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GMG Discussion Paper

Realizing the Inclusion of Migrants and Migration in the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*

MEMBERS OF THE GMG

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
International Labour Organization (ILO)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
United Nations Regional Commissions
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
United Nations University (UNU)
World Bank
World Health Organization (WHO)

The 18 members of the Global Migration Group (GMG) welcome the inclusion of migrants, migration and mobility in the outcome document of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 development agenda.¹ The proposal reflects the consensus view of the United Nations General Assembly reached at the 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD)² acknowledging the important contribution made by international migration to development in countries of origin, transit and destination. In including migrants and migration in the post-2015 development agenda, the GMG stresses the need to place people at the heart of sustainable development and to implement a “rights-up-front approach” aligned with international human rights and labour standards.

In particular, the GMG is greatly encouraged by the inclusion of targets related to migrants and migration in proposed SDGs 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work), 10 (reducing inequality), 16 (peaceful and inclusive

societies) and 17 (means of implementation and global partnership) Acknowledging the contribution of migrants and migration to global development marks a major step forward compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which failed to include any references to migration.

International migrants, refugees and displaced persons also feature in the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General³, especially in the context of population dynamics, poverty reduction

* Background note for the GMG communiqué, “Call to strengthen the inclusion of migrants and migration in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda” available at <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/>

¹ See A/68/970

² See A/RES/68/4

³ See A/69/700

and inequality, as well as in connection with inclusive economies, decent employment and reduction of the costs of transferring remittance.

1. Why migration matters

Migration is a truly global phenomenon with migratory movements occurring both within and across regions. Today, there are more than 232 million international migrants worldwide, equal to 3.2 per cent of the world's population. Approximately half of all international migrants are women⁴ and seven out of ten international migrants are of working age (20 to 64 years), with young people aged 18 to 29 representing a large proportion of those migrating. If those who move internally within a country are added, migrants amount to close to one billion persons or one-seventh of the world's population. Millions more are directly and indirectly impacted by migration, including migrants' families and communities of origin, transit and destination.

Most people migrate to improve their livelihoods, to seek decent work and a better life, and to pursue new opportunities for themselves and their families. Many are compelled to flee their homes to escape human rights violations, discrimination, violence, poverty, food insecurity or environmental degradation. Many others are refugees fleeing persecution and conflict. The complex nature of contemporary migration flows in combination with marked demographic imbalances, labour and skills mismatches, the accelerating pace of regional economic integration, and deepening inequalities, means that mobility is expected to continue to increase in the years to come.

When grounded in human rights, and underpinned by humane, fair and well-governed migration policies, migration can be a powerful tool for development. It has the potential to lift millions of people out of poverty, widen educational opportunities, help match labour demand with supply, foster entrepreneurship and innovation, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, technology, skills and cultural practices. Migrants also contribute significantly to countries of origin through the transfer of financial and social remittances, by encouraging trade linkages, and by making investments. Through temporary and return migration, migrants can also bring needed skills to their countries of origin.

Migration may, however, also come with high social costs, as migrants are often separated from their spouses, children and elderly family members. Furthermore, if appropriate policies aligned with international human rights and labour standards are not implemented, migration can negatively affect development, and contribute to inequalities, exacerbating the violations of migrant rights. In large part, it is the social, cultural, economic and political context in which the movement of people takes place which largely determines whether migration translates into increased opportunities and well-being or deprivation and vulnerability.

Mainstreaming migration into national and local development policies, processes and legislation reinforces the positive inter-linkages between migration and development. The GMG is currently developing guidance for United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and “Delivering as One” (DaO) initiatives.

2. Migrants and migration in the OWG outcome document

In the OWG’s proposal for a set of global sustainable development goals and targets, several migration themes are clearly discernible. In particular, the proposal includes targets that seek to leverage migration for development, address migration challenges, and to facilitate labour mobility.

(a) Safe and regular migration

Removing obstacles to safe and regular migration, including labour mobility, as well as developing and implementing well-governed migration policies, in line with human rights and labour standards, is one of the surest ways to address irregular migration, prevent human trafficking and migrant smuggling, combat migrant exploitation and abuse, and protect migrants’ rights, and enhance their livelihoods and well-being.

Fair and effective policies addressing all aspects of the migration process are essential for harnessing the development benefits of migration and for reducing related economic and social costs. In this regard, it is critical for the international community, in particular at regional and sub-regional levels, to ensure that the decision to migrate is one that is well-informed and one that is voluntarily made, rather than driven by factors such as pervasive inequalities, discrimination, human rights violations and the lack of opportunities for decent work and livelihoods in countries of origin. Further, the international community needs to consider how existing border protection and migration policies may encourage or compel migrants to avail themselves of unsafe and irregular means of migration. The costs of indifference and inaction are much too high, and result in the death of thousands of migrants each year at sea or while crossing international land borders. The Secretary-General's report on the protection of migrants⁵ addresses the challenge to and recent practices in promoting and protecting the human rights of all migrants at international borders.

