

Session 6: Providing Detailed, Timely and Available Data

Background note

Introduction

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) serves as a rallying point for governments, stakeholders, and international organizations to work together towards addressing migration challenges and providing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach towards better migration governance. By recognizing data as the first GCM objective, the GCM underscores the importance of collective effort for enhancing data collection, analysis, and sharing, enabling evidence-based decision-making and fostering cooperation among stakeholders. The session also features GCM Objective 8: save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants and Objective 9: Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants.

Embracing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of migration trends within the Arab region. By engaging governmental agencies, UN agencies, civil society organizations, academic institutions, among other stakeholders, it becomes possible to collect, analyze, and interpret migration data effectively and comprehensively. This holistic perspective enables decision-makers to identify migration patterns, drivers, and vulnerabilities; thus, informing targeted interventions and policy responses.

A whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach necessitates the active engagement of diverse stakeholders in migration governance. Governments, civil society, academia, trade unions, and the private sector among others including international organizations all have unique roles to play in data collection, analysis, and dissemination. By fostering collaboration and coordination with stakeholders, it becomes possible to leverage their respective expertise and resources to enhance the quality and reliability of migration data.

Today, virtually all countries in the region experience international migration, as countries of origin, transit and destination. Furthermore, the Arab region has been severely affected by protracted conflicts, violence and environmental degradation, which have added to the complexity of migration flows in the region. As international migration within and beyond the region receives a growing attention as an emerging issue with global impact, the demand for accurate and disaggregated data to assess the levels and trends of population mobility and their multifaceted impacts on development has increased.

International migration, be it voluntary or forced, is recognized as an important policy area of interest in the Arab region. The Arab region demonstrated significant dynamics in international migration, hosting **41.1 million** migrants. A diverse population including migrant workers, international students, unaccompanied migrant children, asylum seekers, and refugees in 2020 (UNDESA).

The Arab region has emerged as a critical transit point for migrants fleeing hardships driven by conflict, economic hardship, political instability and environmental degradation. For many, the migration journey from and to the region has become as a harrowing tale of desperation, peril, and uncertainty for some. Every year, thousands of migrants embark on these treacherous journeys, as a result, many migrants perish or go missing during their attempts in search of a better life. In the Arab region, IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) has documented more than **33,285** deaths and disappearances occurring in both land and sea routes.

The Mediterranean routes, including the central and eastern pathways, have been among the most heavily traversed by migrants seeking to reach Europe. According to data collected by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, in 2023 alone, over **292,000** migrants arrived in Europe via sea routes namely the Mediterranean routes and the West Africa Atlantic Route. Tragically, more than **29,591** migrants lost their lives attempting the Sea crossing from Northern Africa to Europe since 2014, as documented by IOM's MMP. In 2023, the Mediterranean routes bore witness to the deadliest year on record since 2018, with **3,105** deaths and disappearances recorded along its treacherous waters. Among these grim statistics, **1,878** incidents occurred off the coasts of countries in the Arab region, underscoring the urgent need to address this humanitarian crisis.

Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in the number of migrants crossing through the Eastern route, and the number is expected to continue in the future; around **97,000** migrants arrived in Yemen in 2023 – an increase of more than **20,000** compared to total arrivals in 2022 (more than 73,000 arrivals). This increase can be attributed to various factors, including migration dynamics within the Horn of Africa and the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

These figures on missing migrants only scratch the surface of the true scale of the issue, as many deaths and disappearances go unreported or unnoticed. The ongoing loss of lives and the challenge of accurately documenting these fatalities serve as a persistent reminder of the suffering endured by families of missing migrants. For many, the pursue for answers regarding the fate of their loved ones remains intangible. Addressing the major data gaps in migration by developing effective responses and policies is imperative to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration through highlighting the need for a whole of government and whole of society approach.

Overview of progress

With international migration rising to the forefront of policy issues worldwide, there is a corresponding awareness and interest in reliable, accessible and timely statistical and administrative data and analysis. The statistics needed to characterize migration flows, monitor changes over time and provide governments and policy makers with a solid basis for formulating and implementing policy are very often lacking. Significant deficits in empirical data and non-harmonized definitions, lead to flawed comparison or aggregation, creating misjudgments and misleading public opinions and policymakers.

