Climate change and migration in the Arab Region: Just transition and labour mobility as an adaptation strategy

Summary Report

1- Context:

The United Nations Regional Network on Migration Workstream, linked to the UN Network’s Global Workstream on Climate Change, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Paris Agreement, held its first GCM Talk, a series of global and regional consultations and peer-learning exchanges, to share and discuss experiences, practices, gaps and recommendations to support a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies in which migrant workers are able to benefit from and contribute to. In the spirit of GCM Talks, this event aimed at engaging Member States, the United Nations system, social partners, civil society, migrant groups and diaspora organizations, and other stakeholders to continue discussions on how best to implement the relevant GCM objectives, in particular Objectives 2, 5, 6, 18 and 23. This regional GCM Talk, co-led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), builds on the Regional Dialogue on the Climate Change and Migration Nexus in the Arab Region, which was organized by the Issue-based Coalition on Migration (IBC/M) in the Arab Region, in coordination with the UN Regional Network on Migration, and held on 24-25 October 2022. The IBC/M is working on a Policy Brief on Migration and Climate Change in the Arab Region, which draws on some of the discussions in the Regional Dialogue, with a view to contribute to the 28th Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), to be held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, between 30 November to 12 December 2023.

The Regional Workstream on Climate Change, the GCM and the Paris Agreement draws on the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) Progress Declaration, which emphasizes that the adverse effects of climate change are among the drivers of migration, and which notes that efforts to mitigate and adapt to these adverse effects have been insufficient, especially on climate funding (para. 27). In addition, the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) Progress Declaration underlines the commitment to enhancing and diversifying the availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration, including in response to climate change and environmental degradation (para. 59). During the IMRF, the initiatives presented by Member States and stakeholders highlighted emerging approaches and a renewed willingness not only to discuss the issues, but to take action so that the human rights, including labour rights, of all migrants are respected and that migrants are included within societies and within national adaptation plans.

The GCM Talk gathered an approximate total of 90 participants. Among these, 75 participants joined online, and 12 participants joined in-person. The participants represented various organizations and

entities, including Government Representatives from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, and the League of Arab States; embassies of several countries in Egypt, including Kenya, Netherlands, and Syria; Civil Society Organizations and International Non-Governmental Organizations, such as GIZ, International Detention Coalition, Solidarity Center, and various others; Academia, and UN Agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

2 - Opening Remarks

Ms. Asmara Achcar, Deputy Regional Director, IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (RO MENA)

- Ms. Achcar welcomed participants and highlighted the timeliness of these discussions ahead of the COP28, and also an issue increasingly becoming a universal concern to societies all over the world.
- She stated that climate change poses unparalleled threats to the Arab region; already experiencing escalating temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, increasing sea levels and worsening water scarcity, with projections indicating that these trends will only intensify over the next few decades and have far-reaching impacts on the region’s economies, communities’ livelihoods, peace and stability, sustainable development, water and food security, and human health, among others.
- She mentioned that the interplay of demographic growth, urbanization, differences in economic development and the exacerbation of armed conflicts and political instability, compounded by climate change and environmental degradation, lead us to believe that migratory flows and population movements within the region will only increase.
- She continued by saying that the Paris Agreement legally binds governments to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but that in order to do so, a "green transition" to low-carbon emission economies is needed globally and within the Arab region, and that “skill bottlenecks” remains one of the biggest challenges to ensuring a effective green transition as only a few governments have included “skills development” as part of their planning. It is within this context that it becomes critical to assess how migrants can be integrated in efforts to promote a fair and just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies; and how labour mobility can act as an adaptation strategy to climate change.

Dr. Ryszard Cholewinski, Senior Migration Specialist, ILO Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)

- Dr. Cholewinski thanked participants for taking the time to join the event at what is a very difficult moment for the region.
• He stated that climate change and migration are increasingly and inextricably linked, and that climate change is a driver of migration within countries and across borders, which includes migration and mobility for decent work.

• Adapting to climate change means taking action to adjust to its present and future impacts. Adopting an adaptation strategy to climate change, entails looking also at how climate change, such as rising temperatures, impacts the conditions of migrant workers in specific employment sectors, such as agriculture and construction, which employ a large portion of migrant workers in the region.

• The increasing demand for green jobs has also raised the need for developing requisite skills to meet these labour demands through skill mobility partnership initiatives.

