

## Thematic Session 1 – 8 May 2017

### WHO statement

WHO thanks OPGA in convening this consultation. It is very timely in the development of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).

The right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health is established in the WHO Constitution since 1948. Other ratified international human rights standards exist to protect the rights of migrants including their right to health. Nevertheless, many migrants often lack access to health services and financial protection for health. Worldwide, access to health services and the underlying determinants of health for migrants are not consistently addressed. Barriers in access to health services for migrants include high costs of care and lack of social protection, language and cultural differences, discrimination, and lack of information on their health rights and entitlements. Many migrants often have to deal with poverty and poor living and working conditions - in sectors and occupations with low levels of safety,, which can increase the risk of occupational accidents and other health risks.

Victims of conflict and human trafficking – especially women and children including unaccompanied minors, and people with disabilities – are particularly vulnerable to health problems. These individuals are at higher risk of developing communicable and noncommunicable diseases, including mental health problems. Those most at risk of developing vaccine-preventable diseases are young children who have not yet been vaccinated.

To achieve the vision of the 2030 SDGs – to leave no one behind – it is imperative that the health needs of migrants are adequately addressed in the GCM. The access of migrants to quality health services and financial protection for health is of paramount importance to rights-based health systems and public efforts aimed at reducing health inequities. It is also imperative in efforts towards achieving the SDGs. We will not achieve the SDGs, in particular 3.8 on universal health coverage, unless the health needs of migrants are met.

We are fully aware that health is not the only issue being addressed in the GCM dialogue. However and unfortunately, health is not included specifically in the 6 thematic sessions of the modalities for the development of the GCM, despite health being crosscutting and a prerequisite to sustainable development. To address this concern, and to allow WHO to better support the GCM, in January 2017, the WHO Executive Board in its 140<sup>th</sup> Session made a decision to request WHO to develop a framework of priorities and guiding principles to promote the health of refugees and migrants to be considered during this upcoming WHA, followed by a global action plan in 2019. States also requested WHO to conduct a situation analysis; and to make every effort in cooperation with Member States, and based on the guiding principles, to ensure that the health aspects of refugees and migrants are adequately addressed in the Global Compacts.

In this regard, WHO is providing health-based inputs into the six issue briefs for the six thematic sessions of this global compact. For this Thematic Session 1, WHO co-leads on health with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop the Global Migration Group's inputs into this issue brief 1. WHO is working and liaising closely with IOM and UNHCR and international organizations such as ILO and UNICEF on these issue briefs. In addition, WHO is working closely with UNHCR and the pilot countries on a comprehensive refugee response framework.

In moving forward, WHO is in a process of finalizing the draft framework in close cooperation with IOM and UNHCR and it will be presented to the WHA in this May. This framework can inform the

development of the GCM, just as it is informing our collaboration with UNHCR on the Global Compact on Refugees.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the health sector has a vital role to play in ensuring the well-being of people at the countries of origin, transit, destination and return. We must fully respect the human rights and dignity of migrants; we need to ensure solidarity and to provide a welcoming environment. It is therefore vital to take a long-term view and to use that perspective to strengthen health policies and systems in a way that will help them to address the health challenges of migration today and in the future. This is our obligation and responsibility in ensuring the right to health and social inclusion. We need to find ways to meet the short and longer term health needs of migrants and of host populations; promote immediate health interventions; ensure migrant-sensitive health policies; improve the quality of the health services delivered; and optimize use of health structures and resources in countries receiving migrant populations and promote whole-society and whole-governmental approaches. Meeting those requirements will imply the strengthening of public health functions and of health systems and the development of migrant health strategies within national health policies. Our goal is that all Member States have in place adequate health systems capacity to be able to address the health challenges derives as a result of migration.

For a more detailed discussion, you are kindly invited to participate in our side event tomorrow on Mainstreaming Migrant Health into the GCM. This will take place in Salle XII at the Palais, between 13.00 – 15.00.

WHO stands ready to provide technical and necessary support to MSs and partners today and throughout the process. WHO commits to working with countries to meet the health needs of migrants, and we encourage Member States to similarly make this a focus and a priority in the GCM.

Thank you.