

2. Policy developments in migration, asylum and statelessness governance in the Arab region





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Summary statement

Migration and forced displacement have been receiving great attention from policymakers and decision makers in the Arab region, resulting in an array of policy developments in migration, asylum and statelessness governance. The main policy areas addressed include labour migration; irregular migration; trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; forced displacement and refugee protection; admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization; and expatriate and diaspora governance. In 2020 in particular, special measures were taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic and social crises that hit Arab societies, including migrant and refugee populations. Labour migration, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, received by far the most attention, while the areas of admissions; visas, residency permits and naturalization; and forced displacement and refugee protection were also high on the policy agenda. Moreover, Arab countries have actively engaged in international and bilateral efforts to improve migration management and refugee protection, and intensified coordination in the context of the pandemic.

Background

The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and of the Global Compact on Refugees constituted a milestone in global collaboration to protect migrant and refugee rights. Building on long-standing commitments in international law, they provide a benchmark for considering policy developments in the area of migration and displacement at the national and regional levels. The COVID-19 crisis that unfolded during the reporting period of the present report highlights the key role of national policies and legislation and of regional cooperation in strengthening the resilience of migrant and refugee populations and communities in both countries of origin and destination.

The present chapter provides an overview of national policies and of international and regional cooperation efforts related to migration governance and refugees, carried out by Arab countries between April 2019 and December 2020, building upon previous editions of the Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region. Policy developments in 2020 have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and many of them cannot be understood without considering the impact of the pandemic on the multiple-layered crises

affecting migrants and refugees.²⁵ The implications for migrant workers have been especially pronounced, and merit further research and analysis beyond the scope of the present chapter.

By providing a compendium of policy developments in the region, this chapter responds to the first objective of the Global Compact for Migration and to the Programme of Action of the Global Compact on Refugees (paragraphs 45-47), which focus on collecting and utilizing data to provide support for evidence-based policymaking. It also responds to SDG target 10.7 on facilitating orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Thematic areas of policy development covered in the present chapter include labour migration; irregular migration; trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; forced displacement and refugee protection; admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization; and expatriate and diaspora governance. The chapter also reports on developments in global, interregional, regional, subregional and bilateral cooperation relating to migration, in which Arab countries have been

involved. Under each of the subsections, policies that directly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted as examples; however, they do not represent a comprehensive list of all policies and measures adopted in that regard.

Data sources for chapter 2 include official government publications and information, thematic studies and situation analyses, and reports from IOM country offices and other United Nations agencies. Where necessary, the research was complemented with information obtained from reliable news outlets.

The present chapter acknowledges several limitations regarding its scope and methodology. It is a descriptive compilation of policy developments that occurred during the reporting period. While the research provides an overview of adopted policies, it does not discuss the implementation or the impact of those policies, nor does it provide a normative evaluation of adopted policies. Moreover, the policies reported are not accompanied by an analysis of the extent to which they align with international frameworks for governing migration, displacement and statelessness.

A. Information highlights

In the area of labour migration, Arab countries, especially the GCC and Mashreq subregions that host significant numbers of migrant workers, enacted an array of regulations on work permits, recruitment and access to health care for migrant workers, among others. In addition, efforts to nationalize the labour force have been particularly pronounced in GCC countries.

Numerous policy changes and measures in the area of labour migration were adopted as a direct response to the COVID-19 crisis. Several countries introduced new digital platforms to facilitate online access to and renewal of visas, work permits and contracts. Many countries also waived related fees and penalties, and took steps to extend COVID-19 testing and health-care services to migrant workers.

Several countries adopted laws, strategies and updated their action plans related to refugees, asylum seekers and refugee returnees. Legal developments were mostly oriented at defining asylum seekers and the rights guaranteed to refugees. Specific measures and provisions in the area of administration, housing and health care were also adopted for refugees, refugee returnees and IDPs.

Trafficking in persons, including for forced labour, has been the subject of numerous policy responses, including drafting and revising laws and action plans, establishing specialized committees, and organizing awareness campaigns, while fewer policies have been adopted to address migrant smuggling.

Expatriate and diaspora governance also received heightened attention, particularly in the Maghreb. In addition to institutional developments in this area, several countries made efforts to repatriate expatriates and nationals stranded abroad as a result of COVID-19-related travel restriction.

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B. National policies on international migration, forced displacement and statelessness

1. Labour migration

The area of labour migration has by far seen the most policy developments in the reporting period for the present study (April 2019 to December 2020). This is due, in part, to the significance of labour migration in the Arab region. According to ILO estimates, 12 Arab Middle Eastern countries²⁶ were the destination of 24.1 million migrant workers in 2019, representing 14 per cent of all migrant workers globally.²⁷ GCC countries in particular attract large numbers of migrant workers, along with some Mashreq countries, mainly Jordan and Lebanon. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has had major implications for labour markets in the Arab region, to which countries reacted by adopting exceptional measures and policy changes that markedly affected migrant workers. The majority of developments in labour migration governance took place in GCC countries.

Some policy changes and measures enacted during the reporting period also touched upon the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, through which labour migration is regulated in several Arab countries. Under this system, migrant workers need to have a sponsor to enter, stay, work, change employer, and/or in some cases exit the country. *Kafeels*, or sponsors, are responsible for the working and residency conditions of migrants, which restricts the mobility of migrants and often leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

In a bid to maintain labour market stability in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, many developments were also related to the recruitment of migrant workers and to residency and work permits, which allow migrant workers to take on jobs in their countries of destination.

(a) Work visas and work permits

In 2019, the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) of Bahrain launched a new modality for managing the work permits of migrants in the domestic workers categories, including domestic workers, gardeners, house guards, babysitters, drivers and cooks. The new Expatriate Management System allows employers or persons authorized on their behalf to handle the issuing and renewal of work permits, and adjust the occupation of foreign employees in a transparent one-stop-shop service.²⁸

Moreover, LMRA issued decision No. 2 of 2019, amending certain provisions of resolution No. 76 of 2008 on the regulation of work permits for foreigners other than the category of domestic workers.²⁹ The new decision aims to ensure that employers seeking to renew the work permits of migrant workers have respected workers' rights, including the timely payment of wages. Moreover, employers are now required to register and update data on their businesses and employees regularly in the LMRA database, and commit to paying employee salaries according to the procedures, salary payment controls and requirements defined by the new Wage Protection System, the first phase of which became operational in May 2021.³⁰

The Bahraini Council of Ministers approved a number of measures aimed at advancing policies on the flexi-work permit. These measures include intensifying inspection campaigns to ensure that the holders of such permits do not engage in professions that require prior approval, and taking necessary action against workers in an irregular situation who did not abide by established regulatory measures.³¹

In December 2020, the **Jordanian** Ministry of Labour issued the conditions, instructions and procedures for employing Syrian workers. These stipulations include requirements for receiving work permits, including for temporary and flexible work permits in the agriculture and construction sectors, and the type of jobs accessible to Syrian workers.³²

In **Lebanon**, a series of memos on work permits were issued during the period 2019-2020, addressing the validity of work permits for migrant workers,³³ and the documents and processes required for their completion³⁴ as well as their new cost.³⁵ Lebanon also waived work permits for chairpersons of the board of directors of certain companies if they are non-Lebanese and not residing in Lebanon.³⁶

Moreover, **Lebanon** issued a decision governing the provision of work permits for Palestinian workers,³⁷ and two decisions for Syrian workers.³⁸ The former defines who is a Palestinian refugee, and sets out the documents required for Palestinian workers and business owners to receive a work permit. The two decisions relating to Syrian nationals provide Syrian workers in irregular situations with a mechanism to regularize and rectify their legal situation in Lebanon, but they ceased to apply as of April 2020.

In the same context, other decisions were released in 2019 in **Lebanon** specifying that work and residency permits for foreign and Arab workers can be granted for one, two or three years according to a set of fees,³⁹ and providing a mechanism to regularize the situation of migrant workers who violate the terms of work and residency in Lebanon.⁴⁰

In September 2019, **Saudi Arabia** passed decision No. 48 declaring that the State would bear the fees of expatriate workers working in the industrial sector for a period of five years. In addition, starting October 2019 and for a period of five years, expatriate worker fees have been waived for licensed industrial establishments

collected at the time of issuing and renewing work permits.⁴¹

Work visa and work permits in the context of COVID-19

Bahrain decided to waive the payment of monthly fees for work permits and the fees for issuance and renewal of flexi-work permits for three months as of 1 April 2020.⁴²

In **Lebanon**, the Ministry of Labour issued a memo to restart receiving applications for pre-approved work permits for all workers' categories as of July 2020.⁴³ In addition, the Ministry announced it would accept, on an exceptional basis, all required laboratory tests related to the process of obtaining work permits performed in private laboratories and hospitals until the end of 2020.⁴⁴

The **Qatar** Government announced that migrant workers who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 economic crisis would be allowed to remain in Qatar, and be provided with proper lodging and food. At the same time, migrant workers who were outside the country when flights were suspended would be able to renew their Qatar identity cards without penalties.⁴⁵

As part of its stimulus package to support the private sector, **Saudi Arabia** extended exit and re-entry visas from the country that were not used during the travel restrictions for a period of three months without charges. It also enabled employers to recover the fees of work visas that were not used during the ban on entry and exit, even if they were stamped in the passport, or to extend them for three months without charge.⁴⁶

In March 2020, the Government of the **United Arab Emirates** announced the exemption of foreign workers with expired work permits from the medical exam usually undertaken for issuance or renewal of work and residency permits. Instead, foreign workers had to pay the related fee through the approved payment

channel, while work and residency permits for enterprise workers and domestic workers were automatically renewed and issued.⁴⁷

In May 2020, the **Jordanian** Ministry of Labour announced the waiving of all labour-related fines and fees for migrant workers and their families who wanted to return to their home country. Migrant workers were also exempted from the fine for non-renewal of the annual residence permit stipulated in the Residency and Foreigners Affairs Law No. 24 of 1973.⁴⁸

In March 2020, the **Moroccan** Government announced that work permits and migration permits that would have expired between 16 March and 15 June 2020 would be automatically extended by six months.

(b) Recruitment of migrant workers

Several **Omani** ministerial decisions were passed in 2020 to regulate the recruitment of migrant workers, namely ministerial decision No. 115/2020 governing the recruitment of non-Omani manpower in private sector establishments operating in cleaning services,⁴⁹ ministerial decree 127/2020 governing the recruitment of non-Omani manpower in construction and brick factories,⁵⁰ and ministerial decision 255/2020 governing the recruitment of non-Omani manpower in private sector establishments operating in carpentry, blacksmithing, and aluminium workshop activities.⁵¹

To support migrant workers, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy in **Qatar** compensated 40,000 workers with more than 100 million Qatari riyals to reimburse the recruitment fees they had to pay illegally in their countries of origin, prior to their travel in Qatar.⁵²

In 2019, a tripartite technical committee under the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment of **Tunisia** submitted the Law on the Organization of the Exercise of the Activities of Placement of Tunisians Abroad by Private Agencies (or Recruitment Law), which

was approved, but not yet proclaimed, by the Council of Ministers on 8 May 2019. The new law extends the State's authority to deliver sanctions to recruitment agencies that do not comply with defined operational and procedural standards, such as the ban on recruitment agencies to require any financial payment from prospective migrant workers, or regulations on the content of employment contracts. The Ministry of Labour then approved the formation of a new inspectorate to monitor and enforce the implementation of the Recruitment Law.⁵³

Recruitment of migrant workers in the context of COVID-19

Acknowledging the risk of COVID-19 transmission, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of **Qatar** launched in June 2020 a multilingual e-contract system, which electronically authenticates migrant workers' employment contracts subject to the labour law, as an alternative to in-person visits by company representatives and migrant workers to the Ministry or to the Government Services Complex that were providing this service.⁵⁴ In parallel, Qatar is continuing to operate Qatar Visa Centres in six countries of origin (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines). The services include the electronic signature of employment contracts by migrant workers pre-departure.

