Global Forum on MIGRATION & DEVELOPMENT

GFMD 2020 RCM (Puebla Process)
Special Session on Public Narratives on Migration

Thursday, 18 June 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

1. The Special Session on Public Narratives on Migration was held as part of the GFMD-RCM (Puebla Process) Regional Consultations hosted by the GFMD 2020 Chair UAE and RCM 2020 Chair Costa Rica. In light of the widespread relevance of the topic of public narratives on migration, this session provided an interactive space for a wide variety of stakeholders to explore how public narratives on migration are evolving in the Americas, particularly as a result of COVID-19, and identify how to build effective partnerships and adjust policies to balance these narratives.

2. The Special Session was co-hosted by the Government of Canada and the GFMD Mayors Mechanism, as co-chairs of the GFMD ad hoc Working Group on Public Narratives on Migration. It was moderated by Ms. Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan (Associate Director of International Program, Migration Policy Institute) and Mr. Rafael Barcelo Durazo (Deputy Director General for International Policy on Human Rights, Government of Mexico), with around 140 participants representing national governments, local governments, international organisations, civil society, youth and the private sector.

3. The agenda and concept note were circulated prior to the Session. Additionally, participants were asked to complete a pre-meeting activity sheet to share resources and links on the topic.

4. This report provides a summary of the discussions and highlights the concrete practices shared by participants during the session.

Welcoming remarks

5. In her opening remarks, Ms. Alexandra Young, Director of International Migration Policy, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, speaking on behalf of Canada in its capacity as Working Group Co-Chair, underlined that communicating effectively about migration is a high priority for the Americas and beyond. Perceptions about migration have become increasingly polarized in recent years, and COVID-19 has made this challenge all the more apparent. Balancing the narrative on migration is not something that states can do alone. Rather, this work requires collaboration and partnership between diverse actors.

6. Ms. Sophie van Haasen, Coordinator of the GFMD Mayors Mechanism, Working Group Co-Chair, likewise stressed that fostering balanced narratives is a priority for the Mayors Mechanism. For cities, narratives and communication are essential tools to ensure that no one is left behind in their daily work. She explained the objective of the special session, which was to seek to understand the current realities and challenges on balancing public narratives in the American region, as well as the emerging opportunities particularly in light of COVID-19.

7. Ms. Andrea Quesada, Communications Unit, General Directorate of Migration and Aliens of Costa Rica, representing the Pro-Tempore 2020 Presidency of the RCM (Puebla Process), highlighted that communication is key as the world is transformed by COVID-19. Understanding how the pandemic has impacted migration, migrants and receiving, sending and transit countries, will allow us to create more effective messages through joint communication projects. On this note, she mentioned that the Government of Costa Rica in 2014 adopted the National Policy for a Society Free of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia, through which effective measures are adopted to promote social, intergenerational, inclusive and diversity-friendly practices that will eradicate forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. She also added that there is a need in the current situaation to build common messages of solidarity, resilience and human rights.

Migration narrative trends in the Americas

8. To set the scene, Ms. Banulescu-Bogdan explained that there are two dueling narratives about migration that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent studies on the US and the UK have shown a substantial shift in public attitudes related to unity and solidarity, with fewer people reporting that they view their country as "divided". At the same time, however, impulses to turn inwards and protect our own groups have become evident, as countries have enacted migration bans in an effort to cordon off the threat of the pandemic. The COVID-19 thus presents both a collective threat and an opportunity to build solidarity that can pierce through existing polarisation. Beyond simply crafting and posting messages on websites, however, it is necessary to ensure that messages are heard and believed, and that new ways are found to get trusted information into the public sphere. Peer-to-peer networks and non-traditional or informal messengers are vital in this regard. Governments need to consider the signaling power of how public resources are allocated, and work towards addressing insecurity for all, not only migrants.

Discussion 1: What is the current reality on the ground in terms of public narratives on migration throughout the region?

9. Moderated by Rafael Barcelo Durazo, the first part of the discussion focused on actions that have been taken by countries, local governments, organisations or businesses to promote balanced narratives and/or counter misinformation; the key challenges and successes they have encountered; and the impacts, both negative and positive, of COVID-19 on public opinion towards migrants and refugees.

