Concept note

GFMD 2012 roundtable 3.1 Improving Public Perceptions of Migrants and Migration: challenging preconceptions and shaping perceptions.

Co-Chairs: Canada, Mexico, Russia

Team members: Argentina, Netherlands, Portugal, Philippines, Turkey, USA

International organizations: IFRC, IOM, OHCHR

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1 The Session

1.1 Rationale and scope

While this session is concerned with improving public perceptions of migrants and migration, its starting point is that it is necessary to question current mindsets on how perceptions are shaped in the first place. Thus the metaphor of "shaping" perceptions may be inadequate and a more ambitious attempt to question the foundations upon which our understanding of perceptions is built may be required. Thus a critical line of enquiry for this session is to interrogate – and if necessary challenge – the assumptions that inform current efforts at improving public perceptions of migration.

Although the number of international migrants as a percentage of the total population has remained stable at roughly 3% for decades, changing patterns of migration create the context for the mounting importance of efforts to address public perceptions of migration. These changes include, but are not limited to, a greater diversity in the types of migrants, whether regular or irregular; permanent and temporary; male and female; old and young, including unaccompanied minors; and people across the skills range. These patterns highlight the need to consider perceptions of migration from the viewpoint of countries of origin, destination, and transit and to consider perceptions of migration from the perspectives of both host populations and migrants. It is also necessary to factor in different points on the migration continuum, from pre-departure; to arrival and integration; to contributing to the development of both host and origin societies; and to considering a return to the country of origin. Increasingly, with growing interest in temporary and circular migration schemes, it may also be necessary to disentangle the perceptions of non permanent/mobile migrants. It is also necessary to identify the appropriate roles of government and of the various actors who can influence public perceptions.

A public and leadership that are well-informed rather than misinformed about migration and its impacts on society are a necessary, though probably not sufficient, requirement for effective policymaking in countries of destination, origin, and transit around migration and development.

Public misperceptions around migrants and migration can lead to harmful stereotyping, anti-migrant discrimination, xenophobia, social exclusion, and the curtailing and abuse of migrants' rights. Misinformation about migration can give false expectations and put migrants at risk. An "unwelcoming society" could influence the migrant's choice of destination country as they research destination countries and deter them from going to that country – a consideration for countries with demographic and labor needs. Accurate information about the contribution of migrants to countries of destination, transit and origin

can support a better understanding and appreciation of the benefits of migration. However, as the IOM's 2011 *World Migration Report* (WMR) makes clear, "simply calling for more evidence is not enough, nor is it the only way to move toward more accurately communicating with the public [about migration]… What is required is a dialogue that considers in a critical but balanced way the interplay between political discourse, existing policies, evidence-based research and media coverage."[1]

But balanced, accurate information is necessary but not sufficient for a rational debate about migrants and migration because, as the IOM's WMR observes, concerns about migration often serve as a proxy for deeper fears and anxieties about broader processes of social change that people feel are outside their control. Leadership is also needed to promote this dialogue and overcome preconceived ideas on migration.

Enhanced cooperation between public authorities, at all levels, and civil society is necessary to pursue practical actions, such as to promote respect for diversity, non-violence and social inclusion of all migrants; to enhance cultural awareness between migrant and local communities; to promote through formal and non-formal education, humanitarian values and the development of interpersonal skills to live peacefully together; and to enhance social cohesion through the engagement of local and migrant populations and civil society organizations in voluntary service, community and sport programs[2].

Recognizing the fundamental responsibility and prerogative of the state, the premise of this session is that there are measures that all stakeholders in the migration and development debate can take to deepen and broaden public understanding of migration issues, challenge perceptions, and to eliminate or reduce discrimination against migrants.

While this has become a critical issue for many countries hosting migrants or to which emigrants are returning, public perception continues to be a missing link in the migration and development debate. Although the topic of perceptions of migration has not been the subject of a roundtable in previous GFMD meetings, the issue did take center stage during the inaugural Common Space debate in 2010. It has also subsequently been taken up in internal discussions in some regional consultative processes and was the main theme of IOM's 2011 WMR. As emerged from the Common Space discussions, leadership plays a critical role in setting the tone. Specifically, leadership must channel people's fears and anxieties into values of social, political, economic, and cultural inclusion. Leadership must emphasize migrants' contributions to society (both the receiving society and the country of origin). The issues that emerged from that dialogue – the critical role of leaders; more accurate information flows; media engagement; education and integration programs – form the building blocks for this session.

1.2 Session objectives

(a) To critically examine and if necessary challenge assumptions underpinning approaches to shaping public perceptions of migrants and migration;

(b) To recognize the need for leadership to challenge public perceptions;

(c) To deepen policymaker and practitioner understanding of how the media influences debates about migration; and what influences the media;

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[1] International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2011: Communicating Effectively About Migration*, Geneva, 2011, page 31.

[2] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Resolution 3, Migration: Ensuring Access, Dignity, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion, 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, 2011.

