What is the GFMD?

The GFMD has just entered its 4th year of operation. Established in 2006 at the instigation of the UN Secretary General and a majority of UN member states, it is a government-led process for informal, non-binding exchanges on migration and development policy issues. The annual chairmanship alternates between developing and developed countries. The Forum comprises two segments - the Government and the civil society days - and involves close interaction between the two. The Government days engage more than 160 governments from all regions, and more than 30 non-state observers, including lead international organizations, the EC and the Holy See.

The GFMD is not part of the UN, but linked to it through the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for International Migration and Development. There will be a special report on the GFMD at the next UN High Level Dialogue in 2013.

Launched by Belgium in 2007, it has since been hosted by the Governments of the Philippines and Greece. This year, Mexico will host the Forum in Puerto Vallarta on 8-11 November 2010. The theme of the 2010 Forum is Partnerships for migration and human development: shared prosperity – shared responsibility.

Over the years, the GFMD has grown to be more than just another annual international meeting on migration and development. It is helping to shape the global debate on migration and development in a more linked-up way, both through its interactive method of preparing and conducting the meetings, and in its substance.

How does the Forum differ from other international conferences?

The Forum has appeared on a stage already crowded with a myriad of other players dealing with migration and development. But there is still too little evidence of the actual relationship between migration and development; and still too little connection between the two policy fields. The GFMD aims to help correct this over time, and to contribute to greater interaction between migration and development policy and practice, both national and international. The themes may change each year with the Chair, but policy and institutional coherence remains on the agenda, underpinning all other GFMD themes.

What makes the Forum unique among international fora is its broad inter-governmental dynamic and practical orientation. It draws principally on governments’ ideas, experiences and lessons learned from programs; but also relies on evidence and ideas from non-state expert organizations and civil society to fill the knowledge gaps and add value to the policy deliberations. It brings together policy makers and politicians from developing and developed countries, and countries that host migrants and are the source of migrants. Governments work together in teams to prepare

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and present roundtables, and join forces to implement GFMD recommendations of mutual interest.

As a process, the GFMD strives for continuity.

Each GFMD has brought something old and something new to the process. In 2008, Manila dealt with fundamental human rights of migrants, both in society and in the workplace, where many temporary migrants suffer from discrimination and xenophobia. In 2009, Athens took the rights discussion a little deeper by focusing on integration of immigrants in host countries and the possible impacts of successful integration on development. In 2010, Mexico’s focus is on the partnerships needed to underpin these efforts - partnerships between countries, public and private sectors, migrants and communities, etc that can optimize the human development of the migrants through education, social welfare, health care, gender and family-oriented policies, and through comprehensive approaches to facilitate regular migration and minimize irregular forms of migration such as people smuggling and trafficking in persons.

The GFMD has brought to international attention the importance of migrant integration for development. Brussels dealt broadly with emerging forms of temporary and circular labor mobility to meet shifting global labor market needs. And Manila and Athens looked more narrowly at policies to assure the social and economic inclusion of migrants in such temporary and circular circumstances. How can governments, employers, recruiters and others best protect and support temporary foreign workers in a world where there are few, if any, rights and social support systems for migrants and their families? The assumption was that favorable conditions for migrants and their families while abroad, both short and long term, can foster human development and migrant capacities to remit earnings, secure the wellbeing of their families and generally contribute to the development of home and host countries.

On the flipside, the GFMD has also drawn attention to the development relevance of successful reintegration of migrants into their home communities, if and when they return home. Some countries of origin and host countries are today looking at integration and reintegration policies that complement each other to stimulate labor circulation of mutual benefit. For example, skills training and orientation for work abroad also prepares migrants for return and job reinsertion at home, if linked to real labor market needs in both countries. Portable social security benefits can encourage people to return and provide additional capital for business and job ventures back home. Reducing the costs of migration, and the risks of exploitation by recruiters in the country of origin, can prepare the way for a safer, more protected life for the migrants abroad. These conditions broaden people’s choices, including about returning to their home country.

