



Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021

Special Session 5: Migration governance in the Arab region: priorities, opportunities and lessons learnt from the first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region

Tuesday 30 March 2021

I. Introduction:

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with UNESCWA, the League of Arab States, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and UN Women, organized a special session during the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021, under the title “Migration Governance in the Arab Region: Priorities, Opportunities and Lessons Learned from the First Regional Review Conference of the Global Compact for Migration. This special session was held on Tuesday, 30th March 2021. It aimed to strengthen the integration of migration into development discourse, frameworks and efforts made, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The session sought to build knowledge and enhance dialogue among participants on the main issues and challenges that impede enhanced migration governance in the region and threaten the resilience of migrants. It also provided a platform for participants to share good practices, key achievements and challenges based on the findings of the first Regional Review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region.

This session was facilitated by Dr. Amira Ahmed, Lecturer at the American University in Cairo. Speakers during the Special Session included: Ms. Enas EL Fergany, Director of Refugees, Expatriates & Migration Affairs Department, League of Arab States; Mr. Othman Belbeisi, Senior Regional Adviser for the Middle East and North Africa, International Organization for Migration; Dr. Sara Salman, Regional Advisor for Population Affairs at ESCWA; Mr. Karim Al-Nouri, Deputy Minister at the Iraqi Ministry of Immigration and Displacement in Iraq; Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of the Secretariat of the United Nations Network on Migration; and Dr. Ayman Zohry, Professor and Researcher at the American University in Cairo and Founding President of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies; Ms. Sarah Al-Khatib from the Solidarity Center and a member of the Regional Center for Displaced and Migrants; Ms. Nourhan Abdel Aziz from the Save the Children North Africa; and Dr. Ibrahim Akl, Director of the Family Health Care Institute at the King Hussein Foundation in Jordan.

II. Key messages resulting from the Special Session:

- Achieving good migration governance is key for achieving sustainable development in the Arab region. Arab governments need to accelerate their efforts to ensuring safe, regular, and orderly migration to protect migrants and empower them to become key agents for change.



- Participation in the GCM Regional Review for the Arab States in February 2021 included governments and a variety of stakeholders, as per the GCM resolution definition, in the spirit of 360-degree approach, promoting a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach to migration governance. Concrete progress has also been made in ensuring UN system wide coordination on migration, such as demonstrated through the establishment of 11 country level UN Networks on Migration and one Regional UN Network in the Arab region.
- Countries in the region have realized progress in mainstreaming migration in their development efforts. Despite the important challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, progress has been made in the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact on Migration, notably through finding interlinkages between both international frameworks in the COVID-19 response and recovery plans implemented. Emphasis was made on the importance of inclusion of migrants in COVID-19 recovery plans moving forward.
- Non-governmental stakeholders play a strong and active role in outreach and support of vulnerable migrant groups, such as women and girls including pregnant women and people with disabilities, in addition to data collection, analysis and evidence-based research. It is highly recommended that they be further engaged in discussions and coordinated national and regional efforts working towards effective migration governance. Increased role of municipalities in developing solutions for migrants is another area with a potential for scale up in the region.
- Data collection, analysis and dissemination remains a challenge, particularly concerning special groups and those in vulnerable situations, a sentiment echoed during the multi-stakeholder consultations for the GCM Regional Review. This was coupled along with the recommendation to avail gender and age disaggregated data to guide evidence-based and rights-based migration policies, programming and support to national/local governments on meeting the needs of different groups.
- Rapporteurs from the thematic stakeholder consultation on women, child and youth migrants aligned on the need to combat discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion of migrants, facilitating access to universal healthcare, education, justice and other basic services for all. This was highlighted especially for those in vulnerable situations, and the importance of partnerships dedicated to support migrant populations. Barriers to accessing protection and opportunities specific to women and child migrants, including sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence related services were identified. Direct inclusion of these groups in consultative processes where decisions are made emerged as one of the recommended approaches.

III. Participants

The special session was attended by 134 participants, including high-level representatives of governments. In addition, audience included: representatives of civil society, migrant groups,



academia, private sector, international and regional organizations, regional bodies concerned with migration and sustainable development, and representatives of the co-organizers, the Regional United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab region and the League of Arab States.

