

THEMATIC MEETING 2: The role of communications in promoting widespread recognition of the benefits of migration, improving public perceptions of migrants, combating discrimination, and promoting integration

Co-conveners: Greece and Mexico

29 April 2015, Geneva

The 2nd UN High Level Dialogue (HLD) in October 2013 affirmed the value of the Global forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in fostering a constructive dialogue on migrants' rights. From 2008, the annual GFMD meetings explored the key role of respect for migrants' rights and protection of these rights in maximizing migrants' human development and minimizing the costs of migration.

However, despite the increasing evidence of migration's multiple benefits (including social, economic and cultural) to home and host societies, as well as to migrants themselves and their families, negative perceptions of migrants and migration persist. Public misperceptions and misconceptions are exacerbated by political opportunism and biased media attention. In many countries, policy-makers and government leaders continue to face the huge challenge of striking a balance between responding to international protection needs, addressing demographic challenges and promoting diversity on one hand, and avoiding the politicization of migrants and migration on the other hand. Failure to integrate migrants well into the fabric of society breeds discriminatory and xenophobic opinions and attitudes which, in turn, result in social instability, pose a threat to the human security of migrants and their families, and undermine their developmental potentials. As past GFMD discussions noted, successful integration not only contributes to the well-being of migrants, but also enhances their ability to contribute to their origin and destination countries. This, in turn, has a positive impact on the perception of migrants.

The Declaration of the 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development acknowledged the important role that migrants play as partners in the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, and recognized the need to improve public perceptions of migrants and migration (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 3 October 2013 A/RES/68/4 of 21 January 2014).

In his eight-point agenda for action on "Making Migration Work" (2013 HLD), UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon challenged the international community to improve public perceptions of migrants. In particular, agenda point 5 states: "*There is a need to combat discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and their families by creating greater public awareness about the situations migrants experience and the contributions they make to countries of origin and destination. Such efforts could be promoted through a partnership of the private sector, labour unions, the media, educational institutions and migrants themselves, based on the latest available evidence and highlighting the rights and responsibilities of both migrants and non-migrants.*"

The second GFMD 2014-2015 thematic meeting on “*The role of communications in promoting widespread recognition of the benefits of migration, improving public perceptions of migrants, combating discrimination, and promoting integration*” responds to this challenge and notes that more than a year after the 2013 HLD, there is yet no clear framework on what should be the priority areas for work and what specific actions are to be taken by states and other concerned actors to monitor and counter negative perceptions.

Co-convened by the Governments of Greece and Mexico, the meeting aims to shed light on the growing evidence that the well-being of migrants is facilitated when the benefits of migration are widely recognized and communicated. As well, it intends to promote a more global reflection on an issue that has largely been discussed from the perspective of highly-developed migrant-receiving countries in the north, by also looking at the experiences of migrant-receiving countries in the south as well as countries of origin.

Through this thematic meeting, the GFMD will highlight the importance of migrants’ contributions to economic, social and cultural development in countries of origin and destination. It will explore ways of promoting a more evidence-based communication about migrants and migration by discussing why public misperceptions and stereotypes persist in the face of factual accounts of migrations’ benefits. It will look at vital communication channels at the local, national and international levels and the ways they can address pervasive negative public perceptions. Sharing of various communications tools and messages that have been effective in combating discrimination and promoting migrant integration will be encouraged. Sophisticated uses of social media, traditional media, and face-to face exposure to migrants have been shown in some settings to be effective in preventing the consolidation of xenophobic attitudes, and promoting respect for migrants’ human rights.

Additionally this thematic meeting will attempt to identify successful policies and programs linking local authorities and educational institutions, civil society, media, international organizations or other social partners together in an effort to counter the negative perceptions of migrants and migration and promote social diversity and migrants’ acceptance. The principle of shared responsibility and a development-based approach will guide attempts to identify pragmatic partnerships at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

The outcomes of this thematic meeting are intended to enrich the GFMD 2014-2015 Roundtable session 1.1 on “*Partnerships to promote inclusion and protect the human rights of all migrants in order to achieve the full benefits of migration.*” Good practices and lessons learned will also be added to the GFMD Policy and Practice Database (<http://www.gfmd.org/pfp/ppd>).