



United States Mission to the OSCE

Migration and Integration in the OSCE Space

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Migration and integration are two of the most important issues facing OSCE states today. Migration is generally one of the practical manifestations of a host of problems in countries of origin and reflects hope for a better life in destination countries. As noted by many in the opening plenary, migration can have positive and negative effects, both economic and social, and on both countries of origin and destination.

Given current demographic trends in much of the OSCE space, an increasing number of states will have to deal with migration on a larger scale. In many countries, the decline in the workforce due to aging and shrinking populations cannot be arrested or reversed quickly enough through increased fertility. To maintain quality of life, sustainable development and support pension schemes, many countries will have to open their labor markets, and quickly. Inviting immigrants will force states not only to integrate them, but also to evaluate their immigration policies, especially since migrants often see their move as permanent, whereas receiving states often see the move as only temporary. This mismatch in expectations can create friction and build tensions between the state and well-established immigrant communities.

One area where the Economic and Environmental Dimension is well-suited to play a role is in the often overlooked topic of environmental migration. The OSCE is already doing excellent work through the EnvSec program to address existing environmental problems. Unfortunately, by the time environmental problems, either natural or man-made, become sufficiently acute to cause migration, correcting these problems, if even possible, will take decades.

The OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension can play a crucial role in raising awareness about practices and policies that could produce environmental problems which, in turn, could prompt migration. Helping states address environmental problems is essential; better yet, we should aim to avoid these problems altogether. At local, regional and state levels, there is work to be done so that government and private citizens understand the long-term effects of agricultural policies, deforestation, and desertification, not only as problems in their own right, but also how they can exacerbate the effects of natural disasters. Some states might need assistance in identifying and obtaining alternate sources of fuel, for example, so that impoverished populations are not forced to deforest for cooking and heating purposes.

Given the enormous economic problems faced by rural populations when no longer able to derive their livelihood from the land, and tremendous economic and environmental pressure they put on urban areas to which they migrate, there is an urgent need to help communities through sound environmental, agricultural, economic and business policies in developing their economies so that they can sustain their populations rather than causing them to migrate.

Here again, the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension is well-positioned to assist, especially in helping states develop sound and transparent economic policy that facilitates investment and business creation and makes it possible for people to maximize business opportunities in their home countries. At the same time, economic policy must create equal opportunity access for all legal residents so that they can participate fully in the economy.

Given that there is no simple answer to the complex problems created by changing demographics, migration and integration, the OSCE can play an important role in facilitating the exchange of best practices and lessons learned so that each state can create its own solution. Participating States have had important successes – and failures – with migration, immigration, integration and “family friendly” policies. OSCE-facilitated access to information on their experiences can help states all devise policies that will best address the problems they face.