

## Talking points

# Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the UNECE region

12 and 13 November 2020

Roundtable 1 – Thursday, 12 November 2020, 10:30 – 12:10

Contribution on **GCM objective 15**: Provide access to basic services for migrants

Your Excellencies.... Ladies and Gentlemen.... Esteemed colleagues,

By adopting the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Member States have acknowledged that migrants should be empowered to exercise their rights and obligations. In objective 15 'Provide access to basic services' Member States committed to ensure that all migrants, regardless of their migration status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services. They further commit to strengthen migrant-inclusive service delivery systems, notwithstanding that nationals and regular migrants may be entitled to more comprehensive service provision, while ensuring that any differential treatment must be based on law, proportionate and pursue a legitimate aim, in accordance with international human rights law.

In today's global crisis situation, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the access to services – such as health services, but also adequate housing, water and sanitation – is more relevant than ever.

COVID-19 has put a spotlight on the positive contributions migrants have for our societies and many actors – both governmental but also private sector actors and the broader public – today have an increased understanding that our economies and systems rely on migrant workers. Migrants keep our health systems running; they work in food production and food processing industries; in transport; they are essential for public service delivery in many critical sectors. Migrants' contributions to the social and economic stability of our societies have become more visible during the pandemic.

On the other hand, there are some critical precautions for preventing the spread of COVID-19 and responding to the pandemic such as "washing our hands, staying home and keeping a physical distance", which many migrants in vulnerable situations can't take. They live in underserved or informal parts of cities, in overcrowded accommodations or temporary shelter, sharing rooms and sanitation facilities with many others; many are homeless. They face barriers in accessing services due to language barriers, lack of financial means or social protection schemes – and fear of being deported due to their migration status. They face additional challenges for informing themselves on prevention measures and many face discrimination and social exclusion – not only in COVID-19 times. When economies started to decline, migrants were among the first to lose their jobs, which also impacted remittances and affected family members in places of origin. Even though children are not strongly impacted by the pandemic, migrant children struggle from the socio-economic impacts

of the pandemic and with many schools closed or regions in lock-down, faced increased risks to be left behind for their education.

Ladies and Gentlemen, COVID-19 has highlighted the need to include migrants and their families into our service provision systems. And the pandemic has increased inequalities – not only between migrants and local populations, but also between rich and poor. This inequality is often reflected in a spatial inequality – with the level of service provision being different in rural than in urban areas, but also within urban areas, where some parts of cities are less connected, have a lower level of health, education or social services, where housing conditions and public space might not be adequate. And it is in those underserved areas in cities and peri-urban areas, where people in vulnerable situation live.

The Global Compact for Migration calls for human-rights based, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches – and during the pandemic, the important role local authorities have to play for inclusive service provision has become more apparent. While national level actors have led overall coordination for the prevention and response, local authorities – often in cooperation with civil society actors – have come up with innovative and efficient actions for including migrants: expanding access to health and social services, but also providing food, reducing costs for water or electricity, increasing access to housing or supporting tenure rights to reduce forced evictions. They have established coordination bodies for ensuring that migrants' inclusion goes across different sectors such as immigration services, but also housing, transport, health and education; they have intensified their efforts to provide information in different languages; they have invested in keeping migrant children following their education by enabling additional for online schooling and strengthened engagement – and control - with private sector firms for ensuring that living and working conditions of migrants are improved.

Local actors have strongly engaged to change the narrative on migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic – aiming to reduce xenophobia and underlining the economic, social and cultural contributions of migrants. And some migrant health workers have become well-known on social media for their engagement in responding to the crisis and ensuring the health services could be provided in many cities in the region.

The Global Compact for Migration can't be implemented without a strong coordination between different government levels and between different sectors and a cooperation with civil society and private sector actors. While all UN organizations work under their specific mandates for supporting migrants – with UN-Habitat's mandate focusing on migration and displacement in urban areas and advancing sustainable urban development, the UN Migration Network has established a specific working group on Access to Services for supporting Member States and providing guidance and recommendations – not only for COVID-19 preparedness, response or recovery, but beyond. The Working Group is led by WHO and UN-Habitat and includes UN agencies, but also partners such as the Red Cross, trade unions and different NGOs as well as local governments represented by UCLG. This inclusive and cross-sectoral approach as well as the need for vertical and horizontal cohesion

very well corresponds to UN-Habitat's normative and operational work and we are working closely with our partners for advancing sustainable and inclusive urbanization that making sure, no-one is left behind.

As a closing, I will quote from the SG Policy Briefs on "People on the move" and the SG's Policy Brief on "COVID-19 in an Urban World":

- *No-one is safe until everyone is safe:* We cannot afford to leave anyone behind in our response and recovery efforts, especially refugees and migrants;
- *Exclusion is costly in the long-run whereas inclusion pays off for everyone;*
- *People on the move are part of the solution;*
- *COVID-19 highlights the critical role local governments play as front-line responders in crisis response, recovery and rebuilding.*
- *The crisis has also demonstrated the power of community, and the importance of solidarity and social safety nets in mitigating the impact of shocks.*
- *An inclusive urban future is necessary for resilience.*

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.

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