

Evidence-based approach crucial to migrants and migration – top UN officials

As Governments begin to negotiate a global compact on migration, an accurate portrayal of migrants, and of migration, is needed more than ever before to help shape public discourse and policy, senior United Nations officials said Wednesday, underscoring the importance of an evidence-based approach to the issue.

“Over the long-term [the evidence is clear](#): the benefits of migration vastly outweigh the challenges. And without a clear understanding of migration, negative narratives surround migrants,” Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration told a multi-stakeholder event held at the UN Headquarters.

“We must not allow xenophobic political narratives about migration distort our objective to enhance international cooperation on migration,” she added, stressing that “it is only with facts and context that we can have a respectful and realistic discussion about migration, one that pushes back on the many inaccurate and negative narratives being touted for short-term political gains and misguided policies.”

The event, titled ‘Facts instead of Perceptions: Promoting an Evidence-Based Discussion on Migration,’ comes on the heels of the start of intergovernmental negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – the first such international instrument on the issue – to be adopted later this year.

Ms. Arbour said that there are currently 258 million international migrants today, 3.4 per cent of the global population, an increase from 2.8 per cent in 2000, and the figure is expected to increase in the coming decades.

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that migrant workers in higher-productivity settings contributed \$6.7 trillion – or 9.4 per cent – to global GDP in 2015, \$3 trillion more than they would have produced in their countries of origin.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Louise Arbour, Special Representative for the Secretary-General on Migration (centre) and Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly (centre right) address the fourth informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing of the Intergovernmental Conference and its preparatory process to adopt a global compact for migration.

In 2017, nearly \$600 billion was remitted internationally – three times greater than all development assistance. Some \$450 billion of that was sent to developing countries. And even with these large sums, migrants put 85 per cent of their earnings back into host countries through taxes and spending, Ms. Arbour said.

“Migrants are frequently presented as security threats, but they are statistically less likely to be involved in crime than local populations,” she stressed, adding that there are, of course, those instances when international migration might have negative impacts: when large inflows of migrants have short-term destabilizing effects on local labour markets if they are not properly regulated.

For his part, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak said that Governments should make decisions and policies on migration based on the latest, and most concrete analysis and information, also underscoring the important roles the UN and other partners can play in promoting an [evidence-based approach](#) to the issue.

“I want to stress that migration is a fact. It is not an idea. It is not a theory. It is not a trend. It is a fact,” Mr. Lajcak said.

“And we need to respond accordingly. Not with ideas or theories. But with facts. Data. Information. And evidence,” he added.

Mr. Lajcak said that during the Compact’s consultation phase, there were repeated calls for more disaggregated data on migration.

He warned when facts and information are absent, a vacuum develops in their place, and the vacuum can quickly be filled by emotional rhetoric, politicized messaging, or even hate speech.

The private sector, civil society, regional organizations and the UN can act as crucial sources of data and facts needed for Governments to make decisions and policies on migration, he stressed.

Furthermore, an objective media is key because it can distil sometimes technical, or complex, data down to information products, which are accessible to wider audiences.

“We must do more to build partnerships between all these key players,” Mr. Lajcak said, highlighting the need to ensure that data collection and disaggregation receives proper funding and support.

[Job creation around agriculture can spur youth employment in Africa – UN agency](#)

Agriculture will continue to generate employment in Africa over the coming decades, but businesses around agriculture, including processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, marketing and financial services, could also jobs for young people, especially those in rural areas, the United Nations top agriculture official said Thursday.

“Countries need to promote a rural and structural transformation that fosters [synergies between farm and non-farm activities](#) and that reinforces” the linkages between rural areas and cities, José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), told a regional conference on employment being held from 19 to 23 February in Khartoum, Sudan.

FAO [Regional Conference for Africa](#) primarily focuses on the theme of creating decent and attractive employment in the world’s “youngest” continent in terms of the average age of its population.

Estimates suggest that up to 12 million new jobs will have to be created every year to absorb new labour market entrants over the next 20 years. Today some 54 per cent of Africa’s work force relies on the agricultural sector for livelihoods, income and employment, especially in family farming.

