

The International Migration Review Forum: Thoughts from UNANIMA International's Executive Assistant/Assistant UN Representative, Lara Hicks



Overview

The International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) took place from May 17th to May 20th both online and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Held under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, the IMRF is the first formal review of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), which is the first intergovernmental agreement covering international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Subsequent reviews of the GCM will take place every four years at the UN. Civil society participated by attending the events at the UN, as well as through side and parallel events organized on the margins of the forum. UNANIMA International was able to observe as a member of civil society and I feel so fortunate to have attended each day of the forum in person!



The first part of the IMRF consisted of a Multi-Stakeholder Review, where civil society, people with lived experiences, and public officials came together to share their views about migration policy and governance. This input contributed to the greater conversation and highlighted gaps that remain regarding the GCM and its implementation. Four, or so, Member States attended the Multi-Stakeholder Review.

The second portion of the forum gave space for Member States to share their progress in integrating the principles of the GCM into national laws and plans, as

well as their positions on certain aspects of the Progress Declaration and/or the Global Compact. These “thematic discussions” and policy debates were helpful for NGOs to get a sense of what governments were focusing on. Some of the common themes that emerged from the speeches include:

- We need better data on migration – “good data equals good policy.”
- Migrant workers are often invisible in our labor and migration policies or frameworks. This is also especially true for women migrant workers in unregulated industries.
- To quote Michelle Leighton, Chief of the Labor Migration Branch – International Labor Organization: “We can’t expect social cohesion in an atmosphere of exclusion.”
- Climate change is displacing people now, and residents of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are especially at risk due to rising sea levels and natural disasters.
- Shrinking space for civil society and faith-based groups is concerning because these organizations are often at the frontlines, accompanying people and providing critical services throughout the migration cycle.
- Migrant voices must be heard and are essential to advance the Global Compact, the 2030 Agenda, and other human rights instruments.
- [Click here to access the principles of the GCM.](#)



Lastly, the IMRF concluded with a vote in the General Assembly to adopt the Progress Declaration, which is the outcome document of the IMRF that reaffirms the GCM. The text of the Progress Declaration was negotiated by Member States, with civil society input and advocacy, in the months prior to the forum. Ultimately, the Progress Declaration was adopted by consensus.

Women and Children in the Progress Declaration

Women and children are always at the heart of UNANIMA International’s mission. In addition to our organization’s focus on women and children, UNANIMA International is a member of the NGO Committee on Migration and is part of the Children in Migration Subcommittee. As such, I, and other civil society colleagues, kept a keen eye out for mentions of women and children in the Progress Declaration. In total, children were mentioned eight times and

women were mentioned ten times throughout the declaration. It was great to see the situations of children and women included in the agreed upon text, but moving forward it will be important to build off the initial language with stronger calls for psychosocial supports for women and children, better acknowledgement of women and children in precarious situations (like unregulated labor, human trafficking, domestic violence, etc.), and more explicit mentions of supporting migrant children in family units and those in alternative care situations.

Final Thoughts

Overall, my impression was that the Progress Declaration successfully reaffirmed the principles and text of the Global Compact on Migration. However, something I largely noticed was absent from discussions (in addition to the topics previously mentioned) was homelessness. For UNANIMA International there is an inextricable link between migration and homelessness. The vulnerability of people on the move, forced or otherwise, makes them especially prone to homelessness, unjust housing/labor systems, trafficking, and other violations of human rights. This connection is made so apparent in our publications and conversations with people with lived experiences, yet it was not reflected in the concerns of Member States and only mentioned indirectly in the Progress Declaration. As governments take up the commitments they agreed to at the IMRF and in General Assembly Resolution “Inclusive social development policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19),” UNANIMA International will continue to advocate for the women, children, families, and all people experiencing displacement and homelessness. We will also fight for their inclusion and their voices to be heard in places of power.

To conclude, António Vitorino, the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration stated during the IMRF: “Change can be slow, but when it comes, it can be profound.” I remain hopeful that the agreements made during the forum are the beginning of incremental, live-saving, and profound changes for all migrants and displaced persons.

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