

IOM International Dialogue on Migration

Session 1, Setting the scene, 10:00 – 13:00

Panel 1: Migration and Sustainable Development – New opportunities

Talking points for Karen Koning AbuZayd

Special Adviser on the General Assembly Summit on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants

I have been asked to share my perspectives on the development impact of migration and the long-term work needed to design policies for orderly and safe migration. I will also speak to you about the General Assembly's Plenary Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

Speakers before me have ably described the place of migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. All of the panellists have also emphasized that migration makes a positive contribution to growth and sustainable development. I will therefore focus on some of the shifts in mind-set and practices that will be required and the longer-term work that is needed.

As you know, the General Assembly adopted a decision last December announcing that it will convene a 'high-level plenary meeting' on 19 September 2016 on the topic of 'addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.' The decision also requests the UN Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive report to underpin the summit, which should be issued in May.

Almost all of the Member States that I have begun to consult to secure inputs for the report have emphasized the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as one of the principal frameworks and points of reference for our conversation on 19 September. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as regards migration and development, countries of origin, transit and destination must begin to cooperate around a series of common principles and approaches.

The Summit on 19 September provides an early opportunity for UN Member States to think through together how this can be done. Achieving the goals on migration set in the Sustainable Development Agenda will require States to work both individually and in concert. What does this mean in the case of large movements of refugees and migrants and what should they be doing?

The first thing the SDGs will mean for States is that they must work not only at national level, but also in concert with others, to deliver on the aspiration to 'leave no one behind'. It is obvious that a change in one State's policies can have consequences—both intended and unintended—for refugees and migrants, as well as for other States. While the temptation to act solely in the perceived national interest is high, on migration issues States simply cannot continue to work in isolation from one another. Perhaps this is the most important change in mind-set that implementation of the SDGs will entail and this will undoubtedly take some time.

A second big shift that will be needed is for States to adopt a whole-of-government approach, as long called for within the Global Forum on Migration and Development. This means abandoning a 'siloed' approach and drawing on expertise across ministries to better understand labour shortages and needs, to better calibrate labour supply and demand, to ensure labour market integration for migrants as well as refugees, and to do so in a way which makes economies and societies benefit from the human capital, agency, and energy of migrants.

Another shift that will be needed is how States approach the right to gainful employment set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Developing countries of first asylum, where most refugees live, can be roughly divided into those countries with encampment policies and those without them. African countries tend to have encampment policies more than in other regions. In 2015, there were 43 countries in Africa hosting refugee populations of more than one thousand, comprising a total of more than 4 million refugees. Of these 43, 27 African host countries (more than half) had encampment policies, with 3.45 million refugees living in camps. By contrast, ten countries in the Middle East (including Turkey), currently host more than 6.48 refugees, but only 6 per cent (only 380,500) of refugees live in camps.

This tendency to confine refugee populations to camps and limit both their freedom of movement and access to the labour market must become a thing of the past.

A fourth big shift relates to the high number of refugees and internally displaced persons who are living in long-standing or frozen situations of protracted displacement. Of the world's 59.5 forcibly displaced people at the beginning of 2015, just under half were trapped in open-ended situations of displacement. According to UNHCR, there were some 33 protracted situations in 26 host countries. The largest protracted situation has been of Afghan refugees. Since the outflow of Afghans began in 1979, either Pakistan or Iran has ranked as the world's top refugee-hosting country for 33 out of the past 36 years.

Today, most crises of displacement have persisted for many years. According to a recent study analysing data from 1978 to 2014, fewer than one in 40 refugee crises are resolved within three years, and more than 80 per cent of refugee crises last for ten years or more; while two in five last for 20 years or more. Resolute action in implementing the SDGs means that much more action will be needed to address the reasons underlying these frozen situations and to resolve them. This will enable refugees and IDPs to shed this label and to get on with their lives. I certainly hope that States will take a serious look at this during the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in May.

There is also an important link to migration here. As witnessed in 2015, when refugees lose hope or see no prospects for a better future, they are more likely than not to move onward, in so called secondary movements, which further complicates the task of distinguishing between refugees and migrants.

In my role as Special Adviser, I am charged with preparing the UN Secretary-General's report, which will set out recommendations about what we should try to achieve at the

Summit. At this stage, I am consulting with Member States, UN entities and civil society to understand everyone's concerns.

These are still early days in my consultations with Member States about the summit and their aspirations for it. From my consultations to date, I have been encouraged to be bold and ambitious. I have also been advised to be 'realistic'. Navigating these two approaches will be a challenge, especially when looking at today's difficult global context.

One word on this context. What concerns me most in the months leading up to the Summit is the negative discourse about refugees and migrants. In many countries, the rhetoric is stuck in a narrative of fear, of 'threats' to national security, identity, and jobs. We hear of a 'crisis situation', which too often has its origins in the demonization of the outsider and not facts or evidence. This fear-mongering has become part of mainstream discourse and will be the backdrop for the summit. We must challenge this in the most forceful terms.

We need to shift the discussion to one that is based on facts and on the confidence that practical solutions are within our common reach if States simply opt to cooperate and work together more effectively. This is one of the goals of the Secretary-General's report. This is what underpins the philosophy of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. What should cooperation look like when States work together to manage large flows of refugees and migrants in a rights-respecting way, consistent with the Sustainable Development Agenda?

As we begin to map out the report, we are examining the reasons people leave their homes, the dangers they face on the journey, the uncertain reception they receive in countries of transit and destination. We are also contemplating how to build on the rich array of State-led initiatives over the past two years and be as concrete as possible.

All of these initiatives suggest a global convergence of approaches to the humanitarian challenges of our day, including large movements of refugees and migrants. To simplify the emerging narrative: root causes and drivers of movements must be addressed. Refugees and migrants have important roles to play in contributing to development of their host societies and countries of origin. States need to develop more effective collaborative approaches to address large movements of refugees and migrants. Individual ad hoc responses will not succeed in tackling the challenges of poverty or sustainable development. New global approaches are needed which bring States together in new ways and which incorporate the contributions of international and regional organizations as well as the private sector, social partners, trade unions, and civil society.

The recommendations we wish to make are still a work in progress. We have encouraged all Member States to share their inputs with us in writing by the end of the month.

Based on what I have learned so far in my discussions with stakeholders, it is clear that the report will encourage Member States to go beyond a simple reaffirmation of their commitment to implementing fully the 1951 Refugee Convention, including the principle of non-refoulement.

We want to see action to lift reservations that impair the enjoyment of the full panoply of rights the 1951 Refugee Convention confers. Since States need support in hosting large numbers of refugees, more equitable and predictable systems for sharing responsibility for refugees among States must be constructed.

The migration side of the summit will be even more challenging. On migration, I have heard many concerns. For all States, the question of who is authorized to enter or remain in the territory is a clear attribute of national sovereignty and remains so. Cooperation between and among States tends to play out bilaterally or at regional level. National interests tend to prevail over the collective.

Many stakeholders talk about associating the International Organization for Migration more closely with the United Nations, this being one way of keeping migration on the agenda of the UN and taking forward a common framework on governance of migration. There are also suggestions about how we enhance the protection of migrants at risk, such as migrants stranded in countries undergoing crises, those displaced by natural disasters or climate change, or those fleeing criminal gangs and transnational organized crime.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have shared some reflections with you along with such distinguished panellists.

Thank you.