



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

20 March 2019

Excellency,

I am pleased to enclose herewith the summary of the High-level Debate on International Migration and Development which took place on the 27 February 2019.

The summary contains main conclusions from the key messages and recommendations expressed during the High-level debate. As envisaged in paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 73/241, the High-level debate was held “to inform the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which will review the goals and targets relevant to migration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking into consideration the outcomes of other processes related to international migration and development”.

It is my hope that these conclusions will motivate further action among all Member States, the UN system and other stakeholders to incorporate migration and migrants into all relevant processes and policies, and strengthen outcomes of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and other processes related to international migration and development, in order to leave no one behind.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all delegations and stakeholders who participated in the event and supported it in various ways, thus contributing to its success.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. F. Espinosa Garcés', written in a cursive style.

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

United Nations General Assembly
High-level Debate on International Migration and Development

New York, 27 February 2019

Summary

Introduction

The President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly convened a High-level Debate on International Migration and Development on Wednesday, 27 February 2019. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/241, the debate was organized to inform the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which will review the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets relevant to migration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking into consideration the outcomes of other processes related to international migration and development.

Key messages and recommendations for future action

The debate produced several key messages and action-oriented recommendations:

- The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved if migrants, including female migrants, and migration are included in a comprehensive manner. Governments need to ensure that migration is reflected in all the Goals not only those that specifically reference migrants or migration.
- Migration, which is both a development strategy and a development outcome, is of major relevance to countries of origin, transit and destination. Migrants and migration make a critical contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efforts should be taken to integrate migration in all relevant global policy agendas as well as in development planning at the national level.
- The HLPF should consider migration in all its dimensions. In July 2019, the forum will review SDGs which are particularly relevant to migrants and migration. Member States are encouraged to include migration issues in their voluntary national reviews at the HLPF.
- There is an urgent need to build national capacities to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration. International cooperation on migration should be promoted through North-South, South-South and Triangular cooperation and should be aligned with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
- Assessing progress on the migration-related dimensions of the SDGs remains a challenge. While efforts to improve data and analysis on migration are underway and should continue, governments should undertake baseline assessments of their current migration situation with a view to informing future progress in implementing well-managed migration policies.

- In many countries, the narrative on migration has become the subject of intense, and often negative, political debate, eroding public trust. Urgent efforts are needed to ensure that national migration policies are based on facts and well-founded analysis, and enjoy the trust of citizens, that migration challenges are effectively being addressed, and that the benefits of migration are seized and publicized
- Efforts to address the linkages between climate change and migration should be expanded. Member States may wish to consider how best to understand these linkages and to act in the multilateral context.

Opening

In her opening remarks, H.E. Mrs. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly, highlighted three key points. First, the SDGs can only be achieved if migrants are included in their implementation. Given that migration is a global phenomenon, the rights of migrants must be respected. At the same time, Ms. Espinosa pointed out that achieving the SDGs would be the most effective measure to reduce the adverse drivers that force people from their homes. Within the context of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which provides a comprehensive framework for addressing migration, several issues required priority attention. These include migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the relationship between migration and labour market needs, and, the specific needs of migrant women, particularly around restrictive labour market policies. Second, the President observed that the available evidence clearly demonstrated that the benefits of migration outweigh its challenges, highlighting the role of migrants in enriching cultural diversity and contributing to development in communities of origin and destination. In particular, migrant remittances help to reduce poverty, eradicate hunger, and promote access to health and education in communities of origin. Meanwhile, a significant proportion of the earnings made by migrants are spent in countries of destination. Lastly, she called for an informed debate on migration with a view to eliminating xenophobia, prejudice, negative stereotyping and discrimination against migrants.

Overview of progress in achieving migration-related goals

The first session provided an overview of the progress made in achieving the migration-related SDGs. Panellists emphasized the immense potential of migration for achieving the 2030 Agenda, highlighting Goals and targets that were particularly relevant for migration, including SDG 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17, which are being reviewed during the 2019 HLPF. It was widely recognized that migration and development were interrelated: while migration could make an important contribution to development, the development process also impacted migration patterns. The universal lens of the 2030 Agenda allowed for an articulation of the nexus between migration and development in many different contexts, including poverty reduction, access to health and education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and climate change. It was noted that the contribution of migration to development is often poorly understood and was frequently reduced to a focus on migrants' economic contributions, particularly remittances. Several speakers highlighted that the linkages between migration

and development were much broader, that migration was relevant to the achievement of all SDGs, and that progress towards achieving the SDGs was critical to ensure that mobile populations were not left behind.

