



## Summary of Conclusions

This year's session of IOM's International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) was held at the Geneva International Conference Center, Switzerland, and online, around the theme of the **COVID-19 crisis: Reimagining the role of migrants and human mobility for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals**. The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing travel restrictions meant that only one session of the IDM was organized this year and that many participants joined the session through online platforms rather than in person.

2020 marked the twentieth year of the IDM, IOM's principal forum for policy dialogue with States and other stakeholders. In spite of the global pandemic and occasional technical difficulties in the meeting, participants welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences in responding to the migration challenges caused by the outbreak and in joining together to affirm the importance of restoring human mobility as key to recovery.

The session was grounded in the understanding that human mobility can be part of the solution to the economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic if the movement of people takes place in a safe, coordinated and inclusive manner. Moreover, progress toward attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depends on restoring human mobility. At the same time, recovery must include the socioeconomic inclusion and safety of migrants -- both those who returned to their origins and those who remained in destination countries -- to insure safe, orderly and regular migration in the future.

Ministers, Ambassadors, and other representatives of States, the European Union and the United Nations, youth and health representatives, migrant groups, and international and civil society organizations participated in this year's dialogue.

The IOM Director General, António Vitorino offered opening remarks to the participants. Throughout the two days of meetings, participants addressed key questions and challenges related to migration and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also discussed opportunities for the pandemic to make migration work for all. In addition to panel discussions, the session featured a segment on Migrants' Stories.

The session was structured around six panels led by 39 speakers, representing government officials and policy-makers from countries of origin, transit and destinations, representatives of partner United Nations agencies, academic experts in migration and human rights, health experts, civil society, migrants groups and IOM officials.

The panels focused on:

Panel 1: Safe, coordinated and inclusive human mobility is key to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

Panel 2: Protection of vulnerable migrants during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis

Panel 3: Enhancing migrants' agency and contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

Panel 4: The role of women in the COVID-19 response and recovery

Panel 5: Social cohesion and community resilience: countering discrimination and xenophobia against migrants

Panel 6: Applying the Global Compact for Safe, orderly and Regular Migration in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

In addition, a session on Migrants' Stories was included which focused on the issue of communication during COVID-19, particularly the importance of building a network of trusted messengers to counter disinformation, and on innovation in the health sector and youth leadership. Eugenio Ambrosi, IOM's Chief of Staff offered closing remarks identifying key takeaways from the two days of meetings.

## Setting the stage

In his opening remarks, the IOM Director General asked representatives of all societies to discuss the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for migrants, migration and mobility, as well as to consider their role in the pandemic's response and recovery. As discussions about the COVID-19 situation for migrants and migration and mobility occur, he also asked that representatives put forward recommendations for immediate action. Although this may be challenging, he urged members to work together so as to ensure the immediate impacts of pandemic are mitigated. At the same time, he asked that members remain focused on important long-term goals, such as the SDGs. The Director General stated that "This year started with a decade of action, and we must make sure it does not become a decade of distraction and inaction."

He further noted that the situation of many migrants has been worsened by the pandemic. Many have been left stranded by border closures, or have lost their jobs, housing and means of material support, and the situation may worsen with a global recession. The pandemic has also meant that migrants have become scapegoats, suffering from discrimination and xenophobia; it has led migrants to become more vulnerable and to face heightened risks. He urged representatives to remember the words in the UN Secretary General's policy brief: "no one is safe until everyone is safe." Thus, to leave no one behind, which is a core objective of the 2030 Agenda, requires intervention from authorities at all levels (local and national governments, civil society and the private sector) to ensure that migrants are included in the planning and response. This, he suggested, will require a reimagining of migrants and migration and a reaffirmation of global commitments to existing frameworks so that migrants can contribute fully to future socioeconomic recovery and preparedness, and societies can become more resilient.

