

Session 3

Background note



The third session of the Regional Review for the members of the United Nations Regional Commission for the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will offer space for discussion of progress made in accomplishing objectives 1, 3, 7, 17, and 23 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)¹.

This background note provides examples of progress and challenges in regional, sub-regional and intra-regional collaboration towards the implementation of the GCM by the UNECE Member States drawn from inputs from the Regional Network on Migration voluntary GCM reports submitted to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF)²; the IMRF Progress Declaration³; consultations with stakeholders; and information available on the Migration Network Hub.⁴

Introduction

Enhanced border restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic significantly decreased human mobility, which in the long term could also have demographic effects on countries dependent on migration for population growth. More than 2.7 million migrants including seasonal workers and international students, were stranded unable to return to their countries of origin.⁵ The pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and reinforced underlying inequalities and mobility restrictions had a rebounding effect on both, regular and irregular movements of people.⁶ In virtually all countries for which data are available, migrants were much more likely than the host communities to catch the disease or develop severe symptoms, and faced higher mortality risks.⁷ Migrants were also underrepresented among those who got vaccinated, even though part of the gap is due to unregistered jobs of migrants in their origin countries.⁸

Heavily reliant on international remittances, Central Asia expected a significant decline in remittance inflows in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, in 2021, the remittance inflows to Europe and Central Asia (ECA)⁹ increased by about 16 per cent, reaching historic highs of USD 94 billion mainly due to economic activity in the European Union (EU) and rebounding energy prices. As a share of Gross Domestic Product

¹ [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(A/RES/73/195\)](#)

² [Voluntary National Review Reports](#)

³ [IMRF Progress Declaration \(A/RES/76/266\)](#)

⁴ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/migration-network-hub>

⁵ COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #23: Travel restrictions and mobility update. 24 April 2020. International Organization for Migration, Geneva. Accessible here: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd486/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_23_-_travel_restrictions_and_mobility_-_update.pdf

⁶ COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2021. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), Washington, D.C. and Geneva. Available here: <https://publications.iom.int/books/covid-19-and-state-global-mobility-2021>

⁷ What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants? An update on recent evidence. Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, Paris. Available here: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-has-been-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-an-update-on-recent-evidence-65cfc31c/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ According to the World Bank definition, the Europe and Central Asia region covers Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). For more information: www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca

(GDP), Central Asia has some of the highest remittance rates in the world. In 2021, remittances accounted for 33.4 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP and 32.7 per cent in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰ Globally, remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) registered an increase of 10.2 per cent in 2021 to reach USD 596 billion.¹¹

Overview of progress

At the IMRF in 2022, Member States reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation, and recognized the positive role and contributions of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development in countries of origin, transit and destination¹².

In the Progress Declaration, Member States reiterated their commitment to build on promising practices to harness the benefits of safe, orderly and regular migration, including those that emerged in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to enhancing international cooperation¹³. Consular assistance plays an essential role in establishing proof of legal identity, addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants, providing timely and accurate information to migrants, strengthening procedures and enhancing predictability, supporting diaspora engagement in development, and facilitating return and reintegration. Strengthening consular services via one-shop-mechanisms and the increased support for the use of digital tools is essential in this regard, including ensuring collaboration between countries and stakeholders along migration routes. For example, to enhance consular protection, assistance, and cooperation, and in order to ensure the protection and safeguarding of migrants' rights and well-being, the Portuguese government approved a number of exceptional measures during the COVID-19 pandemic to grant residence status to migrants and asylum seekers with pending residence applications, so they could receive and access services.

Efforts to provide safe access to basic services, including healthcare and vaccines, were essential, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19. While many countries included migrants in their COVID-19 vaccination plans, general safe access to services, social protection and recovery assistance often remains limited. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of ensuring health security through targeted interventions at the border, and cross-border cooperation. Regional cooperation was key to a pandemic preparedness and response project implemented in four Central Asian countries supporting member states in formulate a common way forward in addressing these challenges. In the Western Balkan region, health services were provided to irregular migrants in reception facilities. However, a more route-based approach is needed to ensure continuity of care all along the journey, including through enhanced border health capacities. At the same time, two years into the war on Ukraine, the barriers which Ukrainian refugees keep facing in their host countries, including on accessing basic and specialised health services, can only be solved through inter-regional and also interagency collaboration – such as through the joint WHO-IOM project funded by the European Commission in ten countries, including the Republic of Moldova.

