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IOM International Organization for Migration  
OIM Organizzazione Internazionale per le Migrazioni

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### **“Managing migration in a Mediterranean context – some recent developments and challenges”**

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I am particularly pleased to be again with PAM, this time here in Rome, from where I work on Mediterranean migration issues. This region has in recent years seen an important growth in numbers and diversity of migratory flows.

News reports about migration in the Mediterranean, these days, read like dispatches from war correspondents. The numbers of irregular migrants landing at the Southern coasts of Italy have increased sharply: more than 37 000 until 31 December 2008 vs. 13 529 in all of 2007. On the islands of Lampedusa and Linosa alone, 31 236 landings were registered. For Italy the main countries of boat departure are Libya, Egypt and Algeria, the passengers originate from Egypt, Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Tunisia, Ghana, Morocco and Algeria. Some far-away conflicts such as at the Horn of Africa, directly affect flows.

Boats almost sinking under the weight of their human cargo en route to Europe make excellent material for press photographs and TV spots. These sad pictures fuel both fear and compassion but they only allow a very limited insight into the dramas unfolding on Migration and the Mediterranean: 1502 recorded death in 2008 at Europe's sea borders – the fact that this is 23 % less than in 2007 is no reason for complacency!

Greece reports a growth in arrivals from 4000 in 2006 to more than 10 000 in 2007 and even more last year. 181 recorded deaths need to be added to last year's figures.

The changing routes also are reflected in the number of those who perished: between Tunisia, Libya and Malta/Sicily they have increased to 642 in 2008 from 302 in 2006 and 556 in 2007. At the same token, arrivals at the Canaries have diminished: from 32.000 in 2006 to 12.624 in 2007 and 9.089 in 2008. Recorded deaths too have gone down from 1.035 in 2006 to 745 in 2007 and 136 in 2008. In the straits of Gibraltar, the numbers are down too: 3017 arrivals in 2008, vs. 3748 the previous year and 5579 in 2006. 216 migrants did not survive the journey, with a 7.16 % death rate this appears to be the most deadly area to cross the Mediterranean.

That boat arrivals in Spain are somewhat lower than last year is also due to cooperation with countries of origin/transit. It is however important to note that of the 2,1 million non-EU nationals who live in Spain, only 1% has in fact arrived by “patera” while 62 % have come by plane.

The large majority of migrants in an irregular situation in Europe actually do arrive as tourists, overstay their visa or use forged documents. Some then live on the margins of economies and societies that offer just enough monetary or non-monetary benefits to survive. Many others, however do find remunerated employment and manage to send money to their families back home.

It is as much due to policies and conditions in the European destination countries as due to push factors in origin States in Africa, Asia and Latin America that irregular migration is a main channel into Europe.

In Italy Lampedusa remains a key point for arrivals, although recent measures to clamp down on irregular migration have led to a diversification of both direct boat arrivals and landings of those rescued by the Italian authorities on the high seas. In fact this tiny island close to Libya and Tunisia that had become over the last three years a model for the reception of mixed flows, has now reverted to a symbol for the struggle and chaos that attempts to manage irregular migration in an ad-hoc manner, without preparing a comprehensive approach involving elements upstream and downstream, can result in.

For an organization like mine the new procedures mean that our task – to help identify and assist vulnerable migrants such as victims of trafficking, minors, women, has become more difficult. At the same token, we have received for the first time directly on Lampedusa requests for assisted voluntary return. These measures are however held up by lack of valid travel documents, as most migrants either didn't have them in the first place or have disposed of them before arrival. In the preoccupying mental state that some of these failed migrants who now wish only to return as soon as possible find themselves in, the delays of receiving travel papers from their own consular authorities cause some further hardship and uncertainty.

Channelling migration into legal avenues would thus appear as the logical complement to combating smuggling, illegal stay and work in the underground economy. While cooperation between South and North has indeed started to open opportunities with Senegal, Morocco, some Latin American countries and Spain experimenting successfully with such

schemes it is nevertheless seriously challenged by the current economic crisis.

