International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

Fostering Sub-Regional Cooperation on Migration in Central Asia

28 January 2021, 08:30 – 12:00 CET

A high-level event with government representatives from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and other stakeholders relevant to those countries with additional representation from IOM County Missions, the United Nations Network on Migration Secretariat, and the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund

SUMMARY REPORT

OPENING REMARKS

Ms. Renate Held, IOM Regional Director for South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia I *(Annex 1: English and Annex 1.1: Courtesy Translation to Russian)*

Ms. Renate Held welcomed delegates and opened the event. The Regional Director reiterated IOM's commitment, also as coordinator of the UN Network on Migration (the Network), to support member states capitalise on the benefits of safe, orderly, and regular migration - in particular, through the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). Additionally, the Regional Director highlighted achievements made in the region in advancing the GCM, including through the establishment of Networks at the regional and national levels; contributions to United Nations Secretary General's first biennial report on the GCM (December 2020); and the first regional review of the GCM in the UNECE region (November 2020).

The Regional Director announced the Regional Strategy for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia which identified three pillars: resilience, mobility, and governance; these pillars seek to empower migrants and communities as well as addressing drivers of migration; advance sustainable development outcomes that are responsive to regional migration trends; and focus on strengthening cooperation and the implementation of evidence-based migration governance.

The Regional Director also highlighted the vital roles migrants are playing in the COVID-19 response, but also the increased vulnerabilities faced by migrants, calling on member stakes and stakeholders to work more closely and more effectively to capitalise on migration as an accelerator for development. In the words of the United nations Secretary General: *no one will be safe until everyone is safe.*

Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of the UN Network on Migration Secretariat (UNMN) *(Annex 2: English and Annex 2.1: Courtesy Translation to Russian)*

Mr. Jonathan Prentice reiterated the progress achieved by the UN Network on Migration over the past year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, towards a better coordinated UN system to support member states implement the GCM. Mr. Prentice highlighted the establishment of regional and national networks as the principle mechanism for supporting member states; and prefaced the day's agenda with an overview of the other tools and systems in place to support member states including the Champion Countries initiative -and expressed hope that countries from the Central Asia region would soon join this initiative; a framework for the regional review process of the GCM, the Network's working groups (three core and six thematic), tools and guidance online, the Network Hub website (to be launched spring/summer 2021) and the Migration Multi Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF).

With regards the M-MPTF, Mr. Prentice added that there is already some valuable expertise present in the region as Tajikistan made a successful application and was amongst the six initial beneficiaries with a joint FAO, UNICEF, UN Women and IOM project seeking to empower families left behind. He also thanked the Government of Turkey which recently joined the Migration MPTF donors, setting an excellent example which we hope that many others, including in the region, will follow.

H.E. Erkin Mukhitdinov, First Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan *(Annex 3: English)*
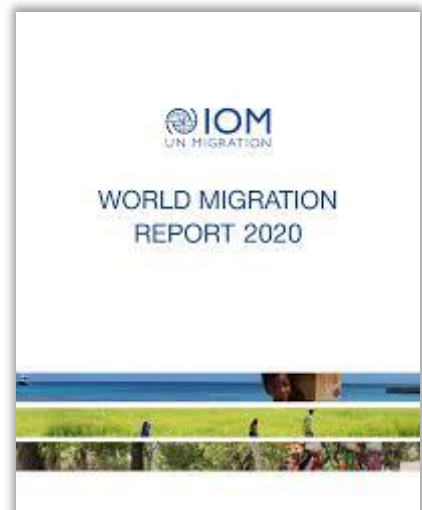
H.E. Erkin Mukhitdinov, speaking on behalf of Uzbekistan, welcomed member states and stakeholders. H.E. reflected on the good levels of cooperation already in place with IOM as well as with countries in Central Asia and beyond. H.E. further underscored the importance of the GCM to lead the dialogue and set out common understanding and shared responsibilities. The Deputy Minister noted that migration plays an important intersectoral role in wider frameworks, for example the COVID-19 response and the 2030 Agenda; and followed this with examples from Uzbekistan's progress in implementing the GCM, including through the adoption of resolutions and legislation for safe, orderly and regular migration and programmes in the field of returns, readmission, reintegration, protection and labour migration. H.E. also highlighted the importance of building on cross border cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation to provide professional development and language training and identify opportunities for labour migration.