In 2019, the **United Arab Emirates** launched an updated version of the Virtual Labour Market platform developed by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation. The platform provides employment services to non-national job seekers and companies using artificial intelligence that matches job seekers to vacancies and tracks their professional development.⁵⁵ The Ministry added another innovative feature to the platform in 2020 to further facilitate the recruitment process and support social distancing in light of COVID-19. The updated platform provides a one-stop shop that allows online job interviews, immediate completion of the assessment

process, and direct communication with candidates, recruitment teams and companies, among others.

(c) Labour disputes

In December 2019, the **Bahraini** Cabinet approved a draft resolution to regulate the Authority for Settlement of Individual Labour Disputes at the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. The Authority aims to reach an amicable settlement between an employer and employee to reduce the number of cases presented to the judiciary.⁵⁶

The **Bahraini** Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments and the Labour Market Regulatory Authority signed a memorandum of understanding with a view to enhancing joint work, including administrative assistance provided to migrant workers in filing labour lawsuits.⁵⁷

Saudi Arabia launched on a trial basis an electronic system called *Weddi* in September 2019 to help manage the amicable settlement of labour disputes by allowing employees to submit a complaint electronically.⁵⁸ In instances where mediation by labour offices does not succeed, the case would be transferred to the Ministry of Justice.⁵⁹ Types of disputes that can be settled through this system include those relating to employment contracts, wages, work-related injuries and compensation, disciplinary actions against employees, dismissal from work, end-of-service benefits, and holiday allowance.⁶⁰ Domestic workers are not included in these provisions.

(d) Standardization of labour contracts

In June 2019, **Morocco** issued decree No. 1356-19 to revamp employment contracts for foreigners, thus substituting the contract template of 2005. The new contract template allows equal treatment for Moroccan and migrant workers, and allows more economic

and social guarantees for both the employee and employer.⁶¹

Qatari decree-law No. 19 of 2020 underlines that all migrant workers have to be issued a work contract; and that employers cannot have their employees work for somebody else unless they are issued a permission from the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs granting them the right to do so for a period that does not exceed six months, extendable.

In April 2019, **Saudi Arabia** issued decision No. 156309 calling on private sector employers to register all employment contracts on the portal of the General Organisation for Social Insurance. This development enables the electronic verification of contracts, and helps ensure they adhere to labour law requirements and comply with the regulations of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development,⁶² in an effort to standardize work contracts and increase the transparency of terms of employment.

In February 2020, the Government of **Kuwait**, in coordination with the Public Authority for Manpower, issued a new unified contract for domestic workers of all nationalities. The contract compels employers to provide domestic workers with appropriate living conditions, pay wages at the end of each month, and provide rest and leave periods.⁶³

(e) Regulations of domestic work

In February 2020, **Jordan** amended resolution 194 on non-Jordanian domestic workers in the Aqaba Special Economic Zone to include a number of requirements, such as the presentation of a health certificate from the country of origin attesting that the migrant is free from diseases, including infectious diseases.

Regulation 63 of 2020 was enacted in **Jordan** in July 2020 to manage the recruitment of migrant domestic workers by organizing the work of

offices concerned with the recruitment of non-Jordanian domestic workers in general. Jordan also amended regulation 90 of 2009 on domestic workers, chefs and gardeners. As a part of these regulations, workers have been given an extended timeframe to leave work or change employers from 30 days to 90 days. On the other hand, employers can claim compensation of recruitment fees from the recruitment agency if the domestic worker refuses/changes her employer within the first 90 days.

In **Kuwait**, the Ministry of Interior banned in December 2019 the recruitment of domestic workers from 27 countries, 2 in Asia and 25 in Africa, due to the absence of a bilateral labour agreement between Kuwait and these countries and because they had no embassies in Kuwait.⁶⁴

In **Lebanon**, in September 2020, the Minister of Labour adopted the Standard Unified Contract for the Employment of Migrant Domestic Workers. The revised contract clearly stipulates that domestic workers can leave the household during their weekly day off and annual leave, and that they are not required to pay recruitment fees or related costs. It also prohibits employers from withholding wages and confiscating passports and other personal documents. A key provision in the contract is the termination clause, which enables either the employer or employee to terminate the contract unilaterally by providing one month's notice, and to terminate it immediately in the event of violations of the terms of the contract.⁶⁵ This legal instrument was, however, suspended in November 2020 by the Shura Council, Lebanon's highest administrative court, following an appeal by the Syndicate of the Owners of Recruitment Agencies.⁶⁶

The **United Arab Emirates** adopted resolution No. 22 of 2019 to reinforce federal law No. 10 enacted in 2017, giving migrant domestic workers the right to terminate their contracts in case of sexual harassment or any kind of abuse by the employer, or if the employer fails to meet contractual obligations. The law aims to protect

migrant domestic workers' rights by allowing them to retain their personal documentation, receive mandatory time off, and access legal processes in case of contract violations by employers or recruitment agencies.⁶⁷

In 2019, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization of the **United Arab Emirates** issued a decision to allow domestic workers who are over the age of 60, and are already in the country, to remain after the conclusion of their employment contracts and to renew them provided that their employer covers health-related cost during the workers' stay in the country, and provided the migrants hold a residency permit.⁶⁸

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization also announced in January 2020 the implementation of new standards for sponsoring domestic workers in accordance with federal law No. 10 of 2017 on domestic workers, for a period of two years.⁶⁹ The new standards raised the monthly income required for a household to hire a domestic helper from 6,000, to 25,000 dirhams or more.⁷⁰ In June 2020, the Ministry stipulated that domestic workers wishing to work in the United Arab Emirates must undertake a mental health assessment and receive a certificate of good conduct. The decision, however, does not take into consideration the relationship between domestic workers and employers, particularly if the former is subjected to different forms of abuse and violence.⁷¹

(f) Updating labour laws

In November 2020, the **Bahraini** Ministry of Labour and Social Development issued a clarification regarding unemployment benefits. It stated that under the unemployment insurance law promulgated by decree-law No. 78 of 2006, unemployment benefits are only paid to unemployed Bahrainis, while non-Bahrainis are only entitled to receive compensation in the event of arbitrary and unlawful dismissal from work.

To protect female worker's rights, the **United Arab Emirates** amended in 2019 the federal law No. 8 of 1980 on the organization of work stating that an employer may not terminate the service of a working woman, including female migrant workers, or give her a notice owing to her pregnancy, and that any termination of service on the basis of pregnancy would be considered arbitrary. The amendments also prohibit any type of discrimination that would deter equality of opportunity and infringe, among other things, on equality in accessing employment. Women migrant domestic workers are not included under these provisions.⁷²

Saudi Arabia passed royal decree No. M/134 approving decision No. 684 on amendments to travel documents, civil status, labour code and social insurance schemes.⁷³ The decision, passed in July 2019, introduces several amendments to the labour law, including an amendment to article 155 prohibiting employers from dismissing pregnant women, and from issuing dismissal notices while a female worker is pregnant or on maternity leave.⁷⁴ Women migrant domestic workers are not included under the labour law, and as such are not protected by its provisions.⁷⁵

In February 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in **Somalia** finalized the draft for the employment policy, which provides a foundation to create sustainable employment opportunities for all, including vulnerable segments of society, such as IDPs, and to prohibit forced labour.⁷⁶

Updating labour laws in the context of COVID-19

Saudi Arabia added article 41 to the Implementing Regulation of the Labour Law to regulate the application of salary reductions, annual leave and unpaid leave on national and migrant workers during the COVID-19 crisis. The new directives were to be implemented for a period of six months starting April 2020. The directives include a provision to compensate the employee in the event of arbitrary dismissal during this period. It also allows employees,

whether foreigners or Saudi nationals, to challenge any dismissal or any decision taken contrary to article 41 or to the Labour Law.⁷⁷

(g) Reforms to the kafala system

On 4 November 2020, the **Saudi** Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development launched a labour reform initiative aimed at enhancing labour mobility allowing transfer between employers and easing exit and re-entry requirements to the country. A decision by the Minister followed on 5 November 2020, specifying the terms for allowing foreign employees to change or leave jobs without the consent of their employer.⁷⁸ Under the new regulations, migrant workers covered by the reform are allowed to exit the country without the employer's permission, after submitting a request to the Ministry. The employer is notified electronically of their departure. Migrant workers covered by the reform are also allowed to transfer between employers upon the expiry of the binding work contract without the employer's consent.⁷⁹ The reforms came into effect on 14 March 2021. The reform initiative only applies to migrant workers who fall under the jurisdiction of the labour law, excluding certain categories of workers such as domestic, agricultural and sea workers.⁸⁰

Qatar adopted law No 18 of 2020, which removed for employees the no-objection certificate requirement to change jobs, and introduced new rules on termination of employment. Workers can now terminate and change jobs upon reasonable notice at any time of their employment contract (a one-month written notice is required if they have been working for an employer for two years or less, and a two-month notice if they have been with the employer for more than two years).⁸¹

Reforms to the kafala system in the context of COVID-19

Saudi Arabia temporarily eased restrictions on migrant workers' mobility between employers

to minimize worker layoffs and enhance the movement of migrant workers, without conditions, between private companies that continue to have high demand for labour during the pandemic.⁸²

(h) Labour force nationalization

Bahrain launched the National Employment Programme in February 2019, which prioritizes the employment of Bahraini citizens by enhancing their capacities, employability and employment opportunities. Two resolutions were passed under this programme: the first increased the fees for issuing work permits under the optional parallel system to Bahrainization from 300 to 500 dinars; and the second increased the fee for flexi-work permits from 200 to 500 dinars, with a monthly fee of 30 dinars.⁸³

In March 2019, **Bahrain** issued law No. 1 of 2019 amending article 14 of law No. 21 of 2015 on private health institutions, which implements a prioritization of employment of Bahraini doctors, technicians and nurses in private health institutions, unless there is a need for special expertise that is rare and unavailable. Private health institutions were expected to start implementing these provisions immediately upon the expiration of the contracts of current expatriate medical staff.⁸⁴

In June 2019, the **Bahraini** Labour Market Regulatory Authority announced a new scheme under the National Employment Programme to increase employment opportunities for Bahraini university graduates: firms in the private sector could recruit from the list of university graduates registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. As a result, the issuance of work permits submitted by a company to the Ministry would be placed on hold for 14 days to allow the Ministry to contact the company and deliver a shortlist of suitable domestic candidates registered with the Ministry for the job vacancy in question.⁸⁵

In **Jordan**, the Ministry of Labour issued decision No.58/2020 restricting non-Jordanian workers from working in specific professions to reduce national unemployment levels.⁸⁶

In **Kuwait**, towards the end of December 2018, as part of efforts to nationalize the workforce, the Ministry for Economic Affairs prepared a five-year plan for 2019-2024 aimed at reducing by half the number of migrant workers in Kuwait, which currently exceeds 3.3 million. The first step was to issue a decision in early 2019 to suspend the appointment of migrant workers in all government institutions.⁸⁷

Since then, **Kuwait** has rolled out plans to reduce the number of migrant workers in the private sector.⁸⁸ As per the plan publicized in October 2019, the number of migrant workers in the private sector should be reduced by half a million (31.2 per cent), from 1.6 million workers to 1.1 million workers, by 2021.⁸⁹ Incentives will be presented to private sector companies that implement Kuwaitization by giving them priority to partner in the implementation of government projects included in the National Development Plan 2035, in addition to giving them tax incentives and discounts on government-provided services.⁹⁰

Similarly, the **Emirati** Cabinet adopted 10 strategic decisions to support workforce nationalization in September 2019.⁹¹ Public and semi-public institutions are expected to facilitate a 10 per cent annual increase in the proportion of nationals working in support services; government entities are to restrict new appointments in administrative and supervisory positions to Emiratis; and all public, semi-public and private institutions are to give employment priority to nationals in 160 targeted professions. Incentives will be provided to complying companies, whereas companies that fail to abide by this decision will have to make contributions to the nationalization programme of a value to be determined by the Cabinet.⁹² The decisions came into effect in November 2019.