With more people moving to cities, demand on urban food markets will grow, which in turn can generate job opportunities in all agriculture-related

activities. But FAO believes that more must be done to create non-agricultural employment in rural areas, including agro-tourism and other services.

“More than ever, strategic partnerships are needed to bring together the African Union, the African Development Bank and the UN system and other development partners,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said.

He warned however that more profitable urban markets can lead to a concentration of food production in large commercial farms, and also the creation of value chains dominated by large processors and retailers.

“In this contest, smallholders and family farmers need specific policies and regulations. This includes providing access to inputs, credit and technology and improving land tenure,” he added, stressing how social protection programmes, including cash transfers can link public food purchase to family farmer’s production.

Sudan: After years of conflict, millions require aid; But is the world paying attention?

If it were a new crisis, it would be one of the biggest in the world, but despite the fact that more than five million people need aid, Sudan is at risk of falling off international donors’ radar, a senior United Nations official has said.

“If it were a new crisis, the dimensions of it, the scale and the need of it, would be such that it would be one of the biggest crises in the world,” Marta Ruedas, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan told *UN News*.

“But nobody realizes that because it’s been going on for so long. The need is there, but the response is no longer the same. And we need to have people respond to it as the need requires, rather than with fatigue, which is somewhat understandable.”

Some 5.5 million people in Sudan require humanitarian support, including 3.1 million in the province of Darfur. Fighting in that region, which is about the size of Spain, has displaced millions of people since 2003. During the past year, there has been sporadic new conflict, but the country has seen the arrival of new refugees from South Sudan, and it now hosts some 770,000 refugees from its southern neighbour.

“The refugees coming across the border are coming in a really bad state. They require a lot of support and we’re just not getting enough [support],” Ms. Ruedas said, adding: “Some have died reaching the border.”

The UN and its humanitarian partners are appealing for \$3 billion to assist South Sudanese refugees and displaced persons. Some \$1.5 billion is meant to aid host communities and agencies helping South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, including \$327 million for Sudan. The focus is on boosting food and water rations, and providing health services.

The greatest percentage of the people in need are displaced Sudanese, who require some assistance getting food and livelihood support, education, water, sanitation and health services. The Government says nearly 400,000 people, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, have returned to their homes, but the majority continue to report that conditions are not in place – including security and access to services – to return to their homes. Many may prefer to be integrated into the communities where they are currently living.



OCHA

Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sudan, Marta Ruedas, visits the Tawilla site for Internally Displaced Persons.

“Some people have been in camps for nearly two decades, and we still call them displaced but really, it’s people who have been living in the same location for 10 years, 15 years,” said Ms. Ruedas.

“We should be able to either integrate them where they are living – because some of these places are like suburbs of a community – or if they do want to go back, and they can return to their place of origin, then we should be able to do that; establish them there and take them off the books of those internally displaced.”

The 2018 humanitarian appeal for Sudan, which requests \$1b to aid 4.3 million people, will be released in the coming weeks. The 2017 humanitarian appeal was only 46 per cent funded, the first time less than half of requested funding was received since the start of the Darfur crisis in 2003.

“Sudan has been on the books of donors – their humanitarian ledger – for so long that donor fatigue is setting in. But just because it has been going on for years doesn’t mean that the need is less,” Ms. Ruedas said.

[Protect the rights of ‘Dreamers,’ UN human rights experts urge US Government](#)

With hundreds of thousands of migrants who arrived in the United States as children facing possible expulsion, a group of United Nations human rights experts has urged the country to take urgent steps to address their situation and ensure that their rights are protected.

“We are increasingly concerned about the impact that ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme could have on the young people who benefit from it,” said the rights experts in a [news release](#) issued by the UN human rights wing, OHCHR, Tuesday.

The call comes ahead of the 5 March deadline for the DACA programme, which grants work permits and renewable two-year deferments from deportation to qualifying migrants who arrived as children under 16, are pursuing or have completed a high school education or military service, and have not committed a serious crime.

Often referred to as ‘Dreamers,’ the DACA beneficiaries – estimated to number around 800,000 – will be stripped of their legal status and their protection from deportation without procedural safeguards if a solution is not reached by the deadline.

The majority of Dreamers are ages 25 or below, and many are current students.

