

# **The Regional Review Report on implementation of the “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration” by the Republic of Azerbaijan**

## **Introduction**

The Council of IOM admitted Azerbaijan as a member state in June 2001 succeeding the signing of Agreement which established legal basis for further cooperation between IOM and the Republic of Azerbaijan in handling migration and its ratification by the National Assembly. The leading role in migration management in Azerbaijan is vested in the State Migration Service (SMS), established in 2007, and is regulated by the Migration Code and in conformity with relevant international instruments.

Following globally conducted interstate consultations, Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), a non-legally binding document covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner was adopted by 152 members of the United Nations in December 2018 in Marrakesh, Morocco. The Compact fosters international cooperation among all relevant actors on migration, acknowledging that no State can address migration alone, and upholds the sovereignty of States and their obligations under international law. The Compact put some commitments before Governments that will eventually serve for protection and provision of migrant's rights through its 23 objectives and ten Guiding Principles.

A UN Network on Migration (UNNM) was established in May 2018 to ensure effective, coordinated system-wide support to the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). In this regard, upon the request of governments, UNNM assists in the development of a voluntary review report for the regional and global review meetings. As specified in the Article 46 and 53 of the GCM, the regional reviews could result in a comprehensive report that will synthesize all inputs received to bring forward issues and priorities of regional importance and propose roadmaps for regional collaboration and actions to advance the implementation of the GCM.

During 2019, 1.752.089 foreigners and stateless persons visited the Republic of Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the estimated number of Azerbaijani migrants residing outside the

country equals to 1.1 million, most of which are settled in European Union, Russian Federation, and Turkey. The international remittance inflows from these regions make around USD 1 billion or 2.3 per cent as a share of the GDP, which also indicates the intensity of economic and social relations with the mentioned areas.<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of the cooperation with IOM Mission in Azerbaijan with the State Migration Service in recent years has resulted in development of substantial policy and legislative reforms on migration, Azerbaijan's integration into UN structures engaged in migration management, as well as fostering capacity-building activities. Consequently, "National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan" for 2020-2025 (to be adopted) developed in 2019 outlines the major strategic visions on migration governance in the country in compliance with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and other relevant international legal frameworks. Furthermore, a diaspora mapping, shedding insights for the skills and demographic profiles of Azerbaijani diaspora communities, was developed. Meanwhile, Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Troika and Steering Group members endorsed Azerbaijan as a member of the Steering Group of the GFMD in April 2020.

In December 2019, United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Azerbaijan decided to establish United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) to support and contribute to effective migration management and protection of human rights of migrants in Azerbaijan. The UNNM for Azerbaijan was established in July 2020 in cooperation with relevant governmental, international, civil, private, and other entities engaged in migration the UNNM aims to foster implementation of objectives set forth in GCM and advocate the further progress with "National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan".

The governance of migration in Azerbaijan during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is significant to mention, as the State Migration Service optimized application process and simplified the permission procedures for migrants. In this regard, the period for the temporary stay of international migrants in the country was automatically extended with no administrative procedure or documentation required; thus, no foreign citizen was forced to leave the country, including those who were refused refugee status prior to COVID-19

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/labormarkets/brief/migration-and-remittances>.

pandemic. While no migrant was placed in detention facility during this period, the status of irregular migrants was legalized based on their applications. Different services provided for the migrants were conducted through a fully digitalized system ensuring zero contact with the applicants. In future SMS together with IOM and UNNM will contribute to the socio-economic impact assessment and restriction on Human Mobility due to COVID19 and provide recommendation on addressing migrants and migrant families' issues.

## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the progress in implementation of the Global Compact by the Azerbaijani government during 2019-2020 years. The current updates on national experience contribute to the Regional Review for the GC for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) to serve as an input to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) to be conducted in 2022.

The main areas covered in the report are as following:

- initial assessment of progress made by SMS and with participation of relevant stakeholders in line with the guiding principles and objectives specified in GCM;
- formulation of key findings, sharing lessons learnt, and best practices in implementation of the resolution 73/195 – GCM;
- updates and impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the management of migration in Azerbaijan;
- highlighting challenges and gaps, identifying national priorities and recommendations in fulfilment of GCM.