(b) Reducing inequalities

Inequalities are a barrier to the attainment of sustainable and inclusive development. The exclusion of people from access to adequate housing, nutritious food, quality health services

⁵ A/69/277

and education, drinkable water and sanitation and other essential services goes against the very objective of the post-2015 development agenda, which places people at its center. As stated in the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General⁶, we must also include refugees, migrants and displaced persons to realize the objective of the agenda which is to leave no one behind.

The international human rights framework provides the norms and mechanisms to effectively address the inequalities that migrants often face. A human rights framework that is effectively implemented is an indispensable precondition for all migrants, including those in irregular status, to enjoy their rights to an adequate standard of living, including food and housing, as well as the highest attainable standards of health, education, social protection and participation in cultural life in a non-discriminatory manner. Such an approach necessitates the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices at the national and local level, the strict enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation as well as the empowerment of migrants and their involvement in decision-making. Further, progress in the effective promotion, protection and fulfillment of migrants' human rights, regardless of their migration status should be monitored.

Efforts to reduce inequalities should also address some of the root causes of migration, including poverty, food insecurity, deprivation from access to water and resources as well as conflict and insecurity in countries of origin. The poor often migrate out of distress, especially in rural areas where low agriculture productivity and limited economic diversification lead to low paid and precarious employment opportunities. Hence, the support towards rights-based, well-informed and gainful migration should be combined with efforts to provide greater opportunities for people in distress to secure viable livelihoods for themselves in the countries of origin.

(c) Decent work, labour migration and protection of migrant workers

Migrant workers contribute significantly to the development of countries of destination by complementing the skills of native-born workers, creating jobs, and filling important labour market shortages. However, migrant workers are often denied access to equal and fair wages, jobs matching their skills (often because of the non-recognition of credentials and qualifications), decent working conditions, trade union rights, and social protection.

Specific employment sectors, such as domestic and care work, agriculture, and construction are particularly at risk of poor or precarious working conditions and lack of social protection for migrant workers. The vulnerability of migrant workers is often aggravated further by informal intermediaries and private employment agencies operating outside the legal and regulatory framework. All too often these entities perpetrate abuses during the recruitment

⁶A/69/700

and placement process, including exercising physical and sexual violence, charging excessive recruitment fees, practicing debt bondage or making illegal wage deductions linked to repayment of recruitment fees. Migrants in an irregular situation are exposed to even graver risks owing to their undocumented status.

In view of the above, there is need to reduce the costs of labour migration, including recruitment costs, to effectively regulate private employment and recruitment agencies, and to promote good business practices and due diligence across supply chains. Recruitment costs paid by migrant workers to recruitment agents, on top of the fees paid by the employers, are a major drain on poor migrants' incomes and remittances. They divert the money sent by migrants from the family to illicit recruitment agents and money lenders. Almost 10 million people use regular channels to migrate in search of employment every year. A large number of them pay illegal recruitment fees to the recruitment agents. According to a KNOMAD survey last year, worker-paid recruitment costs averaged \$1,955 in Kuwait with Bangladeshis paying the highest, ranging between \$1,675 and \$5,154 (Abella and Martin 2014). On top of these direct fees paid to recruitment agents, migrant workers are often subjected to usurious interest rates of over 50 percent on loans taken to cover the costs of migrating (Abella and Martin 2014). The development community should endeavor to eliminate illegal recruitment fees (in excess of genuine costs related to airfare, visa, and training costs). This would require effective regulation and monitoring of recruitment agencies implemented in constructive collaboration between the sending and the receiving countries.¹ For migration to fully meet its development potential, migrant workers must be protected from any forms of discrimination including on the basis of citizenship or gender, as well as from other violations of their rights in accordance with international human rights and labour standards. In the same vein, creating more opportunities for safe and regular migration for low and semi-skilled workers, ensuring the portability of migrants' pensions, health-care entitlements and other social security benefits, as well as the recognition of their skills and qualifications would enable migrants and their families to realize their full human developmental potential. Bilateral labour agreements and free labour mobility within the context of regional economic integration provide an important context for strengthening the protection of migrant workers and promoting decent work.

