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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Regional Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Implementation and Policy Implications for the Arab Region Cairo, 3-4 December 2019

Summary

Under the framework of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, in close partnership the Co-chairs, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the League of Arab States, organized the Regional Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Implementation and Policy Implications for the Arab Region, in Cairo between 3 and 4 December 2019. The conference was organized in collaboration with the members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region.

The conference aimed to provide a platform for member States to identify national and regional priorities, share best practices and key achievements to date in implementing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and explore priority actions for the future. The Conference also sought to enhance participants' awareness of the means and tools to operationalize the GCM, as well as of the follow-up and review process at the regional and global levels, namely the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) scheduled for 2022, and the regional review of the implementation of the GCM preceding it in 2020.

Countries reaffirmed their commitment to engage in the regional review process and discussed initial ideas on how to carry out the review. The Co-chairs of the Working Group on International Migration committed to leading the process and supporting member States as necessary.

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Introduction

1. Under the framework of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab region, the Co-chairs, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the League of Arab States, in close partnership, organized the Regional Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Implementation and Policy Implications for the Arab Region, which was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Cairo between 3 and 4 December 2019. The conference was organized in collaboration with the members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region.
2. The conference aimed to provide a platform for member States to identify national and regional priorities, share best practices and key achievements to date in implementing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and explore priority actions for the future. It also aimed to enhance the participants' awareness on means and tools to operationalize the GCM, as well as follow up and review mechanisms and processes at the regional and global levels, namely the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) scheduled for 2022. This was coupled with the regional review of the implementation of the GCM preceding the IMRF, that will take place in 2020, as per the General Assembly resolution on the format and organizational aspects of the international migration review forums ([A/RES/73/326](#)).
3. The agenda comprised of eight sessions, which included a scene-setting session that provided an overview of the process leading up to the adoption of the GCM and unpacked its principles and objectives, focusing on their policy implications for the Arab region. The second session focused on regional and national cooperation mechanisms and their role in improving migration governance. The last two sessions of the first day of the conference were dedicated to member States to reflect on their experience in migration governance and discuss their challenges, emerging issues and success stories. The fifth session, on day two, discussed the importance of mainstreaming migration in national development planning, while focusing on the migration-development nexus. The sixth session explored priority areas for making migration work for all, while the seventh session focused on means of implementation and monitoring the progress of the GCM. The final session was a roundtable discussion between participants on the way forward and the regional review of the GCM.

I. Conference sessions

A. Opening session

4. The conference began with an opening session during which the Co-chairs of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, Ms. Karima El Korri, ESCWA Chief of Population and Social Development Section, Ms. Enas El Fergany, the Director of the Refugees, Expatriates and Migration Affairs Department at the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and Ms. Carmela Godeau, IOM Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, delivered the welcoming remarks. The three Co-chairs reiterated the importance of regional collaboration particularly in light of the Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which calls for enhanced coordination and collaboration at the national, regional and international levels.
5. On behalf of the host country, Assistant Foreign Minister for Multilateral Affairs and International Security Ehab Fawzy welcomed the participants and emphasized Egypt's commitment to implementing the GCM and working towards achieving its goals. Following the opening remarks, Ms. Sara Salman, Regional Advisor on Population Affairs at ESCWA, highlighted migration trends patterns and drivers in the region, and presented updated data on migration to and from the region, as well as findings at the sub-regional level. She also provided key figures on the transfer of remittances from and to the region.

B. Session one: Setting the scene – global cooperation mechanisms for improving migration governance

6. Ms. Jill Helke, Director, International Cooperation and Partnerships, IOM, presented the process leading from the New York Declaration to the adoption of the GCM at the Marrakech Conference in December 2018. She also highlighted the efforts that the United Nations has taken in response to the GCM including launching the new United Nations Network on Migration.

7. Ms. El Korri of ESCWA unpacked the GCM, focusing on its principles and objectives. She also linked the GCM objectives to the regional migration priorities that were identified in the 2017 Regional Consultation on Migration and presented some promising practices that countries have taken that align with the GCM.

