

Report

Arab Parliaments Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab Region

February 4, 2021

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) held a dialogue with Arab parliaments on the Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab Region, online on 4 February 2021 in cooperation with members of the United Nations Network for Migration in the Arab Region.

The dialogue aimed to provide parliamentarians with an overview of recent developments in migration governance at the global, regional and national levels, highlighting the new structures in place for coordination on migration. The dialogue also aimed to share the timeline for the regional review, in addition to encouraging peer learning and cooperation between parliamentarians regarding their participation and contribution to the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), and its follow-up and review at the regional and national levels. The dialogue also sought to discuss ways to ensure the effective participation of parliamentarians in the regional GCM review process.

This report includes a summary of the sessions' discussions, as well as the most important suggestions and inputs made by the participants.

I. Introduction

In accordance with the efforts exerted to conduct a Regional Review on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in the Arab Region, and in line with the GCM guiding principles calling for whole-of-society approach to the review, ESCWA and IOM, in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab Region, organized a series of dialogues with relevant stakeholders. The dialogues brought together migrants, civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, faith-based organizations, local authorities and communities, the private sector, employers, trade unions, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, the media and other relevant stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels as per the GCM General Assembly (definition of stakeholders (Paragraph 44):

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_73_195.pdf

Parliaments play a critical role in articulating migrants' priorities and issues and advancing their rights. Parliamentarians are responsible for ensuring that laws address the needs of migrants and are effective in protecting their rights. As representatives of the entire population, including migrants, they are responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of government plans and strategies and ensuring that they target and reach the most vulnerable. Ultimately, parliaments in most Arab countries are responsible for scrutinizing and approving the national budgets, and accordingly they must ensure that adequate financial resources are allocated to meet the needs of all population groups, including migrants.

The GCM drew attention to the role that parliamentarians play in this area and stressed the need for their participation in the global, regional, and national reviews of the GCM. In this context, ESCWA and the IOM, in cooperation with members of the United Nations Network for Migration in the Arab Region, organized an online dialogue with Arab parliaments on the regional review of the GCM on Thursday, February 4th, 2021 from 11am to 1pm (Beirut timing).

II. Objectives

The dialogue was timely as governments and various stakeholders in the Arab countries were working to conduct the first review of the implementation of the GCM. The dialogue sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Provide parliamentarians with an overview of recent developments in migration governance at the global, regional and national levels, and highlight the new structures in place for coordination on migration and the timetable for the regional review.
2. Encourage peer learning and cooperation between parliamentarians regarding their involvement and contributions to the implementation of the GCM and its progress and review at the regional and national levels.
3. Discuss ways to ensure the effective participation of parliamentarians in the GCM regional review process in the Arab region.

III. Welcoming Remarks

Ms. Mehrenaz Elawadi, Cluster Leader Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development, delivered the ESCWA opening remarks and welcomed the participants. She highlighted the timeliness of the GCM for the Arab region, which is witnessing an unprecedented migration movement, as the number of migrants hosted by the region exceeded forty million, while the number of migrants from the Arab countries exceeded thirty-two million. The region is characterized by complex migration trends and patterns, which necessitate bilateral, regional and global cooperation to address migration issues and ensure its contribution to sustainable

development and reduce some of its negative effects. Ms. Elawadi added that the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the pioneering role played by migrants and those who continued their work in various fields, including health services, hygiene, agriculture, and others. However, the pandemic also demonstrated the fragility of the migrants' situation and the urgent need for cooperation between various stakeholders to protect them and their rights.

In her speech, Ms. Elawadi touched on the pioneering role that parliamentarians play in representing the population, expressing their priorities and issues, and protecting their rights, especially the weakest of them, including migrants. Through their legislative role, Members of Parliament (MPs) have a responsibility to ensure that laws respect migrants' interests. They are also responsible for monitoring government work, ensuring that relevant government programs are appropriate to the needs of migrants, and allocating the necessary financial resources in the national budget to implement these programs. She noted that the GCM highlights the need for parliaments to be involved in achieving its objectives and in the periodic review process at the national, regional and global levels. She invited participants to reflect on means to better engage Arab parliaments in the regional review process.

