

Final session of OWG retains migration in outcome

From 9 to 19 July 2014, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) held its thirteenth and final round of negotiations on the text of proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 UN Development Agenda, with the objective of adopting an agreed set of goals and targets by the session's end.

The final document, entitled "Proposal of the Open Working group on Sustainable Development Goals," consists of a chapeau and 17 standalone goals, each with an associated set of targets and means of implementation. Goal 17 contains targets that will serve as crosscutting MOI in facilitating the entire development agenda.

Methods of work and key debates

Over the session's nine days, the OWG completed three full read-throughs of the document, operating on a target-by-target basis and receiving revisions continuously from the Co-Chairs and Secretariat. Cognizant of the limited amount of time remaining for discussions, the Co-Chairs discouraged delegations from making lengthy political statements, and instead requested concise, concrete language proposals for goals and targets.

During each read-through of the proposed goals, key thematic debates arose repeatedly between delegations. The areas of energy, climate change, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and institutions and rule of law were particularly contentious for some member states, leading to a lack of broad consensus and the formation of smaller contact groups for discussion. Striving to develop a truly actionable agenda in accordance with the Rio+20 mandate, delegations focused heavily on the formulation of measurable and universal targets. The coherence and consistency of proposed language with prior conventions and outcome documents, as well as careful inclusion of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, served as important lenses for many delegations in their approach to negotiations.

References to migration

Migration received significant attention throughout the nine days of negotiations, with many delegations speaking broadly to the important role of migrants in sustainable development. This understanding is evident in the strong presence that migration has retained in the final outcome document, as framed by a reference in its chapeau to the Declaration of the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

Within the goal set, Goal 8 on economic growth speaks to the rights of migrant workers, and particularly women migrants. In Goal 10 on reducing inequality, a standalone target is dedicated to the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration through planned and well-managed migration policies. An associated means of implementation within the same goal calls for the reduction of transaction costs of migrant remittances to less than 3%. With regard to human trafficking, both Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peaceful societies contain targets that call for an end to exploitation, trafficking, and violence against women and children.

The inclusion of these targets is a testament to the ongoing support of delegations throughout OWG sessions, while their exact placement and wording reflect significant discussion during the final round of negotiations. Support for Goal 8's target on migrant worker rights remained strong during each read-through of the goal. A last-minute proposal to include a reference to women migrants received positive feedback and was quickly incorporated into the text.

Delegations also expressed broad support for migration-related targets within Goal 10, with two clarifying interventions requested from IOM. In response to a question regarding the basis for the use of "5%" for transfer costs of remittances, IOM noted that while this was a benchmark agreed by the G20 in 2011, World Bank data indicates the possibility of further reduction. Momentum on the issue continued into the second read-through of the goal, when a group of over ten



member states expressed support for a more ambitious target on remittances. On 18 July, the Co-Chair indicated decisively that the target would call for reduction of costs to 3% rather than 5%, as is evident in the final text of the document.

IOM was also asked to intervene following a question regarding the measurability of Goal 10's target on planned and well-managed migration policies. IOM cited several examples of relevant indicators for measurement, in addition to providing the Co-Chairs with more detailed information in writing, and the target was ultimately retained.

In other cases, language on migration was not met with consensus. After a dedicated target on reducing the number of internally displaced persons and refugees worldwide was deleted from the Zero Draft, twenty member states called for the reinsertion of language on forced migration. Nevertheless, a troika of states raised strong opposition, noting the sensitive nature of the issue and the importance of unique national and regional contexts. Additionally a proposal to create a dedicated section on migration within Goal 17 was never picked up by the Co-Chairs or commented on by other delegations.

Next steps

Following its adoption at midday on 19 July, the OWG outcome document will now be edited and translated in preparation for consideration by the General Assembly in September. At the same time, the Secretary-General will begin work on a synthesis report to bring together inputs from the many threads of the post-2015 process, including the OWG, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, and various thematic debates.