

Young people worldwide can ‘determine the future of migration,’ says UN senior official

The key role that young people play in determining the future of migration governance around the world is the focus of the session this year of the [International Dialogue on Migration](#) at the UN, convened by the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) on Thursday.

The meeting was focussed on promoting best practices and recommendations on all areas relevant to youth and migration policy, including making young people a part of the decision-making process, empowering young migrants, and countering hate speech against vulnerable people on the move.

In his opening speech to the meeting, António Vitorino, Director General of IOM, declared that, with 1.8 billion young people – those aged between 10 and 24 – in the world today, it is essential to ensure that they are given the opportunity to determine their own futures.

Pointing to the recent protests by schoolchildren against climate change that have taken place in many countries, Mr. Vitorino said that this shows that today’s youth is already finding its voice: “The question is whether we are ready to listen, and act.”

With many young people finding job opportunities limited in their home countries, he continued, they are taking extensive risks, to find a better life overseas. But, he said, while “risk-taking is a characteristic of the young, and one that drives our societies forward with each new generation, such risks should not be taken at the cost of lives or livelihoods.”

António Vitorino also emphasised the importance of education to young migrants, many of whom are denied access to training opportunities in host countries, and experience discrimination in schools. He called on governments to ensure that they are treated “equally, with dignity, and full respect for their human rights.”

Maria Fernanda Espinosa, President of the General Assembly, also took up the theme of risk-taking by young migrants. She mentioned the migrant death toll, estimated at more than 60,000 since the beginning of the century, and the thousands of human trafficking victims. Those young migrants who successfully make it to a desired destination country may face, she said, the “cruel practice’ of separation from their parents by the authorities, xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance.

Ms. Espinosa and Mr. Vitorino were joined on the podium by Jayathma Wickramanayake, The UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, who raised the importance of the UN’s [Youth 2030](#) strategy, which aims to scale up global,

regional and national actions to meet young people's needs, and described the International Dialogue as "an important step" on the way to engaging "the most marginalized young people."

Ms. Wickramanayake said that she was "deeply worried" by the largely negative narrative and political polarization surrounding migration, calling for more recognition to be given to the important role that young people play in "the achievement of sustainable development and their positive contributions to origin and host communities."

The International Dialogue on Migration was created in 2001 by the IOM, to provide a forum for policy dialogue between policy dialogue between host and destination countries, civil society, migrants, experts and other relevant parties.