



GMG Statement

Round Table on “Political Participation in Times of Mass Migration and Refugee Crises”

Co-organized by the Permanent Missions of Ireland and Mexico, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

Friday, 9 December 2016

Conference Room 12, UN Headquarters, New York,

Madam Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Global Migration Group (GMG). UN Women has been honoured to chair the Global Migration Group GMG in a pivotal year for global debates on migration, and in the context of our collective efforts to formulate a comprehensive, coordinated and coherent approach to addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

On 19 September, UN Member States unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants – a solid framework for action for both refugees and migrants. Critically, the New York Declaration includes commitments to ensure that our responses to large movements of refugees and migrants mainstream a gender perspective, promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and fully respect and protect the human rights of women and girls.

The New York Declaration is an important first step towards a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach to addressing large movements to refugees and migrants. Building on this approach, the development of both compacts presents an unrivalled opportunity for Member States and all stakeholders to formulate a coordinated response. It is also important that the global compacts help stem the growing tide of xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiment that we are witnessing across the globe. In this regard, the GMG fully supports the Secretary-General’s Together Campaign to change negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants, and to strengthen the social contract between host countries and communities, and refugees and migrants.

Today’s event could not have been more timely, given the current challenging political landscape, harsh prevailing socio-economic climate, and unprecedented numbers of people on the move. Now more than ever, we need more comprehensive, collaborative and people-centred approaches that address the needs and concerns of refugees, migrants and

communities in countries of origin, transit and destination – including with respect to their inclusion and political participation.

One of the founding principles of people's right to freedom of movement is Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states in paragraph two that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.". Article 13 of the Universal Declaration addresses the right to freedom of movement but it does not touch upon the issue of political rights of migrants. In fact, political rights tend to be linked with citizenship status rather than with residency. This creates a democratic deficit for migrants in countries of destination both in terms of direct political participation, including the right to vote, and lack of access to indirect representation through NGOs, unions and consultative bodies.

In line with the commitments taken through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, addressing this democratic deficit for refugees and migrants would be an important step towards ensuring that no-one is left behind. It is also important to recognise that migrants are not a homogenous group and that the motivations of men, boys, women, and girls for migrating and their migratory experiences will differ widely. Such recognition highlights the importance of targeted interventions and multi-stakeholder engagement, which will help facilitate greater political participation of refugees and migrants, not just in times of migration and refugee crises but beyond these acute situations.

One of the major challenges in promoting the political participation of both refugees and migrants is their invisibility when they work outside the formal economy. Migrant workers in the informal economy cannot join trade unions and they are highly exposed to the risk of exploitation because they cannot report any situation of abuse from employers.

This is compounded by the growing public hostility towards refugees and migrants and xenophobia in many countries and communities of destination. This in turn has led to an increasingly polarized discourse on migration governance and a shirking of the obligations concerning responsibility sharing for refugees, with the result that migration, asylum and refugee policies are becoming more restrictive.

Such policies are impacting the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest, and this group is often made up of women and girls. In response to this, many individuals are turning to irregular channels of migration, which can be both costly and dangerous. The reality for many migrants and refugees that find themselves in this situation is that if they make it to their intended destination, they are faced with an uncertain future in the shadows in which they must remain undetected by the authorities and live on the margins of society for fear of reprisal or deportation. Living in such an environment means that political participation not only risks their future in the country but also creates a barrier to social inclusion and civic engagement.

With the number of people living outside their country of birth currently standing at approximately 244 million, it is ever more important that we all come together as envisaged in paragraph 90 of the New York Declaration to ensure greater efficiency, operational effectiveness and system-wide coherence, as well as ways of strengthening the engagement

of the UN with international financial institutions and the private sector. We need proactive multi-stakeholder collaboration that includes refugees and migrants as well as the communities they reside in and originate from. In view of the progress that has already been made, we should reiterate the important contributions that refugees and migrants make to countries of origin and destination socially and economically, as well as politically.

To this end, the GMG stands ready and is well-placed to work together with Member States, civil society, the private sector and other partners in pursuit of the full implementation of the New York Declaration and towards the adoption in 2018 of the global compact on refugees as well as of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. The New York Declaration is the first step towards a gender responsive global approach to human mobility, based on the promotion and protection of the human rights of all refugees and migrants.

Thank you.