• Addressing climate change will require changes in the world of work in the move towards carbon-neutral and environmentally sustainable economies. This transition needs to be just and take place within a framework of social justice, ensuring decent work, reducing inequalities and leaving no one behind, which are all also important principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

• For the ILO, a key element of just transition is the need to include the voices of all workers, including women, migrant workers and persons with disabilities, as part of the process to green the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible, whilst creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. A just transition, therefore, cannot be realized without effective social dialogue involving governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, as well as the engagement of all other relevant stakeholders.

• Dr. Cholewinski referred to the June 2023 ILO International Labour Conference Resolution and Conclusions concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. The Conclusions endorsed the 2015 ILO guidelines concerning the same as the central reference for policymaking and a basis of action.

• He concluded by highlighting the need for good practices to understand the nexus and linkages between climate change and migration, and more specifically the linkages between labour mobility, employment just transition.

3 – Presentation by ESCWA on Joint Policy Brief on Migration and Climate Change

Mr. Milad Pournik, Associate Social Affairs Officer, UN-ESCWA

• Mr. Pournik mentioned the timeliness of examining and understanding the linkages between climate change and migration in the Arab region.

• The Arab States are affected by a wide range of environmental challenges exacerbated by current and projected impacts of climate change. At the same time, the region continues to
be a prominent region of origin, transit and destination for international migration and forced displacement.

- It is pivotal for policy makers, UN Country teams and Resident Coordinators to work on these interlinkages through a whole-of-society approach.

- Following the COP27 outcomes, and ahead of COP28, the Issue-based Coalition on Migration (IBC/M) in coordination with the Regional UN Network on Migration, is working on a joint policy brief on Migration and Climate Change in the Arab Region, on key areas, looking at:
  1. Labour migration, to provide concrete and practical examples to draw upon.
  2. The Impact on women and children, noting that they are not just victims but also agents of change.
  3. Climate Change, Food Insecurity and Migration, looking at how the impacts of climate change on agriculture is shaping food security in the Arab Region.

- Recommendations of the Policy Brief include: 1) Continued advocacy to raise awareness and to influence policymakers’ agendas; 2) Data and research to bridge the information gaps and help develop evidence-based policies; 3) Support and protect the labour force, including migrant workers through rights-based labour mobility pathways; 4) Adopt a gender-responsive, age-sensitive and disability-inclusive lens for integrated and inclusive policies; 5) Protect food security; and 6) Promote institutional development to ensure climate change adaptation measures are mainstreamed across the board.

**4- Interactive Panel Discussion I: The importance of a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all**

**Moderator: Dr. Ryszard Cholewinski, Senior Migration Specialist, ILO Regional Office for Arab States**

The panel discussed the key challenges and opportunities relating to the inclusion of migrants, and migrant workers in particular, in efforts to promote a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. In addition to identifying the need for policy coherence between employment, labour migration and climate change policies, the panel focused on the protection of migrant workers against the adverse effects of climate change, such as occupational heat stress, and on the role of social partners and other stakeholders in contributing to just transition efforts.
Mr. Jamal Abdulnasser Al Sheeba, Worksite Inspection Supervisor, Labour Inspection Department, Ministry of Labour, the Government of Qatar

- Mr. Al Sheeba stated that Qatar had introduced a Ministerial Decree in 2007 to reduce the number of working hours under mid-day heat between June and August. Despite positive results, there were still climate-related work accidents which drew the attention of authorities in Qatar; thus in 2019, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) in collaboration with ILO, conducted research on how to amend the 2007 decree to fully protect migrant workers from extreme heat and presented a number of recommendations.

- Some of the main changes introduced in the updated 2021 Decree include the extension of the prohibited hours of work in outdoor workplaces (where workers are exposed to weather conditions such as solar radiation, humidity and heat) from 01 June to 15 September, starting from 10:00 am until 3.30 pm, and the adoption of the wet-bulb globe temperature (WBGT) index to assess and monitor the level of occupational heat stress. The WBGT is a measure of the heat stress in direct sunlight, which takes into account: temperature, humidity, wind speed, sun angle and cloud cover (solar radiation).

- The Decree’s implementation required publicising the new heat stress measures on the MoL’s website, dissemination of information to and awareness raising for all employers, and training for inspectors on the new Decree’s provisions, as well as the establishment of punitive measures against non-compliant employers.

