



SEMINAR REPORT

UNITAR Migration and Development Series: Migration and Ageing

organized jointly with UNFPA, IOM and the MacArthur Foundation

1 October 2007, United Nations Headquarters, New York

BACKGROUND

On 1 October 2007, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the MacArthur Foundation hosted a seminar on “Migration and Ageing” as part of the *Migration and Development Series*.

The event was held in Conference room C at United Nations (UN) Headquarters.

The attendees included thirteen delegates from permanent missions, twenty-six staff from the UN Secretariat, agencies and other international organizations; and twelve participants from civil society organizations.

OBJECTIVES

The seminar was intended to: address various interlinkages between migration and ageing, and discuss current trends and policy responses; highlight the impact of global ageing on international migration patterns and the challenges arising for national social security systems; inform participants about the existing international framework on ageing; examine emerging trends in the mobility of older persons; discuss policy options for improving access to, and the transferability of social security schemes for migrants; raise awareness on the need to consider global ageing as part of a comprehensive approach to migration management.

Information on the seminar and the *Migration and Development Series* is available from info@unitaryn.org or at <http://www.unitaryn.org/en/migdevseries.html>



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Ageing is a global trend. Over the next 50 years, the number of older persons will quadruple from 688 million today to 2 billion. However, patterns of ageing are heterogeneous, and there are great regional imbalances in the pace of the 'demographic transition' from high to low levels of fertility and mortality. The highest proportions of older persons are currently to be found in industrialized countries. Over the last decades, migration to these countries has increased in part due to resulting labour shortages.

Ms. Hania Zlotnik, Director of the United Nations Population Division explained that this is mainly the result of below replacement fertility rates. While immigration can be an alleviating factor, Ms. Zlotnik stressed that it cannot be the solution to problems arising from the ageing of societies: "Migration buys you time, but it doesn't solve your problem." Increased immigration will only palliate the effects of ageing under certain conditions, including that immigrants come when they are young. Policymakers need to consider the fact that the foreign-born also age. Indeed, in some countries the percentage of elderly is higher among the foreign-born than among natives. This poses new challenges such as access of older non-citizens to pensions and social services.

Mr. Robert Holzmann, Director of the World Bank's Sector for Social Protection & Labor stressed that there is a need to broaden the spectrum of responses to global ageing, combining migration, pro-natal and retirement policies. He underlined that ageing is not only due to lower fertility rates, but also the result of increasing life expectancy. For the latter, a lengthening of working life and postponing of retirement is likely to be an optimal approach. For a low fertility rate, the optimal policy is not so straight forward. Countries should consider a trade-off between accepting to work longer and receiving more immigrants.

Countries that are at an early stage of the demographic transition would benefit from adopting policies to capitalize on the second phase of this process during which a high proportion of the population is of working age. The outcome resolution of the 40th session of the Commission on Population and Development, held from 9-13 April 2007, describes this phase as a "window of opportunity" for development. Experts concurred that the situation as regards ageing and migration is different in each country. Policy makers need to be aware of the impacting factors and rethink their social security systems accordingly.

An example of proactive policy intervention was examined by Ms. Mika Toyota of the National University of Singapore, who identified various factors shaping Japanese retirement migration. While some, healthy retirees migrate for life-style reasons, others move because of social and financial insecurity, seeking more affordable health care and costs of living abroad. Increasingly, retirees assume a care giving role for their parents or children, as the proportion of lifetime singles in Japan is on the rise. Governments in the region consider migration of the elderly as an opportunity, actively promoting medical tourism and retirement migration through national and bilateral initiatives such as the creation of special visa categories and joint-ventures to establish facilities accommodating older migrants. These favorable policies, along with emerging global and regional markets for care provision, and changing family norms and structures lead to the rise of a new, transnational care regime.

While there is a demand for legal opportunities for temporary and circular migration, the lack of transferability of social security benefits continues to pose an obstacle to enhanced mobility.



Given the complexity of most national social security systems, bilateral agreements are currently the best solution to assure the portability of pensions between different systems. In 2000, however, only about 20% of the world's migrants were covered by such agreements. About 50% had access to social security benefits in their home and host country, but no agreement was in place to ensure transferability between the two systems. In the case of health care benefits, access and portability pose even greater challenges, which have not been fully addressed by any arrangement so far. Improved actuarial structures and cost sharing between countries could be a way of moving forward to facilitate portability in this domain.

In light of the celebration of the international day of older persons, it was mentioned that improving the transferability of benefits is an important means of empowering elderly migrants. Special attention should be given to the situation of women migrants, who often work in precarious jobs without access to social security and health care. Questions touched upon the demographic impact of higher fertility rates among immigrant populations, given that many migrants move at the age of reproduction. With respect to the viability of data on migration and ageing, it was stressed that there would be a need for more clear data on this phenomenon including international harmonization of data and data collection, and for developing ways of taking into account new migration patterns, such as circular migration between destination and origin countries.

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