8. Several issues were highlighted in the animated discussion that followed the two presentations. Participants representing civil society highlighted their exclusion from the policymaking process relevant to migration and migrants as a major challenge limiting their ability to contribute to migration governance and implementing the GCM. A second challenge was their ability to access migration-related data.

9. Participants identified fragmented migration policies as a challenge across the region and agreed on the need to prioritize a holistic approach to migration governance. Lessons learned from countries that have recently adopted or are currently developing integrated migration policies should be shared with countries across the region. There was a consensus on the need for more accessible disaggregated data to better respond to the needs of migrants, particularly environmental migrants, and develop responsive and inclusive migration policies. Participants also emphasized the importance of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches as migration governance cannot be achieved by a single ministry or even by the government alone.

C. Session two: Regional and national cooperation mechanisms for improving migration governance

10. The second session was dedicated to addressing the role of regional and national cooperation mechanisms for the promotion of good migration governance. It was moderated by Mr. Ibrahim Awad, Professor of Practice in Global Affairs, the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

11. Head of the African Union Permanent Delegation to the League of Arab States Abdelhamid Bouzاهر highlighted that migration has been at the centre of the African Union (AU) agenda since its inception. Armed conflicts, insecurity and environmental pressures further amplify its importance. The speaker underlined that the AU's visionary Agenda 2063 is implicitly addressing migration and migration governance in all its seven key aspirations.¹ He noted two initiatives closely related to the issue of migration, namely the setting up of the African Migration Observatory in Rabat, Morocco, which aims to gather migration data and support evidence-based policymaking, and the adoption of the AU Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in Africa, which is awaiting ratification.

12. Ms. Mai Ali, Refugees, Expatriates and Migration Affairs Department, General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, highlighted the role of the League of Arab States in facilitating consultations among Arab countries on migration-related issues and channeling the unified stance of its member States in global fora. It acts as the secretariat of the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugees Affairs, which serves as a platform for Arab countries to discuss and promote a common understanding of issues of international migration, strengthen cooperation and support the sharing of experience. The League of Arab

¹ A Prosperous Africa, based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development; An Integrated Continent Politically united and based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of African Renaissance; An Africa of Good Governance, Democracy, Respect for Human Rights, Justice and the Rule of Law; A Peaceful and Secure Africa; Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity Common Heritage, Values and Ethics; An Africa Whose Development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by African People, especially its Women and Youth, and caring for Children; An Africa as A Strong, United, Resilient and Influential Global Player and Partner.

States supported its member States throughout the preparation process of the GCM by holding consultations aiming to develop a common vision of migration reflecting the priorities of Arab countries.

13. Ms. Lara Ibrahim, Programs' Specialist, Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants highlighted the crucial role of civil society in improving migration governance and reminded participants that the whole-of-society approach lies at the heart of the GCM. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were actively engaged in the preparation phase of the GCM and upon its adoption in December 2018, they pledged to raise further awareness about the GCM, gather information with the aim of changing misperceptions about migration and enhance social cohesion between migrants and host communities. The speaker underlined that civil society actors also need to be closely involved in the review of the implementation of the GCM on the national, regional and global levels.

14. In the discussion that followed, member State representatives highlighted a number of key issues related to migration that receive less attention, including intraregional migration and the role of national parliaments in migration governance, and seconded the remark on the crucial role of civil society for amplifying the development benefits of migration. Several countries shared their experience with setting up national coordination mechanisms aiming to implement the GCM and improve migration governance. Egypt established a committee for the implementation of the GCM involving several government entities. Yemen has a coordination body presided over by the Prime Minister facilitating inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation with Yemeni expatriates and CSOs. Mauritania developed a strategic framework to facilitate migration in cooperation with the European Union and IOM and established a national committee presided by the Prime Minister and including the Ministries of Interior, Defense, Justice, Education, Health, and others. Algeria has a national committee to protect against human trafficking.

D. Sessions three and four: Arab countries' perspectives and initiatives for the GCM

15. Sessions three and four provided member States with the opportunity to reflect on and share their experience with migration governance. The country reporting conducted in these two sessions served as an initial exercise for member State representatives in the lead-up to the 2020 regional review.

16. Session three was moderated by Ms. Fergany from the League of Arab States and Ms. Hajwa Bakhit Azrak Abker, from the Ministry of Justice in the Sudan, moderated session four.

