GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT 2016

A DIALOGUE ON THE GLOBAL MIGRATION COMPACT:

Under the Ninth Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Chairmanship

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Talking points on Social Aspects of the Global Migration Compact

This thematic meeting is an opportunity to explore issues of significance that could – or perhaps should – be addressed in the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

It is evidently not the time to frame recommendations, much less to negotiate them. That moment will come but we are not quite there.

The more modest assignment I would propose for participants in this session is to begin the task of identifying the social dimensions of the migratory experience that should be addressed, that deserve attention.

Given the limitations of time, my objective will not be to draw up an exhaustive list of social determinants or impacts but rather to get a discussion going, to prompt our two discussants to thought and reflection in the hope that their observations will, in turn, incite you –

the participants in this session - to react, to challenge our ideas and – why not - to propose other paths of reflection.

I will touch on 3 points.

I. The migrant is not a "disembodied cogwheel in a globalized socio-economic system"

If we do so, we run the great risk of overlooking the fact that migrants are, first and foremost, human beings; and human beings are, by their very nature social beings. Any treatment of migration that does not take account of this reality is bound to be, at best, incomplete; at worst, fundamentally wrong.

In a world that is greatly preoccupied with the twin economic drivers of growth and productivity it is all too easy to see migrants primarily – or even exclusively – as contributors to the economic commonwealth of countries of origin or destination. But a migrant is never "just and economic agent or actor" – however important that role may be…

II. The "ties that bind"matter

"L'homme", said the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery, and we must forgive him for that because he obviously meant men and women, "est un noeud de relations". "The human being is a tightly woven mesh of relationships" is my clumsy translation. This notion of relationship is of relevance throughout the migration cycle, from the pre-departure phase through departure, arrival and settlement in the country of destination and eventual return to the country of origin.

I would therefore dare to suggest that there can be no proper understanding of migration without account being taken at all times of

those evolving webs of relationship that bind the migrant to all those who play a part (whether positive or negative) in the determination of the nature of his or her migrant experience.

For the compact to be complete we must be sure to bear these complex social equations in mind. But which are the ones that matter the most? Which ones should be given priority of attention in the compact?

III.   Which social aspects matter? Which "social" questions must be addressed?

- **The decision to migrate**, the switch that sets the migration process in motion, is rarely an individual decision. Many significant others have a hand in it: spouses, partners, relatives, authority figures in the community and media outlets. What can be done to better inform decision making processes, to ensure that "best choices" are made?

- **Family relationships** remain of significance throughout the migration cycle. Two particular sets of family related considerations have attracted a great deal of policy attention:
    - The availability or, as the case may be, the non- availability of family reunification options are of immediate interest to migrants. Under what conditions are **family reunion** entitlements desirable, necessary or even essential? Following from that, what obligations may states (or may they not) reasonably require a migrant to fulfil to enable family reunion to take place?
    - When family reunion is not desired/desirable/available/appropriate/achievable, what

provisions should be made for the **families left behind**? There is a rapidly growing body of research on the unpredictable and unforeseen impacts of migration on family members who remain in the country of departure. To name but a few: the changing nature of the relationship between the absent migrant "provider" and the spouse "receiver of support"; the impact of an absentee parent on growing children; the mutations in care-giving chains and modalities; and the corporate impact on communities of origin of families living unplanned but nonetheless very real trans-national existences.

- In addition to their family networks, migrants maintain a broader web of social relationships spanning the divide between their country or origin and their country of destination. The term **diaspora**, is often used in very narrow, reductive terms; It has been largely instrumentalized as a precious source of remittances, of technical expertise, of knowledge and entrepreneurial flair. But diasporas need and deserve to be explored and understood in much broader terms. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that in our inter-connected world the migrant diaspora shares a space of human interaction comparable in importance to large urban settlements. What are the policy implications of this phenomenon?

- Fourth, the international migrant community must look with different eyes at **the encounter between migrants and their host society**. "Integration process" is the label that is most commonly affixed to this meeting of different lifestyles, cultures, languages and religions. It is, in the best of cases, a process of observation,

communication and exchange, a learning of how to live together. In the worst of cases, however, it results in mutual suspicion, mistrust and alienation. Among the many questions that migration policy makers have struggled with three questions stand out:

- o a) on whom does the onus for change lie, on the newcomer or the host society?
- o b) are there, in our globalized world, universal values that can serve as a common foundation for life in societies characterized by migrant diversity? And,
- o c) given that all countries have their own unique, defining myths, traditions and customs, how can the migrant or to use older but perhaps more descriptive terms, the wayfarer, or nomad be given the opportunity to add his contribution to that tapestry?

- Finally, I want to touch on an extremely important but often overlooked social aspect of migration. IOM has learnt through long and difficult experience that there can be no successful migration if the migrant's health is not taken care of. Over time we have come to understand that this is not just about being free from physical illness. These days we talk much more broadly about p**sychosocial health,** a concept wellness that includes mental, social and emotional dimensions. A 2013 research study on migrant well-being noted that "people with a high degree of well-being not only feel safe and secure wherever they live but also feel attached to their community". This is an issue that we cannot afford to ignore. What can we do to improve migrant health?

IV.   **Conclusion**
               To be added