

Check against delivery

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

William Lacy Swing
Director General, International Organization for Migration

“Diaspora Contribution to European Societies”

**Launching Conference of the
Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies
7-8 September 2017, Lisbon**

INTRODUCTION

In a world of unprecedented global mobility, people who are connected to more than one country are increasingly numerous. Individuals may divide their working or personal lives across several countries; family ties may extend across borders; and, people may identify with or even hold citizenship from several countries.

Diaspora, or transnational communities, play an important role when it comes to connecting countries and communities across the world. They share a sense of belonging to more than one community. They can be part of multiple family or professional networks. In fact, I would argue that mobilizing diaspora’s potential for both host and home countries’ development may well be the most neglected aspect of government’s migration policies.

The resources that flow from transnational communities across borders are significant. They include:

- Human and social capital, in the form of skills and knowledge, which can be invaluable in terms of the development of a variety of sectors such as health, education and technology;
- Economic capital, through remittances and savings, but also direct investments made by diaspora members in business activities; and lastly, but by no means least,
- Cultural capital, drawn from their rich and diverse backgrounds which create more dynamic and innovative societies.

In recent years, the international community has increasingly recognized the immense contribution that transnational communities make to the development of their countries of origin and destination:

- Governments have designed and implemented policies and institutions to strengthen their relationship with their citizens abroad so that they can contribute to local and national development.
- Many national development strategies include diaspora engagement as a key component.

The adoption of the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees in September last year reaffirmed the contribution that migrants and diaspora communities can make to sustainable development. The

Declaration invited transnational communities to be involved in the preparation of the Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration.

But engagement with diaspora groups needs to be based on a thorough understanding of their characteristics and motivations. We need to understand how diaspora groups are organized and the issues on which their participation can add value.

As we convene here today I want to highlight IOM's perspective and experience on how best to harness the contributions of transnational communities and diasporas, or what I would call **3Es for action: engage, enable and empower**. Following these 3Es for action will facilitate the development of a supportive ecosystem -- an ecosystem that will maximize the potential of diasporas as agents of development.

I. ENGAGE

Knowing and understanding transnational communities is crucial to engaging them effectively, and developing the appropriate outreach strategies towards diaspora.

IOM regularly maps and surveys diaspora communities. IOM has conducted some 120 surveys to assess the socioeconomic profile of the

diaspora and their willingness to contribute to the development of their countries of origin.

To engage diaspora communities means reaching out to them so that they can voice their needs and interests:

- In countries of origin, outreach can often take place through networks that connect with returning members of transnational communities, including investors, skilled professionals or academics.
- In countries of destination, outreach may be achieved through embassies and consulates including trained labour attachés, whose portfolios now increasingly include service provision to their diasporas. Migration community associations are another convenient point of engagement.

Social media and connectivity also has an important role to play. IOM recently launched the “iDiaspora platform” -- an online forum or platform for diaspora communities to contribute their opinions to the intergovernmental process to develop a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. I encourage members of diaspora communities present here today to participate in the forum.

II. ENABLE

Outreach to diaspora communities will not, of itself, contribute to social or economic development. The degree to which transnational

communities can contribute is directly related to their ability to acquire the necessary skills and resources to serve as architects of economic and social progress.

The steps to enhance the well-being of members of the diaspora include:

- reducing their vulnerability by guaranteeing their access to essential public services, including health and education; and
- ensuring respect for their social rights, in return for their respect of local laws and customs.

IOM is working with governments to strengthen the political and institutional frameworks that reduce the social and financial costs of migration. We do so by:

- promoting ethical labour recruitment to protect job-seekers from abuse and exploitation;
- reducing the costs of remittances; and
- mainstreaming migration into national development policies.

Developing effective integration policies in countries of destination is absolutely key to ensuring that migrants can adapt quickly to their environment and contribute to the community and the economy. Migrants need support to access new knowledge, language, skills and capital. Host

government integration policies will foster social inclusion and avoid the marginalization that migrants unfortunately experience all too frequently.

III. EMPOWER

Empowering migrants is the third objective. Empowerment means giving diaspora communities the opportunity and capability to establish their own priorities of action. Governments can empower migrants by introducing special measures and programmes in a variety of fields.

IOM has supported governments to do this in a number ways. These include:

- We have helped facilitate trade and investment between communities abroad and the countries from which they originate, targeting investment in local projects with a positive socioeconomic impact.
 - In 2013, IOM piloted an innovative project, for example, that established public-private partnerships between Moroccan authorities and Belgian financial institutions that facilitate direct investment by potential entrepreneurs among the Moroccan community.
 - In Georgia, IOM is facilitating access to funding for diaspora-led businesses through the establishment of a dedicated portal to provide information on investment opportunities.

- We are also helping to facilitate the mobilization of skills, knowledge and expertise:
 - In the Republic of Moldova, the Diaspora Excellence Groups programme was launched in May 2017 to target highly qualified citizens who have been resident for at least two years abroad and who wish to work with representatives of government institutions to support policy development;
 - IOM’s “Connecting Diasporas for Development” programme in the Netherlands links professional diaspora members residing in the Netherlands to institutions in their countries of origin through temporary physical and online assignments.
 - Through our “Return of Qualified Nationals (RQN) programme, we assist countries of origin such as Somalia to obtain the services of their diasporas to help build capacity.

- And lastly, we provide financial literacy training and disseminate information on remittance services and costs to heighten awareness of the various financial services and products available to remittance senders, and provide options for the productive use of remittances.

An approach that focuses on these 3Es for action can contribute to:

- a better understanding of the role of diaspora and diaspora-related programming in the migration-development nexus;
- a more diverse range of programmes aimed at developing further the variety of resources that transnational communities can mobilize; and

- greater synergies between diaspora policies developed by governments.

CONCLUSION

Now is a timely opportunity to influence this policy discourse. There is a growing willingness among governments and other partners to engage with the diaspora. And as we continue with the preparations for the global compact on safe, orderly and regular Migration, the policy space for new ideas and concrete actions is also open. I wish you all very engaging and interesting discussions over the coming two days.