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Impacts and Risks of Migration and Refugee Flows in Africa

by

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Patrick Mbite
Malawi Army

United States Army War College
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IMPACTS AND RISKS OF MIGRATION AND REFUGEE FLOWS IN AFRICA

by

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Patrick Mbite
Malawi Army

Professor Kent Hughes Butts
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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Conflict and human rights abuse associated with poor governance have become the key factors that contribute to mass migration in Africa; and it is no coincidence that conflict-ridden countries are often those with severe economic difficulties. Similarly, domestic strife and civil war frequently produce large population dislocations and refugee flows across national boundaries. Population displacements, refugees and migration are not only common phenomena, but are also on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa. Although explanations for the causes include political oppression, economic adversities and environmental degradation, conflicts and wars account for the bulk of sub-Saharan Africa's refugees and migration in recent years. These explanations are themselves dependent on the problem of the African states and their failure to address the region's environmental crisis. This paper will identify the impacts and risks of mass migration and refugee flows in Africa, climate change on economics and security. The paper will conclude with recommendations on how to mitigate these problems.

IMPACTS AND RISKS OF MIGRATION AND REFUGEE FLOWS IN AFRICA

The United Nations (UN), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Labor Organization (ILO) estimate that the number of persons living outside their country of origin has reached 175 million, more than twice the number a generation ago.[1] A series of interrelated factors have contributed to the significant rise in migration in this century including the increased facility of travel and communication, regional and sub-regional economic disparities, environmental changes, natural disasters, conflict, political instability, and the porous borders, to name but a few. The movement of people - voluntary or forced, legal or undocumented, within or beyond borders, constitutes today a complex process presenting some of the most intricate interrelationships of policy concerns for governments.

The ILO estimates that the number of labor migrants in Africa today constitutes one fifth of the global total and that by 2025, one in ten Africans will live and work outside their countries of origin.[2] Given that the number of migrants is rising and that this trend is likely to persist in the foreseeable future, the management of migration has necessarily become one of the critical challenges for States in the new millennium. Throughout its history, Africa has experienced important migratory movements, both voluntary and forced, which have contributed to its contemporary demographic landscape. In many parts of the Continent, communities are found spread across two or three nation-states as movement is often not limited by political boundaries. The focus of this paper is on the intra-regional migrations, its root causes, and its implications for social policy and social service provisioning in the region.

Background

Over the last decades, deteriorating socio-economic and environmental conditions as well as armed conflicts have resulted in a significant increase in migration, refugee flows and IDPs. Conflict and human rights abuse associated with poor governance have become among the key factors that contribute to mass migration and refugee flows in Africa. Equally, domestic strife and civil war frequently produce large population dislocations and refugee flows across national boundaries. Significant internal migratory movements, such as rural-urban migration, add to the complexity of the picture. While urbanization is a natural consequence of development, rapid growth of urban populations strain existing urban infrastructures and pose many social and economic challenges to African governments. The focus of this paper is to discuss the impacts and risks of migration and refugee flows in Africa and their implications and suggest recommendations for social policy and social service provisioning in the regions.

Labor Migration

Labor migration is a current and historical reality in Africa impacting directly the economies and societies of African countries in many ways. It is known that well-managed migration has the potential to yield significant benefits to origin and destination States. For instance, labor migration has played an important role in filling labor needs in mining, construction, agriculture and other sectors, thus contributing to economic development of many destination countries in Africa. John O. Oucho asserts that “labor migration has remained significant as economic fortunes change in the sub-region, with the most buoyant economies, those of South Africa, Botswana and

Namibia, commanding dominance and thus magnetizing an influx of workers, both skilled and unskilled, as well as undocumented workers."[3]

Conversely, the beneficial feed-back effects of migration such as remittances, knowledge and skills transfers, and return migration have in some cases made major contributions to economies of origin countries. However, mismanaged or migration can have serious negative consequences for States' and migrants' well-being, including potential destabilizing effects on national and regional security, and jeopardizing inter-State relations. Mismanaged migration can also lead to tensions between host communities and migrants, and give rise to xenophobia, and discrimination as is the case in South Africa between the indigenous and migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique only to mention a few. According to Ouche, "Zimbabweans have migrated all over southern Africa as economic migrants and refugees, or as both, eliciting highly xenophobic responses in host countries."[4]