During the two days of the session, there were deep discussions about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration and migrants and many shared the ways that their governments and organizations were responding to the increased needs of migrants. Many remarked on how international cooperation stemming from the Global Compact on Migration facilitated the safe return of migrants, protected host communities, and ensured that those in especially vulnerable situations were included and safe. The workshop allowed for sharing of experiences and lessons learned about specific actions that states took to protect migrants and host communities and to ensure their safety in light of the pandemic. Five themes emerged throughout the two days of discussions:

The need to:

- recognize mobility and migrants as key to recovery after COVID-19
- change the narrative to counter discrimination and xenophobia in building social cohesion and community resilience
- protect migrants facing heightened risks because of the pandemic
- mitigate the effects of economic hardship on migrant workers and returns; and
- strengthen collaboration through the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals.

**The main outcomes and conclusions of the discussion are summarized below:**

In the short-term pandemic-induced challenges for human mobility are many, including livelihoods and health risks, loss of employment, remittances and immigrant status, discrimination and wage and benefit losses. But through the COVID-19 response efforts, we have seen new opportunities for greater migration governance with increased possibilities for cooperation networks to build more resilient societies for all. These include:

- The recognition that the pandemic requires global cooperation of all countries
- Efforts to strengthen international collaboration must build on existing frameworks such as the Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration and the Sustainable Development Agenda in order to promote the advancement of the goals and commitments made which will be key for a sustainable recovery
- There must be expanded pathways for legal migration and skill and certification recognition to promote this recovery
- COVID-19 underscores the need to address vulnerabilities in migrant populations, such as women, children and victims of trafficking and smuggling
- Migrants, including migrant women, and diaspora communities must play a key role in recovery
- Combatting xenophobia is key to recovery from the pandemic and must be central to economic and social recovery efforts.

## Unpacking the themes

### **1. Recognize that mobility and migrants are the key to recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic**

While many of the participants spoke of the negative effects of the pandemic and associated restrictions and their efforts to counter these effects, there was also recognition that the COVID-19 crisis presents the international community with an opportunity to rethink human mobility for the benefit of all. The socioeconomic inclusion of people on the move is essential during and in the post-pandemic world. Several participants echoed the principles put forward by the UN Secretary-General which are needed to advance the safe and inclusive human mobility during and after the pandemic: a) exclusion is costly in the long run while inclusion pays off for everyone, b) responding to the spread of COVID-19 and protecting the human rights of people on the move are not mutually exclusive; c) no one is safe until everyone is safe; and d) people on the move are part of the solution.

Although facing heightened risks (discussed in more detail below), migrant women have essential roles to play in the recovery from the pandemic. Discussion at the IDM focused on women as key players in the response and recovery efforts and ways that migrant women can contribute to long-term recovery. Women have been the backbone in the health and emergency care during this crisis. Many participants remarked that 70 per cent of the global health workforce is made up of women. Speaking from the floor of the IDM, participants shared specific examples of governments' redirecting their programming towards protecting and supporting women with policies that address their current and particular needs. Many governments are also strengthening their cooperation with international organizations including IOM, to better respond to migrant women's needs. And migrant and diaspora women have organized to provide needed assistance to migrants facing heightened risks because of the pandemic and to working to restore families and communities.

The IDM highlighted the many contributions which migrants themselves offer in the response to and the recovery process from COVID-19. In the session on 'Migrants' Stories,' several migrants talked of innovative ways that migrants are serving their communities in these difficult times and of their potential role in the recovery process to come.

Chylian Azuh, founder of the Female Returnee Forum in Nigeria spoke of the important role that returned migrant women play in providing accurate information about the risks of dangerous

migration routes and in countering the recruitment of women as traffickers. She also spoke about the personal and psychological support that returnee migrant women can offer to others. Beyleh Daher, Manager of Creative Spaces, Djibouti and Houssein Mohammed, of IOM Djibouti recounted how a Fablab in Djibouti is providing opportunities for migrants and local residents to develop creative ways of supporting the response to COVID-19. For example, Creative Spaces is using 3D printers to build ventilators which are in short supply throughout the region. But in the longer term, Creative Spaces is also providing an opportunity for young migrants to acquire new digital skills and to building community with citizens in their country of destination or transit. This initiative, which has played an important role in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, can also contribute to the long-term recovery. The session reinforced the assertion made by many participants that migrants need to be recognized as agents of change.

