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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

## SEMINAR REPORT

### Migration and Development Series MIGRATION DATA: COLLECTING POLICY RELEVANT EVIDENCE ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*organized jointly with IOM, UNFPA and the MacArthur Foundation*

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#### BACKGROUND

A lack of reliable and comparable data continues to hamper policy-making and cooperation on international migration and development. A number of recent initiatives have sought to map out an agenda for action to address this gap. In this context, the seminar addressed two broad areas of concern: (1) The collection of reliable and comparable data on stocks and flows of migrants and other categories of 'mobile populations' (refugees, IDPs, victims of trafficking, etc.); (2) The collection of data and evidence on the interconnections between migration and development. It aimed to raise awareness of the need, and existing tools to improve data collection on international migration and development.

#### OBJECTIVES

The seminar was designed to: Raise awareness of the need for improved data on migration and development to support the formulation of evidence-based policy making; Present the recommendations of recent meetings and initiatives on data collection, in particular those of (i) the Helsinki meeting, (ii) Roundtable 3.1 of the GFMD2, and (iii) the Migration Data for Development Commission; Highlight the need for internationally accepted working definitions of migration-related concepts, in order to produce comparable data; In light of the 2010 round of censuses and the focus of the 2009/10 Human Development Report, provide an overview of data collection tools which are currently available and discuss their advantages and disadvantages; Present the guidance that the UN DESA Statistics Division provides to Member States in order to improve migration data collection.

Information on the seminar and the *Migration and Development Series* is available from [info@unitar.org](mailto:info@unitar.org) or at <http://www.unitar.org/en/migdevseries.html>

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## SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The discussions during this half-day seminar clearly conveyed the message that better data and research on migration stocks and flows, as well as migration and its interlinkages with development are needed to advance policy making in this area. Experts stressed the fact that the collection of data is not just a technical exercise, to be left to academics and statisticians. Rather, policy makers must identify their needs and define the questions that researchers should seek to answer. In addition, it was stressed that the collection of migration data is costly, and will require that Governments commit adequate resources. Countries who cannot afford to do so should receive support through technical assistance and capacity building.

### **Towards a consensus on migration data**

Experts voiced their optimism regarding the current momentum of the discussions on migration data. Indeed, from the various fora that have recently focused on the topic<sup>1</sup>, a consensus seems to emerge on the need, and the best tools to improve migration data collection and dissemination. Two initiatives are likely to take this forward: First, coming out of the second meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Manila (29-30 October 2008), an ad hoc, States-led Working Group on the topic of migration data and research is being envisioned. Second, the Center for Global Development in Washington, DC has convened a 14-member Migration Data for Development Commission, co-chaired by Lawrence Summers, former chief economist at the World Bank and president of Harvard University, and Patricia Santo-Tomas, chair of the Development Bank of the Philippines, with the aim of exploring the data needs of policy makers if they are to better understand the development impacts of migration in countries of origin.

The Commission recently issued a set of draft recommendations to improve the availability and quality of migration statistics, highlighting five points: 1) Ask basic census questions and tabulate the answers; 2) Exploit administrative data sources; 3) Leverage existing surveys; 4) Provide access to microdata (a basis for further research, in particular on individual cases); 5) Build capacities for data collection and dissemination.

An overview of various migration-related concepts highlighted the fact that few of them are internationally defined, leaving leeway for countries to interpret differently and measure categories such as 'labour migrant' or 'expatriate community'. Even where international legal definitions exist, as for the concepts of 'refugee', 'human trafficking', and 'smuggling of migrants', the availability of data varies widely from one category to the other. In this context, questions arose regarding the gap that exists pertaining to international migratory movements caused by environmental factors. This gap was seen to hamper both the measuring of the phenomenon, as well as effective protection of those concerned. It was pointed out, however, that taking action must not be prevented by a lack of legal and shared definitions: just as humanitarian assistance to those displaced internationally by environmental hazards is being provided in the absence of a clear legal framework, increased pressure from policy makers to receive better migration

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<sup>1</sup> An Expert Meeting on Data collection and research on migration and development was organized on 1 October 2008 in Helsinki, Finland, as a follow-up event to the first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) held in Brussels in July 2007. In addition, during the second meeting of the GFMD, held in Manila from 29-30 October 2008, Roundtable 3.1 was dedicated to the topic of Strengthening Data and Research Tools on Migration and Development.



data has led researchers to launch new initiatives, despite the lack of progress in the harmonization of migration concepts.

