

Summary of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the UN Network on Migration 30-31 January 2024 CICG, Geneva (hybrid)

OVERVIEW

The UN Network on Migration (Network) held its Fifth Annual Meeting on 30-31 January 2023, at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG). The 350 in-person participants were joined by 552 online participants (both days total), representing the Network, civil society and other stakeholders, as well as Member States.

The review of the Network's impact and progress working with stakeholders and Member States to implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) was considered through three overarching themes:

1. **Maximizing the Development Promise of Migration**
2. **Protecting Migrants' Rights and Saving Lives**
3. **Future of Migration**

The thematic sessions were preceded by scene-setting with panelists representing academia, climate activism and the media, and the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund Consultative Forum.

This note briefly summarizes the discussions raised during each session.

A recording of the Annual Meeting with the agenda and statements can be found on the Network [website](#).

SESSION: SETTING THE SCENE: THE MIGRATION NARRATIVE

- Discussions around migration often tend to be polarized, with both pro- and anti-camps exaggerating the harms and benefits of migration. A better framing of migration is needed, not as a problem to be solved or a solution to problems but as it is, based on evidence rather than propaganda.
- Migration policies have often failed or been counterproductive because they are based on inaccurate elements of the nature, causes and consequences of migration.
- Some misconceptions include:
 - i. We are not in unprecedented times of mass migration. Rather, migrants represent roughly 3 percent of the world's population, a figure that has remained steady over decades even as the global population has grown. The composition of migration has changed particularly since World War II, with the end of colonialism in most places.
 - ii. Border restrictions do not reduce migration. Instead, they interrupt the natural circular nature of migration. With restrictions, fewer migrants tend to return to their countries of origin, instead choosing to settle.
 - iii. The development of poor countries will not reduce migration. In fact, any form of development is likely to lead to more migration (first to urban centers then to other countries). Migration is usually an investment for a better future.

- iv. Labour demand in destination countries is the main driving force. Migrants don't take or steal jobs. They respond by filling labour gaps and shortages.
- Storytelling is a powerful and impactful form of communication, and the human stories behind migration should be told to preserve migrants' dignity. Migrants, regardless of status, are continuously vilified and migration narratives continue to be driven by perception and emotion rather than data. Media often reinforces these harmful narratives but should instead be a canvas to illustrate a nuanced representation of migrants based on data. Our language about migration and migrants matters; as well as understanding the various terms regarding migrants (illegal; undocumented; asylum seeker, etc).
 - For (mainly) the global south, climate change impacts food security, livelihoods and health; for the most impoverished, the impacts include displacement. People typically wish to remain within their communities and make a living, yet frequently there are not enough opportunities at home. There needs to be a focus on capacity building with new ways of funding including with the private sector, and skilling-up. Youth have a key role in leading these processes and should be included in capacity building efforts.
 - Many elections will take place this year in countries where political discussions are tainted with xenophobia, particularly against migrants. Yet public attitudes are much more complex on migration, and seeking ways to increase public trust is needed.

SESSION: MIGRATION MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND CONSULTATIVE FORUM

- The [Migration MPTF](#) is the first fund to introduce a human rights marker and a child-sensitivity marker, joining one on gender. In 2023, it also introduced guidelines on strengthening engagement with civil society, migrants and communities.
- The Fund has the second broadest donor base of all global UN development pooled funds, with 21 donors to date.
- In 2023, the Migration MPTF launched 9 new Joint Programmes – bringing the total to 21, to date. These programmes cover all thematic areas and regions, involve 15 UN entities and a wide range of national and regional partners.
- Six of the 21 programmes concluded implementation in 2023 and have achieved significant results.
- To date, 99 countries and regions have submitted funding proposals. Thirty-three joint programmes are in the pipeline.
- The Fund reached its funding target of USD 20 million for 2023 thanks to current donors. The 2024 target is USD 25 million which will need renewed commitment from existing donors and contributions from new, diverse donors.
- The fundraising strategy adopted by the Steering Committee in March 2023 includes initiatives aimed at further broadening the donor base through both a joint contribution initiative and new rules for private sector entities.
- Aligned with the GCM's whole-of-society and people-centered guiding principles, strengthening engagement with civil society has been a priority of the Migration MPTF. To this end, the Fund introduced specific guidelines on strengthening engagement with civil society, migrants and communities, and monitors fund transfers to non-UN entities, including civil society. Ensuring that all Migration MPTF programmes truly and meaningfully

include migrants, communities and civil society can help create change on the ground and positively impact migrants' lives.

