

EAPRO REGIONAL DIRECTOR CLOSING REMARKS

EVENT: Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
Closing Session

DATE: Friday, 12 March 2021

TIME: 14:00-16:00 Bangkok

(closing remarks expected at around 14:45/15:00 Bangkok)

VENUE: Virtual via KUDO connection sent in advance

Madame Chair,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

It has been an honour for UNICEF, as part of the UN Regional Network on Migration, and in collaboration with ESCAP, to participate and contribute to this first regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Asia Pacific region.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of States to implement the GCM in this region since its adoption two years ago. I have no doubt this region will significantly inform the International Migration Review Forum in 2022.

During the Regional Review we have heard about the specific vulnerabilities of children and of promising practices by States to mitigate the risks they face. These examples highlighted that protecting the rights of children is central to ensuring migration is safe and productive for all.

Listening to States and young people, we were also reminded that despite ongoing efforts, millions of child migrants and children of migrants in this region continue to face risks and challenges. Regardless of why they migrate - whether they accompany their parents or migrate alone, or remain behind when one or both parents migrate - migration-related child protection risks and restricted access to basic services are of significant concern. In particular, children who are stateless may be pushed into a lifetime of marginalisation and vulnerability. And despite encouraging efforts in several countries, far too many children continue to face the risks of immigration detention.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted access to already limited services, has further exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for migrants. However, they are frequently overlooked in the pandemic response – and children are too often ignored in the discourse on migrant workers.

Excellencies,

As this important meeting comes to a close, we must remember:

A child is a child. No matter why she leaves home, where she comes from, where she is, how she got there, or if she remains behind when her parents migrate. Every child has a right to protection, care and all the support and services she needs to thrive and reach her full potential. Fulfilling children's rights is a political choice.

This review has clearly shown that when the right policies are in place and implemented, risks for children can be reduced and challenges overcome.

The Regional Review has also highlighted the areas in which progress in implementing the GCM must be accelerated:

- The removal of legal, administrative and practical barriers, and the implementation of measures to provide access to national education, health and child protection systems for all children, including those affected by migration.
- The harmful practice of immigration detention of all children in law and practice must end. Immigration detention is never

in the child's best interests. Non-custodial, community-based alternatives that preserve the right to family unity, need to be scaled up and implemented to ensure the adequate reception, protection and care of every migrant child.

- Cross-border cooperation to protect children, where appropriate, needs to be further strengthened through the development of bilateral cross-border agreements and standard operating procedures.
- And most immediately, COVID-19 responses must fully take into account the needs and rights of migrant children and families.

UNICEF is committed to continuing its efforts to support Member States to make these commitments a reality.

Excellencies,

Creating platforms for and listening to the voices of children affected by migration is essential if we are to collectively and effectively meet their needs. It was therefore very welcome that young people, including young migrants, across the region have actively participated in all stages of this review, and made a strong contribution to the discussions in these past two days.

Indeed, this regional review provides inspiration for meaningful participation of children and youth in the implementation and review of the GCM. We are all better off when young people are given a seat at the table and are taken seriously. And UNICEF looks forward to supporting Member States in further engaging with young people in designing and implementing migration policies and in reviewing action and their impact on the ground.

UNICEF is proud to be part of the UN Regional Network on Migration. We appreciate the strong collaboration with the UN family in supporting governments and partners at all levels throughout the Asia Pacific region to uphold and promote migrants' rights, and to ensure that the GCM commitments translate into real change and positive impact in the lives of children in the context of migration.

The GCM represents a tremendous opportunity to address the risks for children and remove obstacles to help children migrate safely. Let us – together - seize this opportunity as we respond and reimagine a recovery that is inclusive of migrant children and their families also. By implementing the GCM we can turn vulnerability into potential. And shift the needle from

marginalisation to inclusion. And ultimately, truly transform migration from a challenge to an opportunity for everyone.

Thank you.