



Dialogue tables

During the second part of the event of the Future of migration and development, on September 24th, several topics were discussed at five dialogue tables, each organised by one organisation: the framing of migration; migrants in the lead; circular migration and legal pathways; hosting refugees in the region, and finally youth employment and migration.

Table 1. Framing of Migration

Which stories, narratives and language do we want and need to use in our work and in our communication about migration and development? The table was led by Josje van de Grift and Ernst Jan Stroes from Wilde Ganzen where they are responsible for Frame, Voice, Report!. This is a fund for civil society organisations with the objective of strengthening awareness and engagement among EU citizens in relation to the Global Goals.

As an introduction, Ernst Jan Stroes and Josje van de Grift showed two examples of projects that were granted by Frame, Voice, Report!: *Klimaatling* and *Potjebuurt*. Both projects used a way of communication that has a strong focus on the human side. Subsequently, the following statements were presented: “Humanity is lacking in the public debate on migration” and “Positive stories are needed to change the debate on the migration of the future”. Participants were asked to take a stand: agree, disagree or somewhere in between. Where some said that we desperately need to put a human face to migration instead of talking about numbers, others agreed that we should be really careful with the idea of selling the idea of migration. “You don’t need to share your misery or horror stories before one can see you as a person”.

After this discussion, the group was split up in two. In the context of making the debate more human and positive, the participants were asked to first answer the following question: is it a task of your organization and which actions does your organization already undertake? It became clear that a lot of organizations are already making an effort in influencing the public debate when it comes to the framing of migration: sharing personal stories online and offline, using new technology to make people meet each other, influencing and educating politicians, explaining the facts, not using the victim frame and specific words in the debate.

After that, the groups elaborated on the questions: What actions would you like to do and what do we dream about? There was a consensus about the power of meeting each other face to face, in order to increase humanity in the debate. Collaboration in the sector, with media and politics, is important in influencing the debate and also humanizing instead of problematizing. The debate should be about every human being, having the right to migrate and to live wherever they want.

Here lies a task for us in influencing mainstream media, in order to reach the people ‘in the streets’ and to explain the connection between policy and the consequences in daily life for everyone.

Table 2. Migrants in the lead

Anila Noor hosting this dialogue table points out: “The meaningful participation and leadership of refugees, migrants and host community members is integral for a properly functioning ‘whole-of-society’ approach, and must be embedded within the infrastructure.” The group discussed how migrants and diaspora organisations lived experiences are valuable and can lead to better policies. When migrants are really in the lead this leads to other actions and policies.

Qader Shafiq van Bureau Wijland continues: “This requires to create a platform of ‘Migrants Advisors’ from all diverse backgrounds to bridge their experience as knowledge into policies. Consultation require from these committees towards creating inclusive integration. Achieving this will require planning and discussing policies and discussions about its function. We need to make steps to make sure migrants are more in the lead and one way to explore this is a platform or network who can advise NGOs and other organisations.

Table 3. Circular migration and legal pathways

Migration, including circular migration, should be about brain gain. How do we ensure that migration contributes to this? One example is to connect diaspora here, who are often wanting to invest in their country of origin, with Dutch SMEs in Africa. A challenge is, however, the level of education. There is often a mismatch between what is offered and what is needed. So besides circular migration, we also need circular education.

Nevertheless, this lack of education, combined with the need for training, is something NGOs can get into. We have the connections for this. As a sector, we can also take steps to overcome the fear of migration and the lack of political will. We need to change the narrative on migration. Also, our data, lobby and research can help to overcome obstacles regarding migration and circular migration. Finally, we need to involve the diaspora: listen to them, and then act. Working together, we have great potential.

Table 4. Hosting refugees in the region

What can NGOs and governments learn from experiences in Rwanda, Curacao and Bonaire regarding hosting refugees in the region? This question led to a fruitful discussion on good practices in hosting refugees. The discussion was based on two cases. Özge Bilgil from Utrecht University elaborated on her study of Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Marugia Janga from Caritas Willemstad shared her experience hosting refugees from Venezuela on the Dutch Caribbean islands.

The debate centered on the need for refugees to be registered by UNHCR in order to receive protection. This was a precondition for Congolese refugees to be integrated in the host communities, where they could work and travel, and were granted access to basic services. The Rwandan example also showed that cash-based support to refugees can encourage economic activity both inside and near the refugee camp. It helps with integration of refugees in host communities.

Soon we came to identify some best practices in hosting refugees in the region, mainly within the reception of refugees and the role of local and national political leadership. We learned that immediate registration by the UNHCR and a community-integrated refugee reception encourages the integration of refugees with local citizens and furthermore increases economic activities in areas near refugee camps. By taking an active approach in integrating long-term refugees in economic and social structures within the area, inclusion is encouraged which can benefit the refugees, as well as nationals living near these areas.

For NGOs and governments, this means that best practices should be recorded and shared, so other governments have factual knowledge of effects to integrate into their policies. Additionally, the group touched on multi-annual financial planning regarding the hosting of migrants, as people are currently displaced for longer than one or more calendar-year.

Table 5. Youth employment & migration

Migration was, is and will always be there. We should facilitate it to a certain extent. Just as we encourage our own youth to make use of opportunities. The link to economic development and youth employment is not clear. It is a complex one, depending on the context and the individuals; there are collective reasons and individual reasons to want to migrate. Youth Employment is a valuable end in itself. It is a right and helps youth integration and therefore benefits the whole of society. That is the business case as Anne Dankert from CNV presents.

When looking at youth employment we see there is a mismatch between education and the labour market. How can this be changed? It requires skills development but also social dialogue skills, and it requires the development of opportunities for those that have good skills and who would otherwise leave to put them into practice. It requires a systemic approach involving actions on a local level (investments in the community), national (supporting policies) and international level (international bodies invest a lot in young people having a better future). We should invest more in the creation of wage labour opportunities, and in the skills that are necessary for wage labour. Not everybody is an entrepreneur. What are interesting initiatives that create real employment?

A lot of funding for development is based on the assumption that when young people have jobs they won't migrate. "We need to challenge that narrative" Sarah Casteran from Mercy Corps states. "It is a joint dilemma of NGOs, MFA, and academics. There is a relationship but it is complex and not linear. Even if we pull out all ODA, migration will be there anyway, we need to learn to work with it. We should not pretend that we are diminishing migration; we see it as our task to educate our donors, we are very clear. We do not formulate these objectives and we do not report conform these indicators. We do not claim to stop migration. But remaining youth will have a better perspective. Push and pull factors for migration are different for men and women. If there is a market for social care workers than you see the growth of women migration. Where will migrants go in the future? It is an assumption that they want to come to the EU, while we need them in the future.