

## Workshop 2 – Migration Partnerships: From words to action

The changes that have occurred in recent years in migratory flows have made it more difficult for countries to perceive themselves solely as origin, destination or transit countries. More and more states are required to deal at the same time with the flows of their own nationals leaving the country, international migrants entering their territory and so-called transit migrants. Even though this helps countries to better understand each other as they are facing similar challenges, numerous divergences of interests persist between countries that mostly send migrants and those that generally receive them. Hence, many governments of major receiving countries have come to realise that a unilateral approach to regulating migration flows is insufficient and that it is necessary to enhance international cooperation and to find constructive solutions involving origin and transit countries. The idea of migration partnerships is rooted in the growing awareness that issues such as return or prevention of irregular migration can only be tackled through dialogue and partnership and not on the basis of a purely nation-based, inward-looking strategy.

### *Definition*

To define the concept broadly, a *migration partnership* aims at better balancing the interests of origin and destination countries when addressing migration issues, thus bringing about win-win situations. The idea is to encourage various forms of dialogue between officials in order to prevent migration due to dire necessity and thus to ensure that migration flows occur through legal channels and on a voluntary basis. It is not limited to governmental cooperation but requires the involvement of international organisations, NGOs and civil society at large. The objectives of migration partnerships are to improve efficiency and cooperation, and to enhance the positive aspects of migration while reducing the negative ones. Migration partnerships also try to develop strategies that create greater incentives in countries of origin and thereby prevent potential migrants from leaving their country. These strategies deal with poverty reduction, economic growth, conflict prevention and good governance and can be achieved through existing tools of foreign policies. Although not referring explicitly to migration, the United Nations set as the eighth Millennium Development Goal the establishment of a global and comprehensive partnership for development and poverty reduction.

The concrete framework of a migration partnership program depends on the context of its implementation and remains open to various interpretations and approaches. Depending on the particular case, it may be limited to few core elements of migration policies such as a readmission agreement and voluntary return assistance programs. On the opposite end, it can open the gate to broader cooperation including structural aid and development, conflict prevention and good governance in the partner country. Among constituting elements, one can mention the support for migration management in the origin country, changes in the visa regime, stimulating reintegration of returnees, financial aid, conflict prevention

and conflict transformation programs, access to education and measures facilitating the transfer of remittances to countries of origin.

### ***Migration partnerships in the European Union***

The European Union has included certain elements of the partnership based approach in its common migration policies. At the Tampere Summit in October 1999, heads of governments identified migration partnerships as a key element of a common EU approach to migration and asylum. In the 2004 Hague Programme they reaffirmed the necessity to base the common migration policy on partnership, defining the notion as a major instrument to improve asylum systems, combat irregular migration or implement resettlement programmes as well a policy to return illegal immigrants to their country of origin. The EU's approach is clearly based on the perceived links between migration and development. Thus, the European Commission stresses the need to focus the dialogue with partner countries on strategies aimed at reducing poverty and improving living conditions in countries of origin, for instance by creating a better framework to access higher education. A second vital element of the EU's approach toward migration partnerships is its cross-pillar dimension aiming at creating more coherent strategies. The underlying idea is to define policies based on the cooperation between the Council, the Commission and different ministries of member states. Thus, migration partnerships in the EU are based on a long-term strategy.

Support for institutional and legislative capacity-building, support for re-integration of returnees and dissemination of information about possibilities to work legally in the EU are some potential measures of an EU migration partnership. In Morocco, the European Union actively promoted the creation of a state migration authority concerned with improving various aspects of border management. EU member states also developed strategies based on partnership. Belgium for instance financed information campaigns in South-Eastern Europe aiming at warning potential migrants about the risks of irregular migration. A similar project was conducted in Kazakhstan and contributed to the reduction of the number of illegal migrants coming from that country to the EU.

### ***Migration partnerships in Switzerland***

In Switzerland, migration partnership is a new instrument officially recognized as such in the new Aliens' Law (art.100) that will come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008. The idea is to improve collaboration with origin and transit countries on the basis of a coherent national approach. In order to better address migration issues and to define more coherent policies in the interest of all Federal Departments through coordination between ministries involved in migration and their various departments, Switzerland adopted a "whole of government approach" and created several inter-ministerial working groups on the topic.

Several federal offices are presently considering the possibility of a migration partnership with states from the Western Balkans. It intends to stimulate intensive dialogue with these countries, the setting up of return programmes, the improvement of migration management in the region, the prevention of irregular migration and further elements that will address the interests and needs of partner states in the broader field of migration.

### ***Perspectives for future development***

In order to set up a successful partnership, it is essential that the interests of both sides are taken into account. For instance, countries of origin may be reluctant to sign a readmission treaty if their economy depends on remittances of migrant workers. As a consequence,

they could be willing to focus the migration partnership on other aspects. Thus, dialogue and mutual understanding are key elements of such partnership. It must be stressed that the central idea is to create a platform for dialogue with partner countries in order to develop a long-term and efficient migration strategy.

When approached in a holistic way, migration partnerships may be seen as an opportunity to open new perspectives on the migration debate and create added value to conventional migration policy. In the case of Switzerland, there is well-founded hope that migration partnerships will bring about positive outcomes resulting from increased interdepartmental cooperation, strengthen Switzerland's position in negotiations with developing or transition countries and result in a more constructive dialogue and cooperation with partner countries. It is also expected that migration partnerships will enhance global awareness of the links between migration and development.

Denis Dafflon, Denise Efonayi