Fourth informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing

Preparatory process for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the intergovernmental conference on international migration

21 February 2018
Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

Facts instead of perceptions:
Promoting an evidence-based discussion on migration

The President of the General Assembly organized the fourth informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing as part of the preparatory process for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration on 21 February 2018 in New York, in accordance with paragraph 30 of General Assembly resolution 71/280. Representatives of Member States, observers, civil society organizations, academic institutions, parliaments and the private sector participated in the hearing.

At the **opening segment** of the hearing, President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, emphasized that migration facts and data are key to develop effective responses. He noted that when there is a lack of reliable information vacuums occur, which may be quickly filled with rhetoric or even hate speech. He further noted that partnerships with all actors and a whole-of-society approach are required to collect data as well as to combat negative narratives. He added that migration is complex issue and that people see it differently but through facts and data dialogue can be based on reality rather than misperceptions.

The Secretary-General of the intergovernmental Conference to adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Ms. Louise Arbour, began her remarks by saying that many member states called for improved data to support evidence-based policy-making. She noted at the same time, that data alone cannot fully capture everyone's concerns pointing out that different countries have different perspectives and priorities. She also stressed that sometimes even evidence was challenged to compete with culturally rooted ideas. She emphasized the need to create more open and balanced discourse on migration to address misperceptions and intolerant views.

The **first panel** looked at the case for quality data. The panel was moderated by Mr. Bela Hovy, Chief, Migration Section, UN DESA. The panellists were Mr. Phillip Connor, Senior Researcher, Pew Research Center; Ms. Fabienne Venet Rebiffé, Directora General, Instituto de Estudios y Divulgación sobre Migración A.C.; and Ms. Kadri Soova, Advocacy Officer (Migration), Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM).

The discussion began around the types of data (administrative, population estimates, survey data and big data) which all factor into decision making and policy development. Each has their

benefits and limitations. It was noted that data collected should address migrants as well as drivers and impacts. Furthermore, it was stressed that disaggregated data was critical and should include information on disabilities, gender, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, etc. It was only through this information that vulnerabilities could be identified and addressed.

It was noted that a wide range of actors is needed to collect data which is often dependent upon the circumstance. Civil society and grass roots organizations may be better placed to gather data on migrants in irregular situations as they may fear repercussions from government entities. In other cases, there was a call for businesses to collect data on where migrants are employed and on supply chains, to help prevent forced migrant labour.

Sharing data is important yet there are challenges. It was noted sharing between countries of origin and destination would be beneficial but even amongst government departments/agencies there are obstacles. Throughout the discussion it was stressed that ethical data-sharing must be adhered to and privacy and rights of individuals are respected. It is important that data protection laws are in place particularly with the increasing use of biometric data. Furthermore, firewalls would help encourage many migrants, particularly those with irregular status, to share information.

Increasingly new technology is being utilized to collect information. The positive and negative use of modern technology needs to be reviewed. While with new technology greater numbers may be reached faster, there are challenges regarding proper representation and inclusion.

Data requires analysis and confidence in the information is necessary for it to be relevant. Additionally, quality data has a financial cost to ensure that data is collected and analyzed well and that data sharing follows appropriate standards. It was recognized that capacity was uneven amongst Member States. Additionally, it is important that data allows governments to measure progress and to design policies that are relevant.

The **second panel** discussed the challenges of inaccurate narratives. The panel was moderated by Ms. Michele Klein Solomon, Director - Global Compact for Migration, IOM. The panellists were Mr. Bill Orme, Adviser, Ethical Journalism Network (EJN); Ms. Tendayi Achiume, Assistant Professor of Law at UCLA School of Law; and Ms. Monami Maulik, Coordinator, Global Coalition on Migration.

Globally, the current trend of political discourse portrays migrants as national security, economic and cultural threats. This narrative does not correspond with the evidence yet gets traction with the media as it enters the mainstream; some said the media contributes to positions becoming mainstream. In either case, it was highlighted that the narrative affects public opinion which then affects policies.

Given that the media plays an influential role in developing the migration narrative, the language used by the media is important. The media must be objective, grasp terminology, use facts and speak for all (not to take sides). For example, correctly using "irregular" or "undocumented"

rather than "illegal" portrays a factual and more balanced approach. Furthermore, it was stressed that the media must contextualize the situation when presenting a story. Leaving the impression that all migrants commit violent crimes when evidence shows that overwhelming the numbers are the opposite is unethical, for example.

