MIGRANTS AND CITIES

SUMMARY

On 11 December 2015, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) held a briefing on “Migrants and Cities.” This event was part of the New York Migration Series, organized by IOM to enhance knowledge and raise awareness of migration amongst Permanent Missions, representatives of United Nations (UN) agencies, civil society and other stakeholders at UN Headquarters. This briefing was co-chaired by the Permanent Missions of Ecuador and Germany to the United Nations. The webcast of this event can be found at: http://webtv.un.org/watch/migrants-and-cities/4660703489001.

INTRODUCTION

H.E. Mr. Heiko Thoms, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. and Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany, opened the briefing by highlighting the positive opportunities of migration for both the countries of destination and origin. Ambassador Thoms emphasized, however, that for positive opportunities to be realized, proper migration management is essential. Citing the benefits that Germany has derived thus far, Thoms stressed experience sharing as a route to learning from other states’ and cities’ successful and less-successful policies of migration response.

H.E. Mr. Diego Morejón Pazmiño, Chargé d’Affairs a.i. and Deputy Permanent Representative of Ecuador, spoke to equality as a foundational principle in shaping effective migration policy and response. Strengthening institutional frameworks is essential to protecting a country’s diaspora overseas as well as migrants in-country. These frameworks must also incorporate the needs of migrants into social services, border policies and urban planning. Ambassador Morejón Pazmiño noted that combating xenophobia is imperative, particularly in the current climate, and communications campaigns emphasizing the positive contribution of migrants are perhaps one of the most effective means of doing so.

SESSION I: MIGRANTS IN CITIES – URBAN DYNAMICS

The first panel focused on the experience of – and challenges faced by – migrants in cities, particularly as they relate to urban planning, urban development and community integration. The panel was moderated by Ms. Ana B. Moreno, Habitat III Secretariat Coordinator. The three panelists were Ms. Kazi Fouzia, Community Organizer at DRUM South Asian Organizing Center; Mr. Oscar Chacon, Executive Director for the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities; and Professor Jacqueline Klopp, Associate Research Scholar at the Center for Sustainable Urban Development at Columbia University.
Ms. Moreno stressed that cities and local authorities have the most direct role in building the relationships between migrants and host communities, and are at the forefront of building positive reception and integration. Urban planning should ensure cities are capable of responding to migration needs, and cities need to engage relevant expertise in developing positive migration policies. In the framework of the upcoming Habitat III Conference, Ms. Moreno called for more in-depth analysis on the relationship between migration and urbanization.

Ms. Fouzia, in sharing her own experiences as a former undocumented migrant, stressed the importance of community mobilization and migrant ownership, with special focus on combating isolation of newly arrived migrants and increasing community inclusion. Ms. Fouzia stated that education, social and legal justice, and addressing issues of racial profiling are pillars of community cohesion and protection of newly arrived migrants, (particularly undocumented migrants and Muslim migrants). Ms. Fouzia spoke to the power of lobbying local city council leaders to enact change – driven by migrant communities – at even the smallest levels to build momentum and trustworthiness in the community.

Mr. Chacon opened with reflections on his personal experiences, asserting that actual impact of immigration is overwhelmingly positive. The immense potential contributions of migrants and the realized, proven benefits should be emphasized to balance – and ultimately drown out – negative perceptions and fears toward immigration. Mr. Chacon stressed the imperative of migrants themselves holding leadership and ownership in integration programmes and initiatives. While more and more migrants are moving to cities, the growth of cities and gaps in urban planning pose challenges to migrants remaining in cities, largely due to economic inequality, segregation and continued gentrification.

Ms. Klopp emphasized the unique opportunities presented by migration in terms of fostering innovation and new ideas in host societies. Ms. Klopp stressed that IOM’s World Migration Report provides a counter-narrative to xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiment that can be key in local communities, and helps to build political messaging that is more inclusive and respectful of new-found diversity. In speaking from her experiences working on the ground in Nairobi, Kenya, Ms. Klopp emphasized the imperative of urban planning which combats segregation and fosters diverse communities to prevent second-class citizenship. Klopp cautioned against governments relying on the security discourse, which too often paints migrants as potential terrorists and criminals, creating divisive, fearful host societies. Inclusive public services – providing for both migrants and local citizens – can be a crucial step to creating community cohesion and combating host community tensions that often lead to xenophobic fears.

The ensuing discussion was both lively and in-depth, with active audience engagement. Mr. Chacon, responding to a question on bringing support for migration directly into citizen homes, stressed that changing laws does not necessarily change perspectives and public opinion. While there are indeed differences between communities and incoming cultures, there are larger common goals to be pursued.
and emphasized. Ms. Klopp, in speaking specifically to urban planning, stressed the importance of public spaces – such as playgrounds or community centers – as initiators of interaction and development of multicultural respect. Ms. Moreno spoke to the need to address segregation issues in urban planning, as well as the need for structural changes to legislation rather than just emergency-driven policy changes. In responding to concerns raised by current xenophobic narratives, Mr. Chacon emphasized the ability of city and state legislation to bring back positive, fact-based discourse on migration. Citizen diplomacy and citizen decision-making, coupled with innovative approach, is foundational to driving positive changes in narrative. In broaching the subject of climate migrants and environment-driven migration, Ms. Klopp stressed the climate change discussion must be mainstreamed in terms of the discussion on urban migration. Complex analysis and data-driven responses are essential and should be coupled with an alliance of advocacy communities to ensure integral climate migrant voices are raised.

