country lawfully, as do men and women migrant workers and cross-border traders. Many migrants may also at one and the same time fall into two or several of these categories.
5. Complex movements have attracted the interest of and raised concern among governments and various international organizations with different mandates regarding mobile populations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) adopted a 10-point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration which it revised in January 2007. The Plan identifies “protection gaps” in respect of refugees and “other persons of concern” to UNHCR at various stages of the mixed migratory movement. However, the proportion of asylum-seekers and refugees (those in so-called “secondary movements” who move from the first country of asylum to another country) varies depending on the mixed flow in question, across regions and also within the same region. For example, according to UNHCR, considerably more asylum-seekers and refugees have been identified among the “boat people” crossing the Mediterranean to Malta and the Italian island of Lampedusa than among those arriving on the shores of the Canary Islands. Interestingly, even those who obtain the official “status” of asylum-seeker granted by the authorities of some destination countries do not necessarily conduct themselves as such. For example, an April 2009 IOM assessment of Zimbabweans crossing the border into South Africa found that persons granted “asylum permits” by the authorities nonetheless continued to travel back and forth freely across the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe.

6. After the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in November 2007, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) embarked on a strategic initiative in humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants, irrespective of their legal status, with a view to adopting a global policy on migration for its National Societies. In July 2008, it established a new office of the Special Representative for Migration. Vulnerable migrants in mixed flows have also attracted the concern of regional organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the African Union, as well as of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

7. Some commentators hold that the international community is lacking a coherent legal framework to address such movements effectively and that therefore steps should be taken to develop one or at least consolidate existing applicable norms in a single authoritative document. One such proposal calls for the formulation of a “soft law” framework protecting vulnerable groups of irregular migrants, including a mechanism to respond adequately to their needs and coordinate collaboration among relevant international organizations and other stakeholders.

III. IOM’S APPROACH

8. IOM’s mandate to address irregular migration and mixed flows is grounded in its Constitution and the IOM strategy adopted by the membership in 2007. As IOM observed in its 2008 Discussion Note, the IOM Constitution recognizes in its Preamble that “international migration also includes that of refugees, displaced persons and other individuals compelled to leave their homelands, and who are in need of international migration services”. The IOM strategy underlines the need to support “States, migrants and communities in addressing the challenges of irregular migration” and “to provide migration services in other emergency or post-crisis situations as appropriate and as relates to the needs of individuals, thereby contributing to their protection”. Given this normative framework, the Organization, in collaboration with its partners, (1) directly assists particularly vulnerable migrants in situations of mixed flows and (2) provides support and services to governments and other relevant actors in their response to the challenges posed by such movements. In doing so, IOM endeavours to ensure that the support and services provided are in conformity with a
comprehensive approach to migration management, which, while addressing immediate needs, also takes account of the imperative to move towards more holistic solutions. The remainder of this Discussion Note discusses examples of IOM’s work in this field.

A. Directly assisting vulnerable migrants

9. IOM develops and implements a wide range of programmes and projects to identify the specific needs of vulnerable migrants and provide them with individualized assistance and protection in accordance with fundamental human rights principles. IOM’s Global Emergency Fund provides assistance, on a case-by-case basis, to trafficked men, women and children stranded outside their home countries and in need of immediate assistance for voluntary return. Assistance includes the provision of a range of services (e.g. shelter, counselling, medical care, facilitating health referrals) in the country of destination and thus contributes to the migrants’ immediate protection, voluntary return and reintegration in the country of origin.\[1]

10. Facilitating appropriate health care for individual migrants (primarily those in detention) as a fundamental human right at the European Union’s external Eastern European border is one of the objectives of the PHBLM (Public Health Safety Alongside the New Eastern European Border Line) project (2007-2009) implemented by IOM in collaboration with governments in the region and partners. The project also aims to build the capacity of border management and public health staff, and to minimize public health risks.\[12] With regard to providing assistance to migrants in detention, IOM Lisbon collaborates with the Government of Portugal and the Jesuit Refugee Service to monitor conditions in closed detention centres in which arriving irregular migrants may also be temporarily held until their situation is verified.

