The Global Compact for Migration (GCM):
Well Governed Migration as an Essential Element of Effective COVID-19 Response

OVERVIEW

The United Nations Network on Migration is committed to supporting all partners in pursuit of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, recognizing that this cooperative framework provides an invaluable tool for ensuring all in society can contribute to a collective response to COVID-19 and are protected equally against its impact.

To that end this briefing is part of a series by the Network looking at different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they relate to migrants and their communities. The present document outlines the applicability of the Global Compact in preventing and responding to COVID-19, for States, the UN system and other stakeholders, highlighting instances of promising practices as useful models to draw from. We look forward to feedback from all partners, and to updating these recommendations on an ongoing basis.

The paper was drafted by IOM with inputs from all members of the Network's Executive Committee.

"[The COVID-19] crisis is an opportunity to reimagine human mobility for the benefit of all while advancing our central commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. It is fitting to build on the recognition of the vital role played by people on the move to redouble our efforts to combat discrimination against them; to ensure that those in need of protection are able to safely and promptly access it; to health-proof human mobility systems; and to strengthen global migration governance and responsibility sharing for refugees, as already envisaged by the Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration and as spelled out in relevant international human rights and refugee instruments."[1]

KEY MESSAGES

- The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) provides an effective framework for international cooperation on the governance of international migration in all its dimensions, which can be leveraged by states to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Building on the Secretary General's call[2] to reimagine human mobility, this brief will demonstrate how the GCM can guide Member States, the UN and other stakeholders in developing inclusive COVID-19 preparedness, prevention, response and recovery measures that protect human rights and enhance the positive development effects of human mobility.

- As illustrated in the Secretary General's policy brief COVID-19 and People on the Move, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people on the move presents itself as three interlocking crises, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities: a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a protection crisis.[3] With 200 countries, territories or areas affected by COVID-19 so far[4], the scope of this pandemic and associated mobility restrictions is historic.

- Some of the measures implemented to respond to COVID-19 have been harmful for migrants, violating their human rights and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities through discriminatory approaches. The current outbreak threatens to roll back global commitments, including from the GCM, and hinder ongoing efforts to strengthen migration governance, including the promotion and protection of the human rights of all migrants, regardless of status.

- Well governed migration can mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19, stimulate strong socioeconomic recovery and build more inclusive societies that protect human rights and are better prepared to address future crises. Many governments around the world are implementing measures in response to COVID-19 which are aligned with the GCM, such as ensuring that access to health care and other essential services are available to all, irrespective of migration status; extending work and

---

[1] Secretary-General Policy Brief: COVID-19 and People on the Move
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] WHO COVID-19 Situation Dashboard

residency permits or regularising status; releasing migrants from immigration detention and prioritising non-custodial alternatives; maintaining "firewalls" between immigration enforcement and access to information, healthcare, social protection and other services; or temporarily suspending forced returns. In this pivotal moment, it is critical to build on these good practices and demonstrate renewed commitment to implementing the GCM.

- The longer-term impact of COVID-19 is unknown. As the virus peaks with varying degrees of severity and at different times across the globe, strengthened resolve for international cooperation and global partnership is needed to develop and enact effective responses. Such responses are articulated in the GCM and must guide collective action to leverage well-governed migration to support COVID-19 response and recovery.

COVID-19: THE IMPACTS ON HUMAN MOBILITY

While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a global health crisis, it is also having an unprecedented impact on human mobility. COVID-19 is highlighting the importance of ensuring that migration remains safe, inclusive and respects international human rights law as envisaged in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).[5] The pandemic is bringing into focus the vital role that migrants play in our societies, and the need for more effective migration governance that both protects and empowers migrants as important members of our communities.[6]

In the context of COVID-19, the need for effective migration governance is as pressing as ever. The pandemic is disproportionally affecting people and communities who were already in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including migrants, who are at risk of being left behind in our COVID-19 responses. In some cases, migrants have been discriminated against and excluded from access to rights that are critical for effectively combatting the pandemic, including information, testing, health care, education, decent work, social protection, food, housing and other services.[7] Migrants have been particularly vulnerable to stigma and xenophobia, and often scapegoated as responsible for spreading COVID-19.[8] As mobility restrictions have been imposed, many migrants, particularly migrants in irregular situations and migrants with precarious livelihoods or those working in the informal economy, have been more likely to face exploitation. Others have become stranded at borders or are at a heightened risk of human trafficking, arbitrary detention and forced return.[9] COVID-19 is also deepening pre-existing inequalities, including for migrant women who face higher risks of exposure to gender-based violence, harassment,

---

[5] Secretary-General Policy Brief: COVID-19 and People on the Move
[6] IOM, COVID-19 Issue Brief, Why Migration Matters for "Recovering Better" from COVID-19
[7] OHCHR, COVID-19 and the Human Rights of Migrants: guidance
[8] IOM, COVID-19 Issue Brief, Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to Foster Social Cohesion in the COVID 19 Response and Recovery
[9] IOM, Institutional Statement on COVID-19 and Mobility

abuse, exploitation and discrimination.[10] At the same time, the pandemic is also highlighting the importance of migrants' contributions to communities around the globe, including their socioeconomic contributions.[11]

The international community's ability to develop successful COVID-19 responses that protect people and help to build back better, will rely on the same common understanding set forth by the GCM—that migration is a defining feature of our globalized world, connecting societies within and across all regions. Rather than seeking to permanently restrict human mobility, a comprehensive approach to the pandemic is needed—one that optimizes the benefits of migration for all, while addressing its risks and challenges. States must put in place inclusive public health and socio-economic responses that protect the human rights of all migrants and recognize them as an integral part of the solution. Such an approach is foreseen by the GCM and is the only way for the world to effectively respond to global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. In short, **COVID-19 requires strengthened international resolve and cooperation for the commitments and actions identified in the GCM, building on the emerging good practices around the globe to implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as a matter of urgency.**

THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION: A BLUEPRINT FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

The GCM is the first intergovernmental agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Resting on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the GCM presents a cooperative framework to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration while minimizing factors that compel irregular movement or cause or exacerbate vulnerability at different stages of migration. The 360-degree vision and ten cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles of

GCM GUIDING PRINCIPLES
▪ PEOPLE-CENTERED
▪ INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
▪ NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY
▪ RULE OF LAW AND DUE PROCESS
▪ SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
▪ HUMAN RIGHTS
▪ GENDER-RESPONSIVE
▪ CHILD-SENSITIVE
▪ WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH
▪ WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH

the GCM provide precisely the approach necessary to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The GCM places the existing normative framework governing international migration within a cooperative framework for achieving effective migration governance. The cooperative framework outlines 23

---

[10] ILO, Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
[11] IOM, Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis

commitments ("objectives") and subsequent actions which are considered to be relevant policy instruments and best practices. In this way, the GCM provides governments and other actors with a practical framework to help craft inclusive and effective COVID-19 preparedness, prevention, response and recovery measures that respect migrants' rights and leverage migrants' positive contributions to sustainable development. The strong anchoring of the GCM in the human rights framework is therefore critical to effectively respond to the current crisis. GCM commitments and actions can be seen as a guide for States to meet their human rights obligations while designing measures that affect migrants during the COVID-19 crisis. Responses to COVID-19 should address the immediate threats of the pandemic and avoid exacerbating inequalities.

USING THE GCM FOR EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The 360-vision of the GCM recognizes that a comprehensive approach is required to optimize the overall benefits of migration, while addressing risks and challenges for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. Understanding all 23 GCM objectives within the unique conditions of each national context is essential for successful GCM implementation. The Start-up Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration[12] ("Migration MPTF") and the Network's workplan clusters the 23 objectives of the GCM under five thematic areas, which provide a helpful framework for considering COVID-19 responses. In the below, examples of pandemic responses are listed under each of the five thematic areas, demonstrating how the implementation of GCM objectives by governments and other stakeholders can contribute to COVID-19 policy responses.

Start-up Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund

The Start-up Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, or the Migration MPTF, was called for by Member States through the adoption of the GCM. The Migration MPTF, a key component of the GCM Capacity Building Mechanism, supports Member States to implement the GCM. Anchored in the 10 guiding principles of the GCM, the Migration MPTF supports collective action on migration. Programmes under each of the five thematic areas of the Migration MPTF are expected to enter the implementation phase by October 2020. Where possible, programmes to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on migrants and migration-affected communities are being prioritized.[13]

---

[12] For more information see the Migration MPTF website
[13] See "Migration MPTF Steering Committee April 2020 decision" and "Migration MPTF Pipeline of Joint Programmes"

Thematic Area 1: Promoting fact-based and data- driven migration discourse, policy, and planning

GCM Objective 1: Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies.	GCM Objective 3: Provide adequate and timely information at all stages of migration
GCM Objective 17: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration	GCM Objective 23: strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration

Around the world, COVID-19 has triggered incidents of stigma, discrimination, xenophobia, and racism against migrants, including those who have returned to their communities of origin. Stigma, discrimination, and xenophobia undermine migrants' human rights, hinder the ability of migrants and returnees to access essential services, achieve their full potential and enjoy decent working conditions, as well as limit their contribution to COVID-19 response and recovery. Women migrant workers may experience multiple forms of discrimination, as well as violence and harassment.

Data is critical to understanding the reach and impact of COVID-19. Disaggregated data, including by sex, age, national origin, nationality and migratory status, will capture any differentiated impacts of the pandemic on migrant populations and can help articulate the varied realities that migrants face during the pandemic. Further, COVID-19 related data and indicators,[14] disaggregated by migratory status, can be used to trace outbreaks and identify high-risk locations of virus transmission, particularly as countries prepare for and face second waves of the pandemic.

Data and evidence must be leveraged to develop accurate narratives about the experiences and contributions of migrants during COVID-19. As multiple reports have shown, migrants are on the front lines of COVID-19 response, working in essential services such as agriculture, grocery stores, food and other delivery, personal and health care services. In addition, through remittances, entrepreneurship, and as important intercultural connectors, migrants will play an important role in long-term socioeconomic recovery efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to contain its spread have severely impacted existing data collection operations at a moment when there is increased demand for information. Rapid assessments help to identify the extent and nature of the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19, as well as of the preventive measures taken associated with the pandemic.[15] These assessments can also help to

---

[14] Key human rights indicators for monitoring human rights implications of COVID-19, published as part of the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19

[15] ILO, ILOSTAT COVID-19 and Labour Statistics

inform evidence-based narrative. Information and data on travel disruptions, restrictions and blockages are also important to assess COVID-19 impact on human mobility.[16]

Access to trusted and context-specific information, including regarding health, safety, and available support and resources, is vital. Such information must be provided to migrants by national and local authorities, including within the workplace, across communities, and throughout migrants' travel trajectories. The dissemination of accurate information is also vital for migrants returning to home and/or host countries. Relevant authorities in countries of destination and origin, including consular representatives, should reach out to migrants, particularly those affected by lockdown or confinement, to provide timely and accurate information, including regarding available protection and assistance, options and pathways for regular migration, entitlements and social benefits and opportunities for safe and dignified return. Governments should partner with stakeholders and engage migrant communities in developing communication strategies, focusing on providing information in languages and formats that migrants understand and from sources and messengers they trust.

