

**Fourth Meeting for the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration
and Refugee Affairs (ARCP)
General Secretariat of the League of Arab States
Cairo, 7-8 May 2018**

Session 1: Updates on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) – ILO

Excellencies,

Fellow panellists,

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking the League of Arab States ARCP Secretariat for inviting ILO to speak at this session.

This dialogue presents an important opportunity to discuss progress of negotiations of the GCM, and comes at an opportune time after the third round of negotiations, as the text of the GCM begins to take shape.

As the agency committed to promoting decent work, which now is also firmly rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and particularly SDG 8, the ILO is resolute in its support to the GCM negotiations – because nearly always, from the beginning or at the end, much migration today is about work.

Through the ILO Regional Office for Arab States, the ILO operates across 12 countries and territories, fulfilling its constitutional and social justice mandate to protect all workers including “those working in countries other than their own”. This involves delivery of capacity building support and expertise, including through Decent Work Country Programmes operating, or about to start, in five countries in the region.

We take pride that this work has been valued by Member States for nearly 100 years. The ILO’s centenary next year is a moment to reflect, with our 187 member States – Governments, Workers and Employers - on how we want to see the future of work for present and future generations. Labour migration is and will be a central reality of our working future and therefore fair and effective labour migration frameworks will be essential to support a future of work that we would want to see.

This is particularly important in the Arab States region where more than 30 million migrants and refugees live. A large proportion of migrants in the Arab States are in the labour force, with data from 2013 showing a labour force participation rate of more than 89 per cent – the highest of any sub-region in the world.

For many, migration is a positive experience generating remittances that help to support families back home, skills and life experiences. For others, particularly for those in low-skilled occupations – and despite considerable legislative and policy progress across the region - migration is tainted by exploitative recruitment practices, delay or non-payment of wages, dangerous working conditions, and restrictions on basic freedoms, including the freedom of association. The Arab States region is also host to 19 per cent of the global total of migrant domestic workers, who are particularly vulnerable to abuses. Therefore, they require our utmost attention, but also because of the crucial role they play in presenting opportunities for women nationals to enter the labour market and as carers for children and the elderly.

The GCM first draft resolutely commits States to eliminating many of these exploitative conditions, in line with the ILO’s Fair Migration Agenda, which was endorsed by a number of the states present here, at the Abu Dhabi Dialogue 3rd Ministerial Meeting in November 2014.

Importantly, the draft addresses the need (under Objective 6) to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work. This includes prohibiting recruiters from charging fees or related costs to migrant workers. That only employers should pay for recruitment – not workers – is a key part of the ILO General Principles and Operation Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, referenced in the GCM draft.

The draft GCM also includes a number of other provisions to safeguard decent work, including the prohibition on the confiscation or retention of travel or identity documents as well as work contracts, which unfortunately remains prevalent in this region.

The draft Compact goes even further to promote a shared responsibility between employers, recruiters, their subcontractors and suppliers to be accountable for unfair recruitment and other labour rights violations. This emphasis on supply chain transparency and a need to protect vulnerable subcontracted workers including in sectors such as construction, garment and hospitality sectors – is a key goal of the ILO, particularly under the FAIRWAY project on fair migration in the Middle East and the BETTER WORK programme in Jordan.

Additionally, the Compact draft promotes the need for greater labour market mobility, allowing migrants to change employers and the conditions and length of stay. Reform of sponsorship systems in the Arab States to promote an easier switch between employers is in the interests of employers as well as workers, and promotes a productive workforce.

The ILO already has an arsenal of standards, tools and guidance to support the Compact; and by strengthening our partnerships we can better and more effectively deploy them. Ensuring that migration practices are grounded in the rule of law and ILO international labour standards, agreed amongst 187 member countries, can be a key achievement of the Global Compact.

Already a number of countries have been advocating for a closer focus on rights-based approach to labour migration, under the lead of the Governments of Angola and Belgium. The Group of Friends of Decent Work –which comprises an increasing number of governments” – come together to underscore the important role that decent work and labour migration should play in the GCM, including building the knowledge base through better data, adopting fair recruitment practices, skills recognition, eliminating trafficking in human beings, and providing social protection.

The ILO’s Constitution holds that labour is not a commodity. Migrant labour is no more a commodity than any other, and any policy setting that neglects that imperative is deficient by definition.

As was recently noted by the ILO Director General at a GCM side-event, the ILO is pleased that the Compact’s current draft refers to commitments on governing labour migration in areas where the ILO is taking leadership in providing technical support and capacity-building on the ground. Those areas include promoting fair recruitment, skills development and recognition through global skills partnerships, social protection, and on enhancing data and knowledge management.

As a tripartite organization comprising governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, we also understand the benefits that social dialogue can bring to policy debate and implementation. We are working closely in national contexts and with Regional Economic Communities to support good practices in this regard. The Global Compact can strengthen its approach by encouraging the use of such social dialogue mechanisms.

Partnerships among governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, and with other stakeholders are indeed going to be central if we envision a Global Compact that delivers real and shared benefits for all — and perhaps serves as a new social contract on migration.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the UN Development System Reform and the Global Compact give us an opportunity to examine how best to ensure the UN system truly is fit for purpose: how to leverage each agency's special expertise, including those agencies with a normative mandate like ILO, to mobilize coordinated actions in support of the Global Compact's effective implementation.