IV. Agenda

	Ms . Enas EL Fergany	
10 mins	Mr. Othman Belbeisi	Welcoming remarks and Overview of the GCM Review Process
	Dr. Sara Salman	
7mins	Mr. Jonathan Prentice	Brief on the Regional Review Conference and the way forward to the IMRF
7 mins	Mr. Karim El Nouri	Iraq experience on the implementation of the GCM and SDGs
7 mins	Dr. Ayman Zohry	Key findings from the multi-stakeholder consultation on the implementation of the GCM for the Regional Review in the Arab Region
7 mins	Ms. Sara Al Khatib Ms. Nourhan Abdelaziz	Key findings from the stakeholder consultation on women, children and young people
7 mins	Dr. Ibrahim Aqel	Access to basic services and social protection for migrants in light of the COVID-19 pandemic
30 mins	Dr. Amira Ahmed	Q&A Session and Closing

V. Session flow and presentations

Mr. Othman Belbeisi, IOM Senior Regional Adviser for the Middle East and North Africa, opened the Special Session and indicated that the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development comes at the right time to disseminate the results of the first regional review conference of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region, held in February 2021. Mr. Belbeisi went on to emphasize the strong linkages between both international frameworks, and rather between migration and sustainable development. Mr. Belbeisi referred to the participation of the representative of the State of Iraq, which is a GCM Champion Country that presented its national experiences in implementing both frameworks. He stressed that the Global Compact for Migration is rooted in the 2030 Agenda, and both frameworks enshrine the



vision that great benefits can be achieved for societies when migration is managed in a safe and orderly manner and when migrants are protected and empowered.

Furthermore, he stressed that the Regional Review Conference of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab Region was an open and inclusive platform that provided Member States, and all relevant stakeholders, with the space to highlight the main achievements and opportunities regarding migration management in our region. The Regional Review process in the Arab region was also characterized by its inclusiveness. It was preceded by a number of consultations held with various stakeholders involved in migration management in the region. In line with the GCM spirit of the whole-of-government approach and the whole-of-society approach. Stakeholders included representatives of different government institutions at different levels, in addition to representatives from civil society organizations, academia, and others.

He noted that following the success of the first Regional Review conference, our focus must now shift towards building on common best practices and strengthening capacities. He asserted that the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration begins at the local level, in our work and our daily life, so we must work to mainstream migration in all sustainable development efforts.

During the GCM Regional Review conference, it was also highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a major obstacle to sustainable development as it has resulted in the reorientation of important human and financial resources. Nevertheless, this pandemic should be used as an opportunity to work on new innovative methods and build back better. It will be very important to include migrants and take into account migration issues in recovery plans and vaccination campaigns, especially as the world seeks to rebuild together better, knowing that no one is safe until all of us are safe.

Ms. Enas EL Fergany, Director of Refugees, Expatriates & Migration Affairs Department, League of Arab States, explained that the COVID-19 crisis has an unprecedented and unexpectedly severe impact on migration, and casts its shadow on migrants, refugees and displaced persons particularly. She also stressed that the crisis has demonstrated the need to take quick action and work to reduce its impact on these groups and their host communities through cooperation, coordination, dialogue and joint programs between the various relevant partners. She highlighted the importance of the GCM to support member states, in cooperation with other relevant partners, manage migration in an appropriate and effective manner, and develop efficient policies in the interest of migrants, as well as receiving and sending countries. Ms. Enas EL Fergany mentioned that despite the non-binding nature of the GCM and the exceptional and complex circumstances that the world is currently going through, the response of Arab member states is notable with 13 countries have so far prepared their voluntary national reports to review the progress made in implementing the GCM. This constitutes a strong evidence of states' awareness of the importance of implementing the GCM to face the challenges related to migration. It also illustrates their intention to rely on it in order to strengthen migration policies, governance and cooperation on migration issues. The General Secretariat of the League of Arab States is keen on



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continuing cooperation with international and regional organizations operating in the Arab region - chiefly the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). This strong collaboration will aim to coordinate efforts, avoid duplication in work, provide the necessary technical support to member states, raise awareness, and provide advice and ensure effective participation to member states involved in the review process of the Global Compact for Migration at various levels.

Dr. Sara Salman, Regional Adviser for Population Affairs, ESCWA noted that the GCM Regional Review conference was attended by about 500 participants representing various stakeholders and resulted in several key messages that will be presented to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), which will be held in 2022. These issues can be summarized as follows:

