

**Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development
in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities**

Beirut, 15-17 May 2006

As the issue of international migration gains more weight at the international level, regional organizations and governments are becoming more attentive to the challenges and opportunities it presents. It has been globally agreed that international migration affects and is affected by the development process; hence, its economic, social and cultural benefits should be more effectively captured and its negative costs better managed. Taking note of the Secretary General's advisement, the General Assembly decided in its fifty-eighth session (A/RES/58/208) to organize a high-level dialogue to discuss the multi-dimensional aspects of international migration and development in New York on 14 and 15 September 2006.

To facilitate dialogue at the regional level, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in collaboration with the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized an expert group meeting (EGM) on "International Migration and Development in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities" in Beirut during the period 15-17 May 2006. The EGM provided a regional forum for the substantive examination of international migration, in order to identify ways and means to maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impact in Arab countries.

While analysing examples of good practices and predicting viable opportunities, the EGM placed strong focus on the contradictions and weaknesses in current migration policies in the region, as well as on the challenges of achieving the internationally agreed development goals. In addition, the meeting addressed and analyzed such prevailing factors of relevance as the coexistence of labour immigration and youth unemployment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, the ineffectiveness of national capacity programmes to formulate and implement coherent migration policies, and the potential trade-off between population momentum and the transitory demographic bonus. Within this framework, the meeting aimed at:

- a. Assessing the impact of international migration on socio-economic development;
- b. Evaluating policies responses and actions to improve the implementation of regional and global agreements;
- c. Enabling stocktaking of lessons learned and best practices of both the sending and receiving countries; and
- d. Defining a framework for a regional dialogue that would enable these countries to capture the benefits while coping with the challenges

Participants of the meeting included experts from academia and research centers, government officials, representatives of international organizations, civil society and the private sector. The EGM agenda comprised seven thematic sessions, each one covering three sub-regions: *Arab Maghreb Experience*, *Arab Mashrek Experience*, and *Gulf Cooperation Council States Experience*.

- International migration trends and policies in the Arab region
- International migration and socio-economic development
- Temporary labour migration in the Arab region
- Highly-skilled migration: challenges and opportunities
- Transnational communities and return migration
- Remittances: development impact and policy responses
- Migration in the Arab world: governance, management, and capacity building