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2020

Dr. Marie McAuliffe, Head, Migration Research Division & Chief Editor World Migration Report 2020 *(Annex 4: English and Russian, and Annex 4.1.: English and Russian)*

Dr Marie McAuliffe provided an overview of the World Migration Report 2020 which is now available in all UN languages, including Russian. This IOM flagship publication is one of many tools produced by IOM to support and advance evidence-based policymaking, uphold the dignity and well-bring of migrants, and encourage social and economic development through migration. The report is produced by a team of academic contributors with a specialism in various fields of migration. It covers the current geopolitical context, statistics and recent developments in global migration governance, mega trends in mass displacement events, long-term migration trends, and information on international migrant stocks and flows. The report takes a thematic approach to show differences across regions and shines light on the complexity of migration data. Instances where the report has been used to support policymakers include referencing global trends that indicate that formal remittances have increased globally as a result of COVID-19. This is attributed to the decrease of informal cash transfers due to border restrictions, and the uptake in regularised systems, thus suggesting the need to invest in digitisation and supporting migrants access online money transfer services.

Read the World Migration Report in all official UN languages here:
https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020

ROUNDTABLE ONE

Interactive discussion led by Member States and stakeholders on lessons learnt from the implementation of the GCM, and the first GCM Regional Review to identify needs and opportunities, moderated by Ms. Katja Schaefer, Interregional Advisor, United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Ms. Katja Schaefer opened Roundtable 1 with remarks on the challenge and opportunities of working with migrants and host communities at all levels of society to capitalise on the positive impact of migration.

Mrs. Valentina Kazakova, Head of General Administration for Migration Issues, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation

Mrs. Valentina Kazakova expressed thanks to the UN Network and IOM for their support to implement the GCM, adding that GCM recommendations are being taken into account alongside Russian Federation's national goals and priorities. Milestones in this regard include the approval of the state migration policy which sets the direction, up to 2025, for migration governance activities. Legislation and programming under this strategy is diverse and covers: modernisation of visa processes, new federal laws on stateless persons, regularisation of stay conditions for foreign nationals, conditions of entry and return, addressing irregular migration , digitisation of migration information and visa systems, and the provision of documentation to help migrants access essential public services.

A major workstream is to improve evidence-based policymaking by monitoring and analysing key migration statistics to provide objective and relevant data for evidence-based decisions by policy makers.

Lastly, the Russian Federation anticipates becoming a member state of IOM following the necessary legal procedures, and in this regard looks forward to further increasing international cooperation on migration matters.

Mr. Yerbolat Abulkhatin, Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Labour, Social Protection and Migration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan

With the support of IOM, the Government of Kazakhstan is working to build a modern migration system which is seen as critical as Kazakhstan is both a transit and receiving country and one of the largest recipients of migrants from within the Central Asian region. Work done in this regard includes implementation of the GCM and the development of a five-year migration strategy which includes provisions for digitising and modernising the visa processing system, and bilateral agreements with 73 other states allowing visa free travel. In response to COVID-19, the Government of Kazakhstan has extended visas arrangements for around 140,000 migrants who would otherwise have had to leave, and improved terms of stay and access to services for those who arrived without a visa. The government is committed to regional dialogue on migration, via the Almaty Process as well as other consultative mechanisms.

Mr. Savaş Ünlü, Director General of Migration Management from the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey

Turkey hosts the largest refugee population in the world and therefore the government takes international cooperation on migration seriously, with an emphasis on adopting a systematic and evidence-based approach to provide effective services and implement the GCM. Initiatives include online visa and residence applications in line with international standards and providing digital biometric cards to support migrants' access essential services. Additionally, the government of Turkey has provided capacity building support to border guards and increased cooperation with neighbouring countries on Turkey's western border to increase regular migration channels. The government of Turkey follows no-refoulement principles, and with regards vulnerable and at-risk groups, the government has established a hotline for potential victims of trafficking and other crimes and provides cash assistance and in kind support to those who need it.

H.E. Erkin Mukhitdinov, First Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan

H.E. Mukhitdinov highlighted the Republic of Uzbekistan's good relations with neighbouring states including Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation who represent the main countries of destination, an increasing trend as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Particular areas for increased cooperation are in labour migration which has increased since the outbreak of the pandemic. This has involved significant partnership working with the government of the Russian Federation, educational institutions, migration services and the private sector to prepare and match candidates to meet the demand of the labour market. Uzbekistan has conducted recruitment and visa application processes in-country; as well as partnering with Russian universities to provide Russian language training. This support pipeline extends to the provision of safe transport, COVID-19 testing and quarantine on arrival.

