

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE**

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**SUMMARY OF THE IOM MIGRATION DATA STRATEGY:  
INFORMING POLICY AND ACTION ON MIGRATION,  
MOBILITY AND DISPLACEMENT**



## **SUMMARY OF THE IOM MIGRATION DATA STRATEGY: INFORMING POLICY AND ACTION ON MIGRATION, MOBILITY AND DISPLACEMENT**

### **Background**

1. High-quality, accessible, disaggregated, reliable and timely data are essential to inform policies, action and public opinion. The importance of data is referenced throughout the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which calls for the collection and utilization of “accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies” in its first objective. Similarly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of high-quality and timely disaggregated data to guide decision-making and help measure progress. Data also feature prominently in other key international frameworks with strong links to migration, for example the global compact on refugees, the New Urban Agenda, the Agenda for Humanity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.
2. Times of crisis bring an acute awareness of the essential need for timely and reliable data while starkly revealing gaps and deficiencies in existing data systems, as the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has once again demonstrated.
3. IOM is in a unique position to mobilize the international community to help unlock the potential of data to contribute to stronger migration governance outcomes and positive impacts for migrants and societies. Furthermore, IOM and the wider United Nations system are also in need of high-quality data for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their programmes, operations and policy advice.

### **Institutional context**

4. IOM has developed a comprehensive strategy – the IOM migration data strategy (MDS) – to frame, focus and further amplify its existing robust engagement on the issue of data. The MDS is part of broader organizational strategic planning: it has been designed within the framework of the IOM Strategic Vision and is a crucial element to support the implementation thereof across its three pillars of resilience, mobility and governance. The MDS is also intended to build on and create synergies with the IOM Internal Governance Framework,<sup>1</sup> which outlines the essential requirements for a modern and fit-for-purpose internal governance system, in order to strengthen migration data governance across the Organization. Finally, the MDS is aligned with the data strategy recently released by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which aims to foster the individual and collective strengths of United Nations system entities.<sup>2</sup>
5. The MDS is guided by the IOM Constitution, the Charter of the United Nations, and other international agreements and frameworks to which IOM subscribes. A set of overarching principles rooted in the Organization’s commitment to human rights underpins all IOM work, including that on data. The MDS is guided by respect for the dignity, well-being, privacy and agency of individuals; gender equality; inclusion; and diversity in terms of age, sex, gender identity, race, religion, education,

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<sup>1</sup> IOM, [Update on the application of the Internal Governance Framework](#), annex I (S/25/INF/1) (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, [Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere: With Insight, Impact and Integrity](#) (New York, 2020).

disability and more.<sup>3</sup> Based on these are more specific principles applied to data, which are also central to the MDS. Ensuring individual privacy and protection from harm, as expressed in commitments to data protection and to ethical and responsible approaches to data throughout the data life cycle, including data security, are key tenets of the MDS.

### Data vision

6. This strategy covers within its scope all data that reflect the rich complexity characterizing the movement of people today. This includes data on different forms of population movement — whether short- or long-term, forced or voluntary, cross-border or internal — and data concerning the characteristics of movement and those on the move and the reasons for and impacts of migration.<sup>4</sup> In its scope, the MDS fully respects the mandates of other relevant United Nations system entities. Migration data can be thought of as a complex puzzle, different pieces of which are held by a variety of different actors: States, first and foremost, but also IOM and other United Nations system entities, other international organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia. Putting this puzzle together is a great challenge, which can only be approached in a spirit of partnership and cooperation. The MDS seeks to cover the full data life cycle, including the collection, storage, analysis and use of data for policy advice, for programme planning, design and implementation, and for research and dissemination.

7. A key IOM goal is to improve the evidence base for good migration governance in support of sustainable development, effective humanitarian action and peaceful societies and to support implementation, monitoring and reporting by relevant stakeholders on their actions in support of relevant international frameworks. The MDS maps out a path for the Organization to reach this goal and identifies three strategic objectives to guide IOM engagement on data:

- (a) Strengthening the global evidence base on migration;
- (b) Developing the capacity of States and other relevant partners to enhance the national, regional and global migration evidence base;
- (c) Ensuring more evidence-based programming, operations, policy advice and communications by IOM and across the United Nations system as a whole.

8. The first two objectives are closely related and focus on the support IOM can provide to the international community. The third objective is focused on improving the way IOM and the rest of the United Nations system use migration data in striving for policy and programmatic excellence. The three objectives are complementary; taken together, they offer a vision for IOM activities in the area of migration data.

