



Summary of Discussion

Contemporary Challenges of Migration Governance in Asia

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OVERVIEW

Asia is home to over 4.5 billion people. In 2020, more than half (69 million) of the world's migrants (115 million) were in Asia, which is a significant increase from the 44 million in 2015 (World Migration Report 2022). South-South migration represents a significant proportion of migration within, and from, Asia. In 2021, Asia received USD 306 billion in remittances (Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2021; IOM), which is more than any other region in the world. At the same time, the region continues to face multiple challenges when it comes to migration governance.

Migration drivers in the region are multiple and varied, with a range of push and pull factors within and across subregions in Asia. The region itself has a multi-dimensional and complex migration context shaped by issues related to displacement, conflict and inequalities among other factors.

Given this backdrop, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the Coordinator and Secretariat for the Bangladesh UN Network on Migration (BDUNNM),¹ organized a Dialogue on Contemporary Challenges of Migration Governance in Asia on 09 May 2023 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The objective of the dialogue was to provide an opportunity to discuss the emerging challenges in the region and explore ways to strengthen multi-level migration governance.

Mr Abdusattor Esoev, BDUNNM Coordinator and IOM Bangladesh Chief of Mission, gave welcome remarks. Prof. Shahidul Haque Senior Advisor, IOM Bangladesh and Bangabandhu Chair, University of Delhi provided an overview of "Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities of Migration Governance in Asia". Panelists included Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Chairperson of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU); Dr. Rahena Begum, Program Manager, Dhaka Ahsania Mission; Prof. Abul Barkat, Chief Advisor, Human Development Research Centre (HDRC); Advocate Md. Tajul Islam; and Prof. Saleemul Huq OBE, Director, International Centre for Climate Change & Development (ICCCAD). The dialogue was graced by Ms. Sarah Lou Ysmael Arriola, IOM Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and Ms. Gwyn Lewis, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh. Approximately 40 members of the Bangladesh UN Network on Migration and its Technical Working Groups attended the dialogue.

1. The Bangladesh UN Network on Migration (BDUNNM) established in July 2019, continues to support the Government for the implementation of Global Compact for Migration and other interventions. The BDUNNM is comprised of representatives from 10 UN agencies and is supported by Technical Working Groups on Labour Migration and Counter Trafficking in Persons which includes the civil society, private sector and trade unions.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Figure 1: Summary of Recommendations from the Dialogue to Improve Migration Governance

PROCEEDINGS OF THE DIALOGUE

During his remarks, Mr. Esoev highlighted that:

- The Asia region, one of the most dynamic regions in terms of migration and human mobility, faces various challenges such as conflict, violence and effects of disaster, climate change and environmental degradation.
- Migration continues to be a structural feature of an interconnected Asia-Pacific region and is one of the key factors shaping the region with profound social and economic impacts.

He added that Bangladesh as the first country to have been recognized as a GCM Champion Country, continues to be committed to the 360-degree approach to migration, which was showcased through the “Pledging Initiative” at the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). He reiterated the commitment of the BDUNNM, to take forward the agenda of safe, orderly and regular migration ‘delivering as one’ for the betterment of migrants.

Prof. Shahidul Haque, Senior Advisor, IOM Bangladesh and Bangabandhu Chair, University of Delhi provided an overview of “Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities of Migration Governance in Asia”. He reiterated that migration is essential, inevitable, and enduring feature of our society and economy. He added that given the current context, there are four possible scenarios in terms of the future of human mobility:

1. Reduced regular migration due to restrictive policies (Rise of irregular migration)
2. Increased forced migration due to climate change and conflicts (Survival migration)
3. Reduced demand for migrant workers due to technological advancements
4. Increased regular migration due to inclusive and pragmatic policies

Three core impacts of migration:

1. Migration is a fact of life, a defining feature of humanity and our world – and above all, with a positive phenomenon enriching societies and economies.
2. If poorly managed, migration generates huge challenges, from tragic loss of life to rights abuses and social tensions.
3. Effectively managing migration and protecting the rights of all migrants requires strengthened international cooperation.

~ António Guterres, UN Secretary General;
Briefing on report on GCM in February 2022

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For determining future courses of action in the migration area, he emphasized on the following:

1. Despite migration being a development phenomenon, movement across border has been a debated, sensitive and emotive issue that raises obstacles for a trust-based inclusive society
2. Global connectivity and international cooperation are unlikely to be successful and sustainable without people being allowed to move in a orderly and regular manner
3. Securitization of migration is not an effective option for addressing international complexities
4. There is crisis in terms of cooperation and migrants need to be seen as solution rather than problems
5. An innovative migration and mobility system and constructive dialogue for increased international cooperation for migration governance is essential
6. Migration issues should be addressed within frameworks of international norms and practices keeping regional context in consideration

SUMMARY OF PANEL DISCUSSION

To bring forward contextual challenges and pertinent issues, a panel of experts shared their perspectives:

1. Labour Migration

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Chairperson of Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka and Founding Chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU); Co-Chair, Labour Migration Technical Working Group (LMTWG) of the BDUNNM.