- The Fund is a tool for international cooperation that can be strengthened by funding multi-country programmes and through joint contributions.
- A window of the Fund is dedicated to the GCM Regional Reviews and contributions would be essential to support inclusive participation in these reviews. Past contributions by civil society have helped ensure the participation of stakeholders in the IMRF in 2022.
- Identified areas for the Fund's focus is on: (i) climate change & human mobility; (ii) migrants' access to health care; (iii) preventing loss of lives; (iv) protecting children; (v) and regional or multi-country programming.
- The Fund will also focus on expanding its community: donors, Champions, Steering Committee members, UN partners, the private sector, and the people we help every day.
- Several Member States took the floor to express confidence in the Migration MPTF as a vital mechanism which fosters cooperation across partners and encouraged further contributions.

SESSION: MAXIMIZING THE DEVELOPMENT PROMISE OF MIGRATION

- Coordination among different actors is paramount for GCM implementation. The [EU-funded Building Migration Partnerships \(BMP\) programme](#) in El Salvador, Ghana and Kenya has created space for discussion among different actors, enhancing cooperation and coordination to advance GCM by achieving tangible results.
- There are signs that GCM awareness is increasing, and it has been incorporated systematically in the work of many country Networks and governments. To continue this trend, it is essential to openly discuss how to change the narrative on migration, as well as communicate its potential positive impacts. Data shows the Global North has an aging population with severe population shortage to be more acute in the decades to come; migration is a possible source of growth.
- The Network's multi-stakeholder approach is an excellent tool to shape policy that can be used and taken forward. The Network has established six regional multi-agency and multi-stakeholder facilitation teams to support UN country teams. One of the lessons learned from these is we should work more with non-traditional actors, for example municipalities.
- Country Networks – embedded in UN country teams – further support governments to put in place plans and structures to ensure their GCM-based migration policy frameworks are contributing to sustainable development.
- For example, in Kenya the Network has been a gamechanger, designing and launching discussions bringing different actors to a comprehensive approach for migration management. Kenya's National Coordination Mechanism links 47 stakeholders, including civil society, government and UN agencies. Through this support, the Government has enhanced its diaspora management.
- Based on these partnerships, Kenya also launched its National Implementation Plan for the GCM in October 2023. Kenya has taken the lead as a GCM Champion Country and is becoming a regional example. This approach allows the GCM to become more embedded in the DNA of the work of the UN on the ground.
- Similarly, the BMP programme implemented in El Salvador has been a changing factor to support the country to meet its goals as a GCM Champion Country. Bringing El Salvador's

experience with the GCM to regional fora, for example during the pro tempore presidency during the Regional Conference on Migration, encouraged the dissemination of good practices in assessing the needs and challenges to GCM implementation in the region.

- Through the country Network in Ghana, the BMP programme has ensured that migration is well reflected in the UN's Cooperation Framework and its joint work plans. In 2023, the Network was officially recognized as one of the four inter-agency working groups directly reporting to the UN country team and the Resident Coordinator's Office. This is helping to ensure that wider UN planning and GCM implementation planning go hand in hand.
- CARICOM is the first regional body to receive demand-driven technical assistance under the BMP programme. CARICOM is drawing on the GCM as a guiding framework for developing an effective regional migration policy. This is strategically aligned to the region's ambition of achieving free movement of citizens within the Caribbean Community in 2024.
- Coordination and synergies with other initiatives like the GFMD is needed to secure joint efforts that deliver results.
- Donor support often leans towards more security-focused migration management efforts, limiting investments in initiatives that advance safe and dignified migration, for the benefit of development.
- The Network can better enhance the engagement of nonstate stakeholders to maximize migration's impact on development. Such engagement also leads to stronger work with governments opening other channels of cooperation for example diaspora, development, climate change. Such engagement with civil society should be structured and regular, avoiding a one-time opportunity. It should be coordinated and diverse, providing capacity-building support.
- The Network's work should also be framed against the urgency of challenges such as climate change. More action is needed to consolidate proper implementation and follow up actions, with the inclusion of youth.
- Civil society organizations highlighted the importance of a thorough analysis of needs and gaps to achieve coherent migration policies that reach those in need and ultimately benefitting migrants. They also identified the need to include and address the impact of climate change on migratory dynamics.