MIGRATION MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND

Ms. Reiko Matsuyama, Monitoring and Reporting Officer, The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF) Fund Management Unit *(Annex 5: English and Annex 5.1: English)*

Ms. Matsuyama provided an overview of the M-MPTF governance and decision-making structures and programmatic frameworks. The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund was initiated to provide funding to help member states implement the GCM, ensuring a whole of government, whole-of-society approach which is gender responsive and aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional, multi-government project proposals are actively encouraged as these are currently under-represented; likewise, states are encouraged to ensure that proposals take increasingly innovative, whole-of-society and people-centred approaches.

Ms. Matsuyama highlighted that there is a strong and consistent demand for the Fund, but unfortunately, that demand far outweighs the supply. To date, USD 17.3m has been firmly committed by donors, however the 2020 funding target of USD 25m was not reached as momentum stalled in the lead up to, and during, the Covid-19 crisis. Funding is essential to help rebuild the pre-COVID-19 momentum.

ROUNDTABLE TWO

Interactive discussion led by Member States and stakeholders to identify migration priorities for the region, moderated by Ms. Stefanie Allemann, Senior Regional Policy Advisor for the IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Ms. Gülbahar Arslan Elnasharty, Head of External Relations Department of the Director General of Migration Management, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey

Following Turkey taking on the role of Almaty Process chair, Ms. Gülbahar Arslan Elnasharty reiterated the region's upcoming priorities including: ensuring a focus on sustainable development and COVID-19 recovery that is migrant-centred; enhancing regional dialogue on migration and promoting inter- and intra-national cooperation through similar high-level events to share promising practices on GCM implementation and developing innovative approaches and initiatives that adopt a whole-of-society and whole-of-organisation approach.

Mr. Ulvi Aliyev, Chief of the Department for International Cooperation, State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Mr. Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's – and the region's - upcoming priorities in the field of migration since the GCM was established in 2018, and especially as a result of COVID-19. Mr. Aliyev noted that migration is a catalyst for economic development which requires ongoing cooperation at all levels of government and society. Such examples of cooperation in Azerbaijan include partnerships with the private sector to ensure they take a migrant-centred approach in recruitment and support of migrant staff and citizens. Azerbaijan is already engaged in a number of international partnerships to improve the government's capacity to better manage migration and response to emergencies, notably through the establishment of a Regional Migration Management Training Centre, in partnership with IOM, which supports multi-lateral cooperation by opening its services to officials in the Commonwealth of Independent States region and beyond. The service will provide training for government officials and staff on migration management, protection as well as dispelling misleading narratives that generate negative perceptions of migrants.

Mr. Mikhail Chutkou, Deputy Head of Department, Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

Mr Chutkou highlighted promising practices, and emerging opportunities for development in Belarus in the field of migration. This is in the context of Belarus's contribution to the national and regional reviews of the GCM which has contributed to the development and review of national migration legislation.

Examples included the need for bilateral agreements, increased international cooperation on readmissions agreements with Ukraine and the E.U., and developing partnerships with international organisations and other collaborative frameworks.

Since 2018, Belarus has undertaken significant work around the voluntary return of irregular migrants, including providing technical assistance and providing temporary accommodation centres and other support services.

Meanwhile Belarus voiced an interest in receiving best practices in the field of readmission processes and agreements as this is an area of policy the government wished to revisit. Mr. Chutkou also welcomed the offer of support to governments in enhancing their data collection, collation and use for evidence-based policy development; as well as capitalising on diaspora to benefit from their skills and expertise, not just finances. In relation to supporting the returning diaspora, the government of Belarus is providing reintegration support so that returnees can invest skills gained abroad in the economy of Belarus.

Mr. Chutkou concluded by seconding the various previous speakers' suggestions to have more such thematic meetings as peer-learning initiatives and recognised the important interlinkages between the GCM and Agenda 2030.

CHAMPION COUNTRIES INITIATIVE

Mr. Abdelkader Abidine, Chief of the Human Rights and humanitarian Affairs' Division, Direction of Global Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco *(Annex 6: French, Annex 6.1.: English and Annex: 6.2. Courtesy Translation to Russian)*

Mr. Abidine outlined Morocco's work to date on the GCM implementation, follow-up and review, including their experiences of being a Champion Country. Morocco volunteered to be a Champion country in January 2020, building on the country's long-standing commitment to migration.

The government has carried out its role as a Champion Country through engagement with international organizations and UN agencies specializing in migration, asylum, and the fight against human trafficking as well working with non-governmental organizations, civil society associations, immigrant associations, the private sector, workers' unions and academia.