B. Helping to develop policy, legislation and programmes

11. It is vital that the provision of assistance and protection to migrants in accordance with their specific needs takes place within a rule-of-law framework under which coherent policy, legislation and programmes can be formulated. Whereas international and regional human rights, refugee, criminal and labour law\[13] provide a sound base for the development, establishment and strengthening of existing legal frameworks at the national (and regional) level,\[14] important challenges nonetheless remain in effectively applying these standards in practice to the complex migration management situations posed by irregular migration and mixed flows. Equality and non-discrimination are the linchpins of any rule-of-law framework; IOM works with governments and other stakeholders in various parts of the world to counter discrimination and xenophobia against migrants. For example, in Ukraine, the Diversity Initiative has succeeded in fostering more positive attitudes towards the migrant community and supports the government, together with its counterparts, in its activities encouraging intercultural dialogue and to develop policy and legislation.\[15] Further, IOM’s Regional Office in Pretoria manages the project “Counter-xenophobia Initiative for South Africa: Tolerance, Integration, Diversity”, which inter alia resulted in the publication of a landmark, independent research study investigating the triggers and factors that resulted in existing xenophobic attitudes being transformed into actual violence against migrants in that country in May 2008.\[16]

12. With a view to placing the mixed flows phenomenon in the broader context of comprehensive migration management, policy initiatives are also needed to support programmes facilitating and securing more avenues for safe and regular migration in all skills
categories. IOM’s 2008 *World Migration Report* highlights that in many parts of the world the demand for low and semi-skilled work is frequently being met in practice by irregular or undocumented migrants, and that national labour migration policies need to take account of this demand and devise means to address it through regular channels.\(^\text{17}\)

C. **Training government officials and other pertinent stakeholders**

13. The formulation of coherent policy and the development of appropriate legislation and programmes, however laudable and innovative, cannot succeed alone. Complementary capacity-building activities are essential. In particular, government officials have to be trained so as to raise their awareness of the complexity of mixed migratory movements and enable them to identify not only possible asylum-seekers and refugees through, for example, protection-sensitive border procedures, but also the needs of particularly vulnerable migrants such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied (and separated) minors and those who have been subjected to gender-based violence. IOM carries out training activities in various parts of the world in the fields of border management, international migration law and counter-trafficking,\(^\text{18}\) in the context of which the complexities and challenges posed by mixed migratory movements are addressed and the human rights and needs of migrants can be properly identified. IOM capacity-building activities, including training, also target other stakeholders, such as the private sector and civil society groups. In India, for example, IOM Hyderabad engages private sector companies to train and create opportunities for trafficked persons, while in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya such activities are aimed at civil society and address counter-trafficking, mixed flows and the provision of first assistance.

14. In addition to capacity-building activities focused on particularly vulnerable groups of migrants, IOM’s commitment to a comprehensive migration management approach is evident in the development, in collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of comprehensive training modules on labour migration that aim to help policymakers develop coherent policies, including on more regular modes of migration for employment.

15. The recent establishment of research and training centres at the request of and in collaboration with the Governments of the United Republic of Tanzania (the African Capacity-building Centre in Moshi) and the Republic of Korea (the Migration Research and Training Centre in Seoul) are examples of institutionalized initiatives in this area that have the added value of providing training to officials from the relevant region, thus enabling them to learn from each other’s experiences and share good practices.

D. **Disseminating information to migrants and host communities**

16. Another important response to mixed flows is information dissemination targeting potential migrants who might be contemplating hazardous journeys and information campaigns aimed at host communities. IOM has extensive experience in this field. For example, in September 2009, in partnership with the other members of the Mixed Migration Task Force (MMTF) (see under “Cooperation” below for more information on the MMTF), IOM launched a radio campaign to prevent mixed migratory movements through Somalia, help migrants make informed decisions and improve the capacities of host communities to receive migrants and to assist and protect them.\(^\text{19}\) In West Africa, in areas of high emigration pressure whose unemployed youth are most likely to seek better economic opportunities via irregular migration routes to Europe or the Maghreb, IOM has set up targeted youth-employment projects that include training and access to micro-credit, and carries out
information and awareness campaigns on the dangers of irregular migration. With regard to counter-trafficking, IOM works in the countries of the South Caucasus to develop and introduce modules on trafficking in persons (aimed at older school children) into the national education curricula. Information dissemination initiatives on counter-trafficking also include collaboration with the international advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi on a campaign urging consumers and businesses to “buy responsibly”; the campaign was launched on the third EU Anti-trafficking Day on 18 October 2009.

