



Africa Regional GCM Review: COVID-19 as an opportunity to build forward better!

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As Africa prepares for the regional review of the United Nations [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\)](#), it is happening at a time when the world is gripped and battling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as the successful containment and defeat of the virus will require well-coordinated global collaboration under the World Health Organisation (WHO), it is the same way that Africa's organised labour, through the African Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation, is convinced that the GCM, as a multilateral instrument, has the capabilities to drive and attain a pro-rights/progressive global labour migration governance leaning on the whole-of-society approach. For this regional review, African workers are excited and hopeful of using this process in advancing post-COVID-19 recovery efforts in ways that can help deal with the intensification of migration push factors.

COVID-19 and migration

Coronavirus disease is a *mobility concern*¹ given that the spread of it across the globe is mainly through movement and contact. Nevertheless, it is important to state that COVID-19 has had direct and multiplier effects on migration and migrants, as well as on households, communities and economies across the continent. No doubt, COVID-19 is exacerbating push factors - poverty, hardship and inequality on the rise; [jobs and income losses](#) globally and in Africa are worryingly high and growing; health and other frontline workers, including migrants, continue to suffer from inadequate safe and healthy provisions and working environment; chances of advancing a predictable and effective recovery is encumbered by the growing debt profile of Africa and other pre-existing conditions². For a [youthful continent and a youth constituency](#) that represents the most mobile strata of our societies, the COVID-19 pandemic has openly called the GCM to greater essence and prominence, especially in responding to the challenges caused by adverse drivers of migration ([GCM Objective 2](#)).

On account of our commitment to advancing the relevance of the whole-of-society approach to driving a progressive migration and labour migration governance, our organisation, the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation ([ITUC-Africa](#)), in early 2020 when COVID-19

¹ As a mobility concern does not mean it is a mobility disease (Please see <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-21358-2>) and so the race-labelling hysteria, xenophobia and hate attacks against persons and migrants are unfortunate and unacceptable.

² <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2021/03/30/Macroeconomic-Developments-and-Prospects-In-Low-Income-Countries-2021-50312>

landed on the shores of Africa, [wrote](#) to the African Union and the Member States to mobilise the continent and nations on a war footing to protect all persons residing in Africa without discrimination. The ITUC-Africa also compiled a simple, concise and handy [report](#) on the 54 African States' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. A [similar report](#) has highlighted actions by African trade unions (notably from Benin, Guinea, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Togo and Tunisia) to protect workers and provide basic services to migrants (GCM Objective 15). Trade unions, aside from being actively involved in the awareness and education campaign against COVID-19, consciously and deliberately focused on migrants' communities to provide them non-pharmaceutical materials (handwashing buckets, soap, hand sanitisers and face mask) and small-scale humanitarian assistance (food, clothes and shelter). The African Trade Union Migration Network in Togo (RESYNAM-Togo) [assisted in rescuing](#) (in December 2020) and repatriating (in late March 2021), four Bangladeshi nationals who were smuggled into and later became survivors of trafficking in Togo (GCM Objective 10).

For Africa's organised labour, the expectations in the Regional Reviews, are that concrete actions to address push factors, including insecurity from violent armed conflicts and political persecution are engineered and deployed. This will help to stem the anticipated surge in desperate and dangerous migration journeys. We expect to see a well-laid out plan to review and improve health and safety in the global supply and value chain, as well as cross-border trading routes where labour migrants entry is profound to secure the health and safety of workers and migrants. Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs), especially their development, negotiation, adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, need to benefit from collaboration.

To this end, the ITUC-Africa, being a member of the African Union Labour Migration Advisory Committee (AU-LMAC) will continue to seek collaboration with state actors and non-state actors alike on the need to build forward better, especially from the exacerbation of the socioeconomic situation by the COVID-19 pandemic. On this note, it will help if the following recommendations can be considered:

1. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) must be given global priority. Universal vaccination is critical to protect everyone against COVID-19. Migrants and members of their families must not be discriminated against in vaccine management.
2. Africa must lead and direct its labour migration governance process. It is, therefore, advisable for Africa to consider the institutionalization of an "African Process" akin to the Asian Colombo Process. Member States of the African Union must be willing to champion this process.
3. It is critical to work with state actors to improve the ratification, application and enforcement of standards³ governing migration and labour migration. Given the high restrictions to the enjoyment of freedom of association rights to migrants and the asymmetry of power relations skewed against migrant women, the existence of standards will increase protection and reduce exploitation and abuses.
4. The ITUC-Africa in late 2018 launched the [report](#) of the study on Africa Labour Migration to the GCC States. Among other things, the study showed that an effective and inclusive stakeholder process is critical for better implementation of BLMAs and labour migration governance processes. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) is one such arrangement. We hope to see a stocktaking

³ It is useful to achieve a healthy level of ratification of ILO Conventions on labour migration <https://www.basug.eu/new-trafficking-route-to-europe-via-togo/>

of this arrangement and the opening up of the process in an instituted manner to African State Actors and Non-State Actors alike.

5. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States and the Middle East are a growing destination for African Labour migrants. To this end, a continuous engagement to reform and improve the Kafala recruitment system in a remarkable and [commendable way as Qatar has done](#) is necessary. Slavery-like and other exploitative practices in labour migration processes must be effectively removed.
6. One of the ways to recover and build forward better post-pandemic is to consider a bilateral and multilateral skills partnership agreement. It is also critical to support the expansion of social protection coverage and the possibilities of ensuring social protection portability across economies.

Finally, to be able to improve engagement given the intensification of digitalization, trade unions will need support to build and improve technical and institutional capacities. African non-state actors will be looking to the UN Migration Network and other entities to support them to build, consolidate and sustained alliance-building and collaboration with other non-state actors across the globe.



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