### Data action

9. The MDS sets out several deliverables for each objective. There are also three deliverables that cut across all the objectives, further tying them together and supporting coherence of action around

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<sup>3</sup> IOM's deep commitment to gender equality, inclusion and respect for diversity underpins all its varied activities, as well as the management of its own workforce. IOM has subscribed to and is an active participant in a range of relevant initiatives, including the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) and the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. IOM has endorsed the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Settings and is an active member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

<sup>4</sup> This also includes personal data, i.e. information that can be used to identify a person. Specific provisions apply to this type of data. See the [Glossary on Migration](#) (IOM, Geneva, 2019), which contains definitions for terms commonly used in the field of migration. Note also that there are various statistical definitions in the draft [Handbook on Measuring International Migration through Population Censuses](#) (United Nations, New York, 2017) relating to migration.

principled and responsible approaches to data, data cooperation and partnership, and innovation. In addition, an indicative list of interventions is proposed, mapping out steps that will support the implementation of the strategy. Where relevant, these efforts will be undertaken in the context of the United Nations Network on Migration and in concert with wider data-related United Nations efforts and other inter-agency efforts, including in the humanitarian field. To the extent possible, these interventions will build on existing partnerships and on work IOM has already undertaken.

10. The Organization's existing engagement on the issue of migration data is strong, and there is much to build on. Over the years, considerable effort has gone into deepening this engagement with a view to informing programme design and delivery and contributing to the migration evidence base. IOM collects and/or manages data across multiple areas, and it reports, analyses and uses data for a range of purposes.<sup>5</sup> The Organization is well placed to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the movement of people, providing insights that complement traditional statistical data. IOM has developed a data governance policy and works continuously to improve its data systems and applications.

11. Notable achievements by IOM in the field of migration data are built on its key strengths, which include: an extensive global footprint; in-depth understanding of the movement of people globally and robust expertise and capacity in the field of data; a relationship of trust with its Member States and direct engagement with a wide range of beneficiaries; and its mandate within the United Nations system, most notably as Coordinator of the United Nations Network on Migration. The MDS seeks not only to leverage these strengths but also to address the Organization's weaknesses, which have to some extent tempered its ability to build a coherent, well-resourced and well-governed system for migration data. Most of these factors are part of wider systemic issues, namely projectization, decentralization and lack of strategic prioritization.

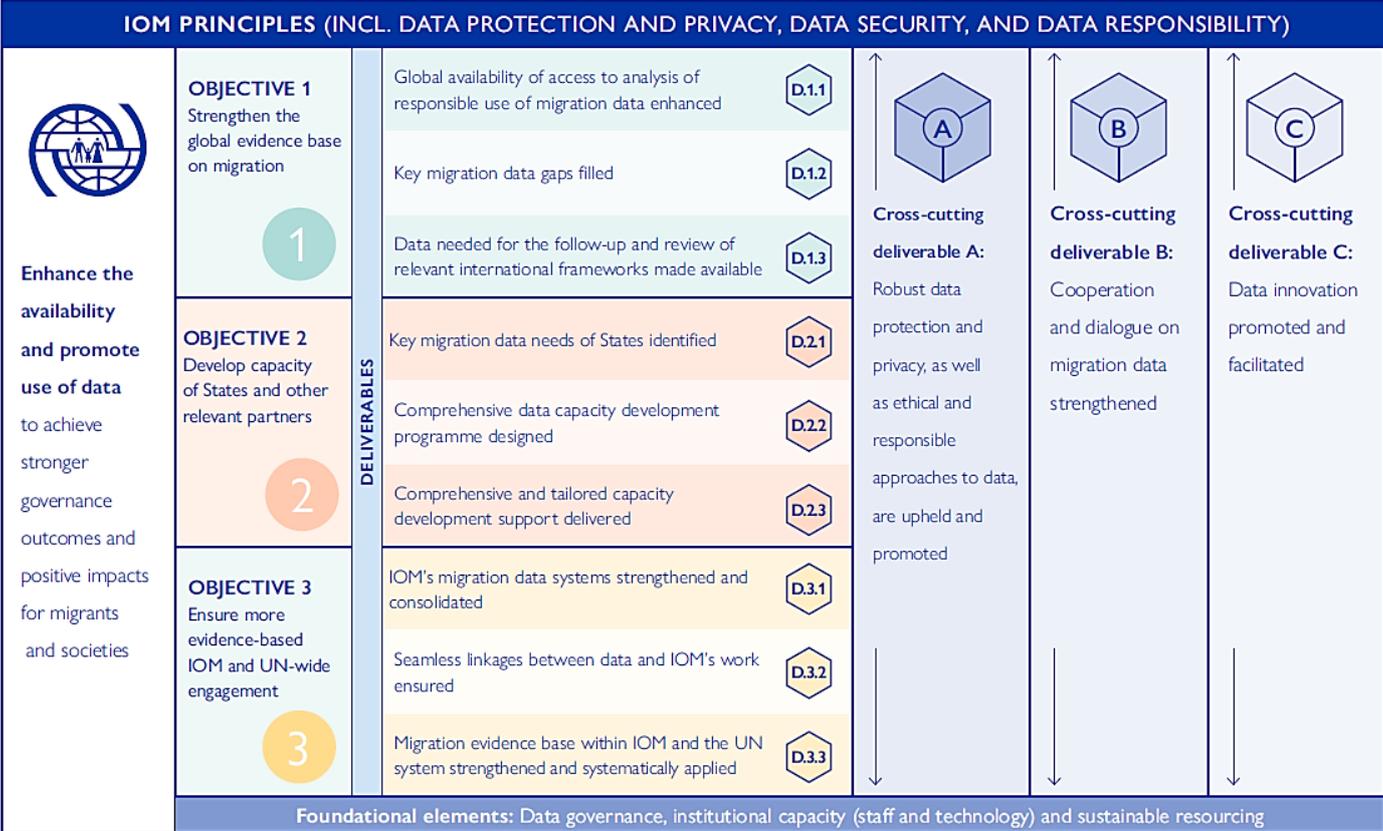
12. The Director General has identified implementation of the MDS as a priority, including in the context of the COVID-19 response. As data are relevant to most aspects of the Organization's work, an important step towards implementing the strategy will be to ensure that the priorities it sets out are integrated into other current and planned IOM undertakings. This includes regional IOM strategies, other forthcoming thematic strategies, and ongoing institutional initiatives such as the Internal Governance Framework and the Business Transformation process.

