



IOM International Organization for Migration



**Capacity Building, Information and Awareness Raising Towards Promoting  
Orderly Migration in the Western Balkans project (AENEAS 2006)**

**Workshop on Establishing Labour Migration Policies in Countries of  
Origin and  
Destination and Inter- State collaboration in the W. Balkans  
Tirana, February 9-10 February, 2009**

**Labour Migration in and from South Eastern Europe**

**Excellency the Ambassador of Switzerland,  
Esteemed Secretary General of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and  
Economic Opportunities, Distinguished co-panelists (Representatives of the  
Delegation, of the Embassies of Italy and Germany, of the ILO project partner)  
Esteemed participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,**

It is a great honour and pleasure for IOM to host this event here today and it is gratifying to see this workshop so well attended by representatives of governments, members of the diplomatic core, experts and practitioners. My task is to introduce the issues which will be discussed throughout today and tomorrow and provide some context to our discussions.

Despite its common recent history, South-Eastern Europe represents a very diverse region, on the reality of migration: some countries in the region are plagued by high unemployment rates and large outflows of emigrants, some others already attract immigrants to fill the labour shortages in booming sectors of their economy. Much of the migration from the region goes towards EU countries such as Germany, Austria, Italy or Greece, but much of the movement is also internal to the region, due to cultural proximity, previous trade links within the context of the former Yugoslavia, and family ties.

While enjoying a relative freedom to move internally during the socialist era (with the exception of Albania), nationals of South-Eastern European states found it increasingly difficult to travel abroad even for short visits, let alone to work abroad. The process of accession to the European Union has highlighted further diversification within the region and opportunities for mobility of its nationals. Intra-regional movements are ongoing, and short term labour migration as typified in the case of seasonal work in the construction and tourism sectors in Montenegro and Croatia. Currently, only Croatian nationals enjoy a visa-free travel to the Schengen area. The recent agreement for visa facilitation with Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia aims to simplify travel to the EU for certain categories of travellers, such as businessmen, students, journalists etc; however the full liberalisation of EU visa policy remains a goal for the future.

Effective migration management calls for the countries in the region to look deeply and comprehensively into the issues that concern them. Not only outflows (both regular and irregular) should be carefully addressed, but the moderately increasing **immigration** of nationals both from other countries in the region as well as from third countries cannot be ignored. Croatia and Montenegro with seasonal workers from the region and further East, and Ukrainian or Chinese diasporae growing in all countries of the region. Controlling such inflows and ensuring their regularity as well as facilitating immigrants' integration process require political, regulatory and institutional adjustments as well.

With the absence of regulation of labour migration and a strong informal economy, much of the migration from and within the region is of an **irregular character**. While some migrants from the Balkans travel legally as students and on work visas, high numbers are still resorting to the help of smugglers and traffickers or slide into irregularity through overstay. Much of the irregular migration is due to lack of opportunities for reasonable work possibilities in the home country, misinformation or lack of information on entry and stay conditions in the host countries, limited access to real opportunities for regular migration as well as unawareness of the risks intrinsic in irregular migration.

IOM strongly believes that, in addition to continued efforts in **combating irregular migration**-- including the abhorrent phenomenon of trafficking in human beings -- preventive measures, and comprehensive assistance to victims, maximizing the use of **regular migration channels** should be integral to a comprehensive policy approach to migration in the Western Balkans, which would combine the economic and social interests of countries of origin in the Balkans and destination countries.

Creating new and legal labour migration opportunities for migrants from South-Eastern Europe and establishing effective labour migration policies should be achieved through **familiarization with effective policies and practices carried out elsewhere**, its harmonization with the EU Aquis, but also through discussion on how particular policies might be adapted or developed to suit specific migration management situations and country needs.

Formal mechanisms of **inter-state cooperation** relating to cooperation on labour migration, concluded at the bilateral, regional and global level are essential, including specific treaties, as is the case of **bilateral labour agreements** or broader agreements, such as the specific **regional and international conventions** relating to the protection of migrant workers, which also include provisions on inter-state cooperation.

**National Strategies or Policy Papers on Migration** also addressing migrants' labour issues can also be a useful instrument to facilitate and implement managed labour migration policies. As an illustration, the Albanian Government, the Delegation and IOM Albania support, has drafted a National Strategy on Migration including measures on labour issues such as management of circular migration, access to information on emigration possibilities, linking the emigration of Albanians with the country's development of Albania. Albania has concluded labour agreements with Germany, Greece and Italy, the latter signed recently, on 2 December 2008.

Besides a comprehensive or holistic approach is necessary to address the problem of irregular labour migration. A series of comprehensive **measures to prevent or reduce irregular labour migration** can be envisaged at all stages of the migration

process encompassing activities in countries of origin (strengthening dialogue and cooperation with countries involved), border controls and the articulation at the country of destination of a viable visa policy, measures and sanctions against those who facilitate irregular migration, including traffickers, smugglers and exploitative employers, safeguard for irregular migrant workers, regularization or legalization programmes, return measures with an emphasis on promoting voluntariness, opening up more regular channels for labour migration, and interstate cooperation.

**Information on labour migration and migration management practices** should be shared so that the countries consider making use of the experience with already existing policies on issues of labour migration in other countries/regions. This would optimize policy instruments for the respective administrations and will have benefits for the development and interdependencies between countries of origin and destination could be increased.

It has also become clear that sufficient **information on destination countries** and working situation needs to be provided to potential labour migrants to reduce the risk of irregular migration and undertaking irregular labour. The facilitation of information and services in this field can positively influence migration benefits to migrants as well as sending and receiving countries. Finally adequate provisions for returning migrants reinsertion into the fabric of the COO.

In this context led me illustrate briefly the project **Capacity Building, Information and Awareness Raising Towards Promoting Orderly Migration in the Western Balkans**, which provides the framework to this event.

The goal of the project is to enhance the accurate and reliable information to potential migrants to support regular migration modalities and minimize risks for migrant exploitation and irregular migration. In order to achieve this, 14 Sporteli Migracioni and other **Migrant Service Centres** (a total of 21) were established and launched in June 2008 in the REGION in cooperation with national partners such as National Employment Offices and Ministries of Labour.

The MSCs receive potential migrants daily and provide them with individualized assistance and group counselling sessions on the reality and risks of irregular migration and possibilities/procedures for work opportunities in the country and legal emigration. The clients also receive referral services to relevant local institutions for individual skills development in view of improving employment potential both at home and abroad. Up to November 2008, that is in the first 6 months of the project, 1,760 persons used the services of the twenty-one (21) Migrant Service Centres spread throughout the region.

The project also aims to support **local authorities** to develop policy and good practice as sending and receiving countries in the context of current and projected foreign labour needs, as well as pursuing cooperation with private sector stakeholders. National training workshops are planned as follow-up to this event in all the countries in the region throughout 2009.

Analysis of the **migration potential from the region as well as of current migratory trends** in the region by means of a research on regular migration from the Western Balkans will be undertaken by the Central European Forum on Migration Research.

The project is funded by the European Commission through the AENEAS 2006 programme and co-funded by the Swiss Federal Office for Migration, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the Government of Liechtenstein and the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs/Italian Cooperation and is implemented by IOM in partnership with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Excellencies, Distinguished Co-panelists and Participants,

I look forward to the discussions during the next two days and anticipate that they will be fruitful and inspiring and that we will all come out with better understanding of the issues characterizing labour migration and who it can be better managed for the benefit of all.

I thank you.