Participants also underlined how investing in migrants means investing in one's own country, whilst recognizing that this investment must be significant and with a long-term perspective to be effective.

Participants recognized the challenges in assessing progress on migration-related SDGs and targets, given the lack of timely, reliable, comparable and disaggregated data on migrants and migration. They also noted that several initiatives were underway to improve the collection and analysis of migration data. Participants highlighted emerging trends that were likely to impact progress on migration-related SDGs and targets, including the expected increase in the number and proportion of international migrants globally. Armed conflict, environmental conditions and the impact of climate change were expected to exert a strong impact on future patterns of displacement and migration.

Several participants highlighted the gender dimensions of migration, noting that today some 48 per cent of all international migrants were female. Speakers drew attention to the potential for women to improve their education and employment opportunities through migration. Yet, the threat of gender-based violence and exploitation, the adverse effects of poor regulations in sectors where women often find employment, and the potential for deskilling was highlighted by many who took the floor.

Economic inequalities and demographic change will continue to fuel shifts in the demand and supply of migrant labour. In developed economies with ageing populations, labour shortages and skills gaps will experience a demand for migrant workers, while large and growing populations of working-age people will need to find employment in developing economies, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Several participants discussed the importance of promoting access to decent work and applying international labour standards to all labour migrants, irrespective of legal status. Examples of inter-regional and intra-regional programmes facilitating labour mobility were also highlighted. The challenges associated with migrant smuggling and human trafficking were raised by several participants, noting that disrupting the business model of illicit actors is vital to harness the benefits of migration.

Rural to urban migration and urbanization continue to transform economic and social landscapes in many countries around the world. Today, cities are home to most international migrants. City governments and municipal authorities play a critical role in navigating access to scarce resources and rethinking the delivery of public services. Especially in the context of large-scale migratory movements, access to basic services could be a significant challenge to social cohesion.

Participants discussed the impact of migration on rural communities, including the potential of migration to empower rural women, to access financial services, and to create investment in rural communities through remittances. Several speakers referred to the need to increase access to basic services, including health and education, for migrants. Some delegations cited examples of service delivery programmes benefiting migrants and non-migrants alike.

Speakers observed that the impacts of climate change would intensify, noting that the effects of climate change would increasingly impact population distribution. While some groups will be directly affected by climate-induced disasters – such as flooding, droughts and extreme weather events – others will be impacted by growing desertification, coastal erosion and instability stemming from resource scarcity, including water. Several delegates highlighted the impacts of climate change on populations in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Participants highlighted the need to integrate migration in discussions on climate change, especially at the United Nations Climate Action Summit taking place in September 2019.

It was noted that policy coherence and an integrated approach towards migration was essential to reap the full benefits of migration. The erosion of public confidence in governments' ability to manage migration was considered another important obstacle towards achieving the migration-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Some delegations drew attention to the challenges inherent to irregular migration – such as the risks to life and safety, the potential for abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and the growth of the informal economy.

Participants emphasized the need to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration, including by providing legal channels for migration, promoting portability of pensions and qualifications, facilitating skills recognition and reducing the costs of sending remittances and recruiting migrant labour. Participants emphasized the need to change the narrative on migration, pointing to the responsibility of politicians to engage in a nuanced, fact-based dialogue, underscoring the contributions migrants make to countries of destination.

During the interactive debate, Member States, United Nations entities and civil society actors outlined a range of activities being implemented in support of the 2030 Agenda. Some Member States showcased their experience in highlighting migration dimensions in their voluntary national reviews at the HLPF. These examples included a broad range of issues relevant to migration, such as diaspora engagement, labour mobility, development cooperation, access to basic services, migrant reception and border management, consular services and access to scholarships.

During 2019, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), a voluntary and State-led forum to promote informal dialogue and cooperation on migration, would focus on (a) joint responses to mixed migration flows, (b) migration narratives and communication, and (c) addressing human mobility as part of urban and rural development strategies.