The **Emirates** Job Bank was also launched in November 2019,⁹³ which is a government platform that enables citizens to apply to vacancies in the public and private sectors in targeted professions, giving priority to nationals in the recruitment process.⁹⁴

A series of **Omani** ministerial decisions were passed, setting the percentage of the Omani workforce in several industries in the private sector. Ministerial decision 168/2020 set the percentage of national workers in coastal fishing and trade at 15 per cent in 2020, 17 per cent in 2021, 20 per cent in 2022, 23 per cent in 2023, and 25 per cent in 2024. Passed in June 2020, ministerial decision 169/2020 set the percentage for the mining sector. Ministerial decision 450/2019, an earlier decision passed in September 2019, does the same for the electricity and water sectors. In a similar manner, a series of Omani ministerial decisions were passed in 2019 regarding the temporary suspension, or extension of suspensions, of recruiting foreigners in different industries, including sales and marketing, information and technology, finance, media and carpentry.⁹⁵

In November 2019, **Saudi Arabia** issued decision No. 63717, which introduced changes to the Nitaqat labour nationalization programme launched in 2011. The decision provides further incentives to firms to provide more job opportunities to Saudis, and improve the ratio of national to migrant workers.⁹⁶

Subsequently, the **Saudi Arabian** Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development passed several industry-specific nationalization measures, including decision No. 61842 of November 2019 on the nationalization of dentistry professions. In December 2019, a decision on the first phase of nationalization of jobs in the hospitality sector came into effect, stipulating that only Saudi nationals should be employed in the areas of marketing and sales, reservations, purchases, front offices, and various administrative positions.⁹⁷ The first phase of a similar ministerial decision on

the nationalization of 20 per cent of jobs in pharmacy and related specialties came into effect in July 2020.⁹⁸ In August 2020, the Ministry passed decision No. 686 on the nationalization of 20 per cent of engineering professions in establishments.⁹⁹ Moreover, decision No. 28889 of 6 October 2020 on the nationalization of the communication and information technology professions requires employers with five or more employees working in specific job categories to nationalize 25 per cent of the existing positions under each category.¹⁰⁰

The **Qatari** Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs announced that it was implementing a replacement and nationalization plan for 2020. The Ministry also requested raising the percentage of Qatarization of jobs in human resources departments to 95 per cent in ministries and other government agencies and public bodies and institutions, and an increase of no less than 4 per cent annually in other departments in the aforementioned institutions.¹⁰¹

(i) Ratification of international conventions

In April 2020, **Oman** ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The States adopting the Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work, including fair wages and equal remuneration for work; a decent living; safe and healthy working conditions rest; leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay; and remuneration for public holidays (article 7).¹⁰²

In December 2020, the Government of **Saudi Arabia** ratified the ILO Protection of Wages Convention 1949 (No. 95), and the Hygiene (Commerce and Offices) Convention 1964 (No. 120). Both conventions will enter into force in December 2021. The ratification sets out safeguards that are especially crucial in the context of the COVID-19 response.¹⁰³

(j) Wage payment and protection

In August 2020, **Qatar** adopted law No. 17 of 2020 on determining the national minimum wage for workers and domestic workers. This law sets a non-discriminatory minimum wage for all workers in Qatar, including domestic workers. The law notes that the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs will issue a decision determining the minimum wage, to be reviewed once a year, and that a committee will be established to support the Minister in that regard.¹⁰⁴

Saudi Arabia launched the Mudad platform in July 2020, aimed at supporting small and medium enterprises in adhering to Wage Protection System (WPS) requirements by providing them with possible solutions to salary management problems and payroll automation. This should contribute to increased transparency and reliability of the financial operations of enterprises.¹⁰⁵ Saudi Arabia also implemented the fifteenth phase of WPS in May 2020, obliging companies with 11 or more workers to register in the system; followed by the sixteenth phase in August 2020, whereby enrolment in WPS becomes obligatory to companies with 5 to 10 workers.¹⁰⁶ The aim of WPS, launched in the second half of 2013, is to increase transparency in private sector firms, help protect the rights of both employers and employees, and ensure that salaries are paid on time and as per employment contracts.

Wage payment and protection in the context of COVID-19

In **Qatar**, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs requested all private sector companies to continue paying full salaries for migrant workers who are in quarantine or receiving COVID-19 treatment, and announced that it would monitor the implementation of the policy and take legal action against companies that violate these obligations, in line with Qatari

labour laws. The Government allocated \$824 million to support these companies in paying salaries, and launched a multi-lingual hotline service to receive worker complaints.¹⁰⁷

(k) Labour trafficking and other labour-related offenses

Within the framework of streamlining the national referral mechanism and improving the prosecution of crimes related to trafficking in persons, the Labour Market Regulatory Authority of **Bahrain** assumed the responsibility for preparing cases instead of the Ministry of Justice. As a result, the Authority established two new directorates in 2020: the Preventive Inspection Directorate that identifies, investigates and documents labour exploitation, with a special focus on trafficking; and the Grievances and Protections Directorate, which receives, registers and documents labour-related criminal cases, while acting as a pro bono legal clinic for migrant workers.¹⁰⁸

In 2019, the Ministry of Interior in **Kuwait** announced that 10,000 migrant workers who were sponsored by fake Kuwaiti-owned companies would not be deported, and would be allowed to legalize their stay in Kuwait for free and to transfer to other companies if they so wished.¹⁰⁹

In a move to counteract trafficking in persons, the Ministry of Labour in **Lebanon** issued in 2020 a public notice cautioning employers about sharing advertisements and announcements about domestic workers on social media, and denouncing these actions as illegal activities. The Ministry stated that these actions deterred human rights, and were considered as trafficking in persons and thus punishable by law.¹¹⁰

In June 2019, **Saudi Arabia** adopted ministerial decision No. 178743 amending the list of violations and corresponding penalties to be commensurate with changes to labour code regulations. The amendments include new fines imposed on employers for committing violations

against workers, including migrant workers. The additional fines are related to offences regarding various employment issues, including registries and record keeping, falsifying workers' information, engaging in activities that involve visa trading, offences surrounding occupational safety, health and women's work conditions, and various breaches related to recruitment activities.¹¹¹

Labour trafficking and other labour-related offenses in the context of COVID-19

Saudi Arabia released 250 foreign detainees held on non-violent immigration and residency offences for subsequent repatriation. The measure was taken to curb the spread of COVID-19 among the inmates of crowded detention centres.¹¹²

(I) Measures related to the health and housing of migrant workers

Bahrain introduced decision No. 76/2020, setting standards and specifications for the accommodation of migrant workers to safeguard their rights. The decision's stipulations included the minimum size of a residence, and adequate facilities, furniture and appliances.¹¹³

In February 2019, ministerial decision No. 57/2019 provided for the establishment of a committee chaired by the **Kuwait** Municipality to monitor and address the housing of migrant worker men who are single (or who are not accompanied by their families), and who live in private and model residential areas. The decision builds on law No. 125 of 1992 and other regulations that aim to limit the spread of this phenomenon.¹¹⁴ The committee is tasked with developing a mechanism to manage the housing of migrant worker men who are single, follow-up on citizens' complaints in that regard, and take all the necessary measures to implement the mechanism in collaboration with the relevant authorities.¹¹⁵

Measures related to the health and housing of migrant workers in the context of COVID-19

Bahrain introduced a set of measures to assist migrant workers in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. In April 2020, the Ministry of Health waived the general medical consultation fee of 7 dinars, paid by non-Bahrainis in the institutions affiliated to the Ministry for a period of three months.¹¹⁶ The Ministry also committed to providing free medical and health-care services for COVID-19 testing, quarantine and treatment to nationals and residents alike.¹¹⁷

During the same period, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of **Bahrain** issued a circular on fighting and preventing the spread of COVID-19 in worksites and workers' accommodation.¹¹⁸ The circular targeted private sector entities and set out a number of directives for both employers and workers to take all the required precautionary measures against the spread of COVID-19.

Bahrain also launched several initiatives in multiple languages via various media outlets to raise awareness among migrant workers on how to prevent COVID-19 transmission. In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development carried out field inspection visits to workers' accommodations.¹¹⁹

As part of measures to ward off the economic impact of COVID-19, migrant workers in **Bahrain** benefited from a nation-wide decision to withhold the payment of electricity and water bills and municipal fees for companies and individuals for a period of three months in 2020.¹²⁰

In May 2020, the Ministry of Public Works of **Kuwait** announced that it would equip and allocate temporary housing to 25,000 expatriates working in service companies contracted by the Ministry of Health to ensure proper social distancing in times of COVID-19.¹²¹

In the **United Arab Emirates**, several health policy measures were taken to curb the spread

of COVID-19, such as free testing and treatment of persons exhibiting symptoms,¹²² and covering the medical costs of all infected workers.¹²³

(m) Foreign investment and business ownership

Following the issuance of the federal law by decree No. 19 of 2018 regarding foreign direct investment in September 2018, the **Emirati** Cabinet adopted a decision in July 2019 allowing foreign investors to own up to 100 per cent of shares in commercial companies in 13 economic sectors covering 122 economic activities. The decision notes that specific rules will govern each sector, and leaves it to local governments to determine the percentage of foreign investors' ownership in different economic activities.¹²⁴ The sectors include renewable energy, space, agriculture and manufacturing; transportation and storage; accommodation and food services; information and communication; professional, scientific and technical services; administrative services; support services; education; health; arts and entertainment; and construction.

Emirati federal law by decree No. 26 of September 2020, amending some provisions of federal law No. 2 of 2015 regarding commercial companies, gives permission to foreign entrepreneurs and investors, regardless of their nationality, to fully establish and own companies in the country without the need for a sponsor.¹²⁵

In **Oman**, the Foreign Capital Investment Law promulgated in 1994 was replaced by a new measure announced by royal decree 50/2019. The new law sets out the requirements for expatriates to establish businesses in Oman, and includes several provisions to protect the rights of foreign investors, such as requiring a notification by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the case of a violation and allowing a period of 30 days to rectify the offence, guaranteeing protection from arbitrary or illegal seizure of assets, and establishing a council for grievances of foreign investors.

(n) Institutional developments

In May 2019, the **Emirati** Cabinet adopted a decision to reduce or cancel more than 1,500 service fees on a number of services in the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, benefiting both citizens and foreign workers residing in the country.¹²⁶ The decision came as part of the efforts exerted by the Government to reduce the cost of doing business in the country, enhance the attractiveness of the economy, promote economic growth, and increase job opportunities.¹²⁷

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of **Saudi Arabia** launched the Qiwa digital platform in April 2019, combining all employment services to enhance service provision and increase labour market efficiency.¹²⁸ The platform supports the provision of data and statistics to help address the challenges facing businesses and employees, and to enhance efficiency and productivity in the workplace.¹²⁹ It also supports initiatives that focus on improving the business environment to attract greater foreign and local investment, and to help create new job opportunities, thereby contributing to the achievement of Vision 2030.¹³⁰

(o) Other policies regarding migrant workers

In July 2019, **Lebanon** passed decision No.1/82, based on decree No. 4340 of 2019, by which the Ministry of Labour sanctioned grace periods to settle the status of migrant workers in an irregular situation. This decision outlines procedures for labour inspections at establishments that hired foreign workers without a work permit, and the subsequent legal measures. However, the decision does not apply to domestic workers in an irregular situation.

Lebanon also passed memo 2/13 in February 2020 that requests heads of units at the Ministry of Labour who are responsible for processing

rejected applications of migrant workers to ask foreign workers to provide justification for requesting an appeal, and to include relevant documents to support their request.

