

# Inter-Governmental Consultations

## on Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies

IGC's responses to specific questions posed by IOM in invitation to April 14-15, 2005 workshop:

**1. In cases where different ministries are involved in dealing with issues discussed in one or more RCPs, how is this work coordinated internally? How could it be coordinated? Is coordination considered beneficial and/or necessary?**

The issues IGC deals with (asylum, refugees, and migration), by their very nature, involve the competencies of several government Ministries and require coordination between those Ministries and their relevant departments. Internal coordination is very much up to individual participating States to determine, and differs depending on Governmental structures, but two approaches can be noted: governments that have a specialized structure dealing with immigration and asylum and governments where competences are shared between different Ministries (Interior/Justice/Foreign Affairs).

Coordination is required on several levels: vertical co-ordination ensuring that senior officials are aware of the activities of experts in working groups and workshops and can provide direction and feedback on experts proposals; and horizontal co-ordination whereby States ensure that both policy and operational experts from all relevant Ministries are involved in discussions.

In dealing with IGC, some participating States have provided specific points of contact, who receive all of the information concerning IGC (invitations to meetings, requests for information) and then dispatch that information to the responsible Ministries/departments concerned. Some participating States also organize regular meetings between the different ministries/departments responsible for IGC in order to ensure effective co-ordination.

For its part, the IGC Secretariat has developed mechanisms over the years to ensure co-ordination. For example, specific mailing lists have been established that include contacts in all branches of government to ensure that those who need to know have the information on the IGC. IGC has similarly established lists of focal points for its specific activities (asylum, return, technology etc.). For every meeting organized, the IGC Secretariat indicates which type of representation is required (policy and or operational) and at which level (senior official/expert). IGC also holds multidisciplinary workshops on specific themes and specific countries, which ensures that different Ministries/departments are involved.

Other ways in which co-ordination is ensured include semi-annual steering group meetings, which bring together senior officials to hear from the Chairs of working groups and to provide directions for new activities.

Coordination at the national level is vital in order to ensure that the right persons attend the meetings. Co-ordination is also important in order to ensure maximum benefit to States. If all provide the most recent and relevant information to the meetings, accurate information on all participating States' policies and practices is obtained and enables participants to inform the policy debate in their capitals.

The IGC secure web site is a facilitator in this respect. All government officials involved can have access to this tool, which provides them with essential information on IGC as documentation for meetings, comparative reports, on line databases and other States' documentation. Experience has shown that coordination is best achieved where a whole-of-government approach to asylum, refugees and immigration issues exists in participating States. The current Dutch chair has made this topic the theme of its year in the chair, and a special workshop will be held on the topic in the spring of 2006.

**2. To what extent are the RCP's achieving the goals they have set? Is there concrete follow up – and of what kind – to the consultations and any recommendations they adopt?**

The IGC was established “to provide a forum for like-minded countries to exchange information on asylum, refugee and migration issues in an informal and non-binding way” (Administrative arrangement 1993, revised 1996). In the sense of the ever-increasing themes and activities, the number of meetings held each year (20), discussions and documentation provided at those meetings and both comparative reports and databases which are all contained in a secure web site, the IGC is meeting the goals that were set.

More specifically, each year the incoming Chair suggests a theme and sets specific goals for the IGC in a management plan, which includes meeting schedules and work plans for IGC working groups. These are evaluated and a report is made to senior officials.

It should be underlined that the IGC does not take decisions or make recommendations but is rather focused on the exchange of information on policy and best practices. However, in terms of follow up, the information exchange has led over the years to *de facto* harmonization of policies and practices in participating States i.e., on asylum procedures, return, smuggling, and technology.

**3. Migration has to an increasing extent been put on the agendas of regional inter-governmental organizations, such as the EU, AU, ASEAN and Mercosur. Will RCPs continue to be important fora for informal discussions or will RCPs be subsumed by the work of these organizations? If RCPs continue to have a role, can and should their work link up directly with the work of these more formal regional and political frameworks or organizations?**

IGC will continue to have an important role as it serves States in a unique way because the information that is shared within the IGC is exchanged informally. More formal international organisations, such as IOM and UNHCR, or intergovernmental bodies like the EU do not always provide the confidentiality or the possibility of frank and direct exchange that IGC does.

Work in the IGC is already linked to activities in other regional fora in terms of providing a forum for informal discussion of topics discussed elsewhere. The IOM, UNHCR, European Commission participate in IGC meetings. Participating States report on the

activities of regional intergovernmental organizations, which are of relevance for the IGC. Similarly, participating States inform other fora on activities in the IGC.

While a good knowledge of activities of intergovernmental organizations is essential to the proper functioning of RCPs such as IGC, secure access to the information available on the IGC Website is not really compatible with direct links with the wider, more open regional and political frameworks.

**4. To what extent is there an interchange of ideas and information between different RCPs? What has been the nature and outcome of that interchange? If no or inadequate interchange exists, would more cross-regional dialogue be beneficial? If so, what purpose would it serve?**

When IGC was established in 1985, there were no regional consultative processes on immigration issues. At the origins of some regional consultative fora (Puebla, Budapest, APC), the IGC was consulted to provide information on how to establish a Secretariat. Similarly, over the years, the IGC has been approached by regional processes to provide information on methodology for information and data collection, which the IGC has provided to facilitate the work of those processes. However, specific IGC information and data is, as a general rule, restricted to IGC participating States and is not shared with other RCPs.

The IGC met with the Asia Pacific Consultations on Refugees and Displaced Persons (APC) in 2001, and the meeting was useful in that it allowed IGC and APC States to exchange perspectives on the issues and see to what extent they have the same challenges.

The interchange operates through participating States, which keep IGC senior officials and experts informed of activities of other RCPs. IGC senior official meetings and working groups for example generally include reports on activities of interest in other RCPs. Most of IGC's interchange is with the United Nations (UNHCR), IOM and specialist international organizations such as ICAO, IATA, which are invited to specific working groups and workshops.