The report derives from the analysis of the legal acts, policies, reports, and inputs from the national stakeholders, such as government entities, international organizations, particularly with UN IOM Mission in Azerbaijan, civil society organizations, private sector partners, and other agencies, reflecting the Whole-of-government and whole-society approaches indicated in the guiding principles of the GCM.

The structure of the report outlines the sections, such as Key findings; selected good practices and lessons learned within the region; Conclusions and recommendations for implementation and future regional review, and Annex with list of participants.

## Key findings

### Comprises all GCM objectives. Policy and legislative reforms on migration:

One of the key priorities in governance of international migration in the country is the adoption and implementation of the “**National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan**” for the period of 2020-2025. The Strategy developed by SMS with the support of IOM Mission in Azerbaijan is envisaged to serve as a road map in effective management of migration in the country, establishing and improving relevant policies providing protection of migrants’ human rights, and implementation of the 23 objectives and 10 guiding principles laid down in the GCM. The 6 strategic visions of the Strategy include: facilitation and availability of regular migration, prevention of irregular migration, development of protection system for vulnerable groups, use of development perspectives of migration, institutional development, and awareness-raising on migration. Concurrently, these visions have been developed in adherence to existing international legal and policy frameworks, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Obj. 10.** Regarding policy and legislative reforms on migration, adoption of “National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020-2024” in July 2020 is one of the achievements of the Azerbaijani Government. The Activity Plan on implementation of the National Action Plan with concerted efforts of the relevant state agencies, including the SMS considers the following activities: Improvement of legal and regulatory framework and institutional measures on combating trafficking in human beings; Preventive work related to trafficking in persons; Criminal prosecution for human trafficking offenses; Social rehabilitation and protection of victims of human trafficking; Development of cooperation in the field of combating human trafficking; Trainings (specialized occupational training) for authorized representatives in combating human trafficking; and Awareness raising on combating human trafficking.

**Obj. 19. Guiding principles (j)** With the support provided by IOM Mission in Azerbaijan and European Union a comprehensive report named “Mapping the Azerbaijani Diaspora: Insights from Big Data” was prepared. In line with the Whole-of-society approach specified

in the GCM the publication provides IOM and the Government with insights into the skills and demographic profiles of Azerbaijani diaspora communities to develop engagement strategy and identify potential partnerships. The report focuses on top sectors of employment in the selected host countries, gathers opinions regarding quality of education and work environments in Azerbaijan and gauges interest in skills transfer initiatives. The report is notable for the comprehensive research methodology applied in collecting and analysing the data which aims to further expand upon the existing scholarship and statistics with an exercise into big data analysis to map the Azerbaijani Diaspora. Based on the findings the report presents key recommendations for: Social and Economic Development, Messaging and Outreach Strategies, and Direction of Future Research.

**Obj. 3, 15 (and 12 partially)**

In accordance with the GCM Objectives on ensuring accurate and timely information for migrants at all stages of migration process and enabling them to access basic services, including in emergency situations, as well as promptly addressing relevant applications and enquiries the “Call Center” of SMS was switched to **24/7 operation** and “**MigAz**” mobile application of SMS was launched respectively. The enquiries can be directly responded and processed through the application that functions in Azerbaijani, English, and Russian languages. This also supports implementation of GCM Objective on strengthening certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral.

In addition to the official web page of the Service that provides comprehensive information in various aspects of the governance and implementation of migration process a new website (**www.migrationto.az**) was developed with the support of EU and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). The new website serves as a centralized and publicly accessible virtual source for obtaining information on pathways for regular migration, visa requirements, application procedures, fees, requirements for work permit, and requirements regarding professional qualification. The website is currently functioning in 3 languages (Azerbaijani, English and Russian).

**Obj. 1. GP. (i)** In alignment with the GCM Objective on collecting and utilizing accurate and disaggregated data for developing evidence-based policies all relevant data on foreigners



and stateless persons temporary staying, working and residing in Azerbaijan is stored in the **Unified Migration Information System (UMIS)** established by SMS. To comply with the Guiding Principle set forward in the GCM regarding the enhancement of collaboration across all sectors and levels of government responsible for migration data, SMS regularly and closely cooperates with the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan.