Mr. Mohammad Maayta, Migration Coordinator, Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC)

- Mr. Maayta observed that migrant workers in some Arab countries exceed the number of nationals, thus it is essential to include them in national adaptation plans related to just transition, taking account also of the need to address possible tensions with nationals who often view migrant workers as competitors in the labour market. One lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic is that there is a shortage of adaptation strategies generally.

- The Kafala system of labour sponsorship remains present in several Arab countries; there is a need to reform the Kafala system through reinforcing the independence of migrant workers by enabling them to change employers, ensure dignified employment, raise the awareness of employers on health insurance, among other issues, and abide by international standards.

- Poor working conditions, discrimination, low wages and occupational, safety and health (OSH) deficits continue to pose challenges, especially in the oil and agriculture sectors which are most impacted by climate change.

- Migrant workers in an irregular situation, including women, are prone to economic hardships, which poses additional challenges in achieving just transition.

- Representation of migrant workers is almost unattainable due to language barriers and/or their inability to take up leadership positions in trade unions; there is therefore a need to change laws limiting trade union rights.

- ATUC’s holistic vision is to focus on the protection of migrant workers; develop training programmes to adapt to new economies; include migrant workers in just transition policies regardless of their migrant status; abolish the kafala system; strengthen labour inspection
and OSH; extend social protection to migrant workers; and build the capacities of trade unions.

Mr. Robert Marinkovic, Advisor in charge of Climate Change-related matters, International Organisation of Employers (IOE)

- Mr. Marinkovic presented IOE’s commitment to supporting the transition to a low-carbon global economy to limit the rise in global temperatures and avoid devastating economic and environmental consequences.
- IOE coordinates the Business Advisory Group on Migration, which regularly engages in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and other policy cooperative frameworks such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).
- IOE is currently preparing a new policy paper on the impact of climate change and mobility from an employer’s point of view to shed light on how green jobs can be potentially filled through labour/skills mobility and advocating for regular migration pathways to meet labour market needs; the paper will be launched at the GMFD Summit in January 2024.
- IOE also monitors and raises awareness of the following key issues:
  - The impact on jobs and competitiveness of climate change policies, carbon markets, emissions trading and other market-based approaches (such as taxation).
  - The impact of sectoral approaches on jobs within sectors but also economy wide.
  - The adaptation challenges: jobs created or lost, re-training and skills needs, capacity building.
  - The links between human rights, climate change and business.
- To address, mitigate and respond to climate-related migration, governments need to pay special attention to infrastructure, dedicated resources and analysis of migration trends; there is a need for data and evidence to provide employers with clear and precise information on migrant workers and their skillsets to make use of mobility trends, which will in turn, allow them to make informed decisions on how these skills can be used in their business operations and to address labour shortages.
- Moreover, it is very important to analyze climate change impact by employment sector and support transitions through, for example, skills anticipation and mobility schemes that can be designed between countries on this basis.

Ms. Manal Bidar, Communication Lead, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Youth Caucus - UNCCD Youth Constituency

- Ms. Bidar, a 20-year-old youth representative from Morocco, stated that being a young person nowadays is not easy with too many crises and grievances in the world.
- When it comes to addressing climate change, grassroot mobilization is not enough, and there is a need for political will and for the UN and the private sector, including the oil industry, to collectively take action and join forces throughout all stages of mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage.
To achieve just transition, everyone has a responsibility and an important role to play, including global corporations and countries that are dependent on fossil fuel, to recognize that climate justice is essential to just transition.

The concept of intergenerational equity must also be taken into account to promote prosperity and quality of life for all and balance the short-term needs of today’s generation with the longer-term needs of future generations.

She presented several key recommendations towards just transition, including:
- As youth constantly struggle to access green jobs, it is essential to expand green job opportunities, climate literacy and capacity building for youth on climate-related issues.
- To stabilise climate change, fossil fuel businesses must be made accountable and accept responsibility for their part in the deterioration of the environment.

5 - Interactive Panel Discussion II: Skills-based labour mobility as an adaptation strategy to climate change

Moderator: Ms. Masako Ueda, Regional Migration, Environment and Climate Change Specialist, IOM RO MENA

Migration, and more broadly, labour mobility, is recognized as a crucial adaptation strategy. The 18th chapter of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report underscores the role of labour migration in enhancing climate resilience. The impact of extreme weather events and slow-onset processes extends to people’s lives, livelihoods, food and water security, and even peace and stability. In light of the mounting challenges posed by climate change, labour mobility offers an opportunity to diversify livelihoods, send remittances to meet the families’ needs and acquire new skills that can benefit both host and origin communities.