Policy makers have learned from the past; but they also see the need for new approaches today. The recession of the 70s led to new guest worker schemes in Europe. Today, more flexible circular migration schemes are being tested that aim to better match skills and jobs on the global labor market while meeting development needs of the labor-sending country. If managed well, circular migration can facilitate the entry of developing countries into the global economy, while filling labor gaps of higher income countries. Some natural experiments with circular migration between, e.g., Mauritius and Canada (and France), Guatemala and Canada, and Ukraine and Moldova are expected to bring benefits from the continuing engagement of the migrants or diaspora with both home and host countries. Circular migration calls for new “transnational” policies to help integrate migrants and their families in both the host and origin country.

Against this background, the Mexico GFMD will continue to move the debate beyond the economic benefits of migration to human development and the social policies supporting it – particularly in regard to education, health, social benefits, gender and family, all key factors for
achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Improving the prospects and outcomes for migrants and families (e.g. through labor market opportunities, health, education and training) can enhance their integration in host countries and their reintegration upon return. Special policy consideration of gender-related needs and the health care and social welfare of both migrants and families abroad and families left behind can deepen the developmental effects of migration.

**GFMD is tackling current and emerging global challenges**

Two global phenomena recognized as potentially impacting the migration and development interface are the economic crisis and climate change. These sharpen the challenges already posed by global labor markets and the need for more flexible, circular forms of human and occupational mobility.

**The 2008-09 economic crisis:** As most countries across the developing-developed world spectrum have experienced shrinking economies and rising unemployment, interest has grown in the flows of labor from poorer to richer countries – will they continue to increase, stabilize, or reverse, and which migrants will be most affected? Lessons learned from past recessions are limited, given the global nature of this recession. Developing countries today know much more about the contribution to development of remittances and other diaspora investments. Remittances have remained relatively high, and governments are increasingly interested in financial instruments to attract more migrant and diaspora earnings, such as migrant or diaspora bonds.

The current recession has also caused governments to shift their focus from migration and remittances to ensuring that during a recession there is no backlash against migrants, which could set back development efforts in the countries of origin. In reflection of this, the GFMD this year will continue to focus on the situation and public perception of migrants in their host countries. More information about the benefits migrants also bring to the host countries can help create a more protective environment. The GFMD has sent a strong message to countries employing migrants not to shut their doors. And traditional strategies of sending migrant workers home when they lose their jobs have also had mixed results.

The recession has brought into sharper focus the trade-offs that migrants and their families often face: for example, weighing up the costs-benefits of going home when the job disappears or the value of earnings drops against sitting it out because of lack of opportunity at home, pressing family needs, and the need to amortize the costs of migrating. One host country offered lump-sum payments to its jobless migrants who had earned unemployment insurance benefits if they agreed to leave and not return for at least three years. But this strategy attracted few takers, as most migrant advocacy groups advised their clients to reject the return-bonus offer. Employers and unions also opposed it because of the greater value of migrants to the labor market in the longer term (and in recovery from the recession) if they are assisted to integrate rather than sent home.

**Climate change:** GFMD member states have specifically requested that this be included on the agenda of the Mexico Forum as a pressing migration and development issue. Given the lack of information and data, it will be addressed in the context of the policy coherence needed to anticipate and mitigate the possible impacts of climate change on migration and development. To date, there has been little if any discussion between states and other actors on the relationship between climate change, migration and development. The Forum will share knowledge and ideas on the subject, including the possible integration of migration into National Adaptation Plans for Action (NAPAs) on climate change. An evidence-based exchange on this issue will be a useful first step for GFMD governments to begin discussing this complex matter in an informal setting.
What has the GFMD achieved?

The GFMD has helped to build bridges between countries, regions, public and private sectors, migrants and their home and host societies etc. on two global issues naturally connected, but where the policies still remain largely disconnected. GFMD governments have over the past 3 years developed a new discourse and new approaches, and made some useful inter-country contacts in the migration and development fields. They have come to understand that there is no quick-fix, no one-size-fits-all model; but there are some good practices and ideas they can pick up from each other, and from some experts.