In Africa, the push-pull framework gives insight into the different forces at work to explain migration. Multiple push factors initiate migration both within the continent and to other regions. For instance, poor socio-economic conditions, low wages, high levels of unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunity are the main economic factors that fuel out-migration. Gurshanran Singh Kainth asserts that, "the basic economic factors which motivate migration may be further classified as 'push factors' and 'pull factors'. In other words people migrate due to compelling circumstances which pushed them out of the place of origin or they are lured by the attractive conditions in the new place."[5] In Zimbabwe the most cited reasons for leaving were political reasons, economic crisis and unemployment. Summed up under political reasons, migration included political

beatings, persecution, torture, and denial of human rights by President Mugabe's security forces against Mugabe's opponents.

In addition to these perceptions, the structure, character and state of the South African economy, compared to those of other African countries, has been the driving economic mechanism behind migration. Hence, as long as the widespread poverty and high levels of inequality prevail on the continent, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia will continue to attract migrants. It is true that despite the numerous problems that face the majority of Blacks in South Africa, for Africans from other parts of the continent, the country is perceived as being the land of increased economic opportunities and hope, especially after the 1994 elections. In addition to these perceptions, the structure and state of the South African economy, compared to those of other African countries has been the driving mechanism behind most illegal migrations. Historically, the mining and agriculture sectors in South Africa have been dependent on migrant labor from southern African countries. Hence, as long as the widespread poverty and high levels of inequality prevail on the continent, South Africa will continue to attract migrants.

In addition to economic factors, various political and social factors create fertile grounds for migration. Among these, corruption, poor governance, political instability, conflict and civil strife are major causes of migration. The push-pull factors are intensified by a number of other issues which make migration an attractive option. The need to join relatives, families and friends are among the factors which compound with push-pull factors. The realities of migration in Africa, underscore the need for states to develop comprehensive policies on migration. Such efforts will require enhanced dialogue on sub-regional, regional and pan-African levels.

Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

Refugees and asylum seekers are a diverse group, with one thing in common; they are subject to forced migration and fleeing from persecution in their countries of origin. They can be unaccompanied children, single men and women, single parents, families with children, or older people who have left families behind. Because of this diversity, they have a range of intersectional identities and can experience discrimination because of socio-economic factors. They are always perceived as a threat to the socio-economic stability of the host country. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies have forced some of the millions of refugees to make use of clandestine means to enter countries, contributing to a distorted impression of asylum seekers and their rights. Repressive laws and practices have aggravated the already difficult conditions facing asylum seekers. They are stigmatized through descriptions such as “illegal”, “they will take our jobs”, and “they’re not like us”. This fuels anti-immigrant and anti-refugee feelings while imposing institutional discrimination often based on racial and religious grounds even though this is not openly stated.

Mpho Makhema asserts that, “due to the assumption that refugees and asylum seekers pose a threat rather than an opportunity for the host country, the twin bases for social protection are undermined: that social protection is a human right and that it is also a relationship of mutual benefit between the state and the receiving individual. Where there is no mutuality, it is difficult to construct or maintain the political will to protect social protection rights, whether by government or the population at large.”[6] However, in recognizing the multiplicity of experiences and identities of these groups, it is important to remember that asylum seekers and refugees also experience a range of

distinct problems and inequalities due to their immigration status, and in these situations human rights legislation may be their only protection.

For example, South Africa, up until the recent outbreak of xenophobic violence, was one of the rare, relatively stable African countries where refugees could expect their basic rights to be protected. As a result, some refugees come to South Africa for security, whereas others use South Africa as an exit point to greener pastures in other continents. Many refugees lost their family members, belongings, dignity and hope due to the violation of their basic human rights by oppressive states, for example, in Zimbabwe. Whilst in the destination country such as South Africa, most refugees are self-employed and work hard in order to rebuild their shattered lives and regain their dignity. Many refugees work in hairdressing, shoemaking, construction, and entertainment industries where they create their own small businesses and employ local people. Housing is a vital area of conflict potential, particularly in informal settlement areas, and one of the most consistent causes of friction in South African society. Competition for resources such as water, sanitation and health services together with employment and business opportunities is also a key dimension to the recent spate of conflict. Further conflict is exacerbated by local practice of preferring non-South African employees, particularly in the domestic, gardening and construction sectors. The lack of a minimum wage in the casual labor sector also means locals are undercut by migrants, triggering unhappiness.

