

Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

Opening plenary

Istanbul, Turkey, 14 October 2015

GFMD Civil Society Chair's Report 2015

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Choices

Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen:

May I begin by offering condolences, on behalf of all civil society here our heartfelt sympathies to the people of Turkey, to you, Mister the Prime Minister, Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu and to your government for the loss of lives and the suffering of so many in Saturday's attack.

Over the past two days, 280 civil society delegates came together during the Civil Society Days of the GFMD, looking at choices and solutions. Close to 50% of us represent migrant or diaspora NGOs. All regions of the world widely represented. Joining us were close to 100 representatives of governments and international organisations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The gravity of the questions before us impose on us all to think critically, to learn some hard lessons of the past and to challenge assumptions that have underpinned too much of the response of the international community so far.

The civil society delegates emphatically reject building blocks of migration policy based on prejudice and fear, of walls, barbed wires and prisons, of stereotypes, of "us and them".

In fact those are not the only choices possible! Rather than build walls, a better choice is needed to build a positive legacy for our planet for generations to come.

Let's look for long-lasting solutions built on the two pillars of successful policy: values and evidence.

First, values. We feel a strong sense of hope, rising from the encouraging text of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and from its support from all corners of the world which now awaits effective partnerships for implementation. This Agenda is anchored in values calling for universal respect of human rights, and encompassing all human rights. This is how our values are codified. Leave no one behind. Migrants' rights are human rights.

Second, evidence. Facts, data, views and opinions, the reality of the world in which we live.

There is a deceptive and dangerous logic at work with assumptions all-too-often embraced as common wisdom and manipulated by short sighted politicians. Solutions cannot be constructed on assumptions that are not founded. Unfounded assumptions too often lead to policy responses that criminalize irregular migration with unnecessary detention, heighten the vulnerability of migrants, and open the door to a wide range of human rights abuses.

Migration policy and its implementation must be rooted both in evidence of the real world in which we live, and in the human rights framework. That's not a choice, but a necessity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

“Gentle optimism and fierce determination” is how we describe the tone of the conversations during the Civil Society Days. We all can do better - and have to do better. This is the tone of the energy we engage in the collaboration with States on concrete projects and measurable progress within Civil Society's 5-year 8-point Action Plan.

Not forgetting the importance - the self-determination and agency - of migrant women and migrant diaspora, everywhere, where evidence resoundingly shows that access to human rights makes all the difference, not just to protection but to economic human development, social inclusion and healthier societies.

With this “gentle optimism and fierce determination”, let's acknowledge progress and the need for more ambition.

1. On children in the context of migration

We applaud Somalia for ratifying two weeks ago the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 196th State to do so!

The United States is the last remaining State that is yet to ratify the Convention. As we have moved to universal global goals with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, isn't it time for the universal ratification of the Child Rights Convention?

We urge all stakeholders to act on the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children in context of migration, being them separated, unaccompanied or with their parents.

We appreciate governments that are leading the way in applying the recommendations on ending child immigration detention, on family reunification, and on access to justice, health, education and other services for children. A number of these obligations are particularly relevant to the topics of the Global Forum on Migration and Development 2015. We urge others to follow that lead.

The right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration should serve as the underlying obligation upon which all related migration laws, policies, and services in countries of origin, transit, and destination must hinge.

Unfortunately we see an increase of evidence of police and other authorities acting in ways that physically harm or traumatize migrant children. The obligation to respect and protect the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence needs to be upheld by all branches of Governments in all migration contexts.

2. On Migrants in crisis

Civil society has been working actively within and alongside the Migrants in Countries of Crisis (MICIC) initiative led by the United States and Philippines after a call for action at the HLD in 2013. By June 2016 MICIC will make available principles and practices for assistance and protection to migrants in countries in crisis. Civil society welcomes this step. But instead of looking only at “countries” in crisis, civil society calls to look more fully at the “migrants” in crisis, improving - without delay - needs-first and rights-based responses to migrants in distress in transit, including opportunities for orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration.

We also call on all Governments to collectively and individually root their response to large influx of asylum-seekers and migrants into their territory, particularly at their borders, in their human rights obligations. We urge all Governments across the world to increase their efforts to accommodate people in need of protection.

3. 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Five of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets refer explicitly to migrants and migration; other goals and targets also apply. What an achievement! We were nowhere close to any such reference when the HLD took place 2 years ago. Now and through March 2016, discussions regarding the translation of targets into national policy, implementation and monitoring of the targets will be ongoing and thus a continued role taken by civil society.

4. On Labour Rights and Conventions

The Domestic Worker Convention, 2013 (C189) is quickly becoming the ILO’s fastest ratified convention, and, although work remains to be done, it offers an advocacy platform for civil society organisations to push governments to make positive policy changes that protect the rights of domestic workers, many of them women.

Shared norms or shared interests for bilateral cooperation is the rationale to call for ratification of, international agreements that would enhance migrant rights and protections, such as the UN Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and relevant ILO resolutions and conventions. Here is another good choice whose time has come: it’s high time for Europe to sign these conventions, together with other main countries of destination.

5. On recruitment

Since the last Global Forum there has been so much action on addressing issues of recruitment: “Fair Migration Agenda”; “Fair Recruitment Initiative”; “International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS)”, partnerships between international organisations and the private sector, movement among recruitment agencies themselves, particularly in Asia, and most recently ground-breaking legislation in the Gulf region. This is an area where governments and private businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to choose reforms and policy changes. Even if at times only on paper at this stage, it illustrates a degree of progress. This is reinforced by strong and steady action by civil society—including migrant workers themselves.

6. On xenophobia

To the great surprise of much of the world, hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens volunteer to help migrants and refugees arriving daily. Underreported and perhaps unexpected, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the Middle East, the Americas, civil society – citizens- step forward to express concrete solidarity with migrants and refugees.

The other side of the coin is choosing to view migrants as somehow undeserving of human rights. Migrants are depicted as invasive, by a belligerent vocabulary. People “flooding”, “swamping”, “jumping the queue,” “threatening our way of life”... The siege mentality fanned by an increasing number of populist leaders and by xenophobic media is disgraceful and dishonest. Society that is truly “civil” demands a new choice: to no longer play with—or surrender to--such intolerance.

7. On governance

The space for civil society is shrinking rapidly worldwide. Since the HLD, more than 60 countries have passed or drafted laws that curtailed the activity of our organizations. The influence exercised by powerful actors that have no democratic legitimacy is increasing, sometimes with governments’ complicity. The criminalisation of citizens, for helping people to migrate safely, even on a voluntary basis, is unacceptable.

We claim a rightful place by demanding genuine participation in governance at local, national, regional and global levels. A place at the decision making table and co-responsibility. We look forward to the developments around the governance of the GFMD on which, yes, we will contribute to think out of the box. We engage in short paths for a long road in the collaboration with governments and governments need to take more action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The recognition of our common humanity can guide us to make the right choices.

We are at a tipping point.

Are we choosing—and tipping—in the right direction?