



UNITED NATIONS NETWORK ON MIGRATION IN THE MALDIVES TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Republic of Maldives has the largest proportional population of migrants in South Asia, with roughly 200,000 to 250,000 international migrants, constituting around one third of the resident population.¹ Inbound labour migrants from neighbouring South Asian countries, especially lower-skilled workers from Bangladesh and India, are key contributors to the economic development of the Maldives, providing the workforce needed for key industries such as tourism and hospitality, construction, agriculture and fisheries, and services. Similarly, higher-skilled workers are employed in education and health sectors filling these labour market gaps.

Despite the close link between migration and the economy of the Maldives, migrants, especially lower skilled migrants, face significant challenges. Migrants are often exploited, discriminated against, and face challenges in accessing health and justice. These issues are especially significant for the large, vulnerable irregular migrant population. Limited complaints mechanisms, advocacy bodies and inspections undertaken by regulators, allow abuses by employers to persist.

Moreover, the Ministry of Economic Development estimates that over 60,000 of these lower-skilled workers are irregular or undocumented. As part of a regularization initiative, the Government has been able to partially register (i.e. verification process is ongoing) over 40,000 previously undocumented migrants. Migrant workers may be undocumented for several reasons. Irregular and undocumented migrants, especially ones who are trafficked, are highly vulnerable to exploitation and forced labour, withholding or non-payment of wages, and debt bondage. The Maldives has remained on the 'Tier 2 Watchlist' in Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report for three consecutive years (2018 – 2020) due to inaction on trafficking and labour exploitation.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has worsened pre-existing issues and reduced the availability of resources to respond to migrant issues. Migrant health has been significantly impacted as most cases of COVID-19 are emerging among migrants residing in the capital Male'. However, the social and economic impact has been greater as lockdowns in the Greater Male' area, the domestic inter-island travel restrictions, and border closures, have interrupted commerce in key migrant-employing industries such as construction and tourism.

Further to these immediate issues, the Maldives is especially vulnerable to climate change impacts, including sudden-onset disasters such as flooding, storm surges and storms. Migration will necessarily be part of a suite of coping strategies in response to environmental change in the Maldives, as well as to pre-empt second-order social and economic challenges of the resident population.

Against this background, the Maldives has endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)² as a multilateral framework that complements national development

¹ International Organization for Migration, *Migration in Maldives: A Country Profile 2018* (2018). Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-maldives-country-profile-2018>, p. xvii.

² Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: www.iom.int/global-compact-migration



plans on ensuring safe, orderly, and regular migration for all. GCM was developed to protect the safety, dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms of all migrants (inward and outward), integrate migrants – addressing their needs and capacities – in humanitarian and development assistance frameworks and planning, combat xenophobia, racism and discrimination towards all migrants, and strengthen governance of migration. During the development process of the GCM, the Government of Maldives (GoM) actively contributed to the ongoing consultations. GCM provides a blueprint on how States can best manage migration and cooperate more effectively with one another and with other stakeholders for decades to come. GCM is non-legally binding and grants states flexibility in their implementation approach, acknowledging the national prerogative to manage migration according to country-specific realities and capabilities. On 19 December 2018, recalling the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants³ and determined to make an important contribution to enhanced cooperation on international migration in all its dimensions, United Nations (UN) Member States endorsed the GCM.

GCM is the first inter-governmentally negotiated cooperation framework prepared under the auspices of the UN. GCM comprises of 23 objectives which cover all aspects related to migration, its implementation, and follow-up and review. These objectives are rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴ GCM's 23 objectives and their associated commitments and actions provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges and reaping the benefits of international migration.

To this end, the UN established a Network on Migration (the Network) at the global level to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to its Member States. Since the launch of the Network at the global level, a number of UN Country Teams (UNCT) established UN Networks on Migration at the national level. Building on the Network, national level UN Networks on Migration are sensitive to specificities of each State.

2. MISSION STATEMENT

The UN system in the Maldives, with its resident and non-resident agencies, is committed to supporting the implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM in the country.

To this end, the UN system in the country establishes a UN Network on Migration in the Maldives to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to the GoM. In carrying out its mandate, the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will prioritize the rights and wellbeing of migrants and their communities of destination, origin, and transit. It will place emphasis on those issues where a common UN system approach would add value and from which results and impact can be readily gauged.

In all its actions, the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will respect the principles of the GCM and be guided, inter alia, by the UN Charter,⁵ international law, and the 2030 Agenda for

³ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>

⁴ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

⁵ Charter of the United Nations: www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/



Sustainable Development. Due regard, will also be given to the importance of the Secretary-General's prevention agenda.⁶

3. OBJECTIVES

Whilst being tailored to local needs and priorities, the terms of reference of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives are fully aligned with the terms of reference⁷ of the Network.

