



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

# Fostering Sub-Regional Cooperation on Migration in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe

24 March 2021, 09:30 – 13:30 CET

*A high-level event organised by IOM Regional office in Vienna with government representatives from Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, and key stakeholders relevant to those countries with additional representation from IOM Country Missions, the United Nations Network on Migration Secretariat, and the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund*

## SUMMARY REPORT

## OPENING REMARKS

### **Ms. Renate Held, IOM Regional Director for South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

Ms. Renate Held welcomed delegates and opened the event. The Regional Director highlighted the central role migration plays in innovation, sustainable and economic development; however, she noted that since the enlargement of the EU, emigration towards Western Europe has been a key trend, leading to significant population decline in some countries. This provides opportunities to capitalise on the benefits of safe, orderly and regular migration – in particular through the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) – and the Regional Director reiterated IOM's commitment, also as coordinator of the UN Network on Migration (the Network), to support member states implement the GCM.

The Regional Director highlighted achievements made in the region in advancing the GCM, including through the establishment of Networks at the regional and national levels; contributions to [United Nations Secretary General's first biennial report on the GCM](#) (December 2020); the first [regional review of the GCM in the UNECE region](#) (November 2020); and the majority of countries present voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution on international migration and development. These milestones were recognised by the UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed at the [second Annual Meeting of the UN Network on Migration](#) (15 December 2020).

The Regional Director announced the Regional Strategy for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia which identified three pillars: resilience, mobility, and governance. These pillars seek to empower migrants and communities as well as addressing drivers of migration; advance sustainable development outcomes that are responsive to regional migration trends; and focus on strengthening cooperation and the implementation of evidence-based migration governance.

The Regional Director also highlighted the vital roles migrants are playing in the COVID-19 response, but also the increased vulnerabilities faced by migrants, calling on member states and stakeholders to work more closely and more effectively to capitalise on migration as an accelerator for development. In the words of the United Nations Secretary General: *no one will be safe until everyone is safe*.

### **Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of the UN Network on Migration Secretariat (UNMN)**

Mr. Jonathan Prentice underlined the importance of building on the regional review of the GCM and maintaining the dialogue in the lead up to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) which is expected to take place in New York in the second quarter of 2022. The first such event, it will be an opportunity for the highest-level representatives from member states and key stakeholders to discuss progress made and ways forward for implementation of the GCM. The IMRF will be preceded by the Secretary General's report in which he is mandated to provide guidance on areas of focus at the IMRF. Mr. Prentice added that it is our collective responsibility to ensure that these opportunities are capitalised on to demonstrate the role of the GCM to support migrants and host communities, while contributing to development.

Mr. Prentice anticipated the event's agenda with an overview of various tools that were called upon by the GCM to support member states in their national implementation of the Global Compact. He encouraged Member States to consider developing concept notes for innovative projects for consideration by the [Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund](#) committee, with a particular request for multi-lateral and cross-border projects. The recently launched [Migration Network Hub](#) is a community of practice, peer learning exchange and repository of migration related guidance, police documents, reports and resources. Lastly, the [Champion Country Initiative](#) is a non-exclusive group of Member States who have put themselves forward to provide key insights, lessons learned, and positive practices that can be shared in dedicated spaces and with other Member State, thus reflecting national

ownership of the GCM and states' sovereignty. Interested Member States may contact their IOM mission or the Network secretariat for more information.

To conclude, Mr. Prentice noted that the challenges and opportunities posed by migration can only be faced through a broad coalition of partners, and collectively we must expand partnerships, for example to include the private sector, trade unions, national human rights institutions, expert stakeholders, academia.

**Ms. Olga Poalelungi, Director, Bureau for Migration and Asylum, Ministry of Interior, Government of Moldova**

Ms. Olga Poalelungi thanked IOM for the opportunity to participate on behalf of the Republic of Moldova. Moldova welcomes forums such as this event to assess progress made in implementation of the GCM and in preparation of the IMRF in 2022 and extended gratitude for tools such as the Migration Knowledge Hub.