The very nature of this crisis is yet to be fully understood, and its uneven impact on different regions of the world, both its proximate and longer term consequences for migratory activity are difficult to figure out with any degree of accuracy. The media may well have identified the topic as one that sells well, but there are more confusing echoes than clear messages. There is a paucity of empirical evidence to sustain serious analysis and lead to firm conclusions.

The need for systematic efforts in tracking and assessing the impact of the global economic crisis on the economic, social and human aspects of migratory activity is all the more essential because of the place of significance migration now occupies among processes of globalization. Human mobility is now acknowledged as being both a part and a consequence of globalization, meaning that variations in patterns of global economic activity are most likely to influence human migratory behaviour and vice versa. This is, of course, especially true in the world of work; where labour forces the world over now include sizable contingents of both permanent and temporary migrant workers.

Two overriding issues are of interest to policy makers and researchers alike: How the economic crisis will affect patterns of supply and demand of migrant workers at the global, regional and national levels, and how it will affect the volume and flow of remittances to countries of origin. It is only through careful monitoring and analysis of developments that governments and other migration stakeholders will be in a position to

respond to the policy challenges that confront them and to act in a coherent and cooperative manner.

The Western Mediterranean region has long been a platform where two important migratory regions come into a contact: These realities are acknowledged in the context of the enhanced cooperation between European Union (EU) member states and its Mediterranean neighbours (Barcelona process and Union for the Mediterranean), “Migration, Social Integration, Justice and Social Security” has been recognized as the 4th key area of cooperation, while at the same time the European Parliament has adopted the Directive on Return of Illegal Migrants.

Against this background, the economic crisis raises several clusters of issues that require close investigation:

1. An accurate and reliable base of information is needed. In order to better inform policy, **basic data** is needed on perceived impact by region and at national level; by employment sector, skill level, length of stay and gender. Data is also needed on flows and use of remittances. Regional specificities are of particular interest. A better grasp of what is happening at regional level can contribute much to a broader understanding of how things are evolving at the global level.
2. The economic crisis is not expected to have a significant effect on established migrant stocks. On the other hand, variations in flows may be expected depending on legal status, visa categories, skill level, labour market demand and mobility. The financial crisis will

not change long-standing demographic and labour considerations such as ageing and shrinking populations in developed countries, declining forces, structural demands for labour in certain sectors of the labour market or the reluctance of workers to take up low-skilled jobs. **Management of regular migration channels** will therefore require considerable attention.

3. The **migration and development** equation is one that is of crucial importance for many developing countries. Early indications suggest that global remittance flows flattened out towards the end of 2008. Further declines are expected in 2009. In these circumstances, new measures may be required to facilitate remittance flows as well as initiatives in both countries of origin and destination to promote productive use of remittances. Greater solidarity between countries of origin and destination is also needed to maintain and strengthen the consensus achieved in last few years on harnessing benefits from the migration and development relationship.
4. In times of crisis migrants are often wrongly perceived as taking away the jobs of local workers, particularly in low-skilled sectors. Social policies can also impact the level of vulnerability of migrants (e.g. recently arrived migrants or certain categories of migrants may not be eligible for welfare and/or other social benefits). Special efforts may be needed to protect the **rights of migrant workers**, to raise awareness of their economic and social contributions and to fight against xenophobia and discrimination.

5. Finally, **migration needs to be factored into early planning for economic recovery**, as it is one of the socio-economic processes that can contribute to global renewal and growth

The international community is struggling to come to terms with an economic crisis that is claimed by many to be of unprecedented severity, but it may yet be possible to prevent the economic crisis from turning into a migration crisis. Migrants must rather be seen as part of the solution than as part of the problem. Through cycles of growth and recession migration remains an essential component of our globalized world.

It is this message that we have put at the centre of IOM's discussions with the Moroccan government to convene a senior experts meeting on migration and the economic crisis towards the summer.

