



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)  
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)



## Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region Terms of Reference

### 1. Background

Migration has long shaped the Arab region, with countries in the region often being, at the same time, points of origin, transit and destination. Demographic and socio-economic trends, conflict and – in some cases – climate change are among the multiple factors that continue to influence migratory dynamics in the region, leading to the intensification of migration.

In 2010, the Arab region hosted almost 25.85 million migrants (of whom over 16.4 million were men, and 9.4 million women), over 10 million more than it hosted in 1990.<sup>1</sup> Available data suggest that the majority of these migrants come from Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, levels of emigration from Arab countries are also high: the United Nations Population Division counted over 13.7 million migrants from Arab countries in 2010, with Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and the Sudan being the main countries of origin with almost half of these migrants staying within the Arab region.<sup>3</sup> Finally, several countries in the Arab region have become important points of transit along the irregular migration routes taken by migrants, including unaccompanied minors, from outside the region. Given data limitations and the role of recent conflicts in the region in creating new situations of displacement, these figures are only estimates which are likely to underestimate the real scale of migration from, to and between Arab countries.

Migration has great potential to positively impact the economic and social development of the region; however its contribution depends on the ability of governments and other stakeholders to effectively manage migration flows through dialogue and cooperation to implement responsive migration policies which uphold migrant rights. At present, labour migration provides benefits to both countries of origin and destination in the region, with migrant workers helping to address labour market shortfalls in their host countries and relieving pressure on labour markets in their countries of origin. Meanwhile, expatriate communities contribute to economic activity through the remittances they send back to their families and communities;<sup>4</sup> and migrants returning through voluntary return schemes are able to help boost local communities through reintegration plans. Migrants can also be important sources of human and social capital through the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and ideas that migration engenders.

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2011). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2011).

<sup>2</sup> Calculation based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012).

<sup>3</sup>With 3.1 million and 1.6 million migrants respectively from Arab countries. Calculation based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012).

<sup>4</sup> The Arab countries are estimated to have received more than USD 47.3 billion in remittances in 2012. Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon figure amongst the world's most important recipients of remittances in terms of absolute value and in terms of the share of GDP represented by remittances.

However, challenges remain in ensuring that migration is safe and mutually-beneficial for countries of origin, transit and destination, and migrants themselves. In particular, there are important concerns regarding the rights of migrants before, during and after their migration due to the social, economic and legal frameworks in which migration takes place. Migrants from and to the region are vulnerable to forms of exploitation and abuse at all stages of the migration process, particularly when they are in an irregular situation. Female migrants are often vulnerable to particular risks of exploitation and abuse due in particular to the intersections of gender, racial and national discrimination, especially when they are involved in domestic work.

As the global and regional understanding of the importance of international migration has increased, the international community has increasingly engaged in research and programmatic responses. Similarly, the need to ensure the effective protection of the human rights of migrants and combat exploitative practices and the smuggling and trafficking of migrants has attracted the attention of policy-makers and other stakeholders. Governments and civil society organizations are now considering how best to incorporate human rights, welfare, safety, dignity and security of individuals and communities into migration policies, legislation and programming.

This engagement has led to a recognition that the impacts of migration are spread across a wide range of areas, and that responses should thus involve different perspectives and expertise to be effective. Thus, in order to ensure that their efforts are complementary and mutually-reinforcing, agencies in the United Nations system have begun to create structures to ensure global and regional coordination on migration-related work. At the global level, the Global Migration Group brings together 16 UN and non-UN member agencies whose mandates touch on migration issues to coordinate their work to ensure a coherent approach to migration across the United Nations system.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in the Asia-Pacific region, UN agencies have established a Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking to coordinate joint work.<sup>6</sup>

Given the importance of migration in the Arab region, many agencies within and beyond the United Nations system are engaged in work on migration. Organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the League of Arab States (LAS), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) among others are involved in concrete programmatic responses and knowledge production to support the reform of labour migration systems and encourage dialogue between Governments on migration. However, past coordination on this work has often been ad-hoc and fragmentary, limiting the impact of these responses. This is particularly concerning given the urgent need for reform of migration management systems in the Arab region. Finally, the need for coordination is accentuated by the preparations for and the likely follow-up from the forthcoming second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, due to be held at the United Nations General Assembly in October 2013.