**Obj. 1.** Meanwhile, it is planned to establish a **Regional Training Center on Migration in Azerbaijan** with the support of the IOM Development Fund. The main purpose of establishing a regional research and training centre on migration is to collect and analyse data in accordance with UN standards, improve the process of training and education in the field of migration in the region, invest in the capacity building on migration and development and facilitation of mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences.

**GP. (j) Obj. 2** Regarding the whole-of-society approach, promoting close participation of multi - stakeholders in migration management in Azerbaijan the **Public Council** has been established under SMS currently consisting of 9 non-governmental organizations. Respectively, IOM Mission in Azerbaijan presents financial support for the partner NGOs, as the number of assisted women and children during the year of 2019 equals to 445 persons.

Similarly, the **Advisory Board** operates to bring together representatives of private sector to assess the impact of migration policy on this sector. These structures aim to enhance engagement of various segments of society in migration governance, consequently, to ensure their positive impact in the management of migration processes. Within the framework of projects implemented in partnership with IOM the setup of Language laboratory and development of software on different systems are main areas of contribution by the European Union (EU), BP and its partners, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of USA, the United States Agency for International Development, etc.. Furthermore, implementation of social projects such as the Migration School, the IT school, the Migration Volunteers, and the Youth Development Forum contributes to raising awareness in this area, as well as supporting human development. Moreover, the tree planting campaign organized together with IOM Mission in Azerbaijan, State Migration

Service and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources is noteworthy for raising awareness and increasing public attention on environment and climate change issues, as well as supporting initiatives of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on green zones and environment. This initiative is aligning with the Objective of Minimizing the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin, particularly the section regarding the Natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation.

GP. (j) Ob. 16, 17. To further enhance the civil participation in migration management “Open Door Day” citizen forums, awareness raising events, mobile services, as well as conferences at national level was organized by SMS in the regions of the country. The events were conducted with participation of migrants and stateless persons, as well as, local citizens, representatives of relevant state entities, public organizations, employers, and entrepreneurs aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discussion to form migration-related perceptions. Such perceptions empower societies and migrants for full inclusion and social cohesion as per specified in the GCM. In this sense, relevant trainings (Azerbaijani language, history, rights, and freedoms of foreigners) were organized by the Training Center of the SMS ensuring smoother integration of migrants to local society. Moreover, SMS supported implementation of the “Socio-cultural integration of foreigners residing in Azerbaijan and persons granted with refugee status to Azerbaijani society” project in 2019. Furthermore, awareness raising month was organized at the beginning of 2019 in two directions: broadcasting short videos for general awareness raising and delivering information directly to the foreigners. The awareness raising campaign is conducted in 2 directions – general awareness by video clips and informing the targeted foreigners. 40.000 flyers were published in Azerbaijani, Russian and English languages within the campaign. These flyers were presented to foreigners in airport, sea ports, railways, restaurants network, etc.

#### Obj. 21.

For facilitation of safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration of migrants, agreements on readmission of persons residing without



authorization signed between Azerbaijan and the European Union, as well as Norway, Switzerland and Montenegro are successfully implemented. Currently, similar agreements on readmission with 13 more countries are in the process of conclusion.

Additionally, in cooperation with the international organizations various projects are implemented to facilitate sustainable reintegration, to promote dignified return and to guarantee due process, individual assessment, and to render effective remedy. In this regard, joint implementation of "Reintegration Support to Azerbaijani Returnees (RESTART)" project has been launched with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Developing reintegration guidelines, raising experience on providing reintegration support to vulnerable categories of returnees in cooperation with the civil society organizations, as well as providing reintegration support to citizens of Azerbaijan returned from EU Member States are envisaged within the framework of the project. A Working Group, established in 2016 and consisting of representatives of the relevant central executive authorities is actively involved in developing flexible solution of reintegration (accommodation, health care, employment, social security, and education) of readmitted persons into the society in cooperation with relevant state authorities.

**Obj. 21, 14.** Moreover, a project aiming to establish an Electronic Readmission Case Management System (ERCMS) in Azerbaijan to strengthen institutional links between consulates and other officials of countries of origin and destination and to ensure certainty, security and dignity upon return and readmission has been launched.

