



## **Statement of the Global Migration Group (GMG)<sup>1</sup>**

General Assembly Informal Thematic Debate on International Migration and Development  
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**“Improving international cooperation on migration and development –  
How can the international community best support cooperation?”**

### ***Introduction***

*Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Joseph Deiss, His Excellency President of the General Assembly,  
Mr. Peter Sutherland, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Migration, Dr.  
Koser,*

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, colleagues,*

I have the honor to address you today as the Chair of the Global Migration Group (GMG), which encompasses 15 United Nations entities plus the International Organization for Migration.

Separately and collectively, members of the Global Migration Group serve intergovernmental bodies, including this one, in a variety of ways. These include: conducting relevant policy research; analyzing global trends; monitoring the implementation of international instruments, such as those which address the rights of migrant workers and members of their families, refugees, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling; and providing guidance on maximizing the value of remittances.

Through our respective constituents, partnerships and networks, we work with all stakeholders – including Governments, workers' and employers' organizations, migrant associations, and civil society – to coordinate a truly global approach to addressing the challenges and harnessing the benefits associated with international migration in a changing world.

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Migration Group (GMG) is an inter-agency group bringing together 16 agencies including ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UN/DESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNITAR, UNODC, UN Regional Commissions, UN Women, World Bank, and WHO.

## ***The Global Picture***

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, we live in an age of mobility, a time when more people are on the move than at any other time in human history. Today, approximately 214 million people, or around 3 percent of the world's population, live outside their countries of birth.

Thanks to the work of GMG members and others, we know more about migrants and trends in migration than ever. For example, we know that girls and women now account for nearly half of all international migrants, and that 16 percent of all international migrants are under age 20. We also know that migrants from developing countries who live in other developing countries are as numerous as those who live in developed countries.

As we hope to illustrate in this statement, the positive potential of migration is great, just as the challenges it presents are many -- from ensuring migrants' human rights to maximizing the value they bring to their countries of origin, transit and destination. The task for the international community is clear: How can we work together to meet these challenges and reap the opportunities of global migration? How can we empower migrants and foster an environment that facilitates their contributions to human development generally and, more specifically, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals?

## ***Migration and Development: Positive and Negative Effects***

Migration and development are inextricably linked. The impact of migration extends far beyond migrants themselves to those they leave behind, as well as to the communities and countries in which they work, travel and make their homes.

Remittances – private contributions earned and sent home by migrants – are among the most positive apparent effects of migration, with the potential to greatly improve the standard of living of migrants themselves and those left behind.

Officially recorded remittance flows to developing countries totaled US\$325 billion in 2010, and are expected to grow between 7 and 8 percent annually to reach US\$404 billion by 2013. These funds far exceed the volume of official aid flows. Compared with private capital flows to developing countries, which have declined steeply in the continuing global financial crisis, remittances have remained resilient. At the same time, “social remittances” -- flows of new ideas, products, information, technology, and practices – also provide a significant benefit to migrants and their families.

While labour migration opportunities, diaspora-related initiatives, and social and financial remittances can be powerful development tools, they are by no means a complete solution to the lack of opportunity and discrimination that so often prompts migration in the first place. Neither are they a substitute for government programmes and critical support systems in developing countries. Rather, they should be seen as complements of sound economic and social policies designed to improve people's lives.

Further, while migration can aid development and reduce poverty, it can also create significant challenges to development. For example, as workers with specialized skills often migrate in search of better opportunities, labor markets in developing countries of origin may experience a decrease in the availability of skilled labor. Migration also can increase social inequity, particularly in countries of origin, as families receiving remittances are better able to afford everything from basic necessities to health and education services than those who do not receive these benefits. And migration also has social costs, most notably the disruption of families when spouses, children, and the elderly are left behind. This is especially true when women migrate, often increasing the need for critical support services.

Finally, while all migrants may face heightened risk of discrimination, migrants in irregular situations are more vulnerable to abuse of their fundamental human rights, often being denied even the most basic labor protections, due process guarantees, personal security and access to health services. Many are afraid or unable to seek protection and relief from authorities. And while trafficking affects women, men and children of all ages, migrant women and girls are at increased risk of trafficking, as well as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health problems.

### ***Migration and Youth: Harnessing Opportunities for Development***

Children and young people also are increasingly affected by international migration. As earlier mentioned, globally there are approximately 35 million international migrants between the ages of 10 and 24 years, with significant regional variations.

Earlier this week, the GMG hosted a symposium here in New York to address the ways international migration affects the lives and well-being of these young people, both migrants and non-migrants. This symposium brought together participants from Member States, GMG member agencies, civil society and academia, and it also provided a forum for young migrants themselves.

During the symposium, we reviewed the latest evidence of the impact of migration on children and young people, and discussed trends, including the rise in youth migration through both regular and irregular channels. We also discussed the challenges young people face, whether they migrate alone, are accompanied by parents or family members, stay behind in countries of origin, or are born in countries of destination.

We learned that young migrants are a very heterogeneous group, and leave home for many different reasons. Many migrate in search of employment. But many others flee their countries of origin because of persecution, armed conflict and other violent threats. Still others leave home due to natural disasters and the intensifying effects of global environmental change. We discussed the heightened risks of exploitation and abuse so many young migrants face, especially those in irregular situations, who are unaccompanied by parents, and especially those who are smuggled and trafficked.

The symposium also documented the beneficial impact of remittances on young people, families and communities in countries of origin. In particular, children and young people living in remittance-receiving households have better education and health outcomes. However, the Symposium also addressed the psycho-social impact on children and young people living in households where one or both parents were working abroad.