The objectives of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives are to:

- Ensure effective, timely, coordinated UN system-wide support to the GoM in their implementation, follow-up and review of the GCM, for the rights and wellbeing of all migrants and their communities of destination, origin, and transit;
- Support coherent action by the UN system in the Maldives with support from relevant regional and global UN entities in support of GCM implementation, where such action would add value, while ensuring well-defined linkages with UN structures at all levels;
- Act as a source of ideas, tools, reliable data and information, analysis, and policy guidance on migration issues, including through the capacity-building mechanism established in the GCM;
- Ensure actions of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives promote the application of relevant international and regional norms and standards relating to migration and the protection of the human rights of migrants, and engagement with UN human rights mechanisms relating to migration;
- Provide leadership to mobilize coordinated and collaborative action on migration by the UN system, including by speaking with one voice as appropriate, in accordance with the UN Charter, international and national laws, and mandates and technical expertise of relevant UN entities;
- Ensure close collaboration with other existing UN system coordination mechanisms addressing migration-related issues, actively seeking out synergies and avoiding duplication;
- Establish and provide support to the capacity building mechanism, as outlined in the GCM
- Engage with external partners, including migrants, civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, faith-based organizations, local authorities and communities, the private sector, employers' and workers' organizations, trade unions, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, the media and other relevant stakeholders at global, regional and national levels;
- Report to the Secretary-General as required on the implementation of the GCM, the activities of the UN system in this regard, as well as the functioning of the institutional arrangements, and support the Secretary-General's biennial reporting to the General Assembly, as called for in the GCM.

4. ORGANIZATION

The organization of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives is aligned to the global UN Network on Migration where the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assumes the

⁶ Secretary General's prevention agenda: www.un.org/sg/en/priorities/prevention.shtml

⁷ Terms of reference of the Network: www.un.org/en/conf/migration/assets/pdf/UN-Network-on-Migration_TOR.pdf



roles and responsibilities of the Coordinator and provides Secretariat support. In line with this global arrangement, the UN Network on Migration in Maldives is chaired by IOM, represented by the Chief of Mission of IOM country office in the Maldives, unless delegated to another IOM official in his/her absence. The Chair of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives serves as the Secretariat and its responsibilities are as follows:

1. Convene and run regular meetings, including preparing the agenda, drafting and disseminating meeting minutes, inviting government officials and other stakeholders when necessary, reporting to the Resident Coordinator, maintaining an up-to-date list of participants, and following up on action points with relevant counterparts.
2. Support coherent action by the UN system in the Maldives in support of GCM implementation, where such action would add value, while ensuring well-defined linkages with other UN coordination mechanisms.
3. Based on the mapping of migration related initiatives of UN entities, provide recommendations on ways in which each UN entity can support the GoM in the implementation, follow-up and review of GCM.
4. Facilitate the identification of priority thematic areas supported by the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives through available resources such as the Migration Country Profile.⁸
5. In consultation with the Members, develop an Action Plan for a period of two years for the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives, optimizing the comparative advantage of each agency, through joint and/or complementary initiatives.
6. Liaise with the UNCT on all matters related to migration and represent the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives at relevant meetings, along with other relevant agencies.
7. Liaise with the Secretariat of the UN Network on Migration in Geneva to inform on developments in the Maldives, information and updates from the Secretariat, and share priorities with the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives.
8. Foster and coordinate joint-UN responses to local migration realities and multi-agency proposals for the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF).
9. Identify opportunities for joint and multi-disciplinary programmes on migration and facilitate the development of relevant project proposals.

5. MEMBERS

The UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will consist of those members of the UN system who wish to be a part of it and for whom migration is of relevance to their mandates.

Government interlocutors will be invited as guest speakers and observers to ensure the alignment of the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives with the priorities of the GoM and to support the exchange of information.

International development partners, 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 will be given the opportunity

⁸ International Organization for Migration, *Migration in Maldives: A Country Profile 2018* (2018). Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-maldives-country-profile-2018>



to participate in the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives meetings upon invitation of the Chair.

6. MEETINGS

The UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will meet every two months and will be convened by the Chair. The UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will replace the Thematic Sub-Group on Migrants and Migration Governance of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Working Group. Ad-hoc meetings can be called if the situation requires increased coordination or information sharing.

7. REPORTING

The UN Network on Migration in the Maldives will produce a progress report on an annual basis on the main achievements and key points identified and advocated through the UN Network on Migration in the Maldives. This report will be shared with the Resident Coordinator and the UNCT and made available to the relevant government interlocutors and other relevant stakeholders, upon request. If particularly sensitive information is contained in the annual progress report, a separate internal report will be made available for the UNCT.