

**OHCHR intervention in the 'Ideas Lab session:**

**TOWARDS A VISION: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES**

**Stocktaking meeting for the Global Compact on Migration, 4-6 December 2017, Mexico**

Messages of xenophobia have increasingly permeated political movements, media and other forms of public discourse in many countries, resulting in a climate of rising violence and other forms of xenophobia against migrants as well as minorities associated with migration, fuelled in some cases by government policies and practices.

Foreigners are easy scapegoats – or even proxies - for deep-seated fears about terrorism and security, crime, unemployment, the viability of welfare systems and other aspects of globalization; the complex structural factors that shape our lives.

Yet what data we have – and much more needs to be done to enhance our capacity to collect human rights-based and disaggregated evidence related to migration - tell us clearly that migrants tend to contribute more to societies than they take out.

But it is here that we meet the limits of evidence. Public beliefs will not be shifted only through the presentation of data – no matter how compelling.

As we struggle for ways to confront anti-migrant discourse, we are learning that in shaping public beliefs, it is as important to build counter-narratives as it is to collect better statistics. A more rational debate about migration cannot be purely rationalistic; it must be about emotions, empathy and values. We must listen to the voices, the stories and experiences of migrants.

OHCHR has been working with a wide range of partners over the last two years to find ways to change the dominant narrative on migrants and migration from one based on prejudice, fear, and misperceptions, to a positive narrative based on evidence, on positive and common values such as human rights, solidarity and humanity.

This is why we urge the Global Compact to adopt a human rights-based approach, to the issue of public perceptions. Such an approach seeks to empower migrants and the communities they leave behind and those into which they arrive. It seeks to foster empathy. It is built on the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and accountability. And in this way it differs from an approach focused only on charity or even pity.