



**OECD ADVISORY UNIT ON MULTI-DISCIPLINARY ISSUES
INTERNATIONAL FUTURES PROGRAMME**
(updated October 2008)

**Proposal for a Forum for the Future Workshop on
The Future of International Migration to OECD Countries**

To be held in Paris on 1st – 2nd December 2008

1. The key issue

Migration, already high on the policy agenda of many OECD countries, is set to become a major national and international policy issue in the next few decades as migratory flows from the developing to the developed world continue and perhaps even accelerate. One key element in this will certainly be demographics, but other factors will also be at work. The economic and social implications for the sending and receiving countries alike are far-reaching, and the stakes huge. Accurate forecasting of future migratory flows, however, is not possible with current knowledge and tools. Yet decision makers in government, business and society at large would be better equipped to address the opportunities and risks if they had a better understanding of the complexities and the wider context of future migration flows.

2. The objective of the workshop

The proposed workshop will explore the main factors shaping the global migration landscape over the next 20-25 years, and examine the key drivers underlying future migratory movements. Various scenarios will be discussed to help provide a better grasp of the key issues that public and private actors will need to address if international migration is to be constructively harnessed for the good of long-term social and economic development.

3. The background

In the OECD area, there were about 82 million migrants at the turn of the millennium, and immigration flows have remained high since then. Current figures for the OECD area show that the foreign-born population accounted for 11.7 percent in 2006, and permanent inflows have increased by 18 percent in 2006 relative to the turn of the century (OECD, 2008). These figures have been steadily growing along with the number of host countries and countries of origin. Between 1990 and 2000, a net average total of some 2.5 million migrants moved from the less developed to the developed regions of the world every year (UN, 2005). The largest inflows were in Northern America with an average of 1.4 million migrants annually, followed by Europe, which absorbed around 0.8 million each year.

It is difficult, if not impossible to forecast the scale and direction of future migration, but the indications are that flows from the developing world to OECD countries will increase in the coming decades. They will be influenced to a large extent by structural changes – technological, demographic, economic, environmental, political, labour-market-related, etc. – but also by shifts in developed countries' policy



stance. Indeed, OECD migration policies will be faced with a double challenge: on the one hand, to exert some form of control over the flows with a view to facilitating the economic and social absorption of new arrivals, and on the other to reap and enhance the benefits that international migration can bring for the economy and society, especially in the light of ageing populations. In attempting to get to grips with this complex future, decision makers will need to be better informed about the factors likely to “push” emigration from developing countries, e.g. poverty, lack of employment prospects, environmental disasters, and civil strife. Equally, however, they will require a better understanding of the likely evolution of factors “pulling” migrants to OECD countries, such as higher living standards, education and employment opportunities, ageing populations, potentially significant skill shortages.

4. Timing, venue and participation

The one and one-half day workshop will be held on 1-2 December 2008 at OECD headquarters in Paris. It will bring together a diverse range of senior officials from government departments, agencies and the world of business, as well as specialists from leading research institutes, foundations and international organizations. There will be around 25-30 participants at the table, together with a number of regional migration specialists, and approximately 50 observers, depending on the final format of the workshop. Participants will be drawn from across the OECD area as well as from some of the key non-OECD sending countries.

5. The organisers

The OECD is well placed to contribute to a forward-looking policy analysis in the field of migration. It has considerable experience and expertise in the economic and social aspects of migration. Specialized departments in OECD, notably the Non-member Economies and International Migration Division of the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS), the Economics Department (ECO), the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD), the Development Centre (DEV) and the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry (STI), regularly address trends and key issues ranging from the monitoring and measurement of international migration flows to the implications for economic performance, labour markets, and movements of highly skilled professionals and the impact of remittances.

The initiators of this event are the OECD’s International Futures Programme (IFP), which reports directly to the OECD Secretary-General, and is charged with identifying and developing emerging policy issues and strengthening cross-Directorate work in the Organisation. The IFP has many years of experience in conducting forward-looking projects of this kind, and will be collaborating closely with other, specialised departments in-house, in the first instance in particular with ELS’s International Migration Division.

6. The proposed structure of the workshop

The emphasis of the workshop is on open discussion among the participants. The proposed format of the workshop is as follows:

SESSION ONE:

The first session would look at the way push and pull factors could evolve over the next 20-25 years or more. On the push side in non-OECD countries, this would include *inter alia* likely future developments in population, income levels, environmental conditions, production of the education sector and skills, employment prospects, and internal migration trends. A regional approach, perhaps with particular focus on Asia, could be explored here. The pull side would include the outlook for ageing, labor markets,



economic growth, availability of skills/qualifications, etc. The session could already flag some of the issues to be raised in the second session: e.g. the question of growing competition among OECD countries for developing countries' skills; whether migration patterns follow those of capital formation; to what extent trade is a substitute for or complement to migration.

SESSION TWO:

To help the participants get a better sense of the political, social and economic context in which migration policy may need to be designed and implemented in the future, the second part of the workshop will focus on policy-independent future scenarios. Two examples of such scenarios might be: (1) a scenario oriented towards some big, largely unexpected change on the push-side of the equation – e.g. a series of major environmental disasters in Africa and/or Asia -- which could put pressure on OECD countries' migration policies and severely test their robustness and reveal unforeseen avenues of entry for potential immigrants; (2) a scenario driven by unexpected developments on the pull-side in OECD countries, e.g. failure to mobilise domestic labour resources in response to an ageing/shrinking labour force, large skill gaps in specific sectors or occupations etc., which could force a major re-think among policy makers.

SESSION THREE:

On the basis of the issues emerging from sessions one and two, the final session would be devoted to identifying key gaps in our knowledge of future migration drivers and trends, drawing general conclusions from the foregoing debate, and discussing areas for further work, including the possibility of conducting a major, in-depth Futures Project (“Project Phase II”) on the subject.

7. Experts and background papers

Discussions will be underpinned by a number of papers commissioned specially for the meeting such as a number of regional background papers exploring the specific situation in the major world regions as well as a ‘push’ synthesis paper and a ‘pull’ synthesis paper.

8. Benefits and outcome

It is expected that the workshop will provide very useful, in some cases unique insights into what the longer-term future might hold for OECD countries and non-OECD countries in terms of the complexity, direction and strength of international migration flows and the forces underlying them. This in turn could serve as a useful building block in governments' long-term strategic thinking on the issue of migration and enable them to develop a long-range view of the future and the policy options that may need to be developed.

More immediately, the papers will be brought together in a report on the future of migration and published as an OECD book in 2009. It is expected that the workshop will identify areas for further work and provide indications of where a follow-up event or project could usefully be pursued.