



United Nations Preparatory Process for the Global Compact on Migration
Informal Thematic Session on ‘Human Rights of all migrants, social inclusion, cohesion, and all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance’

8-9 May Geneva

Panel 2: Social Inclusion and Cohesion

Statement by Nathalie Ebead, Head of Democracy Assessment, Analysis and Advisory Unit

International IDEA

Ladies and Gentlemen, Chairperson,

As an international organisation with the mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide, International IDEA would like to focus its intervention on the importance of empowering (legal) migrants in destination countries to take part in the political life of their host countries, so as to contribute to increased social cohesion in societies as well as resilient democracies.

The right to participate in political decision-making processes is recognized by the international community as a fundamental human right. A fundamental conversation on civil and political rights of people, irrespective of their migratory status, is a key condition for the enjoyment of such rights.

We know that migration poses fundamental and difficult dilemmas for policy makers in democratic institutions. In many destination countries, public concerns and attitudes toward migration significantly influence government policies, party agendas and electoral campaigns. Negative reactions of native populations to immigrants are seen in anti-immigrant protests, vigilante groups, and the adoption of restrictive policies by mainstream parties. Threats to the smooth functioning of democratic institutions and processes arise out of political and social polarisation, securitisation, exclusion and marginalisation or discrimination. Media coverage of migration also influences national and local voting behaviour.

Concerns over migration have reinvigorated far right wing populist parties and leaders. In addition, many political parties across the political spectrum increasingly rally around a narrative of an out of touch political elite vs. the people, and an 'us vs. them' mentality based on ethnocentric identities and xenophobia, coupled with their use of negative media communication that results in media attention. Migration fuelled by globalisation thus impacts on democracy by influencing public support of populist, particularly right-wing populist parties, and their anti-immigrant agendas, impacting on the voting behaviour of citizens.

International IDEA believes that supporting political inclusion is a requirement for democratic sustainability. One of our strategic commitments is to ensure that democratic outcomes are consistent with inclusiveness, and thus we also believe that multiculturalism as an immigration policy that favours inclusion of migrants is beneficial for democratic societies and can contribute to creating conditions for strong and resilient democracies. Thus political parties and governments can adopt strategies and policies that further inclusion of migrants to tackle the migration challenge.

In the context of migration, political parties and parliaments face the challenge of having to integrate the interests of an increasingly diverse population. As the main representatives of the people in political decision making processes, political parties should strive to reflect the interests of all citizens. Globally, data is lacking on whether political parties reflect the diversity of their populations, however the data that does exist shows that minority groups are usually underrepresented.

Adding to the representation deficit is the challenge immigrants face in joining political parties, particularly when faced with traditional party cultures to accept and further their effective participation. These include a lack of a welcoming culture that adapts to the diversity of its members and the need for personal contacts to the (local) party leadership to be encouraged to enter a party and join a candidate list. In addition, immigrants often lack access to historical and established party networks, particularly youth organisations. Different strategies to increase minority representation exist, including increasing a party's profile within ethnic communities, implementing recruitment drives to encourage ethnic minority representatives to stand for election and adopting numerical targets for minority candidates. Other political parties use targets, intra-party minority networks and quotas. Many political parties allow immigrants to hold positions within their party structure, including on candidate lists and some create incentives for immigrants to politically engage with them through special forums or campaigns, although many of these structures are informal and weak, depending on individuals rather than being institutionalised. Overall political parties could be more effective at attracting people of immigrant background.

Electoral systems and the cultural context also affect the level of minority representation in political institutions. The size of an electoral district impacts on the

likelihood of under-represented groups to be elected as this defines how many candidates political parties will be able to field in an election. Similarly a low formal threshold or their elimination can further the representation of under-represented groups, particularly in proportional representation systems. The agenda and views of a political party on migration influence whether immigrants are represented in political party structures, whether they can stand for election as a candidate and whether they have a realistic chance of winning due to their relative position on a party's candidate list. In addition, the level of support provided by a political party to immigrants matters. How inclusive a political party is thus affects the representation of immigrants. Political parties should thus consider the inclusiveness of their candidate selection processes and strengthen their internal party support structures for migrants.

To tackle the potential impact of migration on democracy, governments need to consider the capacities of state institutions in order to enable qualitative services and 'democracy that delivers', while at the same time engaging in a fact based dialogue on migration with citizens and migrants so as to tackle concerns about migration, while highlighting its benefits.

In addition, migration policy needs to be governed by the rule of law and equal access to justice, ensuring in particular effective access to procedures for the impartial assessment of asylum claims. There is little point in democratic accountability if there is no enforcement mechanism for migration policy. Key elements for a fair, democratic, progressive, and effective migration policy include:

- Establishment of clear democratic accountability for migration policy;
- Ensuring the implementation and policy are both governed by the rule of law;
- Human rights and equality should be at the heart of policymaking;
- Measurable indicators and costs and benefits analyses should be embodied for monitoring progress on the implementation of the policy;
- There should be a realistic approach to what national governments can and cannot promise.