## **2. Change the narrative to counter discrimination and xenophobia in building social cohesion and community resilience**

Racist and xenophobic incidents directed at migrants have increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic and there is fear that with the longer-term recession these will only increase. A significant part of the IDM discussions touched upon this discrimination and xenophobia against migrants, and participants shared some of their efforts to counter these messages. As part of this conversation, the panel dedicated to these issues also focused on the primary role the press has in shaping perceptions of migrants locally and internationally. The importance of a positive view by citizens towards migrants was underlined as essential for migrants' integration, development and, in the current context, health. During COVID-19, migrants have been directly responsible not only for a significant percentage of health care but also of providing essential services that have enabled societies and economies to function. Migrants have always been a positive force for development and prosperity; however, positive information is not always shared, which is why data on, and evidence of migrants' contributions must be promoted. The crisis compels us to take proactive measures to ensure the protection of migrants, and this includes developing a positive narrative on migrants.

Participants in the IDM remarked on how the pandemic is an opportunity for governments, the press and civil society organizations to change the narrative about migrants. Now is the time to counter the increasing discrimination and with an empowering, devictimized, and evidence-based narrative. As a crucial ally in this endeavor, the press needs to be made aware of the contributions that migrants make in order to communicate accurately and effectively about migration.

The press also has the expertise and knowledge about how messages are received and can set the tone in delivering positive messages about migrants. It is imperative that the language and manner of communication shifts away from xenophobic scapegoating of migrants to more balanced and positive assessments of their contributions. IOM and other migrant-focused international organizations have played leadership roles in changing the messages about migration, specifically in: fighting stereotypes and including migrants' perspectives; 2) finding human-driven stories that focus more on migrants as individuals and less as a collective; and 3) including migrants in the dialogue and decisions on public messages about migration and migrants.

Community engagement plays another key role in shifting the migration narrative, especially in encouraging positive host community-migrant interactions. Cities and local municipalities are vital in ensuring migrants' needs are addressed and social cohesion is encouraged within the context of the pandemic. And, as noted above, migrants themselves can be important messengers in countering disinformation about migration.

### **3. Protect migrants at particular risk**

While all migrants have been affected by COVID-19 and efforts to stem the spread of the virus, certain groups of migrants are at particular risk. As many participants noted, the pandemic has worsened existing inequities and pushed more people into poverty, threatening the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. As the Director General noted in his opening comments, the World Bank estimates that the pandemic may force between 70 and 110 million people back into extreme poverty.

During the IDM, attention was drawn to women, children, victims of trafficking, irregular migrants and other groups who face risks that make them particularly vulnerable in the current situation.

Although women are playing and will play important roles in recovery from COVID, the widening of gender inequalities due to COVID-19 is causing particular hardships for women. During the IDM, not only in the dedicated panel for the role of women in the pandemic response and recovery, but also across all sessions, panelists and participants highlighted the reasons for women's and young girls' increased vulnerability and the essential roles they are playing during this time.

Gender-based and intrafamily violence has spiked during the many months of confinement, leaving many women without alternatives for escaping dangerous situations – particularly as many of the services available to survivors of gender-based violence have been closed or curtailed by the pandemic. The confinement has also pressured women with added burdens of childcare and household management. Migrant women domestic workers who are unable to return home may be confined with their employers.

As the death rate of COVID-19 is higher for men, more women are left both as single heads of households and responsible for economic support for their families. At the same time, migrant women generally earn less, have less stable jobs and are the first to lose them in a crisis, increasing their vulnerability. The fact that many women work as essential health care workers means that they face an increased risk of virus infection. Moreover, panelists detailed how migrant women face serious health risks because their access to health services is limited and because they have historically suffered health problems as a consequence of the kinds of jobs they hold and their poor access to health care. LGBTQ migrant women and girls are especially vulnerable.

Similarly, migrant girls are often the first to be forced to leave school due to financial constraints. UNESCO estimates that some 11 million girls around the world are at risk of not returning to school. An increase in early marriages is being reported.