10. Participants identified a number of **challenges** in balancing public narratives on migration. Lack of financing for inclusion in Latin America is a particular challenge in light of the current pandemic and economic crisis. One state noted that funding support from other countries had been helpful in overcoming this at times. The polarized narrative on migration is also a concern. The proliferation of (mis)information has caused the general public to doubt true events and succumb to fears, thus making it difficult for evidence-based narratives to have an impact.

Mexico provides accessible data, for instance by identifying the most dangerous migratory routes through Mexico and providing a map of migrant deaths online.

11. Participants recognised the need for **accessible facts, data**, **and analysis** in creating and disseminating narratives on migration. One state advocated for strengthening government websites to improve accessibility and provide information in more user-friendly forms such as images and infographics. They also advocated for the strengthening of dialogue with academia and civil society to create alliances. A business representative emphasized that migration narratives based

on facts and data are needed to support flexibility in migration policies, which is required for sustainable businesses.

12. In order to effectively craft evidence-based communication campaigns, a number of participants emphasized that it is necessary to first **identify the intended audience** and the goal of the campaign. Once the audience is identified, the campaign can focus on connecting with the audience through their key values. Oxfam shared information about the research they conducted in Spain and Latin America which identified that most of the public sit in the 'middle' – neither in favour nor against migration – and can be an effective target audience. However, participants also highlighted that there is a need to take a broad view of the migration phenomenon and consider other relevant audiences, such as the institutions which provide services to migrants to raise awareness of new laws, regulations and narratives.

In Spain, Maldita.es, which is partnered with Oxfam, provides reliable information via Whatsapp to support people in fact-checking hoaxes on social media.

13. In addition to identifying an audience, representatives of all stakeholder groups drew attention to the importance of **identifying the right channels of communication**. Particularly, participants identified a waning trust in government and traditional news media, and the need to engage audiences through peer-to-peer channels and social media. Diverse partnerships, including with youth and journalists, are key to this process. A business representative also argued that now is the time for employers to raise their voices and highlight the virtues of a diverse workforce.

14. Participants highlighted the need to align messaging and action, specifically by taking a **holistic approach to inclusion**. There is a need to look beyond the binary debate on migration and see the phenomenon as a whole – taking into account the whole migration cycle (including areas of transit and return), and the links between migration and development. Migrants must be treated as human beings and not just statistics, and rights must be guaranteed to all people at all stages of the development plan. A local authority noted that resentment can arise when services are provided for migrants but not local populations, so policies must be inclusive of whole communities.

15. In relation to the specific circumstances created by **COVID-19**, some participants emphasized the opportunity provided to create increased solidarity by building on public perceptions of migrants as essential contributors to their communities, as migrants have been providing important services during the crisis.

- *Ecuador's public policy plan 'Toda Una Vida' examines the rights of migrants at all stages of the development plan, and includes a human mobility plan to promote universal citizenship.*
- *Mexico's Intersecretarial Commission for Comprehensive Care in Migration Matters provides a coordinating working group to facilitate integration in host communities.*
- *The City of León, Mexico, has a Programme for the Care of Migrants, which involves a range of different institutions, agencies and civil society organisations (e.g. sanitation and health departments, universities, rural women's institutes) to collect statistics and improve services for internal migrants.*
- *The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR) provides a city-level platform for inclusive policy-making, capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.*

Initiatives on creating evidence-based campaigns
- Oxfam International conducted a [study](#) focused on analysing perceptions and narratives about migration through the frames constructed by groups in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, October 2019. Oxfam Intermon also developed a [guide](#) on public opinions on migration and how they might be shaped in Spain, October 2018.
- [Impacto Social Metropolitan Group](#) led a campaign in Mexico to foster the integration of migrants and refugees. In developing the campaign it was identified that young people (from 20-25 years old) were more open to messages fostering integration, and then the values most important to this group were investigated (security and solidarity) Impacto Social Metropolitan Group is also carrying out an analysis of other campaigns in the Latin American and Carribean Region, including in Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Costa Rica, to identify which campaigns have already been developed, with which actors.
- [Welcoming International](#) is embarking on a campaign on social solidarity in the context of COVID-19 with the Mayors Migration Council and More in Common, working with mayors and local authorities in 6 countries around the world. The initiative aims to seek ways to a) maintain increased social solidarity long enough to enact policy reform or nationwide communications infrastructure, and b) to advance the narrative of migrants as essential contributor without alienating others in the society.
- The Government of Canada is working to promote balanced narratives on migration through the [Immigration Matters](#) campaign, which aims to show the benefits of immigration at the community level through emotionally compelling stories combined with facts.