In May, 2008, a series of attacks took place all over South Africa. In a clash between the poorest of the poor, gangs of local black South Africans descended on informal settlements and shanty towns armed with clubs, machetes and torches, and

attacked immigrants from Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Locals accused these immigrants of taking jobs and businesses away from them, among other grievances. After the attacks, several foreigners were killed, many injured, and thousands of immigrants were displaced, or were returning to their home countries. Dealing with the aftermath of the attacks has become a large problem for South Africa - prosecuting attackers, accommodating refugees, political damage control, and seeking to address root causes of xenophobia. Plus 94 Research asserts that, “South Africa has in the past few weeks been engulfed in barbaric and embarrassing social unrest. Evidence of this violence has been the violence of locals towards foreigners. Characteristics of this xenophobic violence have been murder, causing grievous bodily harm, robbery and intimidation.”[7]

Nevertheless, the large numbers of refugees displaced by conflict and other factors, pose serious challenges to States. Strengthening the response to refugee crises requires further efforts at the national level to establish legislative frameworks, policies, and structures giving effect to international protection obligations; redoubling efforts to find durable solutions for refugees in collaboration with UNHCR and other national and international partners; and addressing root causes of refugee movements including conflict and political instability.

Internally Displaced Persons

The displacement of populations within a country often occurs as a result of conflict or natural disasters. For example, armed conflict, drought, generalized insecurity and extensive internal displacement are the main push factors of the crisis in Somalia. The major causes for displacement are conflict, insecurity, economic opportunity, forced evictions, lack of social support and opportunity to return to areas of

origin. The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are confronted by special vulnerabilities. However, IDPs have special needs by virtue of their displacement. Generally, en route and even at their final destination, IDPs face violations such as rape, arbitrary arrests, forced recruitment, exploitation, lack of access to basic supplies and services, overcrowding, and other physical violence. Many IDPs are separated from their traditional support mechanisms, including clan protection, which exposes them to vulnerabilities otherwise not encountered. IDPs that traditionally belong to minority clans, once forced outside their traditional clan boundaries, often have little recourse to systems of justice when violations against them take place. IDPs rely on host communities for assistance and support.

The current humanitarian crisis has stretched the host community's own coping mechanisms to the limit, thereby severely restricting their ability to assist. Consequently, IDPs currently face even greater challenges. The Norwegian Refugee Council report asserts that "gender-based violence in Somalia is prevalent in IDP settlements and camps. Women have to walk long distances to collect water, exposing them to the risk of rape and other forms of violence. In the absence of effective protection mechanisms, perpetrators have been able to enter camps and commit sexual assaults against girls and women. Many cases of rape have not been reported because of the associated shame, and there are few support services for victims (IRIN, 11 November 2011; Oxfam, 10 September 2010; CRIN, 13 August 2007)."[8]

Border Management

Effective border management is a key element in any national migration system. The strategic goals of border security are to control the movement of prohibitive and restrictive goods including drugs, weapons, the appropriate use of import and export

permits, exchange controls, the movement of persons to eliminate illegal border crossings, human trafficking and smuggling, and the illegal smuggling of goods. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, border management systems are coming under increasing pressure from large flows of persons moving across regions and/or national borders. Specific challenges to border management mechanisms and personnel include building capacities to distinguish between persons having legitimate versus non-legitimate reasons for entry and/or stay. Elizabeth Collett asserts that "the integrity of physical borders remains critical to effective border management. Governments … have made increasing use of technology to monitor their borders, including tools such as … satellites, and radar coverage."[9] A key challenge is therefore to establish a balance allowing States to meet their humanitarian obligations to refugees and others eligible for protection while concurrently addressing the need to manage borders effectively.