**SESSION II: LEARNING FROM CITIES – BEST PRACTICES IN MIGRATION**

The second panel focused on best practices on migration, urban planning, community integration and cohesion, and promoting positive perceptions of migrants. Moderated by Mr. Vikram Singh, Associate Director of City Relationships for 100 Resilient Cities, the three panelists were Mr. Naheed Kurban Nenshi, Mayor of Calgary (via videoconference); Ms. Ratna Omidvar, Executive Director and Adjunct Professor in Global Diversity Exchange (GDX) at Ryerson University; and Ms. June Lee, Editor in Chief of IOM’s World Migration Report *Migrants and Cities*.

**Mr. Singh** added a few key points throughout the discussion on the need to improve data collection and availability on cities and urbanization. Building resilience in cities in imperative, and the resilience needs of individual cities need to be approached in a holistic manner.

**Mayor Nenshi** spoke to the powerful community responses to incoming migrants with examples in his own city of Calgary. He highlighted a number of practices and policies that have proven successful in community mobilization and promoting positive perceptions and receptions of migrants. Cities are engines of economic development and subsequently hubs for growth; migration allows the skills sector to develop and diversify. Beginning at the local level, thoughtful immigration and integration policies promote successful community cohesion and economic advancement. In citing his city’s approach to migration, Mayor Nenshi emphasized “pluralism in action” and the need for cities to celebrate what migrants bring to the table, particularly in terms of capacity and ability to build up the existing community. Mayor Nenshi cautioned that isolating immigrant communities breeds social disorder and takes away the sense of belonging vital to successful community integration and growth. He also raised the issue of migrants not being allowed or able to work in their field. According to Mayor Nenshi, it is important for migrants to remain in work related to their field of expertise, building over the long-run to return to the professional level they were previously working at.

**Ms. Omidvar** stated that while migration is a national and/or international issue, the experience of integration is uniquely local to the city. In looking at sentiments toward migration and integration, cities – informally or formally – often contradict national trends and sentiments, seemingly having an opinion of their own. Cities are adaptable and nimble, and serve as unique “labs” for creating new ideas and
utilizing diversity. Ms. Omidvar noted that business is usually the first to change when the consumer or demographic changes – service innovation as a whole should reflect those changes and extend to those services concerning migrants, integration and overall community adaptation. Ms. Omidvar outlined four key takeaways from her studies on migrants and cities: local leadership matters – mayors may not have a mandate, but they do have a pulpit; the roles of both usual and unusual actors are key; policy making is best done from the community level, as opposed to a more removed, top-down approach; and integration is not something to be worked on exclusively by migrants or governments, but rather as a whole-of-society experiment.

Ms. Lee spoke to the policy that incoherence currently persists, noting that urbanization policies do not often include discussion on migrants – the very people moving to cities – and the migration debate does not often include discussions on cities – though cities are where migrants travel to and settle. In speaking to the report, Ms. Lee discussed the challenges to finding data on migrants’ lives in cities, and efforts in the report to reflect day-to-day realities of migrants in urban centers at the local level rather than from a standpoint of national analysis. Particularly to this point, integration matters, and studies on integration must look at migration in developing countries. For this, more research and first-person narratives are needed on strategies, mobility patterns, and personal meanings of migration for individuals and communities of migrants. Ms. Lee also stressed that migrants are not just targets of policy, nor are they just victims; migrants are agents of change, and should be empowered and equipped as such. There needs to be greater attention to and action on internal migration in addition to international migration. IOM is seeking to create a platform on which the above points, amongst numerous related issues, can be discussed.

The interactive debate that followed focused on diversity, social mobility, public sentiment and integration without loss of identity. Mayor Nenshi, in addressing a question on the role of multiculturalism, stated that while the tone at the top is an important starting point, it is the everyday actions of people and local leaders which set the overall perception of migrants. Ms. Omidvar added to Mayor Nenshi’s perspective, attributing much of Canada’s success in social cohesion to social mobility and achievable, equal pathways to success, (even if such success is greater in the second generation of migrant communities). Regarding a question on integration and cultural preservation, Mayor Nenshi stated integration can happen without assimilation. Integration is driven by policy, programmes, people and pace-setting, perhaps best revolving around individuals’ roles in the community. In responding to a query on breaking the negative discourse surrounding migrants, Mayor Nenshi stressed evidence-based decision making, tying back to points made by Ms. Omidvar, Ms. Lee and Mr. Singh on the crucial role of data and fact-based research on migrants and urbanization.

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