Migrants play a key role in providing basic services, yet, they often face legal and practical barriers to accessing basic services related to health, education, social protection, child protection, and decent work, particularly if they are in an irregular situation. Through the Progress Declaration, Member States committed to providing all migrants safe access to basic services, regardless of their migration status, as well as continuity of care, to ensure that no one is left behind in achieving the 2030 Agenda.¹⁴ Several countries have developed different approaches to provide access to basic services for migrants, with

¹⁰ International Organization for Migration: *South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region On the Move*, 2023; <https://data.worldbank.org/>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² IMRF Progress Declaration, paragraphs 7, 8 and 28

¹³ IMRF Progress Declaration, paragraph 51

¹⁴ IMRF Progress Declaration, paragraph 51

Germany and the Republic of Türkiye offering notable examples. In Germany, the government implemented Migration Counselling services specifically for adult immigrants, providing integration courses for individuals aged 27 and older, as well as for their family members.¹⁵

Member States committed through the GCM to promote mutual respect for the cultures, traditions and customs of communities of destination and/or of origin of migrants, to foster inclusive and cohesive societies by empowering migrants to become active members of society, and to promote the reciprocal engagement of receiving communities and migrants in the exercise of their rights and obligations towards each other.¹⁶ In this respect, a Joint Programme proposal, currently in the pipeline of the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF), aims to foster opportunities to enhance engagement between migrant populations and host communities in the Republic of Türkiye.¹⁷

In this regard, portability of social security entitlements for migrants is essential. Several countries have advanced implementation of bilateral or multilateral agreements to foster portability entitlements in line with international human rights norms and labour standards. Yet, their coverage is not universal, and gaps in their implementation leave migrant workers disproportionately uncovered by social protection systems, indicating a need to improve coordination and communication. A Joint Programme proposal in the M-MPTF pipeline aims to achieve greater portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits by creating a Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans, facilitating regional mobility through an agreed set of objectives such as portability of social rights and mutual recognition of qualifications.¹⁸

To catalyse migrants' development contributions, and to harness the benefits of migration as a source of sustainable development, the Republic of Moldova developed the "Diaspora Succeeds at Home" program, with the aim of mobilizing the human and financial potential of the diaspora to contribute to local socio-economic development.¹⁹

Safe access to services, social protection and recovery assistance often remains limited. This also includes limited cross-border cooperation and the high transfer costs for remittances or the uneven distribution of digital remittances channels across Member States which create barriers for many migrants, in particular migrant woman, lacking access to financial services and mobile-enabled data.²⁰ Remittances are a critical source of support for families and communities; migrants transferred over USD 751 billion in remittances in 2021 to their countries of origin.²¹ As a share of GDP, the UNECE region has one of the highest remittance rates in the world. In the GCM, Member States called for the development of innovative technological solutions for remittance transfer. For example, Malta implemented a solution promoting faster and safer remittance transfers by issuing prepaid cards to unbanked migrants.²²

To illustrate the value of the GCM's 360-degree approach, the last two WHO tri-regional High-Level meetings on migration and health in Istanbul and Sharm-el-Sheik underscored the undeniable reality that single-country solutions, when applied to the complex issue of migration, consistently fall short of meeting regional and global commitments. As such, the session will adopt the 360-degree approach that is essential to effectively addressing the issues at hand across countries of origin, transit, and destination. The focus will remain on fostering inter-country as well as inter-regional cooperation along migration routes,

¹⁵ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/practice/migration-counselling-adult-immigrants-mbe>

¹⁶ GCM Resolution, paragraph 32

¹⁷ [M-MPTF Pipeline](#), page 77

¹⁸ [M-MPTF Pipeline](#), page 62

¹⁹ <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/practice/diaspora-succeeds-home-dar-13>

²⁰ IMRF Progress Declaration, paragraph 63

²¹ IMRF Progress Declaration, paragraph 9

²² <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/practice/pre-paid-cards-unbanked-migrants>

emphasizing the collaboration of all relevant partners and stakeholders, including migrants. This comprehensive approach aims to align efforts of Member States, UN entities civil society, and all relevant stakeholders recognizing the interconnected nature of migration movements, providing a space to look at a set of objectives through a lens of collaboration and partnership.

Guiding questions

1. Has your government developed a GCM national implementation plan or integrated the GCM and its guiding principles into existing frameworks, plans and policies? If so, please elaborate on the process. If not, please indicate if your government has plans to do so, and what the envisaged process is.
2. How has or will your government integrate the recommended actions to accelerate the implementation of the GCM as set out in the IMRF 2022 Progress Declaration into their relevant national policies and plans and reflected in their engagements in relevant international fora (e.g. High-Level Political Forum, Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, COP Climate Change Conference, etc.)? Furthermore, please indicate how the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches were implemented and/or advanced in this regard.
3. Please list some examples of achievements, promising practices and lessons learned that relate to national, inter- and sub-regional collaboration to the implementation of the GCM.
4. What are the main gaps and challenges to existing inter- and cross-regional collaboration on the implementation of the GCM?
5. Outline areas (GCM objectives and/or guiding principles) where the region would benefit from strengthened cooperation in terms of finance, capacity-building, policy advice, data gathering and analysis, technology, multi-stakeholder partnerships, etc.

Session agenda

Session 3: 15:00 – 16:15 CET	
Introductory remarks (5 mins) Member State speaker	Andi Mahila , Deputy Minister of Interior of Albania
Interactive discussion (70 mins) moderated by Stakeholder representative.	Stella Opoku-Owusu , Executive Director of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)