

Fourteenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration

New York 25-26 February 2016

Inputs from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

1. Background

International migration is a major driver of social and economic change in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region. In 2013, of the estimated 231.5 million migrants in the world, over 59 million were found in countries of this region, an increase of almost 7 million compared to 1990. Over 95 million migrants came from countries in Asia or the Pacific, an almost 50 per cent increase compared to 1990.

As the economies of the region further develop and the demographic transition continues at varying speeds, people are increasingly likely to migrate as both the demand for migrant labour and the supply of people willing and able to migrate, will grow. Migration is therefore a structural reality in the Asia-Pacific region, both today and in the years to come. To manage this growing migratory trend in such a way as to ensure that it brings positive benefits to all concerned, countries in the Asia-Pacific region need to establish policies grounded in principles of respect for human rights, decent work and social protection for all, migrants and nationals alike.

Migration within the Asia-Pacific region and between that region and others occurs for a variety of reasons, including both voluntary and involuntary (forced) migration. However, by far the predominant flows are of temporary labour migrants. There are nearly two million departures from the Philippines each year while more than half a million migrant workers leave Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Pakistan annually. Men and women migrate, although they work in different sectors, with male migrants dominating sectors such as construction and women being predominant in domestic work.

Meanwhile, destination countries in the region, particularly Brunei Darussalam, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Maldives, the Russian Federation, Singapore and Thailand, derive substantial economic benefit from the migrant workers they host. Outside the region, migrants are found primarily in the natural resource-rich countries of the Middle East. While high-income countries are the destination of many migrants, migration in the Asia-Pacific region has a strong South-South tendency, with migrants moving between developing countries on a large scale.

Most of this labour migration is officially facilitated and regulated by Governments, but in reality is carried out by private recruitment and employment agencies. The role of these agencies has grown to such an extent that they may go beyond facilitation to even driving migration themselves. In many cases in the region, the number of persons looking for employment in the countries of destination greatly exceeds the numbers those countries wish to employ officially, or official procedures are cumbersome or expensive. As a result, simplified systems that move or facilitate the irregular employment of migrants have developed. Such systems provide low levels of social and job protection, however, and can lead to situations of employment that are so exploitative as to constitute human trafficking. Restrictions on female

migration and the undervaluing of female labour puts women at particular risk of irregular migration.

Although temporary labour migration is the main trend in the region, other migration flows are also important. In 2014 there were nearly 5.4 million refugees in the region, making up almost 40 per cent of the global refugee population of almost 13.7 million people. The largest number of refugees were in Turkey (1.59 million), Pakistan (1.51 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (982,000). Those three countries hosted, respectively, the largest, second-largest and fourth-largest numbers of refugees in the world in 2014, or almost 30 per cent of all refugees worldwide.

In addition to these main trends, migration for permanent settlement in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, and the seasonal labour schemes that Australia and New Zealand implement for workers from Pacific Island countries, as well as marriage migration and student migration are also important forms of migration in the region. Although these flows are smaller than the flows for temporary labour migration, they can nonetheless be significant and require specific policies to prevent exploitation and promote development outcomes.

2. ESCAP's work on international migration in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ESCAP welcomes the 2030 Agenda's focus on international migration and migrants. It is working to respond to this new initiative both alone and in partnership with other agencies of the United Nations and international system.

In order to strengthen the evidence base on international migration and its impact on international migration, ESCAP has produced an *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015: Migrants' Contributions to Development* with its partners in the Asia-Pacific Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking (TWG-Migration), which it co-chairs with IOM.¹ Taking into account the fact that much migration within the Asia-Pacific region is South-South in nature, the report expands the discussion on migration and development to focus not only on migration's impacts on countries of origin, but also on developing countries of destination, and how the positive aspects of migration can be enhanced. It finds that the greatest benefits for development from migration come when the rights of migrants are protected, able to access decent work and social protection in line with international standards. Not only does this maximize their contribution to countries of origin through increased remittances and opportunities for skills development, but also enables them to undertake productive work which adds value to countries of destination and prevents them from being used to undercut national workers. This report benefitted from an extensive expert review during the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration, Development and Social Protection, held from 7-8 July 2015.

To support the process of implementing the relevant targets related to international migration, ESCAP plans to work with the TWG-Migration, to support countries to work on the development of baselines and indicators on the migration-related targets. These will form the

¹ Available from <http://www.unescap.org/resources/asia-pacific-migration-report-2015>

basis of a study on migration and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. It will also carry out a workshop on migration data in cooperation with UN-DESA, in support of this initiative.

Finally, the TWG-Migration will also provide support to the Government of Bangladesh to hold a thematic workshop on “Migration for Connectivity and Business” in Bangkok on 29 March. This workshop will involve a substantive discussion between member States and an exchange of best practice on issues linking migration and different forms of connectivity, as well as the role of the private sector in migration processes, which will feed into the discussions of the GFMD under roundtable 2 (“Connectivity and migration”).

ESCAP is further conducting a project on “Facilitating Migration Management in North and Central Asia”, funded by the Russian Federation. The project aims at building knowledge on international migration in this subregion, and promoting cooperation and partnerships between countries of origin and destination in North and Central Asia. An expert group meeting held from 7-8 April 2015 brought together policymakers and academics to review studies on key issues related to migration in North and Central Asia considering the legal framework governing migration in North and Central Asia, the contributions of migrant workers to the economies of countries of destination, the skill level of migrant workers and skill needs in countries of destination, and sources of migration data. The studies recommend areas for regional cooperation and policy reform, and will form the basis of an advocacy forum to be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 26-27 April 2016. A second phase of the project has also commenced, addressing issues such as the impacts of remittances in countries of origin and destination, and the impact of policy reforms in countries of destination on migration intentions.

To further strengthen the evidence base on international migration in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP has published and continues to update an online database on international migrant worker outflows from select countries of origin in the ESCAP region. The database can be accessed at: <http://sitreport.unescapsdd.org/labour-migration-outflow>.

3. Conclusion

Given the importance of international migration to sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP aims to support the implementation of the migration-related SDG targets in the Asia-Pacific region as a matter of priority, and is shaping its work on migration accordingly. It is furthermore working in partnership with other agencies in pursuit of these objectives, as well as to support international dialogue on migration issues.