Stakeholder Consultations to inform the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
28 October 2020, 11:00-14:00 hrs. (*Bangkok time*) - Virtual

Ensuring that migration is voluntary, regular, safe and orderly
(addressing Global Compact for Migration objectives 2, 5, 6, 12, 18)

SUMMARY REPORT

I. Background

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/195,[1] the Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in Asia and the Pacific will be organized from 10 to 12 March 2021 by ESCAP along with the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific.

2. In the GCM, member States committed to a whole-of-society approach in GCM implementation, promoting broad multi-stakeholder partnerships to address migration in all its dimensions by including migrants, diasporas, local communities, civil society, academia, the private sector, parliamentarians, trade unions, national human rights institutions, the media and other relevant stakeholders in migration governance (para 15 (j)).

3. They also committed to implementing the GCM at the national, regional and global levels in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders including migrants, civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, faith-based organizations, local authorities and communities, the private sector, trade unions, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, the media and other relevant stakeholders (para 41 and 44).

4. ESCAP along with the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific[2] are committed to facilitating the meaningful engagement of stakeholders with the Asia-Pacific regional review process, in line with the principles underpinning a whole-of-society approach:
    ✓ **Transparency**: Generating an open call for engagement to all relevant stakeholders and providing an open and equal channel to receive inputs;
    ✓ **Inclusivity**: Creating room for the widest possible access to all relevant stakeholders through different forms of engagement;

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[1] General Assembly Resolution 73/195 of 19 December 2018.
[2] The Regional Network is comprised of all United Nations agencies at Asia and the Pacific regional level wishing to join. The Regional Office of IOM, Asia-Pacific serves as the Coordinator and Secretariat of the Regional Network. The Executive Committee of the Regional Network comprises of ESCAP, ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UN DRR, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, and UN Women.

✓ **Diversity:** Ensuring non-discriminatory access to all, with particular attention to underrepresented voices and to migrants in situations of vulnerability;

✓ **Meaningful participation:** Providing effective access to all preparatory and follow-up processes within the context of the regional review and encouraging the mobilization of resources to enable participation of stakeholders.[3]

II. Objectives, Organization and Attendance

5. It is in this context that ESCAP along with the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific are facilitating stakeholder consultations to inform the Regional Review in Asia and the Pacific. The consultations are being held in line with the indicative clusters of the GCM objectives envisaged for the roundtables of the International Migration Review Forum in 2022, according to General Assembly resolution 73/326.

6. The first consultation was held on 28 October 2020 and focused on the following five GCM objectives:

> 2. Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin
>
> 5. Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration
>
> 6. Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work
>
> 12. Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral
>
> 18. Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences

7. The purpose of the stakeholder consultation was to elicit stakeholders' experiences, views, expertise and recommendations to inform the Asia-Pacific Regional GCM Review, namely:
    *   Take stock of the overall progress of implementation of objectives to date;
    *   Identify key challenges, opportunities, gaps and emerging issues;
    *   Identify established and emerging good practices and lessons learnt;
    *   Identify resource requirements and capacity building needs; and
    *   Formulate recommendations.

8. Six stakeholders (Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organization PIANGO, Fiji; Migrant Forum Asia, Philippines; Solidarity Center, Sri Lanka; South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SAR TUC), Nepal; Tabaco City Government, Philippines and UN Major Group for Children and Youth, Malaysia and Australia) and two members of the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific (ILO and UNESCO) co-organized the consultation, with guidance and support from ESCAP and OHCHR.

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[3] For more information on the overall approach to stakeholder engagement in the GCM process in Asia and the Pacific, please see: *Engagement of civil society organizations and other stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.* At: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Stakeholders_engagement_20200819.pdf

9.   About 90 stakeholders from around 20 countries in Asia and the Pacific attended the consultation. Participants came from a broad range of sectors, including trade unions, civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, national human rights institutions, local authorities and communities, the private sector, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and academia. About 45 per cent of all participants represented civil society organizations and about 10 per cent each came from academia, migrant and diaspora organizations and trade unions. There was balanced gender representation among participants.