Empowering migrants through upskilling is a pivotal aspect that unlocks the potential of migration as an adaptation strategy. To fully address the importance of skills and labour mobility initiatives, it is essential to adopt approaches that are youth-focused, gender-sensitive, migrant-centred, and grounded in human rights principles.

Mr. Mohamed Alaoui, Founder and Managing Director of Africa Climate Solutions

Mr. Alaoui, a founder of an independent firm specializing in sustainable development and climate change, highlighted several ways in which diaspora’s role can contribute to effective green transition through skills partnerships in the Arab region:

- Investment: The diaspora can play a pivotal role in financing green skills development programs and partnerships. This could involve funding scholarships for climate change and sustainability, supporting training and research initiatives, and investing in projects dedicated to environmental causes. The diaspora's extensive networks can be harnessed more effectively for these purposes.
➢ Advocacy: Diaspora communities have the potential to advocate for the significance of green skills in their countries of origin, highlighting the critical benefits. Numerous investment opportunities exist in the Arab region, such as urban farming, which can be emphasized and promoted by diaspora advocates.

➢ Leveraging and Transferring Expertise: Transferring expertise within the diaspora is essential for strengthening entrepreneurship programs, implementing innovative projects, and enhancing collaboration with diaspora networks and relevant stakeholders. This knowledge exchange is key to driving sustainable development.

➢ Climate Funds: It’s important to recognize that climate funds are limited and not easily accessible to diaspora actors. There is a need for educating diaspora communities on how to navigate and access these funds more effectively to support green initiatives.

Ms. Tatcee Macabuag, Program coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)

- Ms. Macabuag stated that enhancing skills development initiatives and recognizing the skills of migrant workers in their destination countries are crucial elements and especially important for those engaged in new technologies, such as migrant workers in innovative fields or drivers of electric vehicles. Acknowledging their acquired skills allows them to apply this knowledge upon returning to their home countries. She added that in sectors like construction, recognizing the skills of migrant workers involved in sustainable housing construction is also vital; this recognition ensures that these workers have livelihood opportunities when they go back to their country of origin, contributing to the green transition through their expertise.

- She continued that incorporating youth migrant workers into training, education, and capacity-building activities is essential, as the current education system often falls short in imparting knowledge about green transition and innovative technologies.

- She also mentioned the importance of engaging women migrant groups as vital contributors to the transition to green economies and that they can play active roles in smart agriculture and development programs and even be involved in the development process of such initiatives.

- A participatory and inclusive approach is essential. Mobility partnerships for skills development play a key role, enabling migrant workers to receive training in their destination countries through bilateral agreements, regional programs, and multi-country partnerships. Supporting diaspora and migrants with entrepreneurship programs and funding for innovative, smart, and green agriculture initiatives is also crucial.

- Addressing inequalities among states is of paramount importance. Developed countries find it easier to transition to greener economies, while less developed countries struggle to meet climate change mitigation goals. If these disparities persist, it could lead to economic repercussions, loss of livelihoods, and potentially increased irregular migration.

- Civil society organizations (CSOs) have a fundamental role to play in advocacy, monitoring, capacity-building efforts, and facilitating dialogues with government counterparts. They can also create platforms for engagement and discussions among CSOs and diaspora communities.
Mr. Marc Tilley, Youth Representative and founding member of the Red Cross Youth Advisory Group on Climate

- Mr. Tilley stated that young people under the age of 30 constitute more than 55% of the population in the MENA region, compared with just 36% of the global population. Youth’s successful participation in economic, social and public life is not only about improving the personal conditions for young people, but also vital to the whole of society’s inclusivity, social cohesion and economic wellbeing. However, economic shocks, such as armed conflict and the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with slow-onset climate, environmental and migratory trends, have exacerbated existing challenges for young people across the MENA region, raising new questions about the availability of opportunities for younger and future generations.

- He continued that as climate risks increase and communities seek to cope, young people are typically the first to move in search of livelihood opportunities. Investing in green skills and jobs for youth will advance the wider societal effort for climate adaptation and for a green and just transition. Not only in countries of departure, but also in countries of transit and arrival. The reasons people choose to move, and the ways in which people move, are complex, varied and often misrepresented, but motivations are linked to safety, security and livelihoods, all of which are threatened by the climate crisis and environmental degradation.