17. Member States presented their national experiences, highlighting the challenges, success stories, existing and emerging priorities and lessons learned. Twelve countries presented their experiences, namely: Algeria, Comoros, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.

18. The presentations highlighted some common challenges across the Arab region, including the lack of disaggregated data, which hinders evidence-based policymaking. Another data-related challenge is its fragmentation across different institutions and bodies, which lowers the possibility for having comparable data and complicates its accessibility. Another common challenge identified was irregular migration, which presents dilemmas to hosting States that are often torn between responding to the humanitarian situation of irregular migrants and the ramifications of their irregular status that limits the governments' ability to provide them with the services and protection that they need.

19. Countries witnessing conflict or are affected by the waves of conflict-driven migration highlighted the particular challenges faced by host countries which have to accommodate large and often sudden waves of migrants. Addressing their rights and needs puts additional pressure on already strained resources. Member State representatives highlighted the need to differentiate between refugees and migrants as they often require different scope and type of response and incur different responsibilities for the State.

20. The two sessions also brought to the attention of participants some promising practices from the region such as the launch of cross-sectoral coordination bodies, citing the examples of the establishment of national working groups on migration in Jordan, Qatar, Egypt and Iraq. Another promising practice was the adoption of progressive laws and policies in some countries, such as Qatar which passed the 2017 domestic workers law and Law no. 21 which abolished the Kafala system, and Mauritania, which issued a decree to provide migrants with access to health services. A few countries presented their efforts to develop integrated migration strategies, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania and Egypt. Some countries have created migration specialized bodies such as the Ministerial Committee for Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs in Morocco, the National Commissions for fighting human trafficking in Tunisia, Algeria, the Sudan, and Morocco as well as a migration observatory in Tunisia. Other countries, such as Qatar, have focused on establishing labour dispute resolution committees and increasing migrants' access to justice mechanisms. Libya, a country that witnesses a great deal of transit migration, highlighted its life-saving efforts targeting irregular migrants.

21. The representative from Jordan emphasized the importance of the governments' own discourse in fighting and reducing hate speech and xenophobia. Countries also presented their efforts in increasing bilateral agreements to make migration safer and more orderly and to benefit both migrants and sending and receiving States. Some countries, such as Lebanon and Morocco, have also focused efforts on engaging the diaspora as a means to accelerate development. Several member State representatives expressed the need for capacity-building, particularly in the areas of migration data and developing integrated migration policies.

E. Session five: Migration and national development planning

22. The fifth session aimed to explore the interlinkages between migration and sustainable development and critically reviewed the experiences of States in integrating migration into development planning and policies, including challenges and possible synergies. It was moderated by Mr. Ayman Zohry, President of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies (EGYMIG), Adjunct Professor at the American University in Cairo.

23. Ms. Helke of IOM spoke about the linkages between migration and sustainable development and highlighted that the GCM is rooted in the 2030 Agenda: leaving no one behind notably includes migrants. She spoke about SDG indicator 10.7.2 (number of countries with migration policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people), which is directly linked to migration. IOM and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs are co-custodians of indicator 10.7.2. IOM has been working on the measurement framework for this indicator (the Migration Governance Framework). She highlighted that many other SDG targets are also relevant for migration, such as forced labour or student mobility.

24. Mr. Tarik Sissou, Head of the Multilateral Cooperation Division, Ministry in Charge of Moroccan Expatriates and Migration Affairs, Morocco, explained that since 2013, migration has been integrated in all relevant sectoral plans and policies. Morocco has also developed a National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum and a National Strategy for Moroccans Residing Abroad. As for the institutional framework, a Ministerial Committee for Moroccan expatriates was formed by the Government in 1999, and reviewed and expanded in 2015 to cover all migration affairs. It is headed by the Prime Minister and employs a participatory approach. It also has a technical subcommittee with participatory mechanisms to ensure that migration is integrated in development plans at all levels of governance.