(d) To explore means of effectively bridging gaps and disconnects between those who produce/generate data and information about migrants and migration and those who use/consume such data/information;

(e) To help leaders (of the political, social, civil society, private sector fields) disentangle public concerns around migration from deeper anxieties about social change and challenges for which migration serves as a proxy or symptom;

(f) To identify the most effective forms of partnerships, alliances, policies, and programs that deepen public understanding of migration, create the most enabling environments for effective and efficient public policy and promote inclusion and integration of migrants in society; and

(g) To develop indicators which accurately portray impact of migration on public perceptions, immigrant outcomes and social cohesion.

1.3 Guiding questions

(a) What is the evidence on the relationship between public understanding of migration and effective migration and development policymaking?

(b) Are there other ways to approach perceptions and to look at migration differently?

(c) What roles do different migration stakeholders (eg governments, media, civil society, communities, and migrants/diasporas) play in shaping perceptions of migration?

(d) What might be areas where public perceptions of migration need to be changed?

(e) What actions need to be taken to challenge preconceived ideas on migration and change public perceptions of migration?

(f) While fostering an open space for healthy – if critical – debate about migration, what are the areas for stakeholders' action to challenge public perceptions of migration to protect migrants from misinformed stigmatization and discrimination?

(g) What has proven to work and has potential for replication and/or scaling up in terms of the mix of policies, programs, and practices that generate an optimal combination of public understanding of migration and migrants able to realize their full potential in countries of destination and/or countries of origin?

1.4 Possible outcomes

Concrete outcomes could include:

(a) Model programs and practices at national and local levels in developed and developing countries that engage migrants, diaspora other actors in mutually beneficial ways that serve to promote more evidence-based public discussion of the issue of public perceptions of migrants and migration;

(b) Settlement, integration, citizenship and multiculturalism policies and programs that actively promote intercultural understanding, welcoming communities and an enhanced respect for core democratic and civic values;

(c) innovative media programs (including those using social media), especially those directly that involve migrants and diasporas in expressing themselves, that broaden public understanding and appreciation of the contributions migrants and diasporas make to their home and host countries;

(d) shared understanding of the critical role that leadership (political, social, civil society, private sector) plays in framing debates about migrants and migration and identification of specific initiatives that such leaders in receiving countries especially can do to foster public understanding of the benefits of migration in their society; and

(e) strategies by countries of origin to shape in positive ways the public image of their émigrés while abroad and after return.

2 Background material

The background material would review the evidence mapping out the critical roles that different actors – government officials, the media, employers and the private sector more generally, civil society, and migrants (and diasporas) and, not least, citizens themselves – play in shaping public perceptions of migrants and migration and specific steps they have taken (individually and collectively) in particular instances to improve perceptions of migrants and migration.

In searching for workable solutions, the background material would review evidence of the importance of empowered migrants' visibility and voice, and migrant/diaspora-led efforts and contributions to development, and help to promote more realistic and fact-based public discourse on migration. The background material would assess the effectiveness of innovative approaches such as migrants and diaspora telling their own stories, and development of migrant and non-migrant dialogues and other engagement that can help to create more balanced public understanding of migration and its contributions to development, both in countries of origin and destination, compared to other possible measures and interventions.

Specifically in relation to the media, the material would assess its critical role – in theory and practice – not just as a purveyor of information (in the form of news, analysis, comment, etc), but also as a semi-autonomous mediator of public opinion, and by extension an agenda-setter for public policy. In reviewing evidence of the roles that accurate information or public engagement play in deepening public understanding of migration issues, the material would explore contexts in which information and public engagement are used to positive effect and set the scene for practical examinations of the same.

The background material would explore how different facets of migration (including irregular migration) influence and shape public perceptions, and the political and policy measures that have proven most effective in creating an open space for healthy public discourse around migration to enable a depoliticized debate and consideration of legitimate areas of concern.

The background material would explore the approach different countries have taken to addressing integration and social inclusion as necessary but not sufficient conditions to enable migrants to realize their full human development potential and potentially contribute to the development of society (both origin and destination). The material would examine programs that have and have not worked in terms of involving both migrants and host populations in ways that foster tolerance, understanding, and social harmony to identify broader implications and lessons for other countries.

3 Role of co-chairs and team members

(See attached Guidelines for RT Preparations for GFMD 2012)

4 Workplan

Team meeting on the margins of second FoF meeting in Geneva   27 April

Finalize and post the session concept note   22 June

Co-chairs/expert/coordinator prepare RT background paper and materials; plan RT session	May–August
Session methodology, format and session roles and responsibilities (including rapporteur, facilitator, etc) agreed	End June
Team meeting on the margins of third FoF meeting in Geneva	28 June
Final team meeting on the margins of fourth FoF meeting in Geneva	13 September
RT 3.1 session format and expectations of participants announced at fourth FoF meeting in Geneva	13 September
Team reviews, finalizes and posts the background material	End September
Translation of background paper into French/Spanish	October
RT Session 3.1 at sixth GFMD meeting in Mauritius	21 November