The needs of migrant children especially should not be overlooked. They require urgent responses by ensuring access to protection, education and other social services. In spite of the present difficulties of international travel, large numbers of migrant children continue to arrive, including in Europe. Some are unaccompanied although many more children arrive with families. Due to the situation and in some cases to border restrictions, they face more difficulties in applying for asylum.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on migrants who are being trafficked and has increased the risk of trafficking. The lockdowns have left people in precarious situations. Many factories have closed which means that families have a hard time supporting their children and are sending them out to work or leaving them on the streets. The pandemic has fueled opportunities for abuse of the most vulnerable members of society and puts at risk hard-won rights in child protection and labor rights. With the closing of schools, parents are leaving out of school children unattended which leads to more abuse.



For instance, one panelist from Vietnam spoke of the impact of COVID-19 on two particular groups: international students and internal migrants working as street vendors and casual laborers. Students in other countries find their educational progress uncertain as they struggle with digital learning in a foreign country. In some cases students have been stranded in third countries and are targets of hate speech. Internal migrants, who are mostly middle-aged women who are economically disadvantaged with little access to social services or state aid found themselves totally jobless during lockdowns and targets of hate speech.

Participants also noted the need for good data. Presently less than half of the globally reported cases of COVID-19 have age and sex disaggregated data. Such data is essential to assess the effects of COVID-19 on women and men and to ensure provision of adequate testing, treatment and care.

Discussion of migrants at particular risk emphasizes the importance of the SDG's call to 'leave no one behind' and many participants in the IDM highlighted the need to protect migrants facing particular risks – women, children, trafficking victims, irregular migrants and other groups as essential steps in meeting the goals of the SDGs.

#### **4. Mitigate the effects of economic hardship among migrants and returnees**

Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of migrants have lost their jobs or seen severe reductions in their income in countries of destination. In many cases they have been able to return to their countries of origin. In other cases, they lack the resources to return but also lack resources to survive in their countries of destination without employment. In some cases, such as Portugal and Ecuador, steps were taken by governments in countries of destination to provide assistance to these migrants. In Portugal, the government issued a decree that all immigrants and asylum-seekers who were waiting for residence permits would be regarded as having regularized their status. This entitled them to the same social support as Portuguese citizens and provided access to free treatment for COVID-19. Ecuador extended deadlines for all migration processes so that migrants would not lose their status and continued to issue humanitarian visas for Venezuelans.

During the IDM, a number of governments reported on action they have taken to facilitate the return of migrant workers and the life-saving role played by their consular missions abroad. For example, Bangladesh played an active role in facilitating the return of many migrants and provided cash assistance to returning workers.

The government developed a migrant-focused online platform to provide information to returning migrants, monitored their welfare, provided training for them and set aside funds for reintegration of returnees. The government of the Philippines also reported that the central components of their policy are: relief, repatriation, recovery and reintegration. In addition to supporting Filipino migrant workers to return from other countries and from cruise ships, the government has provided free testing and onward transportation for returnees as well as programs to provide training and capital to returned migrants.

## **5. Strengthen collaboration through GCM and the SDGs**

A theme running throughout the IDM was the need to enhance international cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination in light of the serious challenges facing migrants and governments because of COVID-19. International cooperation is needed more than ever in these difficult times. The Global Compact on Migration provides a framework for inclusive COVID-19 preparedness, prevention, response and recovery measures. The Compact frames inclusive policies that protect migrants' rights and leverage migrants' positive contributions to sustainable development that can and are being used by governments around the world. As the representative of the European Union noted, working together is the best way to save lives, to fight criminal networks taking advantage of the situation and to promote good management of migration. He also noted that the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum offers a new comprehensive approach to working together on migration issues.

The IDM dedicated a full panel to discuss the operationalization of the GCM for the response and recovery from the pandemic. COVID-19 has become an opportunity to reimagine human mobility, bringing the GCM as the core instrument for strengthening protection of migrants' rights and working together around border management. It is anchored in and aligned with the 2030 SDG agenda. The GCM is not only a framework for addressing migrants' needs, but it also has concrete applications and interventions for programming in support of migrants. For this reason, the GCM can serve as the directive of how to include and approach migrants during the pandemic response and recovery process.

The current global crisis has proved that the cost of not integrating migrants results in more exclusion and deeper vulnerability for migrants and the economy of both the origin, and the destination country. It is critical to promote immigration with legal documentation, access to financial services, and inclusion in health services. The need for new safe migration pathways – a hallmark of the GCM – was echoed by many of the participants in the IDM.