In April 2019, the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of Qatar signed a decision outlining the conditions and procedures for electing worker representatives to joint committees in companies and establishments that have 30 or more employees. The joint committees include an equal number of representatives of the employer and the workers, and address work-related matters, including organization of work, means to increase productivity, provision of training programmes, social services, risk prevention, workplace inclusion, and improving the level of compliance with occupational safety and health rules.¹³¹

Decision No. 51 of 2020 by the Qatari Interior Minister emphasized the need to notify the relevant department at the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of a migrant worker's change of employer, in accordance with the established rules and procedures; and the need to have a residence permit valid for at least 90 days, unless the permit has expired for reasons beyond the worker's control.¹³²

Other policies regarding migrant workers in the context of COVID-19

In Jordan, the Ministry of Labour issued work protocols/procedures and preventive measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. The protocols covered all sectors excluding domestic work.¹³³

The Ministry of Social Affairs in Kuwait launched a new online platform to provide food assistance to migrant workers in the private sector who were affected by measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.¹³⁴

To offset the loss in revenues as a result of the decline in oil prices and the slowdown of economic activity during the pandemic,

austerity measures were implemented in Qatar in 2020. The Ministry of Finance instructed all government institutions to reduce by 30 per cent the monthly costs paid by the Government to employ foreign workers, effective 1 June 2020. However, the directives left it to the discretion of the public institution to decide whether to introduce salary cuts or to provide migrant workers working in these institutions with a two-month notice before making them redundant.¹³⁵

Government agencies concerned with employment and labour launched a number of campaigns across the United Arab Emirates to raise awareness on COVID-19 in multiple languages via various media outlets to ensure that information would be accessible to the largest number of migrant workers. The Government also teamed up with charities to provide low-skilled migrant workers with personal protection equipment, food supplies and meals, and to promote social cohesion with various initiatives,¹³⁶ such as the 10 Million Meal Campaign,¹³⁷ Together We Are Okay announced by the Community Contributions Authority *Ma'an*,¹³⁸ You Are Among Your Family, which was launched to sponsor and care for the families who lost one of their members to COVID-19 and who are residing in the country regardless of their nationality;¹³⁹ Fund of the UAE: Homeland of Humanity;¹⁴⁰ and the Social Solidarity Fund, which also sponsored travel tickets for migrant workers who were hard hit by COVID-19.¹⁴¹

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation of the United Arab Emirates launched on 30 March 2020 a national programme to stabilize the labour market, and ensure business continuity in the private sector. Ministerial resolution No. 279 of 2020 introduced guidance on employment-related measures that employers can take in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The resolution includes guidelines on teleworking, granting workers temporary leave without pay, introducing temporary

amendments to work contracts, reducing workers' wages temporarily or permanently, and registering the excess of non-national workers in the Virtual Labour Market platform.¹⁴² The Ministry also implemented the Early Leave initiative to support and protect the rights of migrant workers wishing to return home during lockdown.¹⁴³ The Ministry also launched the Together We Overcome the Challenge campaign in seven languages to inform workers of their rights, including the importance of wage settlement through WPS, the availability of a salary complaint service that allows workers to report delays in wage payment, and a hotline service that provides information and advice to workers.¹⁴⁴

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, the **Tunisian** Ministry of Social Affairs issued recommendations to employers, government institutions and landlords on the fair and humane treatment of migrants; and confirmed in-kind and financial grants to vulnerable migrants, support to civil society organizations, and waivers for expiry of work and immigration permits.¹⁴⁵

2. Irregular migration

Migrants in an irregular situation generally lack the required documents or authorization to enter, stay or work in a country. The combination of precarious situations in countries of origin and a lack of access to regular migration pathways often leads to irregular migration, however, migrants can also fall into situations of irregularity owing to administrative errors, the action (or inaction) of sponsors, or because they left their employer without permission or escaped an abusive situation.¹⁴⁶

Especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis, several Arab countries adopted measures that granted migrants in an irregular situation the opportunity to either regularize their status, or to leave the country without incurring fines or penalties.

(a) Regularization

In July 2020, the Ministry of Immigration and Expatriate Affairs and the Ministry of Education of **Egypt** partnered with the Egypt Country Office of the World Food Programme to launch a new online training programme for school teachers on addressing irregular migration.¹⁴⁷ As part of the presidential Life Saving Boats initiative to promote safe migration, this training programme raised awareness on irregular migration from Egypt and its dangers, and on providing safe alternatives for migration.¹⁴⁸

In July 2020, the **Lebanese** General Security provided guidelines for regularizing the status of Arab citizens and foreigners who either entered Lebanon irregularly or whose residency permit has expired, providing special instructions for migrant workers and their sponsors and for Syrian nationals, but without addressing the situation of Palestinian refugees fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic.¹⁴⁹ The guidelines specify all necessary paperwork and information on which regional offices can process respective cases.¹⁵⁰

In **Algeria**, ministerial instruction No. 9 of July 2019¹⁵¹ allows border police to exceptionally grant a regularization visa to foreigners at border crossings, especially on humanitarian grounds.

Regularization in the context of COVID-19

In April 2020, as part of **Bahraini** efforts to reduce the humanitarian and economic impact caused by the pandemic, the Labour Market Regulatory Authority announced a grace period with immediate effect and until the end of the year for all migrant workers in an irregular situation to regularize their status.¹⁵²

The **Emirati** Cabinet issued a decision in May 2020 granting migrants and visitors with irregular status, whose residency permits or visas expired prior to March 2020, an exemption period of three months starting 18 May 2020, during which they could leave the country

without having to pay any of the fines incurred for expiration of visas, identification documents or work permits. The Cabinet decision also noted the possibility for beneficiaries from the exemption to return to the country in the future once they meet the necessary visa requirements.¹⁵³

In the light of the coronavirus pandemic, **Kuwait** issued a decision in March 2020 allowing migrants in an irregular situation who had overstayed their visa to leave the country without paying fines or the cost of their travel, and without being banned from re-entering the country.¹⁵⁴ The grace period for no-penalty departure was offered for a month starting in April 2020. Migrants who failed to regularize their status during the aforementioned period risked deportation, and were prohibited from re-entering the country. The Ministry of Interior also provided an option for some migrants, such as domestic workers; migrants whose visas or permits expired in March 2020 onwards; and spouses, parents and children of Kuwaiti citizens to regularize their status by paying a fee.¹⁵⁵ To facilitate safe departures, Kuwait used schools as shelters to accommodate migrants in an irregular situation by completing the necessary procedures for repatriation until the date of travel.¹⁵⁶ Another amnesty period was announced in November 2020 for the period 1-31 December 2020. However, unlike previously, migrants were required to pay overstay fines but were offered a chance to re-enter the country again on new labour visas.¹⁵⁷

(b) Border control

In July 2019, **Algeria** issued a ministerial decree aimed at identifying coordination modalities between the different authorities concerned with land and coast inspection and control for the purposes of implementing joint patrols, and arresting and penalizing all types of offenders and law breakers (drug dealers, organized criminals, terrorists, persons engaged in illegal transportation activities.) Article 7 provides that authorities should

exchange information on preparations or attempts at migration, including irregular migration by sea, and illegal sailing and docking operations.¹⁵⁸

In December 2019, **Libya** announced the formation of a joint committee on irregular migration for the Tobruk region, bringing together the Illegal Immigration Service, the Passport Investigation Department, the Municipal Guard, and the Chairman of the Steering Council.¹⁵⁹

The **Libyan** Ministry of Interior passed resolution No. 829 of 2020 regarding the establishment of a joint security chamber to address irregular migration. The chamber's first meeting discussed mechanisms of cooperation and coordination, and the speed of information exchange and flow between agencies concerned with addressing irregular migration.¹⁶⁰

3. Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants

Migrant smuggling is defined in the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as "procurement in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident".

Trafficking in persons is defined in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, also supplementing the Convention, as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation".

During the reporting period for the present study (April 2019 to December 2020), several Arab countries organized prevention and awareness campaigns on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Countries also established or reformed entities addressing these issues.

(a) Institutional developments

The Attorney General of **Bahrain** issued decision No. 34 for 2020,¹⁶¹ establishing a prosecution office for trafficking in persons to investigate types of crimes stipulated in law No. 1 of 2008 on combating trafficking in persons.¹⁶²

In March 2020, the **Iraqi** Ministry of Interior restructured and upgraded the anti-trafficking in persons unit to “directorate” level, enlarging it to include six sections, 14 units, and two offices in Baghdad. The new units include an information technology team that compiles data, a strategic planning unit to develop relevant policies, a provincial outreach unit, and a unit that coordinates the inter-ministerial counter-trafficking committee.¹⁶³

In June 2019, the Kurdistan Regional Government in **Iraq** established the Erbil Office of the Directorate for Combating Human Trafficking. In addition, a non-governmental organization was permitted to operate the first trafficking shelter in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.¹⁶⁴

In April 2020, **Kuwait** formed a working group focused on combatting human trafficking and dealing with violators of residency laws. The group includes representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Public Authority for Manpower, the Ministry of Interior, and the Department for Legal Advice and Legislation. It is responsible for determining the appropriate mechanism to deal with residency permit dealers, investigate violation cases, verify data and information gathered to help identify perpetrators of “ghost labour”¹⁶⁵ in the country, and support taking necessary legal measures against them.¹⁶⁶

Morocco officially launched a national Commission to combat trafficking in persons in April 2019, three years after the adoption of a 2016 law on trafficking in persons. The members of the Commission representing ministerial departments, security services, national institutions, and civil society organizations were asked to develop a national plan and mechanisms combining prevention and awareness on the one hand, and the required measures for sanction, deterrence and protection, on the other.¹⁶⁷

As part of the commitment by **Saudi Arabia** to improve the national response to combat trafficking in persons, the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking launched a national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in March 2020, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Organization for Migration.¹⁶⁸ The Supreme Judicial Council of **Saudi Arabia** passed a resolution in February 2020 requesting the submission of cases for prosecution under the anti-trafficking law, such as those on potential forced labour and sex trafficking, to specialized criminal courts. Moreover, a panel made up of five experts on human trafficking was established by the Public Prosecution Office to provide it with advice and support, and to inform the review and development of anti-trafficking policy.¹⁶⁹

In **Egypt**, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on the Protection and Assistance of Child Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Victims of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons were adopted and published in January 2020.¹⁷⁰ The SOPs are inclusive of children on the move, including asylum seekers, refugees, child migrants, and smuggled and trafficked children. The SOPs aim to create a national pathway for the case management of child asylum-seekers, refugees and victims of migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons; to provide them with the necessary services to ensure that they enjoy all their rights without discrimination; and to protect them from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. The SOPs also aim to promote

coordination between the relevant national entities, and set the necessary controls for the engagement of international organizations and civil society organizations.¹⁷¹

In July 2019, **Tunisia** passed decree law No. 2019-653, which established operating procedures and guidelines for the National Authority and four specialized commissions, and their responsibility to monitor, evaluate, research, train, develop and track cases of victims of trafficking in persons.¹⁷²

(b) Other relevant measures and developments

In February 2020, **Mauritania** approved a draft law that repeals and replaces certain provisions of law No. 2010-021 on combating the smuggling of migrants. The new law better protects the human rights of migrants, grants specific protection measures for children and other vulnerable persons, introduces sanctions for smuggling of migrants at sea, and makes provisions for facilitating the voluntary return of smuggled migrants to their home country. The National Assembly approved the law in July 2020.¹⁷³

In **Mauritania**, draft legislation amending law No. 25/2003 on the prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims was approved by the Cabinet in March 2020, and passed by the National Assembly in July 2020. The revision was based on input from civil society organizations and government ministries during several workshops. It strengthens the protection of victims, provides for accompanying measures, and streamlines penalties for trafficking in persons.¹⁷⁴

The national anti-trafficking action plan of **Iraq**, launched in March 2019, included awareness campaigns that advertised its anti-trafficking hotline.¹⁷⁵

In March 2020, the newly consolidated National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking of the **Sudan** drafted, finalized, and

approved the 2020-2022 national action plan to combat human trafficking. The Kassala state government drafted a state-level action plan mirroring the national action plan.¹⁷⁶ The Sudanese Government also signed the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020. Among other things, the peace deal aims to combat trafficking in person, irregular migration, and cross-border crime, and to facilitate the safe return of IDPs and refugees to their areas of origin.

