



REPORT

First Thematic Workshop Under Ninth GFMD Chairmanship On Migration – Connectivity – Business

29 March 2016 ■ Bangkok

I. Inaugural Session

- The first GFMD 2016 thematic workshop on “Migration - Connectivity - Business” (Bangkok, 29 March) was attended by 87 government delegates, representing 48 Member States, 30 delegates from 13 international organizations, 5 civil society representatives and 1 business representative.¹ Its objective was to explore the nexus between connectivity, migration and business and harness its economic, social and political potentials for migrants, businesses, communities and countries while maintaining a people-centered approach.
- The workshop was co-chaired by H.E. Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque, Bangladesh GFMD 2016 Chair, and Begum Shamsur Nahar, Secretary-in-Charge, Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare & Overseas Employment, Bangladesh. It was conducted in a two-part plenary session.² The first part was moderated by Amb. Haque, also featuring presentations from a number of panelists. The working session was moderated by the Governments of Ecuador and France which provided an opportunity for open discussion on the presentations and the theme, including for sharing experiences and offering policy recommendations.
- **Amb. Haque** reflected on the thematic priorities of the GFMD 2016 Chairmanship, under the overarching theme “*Migration that Works for Sustainable Development for All: Towards a Transformative Migration Agenda.*” The first thematic workshop is a first-ever candid conversation within GFMD on the various aspects and issues concerning connectivity vis-à-vis evolving mobility and migration discourse and pathways. While discussion on manifold ‘connectivity’ may not be new, the linkages vis-à-vis migration and global business increasingly merits consideration within GFMD discourse. Given wider and deeper movement of people and range of opportunities being created, physical connectivity within and among economies is preceded by connected communities and societies in so many possible forms. This is increasingly recognized within a supply chain-centric global economic landscape where Regional Trading Arrangements (RTAs) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The

Bangladesh GFMD Chairmanship thus approaches connectivity in terms of connecting ideas, knowledge, technology, culture, people, and movement of goods and services and investment. Referring to diverse regional experiences, Amb. Haque stressed on the need to approach connectivity beyond limited ‘physical’ (e.g. rail, road, maritime, energy, etc.) forms and to consider ‘people-to-people’ manifestations as well – at sub-regional, regional, and or global levels. Referring to available evidences, assessments and trends, he suggested of the potentially transformative effects that connectivity can lend on migration and global business and also bringing regions, economies and societies closer. He identified four drivers of connectivity: (1) multimodal transport serving as the basic form of connectivity; (2) trade, both in terms of distribution network and value chain e.g. sub-national/national/global /regional supply chains connecting economies and growth centers, (3) energy exchange (in respect of production-distribution); and (4) information and communication technologies (ICTs). He thus reasoned that in spite of bringing considerable positive transformation to economies and societies, ‘migration’ is yet to be considered within the interplay of the world of business and connectivity frameworks.

- **Mr. Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN ESCAP** emphasized on sharing experiences, generating a common understanding and establishing norms and forms of cooperation between and among all stakeholders as key to realizing the migration-related targets is international cooperation. He explained that international migration in Asia-Pacific was largely driven by economics - with considerable South-South labour migration flow within sub-regions and across regions. Businesses, he said, remain a key element in the labour migration process and also in the overall governance of migration. He lamented that while physical connectivity has been intense and increasing, labour mobility lagged behind because of restrictive policies. He argued for scope for further reforms in international migration governance i.e. in terms of facilitating the flow of both skilled and unskilled labour which are needed in many countries across Asia-Pacific region.

1. The Workshop drew private sector and civil society to enable them share their perspectives on migration - connectivity - business.

2. Due to time constraints, the previously scheduled two breakout sessions on “Connectivity and mobility: the role of regional and bilateral agreements” and “Connectivity: migration, trade and investments” were dispensed with. Nonetheless, the topics and guiding questions of these sessions were considered during the open discussion.



- **H. E. Virasakdi Futrakul, Thai Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs**, shared Thailand's perspective on connectivity and migration in the ASEAN. Connectivity by land - see - air transportation infrastructure has physically linked people and goods together while software connectivity has facilitated the movement of trade, investment and people across borders. As people-to-people connectivity is an integral part of the whole ASEAN connectivity, migration remains integral to ASEAN regional development as ASEAN strives to establish a resilient, inclusive and people-oriented region, where people are at the center of development³ including migrants. He said, for Thailand, migrant workers' contributions are vital to national economic and sustainable development; hence, efforts are being made to promote migrants' (and their dependents) access to social protection, healthcare and education. Realizing migrant's development potential in a sustainable manner can only be achieved through better migration management, inclusive dialogue and partnerships.
- **Mr. AKP Mochtan, Deputy Secretary General (Community & Corporate), ASEAN Secretariat** explained that connectivity is a very important component of the ASEAN Community, with three elements: physical connectivity, institutional connectivity and people-to-people connectivity. As the seventh largest economy and third largest population in the world, ASEAN adopts a holistic approach in promoting regional integration around three pillars: political-security, economic and socio-cultural. While migration has been a feature of the region for decades, regional integration and connectivity has resulted in increased migration, with one-third intra-regional migrants who are mostly concentrated in low and medium skills and informal sectors. He said, ASEAN acknowledges the contributions of migrant workers to both sending and receiving

countries and it advocates for the recognition of migrant workers not only as agents of development, but as bearers of rights. He apprised that the ASEAN instrument on the protection of migrant workers will be presented at the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Meeting (May 2016).

- In the keynote presentation, **Dr. Khandker Golam Moazzem, Addl. Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue – Bangladesh**, explained the challenges in integrating migration in business and connectivity. He underlined that countries are at unequal footing in the global production networks or value chains, which tend to contribute more to high and middle income countries than the low income countries. This affects the flow of migrants who may be needed to fill in the jobs emerging out of the value chains. At the same time, people are also moving outside regional production networks. Migrants are actually engaged in diverse activities which are partially linked with the global value chains, partly linked with the non-tradable, and partly linked with the non RTA-centric economic activities. Furthermore, traditionally and technically, the existing regulatory structures view migration from a 'trade in service' point of view or, Mode IV of GATS. 'Migration' as such is most often not highlighted in the bilateral trade agreements, rather tend to cover only the movement of certain specific professional skill categories and/or temporary movement of people. Therefore, there is an increasing recognition for new models going beyond Mode IV. The experience of ECOWAS and OECD could be noteworthy in this regard.
- On behalf of the **Global Migration Group (GMG)**⁴, **Ms. Lakshmi Puri**, Assistant Secretary General & Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, emphasized that in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Agenda provides an overall normative, aspirational framework for policy-making at all levels on migration and development; where migration is "indivisible" from other aspects of sustainable development; where it follows an "integrated approach" entailing "government and all of society" and mainstreams migration into key sectors and areas; where "innovation" is sought to reducing both the economic and social costs of migration and enhancing connectivity for trade and investment; where "investment" is at the nexus of migration and development; where migration lends considerable "impact" on sustainable development and its different objectives and goals. She stressed

3. ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025. Details more: <http://www.asean.org/storage/images/2015/November/aec-page/AEC-Blueprint-2025-FINAL.pdf>

4. The Global Migration Group (GMG) is currently chaired by UN Women. Details are at: <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/>

that in order to ensure that migration has a positive impact, human rights of both women and men migrants must be respected, protected and fulfilled at every stage of the migration cycle. She recommended three policy directions for labour migration, connectivity and business: expanding remote work opportunities (*i.e. as much as via Mode IV as also Mode III*), safe and legal pathways for migration, reducing transaction costs of remittances and benefits for those left behind. She also referred to the outcome of the 60th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (NY, 24 March 2016) which affirmed the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

- **Mr. Farooq Ahmed, representative of the International Organization for Employers (IOE)**, representing the voice of global business in migration, lauded the governments for the endorsement of the GFMD Business mechanism. He said that as a latest entrant in the global discourse on mobility and migration, the global employers' community considers an eventual need for a global relocation of resources and labour market adjustments - both at national and global levels. He referred to the emergence of global and regional production networks and value chains which are spurring migration more, facilitated by progressive liberalization of trade, expansion of maritime transports and diffusion of ICTs. Yet, in contemporary world where capital and technology are so mobile, IOE asks for adjustment in the prevailing complexities in labor mobility. IOE thus asked that the global community look at the factors that constrain in reaping the full potential of connectivity and also how the bottlenecks along the path of integrative movements of goods and services and workforce across the world could be unpacked. For IOE, transparency in recruitment of migrant workers, adequate regulatory frameworks at local levels, and adherence to international instruments are crucial.
- **Mr. William Gois**, speaking on behalf of the civil society, appreciated adoption of the ASEAN Declaration to protect the rights of migrant



workers in 2007; and called for full implementation of the ASEAN instrument. He underlined that labor migration is a symptom of the inequalities brought about by the neo-liberal paradigm that promotes free trade and commodification, while connectivity and business promote free trade at the expense of local population, forcing people to find a livelihood and survival outside and away from their community and country in which they were born in. He said that in trade and economic connectivity, it has largely been Trans-national Corporations (TNCs) and large businesses that have benefited most while little has been transformed in the lives of people. To the contrary, he pointed out to increasing fortification of borders and crackdown on migrants and their communities e.g. many migrants being held in detention, including women and children. He also pointed to people's movement along risky pathways and in precarious situations, in the informal sector and care economy. He maintained that connectivity would only bring transformative impacts when people are placed at its center, and drive it from a space that enriches their dignity in an inclusive manner.

II. Plenary Session

During the open discussion, at least 25 interventions from member states, international organizations and civil society participants were recorded. Below is an overview of their key messages:

a) *Nexus between Migration, Connectivity and Business*

- Today, connectivity is transforming the migrants i.e. by allowing them to move more freely. As a country develops, it opens up and gets more connected to the world; and, this, in turn, facilitates more migration. Worldwide connectivity provides better instruments or tools for making fund-transfers (*e.g. by telephone*) and participating in crowd-funding or, participatory investments through virtual platforms.
- Connectivity enables households to develop networks of inter- and intra-household connections in the context of complex trans-local livelihoods. Connections created by migrants become vehicles for the transfer of both economic and social remittances as well as knowledge, technology and skills through person-to-person exchanges as well as business-to-business transactions.
- From economics perspective, mobility is a human response to increasing economic interconnectedness worldwide exemplified by trade, investment, transnational companies and ICT networks and flows. The global economy

consequently requires mobile workforce, flexible human capital and international networks for productivity and growth. Individuals, on the other hand, are drawn by economic opportunities abroad to improve their livelihood. The connectivity-mobility nexus can yield positive development outcomes at individual business and macro-economic levels if corresponding national policies and international frameworks are effectively in place to enable human mobility alongside economic flows.

- From social perspective, the mobility-connectivity nexus is exemplified by migrant workers and diaspora communities which are the embodiment of connectivity due to their mobile livelihood and transnational identities. In order to unfold their multiple potential for connectivity through financial transfers, skills, entrepreneurship, cultural ties and social networks, enabling framework conditions for cohesive relations among migrant host and sending communities need to be in place. As such, integration or rather social inclusion of migrants is an essential condition without which the development benefits of migration cannot be effectively tapped.
- It is important to link connectivity in respect of social, cultural, economic and political dimensions for migrants, particularly in contemporary context where discourse across many countries and contexts are increasingly under stress. A positive narrative on migration – drawing on the 2030 Agenda - urgently need to be developed to illustrate the contributions of migrants to the development of origin and host countries.

b) Connectivity Fostered by ICT Revolution

- The growth and application of ICTs impacts on human mobility in so many ways. Today, migrants do not move under the same circumstances as before. Through the use of communication technologies e.g. mobile phones, migrants are able to have a better understanding of the world before they embark on their journeys, including how to use legal avenues for migrating. Innovation in ICTs has the potential to substantially reduce transaction costs. ICTs can also help create new opportunities for governments to connect with their diaspora.
- A number of national examples were cited e.g. programmes where migrants' investments are matched by governments to support social projects in the countries of origin. This helps to generate new enterprises, which in turn lead to job creation. Also, for instance: organization of fairs and events – in which governments connect electronically with their diaspora to share ideas on

investment.

- On the downside, ICT-fostered connectivity enables smugglers and traffickers to lure their targets. Also, the unlimited access to cultural content from one's country of origin slows down the integration process.
- Over the past three decades, IT has demonstrated its potential as a catalyst /tool for positive change in societies; and it should therefore also be a part of the solution to further strengthen ties between peoples, provide protection for migrants and secure peace and stability.

c) Migration, Trade and Investment

- In a globalized world, increasing human and movement of peoples across borders is characterized by reasons other than economic security, and the ever greater socio-economic and political interactions across diverse sectors and regions.
- Regional partnerships/ integration e.g. through Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) are a key manifestation of economic connectivity. States acknowledge the benefits of establishing regional partnerships e.g. economic corridors to strengthen the links with neighboring countries.
- Physical and economic connectivity projects /initiatives are underway at much faster pace and intensity worldwide. For instance, free movement mechanisms for road transporters in Europe has facilitated fluidity of movement and connectivity between main urban centers through bus networks.
- Within WTO process, Mode III was deemed rather slow compared to other service-related structures. Even in Mode IV schemes, only skilled workers and professionals are allowed to move. A recommendation was made to look into possible ways to optimize both modes of services supply for enhancing labour migration, connectivity and business.