Therefore, in recognition of:

- the importance of international migration in the Arab region;
- the unique perspectives and mandates of each agency in the area of international migration;

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<sup>5</sup> Global Migration Group, *Terms of Reference*, [http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/uploads/what-is-gmg/Final%20GMG%20Terms%20of%20Reference\\_prioritized.pdf](http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/uploads/what-is-gmg/Final%20GMG%20Terms%20of%20Reference_prioritized.pdf). The member agencies of the GMG are: the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Regional Commissions, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UN Women, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, and the World Health Organization.

<sup>6</sup> Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking, 2012, "Foreword" in Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking, *Situation Report on International Migration in South and South-West Asia*

- and the need for inter-agency coordination to respond to the complex effects of migration and to ensure that the United Nations system and other international organizations speak with one voice on the issues of migration and migrant rights,

The regional representatives of the United Nations agencies and other relevant international and intergovernmental agencies listed below agreed to the proposal submitted by LAS at the meeting of the Arab States regional coordination mechanism on 15 March 2013 to establish a Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region (the Regional Working Group).

## **2. Goal**

The goal of the Regional Working Group is to coordinate the complementary efforts of actors in the Arab States region and promote joint research and interventions on migration. It will examine the links between migration and development; ensure systematic production and access to quality (sex disaggregated) migration data; support the development and implementation of Government policies and programmes that maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse impacts of migration in a more coherent way; and promote dialogue between countries of the region to find mutually-beneficial solutions to migration challenges. Recognizing that women migrants face specific risks, the working group will devote special attention to gender perspectives, cultural diversity, human rights and the rule of law.

## **3. Functions**

The functions of the Regional Working Group include:

### **(a) Information sharing:**

Contributing to a better understanding of and developing a common approach towards the migration phenomena in the Region with comparable data by strengthening coordination and information sharing among concerned UN agencies and inter-governmental organizations on normative and technical migration-related programmes, projects, and activities.

### **(b) Establishing priority areas for cooperation and potential joint programmatic responses:**

- (i) Enhancing cooperation among members of the Working Group in order to promote synergies and minimize duplication in migration-related programmes and projects in the Region;
- (ii) Identifying priority areas of governments for the development of joint programmes and projects where UN and international agencies have a comparative advantage. In this context, the Working Group will take into account and support the implementation of the recommendations made by participating governments at the regional consultative meeting for the Arab Region in preparation for the second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held in Cairo from 4-5 June 2013; and
- (iii) Cooperating to publish a biennial "Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab States".

### **(c) Dissemination of innovative/good practices and lessons:**

Identifying best practices in areas of concern to the members of the Working Group and to governments in the Region in relation to international migration and promoting the dissemination, sustainability, and creative replication of such innovative practices where appropriate and possible.

### **(d) Others:**

- (i) Encouraging broad participation and commitment of participating sectors and other

stakeholders, including migrants; and  
(ii) Promoting data production, research and information management among migration policy makers in the Region.

#### **4. Membership**

The core participants of the Regional Working Group on International Migration include, in alphabetical order: the Arab Labour Organization (ALO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the League of Arab States (LAS), UNAIDS, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

#### **5. Organization**

The League of Arab States, UNESCWA, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) will co-chair and act as the secretariat of the Regional Working Group effective from 30 June, 2013.

- The Regional Working Group will meet as often as necessary, but at least three times per year. Given the dispersion of agencies between Cairo and Beirut, the meetings may be held via videoconference.
- The Regional Working Group may decide to open participation to representatives of other concerned UN agencies, intergovernmental bodies, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral agencies, as appropriate.
- The Regional Working Group will report on its activities and recommendations at the scheduled Regional Coordination Meetings.
- Each member agency shall designate a focal point and an alternate to the Regional Working Group at the highest level possible to maintain the quality of cooperation. Cost of participation will be met by each participating agency.

#### **6. Monitoring and Evaluation**

- The Regional Working Group will routinely assess its organization and functioning and adjust as necessary.
- A more detailed assessment of the Regional Working Group's relevance and effectiveness will be conducted prior to the completion of two years.
- The report of findings from the routine and detailed assessments will be presented to the RCM on a yearly basis.