Moldova's location as a transit country between Asia and Europe poses unique challenges. She added that because Moldova is a relatively young country the negative impact of a quarter of the labour force being abroad is particularly acute. Therefore, policies which carefully manage migration, and in particular encourage inward migration to fill the labour market are critical.

Ms. Poalelungi stressed the importance of the GCM's guiding principles and objectives to build the capacity of governments to develop, and evaluate, migration policies, as well as foster multilateralism. Many countries in the region face similar issues and ensuring regional multilateral approaches is especially critical to help countries meet their national priorities. This strategic outlook is increasingly important as many countries have numerous commitments to the EU and other frameworks, including, in this region, EU Ascension and migration liberalisation. Therefore, the GCM will be increasingly relied upon to hone countries' efforts.

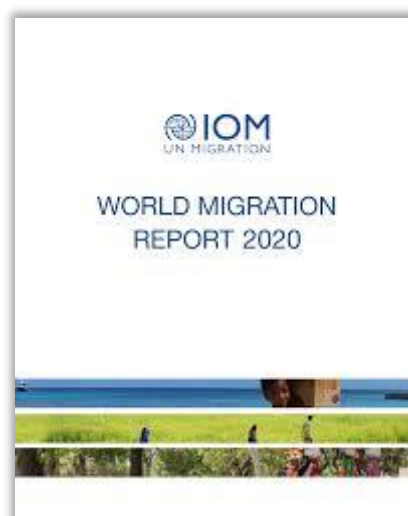
## WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2020

**Dr. Marie McAuliffe, Head, Migration Research Division, Geneva & Chief Editor World Migration Report 2020**

Dr. Marie McAuliffe provided an overview of the World Migration Report 2020 which is now available in all UN languages, including Russian. This IOM flagship publication is one of many tools produced by IOM to support and advance evidence-based policymaking, uphold the dignity and well-being of migrants, and encourage social and economic development through migration.

At a time of misinformation, racism and xenophobia surrounding COVID-19 and increased inequalities in access to health care and vaccinations, the need for accurate information on migration has never been timelier.

The report is produced by a team of academic contributors specialising in various fields of migration. The report is in two parts: Part 1 contains key global and regional data; and part 2 contains complex and emerging trends and migration issues such as increasing disinformation, migration and health, remittances and children and unsafe migration.



It covers the current geopolitical context, statistics and recent developments in global migration governance, mega trends in mass displacement events, long-term migration trends, and information on international migrant stocks and flows. It also attempts to portray the complexity of migration, for example where countries are simultaneously places of origin, destination and transit. The report takes a thematic approach to show differences across regions and shines light on the complexity of migration data. Instances where the report has been used to support policymakers include referencing global trends that indicate that formal remittances have increased globally as a result of COVID-19. This is attributed to the decrease of informal cash transfers due to border restrictions, and the uptake in regularised systems, thus suggesting the need to invest in digitisation and supporting migrants access online money transfer services. Elsewhere, the report indicates significant changes in the number of cross-border refugees and internally displaced persons which has implications for government and UN policies and programmes alike.

The next edition of the report will be launched at IOM Council in December 2021 and will contain a chapter on the impact of COVID-19 on patterns of mobility.

*Read the World Migration Report in all official UN languages here:*  
<https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020>

## ROUNDTABLE ONE

**Interactive discussion led by Member States and stakeholders on lessons learnt from the implementation of the GCM, and the first GCM Regional Review to identify needs and opportunities, moderated by Ms. Alia El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director & Representative to Turkey; Europe and Central Asia Regional Office**

Ms. Alia El-Yassir opened Roundtable 1, thanking IOM for the opportunity to represent gender perspectives in migration. Ms. El-Yassir hailed the GCM as a milestone for migration governance, and recognised the importance granted to gender as one of the guiding principles. Member states are critical in ensuring that the rights of women and girls are met through programmes, policies and legislation deriving from the GCM. As outlined in the presentation on the World Migration Report 2020, gender specific culture and social norms and cultures play a critical role in migration. While the COVID-19 virus is indiscriminate, the impact does discriminate disproportionately along gendered lines, particularly women and girls on the move who are already more vulnerable and at risk of exploitation. Despite these challenges, women and girls are key actors for development of livelihoods and, as seen in the World Migration Report, remittances are crucial, and every year around 100 million women send remittances back home.