Two SOPs, one for family tracing and reunification and another for the protection of child victims of trafficking, were adopted in the **Sudan** in 2019, allowing a systematized approach to support children on the move and unaccompanied and separated children through family tracing and reunification. The interagency anti-trafficking coordination group benefitted greatly from the adoption of the SOPs, which identified the roles and responsibilities of different actors.¹⁷⁷

The **Algerian** parliament adopted law No.15/20 related to prevention of kidnapping crimes. The law stipulated stricter punishment if the kidnapping was carried out by international organized criminal groups, or if it was for the purpose of child trafficking.¹⁷⁸

In June 2020, the **Comoros** ratified the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The ratification of this additional protocol is intended to prevent and combat such crime and facilitate international cooperation against it.¹⁷⁹

Moreover, in December 2020, the **Comoros** became the 150th State Party to ratify the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The protocol aims to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants by land, sea

and air; promote cooperation between states; and protect the rights of migrants.¹⁸⁰

4. Forced displacement and refugee protection

Forced displacement to and from Arab countries continues to be a prominent feature of the region. In 2020, over 9.4 million refugees sought protection in the region, including 3.6 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate, and 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. At the same time, Arab countries were the origin of over 8.8 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate.

Although only 9 of the 22 Arab countries have ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (annex 5 to the present report), regulations and special provisions for persons fleeing conflict and persecution are in place in many Arab countries. During the reporting period for the present study (April 2019 to December 2020), several countries enacted policy developments and updated plans related to refugees, in particular refugee return.

(a) Access to asylum, refugee status and residency

In April 2019, **Qatar** passed Council of Ministers decision No. 12 of 2019 defining groups of persons to be granted political asylum, which builds on law No. 11 of 2018 on regulating political asylum. Decision No. 12 determines five groups of persons that, if persecuted or threatened, can be granted political asylum in the country, namely human rights defenders, media correspondents who document war crimes and crimes against humanity, members of political parties, religious sects or ethnic minorities, writers and researchers, and former or current government officials who oppose or defect from their Governments.¹⁸¹

In February 2020, **Iraq** published its Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2020-2021 in

Response to the Syria Crisis, setting out how the country might better coordinate and address the needs of Syrian refugees. This newest edition places an emphasis on protecting the rights of refugees, their resilience, building communities while addressing development needs, and building state capacity to implement the plan.¹⁸²

Jordan published the latest update of the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), which has since 2015 been the only comprehensive national plan through which the international community provides financial support to respond to the Syrian crisis. The latest JRP (2020-2022) aims to reduce pressures associated with Jordan being a host country, improve living conditions, and help refugees and host communities rely on themselves in eliminating vulnerabilities.

(b) Refugee return

In January 2019, the Banadir Regional Administration and Municipality of Mogadishu in **Somalia** established the Internally Displaced Person and Refugee Returnees Policy in response to the National Development Plan (2017-2019) objective of enhancing the country's resilience capacity by sustainably reducing the number of IDPs, by integrating them in mainstream life and addressing the underlying causes of their displacement. Somalia also passed the National Policy on Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in November 2019, which codifies the Government's responsibility for the first time, both at the federal and state levels, regarding facilitating sustainable solutions for IDPs.¹⁸³ The legislation protects the rights of IDPs and refugee-returnees; and creates a framework to prevent further forced displacement, provide protection and assistance during displacement, and to find a durable solution to their displacement.

In February 2020, the **Syrian** Cabinet approved a plan to gradually restore basic services, infrastructure and economic opportunities in provinces that had been severely damaged by

the conflict, and have been receiving groups of refugee-returnees from Lebanon through the centres of al-Dabbousia, Jussyia and Jdeidet Yabous in the vicinity of Homs and Damascus. The administrative process includes entrance measures such as documentation, as well as providing medical services for those in need.¹⁸⁴

Individual refugees returning to the Syrian Arab Republic, including Palestinian refugees who lived in the country before the conflict, were impacted by Syrian Cabinet decision No. 46, which came into effect in August 2020,¹⁸⁵ and which requires all Syrian citizens and Palestinian refugees registered with the Syrian General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees to exchange \$100 to Syrian pounds in accordance with the official exchange rate at the border before being allowed entry into the territory.¹⁸⁶ Individuals aged 18 and under and those who drive commercial vehicles are exempted from the policy, with further adjustments made to the decision in 2021.

In June 2020, the **Syrian** Government made several decisions on the future of Al-Yarmouk Camp, and on facilitating the return of Palestinian refugees who have long been residents of the camp.¹⁸⁷ The Government launched an official registration process for those wishing to return to the camp in November 2020, which is limited to former residents who can show proof of ownership, have a “sound” structural house inside the camp, and can obtain security clearance.

(c) Access of refugees, IDPs and returnees to economic and social services and rights

In April 2019, **Qatar** passed Council of Ministers decision No. 13 of 2019 defining the rights of political refugees in the country, and their advantages and benefits including freedom of movement, the right to work, housing, health care, and education.¹⁸⁸

In June 2019, **Mauritania** partnered with UNHCR to continue registering Malian

refugees within the Mbera camp, and to begin out-of-camp registration in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Identification cards were distributed and birth certificates were granted to refugee children born in Mauritania.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Government included the Mbera refugee camp in national health services.¹⁹⁰

In March 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of **Somalia** developed the country's first National Social Protection Policy, which sets out a framework for a national social protection system in Somalia from 2019 to 2040. The Government recognizes IDPs in Somalia as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, and has made provisions to create a safety net to address their needs.

In an effort to provide tenure security and address the housing needs of IDPs and refugee-returnees, **Somalia** passed the Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in November 2019. The Interim Protocol establishes the eligibility criteria for land distribution, the availability of land for distribution, priority in land allocation, the determination of beneficiaries, and the obligations of beneficiaries and land ownership.

The **Somali** Government also established national eviction guidelines that lay out conditions, safeguards and a process for legal evictions, in line with international standards. The guidelines prevent arbitrary and forced eviction of occupiers of public and private properties, from homes, encampments and other lands, thus protecting the rights of IDPs and refugee-returnees to residence.

The Ministry of Social Affairs of **Tunisia** issued a decision in May 2019 on the inclusion of refugees registered with UNHCR, employed with a contract or self-employed in the social security system, which grants them access to social services, including health insurance and retirement funds.¹⁹¹

(d) Other measures and developments

In October 2019, **Somalia** launched the Durable Solutions Secretariat, chaired by the Ministry of Planning. It spans 14 government institutions, including the National Commission for Refugees and IDPs. The secretariat aims to launch a durable solutions policy for IDPs, returned Somalis, refugees and asylum-seekers in Somalia.¹⁹²

Forced displacement and refugee protection in the context of COVID-19

In April 2020, in response to the spread of COVID-19, the National Commission for Refugees and IDPs in **Somalia** called for a nationwide moratorium on the evictions of IDPs to protect their right to housing.¹⁹³ The moratorium appeal is in place until further notice.

As part of efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19, the **Lebanese** authorities conducted large-scale disinfection operations in 52 refugee camps across the country in March 2020. Patrols from the General Directorate of General Security coordinated with municipalities and civil society organizations to conduct disinfection operations and enforce the COVID-19 curfew.¹⁹⁴

The Ministry of Immigration and Displacement in **Iraq** launched major disinfection campaigns in camps across the country as precautionary and preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19, in coordination and collaboration with civil defence departments and the Ministry of Health. As at June 2020, the Ministry had launched widespread awareness campaigns about the virus, which included holding direct meetings with IDPs and posting posters in camps, in addition to holding educational seminars about avoiding infection.¹⁹⁵

Owing to the COVID-19 crisis, the **Tunisian** Ministry for Human Rights, Relations with

Constitutional Bodies and Civil Society launched an online platform in April 2020, for foreigners stranded in Tunisia by the pandemic, specifically students, migrants and asylum seekers. The platform helps individuals seek assistance, connect to different organizations, and receive donations and other aid from individuals or legal entities.¹⁹⁶

5. Admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization

The regulation of admission into, residence in and exit of foreigners from Arab countries has seen an array of modifications during the reporting period for the present study (April 2019 to December 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has also led to the adoption of various exceptional and temporary measures, mostly in GCC countries. Several policy developments were also witnessed in the area of citizenship policies, mainly concerning naturalization under specific conditions.

(a) Family reunification

In March 2019, the **Emirati** Council of Ministers approved an amendment to decision No. 30 of 2019 on admitting the family members of migrant workers into the country, changing the requirement for admission from the profession of migrant workers to their income level.¹⁹⁷ The decision now requires a migrant worker to earn a minimum salary of 4,000 dirhams (equivalent to \$1,088) per month or 3,000 dirhams (equivalent to \$816) plus accommodation to be able to sponsor his or her family members.¹⁹⁸ The amendment also requested relevant authorities to explore possible improvements to the terms for provision of basic services to migrant workers, including education and health, and encourage the recruitment of family members residing in the country as an alternative to bringing in new migrant workers.¹⁹⁹

(b) Residency permits

In September 2019, the **Kuwaiti** Government introduced a new measure to increase residency fees for migrant workers and their families by 10 per cent, from \$1,500 per person per year to \$1,650 per person per year.²⁰⁰

In August 2020, the **Kuwaiti** Cabinet approved a new foreign residency draft law to regulate migrants' stay in the country. The proposed residency law focuses on fighting visa trading, and on preventing migrants in an irregular situation from working in the country. It raises penalties in terms of prison sentences and fines for visa traders, employers and employees violating the law.²⁰¹

In May 2020, **Oman** passed ministerial decision 157/2020 amending some provisions of the Executive Regulation of the Foreigners Residency Law. The 2020 amendment to article 24 of the law specifically allows a foreigner's residence permit to be transferred from one employer to another provided that the outlined procedure is followed.

In May 2019, **Saudi Arabia** approved the premium residency proposal under decision No. 521 on approving premium residency, and royal decree No. M/106. Premium residency allows foreign nationals to self-sponsor their stay in the country, and to sponsor the residency of their spouses and children, visitor visas for other immediate family members, and work visas for domestic workers. Other entitlements include the right to own residential, commercial and industrial real estate in any area in the country other than previously specified areas; and the freedom to enter and exit the country, to work in private sector companies except in professions and businesses designated to Saudi nationals; to change jobs; and to conduct business in accordance with foreign investment law.²⁰² To qualify for premium residency, foreigners must provide proof of financial solvency, a clean criminal record, and a medical record free from contagious diseases,

and must have a regular residency status in the event of applying from inside the country and valid medical insurance, among other terms and conditions.

