This document was developed based on the proposals formulated by the working groups of the round table «Migration in the Republic of Belarus: challenges, trends and perspectives» that took place in Minsk on 26 May 2016. The document is signed in two copies in the Russian language.

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Acknowledgements

Mission of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, acting as co-organizers of this round table, convey their gratitude to the participants, experts and spokespersons of the round table, represented by state, non-state and international organizations, as well as to foreign embassies and private companies that took part in the event and contributed to the elaboration of recommendations, presented in this report.

Our special gratitude goes to the donors of the round table, particularly to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Republic of Belarus for their financial contributions and technical support in the organization of this event.

Besides, the organizers express their gratitude to such international donors as the European Union, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and others who have been supporting for many years numerous projects in Belarus in the sphere of migration and combating human trafficking.
The mobility of population and labor force in the 21st century turned into a large-scale phenomenon resulting in an immense direct impact on global demographic processes and socio-economic development of the states and regions.

Over the recent years migration and related issues were in the spotlight of international attention. Due to the recent migration crisis in Europe the topic of migration doesn’t descend from the front pages of the world media and is being actively discussed at high level international fora. Migration became, without exaggeration, one of the key subjects of the international agenda as migration processes affect all spheres of life on the state, community and individual levels. No wonder, migration related issues have been included into the indicators of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

Contemporary migration is characterized by rapid development of information, transport and communication technologies, as well as by the growing social and economic disparity, both between the states and within the societies.

Difficult social and economic conditions, deficiency of prospects for development in native countries, threats of the military conflicts and terrorist attacks, along with the environmental and technogenic devastations force millions of people to look for more advantageous and safer living conditions far from their homes.

In this sense the year 2015 became a real test for Europe and the European Union in general, that faced unprecedented scales of irregular migration. The governments of many European countries had to rapidly develop and introduce a set of emergency measures in order to handle migration flows caused by uncontrolled inflow of thousands of migrants to the EU territory. They had to redirect migration flows into the regulated domain, amend their migratory legislation and strengthen response in terms of provision of humanitarian and social assistance to dozens of thousands stranded migrants.

This experience, not always being positive, can still be used in future for the development of an effective migration management policy capable of adequate reacting to emerging challenges and threats. Owing to the implementation of a complex of effective measures, the EU member states managed to alleviate to a certain degree further negative implications of the unfolding migration crisis and prevent the situation from becoming uncontrollable. Nevertheless, the solution of a wide range of migration challenges still requires elaboration of integrated and coordinated policy, both at the state and EU levels in general.

The Republic of Belarus wasn’t directly affected by this migration crisis, however due to its geographical location which can be characterized as “transit”, it doesn’t stay completely away from the European migration challenges and threats, and also faces a need for effective management of migration.

A number of specific migration trends have been identified in Belarus over the past few years. The first one relates to labor migration of the Belarusian citizens to the Russian Federation – the process which is partially provoked by the absence of visa requirements, border control and linguistic barriers between the countries, discrepancies in the level of wages in Belarus and Russia; the second trend is a substantial inflow of Ukrainian citizens, mainly displaced persons from south-eastern parts of Ukraine, who have arrived in Belarus fleeing instability at home; and the third one is of the growing rate of irregular transit migration towards the West.

In order to ensure effective management of migration related processes the Republic of Belarus should develop effective and balanced policy in the sphere of migration and mobility of population responding to modern trends, meeting the social, economic and demographic interests of the country, as well as in line with the best international experience and standards with due respect for the rights of migrants – one of the most vulnerable population groups. It is expected that the developed recommendations will be further used during the process of migration policy development in Belarus.
The participants of the round table have touched upon all aspects of migration in Belarus, analyzed the current migration situation in the region and discussed potential tendencies in light of the migration crisis in Europe. Besides, the participants also defined some particularly problematic issues that emerge in the process of migration management in Belarus, as well as proposed possible solutions and came up with respective recommendations.

As stated by the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the round table contributed to the enhancement of interaction among competent agencies, helped to identify methods to improve migration situation, inter alia through the exchange of best practices in the field.

The main result of the round table is the text of recommendations for the Government of Belarus on such issues as irregular migration, forced migration and migration and development. The recommendations were developed as a result of three thematic groups’ work and will be submitted to the Government of the Republic of Belarus for consideration while developing and implementing an effective state policy in the field of migration.
Group Work Description. Conclusions and Recommendations

During the plenary session the following presentations were delivered: “Migration policy of the Republic of Belarus at present stage”, “Combating irregular migration by the border services at the European direction”, “Sociological monitoring of migration situation in the Republic of Belarus and its perspectives”, “IOM’s Migration Governance Framework (MIGOF)”.

