

Statement by the Principals of the UN Network on Migration on International Migrants Day

No one's journey should end in tragedy—yet, for thousands of migrants each year, it does. More than 70,000 people have lost their lives along migration routes since 2014. Behind every number is a human life—a family member, friend or neighbour. As Principals* of the United Nations Network on Migration, we cannot turn away from this preventable tragedy. On International Migrants Day, we renew our commitment to a world where migration is safe, regular and dignified.

A lack of viable options for a fulfilling life at home coupled with poorly governed migration, including limited options for safe, regular migration pathways, drive migrants toward dangerous routes, often facilitated by criminal smuggling networks. The consequences are too often deadly. Not only migrants suffer; their families and communities face unthinkable anguish and profound social and economic consequences, compounded by the loss of their loved ones.

We are deeply alarmed by the rising, undue criminalisation and vilification of humanitarian assistance. Search and rescue missions, medical care and other life-saving assistance are increasingly obstructed or deterred, leaving migrants in distress both at sea and on land without hope or help. This is not only a failure to uphold our shared values but a violation of international law. The protection of migrants is a legal and moral duty that must be upheld.

At the first International Migration Review Forum in 2022, Member States urged the Secretary-General to put forward actionable recommendations to provide humanitarian assistance to those in distress and to strengthen cooperation on missing migrants.

In line with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and international human rights laws, the Secretary-General's recommendations are a concrete pathway and a call for policies grounded in international law, compassion and action. In line with these recommendations, we urge all Member States to:

- Prevent the loss of life and ensure safety by strengthening search and rescue operations at sea and on land, providing access and support to humanitarian actors to deliver assistance post-rescue, including during disembarkation, in line with humanitarian principles, and preventing family separation.
- Strengthen cooperation among origin, transit and destination countries and establish national mechanisms for the search and identification of migrants who have died or gone missing, offering closure to families and dignity to those who perished.

investigations to uphold migrants' rights, prosecuting human traffickers, smugglers and other criminals who exploit and profit from migrants and protecting all actors from criminalization for providing life-saving assistance to migrants.
Improve data collection and sharing on migrant deaths and disappearances and enhance foresight to boost preparedness and humanitarian responses.
Pledge to implement the Secretary-General's recommendations by the next IMRF.

We also urge Member States to ensure migrants' access to healthcare at every stage of their journey, providing both emergency care and long-term health support, thereby upholding their dignity and saving lives and to address the adverse drivers of irregular migration in countries of origin by redoubling efforts to expand and diversify the availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration and achieving sustainable development goals.

It is also recommended to redouble efforts to expand and diversify the availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Migrants are not statistics; they are individuals with the same dreams and aspirations that drive us all and who contribute to our societies. When we uphold the human rights of migrants, we create a world where everyone, no matter where they come from, can thrive, individually and collectively.

To assist Member States in implementing these recommendations, the United Nations Network on Migration is committed to providing system-wide support. This includes working in close partnership with organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as other stakeholders that work to defend the human rights and humanitarian needs of migrants. These actors offer critical expertise and capacity in humanitarian assistance, medical care, search and rescue, tracing and identification of migrants who have died or gone missing and support for families of the missing. Together, these efforts can help countries implement effective responses that protect human rights, save lives and restore dignity to those in peril.

This International Migrants Day, let us remember that each life lost diminishes us all. Our call is urgent but achievable: implement the Secretary-General's recommendations, build multilateral commitments to prevent loss of life, ensure accountability and foster a world where migration is not a question of life or death.

* *Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)*

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

World Health Organization (WHO)