INTERACTION COUNCIL

Chairmen's Report on the High-Level Expert Group Meeting

"Ethical and Durable Approaches to Migrant and Refugee Issues"

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Introduction

The InterAction Council has long explored themes connected to refugees and migration: conflict, peace, the global economy, health, youth unemployment, and climate change sectors. This is also one area wherein current discussions on refugees and migrants are lacking: there is little discussion on ethics in migration and refugee policies, and little to no discussion on human responsibilities in relation to migrants and refugees. At its 35th Annual Plenary Meeting in Beijing, China, the InterAction Council touched on the deepening issues posed by displaced people, and the need for wealthier nations to do more to help. In this spirit, the Council committed to making migrant and refugee issues a central theme of its 2019 plenary meeting and agreed to host a preparatory meeting in Cyprus.

On 15th January 2019 in Limassol, Cyprus, the Council convened a High-Level Expert Group Meeting co-chaired by former President George Vassiliou and Secretary-General Thomas Axworthy on, "Ethical and Durable Approaches to Migrant and Refugee Issues."

In Beijing, the urgent refugee dimension of the crisis in Venezuela was discussed. According to the United Nations, three million Venezuelans (10 per cent of the population) have fled, and as we met in Limassol there were daily reports about how the Venezuela crisis was continuing to escalate.

The purpose of this meeting was to find durable solutions for refugees who fall outside the current protection regime, understand and explore the benefits of migration while considering human and ethical approaches to combatting criminality and exploitation, and examine anti-migration sentiment and the responsibility of politicians and media in the debate on migration.

Durable solutions for refugees

The UN Refugee Agency reported that at the end of 2017 a record number of people, a cumulative total of 68.5 million, were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. It is the largest number of displaced people since the Second World War. This number includes 25.4 million refugees (individuals recognized and protected under international law through the 1951 Refugee Convention), 3.1 million asylum seekers (someone claiming to be a refugee but whose claim has not yet been evaluated) and 40 million internally displaced people (those forced to leave their homes due to conflict, human rights abuses or natural disasters but who have not crossed a state border). The recent developments in Venezuela prove the significance of this case.

In 2015, there was a substantial increase in the number of people forcibly fleeing in part due to the Syrian war (the Syrian conflict has forced one half of that country's population to leave home with no end of their displacement in sight). The sudden, yet expected, increase in refugees prompted States to restrict their asylum legislation and caused the EU Commission to propose an amended Common European Asylum System, with a more restrictive approach than before. However, the vast majority of refugees are hosted by developing countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, in conflict-ridden regions. Many of these States, and many UN-led refugee camps in these States, struggle due to inadequate funding to meet even basic needs.

There is a lack of solidarity in refugee protection, as wealthier States put increasing resources on border control and externalize their migration management to developing States. Increasingly, less wealthy States are left to deal with refugees and migrants without the necessary means or even necessary legislation in place. Peter Sutherland, the former UN Special Representative for International Migration, put the ethical dimension well: "Refugees are the responsibility of the world…Proximity doesn't define responsibility."

Iran, a population of 80 million people, is home to nearly one million registered and an estimated two million unregistered refugees from Afghanistan. Remarkably, Iran provides free education for all refugee children, and health insurance and other supports for many more. Host countries such as Iran need greater support from the international community to encourage these integration efforts and to help establish the conditions whereby refugees can return home. The recently adopted Global Compact on Refugees provides the framework for such support, and implementation should be a priority for the global community.

Although the surge of refugees has put tremendous strain on host countries, there are examples of successful integration. In Turkey, according to the Human Development Foundation (INGEV), as of 2017 there were 8,100 Syrian-owned companies employing 100,000 people. Integration can take place effectively where infrastructure exists, such as in areas where there is demographic decline. A handbook that highlights successful case studies starting at the community level from places such as Canada and Sweden and offers a cost/benefit analysis for policymakers could be helpful to host countries that often have limited political and economic capacity to support integration.