(d) Costs of transferring remittances

Remittances are private funds, which contribute to the improvement of the food security, education, health, well-being and housing of migrants and their families. At the macro-economic level, remittances can improve creditworthiness and access to capital, increase the level and stability of foreign exchange receipts, contribute to international reserves, help finance imports, and improve the current account position of recipient countries.

In 2015, remittance flows to developing countries are expected to reach US\$ 440 billion. Remittance costs have been declining over time but as of the last quarter of 2014, remained

high at 8 percent of the amount transferred for all developing countries, and at 12 percent for Sub-Saharan Africa. Taking the cue from the G20 5X5 objective, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development has proposed a target for reducing remittance costs to 3 percent by 2030. Reducing remittance costs from the current average of 8 percent to, say, 3 percent would translate into a saving of over \$20 billion annually for the migrants and their relatives. A 10 per cent rise in remittances could also lead to a 3.1 per cent reduction in poverty.

In high-cost remittance corridors, it will be critical to reduce regulatory barriers to cross-border transactions in addition to promoting transparency and economic reforms. This is particularly important for rural areas in developing countries, where the population has limited access to financial services. Remittance transaction costs can also be reduced through the elimination of exclusivity contracts between national postal services and money transfer operators. An important barrier to lowering remittance fees arises from the costs associated with implementing anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terror (AML/CFT) requirements. Further development at the national level of a risk-based approach to AML/CFT regulation could help reduce these costs. Facilitating the use of more efficient technologies and fostering competition in the remittance market, while still complying with AML/CFT requirements, could reduce overall compliance costs. An adequate regulatory framework should promote the interoperability of platforms or even shared infrastructure to reduce operational costs, increase the number of remittance transfer networks and promote financial inclusion, as well as encourage competition and achieve economies of scale. Moreover, promoting transparency and information-sharing on the associated costs through, for instance, price databases, would enable remittance senders to choose the most cost-efficient options.

Similarly, policies to promote financial and technical literacy among migrants and remittance recipient households, particularly in rural areas, are important to enable them to make more informed decisions about the use and management of remittances and savings. In addition, there is need to adopt better mechanisms to leverage diaspora savings for development financing – including through financial counselling, and establishment of relevant investment products. In general, the promotion of greater linkages between the post-2015 development and the sustainable development financing agendas is required.

(e) Ending human trafficking

Each year, thousands of men, women and children across the globe are abused by criminals who regard human beings as commodities that can be exploited or traded for profit. Almost half (44 per cent) of the estimated 21 million people subjected to forced labour globally are international or internal migrants, many of whom are victims of sexual exploitation. Women are especially vulnerable in this regard and account for between 49 per cent of detected trafficked persons. Children are also particularly vulnerable and constitute 33 per cent of the

total percentage of trafficked persons, which reflects a five percent increase from the 2012 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Reducing the number of persons who fall victim to human trafficking, particularly women and children, is an important target that the global community should achieve.

Interventions to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling should include effective monitoring of recruitment agencies; sharing of databases on trafficking; dissemination of information on the human rights of migrants before, during and after the migration process; adoption as well as effective implementation of key conventions and international human rights and labour standards, and designing more channels for regular migration and regularization of irregular status in specified instances.

(f) Migration and the acquisition and recognition of skills

Migrants are often among the most creative, enterprising and innovative members of society, bringing diversity and enriching the societies in which they live and work. Yet, the lack of recognition of their skills and qualifications, both at destination and upon return, adversely affects their well-being, access to productive employment and decent work, and human development potential while their occupation in jobs below their skill level delimits their contribution to the economy of receiving countries. Moreover, the emigration of skilled workers (“brain drain”) can undermine the development efforts of small developing economies, particularly in such crucial sectors as health and education. It is important therefore that policies facilitating safe and regular migration and mobility as well as initiatives to ensure decent work and adequate protection of migrant workers, as described in (a) and (c) above, give due attention to the recognition of migrants’ skills and qualifications.

Improving the recognition of educational and professional qualifications and skills across the globe, including through multilateral agreements covering trade in services through the movement of natural persons, would constitute an important step to reduce deskilling or “brain waste”. In this respect, the GMG supports the implementation of *WHO Code of Practice on International Recruitment of Health Personnel*, which discourages the active recruitment of health personnel from developing countries facing critical shortages of health workers, encourages the adoption of policies to facilitate temporary migration, and promotes health workforce development. Effective implementation of existing and establishment of new regional as well as global norms and standards in other policy areas, including the UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education would be another tangible action. Bilateral and multilateral agreements and programmes to foster greater complementarity in technical and vocational training, also for temporary or seasonal migrant workers, including agricultural and care workers, would promote accountability and transparency for the recognition of learning experiences and thus enhance

migrant workers' skills and development potential, as well as facilitate their possible reintegration upon return.