The constructive involvement of immigrant and host communities in the planning and implementation of government public policies is one way to engage citizens and an important process that enables decision makers to gain better understanding of the needs and realities on the ground and to make well-informed decisions. In addition, dialogue platforms and participatory policy-making contribute to building social cohesion and trust among immigrant and host communities, as they are both offered the space to interact and understand each other's views and concerns. The inclusion of less skilled and educated migrants is of particular importance in this regard.

Pursuing an 'interactive multiculturalist policy' with a civic component where people can meet and interact in common spaces, such as workplaces, political parties, schools,

neighbourhood facilities and public transport systems can contribute to creating a collective national identity, while respecting the diversity of group identities.

To respond to migration effectively, host country governments can enforce immigration policy and rules through competent institutions and based on accurate data. To ensure safe and orderly migration, government institutions and agencies need to provide clear and accessible information regarding immigration laws and policies, as well as reliable and publicly available data about migration flows. This will allow more informed measurement of the impact of migration on countries. Such data can then form the basis of migration policy debate with the public so as to set realistic objectives as to which issues migration policy should tackle before others.

Fostering networks of international partnerships at the local level is an effective way for migrant-receiving cities to improve integration measures. This can build on local authorities' existing responsibilities for migrant integration (for example in the European Union), as subnational authorities are at the forefront of facilitating the participation and integration of migrants. Many cities are trying to manage migration through innovative approaches to increase mobility and social diversity as a result of partnerships between migrants, local governments and civil society. With the exception of citizenship, migrant inclusion – language acquisition, education, civic awareness, health service access and public safety measures – is usually facilitated locally.

National governments can strengthen their capacity to deal with migration by learning from local examples. The participation and inclusion of migrants in their host cities is thus an indispensable part of building stable, open and vibrant communities. Cities thus have a key role to play in community building and in supporting social, cultural, economic and political participation at the local government level. Local governments influence social capital indirectly through policies and programs aimed at social inclusion e.g., transportation and recreational services, and create common spaces. Local governments should thus work to strengthen community organisations representing the interests of diverse communities.

As a result of globalisation, the requirements of citizenship and residence are being challenged, with the potential for citizens to be disenfranchised because of migration. Notwithstanding controversies on the relationship between naturalisation policies and immigrant integration, there are key obstacles for immigrants in relation to political participation in the form of their lack of electoral participation as well as country approaches to naturalisation.

Today many host societies permit immigrants to participate in elections to varying degrees. In the last 50 years more than 50 countries at different levels (local, provincial and national) held parliamentary debates about the extension of voting rights to

migrants after a certain period of residence. More than thirty countries have reformed their electoral laws and even constitutions to enable non-citizen residents to vote. Policies that extend voting rights universally, even if limited to the local level, offer non-citizen residents the chance to integrate into politics on the basis of equality while at the same time opening up the opportunity to recognise a new sense of belonging. Extending voting rights to migrants however is more than a policy issue that may enhance democracy and sets a high benchmark for countries as it has implications for the principles a country applies when it grants citizenship, and to its political definition of citizenship. Migration policy must therefore consider citizenship policy when democratic institutions define approaches to include migrants in political life.

One possible approach to encouraging migrants to participate in political life on a par with natives and furthering a sense of belonging is thus to promote inclusive naturalisation policies. Citizenship improves immigrants' employment rate, income, housing situation, and participation in elections and other political actions. Naturalization improves their perception in wider society. Citizenship is immigrants' best guarantee of securing residence and equal rights. Integration policies focused on facilitating migrants' participation in political institutions and decision making processes from an early stage of their arrival in host countries contribute to more pluralistic and stronger democratic institutions.

To further migration benefits, naturalisation of resident non-citizens can be facilitated by reducing the administrative burden and time lines for obtaining citizenship. In the period before immigrants become citizens, the integration of migrants as well as their sense of belonging can be enhanced with the support of civil society and community based initiatives on the local level.

Overall, multicultural policies that favour the inclusion of migrants and provide political benefits for societies contribute to creating conditions for strong and resilient democracies. Governments need to consider state capacities in relation to migration policy making and – in particular in countries with high immigration rates and immigrant friendly policies - must work to reduce the potential backlash from those citizens with negative perceptions of immigration. Democratic institutions should thus consider policies that aim to empower migrants to decide how they participate in public life, rather than defining policies on the basis of the citizenship-as-nationality or franchise without nationality models. To strengthen democracy, especially in countries with high or increasing proportions of migrants, policy makers should consider granting voting rights – particularly on local level - as a pathway to easier citizenship. This would better promote respect for individuals' choices than would an approach to policy making that focuses on groups or ethnic nations.

In conclusion, the Global Compact should acknowledge that migration is a global governance issue with implications at the regional and national levels. Governance of

international migration processes at the country level, however, shall continue to be the responsibility of Member States. Resolving the inherent tensions between the international and domestic dimensions of the governance of migratory and refugee flows will determine the effectiveness of the Global Compact. The drafting of, and adherence to, an international Code of Conduct for the treatment of migrants and refugees in accordance with human rights principles would be an important step to strengthening international cooperation.

Thank you