Ms. El-Yassir opened the Roundtable discussion with the hope that it stoked the dialogue necessary to create sustainable and strong sub-regional cooperation on migration, through the sharing of lessons learned and experiences of supporting migrants moving across borders and intra-regionally.

**Mr. Armen Ghazaryan, Head of the Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Government of Armenia**

Armenia voted in favour of the GCM and supports its comprehensive approach to migration, as demonstrated by participating in the regional review of the GCM in the UNECE and UNESCAP regions, with the support of IOM. Oversight of implementation of the GCM rests with the Migration Service of

Armenia, and no specific action plan has been drafted because it is integrated into existing legislation and policy.

Particular achievements include amendments to work permit policies and the development of an electronic system to streamline the issuance of work permits and help all migrants (EU and non-EU) access the labour market. The availability of comprehensive, disaggregated, migration data will be an important outcome of the system.

Returns, readmission and reintegration is a priority in Armenia, and readmission agreements are in place with the EU, Russian Federation and ten other countries; bilateral agreements are in place with European Union member states Estonia, France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria; draft agreements are being negotiated with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia; and negotiations are underway with Eurasian Member states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus. Readmission in Armenia is supported by an electronic case management system that has been in place since 2019 and tracks requests.

Increased immigration to Armenia led the government to develop an integration strategy in 2016, which was further developed in 2019 to cover wider demographic of foreign citizens (Integration and Reintegration Policy 2012-2031). As well as policies, the strategy calls for staff training and the provision of adequate shelter, rights, social assistance, healthcare, economic inclusion of migrants, cultural integration and supporting host communities. Returnees are supported by the State Primary Assistance Program for Reintegration of Returned (including Compulsory Returned) Citizens to the Republic of Armenia (adopted in March 2020) which provides housing subsidies for six months, and information and referrals to essential services.

**Ms. Olga Poalelungi, Director of the Bureau for Migration and Asylum, Ministry of Interior, Government of Moldova**

Because a considerable proportion of Moldova's population works abroad, the government has sought to diversify and develop policies on returns, reintegration and labour migration to provide incentives for migrants to stay in Moldova, strengthen the ties between migration and development and contribute to the country's economic growth. This includes a strategy on diaspora engagement (2020-2030) to provide positive conditions on their return for integration and livelihood development including subsidies and employability support. The Government of Moldova has also sought to increase regular migration by supporting migrants' access to reputable work through language training, skills development and provision of work permits. Lastly, the government of Moldova is drafting a new strategy on migration and asylum, which covers, amongst other topics, migration management, border management, issuance of visas and work permits, entry requirements, returns, readmission and reintegration, the determination of legal status, and visa-free regime agreements with several neighbouring states. In all of the above, Ms. Poalelungi underlined the importance of making statistics, information and data clear, comparable and comprehensive to support evidence-based policymaking.

**Mr. Refet Hajdari, Deputy Director for UN & Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of North Macedonia**

Mr. Refet Hajdari thanked the organisers for the opportunity to contribute to this event. The GCM is well recognised in the Republic of North Macedonia as a comprehensive document which systematises the needs and human rights of migrants; and as a document that provides guidance when planning and strengthening instruments for comprehensive migration governance. Following completion of the voluntary review of the GCM for the first regional review of the GCM in the UN-ECE region, the government has identified gaps and is seeking to transpose the GCM objectives in national legislation.