According to the World Bank, over 1.1 billion people worldwide lack any form of legal identity. This issue affects people in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, primarily in low-income

countries where births are often not registered. Refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and stateless people are disproportionately more likely to be among them. Without a trusted and official way to prove who they are, many are unable to access healthcare, education, and other vital public services. And because they are uncounted, governments and international organizations struggle to deliver the most basic levels of assistance.

For the forcibly displaced, a lack of identity severely exacerbates the challenges that they already face. Not only can it be difficult or even impossible to locate identification documents while fleeing violence, it may be too dangerous for those being persecuted to carry such documentation on their person. Even for those who do have these credentials, paper-documents can be easily lost, stolen, or destroyed.

Traditional means of registering and providing identification to displaced people fall short, failing to sufficiently address the ethical, privacy, and security concerns that are critical for vulnerable populations. Digital identity "passports" that protect privacy, are managed by the user, and are portable across time and space, offer refugees and displaced people a way to securely and safely prove and build-up their own digital identities, providing access to the rights and services that they need and deserve.

Recommendations
- Urge States to support the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and sign on to and implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. As part of engagement with the Compact process, States should participate as Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) pilot countries and encourage migration dialogues.
- Host countries or hubs for refugees such as Iran, Jordan, Turkey, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Colombia should receive additional international support to help them carry the burden of hosting refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Myanmar and Venezuela.
- Encourage the creation and circulation of a policy handbook on "local integration." This is one of the three durable solutions facing the greatest challenge, as neighbouring host countries often have limited political and economic capacity to support integration. A policy handbook could include: case studies; an analysis of what is required to promote certain rights; and a cost/benefit analysis of some of the most pertinent policies.

- Support the development of strong ethical and technical standards for digital identity that are universal in nature, where data is owned and controlled by the user.
- Work to ensure that all refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons have access to a digital identity that protects their privacy, and is portable within and across borders, and across time.
- Recognize that user-managed, privacy-protecting and portable digital identity is not at odds with government-issued identity documents; initiatives like the [Pan-Canadian Trust Framework](#) show how these principles can be implemented by governments to ensure technical interoperability and improve trust.

Understanding migration

Migrants are different from refugees. Refugees are those fleeing persecution. Around the world, people migrate voluntarily for many reasons: work, studies, family, love, or simply for the purpose of seeking new opportunities and a better life. Increasingly, people migrate due to climate change. In 2017, the United Nations estimated there were 258 million migrants (3.4 percent of the world's population), so refugees only make up a small proportion of people on the move. Regular ("legal") migrants travel and remain within the systems in place for legal migration. Typically, they possess the required visas and residence permits. Conversely, irregular ("illegal") migrants, are those who remain in countries without authorization. They may arrive with a visa and overstay it, or they may cross borders illegally. Irregular migrants are difficult to record precisely because their stay is by nature unauthorized and often undocumented. They are amongst the most vulnerable populations in the world.

These irregular migrants travel in part along the same migratory paths as regular migrants or refugees. But all aforementioned groups are governed by different rules and regulations. This creates a complex environment for enforcement of border control measures. At the border, a refugee has different rights than an irregular migrant, but a refugee might enter as an irregular migrant. A regular migrant who has entered legally on a visa might at a later stage apply for asylum and become a refugee; or might overstay a visa and become an irregular migrant. Creating appropriate legislation and practice for these mixed migration flows, while fully respecting refugee and human rights law, remains challenging for States.

To a certain extent, restrictive labour migration policies push migrants to irregular pathways. Developed States are focused on attracting highly educated individuals, while those with no

education are pushed to migrate irregularly. It is a discrepancy that there seems to be an unauthorized work market for irregular migrants all over the world (the agricultural businesses in the US and southern Europe mostly rely on labour by irregular migrants), while States are officially only willing to build legal migration paths for highly-skilled and highly paid migrants.