- Working on eradicating irregular migration by adopting several measures which include conducting bilateral conventions and implementing post-arrival and pre-departure programs and orientation sessions.
- Countering the adverse drivers that lead to irregular and unsafe migration.
- Ensuring access of migrants to essential services, particularly health including Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and education services given the context of COVID-19.
- Ensuring vaccination of all migrants irrespective of their migration status.
- Protecting and enabling migrant workers by intensifying efforts in a way that aligns with Human Rights laws and legislations, including domestic workers.
- Reforming the Kafala system that is ongoing in some Arab countries by increasing salaries and making efforts to settle the status of irregular migrants.
- Protecting the most vulnerable migrants and ensuring their human rights are respected by working on several areas including mainstreaming a gender responsive approach, ending Gender-Based Violence and ensuring the protection of migrant children, this also includes protecting migrants' children and unaccompanied children left in countries of origin.
- Protecting all migrants in case of danger, saving lives, combating human trafficking and smuggling migrants, improving border management, reducing forced return measures, ending migration detention and find alternatives to them.
- Emphasis on the safe return of immigrants and working to reintegrate them into their communities of origin in the event of return.
- Expanding the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in migration governance. Emphasizing the importance of their role and the need to have effective cooperation among all by strengthening consultation and cooperation at the national and regional levels.
- Collecting data and information on migrants in order to draft evidence-based policies that take into consideration migrants needs and priorities. Improved data collection will also allow to better assess the progress made in implementing the GCM.
- Promoting international and bilateral cooperation to find solutions to shared challenges, protect migrants and facilitate the implementation of the GCM in the Arab region.



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Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of Secretariat for UN Network on Migration, emphasized the linkages between the Global Compact for Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. He mentioned the high level of participation during the Regional Review Conference of the GCM, which was not limited to high participation from Member States only but also involved numerous stakeholders. Furthermore, he noted that many of the interventions highlighted the importance of the whole-of-society approach. He noted it was a pleasure to see the extent of meaningful stakeholder participation in this Regional Review. During his intervention Mr. Jonathan Prentice referred to the below points:

- **First:** It is important to maintain the momentum created by the GCM Regional Review Conference. It should not be seen as a one-time event or a single conference or one outcome. The International Community should work to weave a process or series of discussions together across a range of places with a range of different participants throughout the year to gain a better understanding of regional and sub-regional issues.
- **Second:** The UN Network, whether at the global, regional or national level, stands ready to assist Member States and partners in supporting the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration. Guidance material, technical assistance, and other tools developed under the Network's workplan will feed into the Global Compact's capacity building mechanism, in particular the Global Knowledge Platform and the Connection Hub. He noted that the Network welcomed the interest from Member States and other partners to pilot these programs and start operationalizing them so that next year we can truly show the benefits of the GCM. The UN Network on Migration will continue to encourage coordination structures at the regional level as a key element in providing support in implementing the GCM. The Migration Network Hub was launched earlier in March 2021 to help share and spread knowledge about migration, good practices and the initiatives of the GCM among practitioners, stakeholders, as well as the entire UN system.
- **Third:** The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), which is now fully operational and financing the first seven joint programs to support the implementation of the GCM, is the first pooled funding instrument dedicated exclusively to action in the field of Migration and the implementation of the GCM. The Network MPTF will continue to focus our efforts in providing technical support to all countries wishing to benefit from this fund by ensuring geographical balance, affirming full commitment to the principles of the GCM, as well as giving a premium to the quality and innovative nature of the joint programs. It is encouraged that all countries who have not yet done so to submit proposals for joint programs and to submit a concept note through the United Nations system, as the Steering Committee will continue to review the proposals during this year.

Mr. Karim Al-Nouri, Deputy Minister at the Iraqi Ministry of Immigration and Displacement, Republic of Iraq, began by thanking the organizers, expressing his pleasure to represent the Iraqi Ministry of Immigration and Displacement in this regional forum and allowing Iraq to



shed light on its national experience in implementing the Global Compact for Migration and developing its migration management system. It has been more than two years since Iraq adopted the GCM, which is firmly rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and contributes to many Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Particularly, the GCM directly supports SDG 17: Facilitating migration and the movement of people in an orderly and regular manner. Since the adoption of the GCM, Iraq has focused on building its national capacities to achieve the objectives of the Global Compact in line with its national development goals.