17. IOM supports, in collaboration with the governments concerned, the establishment and operation of migrant resource centres in countries of origin. The centres perform the dual task of providing impartial, accurate and reliable advice and information to prospective migrants about regular migration opportunities and labour market and living conditions in destination countries and alerting them to the risks of irregular migration.20 One example is the network of centres recently established in Western Balkan countries under the auspices of a European Commission AENEAS project and implemented by IOM in partnership with the International Labour Organization and local employment offices.21

E. Cooperation

18. In addition to the provision by IOM of direct assistance to vulnerable persons in situations of mixed flows (discussed above), in collaboration with partners that include national and local NGOs, cooperation at the macro level, both between and among States and agencies, is critical to reinforcing the understandings forged at the grass-roots level and sharing good practices across countries and regions. At the inter-State level, given the complex migration management questions associated with mixed flows, regional consultative processes provide an important platform for dialogue and cooperation, particularly in regions where mixed migration movements are especially prevalent.22 For example, in August 2008, a Regional Conference on Migration workshop in Costa Rica was specifically devoted to “Protection and Durable Solutions within Mixed Migratory Flows”, while a number of workshops held under the auspices of the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) and involving 15 countries in that region have addressed irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons.23 IOM is also working with States and other agencies to address the needs of specific groups of vulnerable migrants, including those involved in irregular migration and mixed flows. In June and September 2009, in partnership with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), it convened two working group sessions bringing together nine CARICOM Member States to discuss child migration in the Caribbean with a view to exchanging practical experiences, identifying national strengths and weaknesses and developing a comprehensive framework and set of substantive recommendations relating to several migrant children categories, including children who have migrated unaccompanied to a CARICOM country.24

19. At the inter-agency level, the Praesidium Project constitutes a model response where, at the request of and in collaboration with the Government of Italy, IOM worked together with UNHCR and the Italian Red Cross to provide information and counselling to the large numbers of migrants arriving by boat on Lampedusa and other locations in Sicily. The three agencies also pre-screened the arrivals to identify persons in need of special assistance and to ensure that they were referred to appropriate procedures or structures in the light of their specific needs.25
20. Similarly, since 2007 IOM has been working with UNHCR and other agencies in the context of the MMTF Somalia, which is co-chaired by IOM and UNHCR, and under the auspices of the Protection Cluster of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to address the humanitarian and protection needs of migrants and asylum-seekers transiting through that country. In Angola, IOM and UNHCR, in cooperation with the Department of Immigration (SME), are implementing a capacity-building project comprising inter alia targeted assessments of border operations and training of SME officials in the identification and treatment of various categories of migrants. The training includes HIV awareness and training-of-trainers workshops to ensure project sustainability. In February 2009, IOM brought together representatives of ten origin, transit and destination countries and a number of observers (including UNHCR, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) for a workshop on “Irregular Migration Flows from East Africa and the Horn of Africa Toward Southern Africa”, a previously lesser known migratory route. The participants adopted a series of conclusions and recommendations, and a follow-up meeting is planned.

21. IOM and UNHCR are finalizing joint standard operating procedures to facilitate the protection of and provision of assistance to trafficked persons. The objective of this document is to clearly lay out the responsibilities of each agency in situations where an assessment is required to identify whether a person is a victim of trafficking and, if so, whether s/he is in need of protection and/or assistance (i.e. eligibility for asylum or other forms of support, including resettlement in a third country or voluntary return). Assistance can be provided to identified victims of trafficking, on a case-by-case basis, through IOM’s Global Emergency Fund (see above). IOM has also been one of the key partners in a two-year project to develop implementation strategies for the UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action in different regions, including the holding of regional stakeholder conferences on refugee protection and international migration in the Gulf of Aden, West Africa and the Americas. These conferences have resulted in important collaborative follow-up activities, such as the regional follow-up group of UNHCR, IOM and OHCHR experts set up after the conference in Dakar, Senegal, for the purpose of establishing a framework for informal exchanges on activities, programmes and policies to support West African countries in the protection of refugees and migrants, presenting, sharing and discussing the strategic plans of action of each participating agency in this field with a view to creating synergies or formulating joint actions, adopting common policies and strategies of intervention, of defining and conceptualizing common tools, and of identifying successful experiences and lessons learned.