Recommendations:

- Disaggregate COVID-19 data and indicators, including by sex, age, national origin, nationality and migratory status, to capture the impact of COVID-19 on migrant populations, as well as to inform policy responses.[17]

- Use data to develop and promote open and evidence-based public discourse on COVID-19. In particular, capture and articulate the positive contributions of migrants and migration in the context of COVID-19 to confront racism, xenophobia and intolerance against migrants, and to advance evidence-based narratives on migration.[18]

- Ensure that the public discourse and response to COVID-19 does not contribute to xenophobia and racial discrimination, including by introducing measures to prevent, monitor and address stigma and incidents of racism, xenophobia, incitement to discrimination, hatred and violence, and holding those responsible to account.[19]

- Strengthen information and communication systems to provide migrants with adequate and timely information on the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, as well as measures taken to address its impacts. This includes ensuring that information can be accessed by all, is widely disseminated across various platforms, available in multiple languages and in accessible formats.[20]

---

[16] See IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix Mobility Impacts COVID-19
[17] Based on [GCM Objective 1: Commitment, page 7]
[18] Based on [GCM Objective 1: Action D, page 8]
[19] OHCHR, COVID-19 and the Human Rights of Migrants: Guidance; and based on [GCM Objective 17: Action F, page 26]
[20] Based on [GCM Objective 3: Action c, page 11]

- Strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation and dialogue to exchange information on COVID-19 related measures and developments relevant for migrants, including through joint databases and online platforms.[21]

The Global Compact for Migration – in action[22]	
Examples of positive COVID-19 initiatives and responses	
Belgium	In Brussels, a telephone line has been established for marginal populations, including migrants, to direct them to a local doctor who will answer questions regarding symptoms.
Colombia	The health ministry has requested that all the entities of the health system coordinate plans, programmes and services for the care of migrants, especially those in situations of vulnerability, including irregular migrants.
Ireland	Ireland Health Services has translated resources into 23 languages to make sure that all members of society, including migrants, have the information they need to stay healthy and follow quarantine guidelines.
Lebanon	The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) through the National Mental Health Programme, Abaad, has launched a national campaign under the slogan "#TheRealTest" on several TV outlets with a synchronized introduction of primetime news and on social media. The campaign focuses on vulnerable communities, including migrants and displaced people.
Thailand	Migrant Workers Resource Centres (MRC) and partners in Bangkok, Chonburi, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Sot, and Rayong provide key information on COVID-19 to migrant workers and their communities.
Tunisia	The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) conducted a census of migrant workers in collaboration local authorities; completed a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19; raised awareness on protection measures; and distributed safety kits.
Viet Nam	Rapid assessment of short- and longer-term impacts of the pandemic, including vulnerability analyses covering children of migrant workers and other children in vulnerable situations, are being conducted. The General Statistics Office will also compile and analyze critical disaggregated data at commune level in selected provinces for emergency monitoring and reporting.

---

[21] Based on [GCM Objective 3: Action b, page 11]

[22] Throughout this policy brief, the Network attempts to highlight positive elements of specific responses but does not assess each practice comprehensively. As such, the inclusion of examples does not signify that all elements of the response or practice in a particular country or region are consistent with the GCM guiding principles and objectives.

Thematic Area 2: Protecting the human rights, safety, and wellbeing of migrants, including through addressing drivers and mitigating situations of vulnerability in migration

GCM Objective 2: Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin	GCM Objective 7: Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration	GCM Objective 8: Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants
GCM Objective 12: Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment, and referral	GCM Objective 13: Use migration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives	GCM Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration

Migrants face the same health threats from COVID-19 as any other human being. However, migrants may face increased vulnerabilities due to their living, working, or administrative situations, which put them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and suffering the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic.

Throughout the migration cycle, migrants may face situations of vulnerability that impact their health and safety. Prior to COVID-19, many migrants already faced limited or restricted access to health and other essential services, challenging practical and legal obstacles, and precarious living or working conditions that precluded access to social protection. In the context of COVID-19, many more migrants are finding themselves in such situations, and the consequences have become even more severe.

Most migrants settle in cities and are more likely to live in high-density and poorly maintained urban areas that lack access to basic services. Migrants living in marginalized areas of cities, urban slums, informal settlements, camps, worksite housing, or communal dormitories face increased vulnerabilities to the dangers and negative repercussions of COVID-19.

Migrants confined in immigration detention centers are particularly impacted by the pandemic. In the often-overcrowded detention facilities misinformation is common, physical distancing is impossible, hygiene and sanitation is inadequate, and human resources are stretched.[23]

Across the globe many migrants are excluded from national programmes for health promotion, disease prevention, treatment and care, as well as from social and financial protection schemes for health and other social services. Exclusion makes early detection, testing, diagnosis, contact tracing and care for COVID-19 very difficult, increasing the risk of future outbreaks and deepening the potential for outbreaks to go undetected or even actively concealed among migrant communities.

---

[23] UN Network on Migration, COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do?

In many countries, domestic workers, home-based workers, agricultural workers and others in the informal economy are excluded from health and other social service provisions, as legal frameworks to not recognize these workers equally. Migrant workers in key sectors, including health and agriculture, can be exposed to working conditions that put them at risk of infection. Income insecurity can create incentive for migrants to work while they are sick and increase the likelihood of negative coping mechanisms such as child labour. Rising levels of violence during COVID-19 is also a significant concern, particularly in domestic work[24] in which migrant women comprise 73.4 percent of all migrant domestic workers.[25] For migrants in an irregular status, fear of detection, detention and deportation hinders their access to health and other services, including for COVID-19 testing or treatment. These conditions present an additional threat to public health.

Measures implemented by governments in response to COVID-19 including port closures, delays in disembarkation, and the reduced presence of search and rescue vessels in the Mediterranean and other maritime routes are raising serious concerns about the fate of migrants in vessels in distress and so-called 'invisible shipwrecks'.[26] Travel restrictions and border closures are leaving migrants stranded in transit countries, often without options to seek protection or family reunification. While responding to the current challenges presented by COVID-19, preserving life, protecting rights and reducing vulnerabilities must remain the priority.

