

Submission for 2021 Arab States GCM Regional Review

- Youth perspectives and priorities -

INTRODUCTION

To ensure young people's voices are represented throughout the GCM Regional Reviews in Arab states, the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) has led consultations in the Arab region, focusing on the youth and adolescent's perspective on three GCM Objectives (selected as key priorities based on previous consultations):

- **Objective 2:** Minimise the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.
- **Objective 17:** Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote fact-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration.
- **Objective 18:** Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences.

Consultations surrounding the three objectives were conducted in partnership with UNICEF and supported by organizations and networks including Terres des Hommes and Caritas. Through the use of surveys and focus groups, we consulted 12 organizations focusing on young migrants from 8 Arab countries in total, between December 2020 and February 2021. These organizations represent roughly 15,000 youth. We have gathered input directly from 200 adolescents and youth, the majority of them living in Egypt or Iraq.

This policy brief summarizes the critical challenges and opportunities highlighted by respondents, as well as recommendations and good practices stemming from these consultations. GCM stakeholders and member-states should unite efforts to address the needs of children and youth through three key recommendations:

1. The public and private sectors **must collaborate to increase employment opportunities and meet human rights standards** for young migrants.
2. Governments and civil society must work together to **shape positive narratives surrounding migration and promote anti-discrimination laws**, with specific attention to gender.
3. All stakeholders must **provide access to skills development** while reducing administrative obstacles that stand in the way of young migrants' access to the workforce and education, in tandem with creating a platform that maps all available services.
4. Migration policies **must acknowledge the vital role of children and youth as agents for change and partners** in achieving the objectives outlined in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

GCM OBJECTIVE 2: Minimise the Adverse Drivers and Structural Factors that Compel People to Leave their Country of Origin.

Approximately 57% of young migrants in the Arab region reported conflict, war, and instability as the main reasons for choosing to leave their country of origin (CoO). Poverty is another significant concern as 32% of participants consider difficult living conditions, meagre income, food insecurity, difficulty accessing basic services and resources as push factors to migrate elsewhere. The third reason underlined by a collective 11% was the lack of job opportunities as a repelling factor that drives youth to leave their home country searching for ways to make a living, followed by lack of access to quality education.

Key youth efforts to address the challenges

The organisations that participated in the survey stated that they face challenges in their work to minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that push young people to leave their countries. Overall, a lack of funding was raised as a critical challenge to implement projects. Slow bureaucracy and poor infrastructure are also significant factors. Even when educational programmes and activities are in place, the opportunity cost of attending is often too high for impoverished young people.

Significant effort is invested in children and youth rehabilitation programs, which help address physical and psychological harms and trauma caused by war and insecurity.

Good youth-led practices - Lebanon

In Lebanon, the current economic crisis, the COVID-19 Pandemic and the explosion of August 4th are significant youth push factors driving youth to consider migrating abroad. To respond to this, Natic Station, a grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO), aims to keep the young population empowered and engaged by re-shaping and re-imagining the country in an effort to create positive and protective factors for youth in Lebanon. They are producing a series of initiatives to help the most vulnerable while creating job opportunities through these activities. These efforts are critical in addressing the adverse drivers of youth migration in the region.

Key youth recommendations

- **To governments and Private Sector: Youth call for increased coordination**, to stimulate the creation of job opportunities in countries of origin. A minimum wage imposed by authorities would also help regulate the labour market and motivate young people to find a safe and stable job in their own country.
- **To governments: Youth call to ensure that minimum human rights are accessible** to all by implementing more efficient social, educational and healthcare policies. Governments should focus on food security, infrastructure and education, notably by increasing funding for schools and vocational training centers. Inadequate educational systems for migrants in countries of origin must also be reviewed and enhanced.
- **To all actors working with young migrants: Youth call for enhanced protection** mechanisms to ensure the safety and security of children and youth everywhere, including against trafficking and in areas of conflict.

GCM OBJECTIVE 17: Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination and Promote Fact-based Public Discourse to Shape Perceptions of Migration.

Verbal and physical abuse, particularly bullying, are major forms of discrimination felt by 33% of child and youth migrants, which can often be linked with xenophobia. According to 29% of respondents, unequal access to healthcare, education and vocational training in host countries is aggravated by how migrants are portrayed by the media and by some politicians. In most countries, respondents highlighted that locals show resistance in mixing with migrants. While initiatives to change these narratives and discrimination exist, there is a shortage of resources allocated.

Substantial barriers towards migrant employment are another critical concern for youth. Young migrants reported discrimination in the labour market, with many employers unwilling to hire or pay adequately. Youth also emphasize a hurdle of discrimination in law-making and access to employment and services in host countries. In some cases, governments pose numerous restrictions on access to schools, universities or job opportunities for young migrants, especially with countries enforcing "Kafala" or sponsorship systems.