**Obj. 11, 12.** Another substantial project on the application of API (Advanced Passenger Information) and PNR (Passenger Name Record) systems in Azerbaijan, as well as the harmonization of relevant mechanisms with ICAO standards is implemented for integrated, secure and connected border management.

**Obj. 12.** Due to the consequences of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Azerbaijan is not in the position of securing its border management and controlling irregular migration activities on its occupied territories. The recent acts of implanting Armenians from Lebanon and Syria in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia leads to demographic changes in the region and jeopardizes the peaceful efforts in the settlement of the conflict. Yet these migrants are not only civilians, most of them are trained terrorist warriors from the Middle East settled to commit crimes against the Azerbaijani population.

Such an act violates the guiding principle of (GCM) on National sovereignty and the Objective regarding the integrated, secure, and coordinated border management, as well as international humanitarian law, the 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is not capable of monitoring and providing the rights and wellbeing of these illegally resettled migrants.

In the background of the fight against the pandemic by the international community Azerbaijan has been continuously facing Armenia's traditional acts of aggression. As a result of the recent attacks by the Armenian armed forces on residential areas, there are still civilian casualties. According to information as of October 17, 2020, 60 civilians were killed, 270 were injured, and about 2,000 houses were completely destroyed or damaged. In addition densely populated cities of Azerbaijan out of occupied territories have been continuously exposed to heavy artillery shelling by Armenia which could lead to dramatic environmental, infrastructure and humanitarian disasters. Azerbaijan has taken adequate response measures in order to ensure safety of its people and to restore its internationally recognized borders. Today one of the key goals of the ongoing adequate response operations is also to restore the rights of IDPs to return their homelands by ending the forced displacement.

As it is known, today over 1 million refugees and IDPS in Azerbaijan are still suffering from such aggression policy and destructive position of Armenia which is the root causes of this protracted refugee situation. The long-standing policy of illegal resettlement of Armenians, as well as asylum seekers in the Nagorno-Karabakh, including recent involvement of mercenaries from the third countries to use against Azerbaijan are a clear abuse of the key principles of international protection system and aims to alter demographic situation across Azerbaijan's occupied territories which is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

#### **Obj. 23.**

The United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) was established in July 2020 to facilitate effective migration management in Azerbaijan through timely and coordinated United Nations (UN) system-wide actions. The UNNM will provide support to the Government with the implementation of GCM and further progress with the draft "National Strategy on

Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan” 2020-2025. A Work Plan is currently being developed in coordination with IOM and other relevant UN agencies and UNNM stakeholders.

The UNNM aims to foster a better understanding of migration dynamics through information exchanges, contribute to the improved coordination within the UN system and contribute to the protection of the human rights of migrants in Azerbaijan.

The UNNM works closely with the State Migration Service (SMS), and relevant governmental as well as non-governmental entities, including, but not limited to International Organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), Academia, Private Sector, donors and other entities dealing with migration issues in Azerbaijan, to promote effective migration management and governance, all the while supporting mechanisms to advance the protection of the rights and well-being of migrants and communities in a coherent, holistic manner, in line with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and in accordance with “National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan” as well as other bi-and-multilateral frameworks.

Considering the achievements of the country in the field of migration management at both national and regional levels, as of April 2020 Azerbaijan has been elected as a member of the **Steering Group of the Global Forum on Migration and Development**.

To foster international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration, agreements for cooperation on migration was signed with the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kingdom of Belgium. Currently, signing of relevant documents on cooperation with 16 other countries is underway.

On May 7, 2020 upon the initiative and chairmanship of Azerbaijan, an online video conference with participation of heads of migration and relevant agencies of the member and observer states of **Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States** was held. The meeting discussed activities of the member and observer states in addressing outcomes of coronavirus pandemics in relation to international migrants living on their territories, and the exchange of relevant statistical information about the citizens of these countries.