Recommendations:

- Include migrants in all COVID-19 public health, safety, and prevention measures. Ensure access to essential health and other services[27] as well as continuity of care for migrants, regardless of migration status.[28]

- In recognition of the health risks of COVID-19, prioritize release from immigration detention, stop new detentions on the basis of migration status; and implement non-custodial alternatives to detention in the community that are in line with international law. Take a human rights-based approach to any use of detention in order to protect the rights and health of migrants and staff in immigration detention facilities.[29] Further, ensure that those released from immigration detention have access to adequate housing, food and other basic services and are protected and supported.[30]

---

[24] ILO, Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
[25] GFMD 2020 UAE – Thematic Note: The Governance of Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment Landscapes
[26] IOM, COVID-19 Control Measures, Gap in SaR Capacity Increases Concern About 'Invisible Shipwrecks' and IOM Calls for European Solidarity and Action on Mediterranean Rescue Amid COVID-19; OHCHR, Migrant rescues in the Mediterranean, 8 May 2020
[27] UN Network on Migration, Policy Brief Enhancing Access to Services for Migrants in the Context of COVID-19 Preparedness
[28] Based on [GCM Objective 2: Action g, page 10]
[29] UN Network on Migration, COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do?
[30] Based on [GCM Objective 13: Actions a & H, page 22]

- Systematically include migrant workers as a target population in COVID-19 responses, with particular attention to the needs of women migrant workers, who face increased risks of violence in lockdown and in quarantine.[31]

- International maritime law and human rights obligations must be upheld during the COVID-19 emergency. Solidarity with countries receiving migrants is needed to ensure that people rescued at sea are swiftly and safely disembarked. Standardized COVID-19 health and safety protocols should be applied to all disembarkations including NGO search and rescue vessels.[32]

- Public health emergency preparedness and response measures will need to become a fundamental aspect of migration policies. A central imperative will be to implement rights-based health measures at international borders so that border officials and migration authorities can adequately respond to public health concerns. These procedures must be transparent and clearly communicated to reduce unnecessary delays and expenses.[33]

The Global Compact for Migration – in action	
Examples of positive COVID-19 initiatives and responses	
Kuwait	Kuwait has offered an amnesty period enabling migrant workers without documents to travel home and has announced a number of measures to protect migrant workers.
Malaysia/ Bangladesh	The Malaysian Trades Union Congress and the Bangladesh High Commission have organized food distribution to Bangladeshi workers in 400 locations in Malaysia.
Netherlands	The Netherlands has released a number of people from detention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of people released from detention is unknown. However, the Ministry of Justice and Security has announced that there were 460 people in immigration detention on 31 January and about 330 in March.
Spain	The Government agreed to release persons in immigration detention after making individual assessments case by case.
Thailand	Foreign nationals who had previously been required to apply for visa extensions through the Immigration Office have now been granted automatic visa extensions.
Zambia	Home Affairs announced the release of all migrants in immigration detention.

---

[31] Based on [GCM Objective 7: Action C, page 15 and Action D, page 16]
[32] Based on [GCM Objective 8: Action A, page 17]
[33] IOM, Cross-border human mobility amid and after COVID-19 and summary, and based on [GCM Objective 12: Action A, page 21]

Thematic Area 3: Addressing irregular migration including through managing borders and combating transnational crime

GCM Objective 9: Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants	GCM Objective 10: Prevent, combat, and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration	GCM Objective 11: Manage borders in an integrated, secure, and coordinated manner
GCM Objective 14: Enhance consular protection, assistance, and cooperation through the migration cycle	GCM Objective 21: Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration	GCM Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration

To control transmission of COVID-19, more than 71,000 mobility restrictions have been implemented by 220 countries, territories and areas worldwide.[34] Travel restrictions and border closures have created a patchwork of regulations and have negatively impacted the rights of migrants also affecting their families and communities. Border closures, travel restrictions, and rapidly changing regulations further complicate already complex mobility schemes. As a result, many migrants have been stranded at borders, placed in indefinite detention, deported without due process or other human rights safeguards, or unable to return home whilst individual assessment procedures have been suspended in several countries. Too often, migrants are stranded without adequate information or access to services.

With reduced pathways for regular migration, migrants are pushed into irregular situations, which make them more susceptible to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking and forced labour. Among others, undocumented migrants and seasonal workers are faced with more precarious working and living conditions resulting in greater vulnerability to falling prey to criminal networks. Women and children in irregular situations are particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation, gender-based violence and abuse. COVID-19 measures are likely to lead to an increase in migrant smuggling and human trafficking.[35]

Lockdowns and confinement reinforce isolation. Increased levels of domestic violence reported in many countries is a worrying indicator of the living conditions of many migrants, including victims of trafficking and those in domestic servitude or sex slavery, forms of exploitation that disproportionately affect women and girls. In an environment where priorities and actions are geared towards limiting the spread of the virus, it is easier for traffickers to hide their operations, making victims increasingly invisible.[36] Referral mechanisms, which are essential for the identification of victims of exploitation and abuse and their access

---

[34] IOM, Data taken from migration.iom.int; exact figures as of 3 July 2020 as published in the IOM COVID-19 Disease Response Situation Report
[35] UNODC, Research Brief How COVID-19 restrictions and the economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America
[36] UNODC, Brief: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons

to rights, may slow down or cease to work. As a result, the identification of victims and subsequent referral to protection schemes becomes more challenging. In-person counselling, representation and assistance, including legal aid, are reduced to a minimum or subjected to backlogs. Consultations, when possible, are offered online, which may introduce further barriers to accessing support.[37]

