



Ministerie van
Buitenlandse Zaken

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

INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION Intersessional Workshop

Migration and Development: Mainstreaming Migration into Development Policy Agendas*

Panel 1

Pursuing policy coherence on migration and development policy agendas

Bart von Bartheld

**Director, Movement of Persons, Migration & Alien Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Netherlands**

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Pursuing policy coherence on migration and development: a migration perspective

Bart von Bartheld
Director, Movement of Persons, Migration & Alien Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Netherlands

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking and congratulating our hosts, the International Organization for Migration and the Department for International Development, on having taken the initiative to organise this important conference on migration and development. It gives me the opportunity to inform you about our endeavours to bring about some form of coherence between policies on migration and development. But it also gives me a chance to tell you something about the developments in Dutch society that have led us to our present view on migration issues, a view which some call harsh, even inhumane.

As far as policy coherence is concerned, we – in the Netherlands – feel we are only at the very beginning of a long process. We are still in an exploratory phase. That's why we welcome the initiative of this Intersessional Workshop and why we are looking forward to hearing your views on this issue.

Let me begin with a few words about the current Dutch perspective on migration.

Through the ages many immigrants – both economic migrants and refugees – have made their way to the Netherlands and settled there. Recently, however, the numbers of asylum seekers, family reunions and illegal immigrants rose sharply. As a result, and within one generation, 10% of our population is now of non-European descent. Many of the new arrivals were poorly integrated into Dutch society. New issues emerged: *de facto* segregation, social problems, tensions and security-related challenges. The situation became untenable. Dutch voters made it clear they wanted a change.

In response, the government has developed a stricter approach to immigration, while emphasising the necessity of integrating in society. We are applying the rules for asylum and family reunification more stringently. Only bona fide asylum seekers and family members are welcome to stay in the country. Others are not allowed in, or they have to leave, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Those who are allowed to stay must take responsibility for their own integration into society. For example, migrants have to learn skills, like the Dutch language. This does not make our asylum procedures inhumane. On the contrary, they are careful, predictable and reliable and subject to judicial review. We still live up to our own, traditionally high standards and we comply with the most far-reaching international obligations. We respect the human rights of every individual, irrespective of his or her origins. So strict and fair yes, inhumane absolutely not. Those in need of protection can obtain protection in the Netherlands. What we seek is maintaining a balanced emphasis on controlling migration in the light of the absorptive capacity of Dutch society and with a view to preventing abuse of the system and illegal migration.

Today, migration and development co-operation are two integral parts of our foreign policy. Traditionally, that policy has focused on issues such as human rights, peacekeeping and development co-operation. In recent years, migration has been added to the list.

Changes in Dutch society created a new need to regulate migration. That in turn put increasing pressure on foreign policy, and development co-operation in particular, to play a part in dealing with migration issues. In a search for a fundamental, long-term approach to regulating migration, we gradually began paying more attention to the link between migration and development. The Dutch Minister for Development Co-operation and the Minister for Immigration and Integration decided it was time to work together towards policy coherence. For more than a year now the two ministries have been exploring the many connections between migration and development, in consultation with representatives of the academic world and civil society, including development and migrant organisations. The purpose of all this was to define where the two policy areas can reinforce one another.

It hasn't always been easy to reconcile the views of those who see development co-operation as a way to manage migration and those who view migration as an instrument for development. But a synthesis has emerged in the form of a policy document we - very originally - called *Development and Migration*. This 80 page, broad based document, which was debated and approved in parliament last December, is now available in English translation.

One main conclusion is that there is room to enhance the coherence between our development and migration policies. The document outlines a number of initiatives for achieving that goal.

For the near future, our main priority in the field of migration and development will remain the same: to reduce the push factors for migration, such as conflict, poverty, stagnating economic development and human rights violations. All foreign policy fields contribute to this effort. There are no quick fixes, but that doesn't change our long-term commitment to these goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Against this background and with a view to enhancing coherence we will also focus on a few new topics, such as capacity building in the field of migration, protection in the region, return, and circular migration. Let me say a few words about each of them.

First, capacity building. We will look into the possibility of incorporating capacity building for migration management into existing bilateral programmes and policies for good governance. This will promote synergy between our migration policy and development co-operation. We are aware that the IOM has programmes in this field. As I said we will look into the possibilities; We have no solutions yet.

Second, the Dutch EU presidency made **protection in the region** a European priority. This initiative aims to better protect refugees in their regions of origin. For the Netherlands, this is a way of sharing both the burden and the responsibility. It can also help prevent irregular secondary migration. Of course, the only effective way to enhance protection capacity is in partnership with countries in refugees' regions of origin and in close co-operation with UNHCR. In June, the European Commission will present a pilot proposal for a regional protection programme.

At national level, the Dutch parliament earmarked extra money for UNHCR last year, specifically for enhancing protection in the region. UNHCR has allocated those funds to programmes in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Yemen. It helps those countries create policy and legislation to improve the status of refugees and refugee registration. The Netherlands hopes that these projects will lead to new initiatives and closer international co-operation between Western countries of destination and countries of first asylum.

A third topic we focus on is **return or readmission**. Effective return of illegal migrants remains a high priority for the Netherlands. Without it, the integrity of our asylum system and of our migration policy in general cannot be safeguarded. Without effective return, we also run the risk of losing public support for asylum policy, weakening our capacity to offer protection to those who truly need it. The Netherlands therefore considers it important to conclude readmission agreements with countries of origin and transit on a bilateral, Benelux or EU basis.

One related issue is assisted return. Success in this field often depends on training, preparation and financial support – all areas in which the IOM plays an important and much appreciated role. The IOM programme ‘Return of Qualified Afghans’, which the Netherlands has supported financially, is a case in point. In the near future, we will look at ways of building on programmes like this one.

Fourth, we have to find more areas where the interests of individual migrants, host societies and home societies coincide. **Circular migration** is one possibility. It allows developed countries to fill temporary job openings, migrants to earn an income and acquire skills, and home countries to welcome skilled individuals on their return. We need a legal framework for temporary labour migration. The GATS negotiations on temporary movement of natural persons present a useful opportunity to regulate and enhance migration of this kind. One noteworthy programme in this area is Migration for Development in Africa (or MIDA), on which the IOM and the Dutch embassy in Ghana are working together closely. The programme aims to promote brain gain in Africa by encouraging circular migration between the Netherlands and Ghana, especially of medical personnel. This process transfers knowledge to African experts.

However, circular migration can only become a viable option if there is an effective way of ensuring that temporary migrants will return after their contracts expire. Our ministry is now examining this issue.

To summarise, we have identified four initiatives in the field of migration and development, initiatives that offer opportunities for synergies: capacity building, protection in the region, return and circular migration.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, developments in Dutch society made it absolutely necessary to find solutions for regulating migration. To this end, we started looking closer at the linkage between migration and development, and came up with a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening coherence. These initiatives have been carefully formulated, in co-operation with all relevant parties and were laid down in a broad based document. We feel these initiatives form specific points of contact where effective policy could lead to synergy. We however still have a lot of work to do. To get it done, we must team up with partners like the IOM and UNHCR, each of which has its own skills, knowledge and expertise. And we must and will remain active internationally: within the UN, in the Global Commission on International Migration, as a donor to UNHCR, and in the EU, where we are awaiting the European Commission’s plans on migration and development. Within the Netherlands, too, we will continue to search for solutions- in collaboration with representatives from civil society. Being here together today, trying to strengthen mutual understanding, is a valuable step on the way to coherence between migration and development policy. I look forward to our discussions and the outcome of this seminar.

Thank you.