

Opening Remarks by the Director General of IOM
COVID-19 crisis: reimagining the role of migrants and human mobility for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

International Dialogue on Migration
15-16 October 2020, Geneva

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to a special edition of the International Dialogue on Migration. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the IDM, launched by the IOM Membership in 2001. Over the past two decades, the IDM has provided thousands of stakeholders worldwide with a platform to debate the concerns of the moment, which have covered the broad spectrum of policy issues, linking to portfolios across government.

Our meeting also takes place alongside the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, and at a paradoxical moment. The major issues on the international agenda – not least the Covid-19 pandemic -- demand responses that require stronger international cooperation. And yet we find ourselves separated -- physically, and sometimes philosophically -- from each other while searching for common responses and solutions.

Many of our high-level speakers are joining us remotely today. I appreciate their willingness to make themselves available online, and particularly those speakers who are joining at a very late hour from Asia, while we take our first sips of coffee.

You have all been invited today, representatives of whole societies, public, private and civic sectors to continue a discussion on the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for migrants, migration and mobility as well as migrants' role in Covid-19 response and recovery, and put forward recommendations for immediate action.

This is no small challenge. We must work together to ensure the immediate impacts of the pandemic are mitigated as far as possible, while ensuring that we do not lose sight of our longer-term goals – notably the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This year started with a Decade of Action, and we must make sure it does not become the Decade of Distraction, and subsequent Inaction.

Over the past year, the situation of many migrants has been exacerbated: left stranded by border closures, or losing jobs, housing and means of material support. Too often migrants have become an afterthought for those responding to crisis or, worse, scapegoats to blame for the pandemic. And with global recession, the situation may deteriorate further. But as the Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move has noted "no one is safe until everyone is safe".

Increasingly, governments are recognizing that excluding migrants from COVID-19 response – including access to health services -- will make whole societies, all of us, vulnerable. And further, that it is only through cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination, is it possible to protect the most vulnerable migrants, including unaccompanied minors, women and children, and especially victims of sexual exploitation and violence.

While men are experiencing higher fatalities due to COVID-19, the effects of the pandemic on women and LGBTI people, including migrants, can be harsh, including through increased incidence of domestic violence. UN Women has estimated that up to 8.5 million migrant women in domestic work could be disproportionately affected by a recession that dovetails with increased health

concerns within the household. This potential widening of gender inequalities due to COVID-19 makes a gender-responsive rights-based approach to migration even more necessary.

The pandemic has not only reduced the prospect of advancing the 2030 Agenda, it threatens to reverse the important progress achieved so far. To leave no one behind – its core objective -- will require decisive intervention by public authorities at both national and local level, civil society, and the private sector, all present here today.

And I would like to particularly emphasize the role of local authorities, in promoting solidarity towards vulnerable populations and ensuring that migrants are included in urban emergency planning and responses. I also thank the Honourable Mayors present with us today to offer their thoughts as to how our partnerships can be further strengthened.

At the same time, this crisis presents an opportunity to reimagine human mobility. Economic and social recovery is intrinsically linked to global human mobility. By reaffirming our global commitment to existing frameworks, as well as the Global Action Plan for Promoting health of migrants and refugees, we can ensure that migrants are not only not left behind but can contribute fully to future socioeconomic recovery and preparedness.

We must seize this opportunity to further implement the SDGs in order to create more resilient societies. And societies that can better respond to future crises. In keeping consistent with previous IDM discussions on the follow up and review of the migration related SDGs, this Dialogue aims to foster greater cooperation and develop networks for future action on migration governance and achievement of SDGs in the post pandemic era.

Over the next two days, experts will share their views on carefully selected topics which have utmost relevance for your work:

- the vulnerability of migrants during and beyond the covid-19 crisis;
- the role of human mobility in recovering from the pandemic;
- the agency of migrants themselves in contributing to to the SDGs;
- the role of women in the COVID-19 response and recovery;
- strengthening social cohesion and community resilience and the need to counter discrimination and xenophobia against migrants; and of course,
- the relevance of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the response and recovery efforts.

My hope is that after these two days we will have improved our knowledge regarding the global impact of the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences for diverse migrant populations. And that we will have identified practices, lessons learnt and recommendations for factoring migrants and their needs, skills and contribution in the response and socio-economic recovery efforts.

This is an extremely large undertaking. But a vitally important one. And I look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations.