

Roundtable 1: The Governance of Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment Landscapes and Future of Work

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear Gfmd friends. I would first like to thank the UAE for a very successful chairmanship despite the difficult times.

Roundtable 1 focused on the *Governance of Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment Landscapes and Future of Work*. Under the co-chairmanship of Zimbabwe and Egypt, we had very rich and stimulating discussions along four thematic areas. A broad range of experiences were highlighted among different governments and other stakeholders.

1) The first theme concerned human-centred approaches to addressing future of work challenges and opportunities for labour migration.

Participants shared examples of approaches used at local, national and regional levels according to ‘whole of government’ and ‘whole of society’ frameworks.

It was noted that there are generally very large wage gaps between foreign and national workers. Many migrant workers are usually indebted, in some cases due to their having to pay high recruitment fees and other costs. They lack job security, often from their predominance in the informal economy or in temporary work, and many live in cramped housing. Conditions have worsened due to the pandemic, with high exposure rates for migrant workers. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers have had to return without neither full

compensation for their previous work, nor a secure employment back home. There have been many examples of reduced wages, random dismissals and breach of contracts.

Although migration control is based on state sovereignty, a rights-based approach includes several issues, which are often missing in policies: The overall protection of the rights of migrants; counteracting discrimination and xenophobia; gender equality; equal pay for equal jobs; recognition of rights at the workplace; freedom of association and the right to join labour unions; and access to social protection. Governments can be party to or act in the spirit of ILO and UN conventions relating to the rights of migrant workers. Such international legal norms provide minimum standards and guidance for the formulation and implementation of labour migration policies, e.g. on recruitment fees and costs. There are recent laws adopted in the Middle East which can be linked to the conventions, even though the conventions themselves are not ratified by those governments.

To improve the current situation, source country governments could provide more information about migrant rights before departure, and their Embassies could assist migrants in the countries of destination. Destination countries could involve various stakeholders and partners in monitoring of migrants' employment conditions. In this regard, governments should implement the 2030 Agenda, especially goal 8 on decent work for all, which should interrelate with other relevant SDGs.

From a business perspective, well-managed migration systems are becoming increasingly important. They need to provide clarity; transparency; and

consistency. They should enable businesses to work within the frameworks of predictability, stability and flexibility.

Looking beyond the pandemic, there was some discussion about the future of work. While digitalization is overall positive, there are also some risks. Advances in technology are sometimes used to outsource work to countries with less protection. Another aspect of digitalization is the gig economy, which entails less protection and job security, or the absence of insurance. The digital divide could be counteracted by empowering migrants. There is a need for training and skills to use digital tools, and the overall transfer of technology from developed to developing countries.

Several other lessons learned were shared. For instance, more investments in securing decent work and social protection can level the playing field across businesses and facilitate the formalization of informal labour markets. Governments can do more to ensure fair recruitment practices. More attention is needed to the reintegration of migrant workers upon return. One example mentioned was the common social stigma against domestic workers. This makes it hard for them to work locally after return, or to work in other jobs. Both countries of origin and countries of destination should recognize this profession. Another aspect of return is that the social protection systems in developing countries such as Nepal, is already under a lot of stress. We therefore need to consider reintegration within the perspective of overall labour market policies for all workers. Investments in agriculture could e.g. benefit both stayers and returnees.

2) The second theme focused on data and migration governance.

Discussions concerned the most significant gaps in available data and analytical tools, and the priority focus areas for policymakers. Those areas related to the role of dedicated research in policy formulation, and how standardized data collection and surveys could help policymakers to both meet the challenges of the pandemic, and better anticipate future labour migration needs. Tools are available to support governments in this regard, such as the methods and guidance developed by the intergovernmental International Conference on Labour Statisticians (ICLS).

The discussions revealed a need for improved interagency-coordination in regard of data. There is also a need for advances in access to data and data sharing. Accuracy, consistency and reliability are all important aspects of data in policymaking. Data gaps were identified concerning women and youth as well as forecasting methods. Training and skills development could be used in several developing countries in understanding labour shortages and skills gaps. This could help ensuring better job matching in recruitment.

Partnerships are also needed in terms of data collection and principles for data sharing, including improved skills and training programmes, e.g. across African countries. Ministries of labour, foreign affairs and internal affairs as well as development planning could cooperate in this regard.

In addition, it was pointed out how proper research based on accurate data is increasingly needed for policymaking, e.g. regarding victims of trafficking. Improved data needs to be used in planning of policies and in evaluations. The

standardization of surveys can also provide insights to policymakers, e.g. on domestic workers. Such surveys could also be used for future policy measures. With an improved evidence-base, policymakers will be able to identify the specific needs of people in a development context.

3) The third theme focused on regular migration pathways, skills and job matching.

A key issue was how to upskill migrants to enable them to access job opportunities abroad, and upon return back home. It was noted that the private sector plays an important role here. Moldovan and Filipino returnees in the wake of the pandemic were mentioned as cases. Although they were not entitled to unemployment benefits as they had worked abroad, the Moldovan government made specific provisions for them to be covered. The Filipino government has also stepped up its support to returning migrant workers in order to improve reintegration.

It was also noted that migrants might need regular pathways at different steps in their careers. Improved policy coherence could be achieved through linking migration policy to education, employment and labour market policies. Training can also be scaled-up through cooperation with local authorities and municipalities. Governments could also tailor their admission and visa schemes to meet present and future needs and challenges. One case mentioned involved Russia, which, like most other countries, was addressing the consequences of the pandemic. There had been a high demand for low skilled migrant labour, e.g. in delivery services. Now when a large share of them have left, many employers are having a hard time finding staff. This also shows that policies

need to be prepared for labour market complementarities, adjusting them to the role of migrants in the overall economy.

4) The fourth theme concerned partnerships, international and bilateral cooperation for improved labour migration governance.

Lessons were shared regarding partnerships and cooperation to anticipate and address future labour market demands.

It was noted that international cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships are more efficient than unilateral action. Partnerships can strengthen the application of international treaties and frameworks such as the Global Compact for Migration. Also the Gfmd should continue as an open platform for dialogue, bringing together various stakeholders. Such frameworks could encourage rights-based bilateral and multilateral agreements that protect migrants' rights. Negotiations around such agreements could involve social dialogue with employers and labour unions with a view to ensuring skills-matching, labour inspections and migrants' access to justice.

In regard of a whole of society approach, the importance of citizen engagement was highlighted together with the issue of gender equality. Youth issues and the role of youth organizations were also raised, as well as the importance to include other stakeholders such as businesses and trade unions. Partnerships could address reskilling, rebuilding capabilities, and recrafting protective policies. In addition, they could be used to better manage the expectations of industry stakeholders.

It is also important to involve cities, municipalities and sub-national regions in such dialogue. The local level often has an advantage in understanding migrants and facilitating their daily lives, and to plan and implement policies. Cities of origin and destination are well placed to cooperate in finding solutions. Both parties should pay attention to reintegration and reskilling with a particular focus on women. An example is a city to city project in the Mediterranean region. Two other examples include Indonesia, which works with civil society, businesses, unions and migrant associations in both source and destination countries to protect the vulnerable; and Nepal, where the local government level is reaching out to migrant workers in regard of data, information and skills needs.

Finally, it was suggested that when governments develop bilateral labour agreements, they could involve both migrant associations, unions and employers, cities and regions to achieve more comprehensive packages.

Thank you.