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# ► **Opening Remarks: Asia-Pacific Regional Review of the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**

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Distinguished Delegates, Stake-holder representatives, UN Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to address you today at the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

In 2020, the usual drivers of migration were disrupted by the global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus disease, COVID- 19. The pandemic influenced most migration movements and corridors in the world, driving down migration. In Asia and the Pacific, migration corridors which are normally very active, suddenly closed for several months. Origin and destination countries applied strict entry rules to control the pandemic within their borders. Deployment and outflows of migrant workers fell across the region, particularly during the first months of the pandemic. At the same time, in response to the spread of virus, economic restrictions, including lockdowns, were implemented in host countries, which led to the return of many migrant workers to their home countries, including those who fell out of work; while others were stranded in countries of destination, unable to work or return home. As a result of the disruptions, remittances for Asia are provisionally estimated to fall by 7 percent in 2020.

The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on economies, businesses and workers, and in our region, migrant workers have been among the most affected. Migrants were more exposed to the risk of infection. As migrant workers are concentrated in essential occupations that cannot be undertaken from home, they are less likely to be able to telework. Also there have been some poor examples in Asia and elsewhere where migrant workers were reportedly not able to socially distance at the work-place or not provided with sufficient personal protection equipment. Migrant workers were also put at increased risk of COVID-19 infection due to sub-standard and crowded accommodation. Finally, there was often differential treatment between nationals and migrant workers in social protection and relief and income support measures.

Despite these setbacks, on the health front at least, there has been a robust response on the part of governments to control and reduce infections, and migrants have also benefited from easing of work permit extensions, and in some cases regularization. Governments have also recognized the need to improve standards for employer provided accommodation.

There are opportunities to build back better, and the Global Compact on Migration, along with international standards and regional frameworks, provide us guidance towards this goal.

The centrality of work to migration flows in the region is clear. The ILO estimated in 2017 that there are 164 million migrant workers worldwide, which accounted for 70% of all migrants of working age. While noting the comprehensive approach of the GCM, reflected in its 23 Objectives, I would like to touch upon three thematic areas which are of great importance to making migration safe, orderly and regular in the region.

## **Fair Recruitment**

Fair and ethical recruitment has been on the agenda of policy makers, social partners, civil society and UN agencies for several years. As a result several positive developments can be noted. These include:

- An emerging practice of the prohibition of worker paid recruitment fees in laws
- Private sector initiatives on responsible recruitment
- International guidance on fair recruitment, including definition of fees and related costs

Yet recruitment and migration costs generally remain high in the region and there is much scope to eliminate worker paid recruitment fees and related costs, thereby increasing the amount of earnings that is left with workers and their families.

I would encourage all countries in the region to introduce legislation to remove worker paid recruitment fees and related costs, and undertake regular surveys to monitor the extent of such costs using the methodology developed for SDG target 10.7.

## **Decent Work**

Deficits in decent work were highlighted during the pandemic. One of these is that women migrants continue to face particular risks in domestic work where protections of the labour law often do not apply. Also while migrant workers commonly double their earnings after migration, their wages are still among the lowest in the destination country, and are sometimes not paid in full. Among migrants, women on average earn less.

Still, we do see several positive developments with respect to working conditions. These include ratification of ILO conventions, the development of new laws, the adoption of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant workers, and support services to migrants by trade unions and civil society organizations.

We urge that governments include migrant workers in social protection and income support measures in the same way that nationals are covered. We also urge governments to afford domestic workers the same protections as other workers

## **Labour Mobility**

Throughout the region there are pathways for regular labour migration across different skill levels. But legal channels are limited in relation to employer demand for workers or the size of the labour pool seeking employment. Legal pathways are also often costly and cumbersome particularly for workers in elementary occupations, encouraging irregular migration.

Enhancing the effectiveness of legal channels will make migration more safe, orderly and regular.

## **Closing**

The current economic and social transitions in the global economy as well as the

unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic sharply affect migration in Asia and the Pacific and put pressure on policymakers and regulators to develop timely policy responses and innovative approaches to guarantee effective management of migration.

Partnerships among governments, the private sector, workers organizations, CSOs and other stakeholders will be central in meeting these challenges and delivering the Global Compact on Migration. The UN Network for Migration will need to play its part and I would like to warmly congratulate the ESCAP and members of the UN Network for the hard work that has gone into the preparation of this Regional Review Meeting. ILO is proud to be part of the UN Network on Migration at the global and regional level and to work side-by-side with members of the UN family in supporting governments and stake-holders in the Asia Pacific region to uphold and promote migrants' rights and orderly migration.