- The cumulative shocks of the climate crisis and environmental degradation will continue to push people to move, either directly or indirectly.

Mr. Tilley referred to three calls for action:

1) Listen to young people; the Key messages from the Continent-wide expansion of the Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, the Environment and Climate Change, addresses critical misunderstandings about how climate change, livelihoods and migration interact with each other, and details clear, achievable policy recommendations;

2) Work together: effective labour migration pathways require cooperation and collaboration across all of society, for the benefit of all society;

3) People-positive migration policy and practice means looking beyond the economic arguments for labour mobility. It is important not not to forget that human lives are at the heart of this mobility.

6 - Interventions from the floor and Q&A:

Mr. Nasser Falah (Kuwait Trade Union Federation participant):

Attaining a just transition in Arab countries requires a departure from the current system. The issue of migrant smuggling was underscored as a pressing concern. To ensure safe and regular migration, it is imperative to integrate migrant workers into social safety networks and bolster labour migration
programs. A call was made for migrant workers to actively participate in trade unions and migrant associations, where climate change discussions can take centre stage in their efforts.

**Mr. Mohamed Alaoui (Private sector/diaspora speaker)**

The importance of having further political will across the MENA region from decision makers was highlighted. Technology is changing fast, thus there is a need to train migrant workers to respond to the fast-changing technologies and means to respond to climate change to ensure a just and green transition.

**Ms. Fafa Sid Lakdar Benzerrouki (National Human Rights Council, Algeria)**

The importance of youth migration is significant. To retain the youth in their home country, they must be provided with accessible means, like the Algerian government’s efforts to support the youth through financial and upskilling trainings. CSOs play a crucial role in aiding and raising awareness among young people. Conducting events and workshops like this is essential for this purpose.

**Ms. Manal Bidar (Youth representative):**

Young people should be at the table and be part of the decision-making process, in addition to providing scholarships, training and capacity building programs. She underscored that no decisions should be made “about youth without youth”.

**Mr. Mohamed Maayta (ATUC representative):**

Trade unions lack the necessary resources and expertise to address climate change effectively; investments must therefore be made in training the unions, evaluating national climate strategies, comparing regional economies, and actively seeking inputs from trade unions in government strategies.

**7 – Closing Remarks:**

Ms. Sara El Khatib, Country Program Director, Gulf & Migration Specialist, MENA, Solidarity Center, Member of the Regional Stakeholder Advisory Group to the UN Network on Migration in the Arab region

- Ms. Khatib stated that the diverse representation at this meeting underscores the significance of the whole-of-society approach, a key guiding principle of the GCM.
- The discussions comprehensively covered the impacts, drivers, and opportunities related to climate change. Speakers emphasized the critical connection between climate change and migration, particularly labour migration. All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure a just and sustainable transition, embracing an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach.
• A just transition must include migrants to achieve sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions, pursuing the realization of the goals and commitments of the Paris Agreement and supporting the implementation of the GCM.

• A just transition involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate and environmental action, including an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises through the creation of green jobs.

• Labour mobility can function as a resilience strategy in the face of climate change, if properly managed, in a way that is just and equitable whilst taking into consideration migrant rights and the needs of both countries of origin and destination by ensuring decent work opportunities, reducing inequalities and leaving no one behind.

• This would also include investing in up-skilling initiatives for green jobs and possibly through the creation of skills mobility partnerships, emphasizing the importance of skills anticipation, development, harmonization and recognition to respond to an increasing demand for green skills.

ANNEX: Annotated agenda

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Guiding Questions:
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- Ms. Tatcee Macabuag, Program coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
- Mr. Marc Tilley, Youth Representative and founding member of the Red Cross Youth Advisory Group on Climate

Guiding Questions:
- How to support regular migration pathways to facilitate skills-based labour mobility and access to alternative livelihoods opportunities (good practices and suggestions for the way forward)?
- How can skills partnerships help to fill green skills gaps in both countries of origin and destination while protecting migrant workers?
- How can social partners and other stakeholders support skills partnerships?
- What are some of the key challenges and opportunities when implementing skills partnerships for green jobs?

Moderator: Ms. Masako Ueda, Regional Migration Environment and Climate Change Specialist, IOM RO MENA

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