Mr. Abidine noted that the Champion Country Initiative has afforded Morocco great opportunities to receive additional support and access to new initiatives, but it also requires them to act with great responsibility and lead by example. Morocco has shown a commitment to multilateralism and acceleration of the Global Compact on Migration at the level of the African continent by providing leadership and cooperation through numerous Africa continent consultative processes.

In relation to the multiple comments by previous speakers on the importance of evidence-based policy development, Mr. Abidine also presented Morocco's Migration observatory in Rabat, which was inaugurated on 18 December 2020 on the occasion of International Migrants' day. The Observatory will serve to collect and analyse data about migration trends and routes, and will hopefully address many of the challenges raised by speakers here today -which are very similar to the challenges Morocco has been grappling with.

WAY FORWARD AND CLOSING REMARKS

Amr Taha reiterated the willingness of IOM, also in its capacity as the Coordinator of the United Nations Network on Migration, to support its member states advance the GCM through the implementation of the tools presented during the event – the World Migration Report 2020; the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund; and the Champion Countries Initiative – as well as fostering greater regional cooperation and collaboration.

Mr. Savaş Ünlü, Director General of Migration Management from the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey

Mr. Ünlü gave his thanks for countries' and stakeholders contributions to the event. As the new chair of the Almaty Process, he reiterated Turkey's readiness to support ongoing common goals in-line with the GCM including that of improving multi-lateral cooperation to ensure that the GCM is taken into account by the Almaty Process, and that the Almaty Process will also serve as a regional mechanism to support the GCM.

Ms. Henny Ngu, Livelihoods, Migration and Displacement Advisor, UNDP *(Annex 7: English)*

Ms. Henny Ngu thanked all participants and repeated the offer from the UN Network Executive committee to support member states advance the GCM. Together with partners, the committee has been developing technical guidance and training for governments, UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and other stakeholders. The goal is to incorporate migration into broader development planning processes and UN programming cycle, such as the Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) -both of which are developed in consultation with the respective host governments.

Building on the linkages of the GCM and the SDGs, the technical guidance developed by the Network seeks to identify and build coherence with national development plans that are aligned with SDGs, with migration as a cross-cutting development issue. The key element is to identify synergies between the implementation and monitoring of GCM with SDG implementation and monitoring. This includes aligning with already ongoing processes such as the Regional Reviews, IMRF with the Voluntary National Reviews.

UNDP and IOM have recently strengthened partnerships through the establishment of a joint-fund to ensure that COVID-19 responses are inclusive of migrants. The has led to innovative collaborations with national governments in 11 countries globally. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, UNDP and IOM are supporting local authorities to gauge their readiness to reintegrate returning migrants and support improving of social cohesion and inclusion of returnees in local and national COVID-19 socio-economic responses and recovery action plans. UNDP and IOM are also working together to increase private sector engagement in migration and development policies.

To ensure a whole of society approach, we have heard from many Member States that multi-stakeholder collaboration is key for sustainable migration solutions. Many existent examples of such collaborations which can be scaled up. Participants also highlighted that addressing migration and sustainable development would benefit from cross-border joint initiatives at the sub-regional and regional levels. We welcome more exchanges and cross-learning of multi-country collaboration especially with other sub-regions.

Mr. Zeynal Hajiev, Sub-Regional Coordinator for Central Asia, IOM

Mr. Hajiev thanked all participants and highlighted the demand, which came through in the event clearly, to ensure that intergovernmental consultation mechanisms (including but not limited to the Almaty, Prague and Budapest Processes) can feed into the GCM implementation, follow-up, and review process through collaboration at the regional and sub-regional levels. This included the need to develop regional approaches that tackle specific thematic areas, not least the need for approaches to data gathering and evidence-based policy making. Mr. Hajiev also re-emphasised the numerous tools made available by the UN Network to support multi-lateral, whole-of-government and whole of society approaches that address the transnational issues inherent in human mobility including the Champion country Initiative, the M-MPTF, and the vast collection of data and information collated by IOM. The need to boost this support is even greater since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and migrant assistance can only be truly effective through cooperation at all levels. Mr. Hajiev also thanked Mr Abidine for sharing his experiences from Morocco, providing an example of the types of collaboration that can happen as part of the Champion Countries Initiative and hoped governments in the Central Asia and surrounding areas would consider volunteering for this role.

--- CLOSE OF SESSION ---