Introduction

Migration has become a defining feature of our globalized world, with numbers of international migrants growing exponentially over the past couple of decades. Migration has been recognized as a key accelerator for development in both countries of origin and destination; however, it also poses challenges. Consequently, a holistic approach to migration governance is crucial to optimize its overall benefits, offset the risks and challenges it may pose, and make migration work for all individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. Given the scale of international migration and its transboundary nature, cooperation between countries at the bilateral, subregional, regional and global levels has become an urgent necessity.

Recognizing these facts and determined to enhance cooperation on international migration in all its dimensions, the majority of Member States of the United Nations adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) at an Intergovernmental Conference held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 10 December 2018.

GCM is a milestone in the history of the global dialogue on migration. Rooted in existing international laws, conventions and frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, it aims to foster international cooperation among all relevant actors on migration. GCM adopts a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, and advocates respect for the recognized rights and obligations of migrants as well as those of sovereign States under international law.

Through its 23 objectives, GCM offers a 360-degree vision of international migration.

It recognizes that the key to transforming migration into a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development for countries of origin, transit and destination is to protect and empower migrants, which cannot be achieved without mainstreaming migration in development planning and in all sectoral and cross-cutting policies.

The diverse and complex patterns and trends of migration in the Arab region, and the often-protracted displacement dynamics, underline the importance of a robust global framework and comprehensive approach to achieve good migration governance. In 2017, the region hosted over 38 million migrants and refugees, representing almost 15 per cent of a total of 258 million international migrants worldwide. Over 9 million refugees have sought protection in the region, including 3.7 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate and 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. Conflicts and environmental pressures in the region have also led to internal displacement of around 15 million people. Migration and displacement in the region have had a strong influence on political, economic and social developments, not only in Arab countries where almost half of the region's migrants reside, but also in neighbouring and more distant regions.

The present report provides a multidisciplinary and comprehensive overview of migration trends, policy developments, and priority issues in the region to inform policymakers, researchers and practitioners. It builds on previous editions of the Situation Report on International Migration, published in 2015 and 2017, and thus provides an increasingly comprehensive and up-to-date picture of

migration in the Arab region over time. In addition, the present report examines regional migration governance in the light of GCM objectives, with an emphasis on full inclusion, access to basic services for migrants, reducing vulnerabilities of migrants, and preventing and combatting the smuggling and trafficking of migrants.

The present report follows a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. In addition to desk research on the most recent literature, complemented with news resources where needed, it relies on data from multiple United Nations agencies, including the International Organization for Migration, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and the World Bank. The report uses the United Nations definition of an international migrant as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence. A person's country of usual residence is that in which the person lives, (…) where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest.[1]

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the latest migration and displacement trends and figures in the Arab region and at the subregional level, in line with the first GCM objective on migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies. The chapter also includes information on remittances to and from the region, and analysis of the main drivers of migration and displacement in the Arab region.

Chapter 2 presents an update of policy developments and international efforts on migration governance involving Arab countries between April 2017 and March 2019. Main policy areas under scrutiny include nationality and statelessness, labour migration, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, forced displacement and refugees, and admissions and residency procedures. The chapter also describes developments in subregional, regional and global cooperation relating to migration that Arab countries have been involved in.

Chapter 3 examines regional migration governance priorities in the light of GCM objectives. It provides a policy map for each priority area showcasing policies and programmes adopted across the region, identifies gaps and makes recommendations for policy interventions. The chapter provides a benchmark for countries on the status of existing national frameworks and policies for migration governance in selected priority areas, namely migrants' inclusion and access to basic services, vulnerabilities in migration, and smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons in the context of migration.

Endnotes

Introduction

1.   ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/58/Rev.1, p. 17.