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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Expert Group Meeting on Strengthening Capacities for Migration Management in Central Asia

Bangkok
20 and 21 September 2010

I. Expert recommendations

Experts recommended more focus on and training in the following areas:

1. Pre-departure orientation and training
 - Providing information about matters including existing vacancies, salaries, working conditions and accommodation,;
 - Training of potential migrant workers (legal awareness, necessary professional skills, language and cultural aspects of country destinations);
 - Developing pre-departure centres for the above-mentioned purposes.
2. Employment and stay
 - Providing access to health services;
 - Further developing and fuller implementing existing legislation to protect migrant workers including at the bi- and multilateral level;
 - Addressing needs of migrants (both women and men migrants) in countries of destination, for example setting up centres (in collaboration with NGOs and diaspora organizations) to address those needs;
 - Conducting studies on the impact of migration on the socio-economic development of migrants in receiving and sending countries.
3. Return and re-integration, including remittances management
 - Providing services to support re-integration in the countries of origin taking into account newly acquired skills of migrant workers;

- Improving access to financial services;
- Upgrading financial literacy of migrants.

II. Proceedings of the Meeting

Agenda item 2: Key trends and challenges on migration and remittances in Central Asia

Under this agenda item, the Chairperson, Mr. Jorge Carrillo, invited Mr. Mikhail Denissenko to give a presentation on “Migration and Remittances in Central Asia and South Caucasia” and Mr. Nilim Baruah from the International Labour Organization to give a presentation on “Remittances and their potential for savings in migrant sending countries: the cases of Armenia and Tajikistan”. The chairperson also invited Ms. Dono Abdurazzakova to give a presentation on “Social impact of international migration and remittances in Central Asia” and Mr. Zeynal Hadjiev on “Migration and remittances in Tajikistan”.

In his presentation, Mr. Mikhail Denissenko presented detailed data on the stock and flows of migrants from Central Asia to the Russian Federation. He also gave an overview on migration policies in the region and the main issues related to international migration from the perspectives of the sending and receiving countries as well as the migrants themselves.

Mr. Nilim Baruah presented the results of a study undertaken by the International Labour Organization (ILO) exploring remittances and their potential for savings in the migrant-sending countries Armenia and Tajikistan. In the presentation, he informed that access to formal remittances transfers had improved in the past years and the cost of making remittances was low. However, in both countries, about 90 per cent of remittances were used for consumption and only 8 to 11 per cent were used for savings. Among the savings, only a small amount was kept in banks. Lack of familiarity with the banking system and mistrust of banks were the main reasons for this. He recommended that greater awareness among financial service providers needed to be created to tailor financial products to the needs of migrants and their families.

Ms. Dono Abdurazzakova analyzed the push and pull-factors for international migration in Central Asia and gave an overview of the social impact of international migration in the countries of origin. She outlined that the “typical” migrant worker in Central Asia was male, young, low skilled and from a rural area. In spite of this, female migration was increasing and seemed to be undercounted. The migration profile also had to be differentiated by country. For example, while migration from Tajikistan was dominated by men, there was an increasing number of women migrants from Kyrgyzstan. She recommended special measures to address the needs of migrant women and the families left behind.

Mr. Zeynal Hadjiev, Chief of Mission in Tajikistan, International Organization for Migration (IOM), presented trends on migration and remittances from the perspective of Tajikistan and analysed the positive and negative impact of remittances in Tajikistan. As negative impacts he mentioned family break up, neglect of children, migrants returning with unstable health and labour shortages in agriculture.

In the subsequent discussion, experts recommended creating better awareness of the positive features of international migration as a whole. They also agreed that migrants not only contributed positively to the economies of their countries of origin, but also to the countries of destination. Experts suggested conducting a comprehensive study on the impact of migrants to the country of destination.

Experts also discussed how irregular migrants could be provided access to the formal banking sector. Ms. Altynbekova informed that in Kazakhstan, migrants had to present a taxpayer's number in order to be able to open a bank account. However, irregular migrants did not possess a taxpayer's number. For this reason, irregular migrants had only limited access to the formal banking sector. Other experts shared the experience of the Russian Federation, which had enabled irregular migrants to use the formal banking system by requiring only an identity document. Moreover, migrants did not have to open a bank account in order to send remittances to their country of origin.

