

# Migration and resilience

The Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) is a biennial event held prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. CPF 2015 took place on 23-26 November 2015 and was jointly organised by the Government of Malta (host) and the Commonwealth Foundation. CPF 2015 critically explored policy based actions under the theme of "What Makes Resilient Societies?" It provided an innovative opportunity for civil society organisations to share knowledge and learn from each other as well as to interact with governance institutions on key policy issues. The CPF2015 series elaborates on the issues covered in the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience.

## Introduction

A detailed session at Commonwealth People's Forum 2015 was focused on Migration and Resilience. The session explored the key reasons behind the prevailing narrative on migration; and identifying ways to transform the current discourse; and highlight possible policy solutions for migrants, recipient and diaspora countries.

The session also featured realities on migration from different Commonwealth regions touching on the various aspects from refugee perspectives to climate change and migration patterns resulting from it.

## Key discussion points

### Migration is key to resilient societies

The General Assembly of the United Nations asserts that international migration – ensuring freer and safe movement of people across borders – could bring substantial benefits as part of an inclusive globalization process. Migrant's networks have helped to build social capital and increase the resilience of communities of origin and boosting

social resilience in recipient countries through transfers of knowledge, innovation technologies, and other resources.

**“The history of migration illustrates the profound and multiple associations between migration and human vulnerability. It is important to recognise and acknowledge this.”**

The history of migration illustrates the profound and multiple associations between migration and human vulnerability. It is important to recognise and acknowledge this. Yet, migrants have been and continue to be dehumanised in both policy and media discourses. As the scale of international migration has increased, new narratives have been constructed that challenge the humanity of migrants and demonise the timeless process of migration. Instead there is a need to recover and embrace migration; and a growing and compelling need to enforce and respect migrant rights and voices.

### **An excerpt from the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience**

**34.** Migration is intrinsic to being human; and central to building resilient societies. “Migration is a key element of resilient societies. It increases diversity, innovation and social capital. But it is linked with a globalised economic system, which reinforces the lack of redistribution of wealth and resources.

Migration has become dehumanising in both policy and media discourses and needs to be recovered and embraced as an expression of humanity. We should not forget that migration is also a gendered process. Migration expresses new forms of racialized discourse reflected in the way in which states construct the notion of illegality.

**35.** Building systems that enable resilient societies necessitates moving from seeing migration as a problem, to seeing it as a reality that we need to adapt to and build policy that responds to multiple systems of oppression. There is a need for transparent and accountable institutions, which explain the rationale of public policies on migration; migrant voices need to be part of that dialogue with the aim of creating rights- based policies.

**36.** Governance institutions need to open doors for civil society to have a real say in public policies. Unheard voices, including migrant voices, and those of policy makers defending and protecting the lives of vulnerable people and the rights of migrants need be heard. Civil society needs to be more involved in challenging narratives and discourses that affect migrant rights and freedoms.

**37.** We call on Commonwealth Leaders and institutions to advance policy initiatives and dialogue on the complexity of migration and its links to efforts in building resilient societies.

Building systems that enable resilient societies requires a shift away from seeing migrants as a problem to recognising migration as a reality that societies need to adapt to; and necessitates building policies that capture complex realities and respond to multiple systems of oppression. The proliferation of detention centres and the suppression of migrant freedoms and rights serve instead as an expression of failure in building resilient societies.

Currently, the discourse on migration tends to ignore the nuances as well as the policy agreements and human rights conventions. As a result, the narrative that informs policy discussions show cases migration as a threat to the national security of recipient countries. This has become the starting point for current policy discussions on migration.

“As a process, migration challenges narratives of national identity, including how these narratives are constructed and interpreted.”

### **Migration and Fear**

As a process, migration challenges narratives of national identity, including how these narratives are constructed and interpreted; Having European citizens with Muslim beliefs, for example, challenges and shakes extended notions of identity based on nation states. The static character of these narratives, and the fear of changing them have in turn supported the negative view of migration. Fear of migration prompts policy making guided by fear, resulting in repression and the suppression of freedoms and rights. Nation states have the power to define who belongs and who does not; to make people illegal and to deny people citizenship.

