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## Session 2: Ensuring that Migrants have Access to Basic Services

### Background note

#### Introduction

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in its objective 15, ensures that all migrants, regardless of their migration status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services. While basic services were not explicitly defined in the GCM, they could include drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, energy, mobility, waste collection, health care, education, and information technologies<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of ensuring migrants' access to basic services is also featured under Objective 3: Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration especially for newly arrived migrants; and Objective 4: Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation so that migrants without proof of nationality or legal identity are not precluded from accessing basic services.

Implementation of GCM objective 15 among other relevant objectives requires inclusive service delivery systems that do not discriminate against migrants or exacerbate their vulnerabilities. It also entails incorporating migrant needs into national and local level policies and plans in a child-sensitive and gender- and disability-responsive manner.

Session 2 of the second GCM regional review for the Arab region will offer space for discussion of implementation of objective 15 of the GCM as one of the key regional priority areas. This background note provides context and updates on progress in this pursuit. It draws on several sources, including the GCM, IMRF Progress Declaration, the First GCM Regional Review Report and Outcome Document, and the Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region.

#### Overview of progress

In the first regional review, GCM objective 15 was among the top three objectives on which reporting countries made progress. Eight Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, and Qatar) reported offering migrants support to access health, education, and social care. This ranged from providing free health and social care to migrants without need for documentation proving legal status in Algeria, to exempting children from the prerequisite of holding a residency permit to access public schools in Egypt. The first GCM regional review also highlighted the important role played by local administrations, especially in major cities with the largest number of migrants, in identifying priorities and allocating resources to ensure that migrants have access to basic services. The IMRF Progress Declaration (paragraph 38) also reiterated the importance of providing equal and safe access to affordable basic services to all migrants regardless of their migration status.

Education policies play a crucial role in ensuring that migrant children thrive academically and socially. Access to quality education is a fundamental aspect of integration and social mobility for migrant communities. Education provides migrants with the necessary language skills and cultural understanding to integrate into their new society. Since the last GCM regional review,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-01-04-01.pdf>

several Arab states have continued to make progress in ensuring migrants have access to education. For example, UAE passed *Federal Decree Law No. (39) of 2022 regarding compulsory education, which* explicitly grants residents, including migrants, the right to education. To complement this, the UAE government also supports various educational initiatives to promote inclusive schooling practices.

Access to healthcare for migrants is not only a matter of human rights and social justice, but also essential for protecting public health, promoting economic productivity, and fostering social cohesion. Several Arab countries also supported migrants' access to health in different ways. For example, many Arab countries took steps to extend testing and healthcare services to migrant workers during the global COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing the importance of inclusive public health measures to control the spread of the virus. Some Arab countries, including Morocco, played a central role in the adoption of the Rabat Declaration at the *Third Global Consultation on the Health of Refugees and Migrants* in June 2023. The Declaration reaffirmed the right of every human being, including refugees and migrants, to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Finally, some countries in the region have implemented legal reforms to support migrants' access to health. For example, Bahrain's *Law (23) of 2021* stipulates that non-Bahrainis are exempted from paying medical fees for general health consultations.

Access to other basic services is also important, especially during times of crisis. In Tunisia for example, the Municipalities of Sfax and Sousse implemented projects to facilitate migrant access to services in the context of the pandemic<sup>2</sup>. In Jordan, Habitat for Humanity worked on a programme to increase the reliability of water supply and increase community awareness and knowledge on sustainable water management, which resulted in improved privacy and access to water and sanitation for Syrian refugees and the host community<sup>3</sup>.

The Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (M-MPTF) is also funding a Joint Programme in Morocco, promoting inclusive access to basic services and facilitating integrated multi-cultural socioeconomic activities and dialogue. The programme supports local protection mechanisms and enhances their capacity to promote the rights of migrants and deliver inclusive services to vulnerable populations. It also works with a broad range of government ministries and civil society partners to improve social cohesion in the country.

Despite the progress witnessed, many challenges remain:

- Migrants in many countries still face legal and administrative barriers to accessing basic services due to their migratory status. Migratory status (irregular, regular, refugee, asylum seeker, etc.) often determines the type and scope of basic services that are made available to these different groups. For example, migrants in irregular situations may encounter additional challenges in their interactions with public services because they may fear engaging with public services due to the risk of detection and deportation.
- Migrants continue to face challenges in accessing services due to discrimination, language barriers, and cultural differences. Migrants may not be aware of the available services or how to access them due to a lack of information in their native language or cultural differences in understanding how systems work in the host country. They may also face discrimination or bias from service providers.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/leveraging-migrants-contributionemergency-and-protecting-most-vulnerable-during-covid-19>

<sup>3</sup> [https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/docs/provision\\_of\\_essential\\_services\\_-\\_good\\_practices.pdf](https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/docs/provision_of_essential_services_-_good_practices.pdf)


- Some countries in the region, especially least developed countries (LDCs), may have limited resources and capacity to provide services to both their own citizens and migrant populations.
- The cost, sustainability, and continuum of basic services is another barrier, which constrains access to quality services for migrants.
- Recent conflicts, violence, disasters and socio-economic challenges in the region have caused widespread displacement and forced migration. These large and sudden movements place additional burden on service provision in host countries.
- Limited mainstreaming of migration across government sectoral and national policies, which is essential for ensuring that basic services are sustainable, accessible, and migrant-inclusive.
- Evidence of good practices or progress on providing access to migrants to basic services beyond primary health and education in the region are limited.

Solutions to the aforementioned challenges could include:

- Support universal provision of essential services through reducing reliance on identification for example.
- Promote effective access to available services through appropriate identification and referrals of most vulnerable migrant groups.
- Support regularization procedures, integration programs, and offer legal assistance and counseling to irregular migrants on accessing basic services.
- Conduct cultural competency training to service providers, interpretation and translation services in healthcare centers and schools, and enforcement of anti-discrimination policies based on nationality.
- Explore innovative approaches and leverage technological options to deliver services in a more sustainable and cost-effective manner.
- Coordinate multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral responses from governments, humanitarian organizations, civil society, and the international community to address the challenges of basic service provision posed by large and sudden movements of displaced populations.
- Incorporate migration considerations into policy-making processes across various sectors to ensure migrants can access basic services.
- More focus is needed on basic services beyond education and primary health, for example access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), mental health services, and sexual and reproductive health.

## Guiding questions

- What do you consider to be 'basic services'?
- What challenges do migrants face in accessing basic services?
- What are some successful examples of initiatives or programs that have improved migrants' access to basic services?
- How can governments collaborate with international organizations to ensure comprehensive and sustainable support for migrants, including during crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, or widespread conflict?
- What role can technology and digital platforms play in improving migrants' access to information about available services and facilitating their access to basic services?

- How can partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and private sector entities be leveraged to create more coordinated, sustainable and efficient systems for delivering services to migrants?
  - How can we promote bilateral, regional, and global partnerships for basic service provision for migrants?
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