25. Mr. Saber Soliman, Assistant Minister of State for Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, Egypt, introduced in his presentation the three main pillars of Egypt's migration governance policy, which forms a part of Egypt's Vision 2030. They are strengthening the areas of regular migration, linking migration to development and supporting Egyptians in diaspora. In 2016, Egypt started a programme with more than 500 trainers working on the ground aiming to sensitize young people on the risks of irregular migration and present alternatives. Activities are concentrated in governorates with high rates of irregular migration. The trainings are conducted in partnership with civil society and include vocational education to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship. Other programmes are targeting Egyptian

expatriates and involve cultural awareness campaigns and Arabic language courses. Egypt is also supporting investments and the transfer of knowledge from expatriates.

26. Ms. Hamida Rais, Director General of International Cooperation in the Field of Migration, Ministry of Social Affairs, Tunisia, spoke about the country's draft strategy on migration and Tunisians abroad, which aims to develop cultural ties and encourage investments in Tunisia by expatriates to enhance migration's contribution to social and economic development in the country. She mentioned the Tunisian National Observatory on Migration, which plays an important role in collecting data on migration and facilitating evidence-based policymaking. She highlighted the potential of new technologies for migration governance and provided the example of an e-portal for Tunisians living abroad, which also features investment opportunities. She touched on projects and practices that are implemented at the local level in partnership with international organizations using a participatory approach, bringing together institutions, government bodies and civil society organizations, such as the model initiative of the municipality of Al-Mahras. This initiative aims to sensitive local authorities on the importance of including migration in local development and to enhance the contribution of expatriates to development.

27. In the ensuing discussion, questions were raised concerning the representation and political participation of expatriates, the link between migration and peacebuilding, and the ways of attracting highly qualified migrants and expatriates. All countries represented in the panel, namely Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, have measures in place to ensure the political participation and representation of citizens abroad. It was highlighted, that different communication strategies are necessary to attract expatriates in various regions and that it is important to build trust after a long time of detachment from the home country. The interlinkages between peace and security on one hand and migration on the other hand were debated as well. It was noted that while a lack of peace and security is an important driver for migration, a peaceful and enabling environment attracts highly skilled migrants and investment. It was mentioned that benevolent legislation on dual nationalities has a potential to facilitate the positive development outcomes of migration.

F. Session six: Making migration work for all

28. The sixth session focused on exploring priority areas for making migration work for all in the Arab region. It was moderated by Ms. Amira Ahmed, Professor at the American University in Cairo.

29. Mr. Ausamah Al Absi, Chief Executive Officer of the Bahrain Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), Bahrain, introduced the system of the "flexi work permit" for migrants in Bahrain, introduced 2.5 years ago. The system addresses some of the shortcomings of the *kafala* sponsorship system, which gives a lot of authority to employers that render migrants vulnerable. Bahrain introduced procedures, such as the cancelling of exit visa and blacklists. Under the flexi work permit scheme, the country allows the migrant worker to sponsor himself and work for anyone, full-time or part-time, short-term or long-term. The scheme first targeted highly skilled workers, investors and migrants without a valid visa, and in 2018 it was expanded to be available for regular migrants. The flexi scheme has proved to be efficient in reducing irregular migration.

30. Mr. Asem Miqdad, Executive Director, Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies, Jordan, brought a civil society perspective to the discussion and highlighted the role of CSOs in providing recommendations on how to tackle discrimination and negative misperceptions on migration. CSOs also often provide legal assistance to migrants and follow up on the ratification and implementation of international instruments related to migration. As a good practice, he mentioned the public amnesty and grace period that had been granted for domestic workers and migrant workers in Jordan to regularise their stay, the outcomes of which have been very positive.

31. Mr. Rajai Ray Jureidini, Professor at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar, focused in his presentation on Objective 6 of the GCM which calls for facilitating fair and ethical recruitment and safeguarding conditions that ensure decent work. He stated that despite ILO convention 181 and the Dhaka Principles, which make it clear that recruitment agencies should not charge workers for their recruitment, the practice is widespread. He

identified the structural culture of corruption in the recruitment industry as the root cause for this, leading to labour market distortions and increased vulnerability for migrant workers.