Honesty about uncertainties, and transparency regarding the sources of data were deemed crucial in light of remaining data gaps and discrepancies in available figures regarding migration and displacement. This would also facilitate the comparability of data sets, as well as allowing for an unbiased interpretation of the information presented.

### **First steps: improving the collection of basic data**

Basic information on migration stocks (number of migrants in the country at a given point in time) and flows (migrants entering and leaving the country during a specific period of time) can be derived from population censuses and surveys, if they contain a number of migration-related questions. The seminar looked more closely at the ongoing 2010 round of censuses, which provides a chance to improve the coverage and comparability of migration-related data worldwide. In this regard, it was recommended that countries comply with relevant UN Principles and Recommendations, especially the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. The Principles and Recommendations (Rev. 2) spell out several basic migration-related questions to be included in every census, namely: A) Place of birth/Country of birth; B) Duration of residence in the country; C) Place of previous residence/Place of residence at a specified date in the past; D) Citizenship; and E) Year or period of arrival.

According to the UN Statistics Division, compliance with these recommendations has so far been unsatisfactory during the ongoing round of censuses, with inclusion rates for each of the above-mentioned questions ranging from 30% to 80%. Not only should Governments make better use of the census and other national surveys to collect migration data, they should also ensure that this data is being compiled, and shared in a timely manner. Experts stressed repeatedly that there is no benefit in collecting data without ensuring that it can be publicly accessed and used by policy makers and researchers alike. Using the internet can be a cost-saving way of doing so.

Indeed, one of the obstacles preventing countries from carrying out the census and other national surveys is the high costs associated with these tools. A preliminary estimate by the UN Statistics Division, based on roughly 60% of all countries, projects the global cost of the 2010 round of censuses to amount to approximately US\$ 32 billion. This would equal an approximate cost of US\$ 4.6 per capita. While these figures widely vary across countries and regions, it was deemed alarming that in Africa, only 65% of the costs will be covered from national budgets. Also, ten African countries are likely to face serious if not insurmountable census-taking problems during this 2010 round. Increased efforts to provide funding and technical assistance, especially equipment and capacities, are therefore essential.

### **Mapping out a research agenda: disaggregating migration and development**

Beyond the collection of primary data, the discussions revolved around a broader research agenda that would underpin the current policy interest in the interlinkages between migration and development. In this context, several speakers commented on the need to develop a better understanding of the development impacts of migration beyond economic definitions and indicators. One such approach was presented by the Human Development Report (HDR) Office of UNDP, which laid out the research agenda for the 2009 HDR on human mobility. Coming from a human development perspective, the report is guided by an interest in the effects of migration on the choices and capabilities of migrants, their families and communities. It will also explore mobility as an expression of human development, a choice that individuals make to seek opportunity.



Another concern will be to assess policy impacts on both migration movements and outcomes.

In this context, the seminar stressed the need to look beyond migrants themselves, and to examine the impacts of migration, and of migration policies, on those left behind. This is all the more relevant in light of the current trend in migration policy to promote temporary rather than family migration. Preliminary findings from a UNICEF study on the social costs of migration, specifically its impacts on children left behind, suggest that the life satisfaction of children and adults is lower in migrant households than in non-migrant households. These findings are based on pilot surveys of 300 households and responses from over 1400 interviewees in two test countries, Albania and Ecuador. In both countries, an equal number of migrant and non-migrant households with children under the age of eight years were being compared, and children and adults were asked to rate their life satisfaction as it relates to family, friendship, school, self and their place of residence.

The participatory conduct of the study was commended for exemplifying what is often referred to as a 'human rights based' approach – the active involvement in the process of those directly concerned. At the same time, experts underlined that the subjective and relative indicator of life-satisfaction is most convincing when combined with objective indicators such as poverty, child mortality, health, and schooling rates. Indeed, the study is due to proceed by exploring in more detail the impacts on children in cases where the mother vs. the father migrates and returns; the impacts of migration more specifically on health; and the impact of life satisfaction on the propensity to migrate. A factor to be taken into account throughout is the level of remittances received by each household. In this respect, it was recommended that studying South-South migration flows, where the income differential between countries of origin and destination is likely to be lower, could help extrapolating the impacts of migration beyond the compensatory effects of high remittance revenues.

Finally, in the context of the discussion about the social costs of migration, it was emphasized that the question of whether migration is good or bad for development is much too general to produce useful insights for policy making. Instead, policy makers should seek and be provided with disaggregated information that identifies the variables which increase the positive effects of migration, as well as those decreasing its negative effects.

**UNITAR New York is responsible for the content of this report.**