By way of conclusion, the moderator underlined that (a) the SDGs and migration are intrinsically linked, (b) Member States are committed to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, orderly and Regular Migration, (c) fora such as the HLPF and the GFMD play an important role in facilitating international cooperation on migration, and (d) local governments and cities are at the forefront of integrating migrants.

Addressing capacity building gaps, mobilizing resources and building partnerships

The second session of the debate tackled issues such as national capacities for collecting migration data, international cooperation on migration, and the role of innovative technologies in reaping the benefits of migration.

Speakers underscored the critical importance of a State-led approach towards migration and of national ownership of commitments on migration, including those contained in the SDGs and the Global Compact. While States retain the sovereign prerogative to determine their national migration policies, many countries expressed the need for support in designing and implementing effective and well-managed migration policies and programmes. Participants observed that South-South and triangular cooperation were particularly useful vehicles for international cooperation on migration in light of the growing significance of South-South migration.

Mobilizing resources to support capacity building was highlighted by various speakers. In this regard, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda was referred to as a critical framework to support the implementation of both the SDGs and the Global Compact. Delegates took note of various funds that were available to support national capacity building and sustainable development and to create livelihoods and decent work. Participants highlighted the critical need to embed migration policy within broader economic development policies, including those focusing on trade, labour markets, innovation and technology, with a view to harnessing migration as a driver of economic and social progress.

Several participants noted that national migration policies should rely on a whole-of-government approach, whereby all line ministries involved in the movement of people contribute to policy development. Some participants provided examples of collaborative efforts to develop such frameworks across government ministries. Others highlighted the need for policy coherence in global frameworks relevant to migration, including the 2030 Agenda, the Global Compact and the SAMOA Pathway, amongst others.

During the debate, participants highlighted the critical role of international cooperation and partnerships in addressing migration challenges. In this regard, participants referred to the complementary roles of regional economic cooperation mechanisms, the United Nations regional economic commissions and platforms such as the GFMD and regional consultative processes on migration in promoting cooperation, sharing knowledge and showcasing good practices. Participants highlighted examples of inter-regional and intra-regional collaboration focusing on different aspects of the migration cycle, such as labour mobility, return and reintegration of nationals, and portability of skills and rights. It was noted that regional cooperation would become stronger, with many regions of the world working to strengthen regional mobility, including visa-free travel and arrangements for the free movement of migrant workers and citizens.

Many participants mentioned the critical contribution of civil society and the private sector in developing and implementing well-managed migration policies. There was broad consensus amongst participants that the contribution of stakeholders to migration governance at the local, national and international level was vital. For example, civil society played an important role in orientation programmes for prospective migrants. The role of the private sector in determining needed skills and in providing services to migrants at all stages of the migration process would continue to grow in importance.

Participants emphasized the need to engage directly with migrants in developing and implementing migration policies. Several speakers highlighted the significant contributions that diaspora can make to wealth creation and development at home. The role of academia in promoting an evidence-based narrative on migration was stressed. However, greater clarity was needed on how academic actors could be involved in migration policy discussions, including by bridging the gap between data and policy. Youth were also highlighted as a key constituency that must be involved in discussions on migration policy. Improving data on migration was consistently highlighted as a priority. In this regard, policy makers should engage with the private sector, in particular human resource professionals and other stakeholders as sources of information, for example on matching migrant skills with labour market demands.

Many participants highlighted the opportunity to address the challenges and opportunities of migration in the context of this year's HLPF to be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July as well as the HLPF review forum, to be organized by the General Assembly in September. The voluntary national reviews were considered an excellent opportunity to review progress towards the implementation of the migration-related dimensions of the SDGs.

Conclusion

In her closing remarks, the President of the General Assembly observed that the debate had been useful in focusing the attention of Member States and stakeholders on the opportunities to integrate migration in meetings of the HLPF, to be held in July and September. She emphasized the importance of solidarity and partnerships in dealing with migration, including to support capacity building and promote realistic and nuanced narratives. The President highlighted several key messages from the debate, including the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in developing migration policies, including youth in discussions on migration, investing in safe, orderly and regular migration, while avoiding irregular migration, and combatting exploitation and abuse of migrant workers. She concluded by noting that the SDGs could not be achieved without considering the role of migration and that the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration provided a solid basis to address the migration dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and to promote international cooperation and partnerships on migration.