10.   Mr. Nilim Baruah, ILO, Mr. Wesley Teter, UNESCO and Ms. Pefi Kingi, Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO) provided opening remarks. Mr. Klaus Dik Nielsen, Stakeholder Liaison for the Regional Review moderated the opening session. Mr. Baruah provided an overview[4] of the five GCM objectives to be discussed, including progress and possible ways to advance implementation. He noted that countries in the region had been working on regular pathways, decent work, fair recruitment, and skills recognition and followed up on the implementation of related Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) in recent years, and that the GCM had provided added momentum to these initiatives.

11.   Mr. Baruah stated that disparities in economic growth and incomes acted as a major driver of migration, including unsafe and irregular movements. In addition, human rights violations, food insecurity, poverty as well as corruption, and political persecution were also driving population movements, sometimes in the form of mixed migration flows involving refugees and asylum seekers as well as migrants seeking safety and dignity. Sudden and slow-onset disasters, climate change and environmental degradation were major manifestations of environmental drivers affecting the Asia-Pacific region.[5]

12.   Mr. Wesley Teter, UNESCO, reflected that in 2015 the Education 2030 Framework for Action recognized the complex challenges countries face – from natural disasters to pandemics and conflicts, and how the resulting displacement can traumatize a generation, leaving them without access to quality education and unprepared to contribute to the social and economic recovery countries urgently need. He addressed the central importance of GCM objective 18 and emphasized the need to invest in skills development of migrants and fair recognition of diverse forms of qualifications. Going forward, the Tokyo Convention[6] is an important instrument to help achieve GCM Objective 18 by promoting fair recognition of diverse forms of learning in the Asia-Pacific region.

13.   Ms. Pefi Kingi[7], PIANGO, called for civil society to stand stronger during the global pandemic and called for more financial and technical support to civil society to increase capacity and deliver on GCM objectives. As key priorities, she listed scrutiny and action on climate change migration displacement; mitigating risks and challenges pertaining

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[4] Overview Power Point Presentation:
https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Overview_Stakeholders%20Consultation_%2028%20October%202020 20.pdf

[5] The information is based on the United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2020). *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration* (ST/ESCAP/2801). At: https://www.unescap.org/resources/asia-pacific-migration-report-2020

[6] Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention). At: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

[7] Ms. Pefi Kingi replaced Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia and delivered the opening remarks from PIANGO

to the Pacific Labour Mobility Schemes, and ensuring the safety, regularity and orderly mode of movement for Pacific peoples travelling though countries of transit and countries of destination. PIANGO would be advocating for two added GCM objectives focusing on racism and indigenous rights. Ms. Kingi thanked Member States and the United Nations Regional Migration Network for supporting member States in implementing the GCM objectives with due respect for the rights of migrants.

14. About 90 stakeholders from 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific attended the consultation. [8] [9] Participants came from a broad range of sectors, including trade unions, civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, national human rights institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and academia. There was a balanced gender representation among participants.

15. In preparation for the consultation, an open call for participants, including co-organizers, had been sent to a list of stakeholders which had been compiled with input from the United Nations Network on Migration,[10] the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.[11]

16. This report aims to be a not exhaustive summary of the key points raised in the consultation, and it is structured around the five GCM objectives which were discussed during working groups. A set of guiding questions, in line with the consultation objectives, were prepared for the working group discussions. In addition, specific challenges created by COVID-19 were raised and discussed. Good practices towards GCM implementation were also highlighted. The meeting was conducted under the Chatham House rule.[12]

III.   Outcomes of the consultation

A.   Overall progress in implementation of the five GCM objectives

17. Participants pointed out that there had been progress in implementing the five GCM objectives in Asia and the Pacific, but that challenges remained. A lack of commitment and comprehensive approaches by states towards effective, fair and rights-based migration governance in the region were listed as key barriers. Asia and the Pacific also lacked a coordinated regional response to GCM implementation, and there was little consultation between stakeholders and governments on GCM follow-up. Participants highlighted that in the context of COVID-19, many pre-existing vulnerabilities had been exacerbated, and new ones had emerged. However, several good practices were identified and shared.

B.   GCM Objective 2: Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

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[8] Including, 20 representatives from United Nations entities.