Among presenters were the officials of the Department of citizenship and migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Committee, Center for Monitoring of Scientific Labor Migration of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences, IOM Mission in Belarus.

Within the next section of the round table the participants were divided into three working groups each focusing on one specific direction such as “Irregular migration”, “Forced migration”, “Migration and development”. After this a moderator of each group presented the results of his group work at the general session for coordination and further inclusion into the recommendations of the round table.

The group work was moderated by representatives of the key stakeholders engaged in the implementation of migration activities in Belarus, also acting as organizers of the round table, namely IOM Mission in Belarus, Department of citizenship and migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNHCR.

Working Group 1 – Irregular Migration

Moderator: Representative of the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus


During the group work the participants analyzed the current situation in Belarus in the sphere of combating irregular migration, focusing on the new challenges that evolved as a result of a neg-
ative migration situation in Europe. Reports on the related topics were delivered by representa-
tives of the Department of Citizenship and Mi-
gration, the State Border Committee, IOM.

The participants of the working group were
familiarized with the report of the liaison of-
cicer of the embassy of Latvia on migration re-
lated issues, who described in detail the main
challenges faced by the European countries
during the migration crisis in 2015 and those
measures that were used by the governments
to rapidly respond to the unprecedented inflow
of migrants.

The participants have agreed about the impor-
tance of developing a consolidated national
strategy in the field of migration, in line with
international standards and best practices and
serving as a basic instrument for the elaboration
of the State Migration Program that could posi-
tively influence migration situation in Belarus.

Likewise the participants have identified a need
for further improvement of the national legisla-
tion on migration in order to eliminate the ex-
isting gaps. This particularly relates to the revi-
sion of standards of administrative and criminal
legislation in the sphere of combating irregular
migration.

Besides, the participants have pointed out a need
to enhance the national security of Belarus by
strengthening border surveillance through the
use of advanced border control technologies (in-
ter alia by means of modern equipment use), as
well as by the advancement of the existing da-
tabases (by means of disaggregation of migrant
data).

As stated by the participants, the lack of objec-
tive migration statistics in Belarus that could be
used as a basis in defining the national migration
policy represents one of the key problems that
has to be addressed in the nearest future.

Due to the absence of border control between
Belarus and Russia there is a need to strengthen
cooperation with the Russian Federation in the
field of border security, joint operative and in-
vestigative operations, and formation of a com-
mon migration space between the two.

To improve the effectiveness of border surveil-
ance an Integrated Border Management (IBM)
concept should be developed and implemented,
envisioning close cooperation and a clear distri-
bution of responsibilities between all agencies
engaged in border management.

The participants also underscored the neces-
sity to advocate for the rights of migrants, esti-
mate their vulnerability and potential belonging
to at-risk groups such as victims of trafficking,
refugees, unaccompanied minors, persons with
health limitations etc.

Another serious problem faced by Belarus in
light of the future signing of the Readmission
agreement with the European Union is the lack
of accommodation facilities for irregular mi-
grants that would meet international criteria for
such facilities. Currently, irregular migrants in
Belarus are being held in detention centers that
clearly fall short of meeting basic international
standards for accommodation of migrants. In
this regard, the participants stressed the need to
construct such centers in Belarus.

Similarly, the participants supported the idea of
promoting international cooperation in order to
attract international financial and expert sup-
port, including familiarization of the Belarusian
stakeholders with the best international prac-
tices in the field of establishment, maintenance
and management of migrant accommodation
centers.

Particularly relevant in this regard would be co-
operation with international and regional law
enforcement agencies such as Europol and Front-
tex, with significant practical experience in the
field of combating irregular migration and trans-
national organized crime, such as human traf-
ficking and smuggling.

The group participants have also pinpointed
the need for the development of joint projects
with the participation of all key stakeholders
in order to strengthen their capacity – both hu-
man and technical (i.e. through the supply of
equipment), improve the effectiveness of efforts
aimed at combating irregular migration and
trafficking in human beings, identify potential
victims of trafficking, assess and meet the needs
of the relevant governmental agencies working
in this area.

The following list of recommendations of
working group on combating irregular migra-
tion was prepared and consequently coordi-
nated with other participants at the plenary
session:

1. Consider the possibility of developing a na-
tional strategy in the field of migration (e.g.
in the form of a Concept of the National mi-
gration policy).