## ***Benchmarks of International Cooperation***

Clearly, international migration is an increasingly global phenomenon requiring a truly global approach, anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international legal standards and instruments.

The process to develop such a framework began in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. The Programme of Action underlined the need for a comprehensive approach to the management of migration and policy development, calling for international support to governments in terms of capacity building, training and mutual cooperation.

Twelve years later, participants at the 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development agreed on the pressing need to further complement national migration and development strategies with strengthened bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation (A/61/515).

More recently, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has made significant strides toward a more comprehensive, balanced and cooperative approach to international migration.

With most migration taking place within regions, regional collaboration is critical. To that end, the GMG works at the regional level with Member States to support cooperation, to carry out projects, to develop networks, and to provide support. Regional Consultative Processes on migration (RCPs) have emerged in most regions across the world over the past 20 years and now constitute important building blocks for developing mutual understanding, capacity and cooperation on the multidimensional aspects of migration.

We also work to build national capacity, supporting Governments' efforts to mainstream migration into national development plans. We recently published a Handbook on Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning. We will pilot the Handbook in four countries during the course of 2011.

Under the Joint Migration and Development Initiative, we have allocated 10 million euros to 54 migration and development projects carried out by local governments and civil society organizations in 16 countries. We are also implementing 14 projects on youth, employment and migration, worth 80 million US dollars, as part of the MDG Achievement Fund.

By carrying out these projects, we are developing indicators to monitor and evaluate their results and to assess their impact on development. We will share our experience with the Global Forum at workshop in June of this year.

In these ways and others, the GMG is committed to supporting Member States' efforts to improve the lives and well-being of migrants and enhance the contribution of migration to poverty reduction and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

### ***Three Key Areas for Increasing International Co-operation***

As we take stock and look ahead to the 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, it is clear that much more remains to be done. Dialogue, consultation, and partnerships have never been more important. We have more to learn from each other than ever before. Speaking on behalf of the GMG, I would like to outline three key areas in which we might focus our joint efforts.

*First, any international framework must embrace a proactive and human rights-based approach to regular and safe migration.* The benefits of migration for development can only be truly maximized when migration occurs out of choice, safely, and through regular channels. Therefore, stakeholders in countries of origin, transit and destination must work in partnership to facilitate regular migration.

International cooperation in this area should include: promoting economic growth and sustainable development so that migration can take place as a matter of choice rather than out of necessity of migration; developing policies for regular migration in the context of bilateral, regional and global frameworks; allowing for temporary movement of persons in a manner that benefits both countries of origin and destination and protects the rights of the migrant; providing coordinated assistance to victims of trafficking and to smuggled migrants; cooperating to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants; improving integration and reducing the incidence of xenophobia, racism and discrimination against migrants; and protecting, respecting and ensuring the human rights of all migrants and members of their families.

Among other efforts to guide us, the United National Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols provide States with a framework to increase international cooperation to address unsafe migration, especially in relation to trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

*Second, we must strengthen international efforts to protect the rights of migrant workers and their families.* As a starting point, the GMG urges those states that have not yet done so to ratify and implement all relevant international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the ILO Conventions Nos. 97 and 143 on migrant workers, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The rights contained in these Conventions protect migrants, allowing them to live safe and dignified lives, and to maximize their contributions as productive workers, entrepreneurs and members of society. In particular, enforcing labor rights facilitates migrants' access to essential services and decent living standards. This not only benefits host countries but also accelerates progress toward the MDGs by promoting development and enhancing equity.

International cooperation in this area should include: devising rights-based, gender-sensitive policies for recruiting migrant labor, with a view to facilitating migrants' access to decent work, skills recognition and training; increasing the portability or transferability of social security

benefits, such as pensions and health insurance; and developing policies against discrimination and exploitation in the workplace.

*Third, we must work together to ensure that the potential for migrant remittances is fully realized.* As previously discussed, remittances are a key benefit of migration, improving the standard of living both for migrants and their dependents. While significant progress has been made in recent years to maximize the value of migrants' remittances and reduce transaction costs, further effort is needed to strengthen formal remittance channels and make use of new technologies.

To that end, discussion should focus on how we can work together to promote greater transparency, accountability, efficiency and competition in the remittance service industry. This should include advocating for appropriate regulations for telecommunications companies offering financial services. At the same time, we should work to increase migrants' access to financial services in countries of origin and destination, especially in rural areas, and to provide incentives that encourage migrants and their dependents to allocate remittances to household savings, education and health. Finally, we should find new ways of working together to enhance the value of social remittances – skills and experiences that migrants gain and which can further contribute to development in their countries of origin.

### ***Your Excellencies,***

We have tried to outline the most pressing issues we need to address as an international community to realize the full potential of migration to increase development and improve the lives of millions of migrants and their families. Clearly, international migration is a complex issue, requiring concerted, coordinated effort.

Today's debate carries forward that effort, which began 17 years ago in Cairo and has only increased in scope and complexity since then. Now we must seize the opportunity to build on this momentum and widen the scope and depth of the discussion as we move towards the 2013 High-level Dialogue.

To borrow once again from the Secretary-General, "Migration can be an enormous force for good. If we better manage our shared interests, we can together help to usher in an era where more people than ever before begin to share in the world's prosperity."

On behalf of the Global Migration Group, we look forward to working with you – and engaging with all stakeholders – to achieve that important goal.

Thank you.