Mr. Hajdari outlined the Migration Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia (2015-2020) which is a continuation of the previous Resolution on Migration Policy of the country (2009-2014) and aims to establish legal frameworks that are aligned with the EU and the 2000 UN Convention (the Palermo Convention) with its three protocols. In compliance with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, the country has assumed an obligation to cooperate in the area of visas, border control, asylum and migrations. At the same time, the country has undertaken to cooperate when addressing illegal migrations and readmission.

This is supported by a number of other national strategies and action plans that focus on combatting human trafficking and minimising irregular migration, including: the Strategy on Demographic Development of the Republic of Macedonia 2008-2015; the National Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia on Cooperation with the Diaspora 2019-2023; the National Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration in the Republic of Macedonia 2017-2020; the National Strategy on Development of Integrated Border Management 2015-2019; the National Strategy on Sustainable Development in the Republic of Macedonia 2009-2030; the Strategy on Regional Development of the Republic of Macedonia 2009-2019; the National Strategy on Employment of the Republic of Macedonia 2016-2020; the National Strategy on Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010-2020; the Strategy on Gender Equality 2013-2020 and the National Strategy on Equality and Non-discrimination.

**Mr. Dragan Dasic, Head of Migration, Office for Foreigners, Migration and Readmission, Ministry of Interior, Government of Montenegro**

In recent years Montenegro has made great strides in the field of migration. This includes a new law on foreigners (March 2018 - present) which aims to be in alignment the GCM regarding, for example, the issuance of permits for temporary stays, integration and reintegration, empowering migrants through providing timely and accurate information on services for migrants, and facilitating the issuance of work permits. The number of work permits issued has decreased as a result of COVID-19, however the government hopes to return to previous levels of labour migration after the pandemic. The Government of Montenegro seeks to ensure that all policy and legislative instruments are aligned with UN and EU frameworks. Following a review, the government of Montenegro hopes to work better to collect, share and analyse migration data and develop more supportive reintegration policies.

## MIGRATION MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND (M-MPTF)

**Mr. Philippe Grandet, Senior M-MPTF Manager**

Mr. Grandet provided an overview of the M-MPTF governance and decision-making structures and programmatic frameworks. The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund was initiated to provide funding to help member states implement the GCM, ensuring a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach which is gender responsive and aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals.



Regional, multi-government project proposals are actively encouraged as these are currently under-represented; likewise, states are encouraged to ensure that proposals take increasingly innovative,

whole-of-society and people-centred approaches. A wide variety of partners are also encouraged, including and not limited to municipalities, local government, academia and civil society.

Mr. Grandet highlighted that there is a strong and consistent demand for the Fund, but, unfortunately, that demand far outweighs the supply. To date, USD 17.5 million has been firmly committed by donors, however the 2020 funding target of USD 30 million was not reached as momentum stalled in the lead up to, and during, the Covid-19 crisis. Funding is essential to help rebuild the pre-COVID-19 momentum.

Mr. Grandet encouraged governments and their partners to consider applying, noting that the first stage, a concept note of six to eight pages, ought not be onerous.

## CHAMPION COUNTRIES INITIATIVE (PORTUGAL)

### **Ms. Sónia Pereira, High Commissioner for Migration, Government of Portugal**

Ms. Sónia Pereira provided an overview of Portugal's role as a Champion Country for the GCM. From the outset, the Champion Countries Initiative represents a sign of confidence and solidarity of Member States with the Global Compact and the UN Network on Migration. It demonstrates state sovereignty through their interest, willingness and ability to implement the Global Compact, looking for a better management of migration, at national and international level. As a Champion Country, Portugal has the opportunity to contribute and share experiences of implementing the GCM and reflect on good practices in the construction and implementation of national plans that inspire other countries to build their own plans based on lessons learned. These inputs are disseminated in global and regional forums, such as this one, and enable Champion Countries to influence international and regional cooperation. Based on the experience of Portugal as a Champion Country, it is possible to highlight three essential axes for the implementation of the GCM: coordination, alignment of public policies and integrated vision; flexibility and adaptability to the national reality; and follow-up and monitoring.

