



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

Comprehensive and Solutions-oriented Approaches to Addressing Irregular Migration

Workshop Summary
84th Council Session, 2-4 December 2002

Overview

The workshop on comprehensive and solutions-oriented approaches to addressing irregular migration took place on December 3 as part of the 84th Session of the Council of the International Organization for Migration.

After a brief introduction of the topic, the facilitator invited participants to raise issues of interest and to contribute opinions. The discussion that followed was informal in nature, and highlighted common as well as divergent points of view.

While it was impossible to deal in depth with each of the many topics linked to irregular migration, the participants warmly welcomed the opportunity to discuss these often sensitive issues within the framework of an informal forum.

As one of the most important results of the workshop, there was broad consensus among delegations that the phenomenon of irregular migration needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way. Such diverse yet interrelated issues as legal migration opportunities, trafficking and smuggling, root causes, irregular transit, human rights, and many others are all potentially important components of a comprehensive approach. To this end, cooperation among all stakeholders at the national, regional and international level must be established.

Summary of the discussion

Participants were first invited to identify the main problems produced by irregular migration and the role that migration management can play. It was pointed out that irregular migration can be seen as an outgrowth of the lack of protection or realization of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

A large number of delegations spoke of the need for regular migration opportunities and linked the lack of these opportunities to irregular migration. One delegation noted that migration challenges the concept of the welfare state, the latter being based on solidarity between citizens. Migration that is not managed in a sustainable way, and especially irregular migration, can undermine this solidarity and the ways in which welfare states are functioning.

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As a point of departure for assessing where current policies and approaches fall short, one delegation presented nine characteristics a properly functioning migration management system might display:

1. Regular migration occurring in accordance with national law and regulations.
2. Reasonable opportunities for people to lawfully access temporary and permanent migration opportunities.
3. Support for migration programmes within the community of receiving states.
4. Adequate protection provided for persons in need, including resettlement where appropriate.
5. Prompt return to their countries of origin of persons unlawfully in other states.
6. Respect of human rights and dignity of the migrants.
7. Co-development, including alternatives to regular migration.
8. Strong institutional systems (in terms of personnel as well as technology).
9. Effective bilateral and multilateral cooperation in managing migration flows.

The image of migration within host societies in particular is endangered by irregular migration. Host societies tend to link the phenomena of legal or regular migration and irregular migration, and subsequently the criminal activities that irregular migration might involve. As a result, public support for migrants and for regular migration programmes decreases.

In consequence, a key task for national governments is to ensure and promote public support for national migration policies, including promotion of a positive image of migration. Simultaneously, the protection of migrants, their rights and their dignity must be ensured. In order to measure the capacity of a society to absorb and integrate migrants, the concept of a “threshold of tolerance” was discussed.

Participants emphasized the importance of a dialogue at the national level between governments and the private sector to better adjust national policies and programmes for migration. As labour migration grows worldwide, this dialogue is all the more critical.

The discussion went on to identify predominant root causes of irregular migration. Concerning countries of origin, participants pointed to complex socio-economic conditions that prompt people to migrate. Confronted with a lack of effective migration management and law enforcement in the source countries on the one hand, and restrictive migration policies of destination countries on the other, potential migrants often decide to migrate illegally. This decision is facilitated by the existence of well-organized transnational criminal networks that offer their services to migrants, most often at high fees and in dangerous conditions. In addressing root causes, countries of origin and destination therefore need to develop joint approaches to improve the difficult economic conditions in source countries.

There was a broad consensus among the delegates that information for potential migrants on legal opportunities as well as the conditions and regulations in destination countries is essential. Often, there is a significant difference between the migrants’ perception of opportunities and the actual situation in destination countries.

Raising the question of responsibilities, the participants emphasized the duty of destination countries to receive migrants in full respect of their rights. At the same time, migrants are obliged to respect the laws and regulations of the host societies.

While the participants agreed that regularization of illegal migrants in destination countries could help to ensure their protection, some expressed their fear that such practice could encourage further irregular migration.

Underlining the nexus between migration and asylum, there was broad agreement on the need to ensure the protection of genuine refugees. In this context, the Global Consultations on Protection and the Agenda for Protection were mentioned as relevant in this regard.

Many delegates stressed the need to involve all stakeholders in the establishment of a migration management system. In particular, civil society organizations and national and international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations should be included. Comprehensive solutions require elements of capacity building in countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as sound cooperation at the national, regional, and international level.

◆ **A comprehensive analysis of the workshop will be published in the coming months.**