Since the onset of the pandemic, some migrants have been forcibly returned without due process or individual assessment in violation of the prohibition of collective expulsion and the principle of *non-refoulement*, including unaccompanied children. Others who may wish to return home voluntarily have been unable to do so. When migrants return home, countries of origin and local authorities are struggling to provide for the wide range of returning migrants' needs from access to safe and child-friendly quarantine and basic services, to securing decent work and social protection, to protecting against stigma and discrimination. There are concerns that millions of migrant workers will be forced to return home due to lack of employment and social protection, only to face labour markets in their home countries that are under considerable strain with high levels of unemployment due to the pandemic.[38] Lack of bilateral and sub regional cooperation can hinder economic support to migrants who have lost their jobs and reduce migrants' preparation for re-entry and reintegration into labour markets in their home countries.[39]

Recommendations:

- Crime prevention and criminal justice efforts should be adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic and aimed at effectively combating the various forms of crimes committed against migrants, including abuse, violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons.[40]

- Assistance and support schemes for the most vulnerable, including human trafficking victims and smuggled migrants, should be made available, irrespective of migratory status, and tailored to the emerging needs of the pandemic. Access to justice must be safeguarded, where possible facilitated by technology, including access to judicial processes, collection and provision of evidence, submission of documents and/or filing or adjudicating of motions or petitions to courts.[41]

- Tightened border controls and other measures implemented at international borders in response to COVID-19, including health screening and quarantine at points of entry, must ensure human rights, including non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, confidentiality and dignity and should not imply mandatory or indefinite detention.[42]

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Atalayar, the drama of migrant workers: unemployed when returning home or without resources and far from their families
[39] ILO Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
[40] Based on [GCM Objective 9: Action B, page 18] and [GCM Objective 10: Action C, page 19]
[41] Based on [GCM Objective 10: Action H, page 19] and [GCM Objective 14: Action D, page 23]
[42] Based on [GCM Objective 11: Action C, page 20]

- Forced returns should be suspended in times of COVID-19.43 Enforced returns during the pandemic can only be carried out if they comply with the principle of non-refoulement and the prohibition of collective expulsions, as well as procedural guarantees, including due process, access to lawyers and translators, and the right to appeal a return decision. In all cases, all stages of return procedures should be adjusted to ensure they are compatible with public health strategies.[44]

- As migrants voluntarily return to their home countries, all actors must cooperate to ensure such returns are safe, dignified and voluntary and that reintegration is sustainable. Governments must ensure that nationals who wish to return home voluntarily are duly received and readmitted, in full respect for the human right to return to one's own country and the obligation of States to readmit their own nationals. Voluntarily returning migrants must be included in national response, social protection and recovery strategies without discrimination, and protected against stigma and exclusion.[45]

- Bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements should be strengthened to ensure conditions for safe return as well as gender-sensitive provisions that facilitate sustainable reintegration of migrants. In the context of COVID-19, this includes guaranteeing migrants have access to testing and health services, including preventive measures and treatment, as well as access to education, social protection and decent work.[46]

The Global Compact for Migration – in action	
Examples of positive COVID-19 initiatives and responses	
Costa Rica / Panama	Costa Rica and Panama have signed a bilateral agreement to coordinate migratory movements across their common border, including provisions for medical examinations.
Ethiopia	The government is working in several quarantine centers in Addis Ababa to inter alia: register returnees and identify those who are in vulnerable situations, especially children; trace families of unaccompanied children; ensure a safe return to their homes; and support reintegration to the community.
Guatemala	The government of Guatemala is ensuring that unaccompanied children returned during the COVID-19 crisis have access to safe, dignified and child-friendly quarantine upon return as well as reintegration support, including testing, individual rooms in shelters to avoid the spread of the virus, and psychosocial support.

---

[43] Statement by the UN Network on Migration "Forced returns of migrants must be suspended in times of COVID-19"
[44] OHCHR, COVID-19 and the Human Rights of Migrants: guidance, and based on [GCM Objective 21: Action E, page 31]
[45] Based on [GCM Objective 21: Action F, page 31]
[46] ILO, Ensuring fair recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on [GCM Objective 21: Actions A and B, page 30]

Niger	Koranic students who have returned from Nigeria and other countries in Western Africa due to school closures have been included in the government's list of beneficiaries of food distribution. This operation was implemented under the lead of the Regional Directorate of Population and the "Dispositif National de Prevention et Gestion des Crises Alimentaires".
Philippines	The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) resumed its livelihood program for distressed overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) returning to their hometowns due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
United Arab Emirates	The Government announced automatic renewal of work permits and visas for migrant workers.

Thematic Area 4: Facilitating regular migration, decent work and enhancing the positive development effects of human mobility

GCM Objective 5: Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration	GCM Objective 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work	GCM Objective 18: Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualification, and competences
GCM Objective 19: Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries	GCM Objective 20: Promote faster, safer, and cheaper transfer of remittances, and foster financial inclusion of migrants	GCM Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration

COVID-19 has had significant impact on the ability of migrants to move safely and regularly, including for labour mobility and decent work, access to education, family reunification, or where migrants are compelled to leave their countries of origin due to adverse drivers and structural factors such as poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to health, natural disasters, environmental degradation and the adverse effects of climate change. Migrants around the world, from international students to temporary and other workers, their families, and migrants in vulnerable situations, have been unable to move through regular migration pathways due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions or left stranded without jobs and assistance in host countries. The pandemic has revealed critical deficiencies in access to decent work, as well as the devastating consequences of gaps in social protection coverage, unfair recruitment practices, and unsafe working conditions.

Before the pandemic, migrants, who made up 3.5 percent of the world's population in 2019 [47], have been estimated to contribute nearly 10 percent of global GDP.[48] Estimates indicate that there are 164 million migrant workers around the world[49] rendering migrants an important part of the global labour force. In many countries, migrants represent a significant share of the workforce making important contributions to societies and economies.[50] For example, in 2016, foreign-born doctors accounted for 27% of doctors in OECD countries, and foreign-born nurses accounted for 16% of all nurses.[51] Expiration of residence permits or visas limits migrants' participation in the workforce and hinders effective pandemic response.

COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown measures may provoke the worst recession since the Great Depression. Marked by closures of businesses and extended unemployment the global economy is projected to contract sharply by 3 percent in 2020, according to the IMF.[52] Unemployment, likely to worsen in the coming months, will put pressure on workers and increase competition.[53] As incomes decrease and jobs are lost, migrants are likely to fall into irregularity and may adopt risky coping mechanisms or be taken advantage of for exploitative purposes. Due to unemployment, migrants risk falling out of social protection mechanisms such as health or education, adding to existing vulnerabilities.

Migrant remittances represent a critical source of external financing in low- and middle-income countries and a crucial lifeline for millions of families in home countries. In 2019, migrants sent $554 billion in international remittances to family in low- and middle-income countries, representing over three times the amount of official development aid received.[54] The World Bank predicts the economic crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic will produce the sharpest decline of remittances in recent history, anticipating a 20 percent decrease in 2020.[55] Without remittances, the education, health and livelihoods of family members, especially children, in countries of origin are under threat. Out-of-school children may resort to harmful coping strategies such as child labour or child, early or forced marriage. In Mexico, a 20 percent reduction in remittances may result in 800 additional infant deaths annually.[56]

COVID-19 illustrates the vital role that migrant workers play in essential jobs in health care, construction, transport, services, and agriculture and agro-food processing. In addition, women migrant workers represent a significant share of domestic work. Through their skills, migrant workers contribute to growth

---

[47] UNDESA, International migrant stock 2019

[48] McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), People on the move: Global migration's impact and opportunity December 2016

[49] ILO, ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, December 2018

[50] OECD/ILO 2018, How Immigrants Contribute to Developing Countries' Economies

[51] OECD, Recent Trends in International Migration of Doctors, Nurses and Medical Students

[52] International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, April 2020: The Great Lockdown

[53] 400 million full-time job losses are estimated for the second quarter of 2020. See ILO Monitor, Covid-19 and the world of work, 5th edition

[54] World Bank KNOMAD, Migration and Development Brief 32, COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens, April 2020

[55] World Bank, World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History, April 2020

[56] CGDEV Analysis "Migrant Remittances will Plummet. Here is what that means for Global Development" (May 2020) (based on analysis of previous studies)

and development outcomes in countries of origin and destination. Further, migrants at all skill levels have the potential to make positive contributions to economic development through productive investments.

Regular pathways for migration are needed to adequately respond to global labour supply and demand. Strengthening the harmonization of skills recognition, including by integrating skills aspects in bilateral labour migration agreements, can help address skills shortages, meet labour market needs and foster workers' reintegration in their home countries.[57] COVID-19 prevention measures also impacting recruitment practices, which need to be adapted to current realities. In this rapidly changing context, adherence to guiding principles and operational guidelines of fair recruitment, including recruitment fees and related costs,[58] are essential to ensure that the recruitment and placement of workers protects the rights of migrants and their families, while taking into account the legitimate needs of employers and recruiters.[59]

Maintaining and bolstering economies requires strengthened international collaboration and public-private partnerships to ensure migrant workers and their families have access to decent work and fair working conditions. To enhance the positive development effects of human mobility, governments and all relevant stakeholders must work together to create and promote opportunities for migrants to contribute in their communities of origin, transit, and destination.

Recommendations:

- Support skills development, recognition and matching, including through bilateral labour migration agreements, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, with the aim of protecting the rights of migrants and their families and facilitating their integration or reintegration into labour markets in accordance with the emerging needs and COVID-19 realities.[60]

- Ensure the fair and ethical recruitment of migrant workers by accommodating COVID-19 related travel restrictions, health recommendations, and administrative obstacles and other fees.[61]

- Ensure measures and policies to protect migrants, irrespective of their migratory status, to ensure they have access to decent work, fair working conditions, and are protected from abusive and fraudulent recruitment practices. Identify and address workplace-related vulnerabilities and abuses exacerbated by COVID-19 affecting migrant workers, including seasonal and domestic workers, and those working in the informal economy, with a view to regularize their work.[62]

---

[57] ILO, Guidelines for skills modules in bilateral labour migration agreements; ILO, How to Facilitate the Recognition of Skills of Migrant Workers: Guide for Employment Services Providers
[58] ILO General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs
[59] ILO, Ensuring fair recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic
[60] Based on [GCM Objective 18: Action A and Action G, page 27]
[61] Based on [GCM Objective 6: Actions C, F and G, page 14]
[62] Based on [GCM Objective 6: Actions I and J , page 14]

- Expand the flexibility and availability of opportunities for regular entry and stay based on compassionate, humanitarian, or human rights grounds, particularly for migrants in vulnerable situations, including migrants seeking family reunification, access to education, or migrants compelled to leave their countries due to natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation.[63]

- Consider regularization schemes and facilitate the extension of visas, amnesties, work or residence permit renewals to ensure migrants have regular status and can access rights.[64]

- Leverage the positive contributions of migrants to respond and build back better from COVID-19. This includes investing in knowledge and skills transfer, social and civic engagement, and cultural exchange between countries of origin and destination.[65]

- In recognition of the critical role of remittances to support families and economies around the globe, promote faster, safer, and cheaper transfer of remittances, reduce the costs of transferring migrant remittances, and facilitate financial inclusion of migrant workers and their families.[66]

The Global Compact for Migration – in action	
Examples of positive COVID-19 initiatives and responses	
Argentina / Peru	Argentina and Peru are developing expedited procedures for the recognition of the professional qualifications of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.
ASEAN region	Migrant Worker Resources Centres (MRC) run by governments, trade unions and civil society organizations in seven ASEAN member states are providing outreach and direct support to migrant workers during the COVID-19 crisis, including access to legal remedy in instances of recruitment-related violations.
Cambodia	The government, together with the UN, has launched a joint programme to support returning migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will provide information about COVID-19 and its preventive measures, provision of mental health services, information on infectious diseases, and maternal and child health services.
Jordan	The Jordanian government has agreed to waive all labor-related fines and fees for foreign workers who wish to return to their home countries.