“The US needs to adopt measures to address this situation as a matter of urgency. These migrants risk losing protection of their rights and being expelled from the country where many of them have lived and developed their lives for decades,” the experts underscored, noting that of particular concern is that the majority of these migrants are young women at risk of being expelled to countries where there are high levels of violence, lawlessness and crime.

The human rights experts also underscored that an abrupt end to the DACA programme will disrupt the lives of these migrants and cause “profound grief and irreparable harm by tearing their families apart” and making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse if deported to countries where they barely have any ties.

“Ending the programme without a feasible alternative would also send a wrong signal to the population, as it would reinforce harmful racial stereotypes and stigmatize hard-working, law-abiding young migrants who are an asset to the country which they consider home,” they added.

In the news release, the human rights experts also highlighted that the expiry of DACA offers a “unique opportunity” for regularization of many migrants who have strong economic, social, cultural and family links in the UN, and whose contribution to society is unquestionable.

The UN rights experts making the call include Felipe González Morales, UN [Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants](#); Elina Steinerte, Vice-Chair on Communications of the UN [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); Nils Melzer, UN [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#); Alda Facio, Chair of the UN [Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice](#); and E. Tendayi Achiume, UN [Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism](#).

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based [Human Rights Council](#) to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[At leaders forum in Belarus, deputy UN chief urges concrete action on Global Goals](#)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most ambitious, universal, people-centred and planet-sensitive set of goals and targets ever conceived by the United Nations, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told a regional leaders forum in Belarus on Wednesday.

Speaking in Minsk at the Regional SDGs Coordination Leaders Forum, ‘Building a partnership to underpin national sustainable development solutions,’ Ms. Mohammed said translating the Agenda into concrete Action is one of her top priorities and dubbed the framework’s associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “the global community’s roadmap to transform our world.”

She saw the meeting as an excellent opportunity to discuss implementation challenges, exchange best practices and explore new partnership modalities to advance the global goals.

“Our efforts to leave no one behind will be a test of our common vision, resolve and ingenuity,” she stressed.

Ms. Mohammed emphasized that a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach must become the new norm – with meaningful multi-stakeholder partners central in designing, implementing, financing and evaluating development solutions.

Noting some positive trends and successful initiatives since the 2030 Agenda’s adoption, she stated that the SDGs were being implemented at global, regional, national, city and community levels, in developed and developing countries alike, “reflecting its universality in ownership and scope.”

“More concrete efforts are needed to leverage the capacities, networks, skills and resources of civil society, the private sector, academia, statistical bodies, local community associations and youth groups,” she added.

Ms. Mohammed outlined three key points, beginning with the SDGs need for “governments to go beyond traditional development programmes to tackle the complexity of the 2030 Agenda through integrated approaches, attuned to specific contexts.”

She listed a number of measures underway to help move the agenda forward, including governments incorporating the global goals into national plans and legislative frameworks.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses the Regional SDGs Coordination Leaders Forum in Minsk, Belarus., by United Nations/Egor Dubrovsky

“Achieving these goals will require defining new national pathways and priorities, and mobilizing the necessary financing, technology and expertise,” she asserted.

According to the UN deputy chief, the second key point is the importance of partnerships, saying “small and medium enterprises are slowly coming on board and need to be supported as they play a major role in most economies.”

Ms. Mohammad called fiscal incentives and enabling environments “game-changers” for governments, underlining the importance of long-term investing that price longer-term risks in sustainable development.

She called a data revolution, the third point, “the lynchpin” to ensure that programmes and interventions are targeting the poor and most vulnerable and marginalized communities and regions.

“Without high quality data, providing the right information on the right things at the right time, designing, financing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies is almost impossible,” she stated.

“Governments need to begin integrating different but comparable data sources; explore citizen-generated data to supplement national statistics; link evidence-based policy planning to financing the SDGs; and integrate data from the private sector, academia and civil society, particularly where indicators are not available from existing systems,” she elaborated.

The empowerment of youth and gender equality are also game changers, Ms. Mohammad continued, underscoring the need to address the issues of rights, voice and participation of women and the youth in the design and implementation of policy choices.

In closing, she maintained that together, “we can strengthen partnerships to achieve our shared ambition: an inclusive, equitable, prosperous and sustainable world, for everyone.”