Civil society, businesses, UN entities, religious leaders and parliamentarians all have a role in shaping the narrative by highlighting factual and positive accounts. Narratives and understanding often occur at the community level with direct engagement amongst individuals. It was recognized that to change perceptions a manageable and non-threatening approach is necessary.

The **third panel** looked at combatting xenophobia and stereotypes with evidence-based narratives. The moderator was Ms. Liling Tan, Feature Story News, China Global TV Network, UN Correspondents Association. The panellists were Ms. Catherine Tactaquin, Executive Director, National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights; Mr. Joshua Bennett, Executive Vice President, Show of Force; and Mr. Ahmed Toumi, Member of Parliament, Morocco.

As noted in the earlier panel there is a need for all segments of society to directly challenge racism and xenophobia. Public officials need to promote social inclusion and help change narratives. They also need to take a zero-tolerance approach for hate speech. This is particularly important at the city level where combatting the "us" versus "them" concept is more tangible and threatens the social constructs. There was agreement that there is no one blueprint to combat racism and xenophobia.

Data or statistics are not enough to tackle the negative narrative; the debate needs to be framed differently through compelling storytelling about people. Through building empathy and sharing stories, people whose voices may not otherwise be heard will have a platform. The media, civil society and politicians were encouraged to utilize narratives through human interest stories.

Social media is a valuable tool; it has the power to share good stories but also to spread false narratives. The is a need to examine how to harness social media. However, it was acknowledged that with the vast amount of information available this becomes difficult. Social media is dominated by value statements and there is a tendency for people to focus on social media networks for confirmation of their value. Despite this it was highlighted that social media is one platform to heighten awareness and share human stories. The challenge is to capture attention and messaging needs to be powerful and compelling.

Toward the end of the discussion it was noted that the best way of combatting xenophobia is through integration.

The **fourth panel** looked at the follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Migration. The moderator was David Donoghue, Distinguished Fellow, Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The panellists were William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia; Sergei Markov, Director of Prince Michael of Kent Charitable Foundation; and Austin Fragomen, Chairman, Business Mechanism of the Global Forum for Migration and Development.

It was recognized that the inter-governmental negotiations are on-going and that the follow-up and review of the global compact was a subject of these negotiations.

Participants noted that the Global Compact for Migration's follow up and review will influence its credibility. It was felt it would be important that any arrangement has a whole of society approach, but that the zero draft says very little on the role of civil society, including businesses. It was also stressed that consideration of how migrants themselves contribute to review and follow up is necessary.

The discussion stressed the need to consider how the commitments and progress of the Global Compact are to be reviewed. It was felt that the follow up and review must be regular, fit for purpose, coherent, within the UN system and inclusive. More specifically, participants felt that the follow-up and review should be more rather than less frequent, and it should utilize existing mechanisms that do not create additional burdens. There was also a widespread call for an organization anchored in the UN system to manage the process. Here participants noted the connections to the International Organization for Migration and the Global Forum for Migration and Development, questioning how these structures could be best utilized. There were calls for follow up at both the regional and international levels. Some called for defined steps and timelines.

There was also discussion how the Global Compact for Migration will link with existing processes. Most notable was the link between the Global Compact, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). There was mixed reaction to this link; some felt this would support implementation where others cautioned it could silo migration into the development pillar. Additionally, follow up of both the Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration is necessary given the recognized complementarity of the two.

Some participants believed that there was too much focus on mechanisms but not enough attention given to what is to be measured and what are the criteria of success. It was recognized that some issues will be easily measurable but in other areas it will be difficult. The most difficult measurable will be around migrants in irregular situations. Furthermore, it was recognized that tools and capacity building will be necessary.

In the **closing segment**, the co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations, H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, and H.E. Mr. Juan José Gómez Camacho, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, highlighted that the Preparatory process for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is a Member State-led process but is inclusive at the same time. They thanked the stakeholders for their inputs and expressed the hope that the zero-draft reflected them. They appealed to partners to engage with governments during the negotiations to keep them ambitious. Stakeholder feedback is important to ground the Global Compact in reality.

In his closing remarks, the President of the General Assembly noted the importance of a whole of society approach that was evident throughout the day's discussions. He highlighted the focus on the human dimension – that when dealing with migration we are talking about people. The power of words and data will impact the way the Global Compact for Migration is implemented. At the same time, we should harness technology and new media in support of making migration safe, orderly and regular. We must use data, evidence and a fact-based narrative to ensure sound migration policies. He thanked participants for their active engagement and contributions.