2. Ensure systematic improvement of legisla-
tion in the field of migration, taking into ac-
count new trends in the area of migration at
the strategic, regional and national levels;
including revision of the administrative and
criminal law regulations in the field of com-
bating irregular migration.

3. Develop governmental measures aimed at
increasing the effectiveness of migration
control technologies.

4. Ensure modernization of the existing mi-
gration databases, prepare proposals for
Working group 2 – Forced Migration

Moderator: Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Republic of Belarus

Participants: The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health, State Border Committee, Embassy of Ukraine, Offices of IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, Belarusian Red Cross Society, the Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women, Refugee counseling service, the Minsk City Bar Association.

During the group work the participants discussed situation in the field of forced migration in Belarus, focusing on most serious challenges and trends. Presentations of the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Border Committee, Ministry of Health, the development of the new database on migration with categorization of migrants.

5. Promote implementation of measures aimed at creating a common migration space with Russia and strengthen cooperation with the Russian side.

6. Enhance cooperation with international organizations working in the sphere of migration, such as Europol, Frontex and others.

7. Develop and institutionalize the Concept of Integrated Border Management (IBM) with a view of the existing foreign analogues for such concepts.

8. Cooperate with the foreign law enforcement agencies in implementing joint operative and investigative measures in the field of combating irregular migration.

9. Improve migration related statistics, inter alia by using the data disaggregated approach.

10. Strengthen the capacity of the state agencies in the identification of vulnerable migrants (including victims of trafficking) and assessment of their needs.

11. Expand the involvement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Border Committee in the development and implementation of joint international projects on migration.

12. Prepare proposals aimed at improving the technical capacity of the law enforcement agencies of Belarus involved in combating irregular migration and trafficking in human beings, for their further inclusion in international projects.

9. Improve migration related statistics, inter alia by using the data disaggregated approach.

10. Strengthen the capacity of the state agencies in the identification of vulnerable migrants (including victims of trafficking) and assessment of their needs.

11. Expand the involvement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Border Committee in the development and implementation of joint international projects on migration.

12. Prepare proposals aimed at improving the technical capacity of the law enforcement agencies of Belarus involved in combating irregular migration and trafficking in human beings, for their further inclusion in international projects.
as well as several NGOs directly involved in working with foreigners and forced migrants were delivered.

The participants noted that the situation remains controllable and manageable despite certain difficulties caused by unprecedented increase in the number of forced migrants in recent years. It was noted that Belarus in general ensures appropriate conditions for asylum seekers’ reception in line with international standards. There are a number of projects in Belarus aimed at strengthening the capacity of the governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with forced migrants. As stated by the participants, Belarus continues to improve the national asylum system.

To ensure timely response to the changing migration situation a number of measures are being implemented in the country, including harmonization of legislation in this area. It is expected that during the next session of the Parliament a new version of the Law on forced migration will be adopted. The Law is designed in such a way as to amend the current asylum system in line with the 1951 Convention regarding the Status of Refugees and international standards, as well as ensure timely response to the newly emerging challenges.

In order to ensure the state’s readiness and preparedness for emergency situations caused by an influx of foreigners to Belarus in need of protection, it is planned to more clearly define the scope of responsibilities of the organizations working with this category of migrants, including agencies responsible for mandatory state fingerprint registration, medical examination and identification of personality.

The participants have also noted that, taking into account the current situation, the organization of work with foreigners, arriving in the Republic of Belarus in great numbers and seeking protection, should continue to improve, both in the field of setting up an appropriate regulatory framework, and also through effective legislative practices, along with creation of effective interagency coordination system between various governmental, international and non-governmental organizations dealing with forced migration.

The participants stated the importance of studying international experience and developments in this area, as well as implementation of activities targeted at raising awareness and professional level of government officials involved in the work with foreigners.

Particular attention was paid to the issues related to Ukrainian citizens, arriving in Belarus from Lugansk and Donetsk regions, and the problems that this category of migrants is facing, such as access to healthcare, social services and legal employment opportunities.

The participants also stressed the need for consolidation of efforts of interested state, non-state and international agencies to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups of forced migrants, such as unaccompanied minors, the elderly, people with health problems and disabilities.

During the discussion there were suggested concrete measures to improve the mechanism of working with recognized refugees and persons who have received subsidiary protection status. There was identified a need to study the issue of setting up additional accommodation centers for refugees and asylum-seekers, develop targeted programs for migrants’ integration into society, form positive public attitude towards forced migrants.

The participants also highlighted the importance of joint fund-raising efforts in order to ensure the timely provision of humanitarian assistance to forced migrants.