Azerbaijan continues its engagement in the Almaty Process, a regional consultative process on refugee protection and international migration to, from and within Central Asia,<sup>2</sup> Prague Process which was launched in order to trigger cooperation among EU countries, Schengen countries, Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan states, Central Asian countries, Russia and Turkey in migration sphere, and Budapest Process including in itself more than 50 governments and 10 international organizations, acting in direction of establishing system of constant regulation of migration.<sup>3</sup>

### **The impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on governance of migration in Azerbaijan**

In mid-June 2020, a **Joint Statement on the Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants** was supported by a total of 103 Member and Observer States of the United Nations by and Azerbaijan is among them<sup>4</sup>. The Statement mentions the devastating global effects of the spread of the disease worldwide and calls for the international cooperation to prioritize the protection of human rights and address the needs of migrants during the pandemic.

Following the first incident of COVID-19 infection case at the end of February 2020 Azerbaijan closed state borders, suspended transportation of passengers from other countries, and internal mobility of people were also restricted to prevent further spread of the disease.

Throughout the unforeseen and challenging pandemic period State Migration Service further enhanced its collaboration with international partners on exchange of information and guidance, particularly, International Organization for Migration (IOM) shared with SMS important policy documents, information and guideline ("Cross-Border Human Mobility Amid and After COVID 19") and initiated further activities during the COVID-19 period. Meanwhile, under the overall outcome of promoting migrant-inclusive response to COVID-19 and assisting migrants in vulnerable situations, an emergency response project by IOM

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/en/about-almaty-process#:~:text=The%20Almaty%20Process%20is%20a,and%20coordination%20on%20mixed%20migration.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://migration.gov.az/international/international.>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.un.int/philippines/statements\\_speeches/joint-statement-impact-covid-19-migrants#:~:text=Excellency%2C&text=The%20statement%20welcomes%20your%20report,economies%20heavily%20dependent%20on%20remittances.](https://www.un.int/philippines/statements_speeches/joint-statement-impact-covid-19-migrants#:~:text=Excellency%2C&text=The%20statement%20welcomes%20your%20report,economies%20heavily%20dependent%20on%20remittances.)

providing humanitarian assistance to stranded, vulnerable migrants (foreign nationals) in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia is being conducted. The project corresponds to four pillars of the IOM's Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan<sup>5</sup> and the associated IOM South Caucasus Appeal<sup>6</sup>: Tracking Mobility Impacts of COVID-19, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), Logistics, Procurement and Supply Management, and Protection.

### **Legalization and e-services**

Azerbaijan took the position of adjusting her migration policy to maximum convenience of foreigners in the country, reducing administrative procedures almost close to zero and digitalization of all inquiries. During this period, temporary staying period of foreigners in the country, who do not choose to return to their countries of origin due to various reasons, is extended until the borders reopen and no additional document is required for this. In other words, no citizen of any country was forced to leave the country and no administrative procedure is required, as the permissions are automatically extended.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan successfully managed to handle all applications and inquiries from the migrants through online sources and services, based on zero paper and zero contact principle. This was possible through e-services on the official web-site of SMS, mobile application of the Service (MigAz), the Call Center operating 7/24, and via social network accounts of the SMS. Meanwhile, various awareness raising tools, video instructions were developed for persons facing difficulties in using e-services.

The smooth and non-delayed return of Azerbaijanis from other states to homeland and departure of foreigners from Azerbaijan to their countries of origin was possible through the successful and prompt coordination with diplomatic representations, as well as relevant authorities of foreign countries. Currently limited charter flights and cargo transportations are operating to address the urgent transference cases and needs.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/iom-global-strategic-preparedness-and-response-plan-coronavirus-disease-2019>

<sup>6</sup> IOM South Caucasus COVID-19 Appeal



### **Refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs**

Azerbaijan has not ceased receiving applications for obtaining the refugee status during the pandemic. The processing of asylum seekers' applications was postponed for one month only and the period of relevant permits for their residence in the country is extended. Those who were refused obtaining refugee status prior to COVID-19 were not required to leave the country or were not forcibly placed in detention centres.

Azerbaijan is sparing no effort in order to ensure implementation of pledges made during the Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Two of the three pledges made by the Government of Azerbaijan during the Forum to include refugees, as well as persons under the protection of UNHCR into the medical insurance system and to facilitate legal employment and access to labour market for refugees have been fully implemented. Related with the implementation of the third pledge, granting scholarship for higher education to refugee students is planned this year.