Approaches to border management globally have been and will continue to be strongly affected by security concerns. Some regions in the world have been the subject of attacks linked with international terrorist networks and the possibility that they might constitute targets for further assaults, or transit or organizing points for further attacks elsewhere cannot be excluded. A good example is the abduction of a French tourist from Kenya's northern coast by Somali pirates using the porous border between Kenya and Somalia. The Economist asserts that, "Its border is porous. The Kiunga post, just across from Ras Kamboni, a Somali town near the border, is undermanned. Kenyan soldiers patrolling at the other end of the border have recently been snatched by them."[10] Consequently, the strengthening of border management systems in terms of

technology, infrastructure, business process for inspection of travelers, and training of staff has become a primary area of concern.

Migration and the Environment

Environmental factors play a growing role in causing population movements, and conversely, migration has an impact on the environment. For instance, internal migration, such as the process of urbanization is sometimes linked to environmental degradation and environmental disasters which force farmers and other rural populations off their land. "At the early stages of environmental degradation, farmers reap fewer crops, fishermen catch less fish and pastoralists find ever smaller pastures for their cattle. As earning capacity begins to decline, household members may turn to internal or cross-border migration for work and to generate supplementary income transfers through remittances."[11] The poorest people in developing countries are bearing the burden of the impact of climate change even though they have contributed little or nothing to the problem. The consequences are drastic because they are least equipped to adapt to it. Environmental migration is a reality that can no longer be overlooked. Millions of people have already been displaced as a result of climate change-related disasters. People are also moving from places they have long called home because their environment cannot support them anymore.

Drought caused by physical and climate changes is a significant cause of livelihood insecurity. Declines in the ability of households to be self-sustaining are related to long term declines in production (i.e., resource degradation), increasing population growth and land shortages. Reduction of arable land, widespread shortage of water, diminishing food and fish stocks, increased flooding and prolonged droughts

are already happening in Africa and many parts of the world. Also, the presence of large numbers of displaced persons in refugee camps and IDP hosting areas can have negative effects on local environments. For example, situations of mass displacement can have substantial environmental repercussions as swathes of land have been deforested to set up camps or settlements. Displaced persons resort to unsustainable resource management in order to make ends meet in extraordinary and protracted circumstances. Some development and land conservation initiatives have had similar environmental effects as resettled populations that are poorly equipped with alternative livelihoods or who have been settled in unworkable areas overexploit natural resources. Where affordable housing and sound sanitation are unavailable, migrants take to felling trees and procuring coastal sands for construction material, and to consuming contaminated water and food supplies. IDPs' homes are often precariously built, in contravention of building codes, and situated on floodplains or sparsely forested hillsides. Such development not only accelerate deforestation and soil erosion, they also limit the water drainage capacity of increasingly covered surface areas and the population's ability to access safe, clean water, resulting in further public health deterioration.

Another example is the case study of Darfur in Sudan. "While the causes of conflict in Darfur are many and complex, United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) environment and conflict analysis found that regional climate variability, water scarcity and the steady loss of fertile land are important underlying factors. The decrease in the availability of fertile land and water has been compounded by the arrival of people displaced from conflict-affected areas in southern Sudan during the civil war.

Overgrazing and deforestation have reduced the vegetation cover, leading to a decrease of topsoil volume and quality. The lack of sheltering trees and vegetation has in turn undermined natural defenses against shifting sands. In addition, the region has experienced a marked decline in rainfall. With rapidly increasing human and livestock populations, the weaknesses of institutions governing access to land and water have become more apparent, and some groups have been particularly disadvantaged. As climate change may further compound water and land stresses, Darfur and indeed the entire Sahel region – recently dubbed "ground zero" for climate change will need to place adaptation at their center of their development and conflict prevention plans. In addition to resolving the long-standing ethnic tensions in Darfur, durable peace will indeed depend on addressing the underlying competition for water and fertile land,"[12]

Linking Migration, and Enviroment to Conflict[13]