- **First:** Iraq in partnership with IOM, embarked on articulating the evidence-based data for migration, as it conducted its first national Migration Profile, including a comprehensive assessment of the Migration Governance Indicators of the government of Iraq. Much has changed with regards to migration in Iraq in the past ten years. Migration flows have become increasingly complex, and Iraq is perhaps the largest country in the Arab world experiencing important internal displacement movements within its territory. Iraq is also a country of origin and destination of migrants, the effects of migration in Iraq have become more and more diverse and numerous with the number of Iraqis migrating abroad.
- **Second:** Using this evidence-based and the whole-of-government approach to manage migration in Iraq on the long term, the formulation of the National Migration Strategy included more than six supporting ministries and government institutions. The National Migration Management Strategy references the GCM. This strategy also includes most of the legal obligations and is in line with the SDGs and national development plans. In particular, the priority SDG 14, the Iraq Plan of 2003, and the Sustainable Solutions Plan for displacement, internal, and external migration.
- **Third:** Iraq has established Inter-Ministerial Working Group to activate its plan. Where first, and at the level of decision-making, the Prime Minister established the Supreme Committee to follow up on the situation of Iraqis abroad. At the working level, a Technical Task Force has been established which has a specialized work team to follow up the implementation of each of the pillars of the National Migration Strategy.
- **Fourth:** Iraq focuses on the identification and predictability in future migration procedures for the sake of appropriate examination, evaluation and referral. Work is underway to expand government coordination capabilities at the provincial level and develop standardized procedures in the event of integration. Iraq will soon begin working with a new migration system, with a focus on Iraqis with needs-based support.

Iraq has referred to two key issues in the GCM Voluntary National Report. Two of the objectives of the GCM are of particular importance to Iraq.

- a) Objective No. 2 as the most important in the national context, which calls for minimizing the negative consequences and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin. He noted that this is better done through strong national development coordination as discussed in this forum. Iraq welcomes this important exchange of best practices and experiences in this field.



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- b) Objective No. 21 on sustainable reintegration as another major goal that benefits strongly from national development related to return. The return process needs the necessary infrastructure and services to ensure sustainable aid on the long term. Now as peace gradually prevails in Iraq, most of the displaced persons have returned to their homes while there remain challenges to act in a timely manner. These challenges may require strong inter-agency coordination dynamics and new ways of working. The complex nature and interdependence of migration and development require that the approaches of whole-of-government and whole-of-society be based on the integration of goals into one coherent course of actions. These principles are at the core of the Ministry of Migration and Displaced National Migration Strategy.

Mr. Al-Nouri concluded his speech by repeating the message of Her Excellency, the Minister of Immigration and Displaced at the recent Regional Review Conference on the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region, where the Minister announced that Iraq would join the initiative of the Champion Countries in implementing the Global Compact for Migration, as this was an expression of Iraq's engagement in the GCM. Iraq will submit its Voluntary National Report to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals as a Champion Country for the Global Compact for Migration.

Dr. Ayman Zohry, Professor at the American University in Cairo, indicated that the GCM is based on a set of guiding principles; (1) People centered, (2) International cooperation (3) National sovereignty, (4) Rule of law and due process, (5) Sustainable development, (6) Human rights, (7) Gender responsive, (8) Child sensitive (9) Whole-of-government approach, (10) Whole-of-community approach.

On the whole-of-society approach: The GCM encourages broad multi-stakeholder partnerships to address migration in all its dimensions. Despite this, the majority of stakeholders who responded to the stakeholder survey reported dissatisfaction with the extent to which this principle has been implemented. Hence, more efforts need to be directed towards further application of this important principle. Stakeholders can contribute to the follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Migration through many different means and tools.

Regarding, the application/integration of a human rights-based approach to the implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM in the Arab region, the majority of stakeholders who responded to the stakeholder survey reported that they are dissatisfied with the extent to which this principle is applied. Hence, more efforts need to be directed towards further application of this important principle. Despite the promising practices highlighted by some respondents, more interventions and actions are needed. The same can be said of the implementation/integration of the gender-responsive approach as well as the child-sensitive approach.

Mrs. Sara Al-Khatib, Solidarity Center, indicated that an important set of recommendations emerged from the regional consultation held on February 15th, which was organized by the Regional Office of UN Women and UNICEF in the Arab region with wide participation of



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various stakeholders. She reiterated the main recommendations that emerged from this consultation:

- **First:** Among the most prominent recommendations was to enhance the availability and quality of data disaggregated by sex, gender and socio-economic status of migrant workers, and facilitating access to information.
- **Second:** Emphasizing the need to reform the current migration systems and dismantle the elements of the sponsorship system, in a manner that guarantees the ethical employment of migrant workers, prevents them from paying illegal recruitment fees, and ensures their participation in effective training and orientation programs with access to information before departure from their countries and upon arrival to the host country.
- **Third:** Reform of the sponsorship system needs to be done in a way that guarantees full coverage of them in labor legislation, including domestic workers, and that labor legislation is in line with international standards, supported by strong oversight mechanisms, grievance mechanisms, access to adequate shelter, access to justice, litigation, and accountability of violators. Likewise, guaranteeing migrant workers' freedom of movement between employers is essential, to grant them residence permits in order for them to be able to apply for new jobs.
- **Fourth:** It is important to find alternatives to detention and deportation penalties, and prohibit hate speech and practices, discrimination and exploitation, especially towards undocumented workers. Emphasis was placed on the inclusion of female migrant workers in social and health protection systems, social security, amnesty programs, protection against wage theft, and the right to access all services, especially in light of the pandemic. Emphasis was also placed on the agency of migrant workers, the right to manage their own affairs and money, and their right to organize and collectively negotiate, in addition to their inclusion in national laws that combat violence against women.