As a result of the group’s work the following recommendations were developed:

1. Improve the organization of work with foreigners, arriving en masse in the Republic of Belarus, seeking protection and applying for refugee status or subsidiary protection.

2. Inform interested state, non-state and international organizations about the most recent changes in legislation in the field of forced migration.

3. Continue work started by IOM on the exchange of experience and information between the state, non-state and international organizations working in the field of migration.

4. Enhance skills and knowledge of representatives of state, non-state and international organizations in the field of forced migration (including such issues as human trafficking and gender-based and sexual violence).

5. Prioritize the provision of assistance to the most vulnerable groups of forced migrants (minors, females, elderly, people with disabilities).

6. Improve the mechanism of providing interpretation services from/to rare languages required in the protection procedure, in particular during the consideration of applications for refugee status or subsidiary protection in the Republic of Belarus.

7. Consider the possibility of establishing new and/or additional accommodation centers for forced migrants.
It seems critical, in this regard, to strengthen international cooperation between Belarus and other countries in the field of migration and development and to attract international resources to Belarus in order to achieve sustainable development goals related to migration, to study and exchange experience in this field, to participate in the Mobility Partnership Programme, as well as to promote various initiatives in the field of migration and development in international projects.

Considering the fact that in recent years labor migration has gained increasing importance for Belarus, which is a country of both origin and destination for migrant workers, the panelists focused in their discussion on the need to develop a national strategy based on the country’s interest to attract qualified foreign labor force and prioritize the use of national human resources. Specialized programs on integration and adaptation of migrants in Belarus as well as on reintegration of returning citizens of Belarus should thus be developed.

The participants of the third working group were familiarized with the presentations of the representatives of the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Statistics Committee on the collection and processing of data related to external labor migration; the participants supported the idea of improving the process of collecting statistical information on migration and its further transition to electronic format, as well as the creation of a consolidated segregated database and the use of unified methodological approaches in filling out migration documentation by all involved agencies.

The panelists supported the proposal of a representative of the National Academy of Sciences to enhance/establish cooperation with the academic community in the field of migration and development, to apply a scientific approach to research related to migration processes and their impact on various socio-economic sectors, taking into account the gender aspects and protection of the rights of vulnerable migrants.

The participants also raised the issue of migrant remittances. Representatives of the National Bank presented official statistics on remittances and information about their impact on the country’s economy. It was noted that many migrants prefer to carry cash to Belarus, thus bypassing the banking system.

In this regard, the participants stressed the need to study the system of money transfers to the Republic of Belarus from labor migrants working abroad, to increase its transparency and enhance possibilities for their recording and accumulation. At the same time the participants mentioned the importance of reducing banks’
money transfer fees and promoting the use of remittances by migrant workers to boost local entrepreneurship and regional development in the country.

According to the participants, Belarus should strengthen the local authorities’ capacity and extend their participation in the development and implementation of regional programs on economic opportunities of migrant remittances and improvement of the population’s financial literacy. This measure will create favorable conditions to attract foreign investments to the regions of Belarus, promote territorial labor mobility and intensify economic activity of Belarusian citizens on the domestic labor market.

As a result, the following recommendations were agreed upon:

1. Develop a unified segregated database for the collection and processing of the migration data. Implement on a regular basis research on migration and its impact on the socio-economic development of the country.

2. Explore the existing money transfer system, including both formal and informal channels. Reduce the costs/fees of remittances and develop a strategy encouraging the use of formal channels, alongside the general use of remittances for development. Create favorable conditions for private business development using migrant remittances.

3. Develop and apply programs at local/ regional/ national levels to enhance the capacity of population and local authorities in the field of migration and development as well as population’s financial literacy. Promote investment projects that would engage Belarusian citizens in the domestic labor market.

4. Attract resources of the international community to help Belarus achieve sustainable development goals. Promote initiatives and projects on migration and development.

5. Develop State Program on Migration and Development. Consider the feasibility of establishing an interagency Taskforce on Migration and Development under the Council of Ministers. Develop policies to attract qualified migrant workers, including students who have previously received education in Belarus. Include migration issues into programs and strategies on development at the local, regional and national levels.

6. Promote intergovernmental dialogue and multilateral cooperation in the field of migration and development, exchange of knowledge and experience. Establish an expert working group to study the experience of other countries in the fields of migration and development and mobility partnership.

7. Analyze the successful cooperation between the state, non-state and international organizations on migration related subjects at the local level. Mainstream gender issues in programs on migration and development.

8. Develop joint projects for migrants and returning nationals’ integration into society.