Discussion 2: Looking ahead, what are some opportunities or partnership ideas that can support a balanced narrative on migration?¨

16. The second part of the discussion, moderated by Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, took a forward-looking approach to balancing the narrative on migration. Asked to identify new opportunities, particularly in light of COVID-19, and strategies that involve non-traditional partners, participants reiterated the need to **focus on narratives to achieve social cohesion** and prosperity. It is necessary to move beyond simply reading speeches in order to take action to maintain an open dialogue, enhance positive messages, and address negative messages.

17. Support for a variety of **partnerships** was reiterated throughout the session. Local governments are often more trusted than national governments, and so can be a very effective instigator for balancing narratives. Many international organisations and civil society organisations can provide guidance or assistance to national governments in their messaging or creation of policy. Partnerships between business and government can address general barriers to well-functioning migration, as well as barriers specific to displaced people.

Local governments working towards narrative change

- In 2006 the city of Nashville, USA, launched a welcoming community campaign to reinforce the message that when we effectively include migrants in local communities, everyone benefits. The Nashville campaign included the following elements:
    - Leadership: working with the Mayor and local companies;
    - Shared values: first gathering opinions through research in the community and then using this to reach out to people's existing values; and
    - Localising the economic context: working with the Chamber of Commerce to conduct local economic studies.
- The municipality of **Lampedusa** highlighted its involvement in the EU community Snapshot from the Borders, which unites 35 partners - including 19 border territories, and regions of France, Austria, and Spain – with the goal of improving critical understanding and public opinion about global interdependencies determining migration flows towards European borders. The project focuses on sharing voices and experiences ("snapshots") from the borders to improve Europeans' understanding of migration as a development issue, and to help build bonds of solidarity. It implements a 'bottom-up' approach which focuses on local decision making and the involvement of local stakeholders.

Partnerships with the private sector:

- The Government of Costa Rica is working with business owners to raise awareness about the protection of the rights of undocumented migrant workers.
- Welcoming America has partnered with Ad Council, a group of advertising companies working together to deliver a $24 million inclusion campaign about the benefits that migration has and all the values that migrants share.
- Partnerships with the private sector which showcase practical, real-life examples of the positive contributions of migrants can also be an effective way to balance the narrative on public migration. Talent Beyond Boundaries identifies displaced people who have needed skills and connects them with employers, and care facility Glen Haven Manor's partnership with civil society organisation RefugePoint makes offers to skilled refugee healthcare workers for positions which could not be filled locally.

Partnerships with international organisations:

- IOM's #XenophobiaZero community brings together a variety of partners. For instance, in Costa Rica it is currently working with UNESCO and UNHCR. The community has three components:
    - A sharing space: providing a space to share content (videos, podcasts, documents, etc.) that speaks positively about migrants and their contributions. As institutional discourse is often distrusted, this allows citizens to tell their own stories.
    - A call for action: calling on the community to report xenophobic content or real-world incidents. The IOM then provides arguments, stories and facts to dismantle these xenophobic narratives.
    - A call for analysis: creating an Observatory on Xenophobia to collect information and analyse trends in xenophobic behaviour.

Concluding Remarks

5. The moderators and Working Group Co-Chairs identified a number of key takeaways from the discussion, including:
   - The clear importance of multi-sectoral partnerships and joint cooperation.
   - The need to identify a target audience and effective channels by which to connect with that audience, including by tapping into peer-to-peer networks.
   - Messages and actions focused on building solidarity, especially in the context of COVID-19, should encompass whole communities rather than focusing exclusively on migrants.
   - It is critical to build messages that come from the ground-up and are informed by the local context.
   - Messages need to be authentic and must align with audiences' experiences.
   - Despite regional differences, communication strategies can be useful to learn from and to apply to local realities across regions.

6. The outcomes of the special session will be presented at the GFMD-RCM (Puebla Process) Regional Consultation Online Closing Plenary on 3 July 2020. Together with the outcomes of the pre-meeting activity and the Working Group's survey on public narratives on migration, these outcomes will also feed into the ongoing work of the GFMD ad hoc Working Group on Public Narratives on Migration.

Prepared by the GFMD Support Unit