An informal survey undertaken by the GFMD shows that some attitudes and policies are changing. Some European governments have new or pending migration programs to facilitate circular migration of development benefit to partner countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, Sweden and the Netherlands). New pilot circular migration programs, such as between Mauritius and France, Ukraine and Portugal, and Costa Rica and Nicaragua, are testing the concept and reporting back to the GFMD.

Some key recommendations from earlier GFMD meetings have also been implemented, further reinforcing the thematic coherence between annual meetings. Two informal ad hoc working groups have been set up by governments - on protecting and empowering migrants for development, and on policy coherence, data and research - to ensure future follow-up on GFMD outcomes. Several studies recommended in Brussels and Manila have been completed, to enrich the debates on integration and reintegration, particularly in the context of emerging forms of circular migration. One study resulted in a proposal to pilot a low cost loans scheme for migrants departing from Bangladesh, to better secure their situation and empower them while abroad. This is under consideration by governments interested in the possible lessons for their own situations.²

A number of recommendations have also been made to better mainstream migration in development planning, for example through data collection tools such as the EU’s Migration Profiles, that could better inform linked-up planning. The Swiss and Moroccan Governments are calling together governments and other experts on how to assess the impacts of migration on development, and plan an inter-agency workshop in 2010 to look at indicators for impact assessment. A global call was also made by the GFMD in 2009 for the 2010 censuses to include a migration component.

Bilateral and regional agreements are emerging, that promote regular migration, be it circular or permanent, provide for some social welfare support, facilitate the transfer of remittances, better protect the rights of regular migrants, and combat irregular migration and trafficking (e.g. the UAE’s 3-country pilot labor migration program with India and the Philippines). Regional and inter-regional cooperation has been reinforced, also in the context of closer relations with the GFMD. In Asia, a meeting of Heads of Regional Consultative Processes on Migration (RCPs) discussed how to enhance exchange of good practices among RCPs; and an assessment of the outputs and impacts of RCPs was presented in Athens. Governments agree to continue pursuing policy and institutional coherence on migration and development, and research and data to underpin such coherence.

Where is Mexico taking the Forum in 2010?

Mexico is looking to foster a dynamic debate on partnerships and synergies to address the causes, challenges and effects of migration for development; and of development for migration. Both country of origin and host country derive mutual development benefits from human mobility. Sharing the responsibility for dealing with migration and development can optimize those benefits. The best way to share the responsibility and the benefits is through partnerships.

Partnerships in this context are seen as mutually agreeable arrangements between individuals and/or groups (governments, public and private sectors, migrants, diaspora, employers, home communities, NGOs, international organizations, etc.), that can maximize the developmental benefits of migration for all. Mexico believes that building partnerships among countries of origin, transit and destination can facilitate more comprehensive, balanced policies on migration that enhance human development, and policies on development to address root causes of migration. Non-governmental actors in both fields play an important role in this.

The GFMD meetings to date have proven that governments can successfully discuss migration and development issues at the multilateral level. This year, to move forward, Mexico is also seeking to renew the debate on issues previously neglected by the GFMD, because they were considered too complex for multilateral discussions. Partnerships can foster discussion and consensus on sensitive issues such as irregular migration. Origin and host countries can together diagnose the challenges and devise ways to better manage regular migration, and curb irregular migration and trafficking networks, while addressing the protection needs of migrants in vulnerable situations.

The three GFMD roundtables this year will broadly cover i) partnerships for migration and development (focused on shared prosperity and shared responsibility in addressing regular and irregular migration); ii) human mobility and human development (with a focus on social protection and support for migrants in temporary and circular labor flows, particularly women and families); and iii) policy and institutional coherence and regional/inter-regional processes.

The Mexico Forum is intended to encourage common analysis of the positive and challenging aspects of migration, and result in more concrete evidence of migrants’ contributions to the development of both origin and host societies. This can help inform policies to promote migrants’ human development, and foster their inclusion and acceptance in society, thereby reducing the likelihood of xenophobia and criminalization of migrants.

The GFMD can change the way migrants are perceived in society; but since the Forum is informal and non-binding, the best encouragement for such change is through empirical evidence and proven good practices. The Mexico discussions should yield some insights into how and what kinds of effective partnerships can support these efforts and ultimately achieve more coherent policies.

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