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## Session 5: Strengthening National, Bilateral, Regional and International Cooperation

### Background note

#### Introduction

At its essence, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), reflected the collective commitment to improve cooperation on international migration for the purpose of protecting migrants, capitalizing on the positive returns of migration, and minimizing and possible negative consequences. Recognizing the transboundary nature of migration, cooperation is needed at all levels, national, bilateral, regional and global. Objective 23. Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration particularly focuses on this important topic. It is also featured as part of the ten Guiding Principles of the GCM as (b) International cooperation – “The Global Compact is a non-legally binding cooperative framework that recognizes that no State can address migration on its own because of the inherently transnational nature of the phenomenon. It requires international, regional and bilateral cooperation and dialogue. Its authority rests on its consensual nature, credibility, collective ownership, joint implementation, follow-up and review”.

The first regional review of the GCM in the Arab region resulted in the identification of six key priorities to accelerate the implementation and achievement of the GCM objectives, including the need to strengthen national, bilateral, regional and international cooperation. To this end, the importance of stakeholders’ participation in migration governance and the need to strengthen the consultation and collaboration mechanisms at the national and regional levels was emphasized. At the national level, it highlighted the need for strengthening the role of foreign ministries and migrant associations to ensure and facilitate migrant communication with countries and communities of origin and encourage investment in them. The importance of strengthening the role of local administrations, especially in major cities with the largest number of migrants, was also recognized.

The GCM also acknowledges shared responsibilities to one another as States Members of the United Nations to address each other’s needs and concerns over migration, and an overarching obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their migration status, while promoting the security and prosperity of all our communities. The need to strengthen cooperation was further reiterated in the IMRF Progress Declaration which invites “*subregional, regional and cross-regional processes, platforms, dialogues, forums and organizations... to consider ways to enhance cooperation related to its full implementation, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and in line with a 360-degree vision*” (paragraph 68).

Session 5 of the second GCM regional review for the Arab region will offer a space for collective reflection on the progress achieved in strengthening national, bilateral, regional, and international cooperation, showcase some of the promising practices from the region, and identify the gaps and challenges that remain. This background note draws on the first GCM Regional Review Report and Outcome Document, the IMRF Progress Declaration, and the 2021 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region as well as the forthcoming 2023 edition to provide some context and updates in this regard.

#### Overview of progress

**International cooperation:** International cooperation can support efforts to strengthen migration governance through sharing best practices, facilitating peer learning, and fostering dialogue. Commitment to achieving the goals of global development agendas as well as participating in global fora can also help raise the voice of the Arab region, bringing visibility to its issues and priorities, and exploring means to galvanize efforts to address the challenges. As of mid-2024, the region is home to three GCM champion countries (Egypt, Iraq and Morocco). In March 2022, Morocco hosted the first Ministerial-level GCM Champion countries meeting to build momentum and engagement ahead of the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). Subsequently at the inaugural IMRF in May 2022, the Moroccan government co-hosted a side event on enhancing cross-regional collaboration between the African and Arab regions. Leveraging the achievements from the IMRF's first Progress Declaration, an Informal Dialogue of GCM Champion countries from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe was held in Rabat, Morocco, in January 2023. In September 2023, a Regional Forum of Champion Countries was held in Panama, including Member States from Latin America, Africa and the Arab States. In preparation for the Regional Reviews, a third Champions Informal Dialogue took place in Ghana in November 2023, convening representatives from 28 countries across Africa, the Arab States, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This meeting concluded with key recommendations to guide sustained efforts for the GCM's implementation. This is reflective of increasing recognition of the importance of cross-regional collaboration in relation to route-based approaches and providing a continuum of protection for migrants.

**Regional cooperation:** Migration has a significant regional dimension, as recognized in the GCM that “most international migration takes place within regions”, almost half of the migrants from the Arab region are also staying in the region. Therefore, regional cooperation can facilitate dialogue, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among member states, leading to the development of common policies, standards, and mechanisms for managing migration flows. Cooperation between the Arab region and other regions is also important given the significant migration corridors and cross-regional flows of migrants through a route-based approach.

Regional consultative processes can play a crucial role in promoting regional cooperation on migration issues. In the region, the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs (ARCP)<sup>1</sup>, the Khartoum Process<sup>2</sup>, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD)<sup>3</sup>, the Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5)<sup>4</sup> and the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process)<sup>5</sup> are in place to foster cooperation among sending, transit, and hosting countries along specific migration routes among others. These processes continue to meet on a regular basis to foster regional collaboration. For example, the ARCP convened for its 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting in May 2024, while the ADD held its 7<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Consultation in February 2024.