[9] All ESCAP subregions were represented, except North and Central Asia.

[10] United Nations Network on Migration (Global). More information at: https://migrationnetwork.un.org/secretariat

[11] Pacific and Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. More information at: https://www.unescap.org/apfsd/7/about.html

[12] Chatham House rule: https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule?gclid=CjwKCAiAn7L-BRBbEiwAl9UtkK_4qe3CebZATZeMuXYjWB7_EZ_CcC4n-80SNYMvbXQxgKwCty_KoRoCFOQQAvD_BwE

i. Key Challenges

18. Unemployment, low wages and poorly performing domestic economies were listed as key factors which compelled people to leave their countries of origin in search for better lives. In addition, discrimination in the workplace, harassment in the family and domestic violence, were highlighted as key drivers for migration.

19. A key challenge was the failure by local and national governments to address poverty, vulnerability and inequality in countries of origin as well as exploitation in countries of destination, including sexual abuse and violence, in particular as experienced by women. A participant reported that a major challenge was the lack of consultation between stakeholders and the government on migration issues, and that governments were often failing to see the gaps in GCM implementation.

20. A participant highlighted that climate change and the increase of natural disasters compelled people to migrate in order to survive. There was a lack of attention, let alone a cohesive approach, by governments and stakeholders to address the climate change and migration nexus in a comprehensive and timely manner in Asia and the Pacific.

ii. Specific challenges created by COVID-19

21. Participants reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrant workers in the region had lost their jobs and returned to their countries of origin. Many of them had been forcibly returned. Others had been trapped in countries of destination, sometimes in detention. Both situations had put migrants in an economically vulnerable situation. Many migrant workers were victims of wage theft, and although many had paid recruitment fees, they had incurred additional debts without being able to work or move back home. Participants pointed out that this new situation of vulnerability would put many migrants in concrete danger as they could be more easily targeted by traffickers or would be forced to pursue unsafe and/or irregular ways of migration.

iii. Recommendations

a. Addressing economic and social drivers

22. States should apply an intersectional perspective when addressing drivers of migration and consider social, economic and legal factors that create vulnerability for marginalised groups such as sex workers and other precarious workers, indigenous and rural women, ethnic or religious minority women, LBTIQ persons and others. States must review and reform discriminatory laws and practices that contribute to increasing vulnerability of minorities.

23. Governments should focus on how to improve basic social protection and social welfare of migrant workers in countries of destination and origin.

24. Governments should prohibit employment agencies from charging migrant workers recruitment fees; instead, they should assist migrant workers in obtaining access to lodge complaints or grievances against employers and receive labour consulting services free of charge.

25. Governments should consider debt repayment for migrant workers and debt-for-remittance arrangements.

26. More research should be undertaken on the drivers of migration, including on the effects of climate change on migration.

27.   Specific guidelines should be developed which address protection of migrants in vulnerable situations who may be disproportionally affected by COVID-19.

28.   In the Pacific, there should be increased collaboration between Australian and New Zealand civil society organisations with a focus on Pacific youth who were driven to migrate by climate change. Participation of Pacific youth in research should be enhanced. Labour migration discourses and the review of bilateral labour agreements should have a specific youth and Pacific lens.

b. GCM review process

29.   Effective regional cooperation should be established to monitor progress of GCM implementation.

30.   Awareness should be raised, tools promoted, and instruments developed and implemented, such as the Migrants In Countries In Crisis (MICIC)[13] initiatives in order to accelerate the implementation of the GCM.

31.   Governments and stakeholders should collaborate on GCM implementation and monitor progress regularly.

C.   GCM Objective 5: Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration

i.   Key Challenges

32.   ILO noted that while there were pathways for regular labour migration in the Asia-Pacific region across skill levels, they were often not adequate. A key challenge concerned labour migration corridors where irregular migration was common. This was often due to costly and cumbersome formal processes which negatively impacted migrant workers as they had less protection during employment. A participant highlighted that while there were numerous bilateral agreements which offered legal migration pathways, these were mostly for temporary migration and for migration of lower skilled workers; residency options and rights remained restricted.

