

**Bangkok** - The third of four multi-stakeholder consultations in preparation for the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) took place virtually on 16 December to discuss migrants' integration and their contribution to sustainable development.

Over 70 stakeholders, including civil society organizations, local authorities, academia, migrant communities, trade union, and the private sector, explored various topics such as consular protection and assistance, access to basic services for migrants, social cohesion and migrants' inclusion, their contribution to development, facilitation of remittances, and portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits, in the COVID-19 context.

"Migrant workers are widely marginalized and exploited during 'normal' times," said Realizza F. Otarra, Chairperson of the Filipino Migrant Workers Union in Hong Kong and a migrant domestic worker herself, at the opening of the meeting. "COVID-19 has worsened our situation. In Hong Kong alone, thousands of migrant workers have been laid off, while others have seen their workload double without adequate compensation."

"And still, discrimination and stigmatization have only increased, and social and economic exclusion intensified during the pandemic. It is necessary to address the narratives around migrants, and stress that they bring positive changes to the societies and economies in which they live and that their rights must be protected", she added.

International migration is essential to development in both origin and host countries across the Asia-Pacific. It is estimated that countries in East and Southeast Asia will require 275 million migrant workers by 2030, whereas other countries in South and Southeast Asia have surpluses of workers that local labour markets struggle to absorb. In 2019, migrants' remittances to countries in the region stood at \$330 billion, nearly half of the global total and vastly outstripping overseas development aid inflows. In some countries, remittances make up between 20-40 per cent of annual GDP, supporting poverty alleviation and other developmental gains. As a result of the pandemic, remittance flows are expected to decline by 10.5 per cent this year, impacting the families of migrants in their countries of origin.

Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandrawedi, Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC), in her opening remarks, highlighted the importance of the community context to achieve these results.

"Migrants live and work in urban and other local environments. It is here that their working conditions must be monitored, services extended to them, and their relations with other community members forged for better social cohesion," she said. "However, local government units are often not given the authority and sufficient resources to fully embrace these crucial tasks. A good enabling environment for local governments to support migrants is certainly needed."

Several recommendations were made, which will feed into the intergovernmental meeting to be held in March 2021. There was broad consensus that consular assistance and protection needs to be improved, including by strengthening cooperation between embassies, consulates, and civil society and governments in destination countries.

*The series of four consultations which began in October were seen as a starting point and continuation for meaningful participation of diverse stakeholders in the upcoming regional review which emphasizes a whole-of-society approach to effectively implement the GCM.<sup>[1]</sup> The consultations are being organized by stakeholders, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Regional UN Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific to take stock of the progress made to date in the implementation of the GCM in the region. The Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020, to be launched by the United Nations Network on Migration on International Migrants Day, 18 December 2020, will further inform the regional GCM review process.*

*The first consultation in the series took place on 28 October and focused on enhancing availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration and facilitating fair and ethical recruitment. The [second](#) was held on 19 November and discussed migrant protection through rights-based border governance and border management measures.*

*The next Asia-Pacific stakeholder consultation will focus on improving value-driven and evidence-based policymaking and public debate, and enhancing cooperation on migration. It will be held on 3 February 2021. For more information on this, click [here](#).*

Regional reviews in other regions will also be held in early 2021.

See the [agenda](#) of the consultation [here](#). Reports from stakeholder consultations will be accessible [here](#).

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<sup>[1]</sup> The diverse organizing team of this consultation was comprised of: Awaj Foundation, Host International, India Migration Now, People's Empowerment Foundation, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).