The GCM also recognized the need for coherent United Nations (UN) system-wide support to help achieve the objectives. The UN Network on Migration in the Arab region ensures optimal collaboration between UN agencies as well as other regional entities including the League of Arab

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iom.int/arab-regional-consultative-process-migration-and-refugee-affairs-arcp>

<sup>2</sup> The Khartoum Process is a platform for political cooperation amongst the countries along the migration route between the Horn of Africa and Europe. See more at <https://www.khartoumprocess.net/>

<sup>3</sup> The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a voluntary and non-binding inter-government consultative process, engaging seven Asian countries of labour destination: Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE; and eleven countries of origin: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. See more at <http://abudhabidialogue.org.ae/members>

<sup>4</sup> The Western Mediterranean Forum or 5+5 Dialogue was officially launched in Rome in 1990 as an informal sub-regional forum of like-minded countries, geographically situated on the western rim of the Euro-Mediterranean littoral. See more at <https://www.iom.int/55-dialogue-migration-western-mediterranean>

<sup>5</sup> Since 2006, the Dialogue has offered a framework for consultation, bringing together countries of origin, transit and destination of the migration routes linking Central, West and Northern Africa with Europe. See more at <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/about>

States to address migration in the Arab Region. In the spirit of pursuing a whole-of-society approach, it launched a Regional Stakeholder Advisory Group (R-SAG) in May 2023, with the goal to expand outreach to stakeholders, including civil society organizations and migrant organizations in the region ahead of the second GCM Regional Review in the Arab region.

**Bilateral cooperation:** Bilateral cooperation agreements between countries in the Arab region and key migrant-sending and receiving countries can facilitate orderly and safe migration processes while addressing shared challenges and opportunities. Such agreements may focus on areas such as labor migration, remittance flows, the recognition of qualifications, and promote educational exchanges of students. Bilateral cooperation agreements can also include initiatives to combat irregular migration, human trafficking, and smuggling networks through joint law enforcement efforts, cross-border cooperation and information sharing.

Bilateral collaboration efforts seen in the region mainly involve border management partnerships with neighboring countries or bilateral labour migration agreements. For example, Lebanon and Jordan have both concluded bilateral labour agreements with Ethiopia in 2023 on the employment of Ethiopian workers in their respective countries. Meanwhile, in 2024, the State of Qatar signed an agreement to enhance cooperation and manage labor recruitment from the Republic of Uganda. Similarly, Libya signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Niger in November 2021 on labour migration. In terms of border management, the Government of Niger and Government of Morocco signed a bilateral agreement in 2022 on enhancing the response for counter trafficking including victim identification and assistance. Moreover, tripartite roundtable discussions on solutions, experiences, and strategic approaches to combat human trafficking took place in 2023 between Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

**National cooperation:** National cooperation is critical for developing comprehensive and harmonized approaches to migration management and ensuring a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to migration governance. This requires institutional capacity, data collection systems, and legal frameworks to effectively manage migration flows and protect migrants' rights. GCM also recognizes that it will be implemented in cooperation and partnership with stakeholders including parliaments and local authorities and communities. In the region, there are currently 16<sup>6</sup> national United Nations Networks on Migration to help facilitate cooperation between partners at the national level. Such networks can help identify priority areas for joint programming, ensure operational coordination, and foster meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Arab governments have also been taking various steps to implement the GCM at the national level. First, they have been working with the UN Networks on Migration to advance GCM objectives through a whole-of-society approach. Second, Arab governments have also worked to integrate migration into their development plans and visions. For example, Bahrain and Kuwait have aligned the implementation of the GCM objectives within their plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Third, other countries have chosen to develop standalone migration policies to serve as comprehensive frameworks that outline their approach to managing migration. Such standalone policies can support horizontal and vertical policy coherence to reflect a whole-of-government approach. Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia already have national migration strategies in place and Somalia is currently in the process of developing its national migration strategy. Finally, Arab States have continued making progress in establishing institutional setups responsible for the implementation of the GCM. For example, the Ministry of Interior in Comoros has established a multisectoral commission to follow-up on GCM implementation and the government of Iraq also has an Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group on Migration, chaired by the Ministry of Migration & Displacement.

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<sup>6</sup> Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Despite the progress made, the road for active multi-level cooperation in the region is still long. Limited financial and human resources and competing priorities constrain governments' ability to invest in migration management and cooperation initiatives at different levels. More bilateral collaboration is needed to protect migrants' rights, for example in the area of portability of benefits. Furthermore, despite the diversity of the Arab states between sending, receiving and transit countries, a common policy framework, such as the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018 – 2030), could enhance further regional cooperation and harmonize policies across the region with differences in legal and regulatory frameworks impeding cooperation.

### Guiding questions

- What are some successful examples of international, regional, bilateral, or national cooperation on migration that have yielded positive outcomes?
- What do you think continue to be the main obstacles hindering effective national, bilateral, regional or international cooperation?
- How can we accelerate the adoption of bilateral agreements between countries of origin, transit, and destination to enhance the management of migration flows and ensure the protection of migrants' rights?
- Would developing a regional framework to support harmonization of migration governance across the region be a priority?