In May 2019, the **United Arab Emirates** launched a new long-term residence system, also referred to as the Golden Card programme.²⁰³ Under the new system, residence visas will be granted for 5 or 10 years and then renewed automatically if conditions are still met. Beneficiaries include wealthy foreign investors, entrepreneurs, talented professionals such as doctors, scientists, engineers and artists, and brilliant students and researchers. The benefits of the new system are also extended to family members.²⁰⁴

(c) Visas

In August 2019, **Saudi Arabia** introduced an instant visa service on the electronic platform *Qiwa* that expedites the process of visa issuance, cutting the time needed for private sector firms to issue work visas for migrant workers, a process that used to take up to eight months. Only firms that are part of the *Nitaqat* labour nationalization programme, and classified at a certain tier of nationalization, can apply to and benefit from this service.²⁰⁵

Moreover, in September 2019, as part of a wider strategy to standardize the employment immigration system, **Saudi Arabia** passed decision No. 11 on changes to visitor, pilgrimage and transit visas, and royal decree No. M/2.²⁰⁶ The decisions standardized the validity period of all visitor visas, including work visit and commercial visit visas, and introduced a single fee of 300 riyals (equivalent to \$80) for all visa categories. Previously, visa validity and fees had varied depending on visa category and nationality of the applicant. The introduced changes did not impact residency applications.²⁰⁷

The Government of the Republic of **Djibouti** launched its new electronic visa system in April 2019.²⁰⁸

The Nationality, Passports and Residence Affairs office of the **Bahraini** Ministry of Interior announced the re-extension of all types of visit visas up till 21 January 2021. Extensions will be automatically undertaken with fee waivers granted.²⁰⁹

In December 2020, the **Sudanese** Interior Ministry issued decree No. 179/2001 that cancelled visa-free entry for Syrians.²¹⁰

(d) Access to citizenship

In June 2019, the Omani Minister of the Interior issued decision No. 92/2019, which provides the executive regulations for the **Omani** Nationality Law, based on the Omani Citizenship Law issued by royal decree No. 38/2014. The decision outlines the specification of original nationality, the recovery of nationality, the criteria for the granting and loss of Omani citizenship, and the application process for Omani citizenship and passports. In addition, the decision requires foreigners who apply for Omani citizenship to fulfil various criteria, including proof that they have been living in Oman, that they have no legal cases filed against them, and that they have a valid medical certificate.

In July 2019, the **Egyptian** parliament passed amendments to article No. 2 of the Law of Entry and Residence of Foreigners, amending the laws regulating Egyptian nationality (law 26/1975), and the residence of foreigners in the country (law 89/1960). The new law allows the Prime Minister to grant Egyptian citizenship to foreigners who have purchased a property owned by the State or other public legal persons, established an investment project in accordance with Investment Law No. 72 of 2017, or deposited a certain amount in foreign currency to the State treasury or in a special account of the Central Bank of Egypt.²¹¹

The King of **Saudi Arabia** passed an order in December 2019 to facilitate the process for naturalizing outstandingly talented people.²¹² The aim is to attract scientists, intellectuals and innovators from around the world to advance development, in line with Vision 2030.²¹³

(e) Other relevant measures and developments

The **Comoros** passed order No. 19/07/MIDATI/CAB forming a Multisectoral Committee of Monitoring and Orientation on Migration Issues in December 2019, established within the Ministry of Interior. The Committee's mission is to collect and study all texts on migration issues published by organizations of which the Comoros is a member, so as to reformulate the remarks and recommendations of the Comoros; and to develop and provide the country with a national migration policy that will take into account national specificities.²¹⁴

The **Sudanese** Government issued new regulations in August 2020 regarding the governance of foreign presence in the country, including automating immigration procedures for foreigners, introducing a fingerprint system, granting a foreign number to any foreigner entering the Sudan or wishing to conduct a transaction therein, and linking the system with embassies at a later stage. This is part of the second stage to implement the new electronic system for foreigners, while also activating the role of the Foreigners Control Department through collaboration between immigration offices and monitoring offices throughout the country.²¹⁵

In November 2019, the Department of Immigration, Passports and Citizenship of **Yemen** announced the launch of an online platform for passport services in the Ma'rib Governorate. The platform helps facilitate appointment reservations, and addresses the problem of overcrowding at the Department. Services available via the online platform include applying for new passports, renewing passports, replacing lost or damaged passports, amending personal information, and ordering additional stamps.²¹⁶

Lebanon made changes to their visitor visa applications in June 2020, so that all related documents are submitted exclusively to the Public Relations Department of the Directorate

of General Security in exchange for a service fee. The time required for processing these services was reduced significantly.²¹⁷

Admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization in the context of COVID-19

In September 2020, the **Kuwaiti** Ministry of Interior issued decision No. 598/2020 to extend all expired residency permits and visit visas of stranded foreigners in Kuwait until December 2020. This decision was the third extension issued by the Ministry.²¹⁸

In response to COVID-19, **Tunisia** issued a statement in April 2020 extending all valid residence permits of foreigners residing in Tunisia, including refugees and asylum seekers, until the end of the crisis. There would be no penalization or fees regarding expired visas and overstaying the original authorized duration of stay.²¹⁹

In March 2020, as part of precautionary measures to control the pandemic, the **United Arab Emirates** suspended the issuance of visas to foreigners other than diplomatic passport holders starting March 2020, and the issuance of all types of work permits until further notice.²²⁰ Exemptions were granted for EXPO 2020 and intra-corporate transfers.²²¹ In October 2020, the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship announced the resumption of issuance of new visas for migrant workers in the domestic help category, and of permits to work in vital governmental and semi-governmental institutions.²²²

In April 2020, the Emirati Cabinet decided that residence permits, visas and ID cards expiring in March 2020 would remain valid until the end of December 2020.²²³ The Cabinet then amended this decision in July 2020 to allow further flexibility. Moreover, holders of residency permits who happened to be outside the country during the lockdown period, or those who had stayed outside the country for more than six months, were provided a one-

month period from the date of arrival to renew any permits that had expired after March 2020, provided they return to the United Arab Emirates within a specified timeframe.²²⁴

6. Expatriate and diaspora governance

Arab countries, many of which have substantial numbers of nationals in foreign countries, intensified efforts to engage with their diasporas. In the context of COVID-19, several countries also took steps to repatriate expatriate citizens and citizens stranded abroad due to travel restrictions.

(a) Institutional developments

The **Egyptian** Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs inaugurated a new institution, Egypt Can, in April 2019. Led by the Minister, the institution brings together Egyptian scientists living abroad to further Egyptian research and development.²²⁵

In February 2020, **Algeria** issued a presidential decree to establish the Algerian Agency on International Cooperation for Solidarity and Development. Its main responsibilities include participating in preparing and implementing the national policy for international cooperation; assisting diplomatic apparatus and ministries to optimize foreign technical and financial assistance in support of national development; coordinating the implementation of a training policy of foreigners in Algeria and the training of Algerians abroad, in consultation with concerned ministries; promoting the employment of national competencies; and developing relationships with the Algerian scientific and business communities residing abroad.²²⁶

In December 2020, the Minister Delegate in charge of **Moroccans** residing abroad and the Ombudsman signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen the processing of complaints and requests from Moroccans residing abroad.²²⁷

In December 2020, a partnership agreement was signed between the Ministry of Tourism, Air Transport, Handicrafts, and Social Economy, and the Ministry Delegate in charge of **Moroccans** abroad. The agreement aims to mobilize the skills of Moroccans abroad for the social and economic development of the country.²²⁸

(b) Repatriation of citizens

Repatriation of citizens in the context of COVID-19

In March 2020, **Lebanon** adopted a strategy on Lebanese expatriates wishing to return home, subject to the conditions set by the Ministerial Council with the Minister of Health, and with respect to the mechanism adopted within the Government's strategy to contain the pandemic.²²⁹

In May 2020, the **Syrian Arab Republic** issued instructions to facilitate the return of Syrian citizens, specifically targeting travellers stranded abroad who had left the country between January and May 2020, students who wished to return home owing to educational institutions being physically closed in host countries, and employees with official missions unable to return due to border closures.²³⁰ Palestinian refugees registered with the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic who were stranded abroad were able to benefit from these instructions.

In the same context, **Morocco** began repatriating Moroccan students from China in January 2020.²³¹ Repatriation efforts were later expanded to Moroccan citizens stranded in France, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Gulf and African countries, in strict compliance with health measures.²³² The Moroccan State bore all the costs related to the repatriation operations, and Moroccan embassies and consulates provided financial assistance and medical, administrative and legal support to thousands of Moroccans stranded abroad.

7. Other measures and developments

There are other areas of migration governance that have not been included under specific headers in the present report owing to the small number of developments in the reporting period (April 2019 to December 2020), but which are nevertheless impacting the situation and rights of migrants.

(a) Access to health care and sanitation

Access to health care and sanitation in the context of COVID-19

In March 2020, changes were made to the **Omani** Law on the Control of Communicable Diseases, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic through royal decree 32/2020. The amendments stipulated that all residents infected with a communicable disease listed under the law are entitled to receive medical care and treatment in government facilities. The Ministry of Health further specified that COVID-19 treatment and tests were free to all, including migrants.²³³ Failure to abide by the provisions could result in imprisonment or a fine; and in the case of foreigners, can lead to deportation from the country.

In March 2020, the **Moroccan** Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and the Family, in partnership with UNFPA, took measures to provide a hygiene basket (Salama Kit) that contained personal hygiene items and tools, antiseptics and disinfectants. It also disseminated information about disease prevention, and protecting health professionals and pregnant women from COVID-19. The kit primarily targeted Moroccan and migrant women. The kits were placed at the disposal of civic networks and associations to distribute to targeted groups.²³⁴ In total, over 16 million people were reached with disease-prevention information via television, radio and online communications.²³⁵

(b) Ownership and housing

The Ministry of Housing in **Oman** issued ministerial decision 292/2020 of June 2020 stating that non-Omanis are prohibited from owning the following types of land and real estate: agricultural lands in all provinces; and other lands and real estate in the governorates, states and mountains specified in article 1 of the law, as well as in all islands of the Sultanate, and in the surroundings of palaces, headquarters of security and military authorities specified under the text of article 2, and in the heritage and old neighbourhoods specified by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. This does not include land and real estate located in completed tourist housing compounds.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced decree 357/2020 stipulating that non-Omani nationals can purchase real estate in certain areas in Muscat.²³⁶

(c) Institutional developments

In November 2019, **Djibouti** passed decree No. 2019-279/PR/MI that established the National Coordination Office for Migration within the Ministry of the Interior. The National Coordinator is responsible for examining common priorities, challenges and opportunities related to the management of migration in Djibouti, so as to propose to the Government appropriate measures to tackle them through a national strategy on migration. In October 2020, Djibouti passed order No. 2020-122/PR/MI appointing the members of the National Coordination Office for Migration.

In May 2019, **Morocco** signed a draft law to establish the headquarters of the African Observatory for Migration and Development in Rabat, in accordance with the endorsed proposal by King Mohammed VI, and supported by the African Heads of State and Government at the thirty-first African Union Summit.²³⁷ The Observatory also marks the start of the implementation of the

Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, which emphasize that better statistics and information will prompt better management.

In May 2019, a new committee was created by the Office of the Prime Minister of **Yemen** to ensure the protection of the legal and human rights of migrants in the country. The committee was led by the Ministry of Interior's Immigration, Passport and Naturalization Authority.²³⁸

(d) Other measures and developments

Algerian law No. 5-20 on preventing and combatting discrimination and hate speech was adopted in April 2020. It aims to combat the dissemination or encouragement of all forms of expression that justify discrimination, and those involving expressions of contempt, insult, hostility, hatred or violence directed at a person or group of persons based on gender, ethnicity, race, descent, national or ethnic origin, language, geographic affiliation, disability or health status. It also aims to prevent every distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on the above factors that entail the disruption or obstruction of the enjoyment of human rights.²³⁹

In July 2020, **Tunisia** launched TUNISIA-HIMS, the country's first census of international migration. The survey aimed to gather statistical data on immigration in Tunisia, focusing on different social groups such as emigrants, return migrants, non-migrants and prospective migrants, circular migrants, forced migrants/refugees and immigrants. The data gathered from studying international migration flows, including their causes, dynamics, effects and relationship to development, are meant to make better-informed national migration strategies and to enhance their implementation and monitoring. As such, the survey contributes to fulfilling the "Migration Governance" component of the ProGreS (Governance and Strategy) Migration Tunisia programme.²⁴⁰

The **Moroccan** High Planning Commission began publishing the Moroccan results of the same survey in December 2020. They provide disaggregated data by sex, age and other relevant characteristics.²⁴¹

In June 2020, the Centre for Development Information and Education and the Union of Social Solidarity in **Tunisia** launched the

first training course on the “Socioeconomic inclusion of migrants” as part of the I-Migr project. Targeted at executives and elected officials of municipalities in Tunisia, the course aspires to create an environment that protects the rights of migrants, and to consolidate tools for leaders in the community to better receive, mediate, inform and guide.²⁴²

C. International cooperation on migration and refugee protection

Migration and displacement are intrinsically transnational in nature, therefore international cooperation between States is an essential element of their governance. Arab countries have been engaged in multiple international processes at the global, interregional, regional, subregional and bilateral levels.