Key youth efforts to address the challenges

Youth-focused organizations in host countries are contributing to reducing discriminative barriers by providing legal support and information to young migrants. Migrants also have access to different kinds of support offered by NGOs, such as social support and language or skills-building courses, helping youth overcome discriminative obstacles in accessing jobs. In partnership with governments, international organizations and embassies are working to implement standardized labour contracts to reduce discrimination towards migrants.

Good youth-focused practices - Qatar and Kuwait

Migrant-Rights.org¹, an advocacy organization, aims to advance the rights of migrant workers and change attitudes and practices towards them, through their online platform, localized projects, and grassroots initiatives. They also implemented a project called Ensaniyat in Qatar and Kuwait to engage with businesses, encouraging them to revisit the relationship with their subcontractors and work with students on changing perceptions surrounding domestic workers in the region.

"Within the Ensaniyat's student-outreach program², we utilise the power of dialogue and initiating conversation to achieve a change in attitude towards migrant and domestic workers within the GCC. We're doing this by identifying and making clear the issues migrant workers face and encouraging steps to be taken by our societies to stop them through starting action-influenced conversations to tackle these abuses."

Key youth recommendations

- **To governments and civil society:** Youth call for unity in efforts on shaping positive public narratives on migrants. Governments need to promote migrant inclusion and build strategies that expand on migrant's contribution to national

¹ <https://www.migrant-rights.org/>

² <https://www.migrant-rights.org/project/ensaniyat/>

economies. A particular focus should be on raising public awareness through anti-discrimination and anti-bullying campaigns.

- **To governments and donors: Youth call for the provision of funding and resources to projects focusing on social cohesion - involving both migrants and locals.** Promote migrant integration projects as well as capacity-building training and activities where young migrants can combat negative narratives.
- **To governments: Youth call for the application and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.** Youth also demand the reshaping of laws to criminalize violence against migrants, as well as reshaping policies to encourage migrants to join the host countries' workforce, particularly through facilitating work permits for different occupational practices.
- **To all actors working with young migrants:** Youth call for better coordination between local authorities, NGOs and governments to allow for a more effective fight against discrimination.

GCM OBJECTIVE 18: Invest in Skills Development and Facilitate Mutual Recognition of Skills, Qualifications and Competences

Child and adolescent migrants reported that a core obstacle behind their inability to upskill or resume their studies in host countries comes from the lack of recognition of their previous qualifications. 22% of young migrants also reported language as the first and foremost barrier towards accessing work and resuming their education. In some cases, there was a reported difficulty finding jobs that correspond to the different skills set of migrants. Some respondents highlighted that youth unemployment rates are already high for nationals in the Arab region; this dynamic is more pronounced for migrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic had severe impacts on delaying progress made in addressing qualification and skills gaps, where most education platforms moved online: gaps in technological literacy and limited access to computers, smartphones or online resources have exacerbated existing inequalities. Moreover, numerous restrictions by migratory status have been reported to limit migrants' access to skills development programs, training opportunities, and funding.

Key youth efforts to address the challenges

64% of young respondents reported that civil society organizations are addressing skills-development gaps. Below are some examples of the activities carried out in this regard:

- Capacity building workshops for migrants and locals together on communication and language skills, and soft skills for the labour market and integration into host communities.
- Livelihood skills training such as computer literacy, financial literacy and basic numeracy.
- Training and awareness raising on labour laws and specificities of working contracts in host countries.
- Job opportunities for migrants.
- Tailored education programs for children.

Good youth-led and youth-focused practices - Iraq and Jordan

The Lotus Flower³ is an NGO focusing on women and youth business incubator projects, providing business start-up grants for migrants. It also focuses on building business development skills through capacity training with a specific focus on online marketing skills.

A Global Voice for Autism⁴ is an NGO supporting migrant children with disabilities and autism access educational opportunities. Here, migrant youth organize community programs to train parents and teachers on how to ensure inclusive learning environments.

Key youth recommendations

- **To governments and civil society: Youth call for enhanced access to skills development programs for migrants**, which is the core for building programs to help migrants acquire skills and access quality education. Civil society's role has never been more important in providing fair access to training and learning resources. There must be a focus on diversifying training programs to cover technical skills, language, and other soft skills.
- **To governments: Youth call for a reduction in administratively-burdensome processes imposed on migrant access to employment and education.** Governments must loosen restrictions and increase workforce capacities to accept migrants with matching skills and qualifications to avoid missing out on their valuable skills and talents. Young migrants must be granted the same rights as nationals in terms of access to free, quality education.
- **To civil society: Youth call for the provision of an 'orientation map' of available services to migrants**, where they can easily see what services are offered by various stakeholders. A platform linking young migrants with potential employers according to their skills and competencies is an idea raised by youth. Often, services exist, but migrants are not necessarily aware and, therefore, do not access them. Governments should promote information about available services and programs in the incoming migrant groups' primary languages.

³ <https://thelotusflower.org/>

⁴ <https://www.globalvoiceforautism.org/>