Despite the many myths that migrants (both regular and irregular) take jobs, the research and data show that migration is of net benefit to welcoming nations. Economic development and an investment in education would help States counter this negative narrative, particularly in Africa, in those cases where the cause of migration is a lack of opportunities and not due to conflict. This was the theme of a recent Youth Migration Summit hosted by the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library in Nigeria that emphasized "building bridges not walls" by creating greater opportunities for young people to stop irregular migration. One positive example is Africa's Great Green Wall, which combats desertification and climate change through large scale planting and restoring of degraded land, while creating jobs and preventing the need for migration.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) estimates that at least 2.5 million people were smuggled across international borders in 2016. This constitutes roughly 10 per cent of the total global stock of migrants, a figure that shows the key role that smuggling networks play in facilitating movement for many migrants. Smugglers can quickly adapt to changes in border security and destination demand among migrants, posing a challenge for border management officials. While smuggling routes are volatile, the hubs where supply and demand meet remain relatively constant. The stability of these economic hubs represents an opportunity for both policymakers and practitioners.

Recommendations
- Support the approach of H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo to build bridges of opportunity within and between countries; not walls. Citizens must have opportunities for education and employment at home as they do abroad.
- Call for a vigorous education campaign in schools, in social media, and in academe to disseminate the facts about migration. There are many myths about migrant workers taking jobs away in the developed world, when in fact migration leads to economic advantage.
- As with need for a handbook on local integration, a "guide to innovations regarding migration" handbook should be created to highlight innovations such as the concept of putting pre-processing centres along migration routes and ideas for improving markets in migration hubs.

- Target migration hubs to combat smuggling. Initiatives that target hubs – for example, provision of legal migration alternatives at hub locations and greater protection around these hubs from smugglers – may generate longer-lasting changes in migration and smuggling decisions.

The responsibility of media and political leaders

Responsibility sharing for refugees is one of the greatest weaknesses in the current international system. While the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) struggles to meet its funding needs for refugee protection in developing countries, wealthy States are increasingly devoting their resources to keeping refugees and migrants outside of their realms. The EU is nearly tripling its annual budget on border management from EUR 12 billion to EUR 33 billion in its 2021-2027 financial framework. The figures for border control are far greater than the US$7 billion budget of the UNHCR, all of which is donated voluntarily by States. Currently, the UNHCR only receives from these donations less than 60 per cent of the budget it needs to meet the escalating refugee crisis. This funding gap must be closed. Commitments to support and protect the people living in refugee camps should at least be as large as the amounts spent on border security.

The current political climate too often calls for a restrictive migration policy. Discussions on refugees and migrants have dominated the political agendas of several recent elections and referendums. Migration was a key topic in the US Presidential election, in the Brexit-vote, and in elections across the European continent (France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden, to name a few). In many of these elections, some parties and politicians have resorted to fear-based rhetoric and even racism. Populist nationalists are quick to blame "the other" for citizen ills and disappointments, which is often directed at Muslims; while the alternative right, using social media especially, is unscrupulous about using myths and exaggerations to poison discourse.

Moderates and progressives must not be passive in this battle for public opinion. A favourite tactic of the nationalist populist camp is to weaken public discourse through concentration of media and effective social media campaigns. Such campaigns have succeeded in part because workers have suffered from wage stagnation and feel they have been abandoned by the elites. Inequality breeds resentment which has been turned against the "other."

Journalists, by spending more time in smaller communities, outside of the large urban centres, may portray a more accurate reflection of voter sentiment. Stories that link the benefits of

migration could help change perception, as most people do not realize how much of their daily needs are made possible by migrants, from the food that they eat to the doctor that treats their illness.

Recommendations
- Economic burdens and opportunities should be shared equally; and fairness, a central concept in the IAC's well-known Universal Declaration of Responsibilities, must be part of any debate on who to tax and what to spend.
- Call on leaders of political parties, business, the media, and civic society to rebut xenophobic stoking of fears about migration and refugees and apply the values of tolerance and protection of the most vulnerable contained in the Universal Declaration of Responsibilities.
- Cyber security threats attack many features of modern life but one of the most vicious uses of trolls and fake news sites has been in enflaming public opinion on migration and refugees. The InterAction Council should convene an Experts' meeting on how best to meet the cyber threat.

In preparing for this meeting, the InterAction Council was ably assisted by our partners ID2020 and the World Refugee Council, both of which have released recent reports calling for action on refugee and migration issues, available here and here.

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