## ROUNDTABLE TWO

**Interactive discussion led by Member States and stakeholders to identify migration priorities for the region, moderated by Ms. Stefanie Allemann, Senior Regional Policy Advisor for the IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

### **Mr. Andi Mahila, Deputy Minister of Interior, Government of Albania**

Mr. Andi Mahila thanked the organisers for the opportunity to present the achievements, challenges and goals for migration governance in Albania. Migration is a priority for Albania as a country with multiple migration dynamics: emigration, immigration, return and reintegration, mixed migration flows, and a considerable diaspora. Responsibility for these matters rests within the Ministry of Interior.

Priorities for 2021 include accelerating and streamlining processing times at borders, increasing reception facilities and signing bilateral readmission agreements with countries of origin. With regards readmission, the relationship with Greece is particularly important as it will reduce irregular migration between the two countries.

As the Ministry of Interior negotiates the implementation of the European Union acquis, and in particular Chapter 24 on visa liberalisation, it is increasingly necessary that policy and legislation does not only advance the GCM, but is in harmony with EU standards. It is hoped this is achieved through the National Strategy for Migration (2019-2022) and its Action Plan (developed with the support of IOM). Coordination and monitoring of the strategy is being supported by IOM and GIZ; while an assessment of government institutions capacity to implement the strategy and action plan is underway and will lead to the development of training modules on migration governance for officials.

Stemming from the strategy are a number of measures: IOM supported the draft law on foreigners (December 2020); Albania has sought to reduce irregular migration to EU member states through an awareness campaign implemented by an inter-ministerial working group (January – December 2020); and Albania has signed an agreement with FRONTEX to strengthen border management with the EU. These efforts have led to a reduction in the number of Albanian citizens claiming asylum in EU states from 23,275 in 2019 down 70% to 6,755 in 2020. In 2020, Albania updated, with IOM and UNHCR support, the contingency plan to deal with mixed migratory flows, reduce irregular migration and improve migration and asylum governance in general.

Since voting in favour of the GCM and establishing a Network on Migration, Albania seeks to map the national strategy and action plan against the GCM objectives to measure effectiveness.

**Mr. Refet Hajdari, Deputy Director for UN & Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of North Macedonia**

Mr. Refet Hajdari gave an overview of the joint project “Evidence-based Migration Policy Planning and Discourse in North Macedonia”, funded by the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF) and implemented by IOM (as lead agency), UNHCR and UNFPA under the coordination by the UN Resident Coordinator Office in the country.

The main project goal is to contribute for effective demographic management and migration dynamics through the development of evidence-based migration policies. The project is comprised of three components:

- Supporting policy makers and institutional stakeholders to design and implement a coordinated evidence-based and coordinated migration policies;
- Strengthening the inter- and intra-institutional data exchange mechanisms and collaboration among key institutions with competences on migration management; and
- Supporting public and the policy makers to view migrants and refugees as development actors.

**Mrs. Svetlana Velimirovic, Deputy commissioner, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia**

Migratory movements in Serbia have been characterised by constant changes, as a country of origin following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia until recent years in which Serbia has become a country of transit. The Government seeks to ensure that migration policy is guided by international standards on human rights, and frameworks such as the GCM, the 2030 Agenda and EU law since beginning the ascension process. Serbia shares similar migratory and demographic characteristics to its neighbours, specifically due to its location on the Balkans route, low fertility rates, rural to urban and outward migration. Therefore, national migration priorities are focussed on humanitarian protection and countering the negative impacts of these characteristics on economic and social development of the country. Serbia has in place policies on migration management, immigration and border management, preventing human trafficking, labour migration, returns and reintegration.



Ongoing challenges are ensuring that frameworks are robust enough to deal with mixed migration flows, ensuring better coordination with civil society, capacity building for officials, improving regional cooperation on border management, and data gathering and analysis.

Serbia is developing a joint project for M-MPTF funding with four UN agencies which aims to establish national training centre and data-hub for that will accommodate capacity building events for officials, researchers and key stakeholders. If funding is secured, the goal is to open the centre up to officers and key stakeholders from neighbouring states, thus increasing sub-regional dialogue and collaboration.