33.   Lack of information and communication was also highlighted as a key challenge. A participant reported that in Thailand not all potential migrants had access to information and/or relevant recruitment agencies who could facilitate entry under one of Thailand's Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with other countries which, in turn, pushed them to irregular migration.

34.   ILO further noted that labour market information in countries of destination was often fragmented; such information and systems to assess labour shortages must be improved. ILO also highlighted that stakeholders must consider how labour migration impacts women as there were additional limitations and barriers for women migrant workers which pushed them to irregular migration.

ii.   Specific challenges created by COVID-19

35.   ILO pointed out a need to focus on GCM implementation given the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged stakeholders to consider guidelines for the recruitment,

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[13] Migrants In Countries In Crisis: https://micicinitiative.iom.int/

deployment and return of migrant workers under "the new normal". A key challenge was to prevent additional costs to be absorbed by migrant workers.

iii.   Recommendations

a. Calling for an innovative approach to pathways for regular migration

36.   One participant observed that temporary migration seemed to have become the focus of policies and measures in the Asia-Pacific. He called for more dialogues between countries of origin and destination to open up more regular migration channels.

37.   There was a call for a more proactive approach to support the rights of migrants. This included more inclusive dialogues to discuss safe and regular migration pathways and reducing the costs of migration which was one of the impediments to regular migration.

38.   Timely and relevant data should be produced and made available to enable countries of origins to determine which occupations were in short supply to make it easier for employers to hire migrant workers. When jobs became available to migrant workers, recruitment processes should be made transparent.

39.   Employers and governments should always review the specific needs of groups in vulnerable situations when considering improved legal pathways for migration; they should be cognizant of the fact that a plurality of migration pathways was needed, especially in consideration of the different needs of migrants.

40.   Countries of destination should consider opening labour migration to certain occupations, particularly those in middle skilled categories, where there were labour/skills shortages.

41.   There should be a robust regulatory regime for recruitment agencies, including strong sanctions, where needed; promotion of more government-to-government deployment schemes and direct hiring by companies.

42.   As a good practice, some participants suggested that Governments should look into the ECOWAS protocol[14] which supported mobility within the West African region for labour purposes.

b. Whole-of-society approach

43.   Local governments and public employment offices played an important role in labour migration; their role in ensuring legal pathways should be strengthened. Pathways to regular, orderly and safe migration extended beyond deployment, and included economic and social reintegration.

44.   Stakeholders should assume an active role in developing MoUs and bilateral agreements between states as there was currently very little stakeholder involvement.

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[14] ECOWAS/979 Protocol A/P.1/5/79 relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment. At: http://ecowasmigration.ug.edu.gh/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ECOWAS-1979-Protocol-Relating-to-Free-Movement-of-Persons-Residence-and-Establishment.pdf

D.   GCM Objective 6:   Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work

i.   Key Challenges

45.   ILO remarked that sometimes, the involvement of private recruitment agencies (PRAs) without much supervision had led to rights violations; human rights protection of migrant workers continued to be a challenge in the region. A participant remarked further that temporary labour migration regimes should not allow governments to step away from responsibilities of protecting human rights of migrant workers as governments of both countries of origin and destination were obliged to protect migrant workers.

46.   ILO emphasised that stakeholders need to work with governments on ensuring the protection of the rights of migrant workers and support decent working conditions. A participant noted that recruitment in Bangladesh was often controlled by PRAs or brokers, and that the government had very little influence over them. A participant highlighted the challenge brought about by staff shortages among government service providers, including in embassies who verify job orders and protect migrant workers in countries of destination. Due to resource limitations, frontline embassy service staff may rely on employers or migrant workers to report recruitment violations.

47.   A participant highlighted that standard employment contracts were a challenge and that wages differed between workers and migrant workers in the same position; the participant stressed that the multiplicity of actors in the recruitment and employment industry, including brokers, sub-agents, and sub-contractors, resulted in grey areas of accountability where exploitation occurred. Another challenge was that migrant workers, in some countries of destination, were prohibited from joining unions.

ii.   Specific challenges or opportunities created by COVID-19

48.   Many migrant workers who had paid for recruitment fees, were unable to migrate and had incurred debts; others had lost their jobs, had not been paid for any work already done, but were forced to return home without any information of what would happen to their jobs and any prospects of migrating again; both groups of migrant workers needed assistance in accessing redress mechanisms and other remedies, including unpaid salaries.