Ms. Altynbekova also shared Kazakhstan's experience in implementing a migration policy. She informed that Kazakhstan still had a high number of irregular migrants, but a new law was planned to better regulate migration to Kazakhstan. Currently, about 25 per cent of the migrants to Kazakhstan came from Kyrgyzstan, 35 per cent from Uzbekistan and the rest from other countries in Central Asia, including the Russian Federation. Most of the migrants worked in the construction sector, but this had been changing over the past years, with an increasing number of migrants in the services sector. Currently, about 55 per cent of the migrants to Kazakhstan were men and 45 per cent were women. Demand for migrant domestic helpers was currently increasing. She stressed the importance for providing legal ways for migrants to migrate and the need for liberalization of the existing migration legislation. She also expressed concern about many employers who did not legalize the status of their migrant workers.

Some experts also drew attention to the quota system as applied by the Russian Federation. Other experts stressed that the quota system was important to regulate migration, especially seasonal migration. In this connection, Mr. Malenko stressed the importance of licensing for regularizing migrant workers. Licensing would also protect migrants against police checks.

Participants also discussed practical approaches to make better use of remittances, such as assisting return migrants or families left behind in establishing a business or channelling remittances into infrastructure projects. Mr. Hadjiev mentioned examples where remittances were used for the maintenance of schools.

Agenda item 3: Good practices on migration and remittances in the Central Asia deserving replication

Under this agenda item, Mr. Jorge Carrillo invited Mr. Nilim Baruah, Senior Migration Policy Adviser, Central Asia, ILO Project Office in Almaty to give a presentation on "Labour migration policies in Central Asia" and Ms. Yuko Hamada and Mr. Zeynal Hadjiev to give a joint presentation on "Migration Management in Asia: Lessons Learnt".

In his presentation, Mr. Baruah stated that the Central Asian countries were relatively new in organized labour migration. Due to the visa-free regime among most former countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), migration was often channelled through informal networks. He outlined some good practices of Kazakhstan as a country of destination, where migrant workers were in most cases treated equally to nationals. He also outlined examples of good practices in countries of origin, such as low cost remittances services, service centres provided by the Kyrgyz Government for Kyrgyz migrant workers in the Russian Federation, skills registers (Armenia and Tajikistan) and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 97 and the UN Convention on the Rights of all Migrant Workers and their Families by several Central Asian countries. He also pointed out regional and bi-lateral efforts to coordinate and harmonize labour migration policies.

In their presentation, Ms. Hamada and Mr. Hadjiev presented practical examples from Asian countries of providing assistance to migrants in the migration cycle, which included pre-departure preparations, regulating immigration and employment, protection and support services and return and re-integration services. As lessons learnt from migration in several countries in Asia, they pointed out that, if carefully managed, migration could help alleviate economic constraints generated by high unemployment rates in the countries of origin or domestic labour shortages in the countries of destination. Through a regulated and effective approach, international labour migration could become an instrument for development, regional integration and social welfare. Yet, they emphasized that migrants could only become active members in the economic, social, cultural and political life of host countries if they were successfully integrated there. Further, capacity building on labour migration management in both countries of origin and destination could enhance the benefits of labour migration management for all concerned parties.

In the discussion, Mr. Asanbaev recognized significant policy changes in the latest years, especially in the Russian Federation.

Ms. Altynbekova informed that currently about 30 per cent of the migrants to Kazakhstan were irregular migrants. Kazakhstan had introduced some changes in the legislation, for example the initial period of 3 months during which migrants had time to search for a job could be extended twice. She also emphasized the need to protect migrants and to grant them equal rights. She further informed that Kazakhstan had published a brochure about its labour migration policy. Copies of the brochure were distributed to the Meeting.

Several experts also expressed the need for better departure training of migrants which should include training on financial literacy in order to make better use of remittances and to benefit from savings after return. Mr. Malenko also emphasized the need for language skills. Mr. Kalashnikov informed that currently, school curricula in the Russian Federation included units on the cultures of other CIS countries which would contribute to creating multi-cultural societies. Several experts agreed that Russian language skills would be important to allow the integration of migrants in the Russian Federation.

III. Organization of the Meeting

The Expert Group Meeting on Strengthening Capacities for Migration Management in Central Asia was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It was held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok on 20 and 21 September 2010.

The Expert Group Meeting was attended by 13 experts from 6 countries in North and Central Asia (the list of participants is attached).

The Expert Group Meeting was also attended by experts from the following United Nations offices and intergovernmental organizations: International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). In addition, there were two independent resource persons.

Ms. Nanda Krairiksh, Director, Social Development Division and Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov opened the Meeting. In her opening remarks, Ms. Krairiksh stressed the high importance of international migration in the North and Central Asian Region and outlined the importance of this meeting in shaping a common Central Asian voice. She also thanked the Russian Federation for its financial contributions to the Meeting. Mr. Pomoshchnikov stressed the importance of international migration for the Russian Federation and the importance of remittances for the development of Central Asian countries.

Annex:

List of participants

Experts

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Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer	Social Affairs Officer, SDD

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