### **Migration and state sovereignty**

Migration has also come to be regarded as a process that challenges the sovereignty of the state. Building on narratives of fear and racism has led to the dehumanisation of migrants and less obvious forms of racism. This is all manifesting in the way in which institutions construct the notion of ‘illegality’ of vulnerable individuals. Through detention centres for example which can also violate international law.

### **Embracing Migration**

Embracing migration in building resilient societies is both possible and achievable. Transparent, responsive, inclusive and accessible institutions and systems of governance are all crucial to the process of recognising the values, opportunities and qualities of resilience building that migration offers; and to protect migrants’ rights.

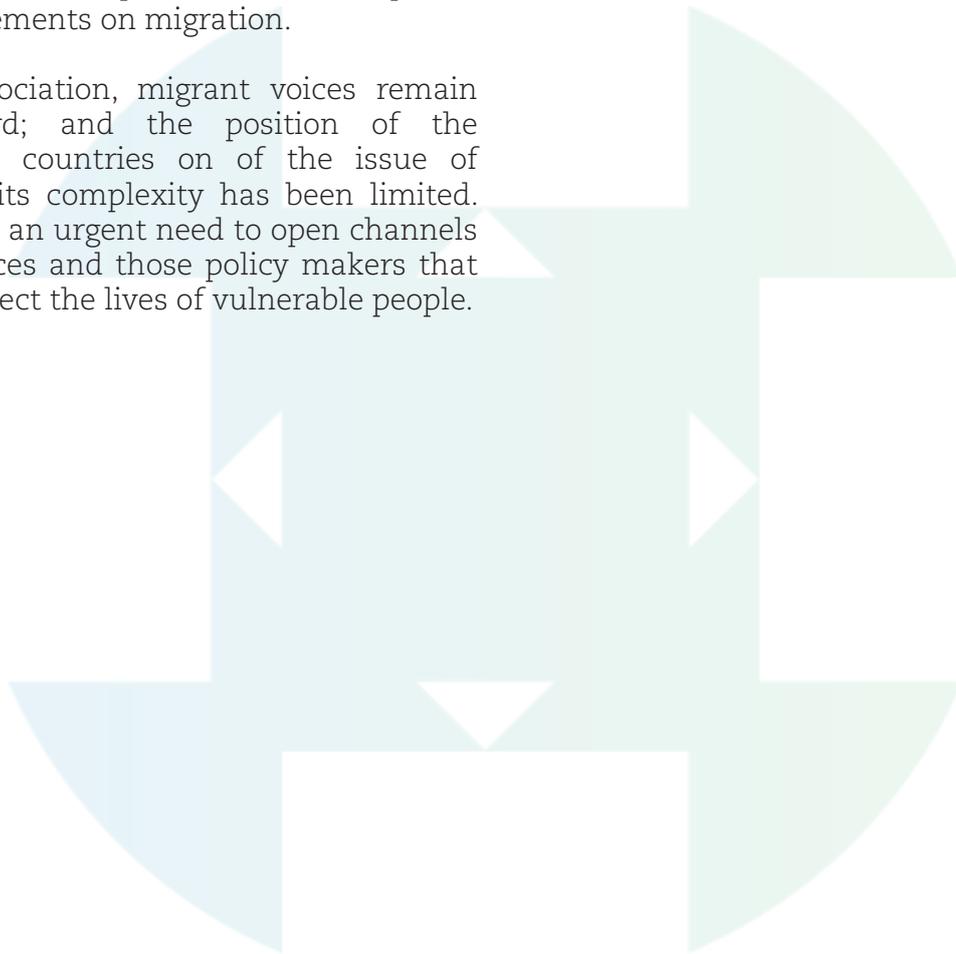
## Moving forward

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Governments and civil society organisations have important roles to play, in protecting and defending migration as a key characteristic of the Commonwealth and in protecting migrant voices and rights.

Accountable institutions are needed, which explain the rationale of public policies on migration. Systems of governance institutions also need to provide access and opportunity for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as competent partners in policy formulation especially on migration. Transparency is also required, to monitor public inter-state agreements on migration.

Across the association, migrant voices remain largely unheard; and the position of the Commonwealth countries on the issue of migration and its complexity has been limited. Instead, there is an urgent need to open channels for migrant voices and those policy makers that defend and protect the lives of vulnerable people.



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