d) Governance Frameworks at National, Bilateral, Sub-Regional /Regional Levels

- State has a primary responsibility to establish enabling environment for safe migration and decent work for migrant workers, including adequate and enforced regulation of migrant worker contracts to ensure safety and decent work terms and conditions. Mutual recognition of skills and academic and professional degrees, qualifications, etc. also remains important.
- Migration policies should be articulated as people-centered and should factor in aspects concerning promotion of migrants' human rights, commitment

to fight against trafficking human beings and migrants smuggling, especially women and children.

- Governments' approach towards migration should be comprehensive and integrated; and should be based inter alia on the principles of shared responsibility between origin and destination countries.
- Multilateral framework on migration need to be enhanced. Specific areas of policy interventions were suggested e.g. portability of benefits, open and transparent dialogue to reduce xenophobia, recognition of diversity and pluralism, integration of migrant workers in global value chains, study on investment patterns of temporary migrants, etc.
- Policy coherence in migration and development is also required under a whole-of-government approach and also coordinated action between origin and destination countries. In the global supply chain, migrant workers remain at the bottom, which makes them vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation. Sound policies in protection of the rights of vulnerable migrant workers as well as regional and international cooperation will enhance the development impact of labour migration as well as reduce irregular flows.
- Public-private partnerships inter alia with the involvement of civil society, trade unions, employers, UN system would be crucial in global migration. The private sector is a crucial determinant in the labour migration process.
- The bilateral /regional trade agreements should consider inclusion of a chapter on mobility. The social clauses that exist in some bilateral /regional trade agreements need to be assessed, monitored and (periodically) reviewed.

e) National Policies

- Participating States shared their experiences and policies aimed at strengthening the nexus between connectivity, migration and business. Some of those policies revolve around trade agreements with neighboring countries e.g. establishing special economic zones, visa-free regimes, policies of free circulation of people under bilateral and multilateral partnerships to facilitate investment and circulation of goods between states.
- Ensuring promotion and protection of human and labour rights of migrant workers was emphasized. In that context, a number of initiatives were cited e.g. national registration systems (*that grant migrants access to services like healthcare and education*), humanitarian visa systems, multi-level integration programs (*that offer information*), counselling, protection from discrimination, employment services, language teaching,

intercultural training and interpretation services.

- A number of countries focus on establishing networks with their emigrant communities abroad, exploring new investment mechanisms. There are instances where governments make use of ICT to engage with their diaspora and discuss investment opportunities at home. In this regard, 'virtual' fairs have proven to be an important tool for fostering participation from migrant communities abroad in economic development of the origin countries. Destination countries also, for instance, are making efforts in creating platforms to enable countries of origin to engage with their diaspora.
- At the national level, countries of destination showcased integration policies that grant services to migrants in all situations, providing health care, education and cultural integration services. Other policies reflect the rights-based approach to migration e.g. provision of humanitarian visas for people fleeing conflict and disasters.
- Public-private partnerships are also being implemented to facilitate land transportation mechanisms for trade purposes. Other physical connectivity examples include: projects in railroad, border crossing, waterways and coastal shipping.

III. Conclusion

- The closing session was chaired by **Begum Samsun Nahar, Secretary-in-Charge**, Ministry of Expatriates Welfare & Overseas Employment - Bangladesh, in the presence of **Amb. Norachit Sinhaseni**, Member and Spokesperson of the Thai Constitution Drafting Committee, House of Representatives. The latter stressed that soft or institutional infrastructure must not lag behind physical infrastructure. Examples of what needs to be done are: mutual recognition agreements, regional transport arrangements and similar cross-border procedures. Without such necessary software, the physical infrastructure that countries have invested in so heavily are unlikely to be fully utilized nor realized to their full potential.
- The session concluded that business and migration connectivity will only be a reality if it is supported by policy harmonization and a balance between the rights of migrant workers and economic gains of trade and business.
- As global businesses continue to recognize and thrive on the value of sourcing people from diverse backgrounds, capabilities and skills, a new business model with an effective framework on the triple link of "migration-business-connectivity" is needed to achieve sustainable development. Integrating migrants' rights into this triple link, however, is still the subject of further discussion. ■