32. In the discussion that followed, the issue of social security for migrant workers was raised. Speakers emphasized the need for more coordination among African countries to protect the rights of their nationals working abroad. Stronger consular presence in countries of destination was mentioned as a prerequisite for this. Finally, the link between migrant workers and the unemployment rate of nationals was raised. Experts argued that loosening the authority of employers on migrant workers renders the national labour force more competitive, as employers' strong authority over migrant workers might lead them to prefer migrant labour.

G. Session seven: Unlocking means of implementation and monitoring progress of the GCM

33. Session seven highlighted the importance of data and monitoring frameworks and partnerships as enablers for accelerating the implementation of the GCM. It was moderated by Mr. Mohamed Khachani, Secretary General, Moroccan Association of Studies and Research on Migration, Professor at University Mohammed V, Agdal, Morocco.

34. Mr. David Martineau, Migration Policy Officer, IOM, introduced the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI), a set of 90 indicators covering six dimensions of good migration governance as enunciated by the IOM Migration Governance Framework. The framework seeks to answer the question what makes a good migration policy and forms the basis for measuring SDG indicator 10.7.2. Sixty-seven countries have been part of the MGI process so far. The entire process lasts roughly for a year and its outcomes can be used to generate a dialogue, identify gaps, develop comprehensive migration strategies and establish baselines to track progress.

35. Ms. Fawz Salih, Director of the Population Policies Division, Ministry of Planning, Iraq, shared the experience of Iraq with the MGI process. It is currently developing a database on migration which should help address the challenge of lack of data and determine gaps in migration policy.

36. In the ensuing discussion, it was clarified that the MGI does not assess how migration policies are implemented, only what is in place. Therefore, it is a first step only and other indicators are needed to look at whether policies are reaching their objectives. Experts made the case for broad stakeholder consultations as part of the MGI process, ideally including migrants, as they result in richer discussions and more comprehensive findings.

H. Roundtable discussion: The way forward

37. Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of the Secretariat for the United Nations Network on Migration, provided a brief overview of the International Migration Review Forum and the regional review of the GCM. He also discussed ongoing efforts to ensure that the Multi-Partner Trust Fund is an effective mechanism to encourage developing innovative projects.

38. The Co-chairs of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, ESCWA, IOM and the League of Arab States, expressed their commitment to continue to support, in collaboration with the Working Group, the regional review process scheduled to take place at the end of 2020.

39. Participants engaged in a roundtable discussion and expressed their views on means and needs for moving forward. Participants recognized the role of IOM in providing technical support at the country level, encouraging different actors, and its commitment to promote evidence-based policies. Some participants questioned the modality of the review, including how to ensure a 360-degree review of the GCM, whether the GCM objectives should be grouped to allow for such a review and how can the review be aligned with differing national priorities across countries. Some participants expressed the need for a clear roadmap to evaluate the 23 objectives, especially given the data limitations and the lack of clear indicators. One suggestion from the

participants was to develop a guidebook on how to evaluate the GCM. There was a consensus on the need for the review to also be guided by the principles and not just the objectives of the GCM. Accordingly, participants stressed the need to ensure an all-of-government, all-of-society approach in conducting the review, through engaging all stakeholders including the parliaments and CSOs. The role of the League of Arab States in preparing for the regional review was raised by Egypt. Finally, the representative from the African Union emphasized the need to strengthen the African-Arab collaboration in designing the way forward.

40. Member State representatives as well as other stakeholders expressed their commitment to engage in the preparatory process leading up to the first regional review of the GCM in 2020.

I. Closing session

41. The Regional Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Implementation and Policy Implications for the Arab Region closed with statements by representatives of the League of Arab States, IOM, and ESCWA. They thanked participants for their participation and stressed their commitment to continue to support Arab countries in implementing and achieving the objectives of the GCM and ensuring that migration works for all in the Arab region. They also reaffirmed their continued support to member States in the regional review process of the GCM.

II. Participants

42. The Conference was attended by approximately 100 participants, including representatives from 18 Arab countries, high-level representatives of Arab Governments, civil society organizations, regional organizations, United Nations bodies, academia and regional and international experts.

III. Documents

43. Conference documents, including the agenda, presentations, and report are available at <https://www.unescwa.org/events/regional-conference-global-compact-migration-2019>.

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