

## CONFERENCE NOTE

### ENHANCING THE CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRATION RESEARCH TO POLICY-MAKING: Intergovernmental Workshop, Geneva, 5-6 February, 2004

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

At a time when international migration is becoming an ever more pressing policy issue, what priority are governments giving to sponsoring migration research to support sound policy-making ?

It is often argued that precise and reliable data and research on international migration trends and the accurate analysis of key migration issues are indispensable to the formulation of effective migration management policies. Yet, migration issues are often poorly understood and remain the subject of much controversy. In many states there is a perception that migration brings more costs than benefits. One of the reasons for this, may be because broadly speaking there is a mismatch between much of the migration research that is being conducted and the information needs of policy-makers. IOM recently organized a conference in Geneva to discuss this problem.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized a consultative meeting for governments on *Enhancing the Contribution of Migration Research to Policy-Making*, 5-6 February, 2004, Geneva, Switzerland. This was the first meeting which brought together 23 countries<sup>1</sup> from developed and developing parts of the world to discuss how governments manage migration research and how research contributes to policy-making. The European Commission (EC), Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and the International Migration Policy Programme (IMP) were also represented. The meeting was made possible thanks to a financial contribution by the Government of Switzerland.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Gervais Appave, Director, Migration Policy and Research Department, IOM, Ms. Anne Grethe Nielsen, Head International Affairs, Swiss Federal Office for Refugees and Mr. Frank Laczko, Chief, Division of Research and Publications, IOM.

#### II. OBJECTIVES

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<sup>1</sup> Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, People's Republic of China, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Ireland, Kenya, The Netherlands, Norway, The Philippines, Romania, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, European Commission (EC), Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), International Migration Policy Programme (IMP).

Although a great deal of migration research is currently being conducted by a range of different actors, much of it appears to have little impact on policy making and does not respond to the specific needs of governments. This contributes to the impression that policy is made without a sound evidence base. The problems are exacerbated in the developing world where migration is increasingly important but where policy-makers lack the resources to do much research.

Policy research, when successful, helps states both to develop migration policies and to assess the impact of existing policies. By enhancing the understanding of migration it also contributes to meaningful policy dialogue with other countries as well as to a more informed public debate on migration; thus it is part, or should be, of a comprehensive migration management strategy.

Many governments are either conducting or – for many developing countries – in the process of setting up migration research programmes to enhance their understanding of migration and to address the complex and interlinked policy considerations it raises. The existence of these programmes raises several questions, most notably, how are governments managing research to ensure that research findings are policy relevant? By providing a forum for information exchange on government sponsored research activities, this consultative meeting for governments sought to: 1) enable States to learn from the experiences of others by highlighting effective and innovative practices; 2) provide a further opportunity for inter-state collaboration with respect to migration policy research; 3) better identify the migration research/policy information needs of developing countries and new immigration countries which lack the capacity to conduct research, or which have just begun to develop such capacities; and finally, 4) to discuss ways in which existing research and information about migration could be better shared and packaged to enhance its usefulness to policy makers.

Reflecting these goals, the proceedings of the consultative meeting were structured around a *Tour de Table* during which all countries reported on their research programmes followed by discussion in plenary. Thematic presentations were also made on the following themes, *Linking Migration Research and Migration Policy More Effectively*, by Dr. Heaven Crawley, Institute for Public Policy Research, London, UK, and Ms Martha Justus, CIC, Ottawa, Canada; *IOM's Migration and Health Research*, by Dr. Danielle Grondin, Director, Migration Health, IOM. Dr. Elzbieta Gozdzia, Georgetown University made a presentation on the *IOM International Migration Journal*.

### **III. Country Reporting**

Delegates reported in plenary on government sponsored research activities in their countries. Presentations highlighted the current migration landscape, research programmes and research and policy priorities. Most governments also made detailed written submissions supplementing their interventions in plenary.<sup>2</sup> Some common themes emerged from the country reporting exercise and subsequent discussions.

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<sup>2</sup> See **Annex I** for compendium of written submissions made by governments relating to government sponsored research activities.

### ***Structure of Research Activities***

Although most countries conduct or sponsor migration research, very few countries have comprehensive and dedicated programmes. Rather, research activities tend to be scattered between different government agencies dealing with migration. This reflects the reality that migration is a multi-dimensional issue with relevance to nearly every government department. As a consequence, the sharing of relevant information between departments is sometimes a challenge, and delegates noted that there is an increasing need to institutionalize research cooperation across agencies, particularly in countries where departments which produce data of relevance to migration are separate from the departments which run migration policy. A related observation is that some governments separate agencies with research missions from those with programmatic functions. All these factors combine to make it difficult to establish comprehensive and coordinated programmes.

However, given the rising importance of migration, several countries are developing new administrative structures reflecting the need to centralize migration matters within one department with overall responsibility in this area. In line with this trend, migration research activities have also been expanded, in particular in European countries facing new immigration pressures. At the regional level, the European Commission which has taken several recent initiatives relating to research and information sharing including the establishment of the European Migration Network has identified policy support as a salient priority for its research activities. More generally within the EU, the move towards a common immigration policy has also contributed to a more coordinated approach to migration research across the Union.

