

STATEMENT

William Lacy Swing

Director General, International Organization for Migration

Thematic Session 1: Human rights of all migrants, social inclusion, cohesion and all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance

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Co-facilitators, distinguished panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to participate in this interactive debate, in particular on a subject of such global importance as migrant integration.

I would like to make three key points on this issue of global importance -- migrant integration:

1. Successful migrant integration is essential if migrants are to make their contributions to society and the economy;
2. Anti-migrant sentiment, and the fear of the “other”, on the other hand, leads to failed integration;
3. Migrant integration is facilitated by partnerships -- a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach.

I.

Successful migrant integration is essential if migrants are to make their contributions to society and the economy.

Migration is humankind’s oldest and most successful anti-poverty strategy -- and the best form of flattery to the host country. Yet, migrant integration is often the most neglected aspect of national integration policy.

Migration has always been overwhelmingly positive. But it requires that we facilitate integration to give all migrants equal access to public services. Healthy migrants make healthy countries. Yet, the opposite is also true.

II.

Anti-migrant sentiment, and the fear of the “other”, on the other hand, leads to failed integration.

This in turn endangers (1) endangers migrants; and (2) denies the host country the contributions that migrants have always made.

Many of the violent and terrorist acts committed recently have been “home-grown” results of failed integration: Paris, Brussels, Nice, San Bernardino, Orlando.

III.

Migrant integration is facilitated by partnerships -- a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach

-- that is, comprehensive partnerships.

There is no single integration formula or model that fits all migration situations. There are various models of integration.

Here, Mayors and other local authorities are key to successful integration. It is they who will help provide language learning, livelihoods, lodging and shelter.

The long-term contributions of migrants and the taxes they will pay offset many times over any access to public services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I see two challenges -- challenges that countries must hurdle in order to manage migrant integration:

- A. First, we must find a way to change the migration narrative. The public discourse on migration at present is toxic. My own country was built, and continues to be built on, the backs of migrants and with the brains of migrants. Migrants are agents of development. Migrants bring innovation. Migrants do not take jobs, they create new jobs.
- B. The second challenge is learning to manage diversity: Demographics, and the aging industrialized world, mean that the world will have further need of migrants. Our societies will, therefore, inexorably become more multi-ethnic, more multi-cultural, and more multi-religious.

To succeed in managing diversity will require: (a) political courage: a willingness to invest in public information, public education, awareness-raising and dialogue; (b) moving the debate from one of identity, to one of shared values and interests.