Statement by Jennifer Vallentine, Asia Regional Manager, the Mixed Migration Centre at Roundtable 4: Improving value-driven and evidence-based policymaking and public debate, and enhancing cooperation on migration, as part of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

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Dear Excellencies, distinguished delegates and colleagues. It is an honour to be here today to discuss the Global Compact for Migration Cluster 4 (addressing GCM objectives 1, 3, 7, 17 and 23). Thank you to UNESCAP for hosting this event and thank you also to OHCHR and ILO for co-hosting this panel.

About the Mixed Migration Centre

The [Mixed Migration Centre](#) (MMC) is a leading source for independent research and analysis on mixed migration. Our overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

We aim to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration.

Every day through [our surveys](#) and network of community-based monitors we speak to migrants across the globe, about their experiences, priorities, needs and the issues they face.

MMC has been closely engaged with GCM processes at the global level and has released two reports stocktaking implementation (available online - [here](#) and [here](#)).

The importance of cluster 4 objectives

The GCM will not succeed in ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration without ensuring the fundamental rights of migrants are afforded, irrespective of their status.

Cluster 4 encompasses critical and cross-cutting objectives imperative for meeting the overall aims of the GCM. Including the need for States to work in partnership to uphold the rights of migrants and reduce vulnerabilities and risks through evidenced informed policies and responses.

As the region struggles with the health, economic and protection crises arising from the global pandemic, reflection and recalibration towards the implementation of the GCM objectives is critical.

Outlining the situations of vulnerability migrants face

Despite the many positive impacts of migration, migrants across the region continue to face significant oppression based on the grounds of sex, age, race, religion, migration status, sexual orientation and other factors.

While the provision for 'migrants in vulnerable situations' in the GCM lays bare the responsibility of states to address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration through the fulfilment and protection of rights, significant protection gaps across the region prevail.

Through our work at MMC, we speak with migrants and refugees about the situations of vulnerability they face. This includes how vulnerability may drive migration, for example through extreme poverty, violence or the impacts of climate change – often with multiple drivers intersecting and compounding each other.

Our survey data also shows that situations of vulnerability are disproportionately experienced by migrants in irregular situations. This includes how migrants encounter discrimination, abuse, sexual and gender based violence, or detention at the hands of authorities, smugglers and traffickers on their journeys.

In destination or host countries too, migrants tell us how they are exposed to exploitation in their workplaces at the hands of their employers and how they are fearful of arrest, detention and deportation by authorities because they lack legal status and protection. Migrants speak about the discrimination and xenophobia they experience, and how this is one of the many barriers they face to accessing essential services and justice.

And so too, upon return to countries of origin, migrants also report to us a lack of re-integration support, struggle to access livelihoods and high levels of debt incurred by their migration journeys.

As we know, the COVID-19 pandemic is a risk multiplier. For migrants in the region, many of whom work in the informal sector, one of the most extreme effects of the pandemic is loss

of income, and migrants have reported overwhelming food and housing insecurity, as well as mounting stress and anxiety.

Those continuing to work throughout this time, often on the frontlines, reported that COVID-19 exacerbated their risk of exploitation, including increased wage theft, and being forced to work without protective gear, in dangerous situations.

As borders have closed and international travel remains restricted, some migrants report an increased reliance on smugglers, and that journeys have become more dangerous, increasing their risk of abuse and pushbacks, particularly from border authorities. This has left migrants in precarious, inhumane and life-threatening situations and vulnerable to abuse by smugglers and traffickers.

These situations of vulnerability are not inevitable and migrants are not inherently vulnerable. They enter vulnerable situations as a result of inadequate policies and responses. Vulnerability can be addressed, as a starting point, through states fulfilling their commitments to the GCM and implementing policies and responses that place the human rights of migrants at the centre.

Promising practices across the region

Even as the risks facing migrants multiply, promising practices are emerging across the region in response to mounting situations of vulnerability. Some of these include:

- the inclusion of migrants in national safety nets amid the pandemic and in COVID-19 vaccine rollout plans or testing;
- cross-border pilots between origin and destination countries of regular pathways to fill labour gaps as well as regularisation schemes for those who became irregular due to the pandemic;
- promising practice emerge in terms of alternatives to detention, particularly for children.

All this is welcomed and should continue in efforts to reduce vulnerability. However, these promising practices, particularly those in response to the pandemic, should not be

temporary and isolated, but rather enduring pathways and be available to all migrants regardless of status.

Furthermore, capturing and documenting these positive practices will share important learnings across countries and encourage practices to become embedded, further developed, improved and expanded. This forms part of a crucial element of evidence-based response to migration. The Regional United Nations Migration network has helped to record some of these promising practices through the Asia Pacific Migration Report released in 2020 documenting implementation of the GCM across the region to date.

Further, the reports from ongoing stakeholder consultations hosted by UN ESCAP in the lead up to the regional review have also helped evidence promising practices from across the region, as well as highlighting enduring challenges.

The need for nuanced evidence to inform effective and balanced responses

Unfortunately, across the region, migration policy and public discourse around migration is still too often made without considering evidence. Instead, it's based on stereotypes about why people migrate, irrational fears about migrants being a threat to societies, and securitisation.

As GCM objective 1 calls for, we need quality data to inform evidence-based policies, including the collection, analysis and dissemination of data sets disaggregated by sex, age, and migration status, as well as other characteristics.

And beyond these larger administrative data sets, states and other stakeholders need to invest in rich and nuanced research, conducted at a granular level, through an intersectional lens and reaching those which are hardest to reach, and may not appear in official statistics, such as migrants in irregular situations. This type of research, including the research we conduct through MMC, can provide a better understanding of the individual and structural issues migrants face and from this, what issues need to be addressed.

This type of research can also ensure the voices of migrants are brought to the fore from the outset, representing themselves as experts in their own experiences, and shaping solutions to the issues they face. If this type of research is effectively utilised by policy makers, it will inform more responsive policies for migrants.

However building evidence is only one part of the equation. States have a responsibility to listen to research findings and recommendations and respond appropriately. They need to partner with academic institutions, research organisations, such as MMC, and other stakeholders so that states can better inform and coordinate their responses within and across borders.

The risks facing migrants are present at all stages of their migration journey, and are too important to ignore. States can create more effective and humane migration systems if they fulfil their commitment to implementing existing frameworks, such as the GCM, grounded in the SDGs and international human rights law. Finally, states must work in strong partnership with other states and stakeholders - including most importantly migrants themselves, to develop policies and practices based on robust and reliable evidence.