In order to satisfy research needs, countries without dedicated programmes tend to rely on commissioning research to academic institutions and other centres of learning. Unlike many European countries where commissioning is the rule, the traditional countries of immigration -- Canada and Australia -- also have dedicated in-house research programmes, focussed around one government department with overall responsibility for migration issues, and complete with budget allocations. Communication across departments and between policy-makers and academia are well developed and made easier through centralization of migration functions and research. These countries have invested significant resources in databases, longitudinal surveys and other studies to enable them to assess the impact of migration over time.

In developing countries, few, if any, resources are devoted to migration research and it is often not possible to speak of research programmes. Participants noted that most migration research is conducted in developed countries and usually addresses the policy concerns of these countries. Nearly all the major centres of migration research, including those dealing with questions of migration and development are based in the developed world. In developing countries there are many other competing priorities, one of the challenges in these resource-strapped environments is to convince policy-makers of the importance of research. Maximising the use of existing resources and pursuing capacity-building projects with International Organizations constitute major priorities. An example of innovative practice in this area is IOM's programme in Albania which seeks to enhance the impact of research on policy-making by creating a research unit within the ministry responsible for migration issues through the

pooling of existing resources within government agencies and the creation of networks connecting it with external sources of expertise.

***Focus of Research:***

The country reporting exercise revealed that the focus of government sponsored research is directly related to how the country positions itself along the origin, transit or destination country continuum. Thus for destination countries, including those facing new immigration pressures such as the European countries, but also Canada and Australia, for whom immigration forms part of their nation building process, migrant integration constitutes a central focus of research. Canada and Australia, have used longitudinal surveys in order to assess migrant integration and the impact of immigration policies over time. These studies have helped them understand labour market and settlement experiences of immigrants and informed subsequent immigration policy choices regarding, for instance, selection criteria (skills levels, language, age) for immigration programmes. For European countries, domestic policy priorities for research also include asylum and irregular migration, and migrant trafficking.

Countries of emigration, including labour exporting countries, tend to focus their research around issues of labour migration, worker entitlements, *diaspora* and remittance issues. Lack of data on the whereabouts and numbers of *diaspora* was one issue developing country delegates highlighted as an area needing further study and an area of potentially fruitful collaboration between origin and destination countries.

Some countries have developed from countries of emigration, to countries of transit or immigration, thus changing their policy perspectives and research priorities. Thus in Romania for instance, research priorities include migrant trafficking and human smuggling, irregular migration, reflecting the fact that it has become a major country of transit migration.

Networks for exchange of migration policy related information are relatively well developed in OECD countries. Delegates noted however, the need for increased exchange of policy research related information between “North” and “South”.

***Resources***

Governments diverge widely in the amount of resources they devote to migration research. The clearest dividing line is between traditional countries of immigration (Canada, Australia) on the one hand and new countries of immigration (Europe) on the other. A third category are developing countries which have very few if any resources for migration related research. In Canada and Australia, the budgets of the departments dealing with migration specifically include appropriations for research. By contrast with these budgets which may run into the millions of dollars, resources devoted to research by European governments are fairly modest although the trend is towards increased spending on migration research. The EU is also setting aside substantial financial resources for research purposes.

Lack of resources was cited as an obstacle for research in many countries especially in the developing world. In this connection it was observed that the European Union has made available new budget lines which could be used for fruitful collaborations

between origin and destination countries. Greater efforts need to be made to maximise existing resources as well as to encourage research into migration and development issues. It is in the interest of the destination countries to promote good migration management in sending countries and hence invest in collaborative research efforts.

The issue of resource differentials highlights the research imbalance between the developed and the developing world. While developed countries produce much data on migration, it is seldom shared effectively among relevant institutions, and even more rarely, between governments of origin and destination countries. In this connection it was noted that countries of origin and destination often have overlapping research interests but rarely consult each other when designing or carrying out research projects.

Much of the data produced by developed countries in the course of their regular information gathering activities, including statistics on national origin of entrants and immigrants could be very useful to countries of origin: these data already exist and are available at low or no cost. Developing countries may be interested in these data for a variety of purposes including in efforts relating to promoting *diaspora* outreach, establishing remittance initiatives, identifying candidates for return migration schemes such as IOM's MIDA programme, protecting welfare of migrants abroad, and other activities. Therefore, delegates observed that greater emphasis should be placed on designing research programmes which benefit both origin and destination countries. More information sharing also contributes generally to enhanced collaboration between major origin and destination areas and consequently better management of migration.

#### **IV. Linking Research to Policy-Making**

The relationship between migration research and migration policy is complex. Many different factors combine to shape migration policy, only one of which may be research. Migration research can contribute directly to policy development, for example, when a government commissions new research or an evaluation study and then acts on some or all of its findings. But often the impact of research is indirect or only has an influence over the long-term. For example, a study may raise awareness about a particular migration issue and, by influencing public opinion, contribute to policy changes in later years.