In addition to the abovementioned, for the purpose of providing proper conditions for refugees to enjoy their rights established under international law, Azerbaijan has started to issue travel documents for refugees since January 2020. Furthermore, starting from July 1st of this year in accordance with the arrangement between the Government of Azerbaijan and the UNHCR, all asylum applications are reviewed only by the Government thanks to the improved national asylum procedure.

It should be noted that measures were not limited to improving protection mechanism of refugees' rights. Concrete steps are taken towards naturalization of stateless persons who also belong to the vulnerable category of persons. In this regard, necessary measures such as country-wide public awareness campaigns, on-spot documentation through mobile service have been taken to detect and engage stateless persons registered in the country to the process of naturalization. Since the last session, around 20% of the stateless persons already have been admitted to the citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the Presidential decrees and considerable number of applications of the same kind is under consideration. Moreover, in order to increase efforts to identify the stateless persons, a Working Group on statelessness, represented by the relevant government agencies, Ombudsperson and UNHCR Representation in Azerbaijan has been established under the leadership of the Prime Minister.



Considering the social and economic challenges refugees and asylum seekers face during this period, the State Migration Service carried out social assistance projects with “Migration Volunteers”, civil society institutions and other stakeholders and these activities continue at the present. In addition, medical care is provided free of charge for refugees and asylum seekers in Azerbaijan. In case of any other needs of asylum seekers during the pandemic, the State Migration Service will coordinate these issues with other relevant government agencies.

Furthermore, due to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas by Armenia, there are more than 700,000 IDPs in Azerbaijan today. During this period, the government, along with other citizens, has taken all measures to ensure that IDPs have access to all services (disinfection of IDP camps, and food assistance).

### **Awareness-raising**

The Call Center of the State Migration Service, also available for international calls, has been operating on non-stop 24/7 regime since the first days of the pandemic. Addressing calls in 3 languages (Azerbaijani, English and Russian), the Center operates in an intensified mode, receiving calls approximately 3 times more than usual.

Awareness raising activities were also conducted through dissemination of information in the form of info graphics, videos, and brochures in different languages on social networks, website and periodicals of the State Migration Service.

### **Labour migration**

The work permits for migrants are issued by SMS in Azerbaijan and due to the pandemic, 16% decrease is observed in obtaining work permits in the first six months of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. Considering the current circumstances of temporary closure of many businesses as well as borders this number can be considered satisfying.

In addition, no migrant worker and their family members are deported or receive irregular status even if their employment contracts have not been extended and residence permits have expired. The notable action by the Azerbaijani government regarding the migrants who were found to be engaged in illegal labor was the decision of not expelling these people, but allowing residing and their status in the country was legalized.

### **Irregular migration**

As mentioned above, during the pandemic, forced returns were suspended in the country and no irregular migrant was forcibly placed in detention centres. At the present, very few foreigners remain in detention centres upon their decision to stay due to financial difficulties.

It is worth to mention again that no administrative sanction was imposed on any foreigner in the form of deportation, and every irregular migrant was legalized based on application. During this period, no COVID-19 infection case was found in any foreigner remaining in detention centres on their own request. There were no difficulties/delays in the detention centres regarding access of migrants to health services, food security and disinfection.

### **Selected good practices and lessons learned within the region**

Among the various policies and activities conducted by the Government for implementation of the GCM Objectives and Guiding principles, development of **“National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan”** (2020-2025) with the support of IOM Mission in Azerbaijan is one of leading achievements. The draft Strategy is a comprehensive document covering all relevant aspects of migration governance in the country upholding the existing international legal and policy frameworks, particularly Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration and in adherence with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Adoption of “National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020-2024” in July 2020 by the President of Azerbaijan largely contributes to Preventing, combating and eradicating trafficking in persons in the context of international migration.

In accordance with the Whole-of-society approach “Mapping the Azerbaijani Diaspora: Insights from Big Data”, a comprehensive report was produced with the support of IOM Mission in Azerbaijan and European Union. The report provides insights into the skills and demographic profiles of Azerbaijani diaspora communities to develop engagement strategy and identify potential partnerships.