3. The way forward: Migrants and migration in the post-2015 development agenda

The GMG is undertaking initiatives to implement the Secretary-General's eight-point agenda for action, as elaborated in his report on international migration and development to the 2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (A/68/190), which acknowledges the important contribution of migrants and migration to development, including in the consideration of the post-2015 development agenda. In particular, it underscores the need to advance efforts to: (a) protect the human rights of all migrants; (b) reduce the costs of labour migration; (c) eliminate migrant exploitation, including human trafficking; (d) address the plight of stranded migrants; (e) improve public perceptions of migrants; (f) integrate migration into the development agenda; (g) strengthen the migration evidence base; and (h) enhance migration partnerships and cooperation.

With regard to the integration of migrants and migration in the post-2015 development agenda, in addition to recognizing the need to place people at the centre of sustainable development in line with the "Human Rights-up-Front" initiative of the Secretary General and with international human rights and labour standards, the GMG recognizes the need to:

- (a) Address the root causes of migratory movements where individual decisions to migrate are based on necessity rather than genuine choice;
- (b) Increase the opportunities for regular migration
- (c) Address the abusive smuggling of migrants, and ensure that counter-smuggling measures do not themselves have a negative human rights impact. Smugglers can act in wanton disregard for the lives and safety of migrants, and smuggled migrants often face multiple forms of exploitation throughout the migration process, including falling prey to trafficking. Counter-smuggling measures that criminalize irregular migration can lead to unnecessary detention, and heighten the vulnerability of migrants;
- (d) Enhance protection for child migrants and other vulnerable groups and end the administrative detention of migrants, particularly children, including where appropriate through putting in place alternatives to detention which are in line with human rights standards;
- (e) Protect the rights of migrant workers and their families, ensure access to decent employment and social protection, and reduce the costs of labour migration;
- (f) Improve the public perception of migrants as part of the efforts to promote inclusive societies. There is need to invest in combatting discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and their families, including through broader advocacy and greater public awareness about the contributions migrants make to countries of origin and destination as well as their experiences; and

- (g) Explore opportunities for leveraging migrants' social and financial resources, within the context of the SDGs and financing for development processes.

In the further elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, the GMG draws attention to the importance of:

1. ***The proposed migration-related*** targets, in keeping with people-centered, inclusive, human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to sustainable development. Specifically, the GMG calls for retaining the targets related to: (a) protecting the rights of all workers, including migrant workers; (b) facilitating safe and regular migration and mobility; (c) reducing remittance transaction costs; (d) eliminating human trafficking; and (e) enhancing capacity building to increase the availability of reliable disaggregated data, including by migratory status. The GMG also highlights the importance of developing sound indicators to measure progress towards migration-related targets.
2. ***Preventing causes leading to displacement (natural and man-made), and ensuring durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons.*** Displacement issues also need to be addressed in the formulation of indicators concerning targets whose implementation will have an impact on the well-being of refugees and internally displaced person (IDPs), including those relating to health, education, gender equality, decent work, urban planning and disaster risk reduction.
3. ***Considering migration as part of the means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development*** with a view to fostering partnerships on migration and mobility – including at the regional level and through multilateral agreements covering trade in services – that:
 - Involve a wide range of stakeholders such as the private sector, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society and migrant/diaspora organizations;
 - Promote policy coherence, including on social, employment, economic, trade, investment, agricultural, industrial and environmental policies, within and across governments as well as with other stakeholders; and
 - Address key challenges such as reducing the costs of labour migration, including those relating to remittance transactions costs and recruitment, enhancing portability of social security benefits and other acquired rights, and promoting mutual recognition of diplomas, qualifications and skills.
4. ***Including migrants, displaced persons, refugees and stateless persons in a standardized list of groups in vulnerable situations and, where relevant and feasible, in the disaggregation of data in the post-2015 development agenda.*** This would ensure that progress in achieving key development goals and targets in areas such as poverty, education, health, social protection, food, housing, water and sanitation, decent work and reducing inequalities are appropriately elaborated and monitored.

The GMG stands ready to support Member States, the international community and other relevant stakeholders in their efforts to foster the inclusion of migrants and migration in the post-2015 development agenda, to elaborate as well as to contribute to monitoring and review of targets and indicators that reaffirm a commitment to human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches, promote multi-stakeholder cooperation as well as coordination and coherence at all levels.

¹ Under the auspices of the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Bank are presently undertaking empirical research to assess the extent of labor migration costs.