Ms. Nourhan Abdelaziz, Save the Children, shared the main point raised by stakeholders in the discussion of the rights of migrant children and youth: the importance of protecting migrant children on the basis of needs, not on the basis of status, and their inclusion in national systems and services regardless of their migration status. She noted that there is also a need to look into the Child and Youth Migration Agency and listen to their needs and aspirations. Ms. Nourhan Abdelaziz presented the main recommendations from the stakeholders' consultation that focused mainly on SDG 10 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, equitable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

- **First:** Strengthen national child protection systems and promote child sensitive cross-border and cross regional cooperation. It is important to strengthen social services workforce (social workers) capacity as a core of a child protection system for migrant children and as part of border management and law enforcement systems. It is critical



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to put in place best interest procedure for children, ensure provision of information on services for migrating children in a child-sensitive manner.

- Second: End child migration detention where it is still practiced. Prohibit migration detention of children in national legislation and establish appropriate care and reception options for migrant children and families. Increase collaboration with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.
- Third: Safeguard availability and access to services for migrants. Address migrant young men and women's inclusion in national education systems, recognition of their previous education qualifications and facilitate access to employment which directly links to SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Providing access to basic services - including to health and vaccination - should be provided to all children irrespective of their migration status which not only contributes to SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages but also SDG 10 on reducing inequalities.
- Fourth: Assure that when returns to countries of origin are necessary and take place, procedures are child sensitive. In addition, make sure countries have policies in place to protect family unity, ensuring that children are not separated from their parent(s) through deportation processes or detention.
- Lastly: address issues that concern migrant mothers and their children
 - Make sure sex and age disaggregated data is collected - to understand the scale of the issue and to programme appropriately.
 - Undertake gender- and child-sensitive reviews and reforms of birth registration and nationality laws and regulations. One of the priorities is to enable women to register their children and pass on nationality to their children, to avoid statelessness which would ultimately contribute to fulfill SDG 5 on gender equality. A combination of national and cross-border efforts, including through engagement of consular services, are recommended to advance this objective.
 - Include children left behind by migrant parents in social protection and child-care measures in countries of origin, and assure children born to migrant mothers are covered in social protection and child-care measures in host countries.

Ms. Nourhan Abdelaziz concluded by reiterating another important overarching message of our consultation – the importance of addressing discrimination of migrants at all levels and promoting migrant inclusion in a way that benefits migrant children and enables them to positively contribute to communities hosting them.

Dr. Ibrahim Aqel, Director of the Institute for Family Health/ King Hussein Foundation, noted that COVID-19 pandemic has been a major impediment to sustainable development. He referred to the importance of health as a key entry point for sustainable development and delving deeper into the importance of reproductive and sexual health, as well as services related to protection against gender-based violence. Dr. Ibrahim Aqel spoke about the impact



of the lack of availability of these services specifically for the most vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees and displaced persons as well as the dire need for coordination with government partners responding to such service needs among migrants.

Closure of borders and movement restrictions have limited the operations of social workers and case managers in the field, reducing their ability to assess vulnerabilities and determine appropriate care options. There has also been limited access to sexual, reproductive health, gender-based violence and protection services since the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic. Due to movement and transportation restrictions, some countries started vaccination programs and did not consider migrants in the vaccination programs and response plan to this pandemic, whether in terms of examinations or in terms of vaccination or providing care. In some countries, if migrants are injured, or they need an advanced level of care, including admission to an intensive care unit and respirators, they could face difficulty in obtaining such services. In addition, migrants and refugees in many countries are not included in the health insurance or social protection programs. In short, these are the most important challenges. In addition to, issues related to mental health, the effects of the pandemic, and the lack of movement of migrants, specifically for migrants who were unable to return to their homes or communicate with their families.

Civil society organizations and NGOs play an important role in cultivating equality, we need to mainstream and reflect on. Recovering from COVID-19 will require the inclusion of migrants and vulnerable populations in all of our response plans, otherwise we will not be able to recover.