Ms. Kristina Mejo, Senior Regional Liaison and Policy Officer and Deputy Regional Director, IOM, delivered the opening speech on behalf of Ms. Carmela Godeau, IOM's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. In her speech, Ms. Mejo stated that the interdependence between migration and development has gained an increasing recognition and importance with the growing commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the adoption of the GCM in 2018. This importance was reflected in the progress made on migration management and the protection of migrants as countries recognize the essential role migrants play in the development path.

Ms. Mejo added that the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the role of migrants, especially since many of them work on the front lines, such as health system workers, or despite the lockdown, continue to work to provide basic services to all people. She indicated that despite the repercussions of the pandemic, countries have continued their efforts not to neglect anyone, achieve the 2030 plan and the Global Compact goals. In this context, successful and promising practices emerged, such as the integration of migrants into health care systems or even in some cases, into social protection systems.

She praised the important role of parliamentarians representing countries and including migrants, as they expressed their concerns and priorities to ensure the development and respect of human and workers' rights. She emphasized the GCM's recognition of the crucial role that parliamentarians play in the context of migration. Ms. Mejo encouraged parliamentarians to share their experiences in addressing migration issues in order to enhance the outcomes of the regional review of the GCM in the Arab region. Ms. Mejo concluded her speech by stressing the effort and coordination required in the coming months to ensure the inclusion of migrants in the recovery plans set in place by governments, especially in the vaccination campaigns recently launched in the region, for a safe society for all.

IV. Sessions

Scene setting session

The session sought to pave the way for discussion by providing an overview of the principles, objectives, and follow-up and review of the GCM in the region. The session was moderated by Mr. Rawhi Afaghani, Conflict Prevention and Peace building Program Advisor at UNDP.

Ms. Sara Salman, ESCWA Regional Adviser for Population Affairs, gave a presentation on the principles and objectives of the Global Compact for Migration and its policy implications for the Arab countries. She reviewed the ten guiding principles that reflect the common understanding of migration, the shared responsibilities of all parties, and the unity of purpose among the participating countries, and highlighted the principle of the whole of society whole of government approach. She explained that the 23 objectives of the GCM provide a road map for countries towards protecting migrants and ensuring their participation in the development process. Ms. Salman noted that 21 of the 23 objectives emphasized the need to involve all stakeholders, including parliaments, to achieve the objectives. She highlighted the role of the United Nations to support Member States efforts in this regard.

Ms. Salman emphasized the need for a whole-of-society approach to the Regional Review, and the importance of cooperation and coordination between the various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to improve migration governance. She discussed some of the GCM policy implications for the Arab region, including the need to develop coherent governance frameworks that are consistent with global commitments; empower and protect migrants; ensure the holistic approach of the entire policies based on evidence; reduce adverse drivers of migration. In this context, Ms. Salman praised the important role that parliaments play in resolving conflicts and opening paths of communication between the state, citizens and other components of the society.

Ms. Hind Kinani, Regional Research Officer MENA Region at IOM, presented the follow-up and review process for the GCM at the national, regional and global levels. She noted that the review is a voluntary process, based on the voluntary national reviews of countries in preparation for the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), which will be held every four years starting in 2022. She added that the Secretary-General of the United Nations established the United Nations Network on Migration to ensure effective and coordinated support to all UN agencies and organizations for the implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM and to ensure appropriate support to Member States, including the provision of data and technical support for the preparation of national reports. She added that Member States called on the relevant sub-regional and regional processes, including regional economic commissions to review the implementation of the Global Compact at the regional level and monitor progress in its implementation starting from the year 2020 and then every four years. She provided an overview of the timelines of the regional reviews across the regions. She noted that the relevant documents are available on the page of the United Nations Migration Network for each region.

