

Session 1.2 - From Global Agreement to Implementation – National action plans for migration-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

**Statement by Dr. Natalia Kanem, Acting Executive Director,
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The world today is increasingly globalized, with more people having greater access to information about prospects and options in new places -- something previous generations lacked. International migration, which continues to increase in scope, scale and complexity, is a key feature of globalization in the 21st century, and an important enabler of inclusive and sustainable development. Economic, social, demographic and technological transformations have fueled the increase in population mobility across borders worldwide. Today, virtually all countries in the world are affected by international migration, whether as countries of origin, destination or transit.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) works at global, regional and country level in three major areas relevant to migration: by addressing the drivers of migration, especially for adolescents and youth, through our development work and leadership on the demographic dividend; by providing protection to those in transit through our humanitarian work; and by advocating for including core migration census questions in the 2020 census round to ensure better estimates of those in transit.

ADDRESSING THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

The reasons people choose to move are complex and specific to the context of each country, community, family and individual. Conflict, persecution, poverty, food insecurity, human rights abuses and other life-threatening situations have caused millions to flee their homes. Others leave their homes in response to labour and skill shortages, demographic change or for family reasons – and the simple desire to seek and explore opportunities elsewhere. The adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters further drive migration and displacement.

This underscores the multidimensional reality of the migration-development nexus and the confluence of these two urgent agendas for countries of origin, transit and destination. UNFPA addresses the drivers of migration through intellectual and operational leadership on the demographic dividend, which focuses on the prospects and pathways for sustainable development in countries with high proportions of young people.

Where development is increasing, fertility rates typically decline, because more girls enter and

stay in school and more young people postpone family life to join the workforce, increasing prospects for a demographic dividend. For this to happen young people need many investments, and the broadest support of the global development community. They need access to reproductive health services, including voluntary family planning; and women and girls need to be empowered and have the right to access health, education, and the formal labour market.

UNFPA has supported national assessments of the potential for a demographic dividend in more than 28 countries in Africa since 2015, including national and subnational analyses of age structure and youth needs; integrating priorities within national development plans, funding and legislation; and providing guidance on the convergence of the demographic dividend with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, links between migration and development are not simple. Economic growth relies on movements of people towards jobs and markets. Many societies depend on migrants to promote a more efficient allocation of labour and higher wages, and to relieve demographic pressure. Migration also generates remittances – which can act as “insurance” in times of crises and be re-invested in local income generation. The movements of intellectuals and entrepreneurs around the world have stimulated innovation and led to an exchange of ideas and technology that form the foundation of our modern world. Migration can also transform traditional roles and break down social barriers, in particular for women and youth – modernizing ideas of gender equality, and advancing opportunities for women.

PROTECTION IN TRANSIT

While UNFPA’s development work helps ensure that people are choosing, rather than being forced, to migrate, our humanitarian activities focus on protecting those on the move.

UNFPA works in more than 150 countries, including all the major countries of migration origin and transit. The Fund also continues to be an active and critical partner in humanitarian crises, providing lifesaving services for reproductive health and to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV).

UNFPA offices are active in relief and protection efforts and the provision of sexual and reproductive health care, including antenatal and postnatal care services, safe delivery and dignity kits, HIV and sexually transmitted infections counseling and testing, and counseling and emergency care for survivors of gender-based violence. UNFPA works closely with others in the United Nations system, particularly UN Women and WHO, to end gender-based violence, and leads the GBV Area of Responsibility in humanitarian settings. Other partnerships include collaboration with the International Organization for Migration on the training of health mediators, medical and protection staff dealing with migrants and to improve data and information gathering on population movements and safety conditions to prevent and mitigate GBV.

UNFPA is committed to delivering sexual and reproductive health services in the midst of conflict, the aftermath of natural disaster and in transition settings. Building resilience and preparedness for “building back better” is a global priority.

DEMOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE

Commitments to social justice and equality are embedded within the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the 2030 Agenda, placing high demands on all governments to develop population data systems that will allow them to locate and track the most vulnerable across a wide range of needs and outcomes.

The aspiration to ‘leave no one behind’ cannot be met without understanding who faces the greatest inequalities, and therefore who is most likely to be systematically disadvantaged at the various stages of mobility.

There is an urgent need for better disaggregated migration data to improve the understanding of these dynamics and to provide the evidence needed to inform policies that make a difference on the ground.

UNFPA commits substantial technical and fiscal resources to help countries strengthen their national population data ecosystems, including population and housing censuses. UNFPA's analysis of census questionnaires from the 2010 census round suggests that data on international migration could be available for a significant number of countries worldwide, if countries systematically collected and disseminated core migration data. Therefore, UNFPA advocates actively for the integration of measures of migration in all 2020 census round questionnaires and for the consistent translation of data into widely available summary statistics.

In conclusion, as a partner in the Global Migration Group, UNFPA remains firmly committed to ensuring that migration is a matter of choice, not necessity, by advancing the empowerment and agency of young people, women and girls – wherever they are, and enhancing their chances to define their own lives and live in freedom and prosperity. We welcome the chance to advance these goals in collaboration with all of you.