

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honour and privilege as IOM Director General to deliver this keynote speech at the second Tokyo Immigration Forum organized by Japan's Immigration Services Agency.

I believe this Forum strengthens international cooperation and global partnerships to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration, which is IOM's *raison d'être*.

I am grateful to the Ministry of Justice and the Immigration Services Agency for giving IOM the opportunity to join this Forum together with key senior practitioners from immigration agencies in Asia, Pacific and other regions, to discuss how human mobility is effectively managed in post-pandemic era, a topic that is extremely relevant to IOM as we continue to establish our global recovery.

I am therefore pleased to share with you IOM's global perspective on access to legal identity as a fundamental right, especially as it pertains to migrants and people on the move.

In partnership with Japan and other Member States, IOM, as the United Nations related agency responsible for migration, reaffirms that well-managed migration is an important enabler of socioeconomic development.

To encourage and support a lasting recovery from the pandemic, we advocate for people-centred migration and for universal access to legal identity as an enabler of rights and equitable access to essential services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought new challenges but has also exacerbated pre-existing difficulties faced by migrants.

When borders were closed around the world, many migrants were stranded outside their country of origin, sometimes without valid identity documents, which seriously curtailed their access to basic services. For some, the situation also prevented them from safely returning home.

In addition, many states struggled to support the return of their own nationals and faced difficulties in supporting the stay, or return, of stranded migrants in vulnerable situations on their territories.

These circumstances have challenged our collective capacity to progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including access to basic services for all.

In order to relaunch sustainable post pandemic socioeconomic growth, we must reignite cross border mobility based on effective rights-based identity management systems that are not only inclusive, but also operate effectively across many scenarios, including emergency settings.

This, of course calls for stronger multi-sectoral collaboration amongst countries in implementing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, or GCM, to ensure that no one is left behind and that we achieve stronger, more resilient communities.

Japan is not alone in finding this issue critical. From our discussions over the past year, notably at the IOM Council and International Migration Review Forum, it is clear that Member States have a strong interest in enhancing the predictability and certainty of cross-border mobility. Governments around the world have recognised the need to integrate public health and protection concerns and building capacities to manage admission and stay pathways safely and equitably.

IOM is in a unique position to support multisectoral efforts to address these challenges. Following agreement from our Membership, we are working towards the establishment of a Member State-led ad-hoc Working group to identify lessons learned, and establish common actions to prepare for future shocks, including future pandemics. We count on Japan's strong voice and leadership in this endeavour.

Distinguished Participants, we have all seen how migrants have made, and will continue to make, significant contributions to the development of host communities.

It has been evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, that many countries -- and not just the most developed -- depend heavily on foreign nationals working as physicians, nurses, and care givers, as well as many other frontline workers in crucial sectors such as public transport and logistics.

And yet, many migrants face systematic obstacles when attempting to access essential public services and social assistance.

Many undocumented migrants are left with few choices when attempting to fulfil their socioeconomic wellbeing and aspirations, and fully participate in communities.

The economic and livelihood disruptions of the past several years have left many migrants even more vulnerable to the risks of irregular migration, sometimes with the facilitation of organized crime involved in human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, as well as unscrupulous employers who lure them into exploitative working conditions.

The pandemic has reshaped border and migration management policies and procedures, by introducing new health requirements into passenger assessment mechanisms and processes, raising the costs of travel, and sometimes excluding those who cannot meet those requirements.

With the uneven application of health certification requirements to cross borders during the pandemic, the forgery of health credentials has appeared as a new dimension of irregular movement, including by organised crime.

In this regard, I would like to commend the Government of Japan's decision to include all migrants, regardless of their migratory status, in the national COVID-19 vaccination plan.

Japan has also set a positive example for the rest of the world by introducing "*special measures for the visa status of persons who have difficulty in returning home due to COVID-19*" which allowed migrants with insecure status an opportunity for employment and to access basic social services.

The pandemic has accelerated the use of technology. But while many states are making considerable progress introducing smart borders and touchless technology in their immigration processes, many migrants struggle to access proper identity documents.

The absence of a proof of legal identity can have a detrimental effect on the protection of migrants' rights, hinder access to safe and regular entry into any country which requires to obtain a visa or permit to stay, and limit access resident status once abroad, including access to employment and family reunification.

This is where international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights intersect with both the 2030 Agenda, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

The fulfilment of human rights cannot be truly universal unless legal identity documentation is accessible for all, including migrants and especially those more vulnerable.

The establishment of resilient and holistic identity management systems, centered on universal access to legal identity, is an urgent step for governments to pursue.

Such systems can enable the provision of services for nationals as well as migrants, including those who may be stranded abroad. But this requires commitment from each government and concerted international cooperation.

Legal identity is also a powerful tool in humanitarian situations, quickly facilitating access to basic rights and services during times of emergency. Indeed, we have seen how the Ukrainian digital identity system has proved invaluable for facilitating access to services in neighboring countries across Europe.

Let me assure you that IOM, as a member of the UN Legal Identity Expert Group and the UN Legal Identity Agenda Task Force, will continue to provide advice and support to Member States in ensuring a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach in designing civil registration, data, and identity management systems. Through this, we hope to protect

migrants from poverty, exploitation and statelessness.

IOM is very honoured to continue its long-standing partnership with the Government of Japan in providing technical cooperation related to migration and identity management, based on our vast knowledge and experience from across the world.

We deeply welcome and appreciate the financial support from Japan for projects which will target seven countries in the Pacific, Sri Lanka and Maldives to strengthen border management systems and to establish a system to facilitate human mobility in case of – and we must assume likely – future pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and confirmed a critical need for multi-sectoral, multilateral coordination and cooperation.

It is my sincere hope that the Tokyo Immigration Forum will continue to be a key international platform for immigration agencies to gather, promote mutual understanding, and increase capacities by sharing information, good practices and experiences.

Thank you very much.