In this context, Ms. Kinani presented a summary of the review and review process of the GCM in the Arab region, which is supported by the IOM, the League of Arab States, and ESCWA in close coordination with members of the national and regional migration networks of the United Nations. She also highlighted the establishment of national level networks in Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates. The presentation concluded with a reference to the receipt of voluntary reports from twelve Arab countries, which are available on the page of the United Nations Global Network for the Arab Region¹.

The presentations were followed by two interventions from the participants as follows:

Her Excellency Mariam Majed Khalfan Bin Thania, a member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, indicated in her intervention the importance of migration in achieving sustainable development and that migration issues are among the priorities of the Arab region and clarified that the increasing numbers of migrants and refugees require Arab countries to commit to protecting their rights while focusing on the specific situation of migrant women and girls and ensuring their full and equal participation.

She reviewed the progress made by her country in migration governance over the past years, in cooperation with international organizations, with the aim of improving the legislative environment for migration, combating human trafficking, addressing issues of migrant workers, providing a wage protection system, and introducing a number of reforms by adopting a minimum wage. She added that the UAE issued a law of equal wages between men and women in the private sector and listed a number of achievements that the country was able to achieve in light of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of protecting employees and workers and reducing the loss of their jobs. These include the initiative to work remotely; provide workers and employees with COVID-19 vaccines free of charge and without discrimination; renewal of work permits and residency visas; caring for the families of all those who died due to the COVID-19 virus for all nationalities; and to make legal amendments in granting the Emirati citizenship to investors, specialized talents and professionals with the aim of appreciating competencies and strengthening the social fabric. She concluded by referring to the fundamental and pivotal role that parliaments do to support migration policy through their legislative work, and called for intensifying efforts to develop policies and legislation in support of safe, regular and orderly migration and to provide the necessary funding to support refugee and migrant programs at the national, regional and international levels.

His Excellency Mr. Michel Moussa, member of the Lebanese Parliament, began his intervention by noting that Lebanon attached great importance to the issue of migration as it is a source and destination country, explaining that his country submitted its first voluntary report a few months ago and that the Prime Minister had approved the proposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants to establish a national mechanism to follow up on the implementation of the GCM. He added that his country agreed to most of the agreements and protocols related to migration and reviewed a number of draft laws that were put in place to combat human trafficking, protect migrants, and address the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants. Some of these

initiatives included facilitating the return of 40,000 migrants to Lebanon; renewal of residency permits for foreign workers and exemption from late fees; and facilitating the voluntary return of migrants to their country of origin. He concluded his speech by stressing that the national vaccination campaign includes migrant workers, refugees, and displaced persons in Lebanon.

The first session: The role of Arab parliaments in dealing with migration issues

This session sought to provide a platform for dialogue and peer-to-peer learning among members of Arab parliaments on their experiences in addressing migration issues. Ms. Sara Salman moderated this session and posed several questions to guide the discussion, namely: 1) Did your parliament address any of the migration issues? 2) What are the challenges you faced? 3) Was there a special role in light of the Covid-19 pandemic?

This session started with an intervention by Her Excellency Ms. Aisha Bint Yousuf Al-Mannai, a member of the Qatari Shura Council and a member of the Arab Parliament, in which she asked about the essential difference between voluntary migration and forced migration and whether the GCM also includes refugees who suffer from great difficulties in accessing education, health services and minimal human rights. She added that the region bears the brunt of the phenomenon of migration by hosting the largest number of refugees and migrants, which exerts additional pressures as countries strive to provide humanitarian aid. She explained that the solution lies in the cooperation of Arab countries to end instability in the region.

She added that the Arab Parliament focuses on implementing regional and international agreements for refugees and the GCM. Efforts included addressing the repercussions of Covid-19 on migrants including job losses, reduced wages, the drop in total remittances from migrants, and tightening of travel restrictions. She explained that the Arab Parliament affirms the need not to neglect migrants and refugees and the countries hosting them in the Arab region, and urges Arab countries to expedite the submission of voluntary reports to follow up on the implementation of the GCM. She concluded her speech by requesting technical support for the Arab Parliament through an awareness building seminar on migration in the Arab region.

