

Asia-Pacific High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development

22-23 September 2008
Bangkok, Thailand

Chairman's Summary

1. The Asia- Pacific High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development

- Concern has been expressed about the increase in irregular migration in Asia and the Pacific region. In some countries, this has been linked to the high cost of regular migration.
- Human trafficking has become entrenched in the region and requires effective counter-trafficking policies and programmes which address critical aspects in both areas of origin and destination.
- It was also noted that, because of its multidisciplinary nature, addressing the challenges of international migration requires policy coherence. Migration policies need to be internally consistent and integrated into the socio-economic development agenda, including poverty reduction strategies.
- Participants reaffirmed that management of international migration should aim at maximizing the positive effect and minimizing risks for both country of origin and destination, and the migrants themselves. Effective management is possible only through constructive cooperation and dialogue among the states.

Roundtable 1:

Remittances for Development

9. The roundtable was chaired by Mr. Bishnu Prasad Lamsal, Ministry of Labour and Transportation Management, Nepal, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Prof. Richard Brown from the University of Queensland, Australia, to make an introductory presentation.
10. Prof. Brown addressed the linkages between remittances and development pointing out the need to be clear as to what is meant by 'development'. If what is meant is economic growth, then it becomes necessary to assess the impact of remittances in terms of their effect on increased savings and investment; if what is of concern is human development, then there comes the need to focus more specifically on the effects of remittances on social protection, poverty alleviation, and improvements in health or increased education. He reported that numerous studies had found that remittances had been linked to reduction in poverty and increased family-based social protection, while at the same time, contributing positively to savings, wealth and investment. The welfare of the migrants themselves, especially women, should receive due attention.
11. He pointed out that in order to better understand the linkages between remittances and development as well as to formulate policies; better data were needed, preferably through customized household surveys. Data from administrative sources and household surveys are both needed to provide a comprehensive picture of the levels and impacts of remittances.
12. Participants noted that some countries experienced both inflows and outflows of remittances simultaneously. Migrants tended to remit less once they had settled in countries of destination. Participants pointed out that linkages between remittances and development were not always automatic and direct. In fact, although remittances were unlikely to initiate growth and development, they could accelerate ongoing development. Remittances not only benefited migrant households but also non-migrant households and communities, through multiplier effects and directly through transfers from migrant to non-migrant households.

13. Participants reported that in some cases remittances had been used to establish small-scale businesses and entrepreneurial activities. Some participants, however, drew attention to the potentially negative consequences of remittances, including the culture of dependency that they might foster at both the household and national levels.
14. Participants noted that in recent years considerable progress had been made in channelling more remittances through formal financial institutions. However, there is still concern that these transfers can be costly and that more effort is needed to reduce these costs. Through technological advances in electronic banking, including money transfers through short message services (SMS) or mobile automatic teller machines (ATMs), the transaction costs of remittances are being reduced. Improved access to and use of formal channels of remittances have also helped to better capture the flows of remittances.
15. Further, participants pointed out that financial literacy was crucial for increasing savings and for facilitating productive use of remittances. Financial institutions were educating clients in this regard, especially in rural areas.
16. It was also noted that remittances had been linked in some countries such as Bangladesh to microfinance projects, involving NGOs. Participants recognized that migrant communities often contributed to the development of their home communities and that a number of countries had taken measures to strengthen ties with their nationals in countries of destination.

Roundtable 2:

International migration in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states

17. The roundtable was chaired by Mr Viliame Naupoto, Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration, Fiji, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Prof. Rallu from INED, France, to make an introductory presentation.
18. The region hosts a number of these countries with special needs, including 14 least developed countries (LDCs), 12 land locked developing countries (LLDCs) and 17 small island developing states (SIDS). Prof. Rallu highlighted the demographic impact of migration on population growth and the dependency ratio. The depletion of adult cohorts through migration had led to higher dependency ratios in some LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. Migration could lead to the emigration of skilled workers. The potential positive effects of return migrants in the labour markets of their country of origin were also recognised. He examined both the positive and negative impacts of remittances at the household and community levels.
19. Participants acknowledged that LDCs, LLCs and SIDS have specific challenges to address when it comes to development, including those associated with their geography and, in some cases, limited opportunities for development.
20. Participants noted that small countries should strengthen their linkages with their migration communities abroad in order to attract their skills and investment at home. Retention of skilled nationals was a common issue. In some cases, the

29. Participants highlighted the importance of information seminars and pre- and post-departure trainings for migrants. In addition there was a need for public information campaigns to dispel unrealistic expectations of migration. Families and children left behind should also receive due attention.
30. Countries of origin were requested to ensure that their policies to protect the rights of migrants did not increase the incentive of migrants to migrate through informal channels. Banning categories of citizens from migrating, such as mothers with young children, were not an effective solution to mitigate the social impacts from migration.
31. Countries of destination needed to share the responsibility for the protection of migrants with countries of origin. It was desirable that regional benchmarks be developed in order to ensure the application of basic labour standards for migrant workers. All relevant stakeholders needed to be included in this process.
32. Some participants noted that negative campaigns against regular and irregular migrants may lead to xenophobia. In order to reduce the scope of such negative campaigns, the contribution of migrants to the economy and society of host and home countries should be highlighted.
33. Regional agreements were needed to develop standards for the protection of the rights of migrants. Bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination could also play a role in regulating labour migration flows. Some participants noted that these two processes can be pursued in parallel.
34. Examples of processes and forums that addressed these issues included the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, the Bali Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process), and the Colombo Process on Management of Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia.

Roundtable 4:

Data and research on migration

35. The roundtable “Migration Data and Research” was chaired by Mr. Abdul Rahman, Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Mr. Hovy from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, to make an introductory presentation.
36. Mr. Hovy emphasized that in order to address migration and development, reliable, consistent and comparable data on international migration were needed. This information was crucial to develop policies which would benefit countries and migrants alike.
37. Data from census counts and regularization campaigns provided information on migrant stocks whereas data from administrative records, such as border statistics provided data on migrant flows. While census enumerations used a standard set of questions, data from administrative records were more difficult to harmonize.

38. There were important gaps in the data on migrant stocks and migration flows in Asia and the Pacific. It would take limited efforts to collect such data on a regular basis. In order to take advantage of the upcoming 2010 census round, delegates were urged to ensure that data on the foreign-born and foreign citizen population by age, sex and skill level be collected and processed. Once collected, the data could easily be made available through the internet.
39. Most delegates agreed that data disaggregated by sex and age were essential in order to provide a basis for sound policy making. Delegates, in particular from small island developing states, expressed a special interest in data on foreigners in their countries as well as on their nationals living abroad. By providing detailed data on the foreign-born and foreign citizens, countries could obtain information on their nationals abroad from host countries. Data could also be collected through household surveys. Participants pointed out that they were interested in obtaining estimates and obtaining information on irregular migrants in their countries.
40. More research on the social and economic impacts of international migration was needed. Migration modules could be included in labour and household surveys in order to obtain more detailed data on the multidimensional aspects of migration, including remittances. Participants from small island developing states pointed out that the impact of migration on small economies was particularly large. Countries needed better information on the net effect of migration taking into account remittance and human capital flows.
41. National conferences could be convened in order to review to data availability in the field of international migration. One participant stressed the need to create a publicly-available database on recruitment agencies to ensure transparency of the