This paucity of basic data and analysis on international migration persists due to outdated, incompatible, or inadequate sources and systems for accessible, timely, reliable data collection and limited digital capacity. This is coupled with the unavailability of systematic analysis of existing data within the Arab region at national, sub-regional and regional level, due to a variety of structural and political reasons.

Challenges remain on how to effectively harmonize migration data. States from the same region have diverse data collection systems, definitions and methods as well as varying priorities and capacities. This in turn, prevents a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and impacts of migration as well as on the specific vulnerabilities of migrant groups and tailored assistance as needed. Furthermore, existing data often lacks disaggregation by key factors such as age, gender, and nationality, making it challenging to tailor interventions to the specific needs of different migrant groups. In addition, inconsistencies in data classification, such as varying age ranges used between different actors, mechanisms, countries, and regions hinder the ability to aggregate, compare and analyze data effectively. Establishing standardized data classification is crucial for

enhancing the accuracy and reliability of migration data, enabling policymakers and stakeholders to better understand migrant populations and develop targeted interventions that address their diverse needs.

A lack of coordination among the various actors collecting migration data also poses significant challenges and the limited access to data further exacerbates the problem. For instance, many vulnerable populations reside in areas that data collectors find difficult to reach, such as conflict zones or detention centers. This restricted access results in substantial gaps in data, making it challenging to obtain a complete and accurate picture of migration patterns and conditions.

Moreover, irregular movements across open or porous borders adds another layer of complexity to data collection. The high degree of irregular migration makes it difficult to track and analyze migration flows accurately, further reducing the reliability of available data and the ability to capture the real magnitude of migration flows in the region. Additionally, many migrant workers are reluctant to share their information due to their precarious legal or employment status in destination countries. This fear of potential repercussions leads to significant underreporting and gaps in the data.

Sources most often used for collecting migration data include population registers, registers of nonnationals, records of issuance of residence and work permits, records of issuance of entry and exit, records of processing of requests for asylum, records for regularization, border statistics, censuses, labour force surveys and other household surveys, and apprehension and deportation records. Collection bodies typically include a variety of government departments (i.e. ministries of labour, interior and planning), national statistical offices CSOs, employment/recruitment agencies, educational institutions, health facilities and any other institution dealing with populations that include migrants. Data uses include migration-related activities from making policy and programme decisions on labour migration, protection, integration, security and others, to the myriad complex social, economic, demographic and political relationships and consequences.

Governments in the Arab region play a central role in driving migration policies and initiatives. Embracing a whole-of-government approach involves integrating data considerations into policy development processes. By investing in data infrastructure, capacity building, and interagency cooperation, governments can strengthen their ability to monitor migration trends, assess policy impacts, and formulate evidence-based strategies to address migration challenges effectively. This integration will provide a richer, more accurate picture of migration.

Despite the opportunities presented by a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, challenges persist in collecting and utilizing migration data. These challenges include resource constraints, data fragmentation, and issues related to data privacy and protection. However, by embracing innovation and technology, stakeholders can overcome these challenges and capitalize on opportunities to improve data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

Civil society organizations among other stakeholders play a vital role in advocating for migrant rights and providing essential services to migrant populations. Engaging various stakeholders in migration governance fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. By incorporating stakeholder perspectives into data collection and analysis processes, we can ensure that

migration policies and programs are responsive to the needs and concerns of migrants themselves and host communities.

Guiding questions

- Has your government developed a national plan to enhance the collection, production and dissemination of data related to migration, based also on international statistical standards? If yes, please elaborate on the process. If not, please indicate if your government has plans to do.
- Has your government developed partnerships or coordination mechanisms to enhance the data collection and dissemination?
- Has your government included migration questions in Census or specific surveys, such as labor force and other household surveys?
- Has your government established partnerships with NGOs, academia, or think tanks to collaboratively develop a country-specific research agenda? What are the main gaps and challenges in data management regarding the availability, absence, and necessity of specific data to support policy and operational responses?
- Has your government developed mechanisms for sharing migration data with other countries, either as destination or origin countries, as well as on a transnational level?