---

[63] Based on [GCM Objective 5: Actions G, H, I and J, page 13]
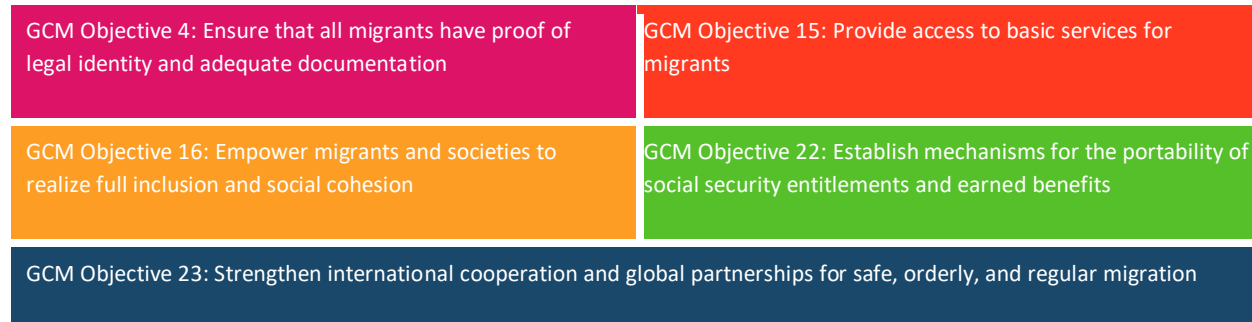[64] Based on [GCM Objective 5: Actions D and G, page 13]
[65] Based on [GCM Objective 19: Actions A, B and C, page 28]
[66] UN Network on Migration Policy Brief: COVID-19 Impact on Family Remittances, and based on [GCM Objective 20: Action A, page 29 and Action E, page 30]

Republic of Korea	The Republic of Korea has extended the employment contracts of temporary foreign workers in its Employment Permit System (EPS) by 50 days for workers whose employment terms are about to expire.
Peru	The Ministry of Social Development is implementing a strategy to provide cash transfers and reach at least 63,000 migrants in situations of extreme vulnerability. The first phase of the program will target 350 families in the Lima North district.
Portugal	The Government determined that all migrants with pending residence permit applications (as of 18th March 2020) will receive temporary residence and have access to the same rights as citizens, including social support. The measure also applies to asylum seekers.
Thailand	The Thai government has approved visa extensions until July 31 for about 1 million migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to ease potential labor shortages as the country's economy reopens.
Viet Nam	The government proposed to lift travel restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 and allow highly skilled foreign workers to enter Viet Nam to help meet labour needs.

Thematic Area 5: Improving the social inclusion and integration of migrants

GCM Objective 4: Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation	GCM Objective 15: Provide access to basic services for migrants
GCM Objective 16: Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion	GCM Objective 22: Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits
GCM Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration	

Migrants' unique living, working, and transit situations, including specific situations of vulnerability, bear due consideration in the context of COVID-19. Limited access to information due to language and cultural barriers, coupled with the marginalization of migrant communities, place migrants amongst the hardest to reach populations when information is disseminated.[67] Migrants in an irregular situation are often unable or unwilling to access health care and other essential services or to provide information on their

---

[67] UN Network on Migration, Policy Brief Enhancing Access to Services for Migrants in the Context of COVID-19 Preparedness, Prevention, and Response

health status when they fear or risk detection, detention and deportation as a result of their immigration status.[68]

The pandemic has disrupted the education of 1.6 billion children. School closures due to the COVID-19 are delaying enrolment, widening existing learning gaps and diminishing the chances for children on the move to catch up to their peers, not least because remote and online learning tools do not reach most migrant and displaced students. For example, only one in four children on the move has access to the internet in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan.[69]

COVID-19 threatens to reverse progress in the fight against poverty, hamper social inclusion and exacerbate existing inequalities.[70] As the pandemic is demonstrating, human rights and human development opportunities are not equally guaranteed for all people. Migrants often face multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities that lead to social, economic, and structural exclusion. Exclusion results in negative consequences that manifest in the workplace and across communities. COVID-19 is both exposing and aggravating existing vulnerabilities, which must be immediately and comprehensively addressed to reduce negative outcomes for migrants and their communities.

The pandemic underscores not only human interconnectedness, but also interdependence. Overcoming the virus requires collaboration and collective action across societies. Social cohesion and integration are fundamental to successful collective action. As neighbors, workers, community leaders, entrepreneurs, students, and so much more, migrants are integral members of society that must be fully integrated into their communities in countries of origin, transit, and destination if COVID-19 response measures are to be effective. In addition, migrants' contributions to prosperous societies are vast, spanning social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Ensuring migrant integration and strengthening social inclusion will allow communities to leverage these positive contributions and build more resilient societies equipped to better respond to and recover from the pandemic.

