

Regional consultation on international migration in the Arab region in preparation for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration Beirut, 26-27 September 2017

Summary of key messages

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a regional consultation on international migration in the Arab region at its headquarters in Beirut on 26 and 27 September 2017, in partnership with the League of Arab States and the International Organization for Migration, and in cooperation with United Nations agencies members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region. The meeting was held pursuant to General Assembly resolution [A/71/280](#) that, under paragraph 22 (a), requests the regional economic commissions to cooperate with other relevant entities of the United Nations system, member States and relevant stakeholders to hold debates and provide input to the preparatory process of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

The two-day meeting was attended by representatives of Arab Governments, regional and international organizations, the private sector, trade unions and civil society organizations to discuss the realities and challenges of migration in the Arab region. Participants agreed the following:

- To recognize that migration is a reality that cannot be prevented by erecting walls and barbed-wire fencing;
- To reaffirm that regional and international cooperation are key to international migration, and that the New York Declaration marked a turning point in the approach to migration in all its dimensions;
- To recognize the inability of countries to deal with all dimensions of migration without cooperation, and therefore the need to conclude bilateral agreements and adopt multilateral mechanisms for migration governance;
- To acknowledge that the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration provides a significant opportunity to identify ways to implement the provisions of the New York Declaration;
- To affirm the importance of respecting the human rights and dignity of migrants and their families;
- To recognize the cross-cutting aspects of migration and asylum, and the distinct and independent pathways of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees;
- To recognize the need to address the root causes of irregular migration, reduce its adverse impact, and combat the different associated forms of organized crime;
- To acknowledge the positive contributions of migrants in countries of origin and of destination;
- To acknowledge the specificities of the Arab region and its unfolding crises;

- To recognize the need to address the key drivers of migration in countries of origin so that migration remains a choice and not an imposed reality;
- To take into account the outcomes of regional consultations held in the Arab region in preparation for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, and particularly the outcomes of the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, and regional consultations by civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa.

Following the presentations and discussions at the sessions of the two-day meeting, and in line with the themes set out in General Assembly resolution [A/71/280](#) on modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, participants agreed to submit a summary of the current regional consultation to the United Nations Secretariat as part of the outputs from regional consultations in preparation for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

I. HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL MIGRANTS, SOCIAL INCLUSION, COHESION AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION, INCLUDING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND INTOLERANCE

1. To promote respect for the human rights and dignity of migrants, irrespective of their legal status, so as to enhance their contribution to society in countries of origin and of destination.
2. To combat all forms of racial and religious discrimination, xenophobia and islamophobia by adopting policies that criminalize such practices and protect migrants, by raising awareness of the positive aspects of migration, and by altering related misconceptions.
3. To recognise the complex nature of migration in the Arab region, notably mixed migration movements; and the challenge of meeting the needs of migrants, particularly the most vulnerable groups, for health services, education, protection and skill development, among others.
4. To develop policies that preserve diversity and cultural inclusion, promote the participation of all, and contribute to migrant family reunification so as to achieve social cohesion.
5. To seek alternatives to the detention of irregular migrants, in accordance with human rights principles, and ensure the decriminalization of irregular migrants.
6. To provide migrants with the right of access to justice and fair trial.
7. To uphold the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and end occupation as a prerequisite to restitution.

II. IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND REGULAR PATHWAYS, INCLUDING DECENT WORK, LABOUR MOBILITY, RECOGNITION OF SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS, AND OTHER RELEVANT MEASURES

1. To increase legitimate migration channels, and provide safe and legal movement opportunities under reasonable controls that respect human rights and preserve human dignity through simplified procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits for various purposes, with a view to reducing illegal migration and its related risks.
2. To conduct awareness-raising campaigns, particularly for young people, on safe migration and the risks of irregular migration, and provide positive alternatives to irregular migration.
3. To promote agreement and coordination between countries of origin and of destination on the voluntary return of migrants, and assist migrants to reintegrate in their countries of origin in accordance with the applied laws in countries of origin and of destination.