49.   In the context of COVID-19, many pre-existing vulnerabilities had been exacerbated and new ones had emerged. Stakeholders need to look at complimentary initiatives without creating the view that governments were not responsible for protecting migrant workers. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic should not provide a new basis for foregoing any gains already made in labour migration systems in the region.

iii.   Good practices

50.   The governments of India and the United Arab Emirates were working towards improving migration pathways for migrant workers using technology to enhance the labour migration process, including job applications, registering all PRAs and closely engaging relevant ministries in both countries.

51.   A joint statement among 17 business confederations in Asia had been released which discussed recruitment reform, forging bilateral agreements and other partnerships, as well as making a business case towards migration reform.[15]

52.   There were various dialogue processes in the region such as the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour,[16] Colombo Process[17] and Abu Dhabi Dialogue[18] which were supported by United Nations agencies and helped raise the voices of stakeholders.

53.   Bangladesh was working with the Republic of Korea to implement fair recruitment practices through the Employment Permit System (EPS). This system ensured decent work and very low migration costs. However, Bangladesh had been less successful in implementing a similar system with countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); decent work and ethical recruitment were still a challenge there.

iv.   Recommendations

a.   Comprehensive approach to fair and ethnical recruitment

54.   A participant called for developing recruitment mechanisms that protect migrant workers from exploitation and abuse, and which allowed for maximizing the socio-economic contribution of migrant workers. One participant stressed that transparent recruitment processes were key to mitigating against exploitation.

55.   There was a need to protect and promote the human rights of migrant workers more broadly and call on governments and the private sector in regulating PRAs so that the rights of migrant workers were respected. Overall, the private sector was getting more involved in the fair recruitment agenda, and this involvement should be strengthened further.

56.   Fair recruitment processes should address social protection mechanisms and ensure that international labour standards were applied equally to all migrant workers regardless of age, sex or other characteristics.

57.   Institutional processes need to be put in place to address challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, for example enhancing migrant workers' access to formal bank loans as an alternative to informal, high interest loans.

58.   A gender and youth lens should be an integral part of examining and improving labour migration frameworks.

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[15] International Organisation of Employers (IOE): Migration policies in view of changing employment landscape - A call from Asian employers' organisations to policymakers for stronger dialogue. 2020. At: https://gfmdbusinessmechanism.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Asian-Employers-position-on-migration-2020-15.07.20-FINAL.pdf

[16] The ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) is a regional tripartite platform to discuss issues faced by women and men migrant workers from and within ASEAN. More information at: https://www.ilo.org/asia/WCMS_416365/lang--en/index.htm

[17] Regional Consultative Process on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia (Colombo Process). More information at: https://www.iom.int/regional-consultative-process-overseas-employement-and-contractual-labour-countries-origin-asia

[18] The Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) was established in 2008 as a forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asian countries of labour origin and destination. More information on: http://abudhabidialogue.org.ae/about-abu-dhabi-dialogue

b. Freedom of association should be prioritised in policies and measures

59.   All migrant workers should be able to join trade unions without any negative consequences on their employment situation; the possibility of joining trade unions should be an integral element of ensuring fair recruitment and decent work for migrant workers.

E.   GCM Objective 12: Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral

i.   Key Challenges

60.   Protection challenges in the context of mixed movements in the Asia Pacific region were highlighted by participants.
61.   There was the need to review and follow up on GCM implementation in parallel to review and follow up on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).
62.   The dynamic characteristics of mixed movements had not been fully addressed in the existing protection measures. Participants pointed out that many States in the region had not ratified key international human rights and labour law frameworks, and they called on States to ratify or accede to the international instruments and apply them to international migration.
63.   The fact that many countries in the region used immigration detention as a tool to control access to their territories was noted as a key challenge, as were other institutional models which involved keeping people in shelters or reception centers, often resulting in separation of families.
64.   A participant highlighted the lack of referral mechanisms to social services and barriers to access livelihood options. This often resulted in organised crime syndicates taking advantage of these gaps by engaging in human smuggling and trafficking, given the fluid nature of both, where in some instances human smuggling had changed into human trafficking.