Recommendations:

- Eliminate requirements of legal identification to access COVID-19 related information, health and other essential services.[71]

- Incorporate the health needs of migrants into national and local health-care policies and plans, such as by strengthening capacities for service provision, facilitating affordable and non-discriminatory access, reducing communication barriers, and training health-care providers on culturally sensitive service delivery.[72]

---

[68] OHCHR, COVID-19 and the Human Rights of Migrants: guidance
[69] UNICEF, Children on the move in East Africa: Research insights to mitigate COVID-19
[70] United Nations, A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19
[71] Based on [GCM Objective 4: Action F, page 12]
[72] Based on [GCM Objective 15: Action E, page 24]

- Establish "firewalls" to separate immigration enforcement activities from COVID-19 service provision as a means to ensure that undocumented migrant, especially children, can seek care and access services without fear or risk of immigration enforcement.[73]

- Identify ways to make education systems more inclusive and evaluate learning approaches to ensure that migrant children are reached. Online learning should mitigate, not exacerbate, existing barriers, inequalities and gaps. Language courses, catch-up and bridging programmes should be scaled up.[74]

- Ensure that social protection measures are available and accessible to migrants and their families, regardless of their migration status, as they are likely to be in precarious housing and working conditions and disproportionately affected by unemployment or reduced employment as a result of the pandemic. Support the establishment of national social protection floors to ensure basic social security guarantees to all, including migrants and their families, to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19.[75]

- Promote multicultural activities and exchange to leverage the skills, cultural and language proficiency of migrants and receiving communities for strengthened COVID-19 response and recovery.[76]

- Develop broad multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships, including migrants, diasporas, local communities, civil society, academia, the private sector, parliamentarians, trade unions, national human rights institutions, the media and other relevant stakeholders in order to ensure that the needs and rights of migrants are included across all policy sectors and level of governance.[77]

- Strengthen existing and identify new opportunities for public-private partnerships and joint programs in support of social inclusion and migrant integration to combat and recover from COVID-19.[78]

The Global Compact for Migration – in action	
Examples of positive COVID-19 initiatives and responses	
Canada	In Quebec, migrants have been given access to the clinics dedicated to COVID-19 diagnosis, regardless of their migratory status or insurance.
Germany	Germany has set up an online platform to recruit seasonal workers, including applicants for asylum, to harvest crops as a result of labour shortages created by COVID-19.

---

[73] Based on [GCM Objective 15: Action B, page 24]

[74] Based on [GCM Objective 15: Action F, page 24]

[75] Based on [GCM Objective 22: Actions A and C, page 32]

[76] Based on [GCM Objective 16: Actions G and H, page 25]

[77] Based on [GCM Objective 23: Actions B and Action C, page 32]

[78] Based on [GCM Objective 23: Action D and Action E, page 33]

Greece	The Ministry of Education has included schools on an online learning platform. 700,000 students and 166,000 teachers are already registered. Guidelines have been translated into 10 languages to support the registration of 1,506 refugee and migrant children.
India/Bangladesh, Nepal/Sri Lanka	The Government of India organized a regional meeting on "Evacuation and Repatriation of Migrants in Times of COVID-19" that included the Governments of Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Discussions focused on providing support on reintegration to returning migrants including through skills development and recognition, fair recruitment, labour market information, promotion of dialogue between stakeholders, exchange of experiences and data and better coordination countries.
Ireland	During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ireland pays unemployment benefits of 350€ per week to non-EU migrant workers. The government has confirmed that there are no plans in place to share any data we receive as part of an immigrant's application for a COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment with GNIB (Immigration Authorities) or the Department of Justice and Equality.
Myanmar	Migrant Workers Resource Centers (MRCs) run by local government, civil society organisations, and labour organisations respond to the needs of returning migrants from Thailand and China. By mid-July, MRCs provided Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs) to frontline service providers and over 100,000 care packages to returning migrants. In addition, three groups are offering trainings and empowerment activities.
Peru	The Ministry of Education is implementing distance learning for all public schools, paying specific attention to reaching rural areas and enrolling migrant children.
Qatar	Medical services, including medical check-ups for COVID-19 and quarantine services, are provided free of charge.

STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

COVID-19 is a global issue that requires strong multilateral collaboration to develop and enact effective responses. International cooperation is one of the guiding principles of the GCM, which recognises that "no State can address migration on its own". The GCM calls for mutual support amongst States, including through the provision of financial and technical assistance and international support for the Migration MPTF. Objective 23 explicitly calls on states to "strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration" and is featured in all five thematic areas outlined by the Migration MTPF and the UN Network's workplan, underscoring the need for joint programming and

collaboration among all actors to employ a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to migration governance.

The longer-term impact of COVID-19 is yet to be seen. Yet to successfully counteract COVID-19, it is certain that governments and other stakeholders across all policy sectors, at all levels of governance, and throughout every region of the world—must work together to ensure that migrants are included in all pandemic preparedness, prevention and response plans, as well as in post-crisis recovery action.

THE GCM: A ROBUST INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORK TO ANSWER AN UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL MOBILITY CHALLENGE

While presented with an unprecedented global challenge, the international community is simultaneously armed with a robust, international cooperation framework to help respond. Well governed migration, as outlined in the GCM, can be a transformative way to mitigate some of the immediate negative impacts of COVID-19, and help states to build stronger, more inclusive and resilient communities that protect human rights, stimulate strong socioeconomic recovery and accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Migrants must be recognized as an integral part of any effective COVID-19 response measure. The GCM, through its 360-degree vision, 10 cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles, and internationally agreed set of 23 objectives, commitments, and subsequent actions, provides a blueprint to ensure that migrants remain at the center of our collective action to combat and recover from COVID-19.

The United Nations Network on Migration (the Network) was established to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to States in their implementation, follow up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

While the Network's mandate is focused on migration, the Network calls on States to also implement these recommendations where they apply to refugees and asylum-seekers and to protect the human rights and health of everyone equally, regardless of migration status.

To support effective, evidence-based responses to the pandemic, the Network has established a COVID-19 portal on the website. The portal includes news, information, resources, and statements regarding COVID-19 human mobility considerations to help inform appropriate response and recovery efforts. Network statements and policy briefs provide explicit recommendations on how governments and other stakeholders can protect migrants' rights and leverage migrants' positive contributions through individual and collective action.