The GCM and the SDGs converge in several important ways. They share the objective of reinforcing efforts to protect migrants and ensuring equal access to healthcare services for all people on the move. Both draw attention to the need to assist migrants in vulnerable situations, advocating for migrants' rights across sectors and countries. They both focus on particular cross-cutting themes such as: climate change, gender and identity, youth. Both are based on the imperative of shared responsibility for migration, including in the difficult situation caused by the pandemic.

While governments need the GCM and the SDGs as central components in strengthening international cooperation to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, migrant and diaspora communities can also play a significant role in strengthening the GCM. They also can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through reinvigorating social and economic development in a post-crisis environment. Migrants and diaspora communities must be given the opportunity to contribute their skills for the economic and social development of their communities.

## **Recommendations for the way forward**

### **Mobility as key to COVID-19 response and recovery**

If migrants are accounted for in national and local socio-economic responses to the pandemic, they can better contribute their skills and resources to achieving long-term resilience in both their destination and origin communities. COVID-19 response efforts should include targeted policies to empower migrants as agents of change for a full and inclusive recovery, such as:

- Recognizing the key role that migrants and diaspora members play as agents of change
- Providing spaces and opportunities for migrants to develop creative responses to COVID-19 and to longer-term recovery.

As migrant women have an important role to play in the response and recovery efforts, particular measures should be directed at:

- Providing opportunities for migrant women to participate in policymaking on issues that affect their lives
- Improving educational opportunities for migrant women and girls, and

- Encouraging migrant women to participate in associations to share experiences and develop collective approaches to challenges.

### **Changing the narrative and confronting xenophobia and discrimination**

- Emphasizing that migrants must be included as key actors in post-COVID-19 recovery efforts at all levels
- Recognizing migrants as an important part of societal enrichment and economic development in their destination and origin countries.
- Considering the different challenges and needs of both low- and high-income cities and taking into account regional and municipal needs in their policies.
- Ensuring migrant-sensitive local health systems not only assisting the migrants to address their health needs but also aiding the larger community through migrant inclusion in health systems.
- Engaging with the press in the way migrants are perceived and working with migrants to counter disinformation.

### **Protecting migrants at risk**

- Ensuring non-discriminatory access to healthcare
- Providing for the special protection needs of migrant children while ensuring access to education and other services
- Increasing protections for domestic and healthcare migrant workers and implementing further regulations in these sectors
- Creating increased opportunities for reporting and responding to domestic violence
- Working with law enforcement to prevent traffickers from exploiting migrants made vulnerable by COVID-19
- Global and regional pathways must be established to enable migrant women, especially young migrant women to contribute their skills and efforts to the global economic recovery.

### **Mitigating the effects of economic hardship of migrant workers and returns**

- Strengthening international cooperation between countries of origin and destination to provide relief to migrant workers in difficult situations and to support repatriation of migrant workers when necessary

- Learning from efforts of governments to provide support to returning migrants in both the immediate term and in longer-term recovery
- Safeguarding the economic contributions of migrants and diaspora communities during and after the pandemic through targeted policies such as:
  - Lowering remittance costs
  - Financial literacy programs for migrants
  - Safer, global remittance mechanisms
  - Increasing capacity for reskilling and certification of migrants in diaspora and for returning migrants
  - Agreements with destination and origin countries to ensure increased access to social services.

### **Strengthening cooperation through the GCM and the SDGs**

- Implementing mechanisms to protect migrant rights regardless of their status, particularly the most vulnerable migrants, must be strengthened
- Promoting social and economic integration of migrants into host communities with the support of the international community
- Combatting all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance
- Increasing awareness-raising and capacity-building on migration issues

### **Closing words**

As Eugenio Ambrosi, Chief of Staff, IOM, summed up, “only together and with the needs of all actors, including the most vulnerable, considered, we will be able to move past the pandemic and the economic and social fallout that has ensued. To build more resilient societies for the future, we will have to work at the local, national and transnational levels to ensure safe, coordinated, orderly migration that involves targeted migrant protections and policies. In this way, we can come closer to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

This summary is not exhaustive. As always, a detailed report of the deliberations and a collection of experiences, best practices shared and recommendations made, is being produced and will be made available in due course.