4. To promote, evaluate and monitor opportunities for circular and seasonal migration as a means of reducing irregular migration.
5. To prioritize the protection of migrant workers against abuse and exploitation by harmonizing national and international laws and treaties; by building and developing the capacity of institutions tasked with protecting workers; by adopting ethical recruitments and providing decent working conditions (such as removing recruitment fees incurred by workers, adopting clear contracts, and providing health insurance); and by expanding trade union freedoms.
6. To integrate migrant workers into labour markets of destination countries by regularizing their work in all economic sectors. In this regard, some countries in the Arab region have adopted policies for incentivizing the employment of migrants, particularly forced migrants.
7. To recognize the scientific and technical qualifications of migrants; promote the development of their skills in countries of origin and of destination by establishing training centres to upgrade the capacity of the migrant labour force and by recognizing such qualifications, capacities and skills; develop incentives for the employment of skilled migrants, such as linking their skill level to the reduction of work-permit fees; and strengthen cooperation between countries of origin and of destination in the area of training so as to develop the skills of potential migrants.
8. To facilitate administrative and legal procedures before, during and after migration, including providing migrant workers with documents and guidelines that are clearly drafted in their native language prior to departure from their countries.
9. To develop and replace sponsorship regulations with procedures conforming to the principles of human dignity and economic needs by leveraging national and international experiences in this area. For example, some Arab countries have adopted the blue card and the flexible work permit, which are not tied to the employer.
10. To develop policies in line with international conventions for the recognition, protection and management of domestic work, in accordance with international law and human rights.
11. To protect female migrants from all forms of exploitation and violence, and uphold gender equality in terms of salaries and privileges.
12. To emphasize countries' responsibility for their nationals abroad, particularly those living in vulnerable conditions in countries of destination.

III. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION IN ALL ITS DIMENSIONS, INCLUDING AT BORDERS ON TRANSIT, ENTRY, RETURN, READMISSION, INTEGRATION AND REINTEGRATION

1. To enable safe and legal movement opportunities under reasonable controls that respect human rights and preserve human dignity through simplified procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits for various purposes.
2. To rely on effective elements of migration governance by adopting a human rights based approach, and by taking into account gender differences in policy formulation, adoption and implementation.
3. To stipulate social protection for migrants in inter-State bilateral agreements.

4. To underscore the need for cooperation and coordination among various international, regional and national institutions to ensure the consistency of laws and policies, given the complexity of migration issues and overlap between relevant bodies.
5. To emphasize the importance of effective cooperation among Governments, the private sector, trade unions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders, and to adopt multisectoral approaches to migration, particularly in complex humanitarian, development and security settings.
6. To adopt border governance and entry systems that respect human rights and provide protection for migrants against abusive practices.
7. To strengthen cooperation between embassies and civil society organizations working with migrants and diasporas to support migrants and facilitate their integration and positive contributions in host communities, and to establish close ties between migrants and their countries of origin.
8. To promote cooperation with experts, research organizations and academic institutions in the Arab region to build a knowledge base on international migration, and to establish an Arab network for international migration to facilitate the exchange of expertise and best practices.
9. To strengthen the role of national statistical offices and build partnerships among various actors to gather and analyse evidence and data on migration drivers, patterns and trends, disaggregated by age, gender and migration status, among others, to create scientific grounds for the formulation of effective policies on migration.
10. To reaffirm the importance of information exchange between countries of origin and of destination, using electronic means to facilitate bilateral communication.
11. To discuss standardizing concepts related to international migration.

