

The 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
Second Preparatory Conference
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“Migration management and its linkages with economic, social and environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security in the OSCE region”

Welcoming Remarks by
Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities
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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished participants,

On behalf of my Office, I am pleased to welcome you to the second part of the Preparatory Conference being held here in Tirana. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government of Albania for hosting this important event.

Furthermore, I am pleased to see such a wide representation from OSCE participating States, International Organizations, the private sector, as well as representatives from academia and NGOs. I look forward to an active exchange of experience and expertise.

In fact, this is why we have gathered here: to exchange ideas as well as learn from our collective experience related to migration management, and its linkages and inter-dependencies with economic, social and environmental policies. Better policy coherence would maximize the benefits of migration while mitigating the negative consequences for both countries of origin and destination.

Migration is an integral part of today's economy. The OSCE area alone, in 2005, was home to about 115 million migrants that represents 9.5% of the population of the OSCE countries. A sizeable number are engaged in economic activities, which has allowed for significant social and economic advancement in both destination and origin countries in the OSCE area. We have also seen in many countries a “feminization of migration”.

Migration movements, as we know, are mainly due to the globalization of our economies, increased economic cooperation and the reduction of barriers to movements; labour force decline as a result of demographic change in developed countries and demand for foreign labour in specific sectors as well as large income and employment opportunity differentials between countries. As these factors are of longer term nature, it is generally expected that international migration will continue and therefore to maximise the positive socio-economic effects, it is important to find effective and cooperative migration management policy solutions.

The OSCE participating States have politically committed themselves to advance economic, social and political cohesion in the OSCE region for the benefit of our collective security. This includes commitments also in the area of migration and more specifically related to protection of migrants and migrant workers, optimizing the benefits of migration, mitigating the adverse impact of migration and fostering cooperation between destination, transit and origin countries. The Forum process of the Second Dimension provides one platform within the OSCE framework where issues related to these commitments can be openly discussed and information shared with the overall objective of strengthening the collective security and stability in the OSCE area.

However, our need for collective stability and security should not be overshadowed by the challenges of the global financial crisis and the economic downturn. To stem any rise in discrimination and xenophobia directed towards migrants in our societies, we need to raise awareness through public discourse that migration has become an integral part of our global economic environment and that it generally contributes to economic growth and social development. We must fight against any negative perception of migrants only “taking jobs” and “being a strain on the social welfare system”. In times like these, it is important to pay particular attention to human and labour rights as well as the status of migrants and their families, both legal and illegal.

As the underlying factors to international migration are long-term and the economic downturn can be expected to further deepen the economic divergence between developed and developing countries, regular migration channels should remain open or be further developed in order to avoid increased irregular migration. The foreign labour demand may momentarily be suppressed, but it is guaranteed to rebound with economic recovery. Actions that would send migrants home in large numbers could also have a damaging effect on origin country development through drastic cuts in remittance incomes, even further compounding the negative effects of the economic downturn. Therefore, it may be prudent to find more flexible and mutually beneficial solutions to bridge the downturn period. When economic activity starts to pick up again, migrant labour may in fact contribute to faster economic recovery.

To facilitate OSCE participating States in their efforts to deal with the economic downturn, we could discuss what the OSCE as an organization could do in the area of economic development. For example, we could support our field presences in their work with the host governments on trying to find solutions to the negative impact of the crisis on national economies. With the drastic cut in foreign direct investment and increased competition for financial resources, it has become vital to create conditions that encourage business development. This could include helping returning migrants to set-up self-employment opportunities.

Environment and security is an integral part of the Second Dimension’s activities and our migration management dialogue would be incomplete if we did not address the environmental factors related to migration

There are widely varying estimates of the number of people who will be affected by environmentally induced migration. Environmental factors such as climate change and environmental degradation are gradual. Therefore, it is harder to determine their direct effects on migration as they are often interlinked with economic opportunities and lack of social cohesion and conflicts. Although more research still needs to be conducted, there is a general acknowledgement that environmental disasters, environmental degradation, prolonged draughts and water scarcity have a multiplier effect on other migration drivers.

In this Preparatory Conference we could consider the role of the organization in the promotion of good practices and in the co-ordination of research studies in order to increase knowledge regarding migration flows brought about by environmental circumstances and how these might affect the OSCE area.

In the current climate and with the issues at hand, I strongly believe, that there is urgency for us to come together and to discuss common issues concerning migration management and to find solutions that are mutually beneficial, fair and equitable as well as sustainable. For this we need political will and open dialogue.

This includes stepping-up efforts to: improving policy cohesion between migration management, economic development and environmental policies; encouraging legal migration and combating illegal migration by balancing facilitation and prevention measures; understanding the demand and supply of labour markets; creating conditions for improved economic development and co-operation; facilitating integration of migrants in host societies and their reintegration on return; and improving their protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I close, I would like to bring to your attention the recent publication *Gender and Environment: A Guide to the Integration of Gender Aspects in the OSCE's Environmental Project*. This Guide was produced in cooperation between my Office and the Gender Section. For those interested in the publication there will be a Question-and-Answer session during the afternoon coffee break in the ONUFRI Room.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that the main objective of the Preparatory Conference is to formulate specific recommendations for the OSCE to follow-up on and carry forward to the final stage of the Forum process, the Athens Economic and Environmental Forum in May.

Once again, let me wish you fruitful and lively discussions!

Thank you.