13. In turn, implementation of this strategy will support other immediate IOM priorities, such as its engagement with the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement established by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, by ensuring IOM can leverage its capacity to further enhance data and evidence on internal displacement for more effective and informed policies and action. Targeted initiatives can be used to spearhead MDS implementation in these and other priority areas, for example to better capture data on migratory flows or to launch a comprehensive migration data capacity development programme.

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<sup>5</sup> IOM collects data on a vast array of issues, much of it as part of its programmes and operations. Some of this information is publicly available, while other data are collected for internal use only. In all cases, data collection and management adhere to the IOM Migration Data Governance Policy. In cases where IOM processes beneficiaries' personal data, this is done with full respect for the IOM Data Protection Principles. In line with these principles, only anonymized data may be made publicly available. In no case would personal data be made publicly available if the beneficiary has not consented to it.

**IOM migration data strategy at a glance**



**Preconditions for success**

- 14. IOM needs to be strengthened further if it is to be able to pursue these actions and realize the objectives of the MDS. Internal data governance, staff and institutional capacity, technical infrastructure and sustainable resourcing require critical attention.
- 15. These priority areas reflect wider organizational needs and echo many of the key areas highlighted in the IOM Strategic Vision as areas in which institutional investment is required. Efforts to address them will need to be taken forward together with and as part of overall institutional strengthening, thereby contributing to and building on key Organization-wide initiatives, such as the Internal Governance Framework and IOM budget reform.
- 16. The MDS proposes specific steps to achieve improvement in each area requiring it.

**Strengthening internal governance**

- 17. To ensure IOM is well placed to deliver on its data-related aspirations and realize its potential in this area, there is a need to strengthen migration data governance in IOM. This will help in addressing the fragmentation that results from decentralization and projectization, as well as in identifying and reflecting new roles stemming from new IOM responsibilities within the United Nations system.
- 18. As part of this effort, IOM intends to rethink its data-related structures. This has implications for the Organization’s core structure and is closely linked to the broader institutional reform process. The MDS identifies key requirements for the new data governance structure in IOM and highlights

areas where investment is needed. This includes the need to clarify, streamline and consolidate data-related functions and roles across IOM by:

- strengthening global-level functions for migration data review, quality assurance and analysis;
- clarifying lines of accountability and responsibility among different migration data-related functions in IOM (at regional and country levels, as well as within different thematic pillars); and
- standardizing and strengthening the data-related functions of IOM regional offices.

#### **Enhancing staff capacity**

19. IOM has extensive migration data expertise, much of it sectoral and housed in different parts of the Organization. There is a need to continuously nurture and support further development of this expertise and promote cross-fertilization and exchange across the different thematic areas and units. It is also critical to address existing capacity needs and those related to the strategic priorities identified. This includes boosting the capacity for data analysis and the skills and expertise for data innovation available within the Organization.

#### **Enhancing technical infrastructure**

20. IOM needs to ensure its technical infrastructure and data governance processes support coherent migration data collection, storage, analysis and use, and also the use of the new technologies and sources of data recommended in the MDS. There is therefore a need to ensure that the requirements of the strategy are incorporated into the ongoing improvement and updating of the ICT data infrastructure.

#### **Ensuring sustainable resourcing**

21. The need for sustainable resourcing underpins all other areas for improvement. More predictable funding is needed to support implementation of the MDS and, overall, to enable IOM to bring coherence, continuity and a forward-looking approach to its migration data activities. Resources will be needed to strengthen IOM institutionally and to reinforce essential systemic functions related to migration data, as outlined above. There will also be a need for predictable funding in order to provide systematic support to targeted IOM initiatives on migration data, including the latest innovative undertakings, and to make progress with respect to the Organization's strategic objectives more generally. This is to be considered, potentially, in the context of IOM budget reform discussions.