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Panel discussion

Human mobility in pursuit of a better life: Challenges, opportunities and solutions

Wednesday 19 August, 4.45-5.30 p.m.

Concept note

Human mobility is a fact of life and a global reality. Men and women have always moved in search of a better life. In 2019, more than 270 million people, i.e. some 3 per cent of the world's population, were estimated to be international migrants – these are men and women who were born abroad and/or held foreign citizenship – of whom 48 per cent were women; 12 per cent were below the age of 18.¹

The vast majority of international migrants are workers who seek better economic and professional opportunities. In this case, mobility is usually a choice. The rest are women and men, girls and boys fleeing their home and country, seeking refuge in safer havens, generally because of conflict and the impact of natural disasters. They have no choice and leave everything behind. The numbers of people fleeing have been on the rise over the years. 2019 saw 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers.²

Human mobility also happens within a country with similar dynamics – movement by choice or by necessity linked to security and survival challenges. An estimated 28 million people – 10.8 million due to conflict and 17.2 million due to disasters – were newly displaced within their own countries and territories in 2018.³ In 2019, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 41.3 million women and men around the world were forcibly internally displaced.

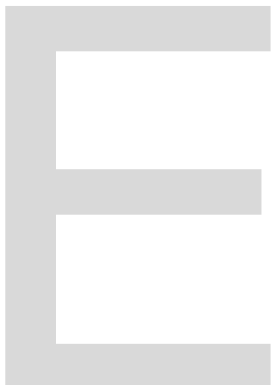
Over and beyond national differences, people everywhere aspire to the same things: a decent life, good health and education, a safe environment, strong democratic institutions and, above all, peace. Moving within and between countries contributes to reducing poverty, providing safety and refuge, fulfilling aspirations and improving life for all. Human mobility, if properly managed, brings about greater human well-being and collective wealth. It expands knowledge and strengthens the bonds of human solidarity.⁴

¹ Key Global Migration Figures, 2017–2019, International Organization for Migration, Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (updated 13 December 2019).

² UNHCR website, "Figures at a Glance", accessed February 2020.

³ Key Global Migration Figures, 2017–2019, International Organization for Migration, Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (updated 13 December 2019).

⁴ Declaration of the 138th IPU Assembly, [Strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidenced-based policy solutions](#).



But barriers to smooth and rewarding human mobility exist. The paths to safe, willing and orderly human mobility are difficult and often unclear; the potential benefits of migration are yet to be fully marshalled; support to countries hosting large numbers of refugees remains insufficient, as are efforts to harness the contribution of refugees in host countries. Too often, increasing numbers of migrants and refugees are not protected from discrimination, exploitation, trafficking or other kinds of abuse. Discrimination against migrants or refugees based on culture, gender, race, ethnicity, religion or other differences is a sad reality, with accrued vulnerability for women, children and people with disabilities.

The 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees offer a framework for more predictable, organized, fair and manageable international mobility, recognizing that international cooperation is at the heart of all efforts and solutions. They offer a road map for all stakeholders – governments, parliaments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society – to work together to facilitate human mobility with a view to better outcomes for all. The bulk of refugee and migration policy today remains ad hoc, with countries devising their own solutions to a host of common problems. Given the many persistent barriers to safe and regular human mobility, unlocking this potential is one of the greatest challenges – and opportunities – of the twenty-first century. This requires working together across countries, sectors and disciplines. A more coordinated system is required in order to bring countries together around comprehensive responses and sustainable solutions that work for all.

At the national level, the Global Compacts call for a “whole-of-society approach” which is based on the idea that migration and human mobility is a multidimensional reality that cannot be addressed by one government policy sector alone and that the participation of all relevant State authorities, including at the local level, and non-State stakeholders, in particular refugees, migrants and host communities themselves, is crucial to ensure full implementation of the commitments made.

This also extends to parliaments, which are called upon to legislate and to strengthen existing legal frameworks to bring about safe, fair and orderly migration and fulfil the commitments linked to the Refugee Convention; to adopt budgets to address the needs of migrants, refugees and host communities; and to combat discrimination and xenophobia in their capacity as opinion leaders.

Key questions

Two years after the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, are countries on track to implement their commitments? What have parliaments done / what can parliaments do to stay on course in the face of some of the challenges in implementing the Compacts?

What progress has been made in implementing a “whole-of-society approach”? Which countries have advanced most on this and how?

What are examples of good practices and measures to ensure safe and orderly movement and inclusive policies for migrants and refugees? Has any progress been made in developing clearer legal pathways for orderly migration and comprehensive refugee responses?

How can countries harness the benefits of international migration, including better inclusion in host societies?

What can parliaments do to protect the rights of people on the move? What can members of parliament do to combat stereotypes and xenophobia towards migrants and refugees?

What are the needs of women, children and vulnerable populations on the move? What measures are needed to protect them from exploitation, abuse and discrimination? How can parliaments secure the development of children on the move to avoid a lost generation?

What measures need to be taken to mitigate and prepare for an increase in human mobility linked to climate change?

What is the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences, including travel restrictions and border closures, on human mobility? What are the challenges faced by refugees and migrants in terms of access to health and the impact on their daily lives?