Issues discussed:

- The challenges of migration both for the migrant workers and other stakeholders were not less even in the pre or post pandemic time.
- In the last five years (2017-2022), some 709 female migrant workers' dead bodies have been received from different destination countries, which needs to be delved into more.
- Need to address issues related to climate change, social cost of migration and unethical recruitment practices.

2. Counter-Trafficking in Persons

Speaker: Dr. Rahena Begum, Program Manager, Dhaka Ahsania Mission and Co-Chair, Counter Trafficking in Persons Technical Working Group (CTIPTWG) of the BDUNNM

Issues Discussed:

- Trafficking in persons is modern-day slavery and a global problem, and Bangladesh along with other regional and international partners is making continuous efforts to eliminate this problem.
- The most common forms of human trafficking identified in Bangladesh include trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, domestic servitude, forced labour and other exploitations in both internal and cross-border settings.
- Although Bangladesh remains in tier 2 of the US TIP report, the Government of Bangladesh has taken a strong stand by signing the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.



3. Mechanism of Migration Governance

Speaker: Prof. Abul Barkat, Chief Advisor, Human Development Research Centre (HDRC)

Issues Discussed:

- The Asia region lacks of effective frameworks to address the complex needs of migrant workers.
- There is a need for an Action Plan for GCM which would provide a strategic framework to harness the benefits of migration and create an enabling environment for maximizing the developmental potential of Bangladesh.

It will require multiple forms and formats of sub-regional, regional, and international cooperation, collaboration, and partnership. Strengthening regional cooperation will remain a critical step toward achieving a comprehensive and sustainable approach to migration governance in Asia.

~ Prof Abul Barkat, Chief Advisor, Human Development Research Centre (HDRC)

The Bangladesh Migration Governance Framework (BD-MiGOF) developed and endorsed in 2020, could form the basis for the GCM NAP.

4. Rights Based Approach to Migration Governance

Speaker: Advocate Md. Tajul Islam

It is Important to adhere to a human rights-based approach to migration which promotes the empowerment of migrants as a key goal, as well as their meaningful participation in policy and decision-making processes.

Bangladesh has strong legal and policy frameworks including the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013; Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy-2016; Wage Earners' Welfare Act and Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 among others. However, there are some discrepancies in the legal frameworks which need to take into account emerging trends and be in line with international conventions and frameworks.

5. Governance of Climate Change and Migration

Speaker: Prof. Saleemul Huq OBE, Director, International Centre for Climate Change & Development (ICCCAD)

Issues Discussed:

- Emphasized on the need to address the challenges of people being displaced due to impact of climate change.
- Issue of climate induced displacement had not received adequate attention at the international forum however, it was well placed at the COP27 the discussions concluding with the decision to establish and operationalize a loss and damage fund, particularly for nations most vulnerable to the climate crisis.
- Recommended that a forum on climate change could be formed to ensure that the dialogue continues to address the challenges of affected communities.

In her remarks, Ms. Sarah Lou Ysmal Arriola, IOM Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific spoke on the "Global Compact for Governance of Migration in the Context of Asia." She stated that the Asia and the Pacific region is at a crossroads, with the pandemic having exposed the region's fault lines with three overlapping crisis – the pandemic, climate change and more frequent disasters. Migration is more than just numbers, but a complex phenomenon that involves a range of economic, social, and political factors. While migration can bring significant benefits to migrants, transit, and host countries, it can also create a range of social, economic, and political challenges that require careful management. She highlighted some of the following challenges inter alia:

- limited availability of data on migration,
- lack of protection and support for migrants
- capacity of national and local institutions

Ms. Arriola recommended that good migration governance requires a multi-pronged approach guided by international norms and standards that involves investing in economic development, promoting social inclusion, and resolving conflicts peacefully. She also suggested that enhanced coordination is needed to promote social and economic integration of migrants and increase awareness and understanding of migration among the wider public. She thanked the members of the BDUNNM and its TWGs for their active role in supporting the Government of Bangladesh for improving migration governance.



WAY FORWARD FOR IMPROVING GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION

In the summary of discussion, Prof. Haque highlighted few recommendations that emerged from the discussions:

1. Need to address the climate induced displacement along with loss and damage and food security
2. Stages within the migration process that have not been dealt with including issues related to unnatural death of migrants and social cost of migration
3. Need to review the legal systems and framework aligning them with recent development frameworks and international conventions and standards
4. Need to continue to support the civil society through enhancing partnerships and providing technical and financial assistance
5. Need to continue cross regional collaboration and share good practices across regions
6. Need to address the vulnerabilities related to gender and ensure that gender is mainstreamed across interventions
7. Need to consider a human rights approach for all interventions related to migrants

CONCLUDING SESSION

In her closing remarks, Ms. Gwyn Lewis, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, appreciated the role of the BDUNNM and its TWGs in shaping the migration governance discourse since its launch in July 2019. She added that it was increasingly important to leverage migration as a development tool in the context of Least Developed Country (LDC) graduation and beyond.



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