ii.   Specific challenges or opportunities created by COVID-19

65.   A key challenge raised was the need to address opportunistic migration policies which took advantage of the current COVID-19 situation by forcibly returning migrants without respecting their human and labour rights. In this context, ensuring the protection of irregular migrants was highlighted as vital. People smuggling was also listed as a major concern in the context of the widespread COVID-related restrictions. Many migrants in need of entry had turned to paying for irregular services connected with people smuggling.

iii.   Good practices

66.   Shelter camps and relief centers had been established in response to COVID-19, which had proven very helpful for migrant workers.
67.   Affordable rental housing provided by governments through under-utilized government buildings had been offered in certain localities to protect migrants and limit

their harassment, including when they had been expelled from their private accommodation.

68.   Positive and important strides in victim of trafficking identification were noted in, for example, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

iv.   Recommendations

a.   Comprehensive approach to protection of migrants

69.   A participant called for member States to assume their responsibilities for protecting migrants and their families, including when experiencing trauma, within their respective borders; return of migrants must respect the principle of non-refoulement.

70.   States should assume a central role in building stronger linkages between protection and status determination in developing a comprehensive approach to migrant protection. ASEAN countries should be proactive in offering protection to prevent trafficking in persons.

71.   There was need to regularise the frameworks that governments, the private sector and civil society apply in coordinating their work regarding migrants

72.   More relevant and timely data needed to be gathered and made available to inform protection. Data needed to be collected in a harmonized and comprehensive manner to allow for comparability.

73.   Social services provided to migrants should be expanded and interventions made to effectively address the sub-standard living conditions that migrants often live in.

74.   There should be increased documentation of the stories and experiences of migrants throughout the migration cycle.

b.   Screening assessment and referral

75.   Active screening and assessment measures should be put into place; the use of technology for protection should be optimised to improve efficiency, respecting privacy concerns and ensuring firewalls existed between service providers and immigration and law enforcement.

76.   There should be capacity-building for frontline workers to identify migrants in vulnerable situations, including by applying gender-responsive approaches; the capacity of United Nations entities, civil society and the private sector should be enhanced to provide assistance to returning overseas migrant workers, including preparing for their integration with an emphasis on reintegration being a key issue on the protection continuum.

F.   GCM Objective 18: Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences

i.   Key challenges

77.   A key challenge in preparing the migrant labour force for mobility in the Asia-Pacific region was the lack of a uniform skills-based assessment framework to capture work experiences and learning progress across countries. Having mutual skill recognition schemes was challenging because of the disparity in skill definitions and assessments in countries across the region. An added difficulty was the informality/lack of documentation around skills and up-skilling within industries with many migrants. A

key barrier was that countries of destination often imposed their skills framework on migrant workers without recognizing the skills and experiences of the migrant workers.

78. A participant noted that in moving towards a fair standardization of skills, qualifications and competences, a key challenge was to ensure the integration of a wide range of migrant voices into decision-making processes on fair standardization.

79. The costs of formal recognition and translation of documents were identified as additional barriers to the transfer of skills and experiences.

ii. Specific challenges created by COVID-19

80. Participants noted that that COVID-19 had highlighted fallacies about 'highly skilled' and 'low skilled' workers and that the time was opportune for a debate on rethinking migration with a due focus on labour mobility and skill recognition which may pave the way for implementing GCM objective 18. Participants noted that it was time to rethink how to define skills and collectively redefine them. In addition, digital up-skilling for all needed to be addressed and implemented.

Recommendations

a. Calling for an innovative and comprehensive approach to skills development

81. Participants highlighted that there was a growing need to assess skills, not only qualifications, in a holistic way that accounted for both technical and soft skills. A participant emphasised that skills development should be looked at in the context of human development and that skills-building must be sensitive to the migrant workers' cultural contexts. Another participant called for an increased role of employers in revisiting and redesigning traditional skill-training programmes.

82. Each country in the region should invest in skills development with research on current labour market trends and skill gap analyses at the local, national, and global levels.