**Ms. Laurel Townhead, Representative, Humans & Refugees, Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Switzerland**

Ms. Townhead welcomed events such as this that approach the GCM follow-up and review process as a series of conversations to foster cooperation and momentum, not a static single event.

QUNO have been involved in the GCM since its establishment; and QUNO welcomes states' recognition of the importance of adopting a whole-of-society approach. Ms. Townhead encouraged governments present to consider how best to ensure whole-of-society approaches are put into practice, irrespective of cross-governmental working practices. This may be through inviting civil society organisations and key stakeholders to contribute to existing government consultative mechanisms; establishing GCM advisory committees; or leveraging the support of the Network to mirror whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches at national government, municipality, and civil society levels.

Ms. Townhead reflected on the interest for learning and exchange and suggested the need for thematic learning sessions. These would be a platform for sub-regional experts and stakeholders to consider an aspect of GCM implementation (for example gender-responsiveness, child protection) reflecting on what worked, what could be improved, and how governments and stakeholders can support each other multi-laterally. Of note for potential inclusion are training materials developed by the [UN Network on Migration Core Working Group 2.1](#) on integrating migration into existing frameworks and reporting structures.

QUNO have prepared the briefing paper "[Using the Regional Migration Reviews to Further Human Rights Protection](#)" (an update is due soon).

**Mr. Anh Nguyen, Chief of Mission, IOM Ukraine**

Mr. Nguyen provided perspective from the UN country level, affirming the value of regional follow-up events. Increasingly, countries in the region express an interest in advancing dialogue on labour mobility, environment and climate change, diaspora engagement, data migration, and facilitating border crossings and trade. Minimising irregular migration will remain a constant, but exploring these avenues is increasingly pressing. Mr. Nguyen offered that Ukraine stands to benefit greatly from exchange with other countries and can also contribute its experience.

The government of Ukraine has publicly stated its intention to remaining open to implementing the GCM, and indeed in 2018-2019 Ukraine underwent a migration governance assessment by IOM which is under review; and Ukraine has committed to advancing the 2030 Agenda. Ukraine's progress in these regards is supported by a migration working group established within the UNCT, and consultative events which involved the whole-of-society. The resulting policy paper makes the recommendation that Ukraine officially commits to implementing the GCM.

## CLOSING

**Mr. John Kennedy Mosoti, UNFPA Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Country Director for Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia and Director for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)**

Mr. Mosoti prefaced his closing remarks with an anecdote about a village in south-eastern Europe which flourished economically and socially during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of increased return migration, highlighting the positive impact that can be harnessed from migration.

He added that the South Eastern and Eastern Europe region is in a critical position in terms of migratory flows, and it is heartening to hear about positive policies and programmes that governments and stakeholders are putting in place to implement the GCM. He praised the GCM as an example of a common cause which has brought states together to discuss important issues and challenges, whilst providing guidance on solutions and good practice that respect states' sovereignty. Mr. Mosoti thanked Dr. Marie McAuliffe for the presentation on the World Migration Report 2020 for its important contribution to the evidence base on migration; he thanked Mr. Philippe Grandet for the presentation on the M-MPTF, adding that pooled resources such as this have a good track-record of responding to the complex nature of phenomena such as migration; and he thanked government representatives and stakeholders that contributed to the discussions. The UN and member states have a collective responsibility for human rights and to implement the 2030 Agenda alongside the GCM and good things can be achieved through effective mobilisation of resources and capitalising on follow-up meetings to overcome coordination issues. This can be seen in the work showcased during this meeting, particularly amongst those states aspiring to join the EU.

Before closing the meeting, Mr. Mosoti highlighted the importance of ensuring gender perspectives and child protection are enshrined in all the work of the Network and governments. Migration issues will be with us for a long time, and our enriching discussions strengthen our response and advancement of the GCM.

- CLOSE OF MEETING -