



Gaps and Remedies: Xenophobia, Racism, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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The lessons learned from frontline realities in the war in Ukraine have been stark: it is clearly easier for societies to absorb similar-looking people, and the deep-seated fear of the “other” comes out strongly during uncertainties, regardless of the rule of law. The official American welcome given to Afghan refugees who helped Americans in their country fizzled out when the Afghans were turned over to local authorities in their new homes. Ukrainian refugees were more easily assimilated and assisted at the local levels, despite a sometimes chilly reception at the national level.

The NGO Committee on Migration advocates with Member States of the UN, UN entities, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders for a more complete understanding of xenophobia, racism and related barriers to the social inclusion of migrants and refugees. We also identify promising practices that foster the creation of peace and harmony at all stages of the migration experience.

Over the past two years, we have reviewed and updated our [compendium of best practices](#) created partly as the result of a collaboration with the University Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants (UARRM), Rutgers University. We used a multi-lingual survey sent to 250 on-the-ground practitioner organizations to take a hard look at how COVID-19 has exacerbated xenophobia against migrants and refugees. The resulting paper is titled [Report of a Survey on Migrant and Refugee Victims of Xenophobia, Racism, and Intolerance in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic](#). It is clear that migration and xenophobia are understood and practiced at different levels – so we updated and redistributed our definitional flowchart as an [infographic](#) (also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#)), a tool easy to share with both new and existing partners and designed to reduce unconscious bias.

We shared our concerns with NGOs, UN agencies, and country representatives, writing letters and conducting a series of advocacy meetings prior to the [2022 International Migration Review Forum \(IMRF\)](#) to share our understandings with Member States and foster discussion on key issues and lessons learned. We continue to push especially for lawmakers to examine existing social, economic, and political systems for hidden inequalities in both structure and delivery of services, in order to eliminate racial and xenophobic biases (SDG 10 and across the SDGs broadly; [GCM objectives 15, 16, 17](#)).

It is especially concerning to us that even in countries willing to consider laws for the safe transit of migrants and refugees, as well as the absorption of certain numbers of people on the move, these laws are not implemented at the provincial and local levels. It is therefore essential that discussion of the issues and implementation of laws on the books be encouraged and actively fostered on the ground.

We acknowledge the many advances resulting from the [Global Forum for Migration and Development \(GFMD\)](#) and the discussions leading to the IMRF. However, we need more collaborations to be effective, with regional consultations and

¹ The NGO Committee on Migration, an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocates for the protection and fulfillment of the human rights of migrants and refugees. Its Sub-Committee on Xenophobia, Racism and Social Inclusion works on behalf of migrants, refugees and their families, guided by human rights standards.

seamless sharing of best management practices through the mayors of major cities and the governors of provinces or states.

Gaps abound. Countries that are diligently changing national laws are often not able to press for a consistent regulatory environment at the local level with sufficient outreach and training to encourage change. While we press for national awareness, real change hinges on on-the-ground, local level interventions to remedy the GCM implementation gaps and problems we identify below.

- **Effective inclusion of migrant voices:** some migrant voices have been included in the dialogues concerning implementation of the GCM and other agreements, but since the processes are State driven, migrants themselves, migrant-led organizations, and other experts who work with migrants lack a functional seat at the table.
- **Lack of acknowledgement of successful integration:** when the voices of migrants are not heard, their successful inclusion in host communities is rarely acknowledged. Instead of being welcomed as a strong addition to local communities, migrants and refugees are perceived as a collective burden. Long processing times create a dependent paralysis for the migrants, who need work permits, new pathways, safe pathways, and pathways to regularization to maintain agency.
- **Policies at local levels:** good practices and policies developed on a national level must be implemented on local levels. However, in communities unwilling to accept the arrival and inclusion of strangers, local authorities frequently lack both a regulatory framework and inclusive strategies to bring people to accept and support change.
- **Lack of access to education and training:** the lack of opportunities for migrants and refugees to continue their education or to have their prior credentials evaluated and acknowledged leads to a perception that “they” take to survive rather than learn to belong. Barriers to education prevent migrants from becoming integrated into the new society and make it more difficult to recover from the despair that takes over in detention/transient camps.
- **Restrictive laws limiting family unity and unification:** Barriers serve to justify other barriers. When states restrict migrant admissions to working-aged men, the result is not only an inhumane denial of the human right to family life but also a strengthening of racist and xenophobic tropes preventing migrants’ full social inclusion.

Remedies therefore include:

- Effective inclusion of migrant voices with meaningful participation at all major conferences.
- Regularization of the status of migrants, providing new safe pathways for migration and to citizenship, and acknowledgement of migrant and refugee contributions to the communities in which they live.
- Implementation of national policies on the local level; local development of inclusive strategies.
- Access to education and training; acknowledgement of existing credentials.
- Family unity and unification policies.

Migration has played a crucial role in shaping societies and cultures. Throughout history, people have moved to new lands in search of better opportunities, and the exchange of ideas, customs and traditions that follows has helped to create the diverse and vibrant societies we have today. Xenophobia, racism, and other barriers to inclusion therefore hinder us all.

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