IV. CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS TO ALL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING REMITTANCES AND PORTABILITY OF EARNED BENEFITS

1. To highlight the central role of remittances in fighting poverty and their impact on development in countries of origin, and to leverage remittances as a complementary tool but not as an alternative to international development assistance.
2. To establish national institutions for diasporas; strengthen direct communication with migrants, including from the second and third generations; build trust between diasporas and countries of origin; and benefit from technology and social media platforms in that regard.
3. To develop mechanisms to increase benefits from remittances in terms of investment in countries of origin, including developing a single-window system, simplifying administrative transactions and promoting partnerships between countries and migrants.
4. To boost the positive impact of remittances by promoting innovation in money transfer mechanisms, lowering transfer fees, and implementing financial literacy programmes such as building the financial management capacity of recipients to encourage them to save and invest.
5. To underline that the capacity of migrants to contribute to host countries' economies is contingent upon their engagement and inclusion in society and the labour market.

6. To promote the inclusion of migrants in countries of origin by providing them with means of participation and representation in national institutions, such as granting them the right to vote abroad and granting them parliamentary seats.
7. To strengthen cooperation at the regional level and among countries of origin, transit and destination to maximize the economic and development benefits of migration.
8. To adopt a participatory approach between Governments of destination countries and migrants in reaching common solutions and in adopting laws and policies on labour and investment.
9. To reduce the adverse impact of brain drain by investing in the labour force and the labour market of countries of origin, and by adopting mechanisms to benefit from the intellectual potential and capacity of diasporas.
10. To collect disaggregated data and statistics on migrant remittances and investments to adopt more effective economic policies.
11. To strengthen regional cooperation in facilitating remittances and lowering administrative barriers; and to revisit existing constraints aimed at combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism, so as to facilitate remittances and encourage migrants to invest in countries of origin.
12. To adopt constitutional and legal frameworks that enshrine the role of migrants in promoting economic and social development, and that strengthen their engagement in development.
13. To adopt a participatory approach in the development of national strategies, with a focus on migration, and engage all relevant administrations in developing, implementing and monitoring such strategies and work programmes.

V. ADDRESSING DRIVERS OF MIGRATION, INCLUDING ADVERSE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURAL DISASTERS AND HUMAN-MADE CRISES, THROUGH PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, POVERTY ERADICATION, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION

1. To integrate migration into national development plans, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals, so as to address the development-related causes of migration and ensure that no one is left behind.
2. To address the key drivers of large-scale refugee and migrant flows, and take action in this regard.
3. To consider countries' ability to accommodate the massive influx of migrants, and to grant them access to further development and humanitarian assistance.
4. To intensify efforts to achieve development in countries of origin, and provide citizens with employment opportunities that secure a decent life and reduce illegal migration and its related threats.
5. To actively engage in regional consultative pathways given that they provide opportunities for intercountry exchange of expertise and experience, analyse the problematic issue of irregular migration, and reach appropriate solutions commensurate with the reality of each country.
6. To provide an environment conducive to the return of migrants to their countries of origin and empower them to carry out economic, social and cultural investments therein.

7. To build the capacity of rural communities to increase their resilience and alleviate poverty, so as to reduce forced migration through the promotion of agricultural investment, economic diversification and support for diaspora contributions in this field.
8. To raise awareness of the demographic dividend, population structures and, specifically, the contribution of young people to development.
9. To explore the possibility of integrating migrants from conflict-affected countries into the economy of destination countries so as to economically enable them to return to their countries, whenever possible.
10. To draw attention to the growing impact of environmental degradation and climate change forcing large groups of people to migrate, and to develop policies that reduce environmental degradation and its adverse impact on populations.

VI. SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY, INCLUDING APPROPRIATE IDENTIFICATION, PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO MIGRANTS AND TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

1. To reduce irregular migration, combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking, and prevent criminal networks by raising awareness of the related risks and by enacting and enforcing the necessary laws.
2. To ensure the decriminalization of human trafficking victims and those who are forced to illegally cross borders, and to fight and criminalize smuggling rings in accordance with national and international legislation and laws.
3. To protect migrant girls from exploitation, forced marriage and all forms of gender-based violence.