The growth in urban violence is one way in which climate change related migration may contribute to instability. However, when migration (environmental or not) is linked to conflict, it is never the only, and usually not the most important, factor causing violence. For instance, the targets of South Africa's xenophobic riots were mostly African (and some internal) migrants, but the riots were a response to frustrations over unemployment and poor service delivery by the state, combined with a xenophobic view on immigration inherited from the Apartheid period. This made immigrants easy targets for the venting of anger, rather than the cause of urban violence. "Migration is generally considered to be the intermediate stage which links environmental degradation and disasters to conflict (Homer Dixon, 1991 and 1994). As mass relocations are presumed to occur in response to degradation, conflict may erupt in receiving areas in response to competition, as environmental migrants may burden

the economic and resource base of the receiving area and promote contests over resources; … as developing economies are reliant on the environment for survival and if resources are scarce, environmental migrants may possibly join antagonizing groups or intensify the violence through any of the above conditions (Reuveny, 2000: 657-659)."[14]

Conflicts can occur over the direct use of scarce resources including land, forests, and water. These ensue when local demand for resources exceeds the available supply or when one form of resource use places pressure on other uses. Such situations are compounded by demographic pressures and disasters such as drought and flooding. Unless local institutions or practices mitigate competing interests, these tensions can lead to forced migration or violent conflict at the local level. Darfur demonstrates how the steady loss of fertile land, coupled with rapidly increasing human and livestock populations have driven the region to war. Ted Dagne explains that "at the core of the conflict is a struggle for control of resources. The large nomadic Arab ethnic groups … farming communities of Darfur for water and grazing, often triggering armed conflict between the two groups."[15] The conflict and crisis in Darfur has had an unprecedented impact on migration and mobility, restricting and blocking physical movement of people and livestock with dire consequences for their livelihoods.

Recommendations

The purpose of the above discussions is to offer recommendations on how to improve the execution in the management of migration and refugee flows in Africa. Establishing regular, transparent and comprehensive labor migration policies, legislation and structures at the national and regional levels can result in significant benefits for States of origin and destination. There is need to build national capacity to manage labor migration by developing national labor migration policies and legislation consistent

with overall population policy and government structures to manage labor migration. Promote respect for, and protection of, the rights of labor migrants including combating discrimination and xenophobia through civic education and awareness-raising activities. Facilitate the integration of migrant workers in the labor market. Set up national and sub-regional social dialogue mechanisms to address migrant worker issues.

Refugee and asylum seeker protection is a central aspect of international, regional, and national efforts to protect persons fleeing persecution. Therefore, states are encouraged to adopt and incorporate into national policies the international instruments pertaining to the protection of refugees. Train relevant law enforcement officials who have first contact with refugees (immigration officers, customs, and police) in the obligations set forth in relevant international instruments, to enable appropriate and humane screening of refugees and asylum-seekers at borders and referral to the competent authorities. Establish focal points within relevant ministries and devise national contingency plans in order to enhance capacities to address situations of mass displacement as well as mass return in a timely, efficient and appropriate manner. Safeguard the human security needs of refugees (physical, material, legal and health), especially in the context of refugee camps and with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups (women, children, disabled, and the elderly), while at the same time ensuring that refugees are aware of national laws, regulations and their obligations to abide by these. Increase local protection capacities through the involvement of civil society, for example by engaging NGOs in the provision of legal and social counseling to refugees, and public information campaigns to counter xenophobia. Engage in public information and awareness campaigns on the plight and rights of refugees including the

contribution refugees can make to the development of host communities, in order to counter increasing xenophobic tendencies and foster tolerance and understanding.

Situations of displacement become protracted when the causes of displacement are not addressed or remain unresolved, for instance in conflict situations where continuing conditions of insecurity prevent refugees and internally displaced persons from returning home. For example, Somalia is the worst offender for refugees and internally displaced persons, economic decline, human rights and security apparatus. The absence of permanent national government has led to ongoing civil violence, economic hardship, poor social conditions, and the displacement of thousands of Somali citizens. An upsurge of civil violence in the southern part of the nation has created further destabilization and threatens any potential improvements to Somalia's condition. Coupled with famine and violence, the precarious situation prevents refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia to return home.

