

Conference Education as Investment into the Future

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Perceptions about Living Abroad: Educational Aspects of Migration Policy

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Mister chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Let me first of all congratulate the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan as well as the OSCE under the Bulgarian presidency for organizing this timely conference that will help us to reach a better understanding of the link between education and political stability.

I have been asked to present the perspective of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a rather small but dynamic intergovernmental organization that currently has 102 member states.

My organization is dealing with migration. In most countries in this region, IOM has been cooperating for many years with governments within the framework of so-called Capacity Building in Migration Management programmes. IOM has been rarely dealing with the education of children, but has been providing education for adults, and in many cases, these adults were government officials.

When saying that IOM has been educating officials, I should mention at the same time that in our understanding, education is an ongoing, life-long process, and education, in the context of our programmes, is a dialogue, a process of discussion where as a result all the participant sides are learning. Education in this sense takes place when we have meetings with inter-ministerial working groups to assist in defining the best migration policy for a country of the region, when we have a close look at border management, or when we, as at the beginning of March this year, organized a study trip for government officials from Central Asia to Italy, in order to learn how the Government of Italy manages legal labour migration.

Many people, particularly in this part of the world, consider migration as a problem. In our organization, we have the experience that problems linked to migration can be solved, and we know that migration itself is not only a problem, but very often part of the solution. For instance, if in a country salaries are low and unemployment high, it seems reasonable for the government to help its citizens to earn money abroad in order to feed their families and to accumulate the capital needed for the development of the country. There are successful examples: South Korea, a country that for many decades built its wealth partly on the work of its labour migrants abroad before importing labour migrants from abroad, or the Philippines, a country that is able to send almost 900,000 workers abroad every year legally, and that allows them to earn 7 billion US Dollars per year. It is obvious that for countries that consider promoting labour migration, the education level will be of particular importance, because it will directly influence the earnings of these migrants.

It seems reasonable to believe that migration is an aspect of globalization. If ideas, goods, services and capitals move more and more freely across borders, it would be unrealistic to think that people would agree to limit their freedom of movement to their hometown or native village.

Freedom of Movement has also been recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and has been a major topic discussed in the 1970-ies, within the framework of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Freedom of movement means that

- Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state
- Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to his/her country

We know that this freedom of movement is not yet fully guaranteed in all the countries of the region.

But there is another limit to the freedom of movement: countries are allowed to limit the entry of foreign citizens, to define under which conditions they may enter, how long they may stay, to establish criteria that regulate who and under which conditions someone may, with time, become a citizen of that country, in other words, to have a migration policy. Such policies can be developed and formulated, or they can be implicit. But they limit the freedom of individuals to enter a particular country or take up residence in a particular country.

Borders are the place where States ultimately decide who can enter and who has to stay outside. Borders still exist, and while they are disappearing within Europe, borders have appeared in Central Asia.

IOM has been cooperating with several Central Asian Governments to find the right way to manage borders. The right way, in IOM's experience, is to facilitate the movement of people through border checkpoints, to invite the travelers to cross legally, and in the same way to control the persons and the goods that cross these borders, in order to prevent the movement of narcotics, weapons and persons that pose a threat to state security.

Freedom of movement and security are both important objectives for societies, particularly when there is a threat of terrorism. Unfortunately, in Central Asia, I have often observed border management that prevents the freedom of movement of people and at the same time facilitates the activities of criminal groups involved in the smuggling of goods and irregular (illegal) migrants. Societies that do not develop efficient mechanisms to eradicate corruption will end up in situations where simple people will have trouble crossing borders, while drug traffickers, traffickers in human beings and terrorists are likely to find ways to pay off the right officials to do their business.

If freedom of movement is finally achieved, the problems don't stop. The other side of the coin "freedom" is responsibility, and in this context, we have to talk about the role of education - to help people to become responsible citizens.

If young people have been educated in a closed system with closed borders where initiative was punished and where conformity was the main objective of parents and teachers, they are not able to take responsibility, not prepared for freedom. They also won't be able to compete in competitive societies, even with good formal education. Their perceptions about living abroad are likely to be wrong. Some may also try (to use Dr. Andrea Berg's wording) "to buy a job", will have difficulties to understand the rules of the competition, and may end up committing crimes.

Others that dream about life abroad end up in slavery. I suppose that all of you know that practices of slavery and trade in human beings have reappeared, not only in Central Asia. Often, the first step into slavery is to accept an offer to work abroad.

IOM has been assisting victims of human trafficking to return to their country of origin, has started to establish networks of NGOs operating hotlines in Central Asia, has published advertisements in the same papers that publish advertisements as the traffickers promising high earnings abroad. IOM and other international organizations including OSCE have provided advice to governmental working groups elaborating better laws against human trafficking, have trained consular officials, and help law enforcement agencies throughout Central Asia to improve their investigation methods against human trafficking.

It is important to understand that those who were trafficked abroad for sexual exploitation did not necessarily have the intention to become prostitutes, and even if they did, they did not intend to be deceived, beaten, raped, exploited, or even worse, killed. They may have been dreaming about a happy end like in the well-known movie “Pretty Women”. Even if these women made mistakes, we have to ask ourselves: what has been our contribution, particularly if we work in the educational sphere, to show them other opportunities? Did we tell them about the risks?

NGOs working with IOM on counter-trafficking have been granted access to schools, including here in Tashkent, to talk about the risks. For this purpose, IOM has produced brochures in the different national languages and in Russian.

IOM is aware that this is not yet very significant yet and is not sufficient to deal with this problem. Joint efforts of the Government, including the Ministries of Education, of international organization and of NGOs are needed to change the situation.

Because of the transnational character of the crime of trafficking, the dialogue and the cooperation between countries of origin and countries of destination of trafficking is of particular importance. IOM believes that this cooperation should not only involve officials in law-enforcement, but also officials of the Ministries of Education, and of Ministries of Information where they exist. Young women who risk being victims of trafficking, travel agents, police and border guards, consular officials, teachers – they all should know that trafficking exists, how it can be recognized, and what can be done to combat it.

Trafficking in human beings is a criminal business that brings profits almost as high as drug trafficking and the illicit trade in arms. It is possible, even probable, that the same transnational organized crime groups are involved in smuggling drugs, trading in human beings and destabilizing the region.

I hope that terrorism will not become an excuse for freezing the discussion about the best ways to manage the transition process in this region. As I said before, joint efforts of governments, international organizations and NGOs are needed to solve the difficult problems of this region in a comprehensive way. IOM is ready to contribute in its particular field of expertise.