

Understanding large movements of refugees and migrants
GMG preparatory meeting for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on
addressing large movements of refugees and migrants
United Nations, Conference Room 7
25 April 2016, 10.00 am to 1.00 pm

Summary note

The meeting provided an overview of the magnitude, drivers and impact of large movements of refugees and migrants. The meeting was organized by the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹

In her opening remarks, Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women and Chair of the Global Migration Group (GMG) stressed that gender-responsive migration and visa policies were a key step towards maximizing benefits and minimizing risks associated with migration of women and girls. She also indicated that the Agreed Conclusion of the Sixtieth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recognized the contribution of migrants - including women migrant workers - to sustainable development. H.E. Karel van Oosterom, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, co-chair of the meeting, emphasized the need to invest in education and jobs for youth in developing countries and to recognize that the specific vulnerabilities of people on the move. He also stressed that safe, orderly and regular migration required partnerships and cooperation. H.E. Virachai Plasai, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand, co-chair of the meeting, emphasized the need for greater responsibility sharing in hosting refugees. He also highlighted the need for capacity building in host countries on practical issues, such as screening and identifying persons on the move.

The first panel provided an overview of global levels and trends in international migration and refugee movements. Speakers highlighted that the number of international migrants was expected to further increase in the future and discussed the role of population dynamics, in particular population decline in developed countries and a strong increase in the working age population in some developing countries, as a driver for migration. Taking stock of the current global refugee situation, it was highlighted that global responsibility sharing for refugees was uneven and shouldered by only a few countries. Fewer durable solutions for refugees and insufficient humanitarian assistance combined with situations of protracted displacement further aggravated the plight of refugees. The panel also discussed the migration relevant targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies (target 10.7).

¹ See <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/events/index2.shtml> to access written statements and presentations by the co-chairs and panelists.

Environmental factors and climate change as drivers for migration and displacement were presented, highlighting the relevance of the inclusion of migration in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Climate agreement. Panelists further pointed to relevant voluntary state-led initiatives such as the *Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) initiative* to protect migrants in countries experiencing conflicts or natural disasters and the *Nansen Initiative* for the protection of persons crossing international borders as a result of natural disasters and climate change.

The second panel focused on the impact of, and responses to, large movements of refugees and migrants. It also highlighted the significant contribution of migrants and refugees to countries of origin, transit and destination. It discussed the economic contribution of migration to host societies, including by filling gaps in the labour market, by providing access to new skills, by increasing competitiveness, and by mitigating a declining work force in ageing societies. Similarly, the contribution of migrants to development in their home countries was discussed, including through the productive use of remittances through financial inclusion and diaspora engagement. Beyond the many positive impacts, the panel also addressed the challenges of mass population flows, in particular for women, girls and children, including gender-based violence along the migratory route or at destination. The panel presented resilience-based development solutions with the aim to support countries in aligning crisis priorities for large population movements with national development goals, and to better integrate humanitarian and development interventions in order to enhance preparedness of countries, and host communities, for future shocks.

During the interactive debate, participants noted the importance of placing human rights at the center of the debate on 19 September as well to mainstream a gender perspective throughout the migration agenda. While it was acknowledged that migrants and refugees often faced similar vulnerabilities and challenges along their migratory routes and at their destinations, participants cautioned against blurring existing distinctions between voluntary and forced migrants, between root causes of involuntary migration and drivers of voluntary movements, and between the obligations of Member States under international law with regards to international migrants and refugees. Delegates expressed concern about the current protection gaps for displaced populations compelled to flee due to adverse impact of climate change. Broad support was expressed to strengthen migration governance through the relevant voluntary state-led initiatives, such as the Nansen Initiative and the *Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative*, in order to address environmentally driven migration. While reiterating the need for greater responsibilities for hosting refugees by the international community, delegates recognized that refugees had also an important contribution to make to host countries. One participant observed that admission policies should take into account the capacity to absorb newcomers. Several delegates supported the need for positive narratives on migration by highlighting the contributions by migrants and refugees to host countries. Participants called for concrete action to combat manifestations of xenophobia and discrimination against migrant and refugee populations. Participants highlighted the important contribution of various “building blocks” for the 19 September GA meeting, in particular the first World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul (May 2016). Many participants pointed to the centrality of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.