Despite the general consensus that policy research is important, there was nevertheless agreement among participants that it is often difficult to determine the extent to which research informs policy. Several reasons were identified as contributing to the complexity of the relationship between research and policy-making including the fact that researchers and policy-makers have different objectives, speak different "languages" and have different time-frames and audiences. Government-funded research involves three key stakeholders – research managers, research providers and research users. The relationship between these stakeholders is not always an easy one and this can reduce the impact that research has on policy.

For example, a common complaint of policy-makers is that researchers cannot keep up with fast moving policy agendas. Often, there is a perception on their part that the

policy agenda has moved on by the time research results become available thus rendering results obsolete from the start. This raises the question of how to ensure that research is timely from a policy perspective, without compromising the soundness of research methodology and data. While policy-makers need to come up with concrete responses to emerging policy challenges, research is seldom conclusive and rarely provides ready made answers. Equally, policy contexts will inevitably shape the way decision-makers view the evidence. For instance, asylum evidence which may at times be very politically sensitive, may be viewed and treated differently from evidence in other fields, say labour migration. Treating comparable evidence differently may not make sense from a researchers' perspective but it does highlight the differences in the priorities of policy-makers and researchers. It also underlies a common complaint of researchers that policy-makers endorse research results only when it suits their purposes. Ultimately, research alone does not always make the case for policy action.

In order to improve the linkage of research to policy-making, several ideas were raised. As a starting point, policy-makers need to be committed to evidence-based policy-making and researchers need to be aware of policy-environments. Put differently, researchers and policy-makers need to agree on what counts as evidence and on what evidence is needed, or will be needed, to inform policy. This may require some awareness raising on both sides of the researcher/policy-maker divide. Additionally, because migration is a cross-cutting issue, multi-disciplinary approaches are often required which also implies educating policy-makers who may be unfamiliar with relevant academic disciplines and research methodologies. With respect to the issue of timeliness, research efforts need to be future-looking and attempt to anticipate the evolution of policy agendas. Ongoing dialogue with policy-makers will ensure that researchers are aware of policy-makers timeframes and also stay abreast of policy-agendas. Particular attention must be paid to “packaging” research results so that they are easily accessible and comprehensible to policy-makers. Few people have the time or patience to read through lengthy and technically difficult texts, least of all politicians. Moreover, when evidence is made accessible it lends itself to a wider audience including civil society and the general public. This constitutes another important, if indirect, way to influence policy-makers. It also contributes to a more informed and serious public debate on migration.

## **V. Conclusions – Research to Inform Policy**

To sum up, one of the key conclusions from this meeting was that governments have to accept that they should have a greater role to play in managing migration policy research, although this certainly does not mean that all research should be controlled or funded by governments. Policy-makers need to be committed to evidence-based policy-making and researchers need to be encouraged to develop a closer dialogue with policy-makers if they seek to influence policy. At present there is an impression that migration policies are often developed without a sound evidence base. Few countries have a clearly defined migration policy research programme sponsored by government. In rich countries this is not because of a lack of research, but because much migration research is often not considered to be relevant to policymakers. Researchers, often tend to feel that policymakers lack understanding and respect for research findings. In poorer countries, the problem is exacerbated by the lack of

capacity to conduct research. But even in poorer countries, policymakers complain that too often the results of research are difficult to access and too narrowly disseminated through academic circles. They also complain about the lack of policy recommendations in research reports. Closer collaboration between researchers, research managers and policymakers could promote better understanding of the potential contribution of research to policy.

The conference concluded with a discussion and summing up of key points:

- 1) Information about government research activities tends to be scattered; there is a need for better information sharing between agencies and governments;
- 2) Despite the domestic orientation of most government research programmes, there is an increasing need for international comparative studies, internationally comparable data on migration and greater information exchange between governments on research design and implementation;
- 3) Beyond calling for more research and research with greater relevance to policy, it is equally important to understand how to improve co-ordination of existing research and information sources to assist policymaking.
- 4) There is a need for better information on “best practices” to inform policy-makers about successful research approaches which have been applied elsewhere;
- 5) There are real opportunities for research partnerships i) between origin and destination countries with overlapping research interests; ii) within regions where more and more migration policy-making and information exchange is already taking place; iii) in thematic groups with particular topical interests (e.g. remittances) or interests in particular methodological approaches to research (longitudinal studies).

In light of the above, there was general agreement that this meeting had established an informal “network” of government contact points and that further collaboration should be pursued in furtherance of the above goals. In particular, delegates called upon IOM to act as a focal point for future initiatives and information exchange in this area. As a first step, IOM tentatively agreed to create a “toolkit” on government research by 1) making available online all reports submitted by governments concerning their migration research activities; 2) creating an electronic “bulletin board” with information provided by governments on completed, ongoing, and planned research activities; 3) producing a *Mapping Study on Government Sponsored Research Programmes*, to serve as a guide and analysis of government research programmes.