Ms. Salman clarified that the Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by countries in 2018, addresses issues related to refugees, while the GCM focuses on migrants. She added that the GCM does not distinguish between migrants regardless of their legal status, but rather emphasizes their rights and their contribution to the development process, hence the importance of having harmonious governance frameworks consistent with the global obligations to regulate migration and facilitate regular migration, adding that many countries have taken commendable steps in this regard, including amending the procedures for obtaining a visa and ending or reforming the sponsorship (Kafala) system.

Mr. Mohamed Al-Tayeb Al-Askari, member of the Algerian National Assembly, emphasized the need for wider regional coordination due to the influx of migrants caused by various reasons, including armed conflicts, political and economic crises, famine, climate change. He added that Algeria receives thousands of irregular migrants and treat them on the basis of solidarity and

respect for their dignity and rights. The Algerian Parliament has approved the amendment of the Law against Trafficking in Person and adopted a comprehensive approach calling for eliminating the root causes of adverse migration and addressing its consequences through equitable distribution of wealth, economic reform, consolidation of security and peace, and the provision of necessary support to neighboring countries. Mr. Al-Askari concluded by affirming that his country values the GCM as a comprehensive roadmap for improving migration governance, however Algeria reiterates the sovereign right of states to manage migration at the national level.

His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Ouzzine, Deputy Speaker of Parliament and Rapporteur of the Foreign Committee of the Moroccan House of Representatives, referred to his country's achievements in improving migration governance, including the selection by African leaders of His Majesty King Mohammed VI as the leader of the African Union in the issue of migration; preparing the African agenda document on migration presented by the Kingdom of Morocco to the African Union; as well as the establishment of the African Migration Observatory. He also referred to some of the achievements made by his country in managing migration in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. He concluded his speech by stressing the responsibility of Arab parliaments to develop appropriate legislation, urging governments to implement inclusive public policies, spreading a culture of tolerance that respects diversity and accepts others, warding off xenophobic speeches, correcting wrong judgments against immigrants, confronting the causes of adverse migration and promoting development, and working towards peaceful conflict resolution and prevention through multilateral diplomacy.

Ms. Salman stressed the importance of documenting the roles of legislative parliaments in the field of migration management at the national level. She also clarified that the GCM is non-binding and that one of the guiding principles of the GCM stresses the States autonomy. She noted the extra pressures that States face as a result of irregular migration and stressed the need to curb irregular migration and widen regular migration pathways.

His Excellency Mr. Nidal Ammar, member of the People's Assembly in the Syrian Arab Republic, highlighted the long suffering of the Syrian people with war, violence, death, displacement. He referred to the role that the Syrian Parliament plays in coordinating and ensuring the return of the displaced to Syria and the main challenges facing the government and the people, mainly the international sanctions.

His Excellency Deputy Michel Moussa stressed the need to confront hate speech and incorporate it in all laws and legislation related to migrants, and he referred to the national plan for human rights in Lebanon that is being developed in cooperation between the parliament, the relevant ministries and civil society in line with the recommendations of the international frameworks. He also emphasized the need for social ecosystem that supports the appropriate implementation of migration related laws.

Mr. Mohammed Ouzzine emphasized the role of the Moroccan Parliament in migration related laws and policies, including the national migration strategy. He stressed the importance of

creating frameworks for cooperation and partnerships between regional economic commissions, regional intergovernmental bodies, and parliaments to improve migration governance, as well as the importance of engaging parliaments in the different regional and global platforms and events.