Protracted displacement situations have adverse consequences for the lives of refugees and IDPs who are at risk of suffering material, social and cultural deprivation in camp settings for prolonged periods of time. Subsequently, States are recommended to adopt measures to enhance self-sufficiency of refugees and IDPs residing in camps, including, granting rights to employment, access to land, freedom of movement and other social-economic rights when possible. Ensure that refugees and IDPs have access to education and skills training in order to facilitate their eventual integration or reintegration into host and/or home communities. Use voluntary repatriation through reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction mechanisms. Call upon the international community to expand humanitarian agencies to assist governments in fulfilling their

obligations towards the internally displaced, and ensure access to highly insecure areas where humanitarian assistance is inhibited, for example by means of humanitarian corridors.

Effective border management is a key element in any national migration system. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, border management systems are coming under increasing pressure from large flows of persons, including irregular and mixed flows, moving across region and/or national borders. Therefore, there is need to strengthen national laws regulating migration including through the creation of clear, transparent categories for admission/expulsion and clear eligibility criteria for protection. Improve the capacities of border management mechanisms and personnel by optimizing new border management technologies and providing technical training for those involved in border management and migration policy. Provide adequate information about the requirements, challenges and opportunities of migration for the population in general and particularly for potential labor migrants before they cross borders. Strengthen co-operation between states' sub-regional and regional agencies, and the international community in particular in the area of law enforcement, sharing migration-related data and information, training and sustained dialogue. Enhance the role of African Union (AU) as well as other sub-regional and regional agencies in mobilizing financial and technical resources, harmonizing policies and programs of action, and coordinating activities of Member States for effective border management. Strengthen Inter-State Dialogue, and Regional Cooperation for effective management of state borders.

Urban-rural migrations worsen environmental degradation in rural areas. An expanding population increases the demand on soils and intensifies deforestation as

inhabitants clear forest land for fuel wood and shelter. Environmental considerations can play an increasingly important role in the formulation of policies on migration and the environment. States are encouraged to incorporate environmental considerations in the formulation of national and regional migration management policies to better address environment related causes of migratory movements as well as the impact migratory movements have on the environment. Counter environmental degradation caused by large protracted presence of displaced persons, for example by means of implementing relevant and targeted environmental protection programs including periodic review of ecosystem impacts and remedial measures to mitigate such impacts**.** Effective Effective management of environmental migration is essential to ensuring human security, health and well-being and to facilitating sustainable development. With more informed action and multi-stakeholder cooperation, societies around the world will be better able to achieve these objectives.

Conflict is a root cause of forced displacement. Displacement caused by conflict has destabilizing effects on national and regional security, with adverse consequences for the ability of host nations to provide protection to refugees and security to their own nationals. Since forced displacement is closely linked to conflict, both as a consequence and as a potential cause of further conflict, challenges posed by refugee and IDP movements must necessarily be addressed within the broader context of political and institutional efforts at the national, regional and Continent-wide levels aimed at strengthening political dialogue and institutions, and at preventing and managing conflict.

Adaptation measures by reducing the impact of climate change can lessen the

need to migrate as well as reduce the risk of conflict. Alongside information and infrastructure measures, addressing general factors of conflict and forced migration can also contribute to vulnerability reduction and adaptation. Financial resources must also be made available for countries to deal with problems of climate change-related displacements.

Conclusion

Migration in Africa is and has historically been characterized by complex flows arising from a combination of root causes that include conflict, poverty, drought, political repression, forced repatriation, and forced resettlement. It is evident that conflict, extreme poverty and poor governance have been and continue to be key driving forces for African migration. Without peace and stability, increased food security, infrastructure, and employment opportunities, it can be anticipated that migration flows in Africa will continue. It is a fairly likely estimation that migration flows in Africa will continue to increase due to political instability, limited employment and education opportunities, poverty, overpopulation and food scarcity.

As migration involves origin, transit and destination countries, inter-state, inter and intra-regional cooperation are crucial for the management of migration. As a result, Governments should look for collective solutions to migration through bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements and dialogue in a manner that benefits all parties involved in migration: the country of origin, the destination country and the migrants themselves. Migration management requires information and its systemic use. Member states should encourage research to generate information, identify problems and devise appropriate responses and strategies. Migration management requires capacity and

adequate infrastructure. Member states should encourage capacity building programs to effectively manage migration by investing on training and awareness raising as well as putting in place adequate infrastructure and technology.

Endnotes

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