83. A cohesive and comprehensive skills and competences framework which was mutually accepted across the region should be developed, based on trust and transparency.

84. Skill-certification programmes should be established and include prior recognition of skills of workers and their certifications, and tools should be developed and officially recognised to ensure storage and portability of these certifications.

85. Proper pre-departure orientations should be made accessible to all prospective migrant workers.

86. There was a need to invest in the reskilling of returning migrants in countries of origin.

b. A whole-of-society approach

87. There was a need to have a comprehensive discourse on investing in skills development and facilitating mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences – with governments, the private sector, migrants and trade unions representing migrants.

88. Local governments should set up inter-governmental agencies to help address issues related to GCM objective 18, including matching migrant workers' skills with job demands.

IV.   Closing and next steps

89.   Sabine Henning, ESCAP, thanked all participants for attending the first consultation. She also thanked the co-hosts, in particular the stakeholders and the United Nations entities for organizing the meeting. The consultation was the first in a series of four stakeholder consultations of the Regional Review.[19]

90.   In accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/326, regional reviews were convened by regional commissions to take stock of the implementation of the Global Compact. The outcomes of the regional reviews would inform the International Migration Review Forum in 2022. The Regional Review in Asia and the Pacific would be State-led and follow a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach.

91.   The Regional Review would take place from 10 to 12 March 2021, likely as a hybrid meeting. Invitees would include representatives of ESCAP members and associated members; intergovernmental organizations; United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds; and other relevant stakeholders from Asia-Pacific. The report of this first consultation and subsequent reports of forthcoming consultations would serve as the basis for a conference room paper, which would inform the Regional Review meeting in March.

92.   Ms. Henning encouraged all stakeholders to fully engage in the forthcoming consultations and requested that follow-up questions be directed to Mr. Klaus Dik Nielsen, Stakeholder Liaison for the Regional Review in Asia and the Pacific (klaus.nielsen@un.org). She then closed the meeting.

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[19] The Regional United Nations Network on Migration, with support from OHCHR and IOM, had organized a consultation with stakeholders in February 2020 to preview the regional review process and discuss the workplan of the Regional Network.

Programme

Time	Details
10:45	*Participants join Zoom meeting*
11:00-11:10	**Welcome and session overview** **Moderator:** Klaus Dik Nielsen, Stakeholder Liaison, Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration • Nilim Baruah, ILO • Wesley Teter, UNESCO • Emeline Siale Ilolahia, Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organization PIANGO, Fiji
11:10-11:20	**Presentation on GCM implementation of objectives 2, 5, 6, 12 and 18** • Nilim Baruah, ILO
11:20-11:30	**Q&A for clarifications**
11:30-12:20	**Working groups – Round 1** • **Objective 2.** Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin *Co-host: Paul Tacon, ESCAP and Emeline Siale Ilolahia, PIANGO* • **Objective 5.** Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration *Co-hosts: Nilim Baruah, ILO and William Gois, MFA* • **Objective 12.** Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral *Co-hosts: Donato Colucci, IOM and Nick Llosas Jr, Tabaco City Government, Philippines and Miyuru Gunasinghe, Solidarity Center, Sri Lanka*
12:20-12:30	*Participants join 2nd Zoom meeting (with link provided in chat box)*
12:30-13:20	**Working groups – Round 2** • **Objective 6.** Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work *Co-hosts: Shabari Nair, ILO and Laxman Basnet, SAR TUC* • **Objective 18.** Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences *Co-hosts: Wesley Teter, UNESCO and Aayesha Fazal, Elana Wong and Minh Nguyen, UNMGCY*
13:20-14:00	**Synthesis: Highlights, challenges, and recommendations from the working groups** **Moderator:** Klaus Dik Nielsen, Stakeholder Liaison, Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration • Objective 2, *Emeline Siale Ilolahia, PIANGO* • Objective 5, *William Gois, MFA* • Objective 12, *Miyuru Gunasinghe, Solidarity Center* • Objective 6, *Laxman Basnet, SAR TUC* • Objective 18, *Elana Wong, UNMGCY* • Open discussion
14:00-14:15	**Closing and next steps** • Sabine Henning, ESCAP