Ms. Jamila Debbech Ksiksi, a member of the Tunisian Assembly of People's Representatives highlighted the large influx of migrants to and from Tunisia, including through the irregular migration pathways. She explained that Tunisia does not yet have a coherent migration policy framework, however the parliament has initiating some legislation including the Law against Trafficking in Persons and the establishment of a national body to prevent human trafficking and a law to combat racial discrimination, which made Tunisia take the lead and be the first in the Arab world and the second in Africa, among countries that have legislation against racial discrimination.

She added that work is underway to introduce amendments to the current migration laws that date back to 1968, as well as to organize consultative dialogues with components of civil society in cooperation with international organizations in order to present proposals to reform the legal system regarding the regulation of migration. Migrants face several Challenges in Tunisia including limited health and social coverage and access to services; inability to access organized labor movements, and their exposure to economic exploitation and racial discrimination. She highlighted the role of the civil society as an opportunity to improve migration governance in Tunisia.

Session 2: Open discussion on promoting the whole of society approach to the voluntary review of the GCM at the national level in the Arab region

This session aimed to exchange ideas on means and methods to ensure the effective participation of parliamentarians in the regional review of the GCM, especially in the regional conference that will be organized on 24-25 February 2021. It was moderated by the Special Envoy of the Director General of the International Organization for Migration for the Arab Gulf States region, Mr. Hassan Abdel Moneim Mostafa.

Mr. Raymond Hilal, member of the People's Assembly in the Syrian Arab Republic, affirmed that the Syrian Parliament plays an essential role in enacting laws and legislations that ensure the safe and secure return of all migrants and following up on the government's efforts to continue providing facilities for every migrant who wants to return, and pointed to the challenges facing the state in the process of data collection and analysis, the weakness of the institutions and infrastructure, and the consequences of sanctions in the field of securing basic and health materials, as well as the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation of policies and programs in general, indicating that the state is putting in place intensive measures at the borders for all arrivals to the Syrian territories.

In his second intervention, Mr. Mohamed Al-Tayeb Al-Askari believed that burden-sharing between countries of origin, transit and destination is a necessary issue that should be included in the compact. He explained that Algeria deals with the issue of migration using a

comprehensive, balanced and solidarity approach, on the one hand the government is concerned with the national community residing abroad and protecting it from all forms of discrimination, racism and hostility, and on the other hand it is concerned with the basic rights and dignity of migrants after Algeria has become a destination country as well. In this context, Algeria has joined several regional and international legal mechanisms related to human rights, combating human trafficking and protecting migrant workers. He added that combating transnational organized crime will help strengthen cooperation on the issue of migration, and stressed on the need to ensure political stability and reduce armed conflicts and terrorism, especially in the Sahel region due to its clear intersection with organized crime and extreme poverty, by supporting African organizations such as the African Union and encouraging investments that support development.

A. Closing remarks

The dialogue of Arab Parliaments on the Regional Review of the GCM in the Arab region was concluded with words from the organizers in which they thanked the representatives of the national parliaments and the participants from the Arab Parliament for their attendance and stressed the importance of this dialogue in advancing the implementation of the GCM, its follow-up and review at the regional and national levels in the Arab region and in enhancing understanding about the role of parliaments, as well as discussing ways to ensure the effective participation of parliamentarians in the regional review of the Global Compact in the Arab region.

Ms. Salman affirmed that the organizers will continue to work with Arab parliaments to support them in their work on migration, she also thanked the IOM for the distinguished partnership and successful cooperation in the process of following up on the implementation of the GCM. She encouraged parliamentarians to participate in the regional conference on February 24 and 25, which will bring together representatives of Arab governments and parliamentarians, in addition to representatives of civil society institutions and various stakeholders.

For his part, Mr. Hassan Abdel Moneim Mostafa praised the participation of parliamentarians in the process of reviewing the implementation of the GCM and the efforts made by Arab parliaments to improve the governance of migration, activate the role of migrants in development and protect their rights, and stressed the need for cooperation and facing challenges in a participatory manner.

Annex

Arab Parliaments Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab Region

February 4, 2021

List of Participants

a. ESCWA Member Countries

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