

IDM: Understanding migrant vulnerabilities: a solution-based approach towards a global compact that reduces vulnerabilities and empowers migrants

Setting the Scene- remarks

18th July 10:30/11:00

Across its multiple assistance and protection activities, IOM is confronted with many migrants' stories, profiles and sometimes tragedies, all part of a reality of human mobility which has little to do with the manner in which contemporary migration is often caricatured. While we all recognize that migrants are most often positive agents of today's modern and interconnected world and as such are not intrinsically vulnerable, it is also true that many are confronted with various challenges, a situation borne out of the complex set of factors that bring them to leave in the first place as well as, most critically, the conditions they face along migratory routes, when those are irregular.

Many of the migrants that IOM meets and assists along their migratory pathways, face severe abuses of their fundamental rights, through human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of exploitation, inhumane treatment, physical and psychological abuse, loss of resources, family separation and the list goes on.

As just stated by the Director General, the New York Declaration and the subsequent development of a Global Compact present us with an opportunity to “leave no one behind”; through the New York Declaration, you Member States have committed to upholding the human rights of all migrants irrespective of their migratory or legal status, and to addressing their immediate needs upon reception, and this without discrimination. More specifically, the New York Declaration -under the provisions for migrants- indicates the need to work towards and commit to guiding principles consistent with international law on the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations and the recognition that some might not qualify for return and thus require forms of alternative protection.

Having recalled these key commitments, I wish to highlight some elements emerging from the situations in which migrants find themselves, which we hope will also help guide the agenda of these two days:

1. Within the context of this gathering, and more largely within the context of migration, vulnerability is defined as vulnerability to violence, exploitation, abuse and rights violation during the migratory process (at departure, in transit and on arrival), not necessarily as a predetermined condition.

2. Vulnerability is not inherent to migrants. It is the result of many factors and their interplay. These factors can be 1) the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals but also 2) the social, economic, environmental and political migrants of the context which migrants come from or travel through; these factors largely influence migrants' capacities too; 3) the external disruptive factors induced or resulting from migration including forced migration, such as loss of resources, family separation, loss of livelihood and 4) finally the physical environment in which they find themselves at a particular moment, be that a camp, transitional shelters, detention/retention centers, border areas etc. It is critical to analyze how these factors interplay in any given context, in order to define what constitutes vulnerabilities.

3. Migrant women and children are not vulnerable by definition, but their potential situation of vulnerability is defined by other critical factors and their impact on the concerned individuals. Surely age, sex and gender are some of the defining elements which have an impact on vulnerability, but some sessions of the agenda will explore in depth some other defining factors.

4. There are challenges linked to the identification of these situations of vulnerability. Good practices, for example in relation to individual screening and triage, as well as States' existing responses to some of the most recurring situations of vulnerability, will be presented throughout the next two days. There is certainly a need to undertake a more concerted effort to track such best practices more systematically and consider replicating them in contexts that are facing, or are more prone to crisis situations. As a result of individual screening, migrants in a vulnerable situation could be granted alternative or temporary forms of protection on the basis of policies that seek to prevent migrants from being returned or denied entry, this based on the particular circumstances they faced along their migratory journey.

5. Another element that the IDM wishes to stress is the agency and resilience of migrants, who are ultimately enablers of their own solutions. States and other key stakeholders are increasingly recognizing the need to leverage this agency, empower migrants and, through effective integration and inclusion approaches, reduce the risks they could be exposed to. Those fundamental principles are largely recognized and acknowledged the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Agenda. IOM is particularly keen in stressing the progressive nature of many of the solutions that migrants have access to, solutions which should be ultimately driven, to the extent possible, by migrants themselves.

6. Lastly, I want to recall the existence of some effective guidelines and policy dialogues which have produced practical guidance of relevance to this topic, such as the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative through which a group of like-minded Member States led by the Philippines and the United States contributed to identifying assistance and protection options for migrants caught in countries experiencing crises; other such examples include the Regional Conference on Migration, also referred to as the “Puebla Process”, which focuses on migration policy and management in Central America, the United States and Canada, or recent Global Migration Group efforts, supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The message I want to close with is that we have a comprehensive legal framework grounded on human rights law and an increasingly rich set of practical examples and guidelines governing the protection and assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations. What is missing is the link between policy and practice, between rhetoric and the grim realities IOM and its partners

face in multiple settings, between isolated efforts and global approaches. The development of a Global Compact now is our chance to seize momentum, foster cooperation and complementarity. We are confident that these two days will bring value to this debate and provide some concrete recommendations.

Thank you.