COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION ISSUES OAS/Ser.W

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CONCEPT NOTE

THEMATIC SESSION: "ADDRESSING THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF MIGRATION"

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(Prepared by the Chair of the CAM with support from the Technical Secretariat)

International migration is a major policy issue that is deeply intertwined with human rights, development, and geopolitics at the national, regional, and international levels. According to IOM, there are five main types of factors that prompt people to migrate: economic, demographic, social, political, and environmental factors. These factors form the context in which people move from one place to another. In addition, micro-factors—such as age, gender, and income level—determine the scope of influence that the general factors may have on migratory decision-making at the personal or household level. Finally, there are related factors that facilitate or impede migration, such as the human, financial, physical, and psychological costs and benefits of migration, and the migratory policies that facilitate some forms of migration while hindering others.

Therefore, it is essential to assess and analyze the various causes that drive migration in the Americas, while also recognizing that these causes vary in each subregion and have different contexts and origins, which can be addressed from a perspective of development and integration. Among the causes of mobility in the region are underdevelopment, lack of growth and asymmetries between economies, weak institutions, rising poverty and inequality levels, lack of access to education, health, housing, and employment, human rights violations, widespread violence, political conflicts, tensions among ethnic groups and communities, environmental degradation, and family reunification.

Economic and social inequality often have a key role in people’s decisions to migrate in search of better opportunities and living conditions. In addition to economic reasons, the decision to migrate can also arise from family conflicts, tensions within their communities of origin, as well as the effects of climate-change and of natural disasters (such as prolonged droughts, hurricanes, earthquakes), that disrupt economic life and the availability of basic services in the places people migrate from. These diverse motivations highlight the need for a comprehensive and multi-causal understanding of migration, through approaches based on development and integration.

Migration is also not a homogeneous phenomenon. There are various forms of migration, which can be permanent or temporary, depending on people's needs and aspirations. Some migrants seek long-term settlement in a new place while others relocate only temporarily, such as workers crossing borders for seasonal work. There are also people who cross borders daily to work or study and return to their place of origin at the end of the day.

In addition to the wide range of reasons for migration and the different types of migration, it is essential to also understand the different phases of the migration cycle and the vulnerabilities associated with each stage of this cycle. The migration cycle comprises the initial motivation to migrate in the place of origin, transit to the destination, integration in a new place and a return to the place of origin.

During the transit stage, migrants face countless challenges related to the length of their journey, potential legal and geographical risks, and the very real possibility that this transit phase could become permanent. Physical safety and survival are also critical issues during this stage.

Integration in the place of destination marks a new phase, in which migrants seek to settle and find work. Social protection in the place of destination will vary, depending on the country-specific social protection systems and the ability of migrants to access services and employment. Social reproduction—both at the family and community levels—can also present challenges for migrants at their place of destination. The inclusion of their children, establishing social relations, and building a sense of belonging to the host society are key aspects in this phase. Returning to the place of origin poses additional challenges, as migrants must reintegrate into the society they left, and into the social protection system of their country of origin. The transferability of rights and benefits is a major issue in this context as well.

Socio-demographic status, migratory status, and labor market insertion are key factors that influence the well-being of migrants throughout the migration cycle. These elements—along with motivation and other individual characteristics—must be considered when addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of migrants in the region.

At the global level, the Sustainable Development Goals make a call for “orderly, safe and responsible migration and mobility of people” (target 10.7) as a means to reduce global inequalities. Similarly, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016, and the Global Compact for Migration in 2018, both support and encourage international cooperation among all relevant actors to create pathways for a “safe, orderly and regular migration.” The New York Declaration and the Global Compact also include specific language that encourages States to work towards minimizing the adverse and structural factors that force people to leave their country of origin.

Bearing all of the aforementioned in mind, this thematic session of the CAM will promote dialogue to address the structural causes of migration—through a development and integration perspective—where States will be able to share the policies and good practices they implement in order to respond to these structural challenges.

After the presentations of the panelists, a space will be opened for delegations to speak on the aforementioned topics. States in particular are encouraged to share good practices, with a view to consolidating the information shared during this session and making it available to Member States.

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