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MIGRATION AND EDUCATION: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 176th session of the Executive Board at the request of Norway.

An explanatory note together with a proposed decision are attached.

Decision proposed: paragraph 15.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Introduction

1. Migration has been a constant and influential feature of human history. It has contributed to the rise and fall of civilizations; it is perceived as a necessary driver of economic growth in some countries and as a threat to development in others. The United Nations estimates that there were close to 200 million international migrants in 2005. In the last decades, the proportion of migrants within the world's rapidly increasing population has risen slightly. In 1960, international migrants represented 2.5% of the world population and 2.9% in 2000.
2. Migration is many faceted, and discussions on brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation attract many views.
3. Migration may result in the departure of a country's brightest, best educated and most entrepreneurial citizens. This deprives the state of revenue and prevents countries of origin from gaining an early return on the investment they have made in the education and training of those people. Most seriously, when it involves the departure of professionals in sectors such as health and education, migration can adversely affect the supply and quality of essential services.
4. On the other hand, migrants contribute massively to the national economies of their home countries through sending remittances to their families. Remittances to developing countries rose from US \$160 billion in 2004 to US \$167 billion in 2005. This is more than twice the level of development aid. In many developing countries, the remittances received from migrants constitute a more important source of income than Official Development Assistance (ODA) or Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Almost half of these remittances are transferred between countries in the developing world.
5. Migrants are a diverse group; some have education and skills that are recognized and render appropriate job opportunities in the host countries, while others find it hard to document their skills and professional qualifications and settle for manual and unskilled jobs.
6. These facts – that large population groups spend parts of their adult lives in another country and that their actual knowledge and skills often are not recognized in the host country – call for an initiative to strengthen international arrangements and mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications.
7. The United Nations High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 2006) called for global cooperation on addressing the various challenges raised by the comprehensive issue of migration. In the Chairperson's summing up of the High-Level Dialogue, it was concluded that there is a unique opportunity to identify ways and means to maximize the developmental benefits of international migration and to reduce its negative impact.
8. One obstacle to the maximizing of benefits from international migration is the lack of comprehensive recognition systems for qualifications and prior learning. The lack of recognition of qualifications deprives the individual migrant of more rewarding job and learning opportunities; the host country is deprived of a valuable knowledge worker; and the home country will not reap the full potential remittance from that migrant.
9. Linked to the issue of migration is also the new setting for higher education in a more globalized society, characterized by the growing importance of the knowledge society/economy; the development of new trade agreements which cover trade in education services; and the growth of different forms of cross-border higher education provision. As part of the debate are the issues related to the value of the qualifications offered and their acceptance by the labour market, quality assurance and the need to provide student protection from non-reputable providers. It therefore

places a new light on the issues of qualifications recognition and the related fields of quality assurance and accreditation, shifting it from a technical level to policy debate.

10. As the only United Nations agency with a mandate in higher education, with its more than 30 years history of developing regional frameworks for the recognition of qualifications and recently a strong global activity in quality assurance in cross-border higher education, UNESCO will be the natural agent for generating and coordinating efforts to address this issue in the education sector.

11. The need for recognition of qualifications in connection with migration is relevant for all levels of education, both formal and informal. However, at this point it seems feasible to focus on higher education.

12. Quality of education is high on the global agenda and an increasing number of countries have developed or are in the process of developing quality assurance mechanisms for higher education provisions. At the same time the growing number of mobile students worldwide makes the issue of recognition of foreign qualifications more acute. UNESCO is playing an important role on the global scene within both these fields as reflected in document 33 C/5 1.4.2 (a)(i) Higher education for the knowledge society.¹

13. UNESCO should play a major role:

- (a) in placing a special focus on migration and education;
- (b) in providing a linkage between the work on quality assurance and recognition and the more general issue of migration (possible starting point being the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education);
- (c) in building on and strengthening the work already done relating to: the regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications; the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education; and capacity-building in quality assurance in higher education as stipulated in 33 C/5 1.4.2.

14. To achieve the above, UNESCO should appoint a working group that will develop, in cooperation with relevant regional organizations, institutions and stakeholders, a code of good practice on migration and the mutual recognition of qualifications in the field of education, based on accepted principles of quality assurance.

Proposed draft decision

15. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), the 1998 Declaration adopted by the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and building on the six regional and one interregional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education, the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education, the 1997 Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching

¹ "Where the Director-General is authorized to:

- (a) implement the corresponding plan of action in order to:
 - (i) support Member States, institutions and other stakeholders in improving the quality of higher education by setting up quality assurance mechanisms for higher education provision and by updating the regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications;"

Personnel and the 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education,

2. Also recalling 32 C/Resolution 10 on higher education and globalization and 33 C/Resolution 19 on Cooperation between UNESCO and OECD in drafting guidelines on “Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education”,
3. Further recalling the United Nations High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006,
4. Having examined document 176 EX/8,
5. Reaffirms the belief that UNESCO should play a major role in the internationalization of higher education in knowledge societies based on the 1998 Declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education;
6. Recognizing that mobility and migration both within States and across borders, whether voluntary or forced, is a reality for an increasing number of individuals,
7. Acknowledging the challenges and opportunities associated with increased mobility at international, national and individual levels,
8. Aware that increased mobility both within States and across borders constitutes a challenge to Education for All, and particularly to exercising the individual right to education;
9. Affirming that appropriate systems for the recognition of qualifications benefit both migrants and their host country,
10. Further affirming the need to see this in conjunction with the issue of brain drain and codes of good practice for recruiting foreign professionals,
11. Requests the Director-General to:
 - (a) include work on the issue of migration and recognition of qualifications in the next 34 C/5 with the aim to facilitate the recognition of migrants’ higher education qualifications;
 - (b) appoint a working group that will develop, in cooperation with relevant regional organizations, institutions and stakeholders, a code of good practice on migration and the mutual recognition of qualifications in the field of education, based on accepted principles of quality assurance.