1. Interregional, regional and subregional processes

(a) Related to the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees

ESCWA, IOM and the League of Arab States, in collaboration with the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, organized a regional conference on the implementation and policy implications of the **Global Compact for Migration** for the Arab region in December 2019. The conference provided a platform for member States to identify national and regional priorities, share best practices and key achievements to date in implementing the Global Compact, and explore priority actions for the future.²⁴³

In 2020, ESCWA, IOM and the League of Arab States, in partnership with the Regional United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab Region, launched the first **Regional Review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab**

Region. The regional review process, which spanned a year, included several capacity-building workshops²⁴⁴ and multi-stakeholder dialogues²⁴⁵ aimed at supporting member States to develop their voluntary national reviews of the Global Compact for Migration; encourage a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach; strengthen focus on migrant women, children and other vulnerable groups; and foster regional collaboration and cooperation. The review process culminated in a regional review conference held in February 2021 aimed at evaluating progress made towards achieving the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration, highlighting common trends, challenges and emerging issues, and exploring means to strengthen regional collaboration.²⁴⁶

In January 2020, the African Union and the Government of Egypt, the current African Union Chair, hosted the second International Forum on Migration Statistics (IFMS) in Cairo, with a focus on addressing disaggregation of the SDGs and their targets by migratory status (SDG 17.6). IFMS is a global platform that brings together a wide range of actors from national and regional authorities, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and the private sector for the purpose of improving data on migration and migration-related topics.

The twelfth Summit Meeting of the **Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)** was held in Quito in January 2020, concluding the 2019 Ecuador

GFMD Chairmanship under the theme “Sustainable approaches to human mobility: Upholding rights, strengthening state agency, and advancing development through partnerships and collective action”. The Summit was preceded by preparations at the regional level, including a consultation with the African Union and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

The 2020 **GFMD Regional Consultation with the African Union** took place online over several sessions in May and June 2020. The African Union chose to focus on the following three themes: governance of labour migration in the context of changing employment landscapes, skilling migrants for employment, and addressing gaps in migrant protection. The policy dialogue at the Regional Consultation also focused on the COVID-19 context, highlighting the increased vulnerability of migrant workers and undocumented migrants, including challenges such as poor living conditions, lack of access to health care, job losses, reduced remittances, forced repatriations, and increased discrimination.²⁴⁷

The 2020 GFMD Regional Consultation with the **Abu Dhabi Dialogue** also took place online in July 2020. It focused on the following three themes: governance of labour migration in the context of changing employment landscapes, leveraging new technologies to empower migrants, and fostering partnerships to realize migration-related goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Senior Officials Meeting of the **Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugees Affairs (ARCP)**, chaired by the League of Arab States, took place in Cairo in June 2020. Senior officials of ARCP member States met for a regional review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, and in preparation for the thirteenth GFMD summit.²⁴⁸

The Protracted Displacement Conference was held as a four-day virtual conference in October and November 2020 on the theme “Protracted displacement of refugees: Hopes, perspectives, and solutions?”. Jointly hosted by Yarmouk

University, the German Jordanian University, Academics in Solidarity, EDU-SYRIA, the German Agency for International Cooperation and UNHCR, the Conference gathered key actors and scholars to facilitate global dialogue on durable solutions for host and home countries of refugees in the Middle East under the topics of repatriation, resettlement, and sustainable cohesion in the host country.

(b) Cooperation on labour migration

In October 2019, the **fifth Ministerial Consultation of ADD** convened in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, to follow up on the implementation of the Colombo Declaration and its four thematic areas: cooperation on skilling, certification and mutual recognition; labour recruitment; the role of technology in the governance of human mobility; and ADD inter-regional and global cooperation. In addition, panel discussions and meetings were held on future of work, improving financial literacy among domestic workers, and inter-regional cooperation. In April 2019, prior to the ADD Senior Officials Meeting and in the run up to the Ministerial Consultation, the ADD secretariat organized the **High-level Symposium on the Future of Work**, facilitated by ILO.

In November 2019, the Italian-funded AMEM project, implemented by ILO, held a **regional workshop on labour migration statistics** in Rabat, with participants from national statistical offices and the Governments of **Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia**. The workshop issued a series of recommendations on strengthening and harmonizing labour migration statistics and information systems between Maghreb countries.²⁴⁹

(c) Europe-Africa cooperation on migration

In September 2019, Egypt chaired the **Khartoum Process** Thematic Meeting on “Legal frameworks and policy development: Optimising the benefits of organised labour migration”. A response to the Joint Valletta Action Plan,

the Thematic Meeting provided an overview of existing labour agreements both at the bilateral and multilateral levels, while discussing best practices and areas for additional work. Moreover, the Thematic Meeting provided resources on protecting migrant workers' rights, and ways to increase inter-State cooperation to address challenges regarding labour migration.²⁵⁰

In October 2019, the **Khartoum Process** held another thematic meeting with a focus on "Migration for development: Harnessing the potential of the diaspora" to explore leveraging diaspora potential for development. Discussions were structured around the following thematic pillars: engaging the diaspora in their host countries; options for the countries of origin; fostering an environment favourable to the engagement of the diaspora in their country of origin; and remittances and investments: ways to maximize the impact of remittances.²⁵¹

The 2019 meeting of the Mediterranean Dialogues took place in December 2019 in Rome to continue the conversation on current challenges with migration in the region, and to rethink traditional approaches to create a positive agenda. The meeting focused on the recent increase in migrants travelling irregularly from the MENA region to Europe via sea routes.

In March 2020, the **5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean**²⁵² hosted the eighth Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration and Development in Marrakech, Morocco, to discuss migration and development issues in the Western Mediterranean. At the conference, ministers agreed to support cooperative efforts to better understand migration trends, to facilitate mobility and regular migration, to address irregular migration and the exploitation of migrants, to respect migrants' rights, and to promote sustainable development. They adopted a declaration that listed actions to be taken towards this goal under the following five themes: coordination of national migration policies; facilitation of legal migration and mobility; strengthening links

between migration and development; migrant integration policies; and policies to address irregular migration, and combat smuggling of migrants and human trafficking.²⁵³ In addition, the countries of the 5+5 Dialogue supported the continental leadership of Morocco on migration, which was manifested by the establishment in Rabat of the African Migration Observatory.

(d) African initiatives on migration

The **African Union**, in collaboration with IOM and the Economic Commission for Africa, held the fifth Pan-African Forum on Migration (PAFoM) in Cairo in September 2019, on the theme "Strengthening migration data and research for evidence-based policy development and implementation towards effective migration governance in Africa". In addition to adopting the PAFoM terms of reference, representatives at the Forum shared expertise of evidence-based policy development and migration governance in Africa, specifically how to enhance migration statistics in Africa, and how to strengthen the continental, regional and national consultation mechanism on migration to enhance collaboration among African Union member states for good migration governance in Africa.

After a round of expert meetings on the topic, the **Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) Sectoral Ministerial Meeting on the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (FMP)** in the IGAD Region took place in Khartoum, where the Protocol was adopted on 26 February 2020.²⁵⁴ The Protocol builds on the African Union's FMP to facilitate the free movement of persons across borders to foster socioeconomic development through trade, business and tourism, among others, and will be implemented in phases. Provisions include guaranteeing the right of entry and removing visa requirements, ensuring the rights of workers to freely move across borders while enjoying equal treatment under the law, establishing the right to reside in a third country, and allowing

the unhindered establishment of a business in another country.

International cooperation on migration in the context of COVID-19

The onset of the pandemic posed a challenge for regular programmes on migration cooperation planned for 2020. Officials and representatives continued to meet, but most meetings were adjusted and moved to online platforms.

In March 2020, responding to the United Nations Secretary-General's call for an urgent and coordinated response from the international community to address the COVID-19 pandemic, IFAD, together with the co-organizers of the Global Forum on Remittances, Investment and Development, launched the Remittance Community Task Force (RCTF) as part of the 2020 campaign for the International Day of Family Remittances on the theme "Building resilience in times of crisis". Over 40 key stakeholders of the global remittance ecosystem from all sectors joined forces to raise awareness of the pandemic's impact on the one billion people involved in remittances, and outlined a set of immediate and short-term measures to address the challenges confronting migrant workers and their families as a result of the pandemic. RCTF work culminated in the release of a blueprint for action entitled "Remittances in crisis: response, resilience, recovery", aimed at improving response and support resilience and recovery of the remittance market; and maintain the flow of fast, cheap and safe remittances during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. The recommended measures, directed to government authorities, remittance service providers and diaspora groups, fed the menu of policy options for the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, and the G20 plan of work on financial inclusion.

In May 2020, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, in partnership with various

organizations such as the World Bank, IOM and UNDP, put forth an international call to action on the theme "Remittances in crisis: How to keep them flowing". The initiative aims to raise awareness and calls upon policymakers, regulators and remittance service providers to enact measures to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on remittance flows, and alleviate the financial pressure on migrants, members of diaspora communities, and local economies reliant on remittances. Actors were specifically urged to improve migrants' access to remittance services, by enabling physical or digital access to providers of cross-border financial services. Since the initiative's launch, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen have joined the movement.

2. Bilateral cooperation

Algeria ratified a memorandum of understanding with **Niger** through presidential decree No. 264-19 of September 2019 on labour, employment and social security, including provisions for the protection of migrant workers and the dissemination of information about their rights.²⁵⁵

In June 2019, **Bahrain** signed a memorandum of understanding with **UNODC** to establish a Regional Centre of Expertise and Training in Combatting Trafficking in Persons. The Centre is responsible for supporting the setting of standards on combatting trafficking in persons, building the capacity of trainers, and graduating experts in this field.²⁵⁶ In 2019, Bahrain also concluded memorandums of understanding with several countries of origin of migrant workers, including India and Pakistan, which focused on oversight of recruitment agencies and protection of migrant workers in Bahrain.²⁵⁷

In July 2019, the **Comoros** and **France** renewed their partnership to relaunch bilateral and decentralized cooperation to strengthen management of migratory

flows, efforts against human trafficking, and regulation of readmissions.²⁵⁸

In September 2020, the Governments of **Djibouti** and **Ethiopia** agreed to open a third point of entry close to the northern border of Djibouti in an effort to combat trafficking in person and the smuggling of migrants.²⁵⁹

Egypt and **Jordan** signed several memorandums of understanding in July 2019. Agreements relevant for migrants and refugees include a plan to extradite Jordanian prisoners in Egypt and Egyptian prisoners in Jordan, and returning them to their respective countries of origin to continue their sentences; as well as the commitment of Jordan to provide Egyptian students in Jordanian schools the same treatment as Jordanian peers in terms of tuition and fees.²⁶⁰

The **Minister of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs** signed an executive contract with the **German Agency for International Cooperation** to establish an Egyptian-German Center for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration in Cairo. The Center provides various services, such as facilitating the return of Egyptian migrants from abroad and their reintegration in their home country, raising awareness to reduce irregular migration, and providing emigration assistance to Germany, including information and German language courses.²⁶¹

In December 2019, **Egypt** also signed a memorandum of understanding with **Saudi Arabia** on strengthening cooperation between the Saudi Post Corporation and the Egyptian Post, especially regarding services provided to Egyptian pilgrims, judicial correspondences, and remittances.²⁶²