Let me repeat: Migration by its very nature is a transnational phenomenon requiring the cooperation and active collaboration of different interlocutors, both at national and international level. A comprehensive and balanced approach to migration requires policies and measures addressing a broad range of challenges and opportunities including regular and irregular migration, human rights of migrants, migration and development, inter-state dialogue and cooperation, integration and return.

Besides the crisis, there are two other major issues that are increasingly mentioned as intrinsically linked with migration: on the one hand development, on the other security.

After the events of 9/11 and in light of a sustained global terrorist threat, security concerns are high on national and international agendas, including in the context of the movement of people. While security is a necessary dimension of migration management it must however not become the principal focus of the debate – although there are close links between cross-border mobility and security: irregular migration poses a threat to security and stability in a variety of ways:

- In its most corrosive forms of smuggling and trafficking, it is linked to transnational organized crime. Entry of migrants in an irregular manner undermines the capacity of states to ensure public order; trafficking and smuggling on a large scale can corrupt and undermine the institutions of the state.
- Moreover, irregular migration fuels corruption, informal economies and undermines social cohesion, which, at worst, may provoke xenophobia and racism.

In this complex picture, the challenge that States face is how to protect society and reduce irregular migration without stifling legitimate and needed movement and without imposing serious constraints on personal rights and liberties. The prospects of young migrants, unemployed and disillusioned both with their country of origin – where they didn't see a future for themselves - and the country of destination where their economic expectations remain unmet, can indeed create a dangerous mix. Against this backdrop and that of reports about the high crime rate of some groups, the fact that most migrants, like most nationals, are decent persons looking for work, security and safety, and are contributing substantially to

the economy even at times when the GNP decreases, tends to get overlooked.

Security has however a wider dimension than the one advanced in political campaigns and media reports. Lack of security, including a deficit of human security available to the migrants that try to reach Europe's shores is a major push factor. Climate change as a push factor too needs urgent attention in this regard.

Another issue that merits more profound understanding is the burden that origin and transit states face as a result of heavy migration pressures and flows. The European University Institute estimates the numbers of migrants in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries at 5.6 million, with 3.6 million in irregular situations. The influx of migrants puts considerable strain on their often under-resourced social and welfare services, when irregular migrants temporarily settle there while trying to reach their destination. Transit states often do not have the capacity to send these migrants back to their countries of origin or to accommodate them. In addition, irregular migrants typically take up informal jobs while in transit, fuelling growth of the informal economy - and corruption. These transit States are also often ill-equipped to apprehend or readmit considerable numbers of irregular migrants en route to Europe.

To help respond to some of these challenges, our projects in Libya and Morocco provide support in responding in a humane manner, by offering such migrants voluntary return possibilities and reintegration activities in country of origin. By December 2008 more than 3000 migrants have thus been assisted to return from Libya and 1200 from Morocco. Another

initiative has just been approved for funding by Italy: assistance in Niger to set up a support structure for migrants with health and other serious problems who have been returned – without IOM involvement and often by force.

Distinguished members of parliament from the Mediterranean countries,

the answer to all these challenges and problems remains, in IOM's opinion, cooperation, an approach shared by your assembly. Among the actions we propose are to:

- Manage the balance between demand for and supply of migrant labour at the international level,
- Strengthen social development and economies through focused programmes linking migration and development, using the assets – remittances, knowledge, experience, contacts - of migrants, with particular attention to regions under strong emigration pressures in order to offer alternatives to irregular migration,
- Underline the need to respect rights and obligations of migrants and host societies independent of their status as permanent or temporary migrants (a distinction that gets increasingly blurred anyhow),
- Maximize through intelligent and innovative integration efforts the stability of host societies and foster dialogue on concrete experiences or practices – good or not so successful – involving religious and political leaders.

To make these undertakings succeed, acceptance and respect of diversity is crucial, and concerted efforts are required to create relationships between culturally distinct communities of migrants and nationals with a view to building social cohesion and harmony. You can contribute a lot to this.