SESSION: PROTECTING MIGRANTS' RIGHTS AND SAVING LIVES

- Key discussions during this session included the need to observe human rights law, the importance of safeguarding lives along land-based migration routes, the transnational nature of addressing migrant deaths and disappearances, the lack of official data concerning counter-smuggling efforts, and the impact on people on the move.
- Altogether, 60,000 migrants have lost their lives in the last decade and more have died in 2023 than in the last decade.
- The Network workstream on actionable recommendations on missing migrants and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress will shortly finalize its work to be included in the next Secretary-General's Report on GCM implementation. The draft recommendations are clustered in 3 areas: (i) strengthening data and evidence and addressing gaps; (ii) strengthening the normative and policy environment; and (iii) strengthening the operational environment, including solidarity and support for humanitarian action.
- Calls were made to reinvigorate our commitment to saving lives, particularly in light of the forthcoming GCM Regional Reviews. Collaborative action and political will was called for to protect migrants, emphasizing the need to transition from advocacy to actionable initiatives.
- The best interests of children must be at the forefront of all actions and policies, highlighting the challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated children. The lack of support for integration or reintegration into communities leads to children missing out on education and medical care, as well as facing risks like child marriage. The Migration MPTF has set a good example by adopting a children's sensitivity marker underlining the importance of agencies considering potential impacts on children in project proposals.
- There is an increased understanding of the importance of the complementary implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and GCM for the protection and safeguarding of lives. This was particularly emphasized at the municipal level where local policies need to respond to all members of the community.
- Achievements of Network workstreams. The Alternatives to Detention workstream helped collect and disseminate practices to end children immigration detention including through a peer learning exchange. The Returns, Readmission and Sustainable Reintegration workstream developed a checklist and organized a peer-learning workshop in Honduras. The issue of 'return' is key priority for many governments that requires a human rights-based approach and partnership. The Network was encouraged to promote its guidance on rights-based pathways.
- There was an emphasis on the importance of preventing the criminalization of people on the move. The dismantling of smuggling networks and transnational organized crime organizations should be the primary approach to address irregular migration. Great attention is needed to address the exploitation of migrants.

FUTURE OF MIGRATION

- Many global transformations are and will impact the future of migration including: a changing climate, an aging population, the reliance on migrant workers, and more. These changes are all interconnected and will impact everyone – including migrants. We need to be nimble and coherent in our approaches to migration, and continue to make progress on safeguarding the human rights of migrants.
- It is important to acknowledge how these transformations will impact people differently. For example, climate change impacts different aspects of human mobility, much of it locally. It is key to learn from communities who have been directly affected.
- The policy challenges presented by climate change and human mobility have been recognized for some time. The GCM offers a blueprint to address migration, we still need to provide more permanent pathways for those in extreme situations of vulnerability. It is critical to build on the momentum from COP 28 to continue to integrate human mobility into the discussion on climate change.
- Reliable, timely, and appropriate use of data in these areas is essential to make more sound migration policies and to foresee future trends. At the same, we need to be reminded of the people behind the numbers – the migrants and communities themselves. We need to uphold their dignity and have them co-create solutions for the challenges of today and tomorrow.
- To prepare for the future of migration, we need to be “forward oriented” – have foresight – so that solutions are not short-sighted but reflect the sustainable, long-term changes required. For example, according to current data, the global population will increase to 9.7 billion people in 2025, and the number of people over the age of 65 will continue to grow to 2050.
- Reliable and timely migration data can also help improve migration narratives and national policies, as highlighted by the Migration MPTF joint programme (JP) in North Macedonia.
- The implementation of the IGAD Migration MPTF JP has supported inclusive data/policy making and the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) capacities of governments, as well as helped increase preparedness on displacement/disasters in the region.
- The world will continue to see the demand for low-wage migrant workers irrespective of skill set, particularly in sectors such as construction, garment manufacturing, etc. The future of work needs to be one of decent work.
- There is a need to rethink the paradigms of regular pathways and temporary labour schemes. Low-wage migrants continue to face the challenges of family separation, access to legal identity and their short-term legal status. It’s important to rethink migration pathways and provide more rights-based permanent solutions, including via regularization schemes.
- Regular pathways must be well designed, taking into consideration policy coherence; ability to operationalize it; clear communication with migrants; buy in from partners and stakeholders and, clear public communication. It is critical for partnerships to be allowed to test ideas/pilots subject to rigorous monitoring and evaluation.
- Youth will continue to engage in key international areas including preparations for the Summit for the Future. There is a need to strengthen the sustainability and coordination of youth-based organizations. States can look into creating migrant advisory boards including youth based on their technical expertise. It will be important to foster migrant and youth participation in migration policy development, in line with the IMRF Progress Declaration.



- Developing portable green skills and empowering youths affected by climate-related mobility requires capacity building support and collaborative action.
- There was a call to embed the Network within mechanisms at the regional level and ensure inclusive participation with stakeholders.
- It was also recommended that the Network hold a GCM Talk on the meaningful participation of migrants.
- Some of the future work of the Network will include looking at the routes-based approach to mixed movements and strengthening the narrative on migration. Looking ahead to the next IMRF in 2026 will require strategic and collaborative action to make migration work for all.