For ensuring accurate and timely information for migrants at all stages of migration process and enabling them to access basic services, “Call Center” of SMS intensified its work operating **24/7** and “**MigAz**” mobile application of SMS was launched by the Service. A new website ([www.migrationto.az](http://www.migrationto.az)) was developed with support of EU and ICMPD and all services provided these sources are available in three languages.

Meanwhile, it is planned to establish a **Regional Training Center on Migration in Azerbaijan** aiming to improve the process of training and education in the field of migration in the region, to enhance the capacity building on migration and to facilitate mutual recognition of professions and specialties is planned to be established with the support of the IOM Development Fund.

Additionally, in cooperation with the international organizations various projects are implemented to facilitate sustainable reintegration, to promote dignified return and to guarantee due process, individual assessment, and to render effective remedy.

Joint implementation of “Reintegration Support to Azerbaijani Returnees (RESTART)” project with the support of ICMPD is in progress with the aim to strengthen the capacities of authorities and civil society in Azerbaijan to actively facilitate sustainable return from the European Union Member States and reintegration of Azerbaijani nationals. Additionally, another ongoing project aiming to strengthen institutional links between relevant stakeholders in other countries of origin and destination and to facilitate safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration of migrants is Electronic Readmission Case Management System (ERCMS). For ensuring integrated, secure and connected border management API (Advanced Passenger Information) and PNR (Passenger Name Record) systems are planned to be launched, simultaneously harmonization of relevant mechanisms with ICAO standards is conducted.

The United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) established in July 2020 in Azerbaijan supports the country in fulfilling its commitments within GCM and will facilitate implementation of “National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan” 2020-2025 to be adopted by the government.

Azerbaijan was elected as a member of the **Steering Group of the Global Forum on Migration and Development** as of April 2020 which indicates the country's achievements and interest in the field of migration management at both national and regional levels.

Azerbaijan has demonstrated an exceptional support for international migrants on its territory during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as it kept hosting all migrants choosing to stay in its territory by applying automatic extension for their stay without any further documentation or administrative measures applied. Through its online sources and services almost all applications and enquiries were addressed electronically ensuring social distancing. The extension of stay was also applied to people who were refused to obtain refugee status before the pandemic started and those whose employment contracts were not extended and residence permits expired. Even migrants involved in illegal labour were not deported from the country and received regular migrant status. No migrant, despite their status, was placed in detention and those few people who remain in these facilities choose to stay due to the financial challenges.

### **Conclusions and recommendations for implementation and future regional review**

Referring to the activities conducted in line with the GCM during 2019-2020 the State Migration Service has reached the following conclusions and recommendations for implementations of the governance of international migration:

- assessing the impact of mobility restrictions on countries of origin and destination in times of global crisis such as the current pandemic. Although Objective 2 of GCM in a separate section does specify the regulation of migration during natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation, it fails to address the strengthening cooperation and solidarity on migration management in emergencies, establishing a mechanism to allow the countries of origin to obtain operational information about their citizens in any country of destination.
- Although urgent measures were taken during the pandemic, in crisis situations, coordination of emigration and immigration activities at the national and international levels, appropriate preparation measures, pre-planned steps in case of any emergency situations, for identifying responsibilities of relevant government agencies, civil society and migrants, and managing migration in crisis situations, the

need for implementation of action plans, trainings and awareness-raising activities have emerged.

Meanwhile, State Migration Service will continue conducting regular analysis in various areas of migration to make evidence based and timely decisions in accordance with the current situation, contemplating the experience of other countries and international recommendations. Focusing on securing the public health under current shortcomings relevant organized measures will be taken and migrants residing in the country, will be included as a part of this process, and ensured to enjoy their rights and freedoms.

Deriving from the previous experience through its Migration Volunteers project during and before the pandemic, the Service plans to foster mobilization of the youth through volunteering in migration management process in the country. The Service, in collaboration with all the relevant government and society stakeholders, will continue awareness-raising activities focusing on making these activities more accessible and using a more simple and fluent language comprehensible by migrants, particularly vulnerable groups.