In July 2020, the ministers of expatriate affairs of **Egypt** and **Yemen** met to discuss continued cooperation and the exchange of expertise in the migration affairs file,

especially regarding the large Yemeni population residing in Egypt, and addressing irregular migration.²⁶³

In January 2019, **India** and **Kuwait** signed a memorandum of understanding providing a structural framework for the two countries' cooperation on matters of Indian domestic workers in Kuwait, in particular providing stronger safeguards for Indian domestic workers, many of whom are women migrant workers. The memorandum of understanding is valid for five years, and incorporates provisions for automatic renewal.²⁶⁴

In January 2020, the **Philippine** Government imposed a total ban on sending Filipino workers to Kuwait after the death of an overseas Filipino in **Kuwait**. The ban has since been lifted. In February 2020, the First Joint Committee Meeting on the 2018 Philippines-Kuwait Agreement on the Deployment of Domestic Workers took place, at which officials discussed several protection measures for Filipino domestic workers to be institutionalized in Kuwait. As a part of these measures, a bilateral agreement was signed between the two countries to protect Filipino migrant domestic workers through a harmonized standard contract that ensures their rights, including retaining their personal documentation and mobile phones.²⁶⁵

Guyana and **Kuwait** signed a visa exemption agreement in August 2020, which allows diplomats and holders of special service passports to enter the countries without visas.²⁶⁶

Libya signed a cooperation agreement with the **International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** in November 2019, aimed at supporting and developing cooperation between ICMPD and the Government in the areas of migration governance and policy development, and studies to address the migration crisis in Libya.²⁶⁷

The **Libya-Italy** Memorandum of Understanding on Migration (LIMUM) was extended in February 2020 until 2023, with slight modifications proposed in June 2020.²⁶⁸ LIMUM provides Italian support to the Libyan Coast Guard and other Libyan authorities to intercept vessels crossing the Mediterranean, and return asylum-seekers to detention camps in Libya. UNHCR reports that the coast guard has picked up and returned roughly 40,000 migrants and refugees to war-ravaged Libya since the agreement was brokered.²⁶⁹ UNHCR continues to note that Libya is not a safe place for the purpose of disembarkation following rescue at sea.²⁷⁰

In May 2020, **Libya** and **Malta** signed a memorandum of understanding on combatting illegal immigration across the Mediterranean. The agreement is valid for three years, with an option to extend for an additional year. It also sets up coordination centres funded by Malta, one in Malta and one in Libya, to coordinate and support regulation of migrant boats from Libya to European countries. Moreover, it states that Malta will ask the European Commission for increased financial support to secure its southern border, in an effort to dismantle migrant smuggling networks.

Mauritania and the **United Arab Emirates** signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding in February 2020 at a meeting between the two heads of State. Among them was a memorandum of understanding between the two ministries of foreign affairs on a mutual visa waiver.²⁷¹

In September 2019, **Morocco** and **Spain** held the nineteenth meeting of the Spain-Morocco Standing Group on Migration to analyse the development of migratory movements over recent months; assess ways to strengthen collaboration between the two countries in border surveillance and the fight against human

trafficking; encourage orderly and safe regular immigration channels through measures such as the joint management of recruitment at source; and foster coordination and cooperation in the fight against irregular immigration networks and human trafficking.²⁷² The two countries also launched Young Generations: Agents of Change, a post-graduate training programme in Spain for young Moroccans.²⁷³

In February 2019, Morocco set up a committee to organize visits to harvest places in Spain, and investigate the recurring exploitation and sexual abuse complaints of Moroccan migrant workers there.²⁷⁴ In March 2019, **Belgium** and **Morocco** launched a pilot project addressing labour shortages through innovative labour migration models, which continued until August 2020. The project aims to facilitate bilateral cooperation in the management of regular migration by offering a safe and lawful alternative to young Moroccans willing to gain qualified work experience in the ICT sector in Belgium.²⁷⁵

France and **Morocco** signed an agreement on the repatriation of underage Moroccan migrants in December 2020. The agreement calls for the establishment of concrete tools for taking care of unaccompanied minors and facilitating their return from France to Morocco.²⁷⁶

In June 2020, **Oman** ratified an agreement with **Slovakia** through royal decree 63/2020 preventing double taxation for residents of either or both countries on personal taxable income.

Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding with the **African Union Commission** in January 2019 for a monetary grant of \$20 million towards supporting the safe reintegration of repatriated African migrants, specifically in response to irregular migration from the Sahel region of Africa. Furthermore, the Qatar Fund for

Development will partner with financial institutions in the recipient countries to design and implement programmes for the economic reintegration of returnees.²⁷⁷

In November 2019, **Qatar** and **Somalia** agreed to renew the memorandum of understanding established in 1983 that allows Somali workers to work in Qatar.²⁷⁸ As part of efforts to advance labour reforms, the Qatari Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs has organized a series of bilateral exchanges with counterparts in Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. For example, in January 2020, Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding with Sweden and ILO to cooperate on a number of labour-related issues, including those that apply to migrant workers such as occupational health and safety at work and corporate social responsibility.²⁷⁹

In January 2020, **Somalia** adopted the Joint Plan of Action for 2020 with **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**. The comprehensive plan focuses on several intertwined objectives for consolidating peace, stability and security and combating trafficking in person.²⁸⁰

Switzerland and **Tunisia** signed an agreement in March 2019 on social security that further strengthens the social coverage of Tunisians living in Switzerland.²⁸¹

The **United Arab Emirates** and the **United Kingdom** signed a memorandum of understanding in April 2020 to facilitate the movement of nationals of the two countries in emergencies, specifically making provisions to allow flights chartered by the United Kingdom to use Emirati airports to transit and fuel on their way back to the United Kingdom. The agreement is part of Emirati efforts to intensify international cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and part of United Kingdom efforts to fly

back British nationals stranded overseas owing to the pandemic.²⁸²

In July 2019, **Rwanda** and the **United Arab Emirates** signed a memorandum of understanding to consolidate cooperation on recruitment and employment of Rwandan workers by private sector firms in the United Arab Emirates.²⁸³

The **United Arab Emirates** signed a memorandum of understanding with **South Korea** in February 2019 covering a number of areas, including avoiding double taxation and preventing tax evasion.²⁸⁴ In December 2019, the Emirati Government also signed several agreements with **Sierra Leone** regarding bilateral cooperation on several items including the avoidance of double taxation.

In June 2019, the **United Arab Emirates** also signed four memorandums of understanding with **Nepal**, **Pakistan**, **Viet Nam** and **Uganda** to establish bilateral cooperation on the recruitment and employment of migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates, focusing on the hiring of domestic workers.²⁸⁵

The **United Arab Emirates** also signed a memorandum of understanding with **Uganda** in June 2019 to encourage good practices in the governance of labour migration, including improving the recruitment process for Ugandan domestic workers by creating official job offers and standardizing employment contracts.²⁸⁶

In September 2019, the **Philippines** and the **United Arab Emirates** signed a memorandum of understanding to combat human trafficking, which outlines the two countries' cooperation in adopting procedures to combat human trafficking, sharing best practices, exchanging information, promoting human rights, and providing assistance in the protection, rescue, repatriation, recovery, and rehabilitation of trafficking victims in accordance with domestic laws.²⁸⁷

Table 5. Policy developments by country and thematic area, April 2019 - December 2020

Country	Labour migration	Irregular migration	Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants	Forced displacement and refugee protection	Admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization	Expatriate and diaspora governance	Other measures and developments
Algeria		+	+			+	+
Bahrain	+	+	+		+		
Comoros			+		+		
Djibouti					+		+
Egypt		+	+		+	+	
Iraq			+	+			
Jordan	+			+			
Kuwait	+	+	+		+		+
Lebanon	+	+		+	+	+	
Libya		+					
Mauritania			+	+			
Morocco	+		+			+	+
Oman	+				+		+
Qatar	+			+			
Saudi Arabia	+		+		+		
Somalia	+			+			
State of Palestine							
Sudan			+	+	+		
Syrian Arab Republic				+		+	
Tunisia	+		+	+	+		+
United Arab Emirates	+	+			+		
Yemen					+		+

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

Note: Red plus signs refer to the adoption of policies and measures related to COVID-19.

D. Conclusion

Between April 2019 and December 2020, Arab countries adopted an array of policies, regulations and measures on governing migration and forced displacement. In 2020

in particular, special legislation was passed in this area to respond to the pandemic, and the economic and social consequences it has had for Arab countries and their populations.

Table 5 maps the main policy developments set out in the present chapter by country and thematic area.

Labour migration: Labour migration is the area that witnessed the most developments in migration governance in the reporting period for the present study. Many countries took significant strides to reform recruitment and work permit processes for migrants to ensure more flexibility in terms of changing employers, and to protect migrant workers from abuse and exploitation. Reforms to the kafala system and initiatives focusing on domestic workers were also adopted. The onset of the pandemic pushed many countries to develop virtual platforms to govern labour migration, which have facilitated processes for migrants and employers. Supporting and protecting migrant workers during the pandemic was among the primary concerns for several countries, especially those with large migrant worker communities. As the pandemic continues, more efforts are needed to ensure that migrant workers, especially the most vulnerable amongst them, such as migrant domestic workers and migrants in irregular situations, have access to basic services, including health care and social protection. Actions to increase migrant workers' social inclusion and fight xenophobia and racism also need to be stepped up.

Irregular migration: In view of the pandemic, many Arab countries offered grace periods for migrants in irregular situations to either regularize their status, or to safely leave the country without payment of penalties. Simultaneously, there has been an increase in border control, especially in the Maghreb, in collaboration with European countries. Special attention should be given to ensuring border control authorities act in accordance with human rights and humanitarian laws, especially regarding forced returns.

Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants: The reporting period saw more initiatives for increased collaboration between various governmental departments through the formation of special units or groups. Some countries also held workshops and training sessions in collaboration with civil society and experts from other countries. A growing number of countries have also developed or are developing a national human trafficking action plan. Countries should continue to prioritize efforts to combat human trafficking in a coordinated manner, and to provide protection and asylum for victims. Counter-smuggling policies and initiatives should focus on protecting the human rights of smuggled migrants and refugees, and on combating the crime of migrant smuggling.

Refugees and asylum seekers: Several countries have created asylum laws defining asylum seekers and the rights guaranteed to refugees. Some countries that have witnessed conflict have been making provisions for refugee returnees and IDPs to ensure their return is safe, voluntary and sustainable according to international law and humanitarian law. These developments should continue to be monitored and supported.

Admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization: Most developments in this area were administrative changes in visa requirements. However, Governments also increased flexibility because of the pandemic, with a general trend of extending visas and residency permits for those who were already holders, but imposing greater restrictions on obtaining new visas. A handful of Arab countries have enacted changes to their nationality laws, providing more pathways for naturalization. However, more attention should be given to vulnerable groups, in particular stateless persons and children, who fall outside of these regulations.

Expatriate and diaspora governance: Some Governments have focused on engaging with their nationals abroad. Several countries adopted measures to address repatriation during COVID-19-related travel restriction and quarantine measures. The role of Governments in engaging with their nationals abroad and with diasporas should be further developed to strengthen migrant protection and contributions to development in their countries of origin.

International cooperation: The reporting period saw a flurry of activity surrounding the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration, as well as increased attention to the use of disaggregated data and statistics to monitor migration and displacement. Several of the follow-up initiatives regarding existing

processes and treaties brought together Governments and other relevant stakeholders to share ideas and exchange good practices on how to govern migration and displacement, particularly in the context of the pandemic. A more systematic engagement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders would bring additional value.

Bilateral cooperation: Countries collaborated in diverse areas related to migration and displacement, including the protection of migrant workers, particularly migrant domestic workers, border controls, and human trafficking. Improved bilateral collaboration and coordination is needed to better protect migrants and refugees, particularly given the continuing COVID-19 crisis.