22. Other pertinent forms of inter-agency collaboration include those taking place within the IASC (referred to above in the context of the MMTF) and with the European Border Agency (FRONTEX) and the World Health Organization, which are two of the partner organizations in the PHBLM project. IOM supports and works within the overall framework of the 61st World Health Assembly resolution on health of migrants to “promote equitable access to health promotion, disease prevention and care for migrants and promote migrant-sensitive health policies”, among others. IOM, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and United Nations partners have developed a guidance tool on providing health care for trafficked persons. Finally, IOM Field Offices also collaborate nationally within UN Country Teams in activities of relevance to mixed migratory movements, such as forced labour and counter-trafficking projects, campaigns on violence against women and other United Nations Theme Group on Gender activities.
IV. CONCLUSION

23. Mixed migratory flows tend to be irregular and therefore require a versatile response tailored to the individual needs of migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, in accordance with established international norms protecting the human rights of all persons, irrespective of their immigration status. As illustrated in this paper, IOM, in collaboration with its partners, is firmly engaged in such responses. In all the areas described above, IOM directly assists particularly vulnerable migrants (thus contributing significantly to their protection) and provides wide-ranging support to governments and other stakeholders through its programmes, projects and activities to address mixed flows and to prevent their most abusive manifestations. IOM looks forward to receiving further guidance from the membership on its work in this field.

End Notes (English only)


6 “Migration and protection issues”, speech by Thomas Linde, Special Representative of the IFRC Secretary General on Migration, to the UNHCR Executive Committee, Geneva, 8 October 2008.


11 For more information, see http://www.iom.int/unitedstates/ct/PDFs/Global%20Fund/GAF%20for%20Website.pdf.

12 For a summary of the PHBLM project, see http://www.migrant-health-europe.org/component/content/article/67.html.

For example, in Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa, IOM supported government efforts to develop comprehensive legislation to address trafficking in persons, with the result that such legislation has been enacted in the first two countries and draft legislation is awaiting approval by Parliament in South Africa.

For more information, see http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/2026.


For example, the Southern African Counter-trafficking Assistance Programme (SACTAP) has trained over 3,000 government officials (mainly law enforcement agents) in the region. In South Africa alone, over the last year, 1,290 officials representing the five client institutions – Departments of Home Affairs, Social Development, Health, Justice and Constitutional Development (National Prosecuting Authority and the Lower Courts’ Magistrates Commission) and the South African Police Service – have been trained. Most civil society and faith-based organizations in Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have also received training and continue to consult IOM on a regular basis as a result.

The radio campaign is implemented by the BBC World Service Trust under the auspices of the broader Somali Lifeline Programme.


EC AENEAS 2006: Capacity Building, Information and Awareness Raising – Towards Promoting Orderly Migration in the Western Balkans.

E.g., the Intergovernmental Authority on Development – Regional Consultative Process on Migration (IGAD-RCP), the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) and the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA) in Africa; the Migration Dialogue in the Western Mediterranean (5+5 Process); the Regional Conference on Migration, or Puebla Process, in the Americas; the Ball Process in the Asia-Pacific region; and the Söderköping Process in Eastern Europe, which is specifically concerned with cross-border cooperation. For more information, see the IOM website at http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/policy-research/regional-consultative-processes/snapshots-selected-rcps.

See respectively the Puebla Process website at http://www.renws.org/pagina_n38.htm and the website of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) at http://www.queensu.ca/samp/midsa/#activities.

The framework and recommendations will be submitted to CARICOM’s Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD).


See MMTF Somalia, Mixed Migration through Somalia and across the Gulf of Aden (April 2008), available at http://www.unhcr.org/4877716c2.html. IOM and UNHCR have also prepared a joint study on Mixed Migration and Yemen as a Transit Country (February-July 2009), which aims to understand the movement of the mixed influx of migrants and refugees after their arrival in Yemen. In addition to IOM and UNHCR, the other MMTF members are the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, OHCHR and the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils.

SME – Serviço de Migração e Estrangeiros.

Shortly after this meeting, IOM also published the study prepared by C. Horwood: In Pursuit of the Southern Dream: Victims of Necessity, IOM, April 2009 (available from IOM Pretoria’s website at http://www.iom.org.za), which describes the smuggling of male migrants from East Africa and the Horn to South Africa.

An information note on the project is available at http://www.unhcr.org/497730212.html.

Regional Conferences on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Sana’a, Yemen (19-20 May 2008), Dakar, Senegal (13-14 November 2008), and San José, Costa Rica (19-20 November 2009). In addition, IOM and UNHCR organize an annual seminar on “Mixed Migratory Flows in the Caribbean: Migration Management, Contingency Planning and Refugee Protection” in the Caribbean region.

One planned concrete follow-up activity in 2010 is the formalization of a partnership between the IOM and UNHCR regional offices in Dakar for the development and implementation of a voluntary return mechanism for unsuccessful asylum-seekers from countries that are not members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).


Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers, IOM, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, Geneva, 2009.